

Ethics

Unit 313 – Foundations 3

Week 5 Human Sexuality and Christian Ethics



Introduction

Sex, like marriage, was God's idea. It was part of his design in creating humankind and it was given to us as the means by which we procreate and fulfil our God-given mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It is however widely accepted by psychologists and sociologists, both within and beyond Christian faith, that for human beings sex is about more than just reproduction. The purpose of sex includes pleasure and emotional bonding as well as procreation and because of this, sex plays an important part in building relationship as well as realising reproduction.

“All that we can surmise of humankind's genetic history argues... (that) sexual practices are to be regarded first as bonding devices and only second as means for procreation” – E.O. Wilson¹

“There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, “The two become one”. Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever”. - 1 Corinthians 6:16 (MSG)

The New Testament in particular also teaches that the only appropriate context for sexual expression and exchange is the loving, life-long, covenantal commitment that a husband and wife make when they pledge their lives and bodies to each other in marriage.

“Now regarding the question you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations. ² But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfil his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfil her husband's needs. ⁴ The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷ But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another. ⁸ So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. ⁹ But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust. - 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

¹ E.O. Wilson, “*On Human Nature*”, (Harvard University Press, 1978), pages 141-148,

“You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. ¹³ You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. ¹⁴ And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead. ¹⁵ Don’t you realise that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ And don’t you realise that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” ¹⁷ But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. ¹⁹ Don’t you realise that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body”. – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral”. – Hebrews 13:4

There are two primary reasons why God reserves sex for marriage:

(a) Sex is extremely powerful

Sex is good and a gift from God but sex is also very powerful and as with anything in life, the more powerful something is the more control it requires.

“Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? Certainly - but only within a certain context. It’s good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world full of sexual disorder”. – 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 (Message)

“Can a man scoop a flame into his lap and not have his clothes catch on fire? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? So it is with the man who sleeps with another man’s wife. He who embraces her will not go unpunished”. - Proverbs 6:27-29 (NLT)

(b) Sex is intentionally purposeful

Everything God creates He creates with purpose and whenever something created by God is used for a purpose other than that for which it is created, it becomes susceptible to abuse and misuse.

“The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality — the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to “stand up for your

rights.” Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out”. - 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (Message)

1. Sexual Identity, Orientation and Gender

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female...’ – Matthew 19:4

Jesus affirmed that God’s original design for humanity was expressed in the creation of the dual genders of male and female and that procreation between the two would be the means by which humankind fulfilled the God-given mandate to “be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth”.

However, it is widely recognised today that gender can be a complex and fluid issue as both nature and nurture affect how we experience gender.

There are 4 essential elements that form human sexual identity:

1. **Biological Gender** – The gender you are assigned at birth; represented by a spectrum to accommodate gender ambiguity.
2. **Gender Identity** – One’s personal experience of one’s gender often influenced by primary socialisation factors such as parenting and upbringing. Gender Identity may not correlate to the gender assigned at birth (EG transgender and intersex individuals)
3. **Sexual Orientation** – the spectrum of sexual attraction options usually identified as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual or asexual.
4. **Sexual Behaviour** – actual sexual practices and preferences

When all 4 line up and an individual’s Birth Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation and Sexual Behaviour are consistent we refer to that person as **CISGENDER**.

Traditionally Christians have defined anyone who isn't cisgender as in some way 'damaged' or 'broken' by the effects of sin and death. As a result of the rebellion of humankind against the rule of God (Genesis 3), sin and death entered the world, corrupted the creation and damaged the reproductive processes resulting in imperfections and inconsistencies in the entire human persona, spirit, soul and body, including the way we experience our sexual identity. The fact of the matter is that we are all broken and damaged by sin regardless of how consistent our sexual persona is or isn't.

The recent and developing field of Epigenetics (i.e. the study of the effect that androgens have in-utero) may one day shed more light on our understanding of gender and sexual identity formation but right now we don't know for sure to what extent chemical washes in the womb affect the formation of sexual identity.

2. Understanding Homosexuality

A homosexual is a person who sustains a ...

“predominate, persistent, and exclusive psychosexual attraction toward members of the same sex ... feels sexual desire for and a sexual responsiveness to persons of the same sex and who seeks or would like to seek actual sexual fulfilment of this desire by sexual acts with a person of the same sex.”²

There are many fluid definitions which emphasise homosexuality as a political statement, as a psychological orientation, as sexual activity only etc. The central issue for Christians is – are same-sex relationships a viable, God-given way of giving expression to our sexuality?

3. Homosexuality and Nurture: caused by environment?

(a) Some argue that homosexuality is caused by family dysfunction

(i) Arrested Development

Some consider homosexuality to be an example of “arrested development” – the therapist must assist the person to transition through to heterosexuality.³

(ii) Relational Deficit

Some locate this arrested development in some deficit of relationship with the parent of the same sex.

(iii) Parental Dysfunction

Others locate it in a combination of dysfunction with both parents – the parent of the opposite sex being dominant and the parent of the same sex being passive. The classic statement being, “A dominant, aggressive, hostile, binding, but hypercritical mother ... combined with a passive, ineffectual, rejecting, indifferent father.”⁴

² G. A. Kanoti and A. R. Kosnik, “Homosexuality: Ethical Aspects,” in W. T. Reich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* Vol. 2 (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 671.

³ S. J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 16.

⁴ T. E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995), pp. 92-93.

(b) Some argue that homosexuality is caused by cultural or societal dysfunction

How does society view and value maleness and femaleness? Are some actions generally perceived as “sissy” or “tomboyish”? Does the male have to “win” or display “machismo”?

4. Homosexuality and Nature: caused by biology?**(a) Some argue that homosexuality derives from genetics****(i) Siblings**

Some studies showed that homosexual persons are 2.5 times more likely to have homosexual siblings than heterosexuals.⁵

(ii) Twins

Some studies showed that homosexuality occurred more often between fraternal twins than non-twin siblings or adopted siblings.⁶ Another study disputed this.⁷

(iii) DNA

Some see causes in DNA markers in chromosomes.⁸

(b) Some argue that homosexuality derives from hormones**(i) Decreased testosterone**

Some see this in a decreased level of testosterone during the critical period of prenatal development resulting in a “feminization” of the brain. Female homosexuality is seen as resulting from an overexposure to testosterone during the same period.⁹

(ii) Brain structure

Others note that the anterior hypothalamus (the section of the brain that controls sexual behaviour) in homosexual men appears to resemble the anatomical form usually found in women.¹⁰

⁵ R. C. Pillard and J. D. Weinrich, “Evidence of Familial Nature of Male Homosexuality,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 43/8 (1986): 808-812 and J. M. Bailey and D. S. Benishay, “Familial Aggregation of Female Sexual Orientation,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 150/2 (1993): 272-277.

⁶ J. M. Bailey and R. C. Pillard, “A Genetic Study of Male Sexual Orientation,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48/12 (1991): 1089-1096 and J. M. Bailey and R. C. Pillard, “Heritable Factors Influence Sexual Orientation,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50/3 (1993): 217-223.

⁷ M. King and E. McDonald, “Homosexuals Who Are Twins: A Study of Forty-Six Probands,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 160 (1992): 407-409.

⁸ C. H. Hamer *et al*, “Linkage between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation,” *Science* 261 (1993): 321-327.

⁹ C. M. McCormick and S. F. Witelson, “Functional Cerebral Asymmetry and Sexual Orientation in Men and Women,” *Behavioural Neuroscience* 108/3 (1994): 525-531.

¹⁰ S. LeVay, “A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science* 253 (1991): 1034-1037.

The reality is that no single marker has yet been found. Even the researchers themselves are often wary of attempts to draw sweeping conclusions from their work. Although there may be genetic or hormonal factors connected with homosexuality, no-one knows if they cause it. To give one example: does brain structure or homosexuality come first? Does one, and which one, cause the other?

“There is a general consensus today that no one theory of homosexuality can explain such a diverse phenomenon ... There is no single genetic, hormonal or psychological cause of homosexual orientation. There appears to be a variety of factors which provide a ‘push’ in the direction of homosexuality for some persons ...”¹¹

Similarly, Feinberg and Feinberg conclude:

“Homosexuality is the result of a variety of causes, none of which decisively determines sexual preference. There may be some biological factors which either predispose or contribute to homosexuality, and the home environment is also a significant factor. Still, in cases where all of these elements are present, one will not necessarily become a homosexual”.¹²

5. The physiological/biological nature of same-sex intercourse

(a) *A deficient act? (non-complementary)*

The unity involved in two becoming one in marriage is reflected in the biological complementarity of male and female. In same-sex intercourse, some other body part (finger, artificial penis, mouth, anus) substitutes for the sexual organ that the other partner cannot provide. Hence, the body part that each brings to the union does not represent their unique contribution to the union – for they bring the same part.¹³

“Given the meaning of ‘contrary to nature’ (*para physin*) and comparable expressions used by Jewish writers of the period to describe same-sex intercourse, the meaning of the phrase in Paul is clear. Minimally, Paul is referring to the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female. Put in more crude terms, Paul in effect argues that even pagans who have no access to the book of Leviticus should know that same-sex eroticism is ‘contrary to nature’ because the primary sex organs fit male to female, not female to female or male to male. Again, by fittedness I mean not only the glove-like physical fit of the penis and vagina but also clues to complementarity provided by procreative capacity and the capacity for mutual and pleasurable stimulation. These clues make clear that neither the anus, the orifice for excreting waste products, nor the mouth, the orifice for taking in food, are complementary orifices for the male member. For Paul it was a simple matter of common sense

¹¹ G. D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), p. 54.

¹² John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg and Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 189 (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996). See also Evelyn Hooker, “Sexual Behavior: Homosexuality,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 14: 224.

¹³ S. J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 110-112.

observation of human anatomy and procreative function that even pagans, otherwise oblivious to God's direct revelation in the Bible, had no excuse for not knowing."¹⁴

(b) A deficient act? (non-procreative)

Heterosexual intercourse may bring children into being, who symbolize the union of the male and female. Homosexuality is not a union of one with another who is truly "other" and cannot bring into being children.¹⁵

It simply confuses the bond of informal friendship with the male-female sexual bond of marriage.

6. Scriptural Passages on Homosexuality

These passages seem to address homosexuality explicitly:

(a) Genesis 19:1-11 (particularly verses 5-8)

"They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them. Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

The sin of Sodom has traditionally been understood to be homosexuality.¹⁶ Against this, some have argued that –

(i) The sin was sexual assault or rape – non-consensual sex.

(ii) The verb translated as "to know" is rarely used for sexual conduct.

The Hebrew verb וָדָע (*yadah* – 'to know') appears 943 times in the OT and in only 10 of those occasions does it refer to sexual conduct (heterosexuality). Revisionists prefer to translate as "get to know" as in "become acquainted, become relational with" – this is within the semantic range. However, Genesis 19:8 states that Lot's daughters had "not known a man" (literal translation – NIV translates as "never slept with a man"). This surely means more than mere acquaintance – after all, they were already acquainted with their own father! Also, of the 10 occurrences of the verb "to know" that have sexual connotation, 6 occur in Genesis (including Genesis 19:5 and 8).

(iii) The sin was breaching the code of hospitality. In desiring to know Lot's guests – that is, checking their *bona fides* – the men of the city compromised Lot's protection of them and contravened the code of hospitality. Furthermore, when Sodom's sins are mentioned elsewhere

¹⁴ R. A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 254-256.

¹⁵ S. J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 112-115.

¹⁶ J. S. Feinberg and P. D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), p. 189.

they do not include homosexuality but have more to do with hypocrisy and social injustice (Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:49-50). Also, Jesus doesn't mention homosexuality when he refers to Sodom (Matthew 10:15, 11:24 and Luke 10:12).

Other 1st century Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus both interpreted Genesis 19:1-11 to refer explicitly to homosexual acts. Philo (a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt) and Josephus (who lived in Israel for the first 30 years of his life and thereafter in Rome) also cite other sins such as arrogance, inhospitality, gluttony, drunkenness, adultery – all due to the extreme wealth of cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah. For them, homosexual conduct was merely the most outrageous example of a wider range of sinful conduct – this validates the observation that some of the other applications of the Sodom story (arrogance, inhospitality, social injustice) were not necessarily made to the exclusion of a critique of homosexual intercourse.

(b) Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

(c) Romans 1:18-27

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion”.

“Much attention has been drawn to Romans 1, where Paul enumerates homosexual actions, for male and female homosexuals alike, as part of what it means to be heathen (1:32-32). As any classicist knows, homosexuality was exceedingly common in first-century society. Paul does not list homosexuality and lesbianism immediately after idolatry in Romans 1:25ff because they are worse than other sins, but because this inversion of the proper relationship between the sexes is a mark of the inversion of the proper relationship between man and God. When Paul describes these practices as ‘against nature’ he does not mean that they are against the instincts of the homosexuals themselves: he is well aware that ‘those who do such things ... not only do them but approve those who practise them’ (1:32). No, what he means is that a wrong relation between human beings (homosexuality – along with other things he mentions: strife, envy, murder, deceit, gossip, ruthlessness, pride and so forth). In that first chapter of Romans he is not isolating special sins for special treatment. He is pointing out that you cannot reject God from your individual life and your society without profoundly affecting both society and the individual. Out of touch with God, we become out of touch with each other and with ourselves.”¹⁷

(d) 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”.

Sexually immoral - πο/ρνοβ (*pornos* – “one who engages in sexual immorality, whether man or woman”). In some contexts, it is distinguished from an adulterer or adulteress – see verse 9 where it is contrasted with μοιχο/β (*moichos* – “adulterer”).

Male prostitutes - μαλακοβ (*malakos* – “soft to the touch” – even used for luxurious clothes e.g. Luke 7:25; “homosexual”). In some contexts it refers to the passive male partner in homosexual intercourse – for example, here where it is contrasted with *arsenokoites* (the active male partner). This latter view is also supported through the use of the word by another 1st century Jew, Philo. He twice uses the word *malakia* in his description of the behaviour of passive homosexual partners (*hoi paschontes* – *On the Special Laws* 3.37-42). Homosexual offenders - αορσενοκοι÷τηβ (*arsenokoites* – “male partner in homosexual intercourse” – literally “male bedders” or “males who take other males to bed”). In some

¹⁷ M. Green, D. Holloway and D. Watson, *The Church and Homosexuality: A Positive Answer to the Current Debate* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p. 24.

contexts it refers to the *active male partner* in homosexual intercourse – for example, here where it is contrasted with *malakos* (the passive male partner).

(e) 1 Timothy 1:8-11

“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 9 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine 11 that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me”.

“adulterers’ (verse 10) – “perverts” (verse 10) – ἀρσενοκοιτῆς (*arsenokoites* – “male partner in homosexual intercourse” – literally “male bedders” or “males who take other males to bed”).

7. Conclusion

Summing up a discussion on Gen 19:1-11, Lev 18:22 and 20:13, Rom 1:26f, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:8-10, Feinberg and Feinberg say:

“In summing up our discussion of biblical teaching on homosexuality, we note that Scripture does not say a lot about homosexuality. Possibly this is because it was not widespread in Jewish culture. However, we cannot escape the clear conviction that when Scripture does speak of it, it prohibits and condemns it. Thus, we must conclude that pro-homosexual writers seem to escape the text’s meaning, not explain it”.¹⁸

“That, then, is the essence of the biblical teaching. Homosexual activity is wrong, as fornication, adultery, bestiality are wrong, because all of them defile the ‘one man-one woman – for keeps’ which is both the Creator’s instructions for mankind (Genesis 2:24) and the clearest embodiment we can get of the total and exclusive self-giving between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:21ff). It is written into creation. It is written into redemption. No Church which claims the name of Christian is at liberty to repudiate something which is central to creation and redemption.”¹⁹

¹⁸John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg and Aldous Huxley, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 201 (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996).

¹⁹M. Green, D. Holloway and D. Watson, *The Church and Homosexuality: A Positive Answer to the Current Debate* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p. 27.