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The Bible on Sex—The Way to Happiness and Holiness

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The Bible addresses human sexuality from a holistic perspective of God's intention and design. In contrast to both pagan sex rituals and our modern obsession with sex, the Bible places sex within the total context of human nature, happiness, and holiness. Taken out of this context, sexual anarchy reigns as sex is set loose to be an end in itself.

God created human beings as male and female, both in His own image [Gen. 1:27]. Thus, gender is not a mere biological accident or social construction. The contrast and complementarity between the man and the woman reveal that gender is part of the goodness of God's creation. Modern efforts to redefine or redesign gender are directly contrary to the Bible's affirmation of maleness and femaleness as proper distinctions. God's glory is seen in the maleness of the man and the femaleness of the woman. This pattern of distinction is affirmed and enforced by liturgical orders and restrictions on dress, hair length, etc. Any effort to confuse or deny gender differences is expressly forbidden and opposed by Scripture, especially as seen in Old Testament legal codes.

Throughout the Bible, a complementary pattern of relation between man and woman, particularly within the institution of marriage, is presented as the divine intention. Both are equal in dignity and status, but a pattern of male leadership in the home and in the church is enforced by both descriptive and prescriptive passages. This runs counter to the egalitarian wisdom of the modern age, but offers the only means of establishing a true order and pattern for marriage and the family.

The Bible places sex and sexual activity within the larger context of holiness and faithfulness. In this regard, the Bible presents an honest and often detailed explanation of God's design for sex and its place in human life and happiness.

First, the biblical writers affirm the goodness of sexuality as God's gift. The Song of Solomon is an extended love poem with explicit erotic imagery and language. Sex is affirmed as a source of pleasure and shared intimacy between husband and wife. Sexual pleasure is not an accident of human biology—it is one of the Creator's sweetest gifts to human beings. The promise of sexual pleasure and satisfaction is to draw us into the marital covenant, and then shared joy of physical union is a vital part of the marital bond.

Second, the gift of sexual activity—as presented in the Bible—is consistently located only within the context of the marital covenant. Joined to each other within this monogamous covenant, the man and the woman may be naked, and not ashamed [Gen. 2:25]. The consistent witness of the biblical writers is that sexual relations are limited to this covenant relationship. All forms of extra-marital sexual activity are condemned, including premarital sex (fornication). Adultery is expressly forbidden as a particularly dangerous and damaging insult to the marriage and to the glory of God. [Ex. 20:14, Deut. 22:22, 1 Cor. 6:9-10]. At the same time, the husband and wife are ordered to fulfill their marital duties to each other, and not to refrain from sexual union [1 Cor. 7:2-5].

Third, though pleasure is one of the goods biblically associated with sexual union, the Bible consistently links procreation with the marital act. Sexual pleasure and procreation are linked in a healthy and natural approach that avoids the denial of either. Modern contraceptive technologies were unknown in the Bible, and the contemporary “contraceptive

mentality” that champions sexual pleasure completely severed from procreation is foreign to the biblical worldview.

Fourth, the biblical writers address human sexuality honestly. Paul acknowledged the reality of sexual passions [I Corinthians 7:9] and admonished those who have not been given the gift of celibacy to marry, rather than to allow their passions to turn into sinful lust.

The reality of sexual brokenness is also addressed. The pain and shame of adultery, for example, are demonstrated in the account of David’s sin with Bathsheba. Paul’s horror in learning of sexual sin among the Corinthians occasioned some of his clearest teachings on sexuality and holiness. At the same time, the Bible points to salvation and the atoning work of Christ as the ground of our sexual healing and the promise of forgiveness. As Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians, “such were some of you,” listing the sexually immoral, adulterers, and homosexuals [1 Cor. 6:9-11]. The tense of the verb is critically important in this text, for the “such were some of you” serves to underline that Christians cannot continue in such sins.

The biblical writers affirm sexuality as a part of our embodied existence. As human beings we are sexual creatures, and as sexual creatures we are called to honor God with our bodies. Within the context of the marital covenant, the husband and wife are free to express love for each other, experience pleasure, and join in the procreative act of sexual union. This is pleasing to God, and is not to be a source of shame.

The biblical writers link holiness to happiness. True human happiness comes in the fulfillment of sexual holiness. The attempt to enjoy sexual happiness without holiness is the root of sexual deviance.

Just as the biblical writers present marital sex as holy and natural, all other forms of sexual activity are presented as condemned and sinful. In addition to adultery and fornication, the Bible expressly forbids homosexuality, bestiality, incest, prostitution, rape, pederasty, and all other forms of sexual deviance and perversity [Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27; Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:23; Lev. 18:6-18; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Ex. 2:16-17; Prov. 7:1-27].

The Bible presents sexual deviance as an intentional rejection of God’s authority as Creator and Lord [Romans 1:18-25]. As Paul warns, those who practice such sins will not inherit the Kingdom of God [1 Corinthians 6:9-11]. Both Old and New Testament writers warn that the people of God are to remain untainted and uncorrupted by such sins. Interestingly, the sexual practices of the various pagan nations described in the Old Testament and the sexual mores of the Roman empire of the first century are remarkably like the obsessions of our own day.

Sexuality is one of God’s good gifts, and the source of much human happiness. At the same time, once expressed outside its intended context of marital fidelity, it can become one of the most destructive forces in human existence.

Marital sexual love is expressed in the intimacy of sexual union and the marital act of conjugal union is the source of both pleasure and procreation. Both are goods of the marital act and relationship that are to be welcomed and accepted with thankfulness. The biblical writers instruct that true sexual happiness is inextricably linked to sexual holiness as believers live their lives before God.

These principles are of crucial importance as Christians grapple with the sexual confusion of postmodern America. With some denominations debating homosexual clergy and same-sex marriage, evangelical Christians must hold fast to the biblical wisdom, knowing that God has revealed His perfect pattern for human sexuality within the Bible. Those who brazenly reject the authority of the Bible on issues of sexuality actually reject the authority of the Creator to determine what is right and wrong, natural and unnatural, allowed and forbidden. Ultimately, we must choose between biblical authority and sexual anarchy.

