

Introduction

Over the last several weeks, we've seen that our views on sex and gender "depend on background beliefs that we bring to" the discussion. And these background beliefs have to do with three primary issues: identity, freedom, and love. And furthermore, "our views on such matters are shaped by reasoned argument and reflection less often than we like to imagine." That's just not the way it works. What typically happens is that "our background beliefs are commonly held at a kind of prearticulate level. We take them in with the air we breathe, [we] drink them in from the surrounding culture."¹

And this is the reason we started this entire series the way we have. Before ever getting to some of the very complicated issues of sexuality, such as same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria, which we'll do beginning two weeks from now...but before getting to that, we've needed to start much further back. And so we've just spent three weeks trying to see air. Trying to recognize the air we breathe.

And now it's time for us to shift our attention from the stories our society tells to the story God tells.

My goal for tonight is to help us begin to see sexuality and gender from God's perspective. And the way to do that is to turn our attention from the stories of identity, freedom, and love that our society tells to the story that God tells. And to hear the story God tells, we turn to the Bible.

How do We Know the Truth about Sexuality and Gender? Romanticism vs Christianity

Now some people, at this point, may want to say, "Wait, wait, wait a minute. It's not that simple. After all, the Bible was written by humans, and so we need to be careful about presuming that we can just read it and find God's perspective.

And yes, it's true enough to say that humans wrote the Bible. However, if we simply go from saying humans wrote it to saying that the Bible is therefore inadequate, as though the human authors were some shameful secret that we have laid bare, some deficiency that we are now in a position to patch up, well, then we're the ones who "must stand charged with ignorance and superstition." **The humanity of the Bible does not entitle us to patronize it.**²

The Bible is God's chosen means of telling us the truth about the world. Scripture is the **record that God has authorized.**

God has set Scripture apart from all the other writings and all of our experiences and all of our scientific abilities.

- Just like God "set apart a particular race and a particular member of that race for the salvation of the world,"

- in the same way, he “set apart particular writers to” give us “a definite and decisive testimony to what he has done.”
- “Just as we speak of the sinlessness of the human being Jesus of Nazareth...
- so we” can speak about the “perfection in Holy Scripture.”³

Now some people will counter this by shifting the argument from a critique of the Bible to a critique of the Church’s history of interpreting the Bible. So it’s becoming common to hear someone say something like this:

- Well the Bible “can be used to support a number of different views on a host of important issues. Take any passage of Scripture, and you’ll find sincere Christians who hold one view—and a similar number of equally devout believers who hold an opposing view.”⁴
- And so, the claim that’s being made here is that there hasn’t really been a single, overarching Christian understanding on sexuality and gender.

And here’s where it gets tricky.

On the one hand, “there have been varieties of local law, custom, and permission within Christian cultures with respect to sexuality over the past two millennia. But the basic lines of discussion have been stable, and they point in a relatively stable direction.”⁵ The history of the church, the tradition of the church, until approximately 40 years ago, it has been clear and consistent on sexuality.

To put it bluntly: **most Christians at most times in most places have believed the same thing about sex and gender.**

- Over the course of the history of the church, across racial, ethnic, historical, and cultural lines, there has been a **consensus** about human sexuality, and this is across each of the three major expressions of the church—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.
- And it’s been this way since the very beginning.

On the other hand, over the last forty years a minority portion of the global church has seriously called into question the church’s historical position regarding sexuality and gender.

- And in fact, here in the West “most scholars who have written books about homosexuality in the last forty years have concluded that the Bible does **not** condemn consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations.”⁶

So what are we to do with this? Has the church gotten this wrong for 2,000 years? After all, for many years, some in the church stood on the wrong side of the question of slavery. In the words

of Preston Sprinkle, a New Testament scholar who focuses his work on contemporary sexual ethics, too “many Christians held the Bible in one hand while they whipped their slaves with the other. Christians have stood on the wrong side of science. The famous Christian astronomer Galileo was excommunicated and imprisoned for trying to overturn the church’s traditional belief that the sun revolves around the earth. Yet we are thankful that Galileo had the nerve to question tradition—even one that was written in stone.”⁷

It’s an undisputed fact: we all have biases and presuppositions that we bring to Scripture when we are interpreting it. But, we also “have the ability to identify our assumptions, invite people to challenge those assumptions, consider the strengths and weaknesses of alternative interpretations, and prayerfully and communally interpret the [Bible]...in a responsible and humble manner—always being open to the possibility that we could be wrong.”⁸

Look, I love the Bible. Along with the Psalmist I can honestly say to God, *“Oh how I love your law!”*⁹ I absolutely cherish God’s life-giving word. It’s a refuge, and a rock. It’s a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.

And yet I know, that so many times the Bible has been wielded like a club to bludgeon people. Some of the pages of the Bible are dripping with the blood of our gay and trans* siblings.

Countless LGBTQ+ believers have found themselves struggling under the weight of burdens that no Christian should ever bear, burdens given to them not by Christ, not by the Bible, but by stigma, and prejudice, and discrimination. Sometimes out of reckless ignorance, and sometimes out of old fashioned hatred.

“Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth contemplate suicide three times more often than heterosexual youth”¹⁰ “Of all teen suicides from 2013 to 2015, nearly 25 percent were LGBTQ.”¹¹ “Of all homeless youth in the United States, 40 percent are LGBTQ.”¹² “LGBTQ people are also more likely to be the target of hate crimes than any other minority group in the United States, surpassing Jewish, Muslim, and Black people.”¹³

And so as we turn our attention from culture to Scripture, let us be very careful.

And yet, let us remember that **the Bible is the true story of the whole world and it is authoritative for all of life today.**

- This is a basic belief of Christianity.
- The authority of the Bible is an essential component of the Christian faith.
- Without this belief, and not just the belief, but the practice—without the authority of Scripture—we do not have Christianity, we may have the sound and fury, the trappings of Christianity, but it’s all a shell game. Without the authority of Scripture, Christianity has been transformed into a new religion.

And so with fear and trembling, with humility and courage, we seek “a biblically shaped imagination, one trained in Scripture-shaped instincts.”¹⁴ We are seeking the Christian view of God, sex, and human flourishing as it comes from Scripture.

And part of what I’m saying is that when it comes to the truth about sexuality and gender, **experience cannot be our starting point**. We are creatures. God is the Creator. And so to have a good, true, and beautiful view of sexuality, the proper starting point is not our own experiences but God and the great true story of his dealings with the men and women whom he loves.

We started this series of teachings with culture not so that we could build a Christian view from culture. No, we started this series with culture in order **to unmask our own presuppositions**, so that we can begin to **recognize our own perspective** as we listen for God’s voice on this subject.

When it comes to sex, the Bible is where we turn to find the truth. This is the source that tells us what is right and what is wrong. And a fundamental reason that our Secular Age is so uncomfortable with this approach is because we are children of the Romantic movement.

I’m talking about Romanticism, the widespread **posture** that

- began in England and France in the 18th century
- and reached its culmination in Germany in the last generation of the 18th and the first generation of the 19th century.

It really took hold of society at large through the poetry and novels of people like Goethe, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, Victor Hugo, Jane Austin, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.¹⁵ (And by the way, I’ve just listed several authors and poets that I love and read regularly.)

This is the air we breathe. And we’ve got to learn to recognize it. Because, you see, in romanticism, the **most important reality is the inner life, the intuition**. And so the hero is:

- the rebel against tradition,
- the subverter of institutions,
- the one who seeks authenticity and sincerity.

With romanticism, our Secular Age has come to place the greatest value on experience, relationships, inner insight, moral intuition, innate desires—Live your truth! Speak your truth!

- And so, “morality is a personal choice... a matter of individual decision.”¹⁶

- Everybody is entitled to their own opinion. Don't judge anyone else on moral matters, and don't let yourself be judged.
- And so largely from the influence of romanticism, we have come to see that the problem with society is not so much immoral people, but people who make moral judgments about people.
- To push your own moral views is to do violence, to dominate and control others, "a kind of pathology that violates other people's dignity and rights."¹⁷

And yet, Christianity is very different. **In Christianity we learn morality from Scripture. God has spoken to us from outside of us.** And so we are not left to ourselves, we don't have to figure it all out by ourselves for ourselves.

I'm dwelling on this point, because it's one of the serious sticking points. "The traditional Christian conviction is that Scripture is our primary text," and therefore,

- "we seek to interpret and align our lives with its truth."

But our Secular Age, with its "culture of authenticity has reversed this dynamic. Within the modern mind-set,

- our lives and personal experiences have become the primary text;
- [and] we seek to interpret and align Scripture in accordance with" our experiences and desires.

And as a result, in too many churches, and among too many Christians, the "biblical teaching on...sexuality has been...chastised...and reinterpreted."

And so we must learn again to be skeptical of the 4 primary Secular sources of authority:

- First of all, we must become skeptical of our own **moral intuitions**. Remember, we spent three weeks seeing how the stories our society tells in such remarkable ways, they give us a script that lulls us into believing that what seems to make sense to us, what seems to just be natural and self-evidently true is deeply shaped by our society. It's not a pure insight.
- Second, when Christians say that the Bible is the source of authority on this subject, we're elevating the Scriptures above our **relationships** with people whose experience is at odds with the witness of the Bible. And so we must be skeptical of the insights we get about sexuality and gender from our friends.
- Third, recognizing the Bible as the authoritative source for moral guidance, this means we're bringing our own **attractions and feelings and deep desires** under subjection to the

Scriptures. We must allow Scripture to contradict our deepest impulses, feelings, sexual orientation, and sexual urges.

- And finally, fourth, I must learn to submit my **wishes** to Scripture. In other words, what I wish to be true, what I imagine should be true...this too must be subject to the Scriptures as the church has historically read them.

Do you see, part of what I'm saying is that we do not know God reliably until we meet him in the Bible. And we do not know if we think about sexuality and gender is true until we hear from God in Scripture. And when we come to the Bible, we must remain open to learning what we may not expect and do not already know.

And so, as we turn now, for the rest of this series, from the stories our Secular Age is telling about sexuality and gender to the story that God tells about this issue...it's not so much about my view, this is about the teaching of the Scriptures, passed down through the Church. And yes, it's presented in my voice, but what we're recovering is "the moral logic behind Christian sexuality: how babies relate to marriage, and marriage to sex, and sex to identity, and identity to being male and female—and how all of this relates to the person of Christ. That's where we're headed" tonight and over the following four weeks.¹⁸

Alright, if you have a Bible with you, turn to **Matthew 19:1–12**.

Sex in the Bible: Creation and Purpose

Read Matthew 19:1–12

In this passage Jesus is in a debate with the Pharisees about divorce. And in his response twice he quotes the Old Testament.

- In **v4** he quotes from **Genesis 1:27** [**read it**]
- and in **v5** he quotes from **Genesis 2:24** [**read it**]

Why does Jesus do this? Why does he answer the tricky and complex and seriously dangerous question about divorce by quoting from the story of creation?

Because "Jesus considers God's original creation of humans as male and female to still be normative thousands of years later. The idea of 'male and female' is not just relevant for the beginning of creation. Jesus operates with the conviction that 'the created order' as expressed in Genesis 1–2 'is a guide for the moral order.'"¹⁹

In addition, another important way that Jesus' words pertain to this whole subject we're talking about is that Jesus is showing us that we cannot know whether a thing is good or bad or right or wrong unless we know the purpose for which it was made.

It's so important for us to see what Jesus is doing here. Let me explain what I mean.

The British philosopher, Roger Scruton, wrote a book entitled, *Sexual Desire*. And in the first few pages Scruton has this wonderful analogy. He compares English butchers with French butchers. He says that in butchery, "an object is divided, sometimes according to its nature and sometimes in defiance of" its nature. The French butcher, Scruton says, "prompted by a native respect for... [the fruits of the earth], endeavours to separate each natural texture and flavour from its competitors, detaching a complete fillet from the bone, fat, kidney and skin that encase it. He divides nature more nearly at the joints than does his English colleague." In contrast, and I'm quoting at this point:

"The English butcher, motivated by a zealous disdain for the corpse before him, and also for the man who will eat it, chops the creature savagely into rough-hewn blocks, having little more than a tradition of fair-play to recommend them. An English "joint" may consist of a scrap of dorsal muscle, a piece of backbone, a fragment of kidney, some skin and marrow, a few hairs, and the indelible mark with which Farmer Jones once branded his lamb."²⁰

A friend of mine, pointed this passage from Scruton out to me. His name is Matthew Mason, and he's a Brit. He lives in Salisbury, England. And he said that he hated to even bring this illustration up because as a matter of integrity and principle, he's made a point in life to never speak well of the French. But, Matthew said, in all fairness "there is a reason French cuisine is famous and English cuisine is" not.

When I lived in England and was studying for a PhD, my mentor was a wonderful scholar by the name of Craig Bartholomew. He's South African, but he moved to England and had become a British citizen. He told me one time that the British could take any piece of meat, and ruin it.

Do you see the point these three distinguished British gentlemen are making? "There is a natural pattern, a natural structure to the carcass in front of the butcher. And the French butcher is attentive to that structure. A skillful butcher will allow himself to be constrained by the natural pattern he has in front of him and in that very constraint, he sets himself free. Free to produce cuts of meat of the highest quality."²¹

And so "as it is with butchery... it is with creation as a whole. God has designed the cosmos in an orderly way. There is a God-given grain to the universe, a bit like the grain in a piece of wood or marble. [And we're told, that] a skillful sculptor will be attentive to the grain in the marble in front of him, and will work with it and allow it to discipline him, where necessary even transforming what he plans to do with it, in order to work *with* the grain of stone" that he's

dealing with. “There’s an order to reality. And the wise person will pay attention to that order. They’ll pay attention to the grain of the universe. That’s what it means to live wisely. To pay attention to the grain of the universe and cut with that grain. A foolish person ignores the grain, ignores reality, and thinks they can live however they please.”²² Do whatever they want.

So back in **Matthew 19**, when Jesus is asked a really touchy question about divorce and remarriage, this is how he goes about answering the question. And notice how in both exchanges with the Pharisees he begins by alluding to **Genesis 1:1**.

But this reference to the first line of the Bible it has a slight edit, a word change.

- If you brought along a copy of the Bible, and I hope you did, and please do for the next several weeks...Find **Genesis 1:1**, and notice the first four words, *“In the beginning God created...”*
- Okay, now turn to **Matthew 19:4**. Here is Jesus answering the question about divorce by going back to the very beginning of the Bible. And he echoes the first sentence of Scripture, but he changes a key word. See if you can find the critical change. [Answer: *“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning”*]
- And in **v8**, he does it again, *“from the beginning”*
- Instead of *“in the beginning”* (**Genesis 1:1**) he says *“from the beginning”* (**Matthew 19:4, 8**).

Now what’s the big deal? It’s this. Jesus’ point is that the purpose of things *“in”* the beginning carries on right down through history, to the present day. God put into creation an order, a purpose. So Jesus is asked a really controversial question about marriage and divorce. And his response is to go back all the way to creation.

The way Jesus handles the tricky ethical questions about divorce is a crucial passage for the whole question of a Christian reading of the Bible. Jesus is teaching us to read the Bible as the story of creation and new creation.

The great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck summarized the essence of the Christian faith in a single sentence. If you could do it in one sentence, what would you say? Here’s Bavinck, and I don’t think you could do better than this. **The essence of Christianity is that “the creation of the Father [was] ruined by sin [but it] is restored in the death of the Son of God and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into” the kingdom of God.**²³

Here’s the point: the gospel is about new creation. In the work of the Son and the Spirit the Father is renewing his original creation.²⁴

“Think of it like this: The Ghent Altar Piece, one of the greatest masterpieces of all western art has recently been restored. It was dirty and damaged. [It had] been stolen several times. [And] what do [you do] with a great masterpiece when [it’s in a] state of disrepair? [You] don’t hire someone to paint a new one! No! You get a conservator to lovingly restore it. Clean” it and repair it.

And that is what God is doing with his creation. He’s not discarding it and replacing it with something different.

Summary: So the starting place for finding the truth about sexuality and gender is not our experience, or intuitions, or feelings, or friendships...it’s God’s original purpose for sexuality and gender in the beginning of creation.

Remember, when people were confused about divorce Jesus said, we have to go back to God’s original purpose for marriage in the beginning of creation. And so we need to do the same thing. Now that we’re confused about sex and gender, we need to go back to God’s original purpose for sex and gender in the beginning of creation.

We can’t know right and wrong about sexuality and gender and all the complicated issues we need to get to eventually, we can’t talk about homosexuality or extra-marital sex, or divorce, or remarriage, or gender dysphoria...all of those really important issues, if we have questions about them, we have to challenge the deep stories our culture tells about love that teach us our feelings determine rightness or wrongness. No, at the end of the day, what’s right and what’s wrong in sex is based on how our behavior corresponds to God’s original purposes.

Transition: So let’s follow Jesus’ direction, and let’s see what the purpose of sex has been from the beginning.

Sex in the Beginning: Three Purposes

And as we’ve seen there are two key passages, [Genesis 1:27](#) and [2:24](#). And in these passages we learn about the purpose of sex. And what we learn is that from the beginning, God created sex for three purposes:

1. uniting a husband and wife in intimacy, pleasure, and love
2. creating a child out of that husband and wife intimate love
3. pointing in a sacramental way to the love of God

And now for the remainder of our time, let’s take each one of these in turn.

1. Unitive

First of all, the unitive purpose of sex: sex unites a husband and a wife. One of the three purposes of sex, from the beginning, is that it forms a deep bond between a husband and a wife.

Genesis 2:24, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

What does this mean? Why does the very first description of sex use this graphic image of becoming *“one flesh”*? What point is God making by saying that when two people have sex they become “one body”? Is he merely making a physical observation? No.

In the Bible, the word *“flesh,”* when it’s used in this way, it’s not talking merely about a physical body. It’s talking about the whole person. “For a husband and wife to become *‘one flesh’* is the **bodily expression of a personal union at the deepest level of their being.**”²⁵

“We are all well aware that a good marriage does not just happen. The reality of becoming ‘one flesh’ begins with wedding vows, but it takes a lifetime of work and attentiveness in order for two different people genuinely and deeply to become one.”²⁶ And yet when the Bible first talks about this incredible possibility, of two humans becoming one, sex is a key part of the process by which that happens. Sex “is intended to have a profoundly unifying effect on two people.”²⁷

In **1 Corinthians 6:12–20**, Paul forbids Christians from having sex with a prostitute. And the reasoning he gives is remarkable. Starting in **v16**, *“Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’... Flee from sexual immorality.... You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

So Paul “is decrying the monstrosity of physical oneness without all the other kinds of oneness that every sex act should mirror.”²⁸ “We might paraphrase Paul’s statement this way: ‘Don’t you know that the purpose of sex is always ‘one flesh’—to become united to another person in every area of life? Is that what you are seeking with the prostitute? Of course not—so don’t have sex with her.’”²⁹

In other words, “sex with a prostitute is wrong because **every** sex act is supposed to be a **uniting** act. Paul insists it is radically dissonant to give your body to someone to whom you will not also commit your whole life.”³⁰

“Sex is perhaps the most powerful God-created way to help you give your entire self to another human being.”³¹ “It is a mode of presence to the spouse unlike any other.”³² “It is God’s appointed way for two people to reciprocally say to one another, **‘I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you.’**...[And we] must not use sex to say anything less.”³³

Transition: Okay, so the first purpose of sex is for a total union between two people. For two people to unite at all levels of their lives. And the second purpose of sex is to make children.

2. Procreative

Let's go back to **Genesis 2:24**, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

This final phrase—the two *“shall become one flesh,”*—we've spoken about one thing it means. But, it means more than “union.” You see, it's a double entendre. It's not only about the husband and the wife becoming joined, and thus one flesh. It's also about the fact that when a husband and wife join together in sex they produce one flesh.

In other words, when the husband and wife hold fast to one another in sex, another person is created, another flesh is created. One flesh is produced, another person proceeds out of their union. The man and the woman become one, not [only] in the sexual act itself, but in the fact that this act *gives rise* to flesh, a new human life.³⁴

And of course this is a purpose of sex. Remember **Genesis 1:27**, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”*

In this passage it is clear that part of our ability to bear God's image is our ability to co-create new life with Him.

In Genesis 1–2 we see that “God created people to be in relationships, in families... Creation teaches” this, and it's affirmed by “Jesus, Paul, and others in the New Testament... God intends people to be born into families with heterosexual marriage.”³⁵

And this is one of the reasons that sex is sacred. When we have sex, we can co-create with God a new living soul. In the words of the great 2nd century Christian apologist, Clement of Alexandria, in this we become a likeness of God—co-workers in the creation of humans.³⁶ When a husband and a wife have sex, they share “a little of the awesome power of the creator of the universe.”³⁷

So on the one hand, we serve God by co-creating with him those who bear his image. **But it's more than that**, this is not just about population growth. We serve God and his Kingdom in marriage by producing families of disciples, children who know and love and serve the Kingdom of God. It's not just about having kids, it's about raising them well.

So think about this: **“The Church has taught from the very beginning** that

- **just as human beings are made for something outside of ourselves**—namely, communion with God—
- **sex is made for something outside of its enjoyment**—namely, participation with God in the creation of” a new person.³⁸

Now think back to some of what we talked about in our 3rd session, the one on sex and freedom, where we saw that “mutual consent rather than a marriage contract between a man and a woman is the new moral foundation for sexual relations.”

And one of the results of this, along with the invention of the Pill, has been that sex has “been disconnected from marriage and procreation. And so the decision to have children is now a choice separate” from getting married not to mention a choice separate from having sexual intercourse.³⁹

We’ve forgotten that sex is for babies. Most people use contraceptives. And so when an entire society regularly has sterile sex, it is virtually impossible to remember this particular purpose of sex. Instead, **we tend to think of sex as primarily for pleasure or intimacy or unity.** But sex has three purposes: the unitive, the procreative, and as we’ll see in a minute, the sacramental.

This is not to say that sex is **only** for procreation. It’s not. Every act of sex between a husband and a wife doesn’t have to be open to pregnancy.

A husband and wife can turn to one another in loving affection without the possibility of pregnancy because it embodies, nurtures, and enriches their complete sharing of life. A husband and wife can seek that, even when children are not planned, or wanted, or desired in that season. Sexual pleasure through the uniting of a husband and wife is a fulfillment of one of the purposes of sex.⁴⁰

So not every act of sex between a husband and a wife has to be open to pregnancy, **and yet** the shift **from child-centered to romance-centered marriage** is a shift away from God’s original purposes. From our Hallmark cards to our divorce courts, the American view of sex has come to emphasize feelings over duties,⁴¹ and career and romance over the “years of sacrificial nurture”⁴² that’s required when we have children.

Our society is at war on children. From abortion, to deliberately childless marriages. And then there’s the whole way in which our culture demands that women get rid of the mom-bod and get back to a body-type unmarked by child-bearing. We need a society that helps women to be filled with humble thanks for the ways God has used children to mark their bodily life.

People considering marriage must be open to children, and they must be devoted to raising them well. Let us not accidentally allow the technology of birth control to make us forget the procreative purpose of marriage and sex.

Transition: In creation, we see the purposes of sex as unitive, procreative, and finally as a pointer and a participation in the love of God.

3. Sacramental

This is called the sacramental purpose of sex. In your Bibles, turn to **Ephesians 5:31**, “*A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*”

So

1. sex is unitive: that is, it’s for the the husband and wife
2. sex is procreative, that is, it’s for children
3. And third: sex is sacramental, that is, it’s for God.

“This is true in the sense that sex should be received as a good gift.” But it’s also true in the sense that when practiced according to the grain of the universe, sex between a husband and a wife can train us to “turn away from idols...from ingrown selfishness to kingdom work, and...to point our whole lives – body and soul, sex included – toward the only One who can truly satisfy the thirsty animals that we are, the God we have met in Jesus Christ who promised” us in **John 4:14**, “*those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*”⁴³

“Our sexuality instructs us of our need for God as we experience in our sexuality a longing for completion in another (*eros*). Indeed, a Christian understanding of sexuality focuses more on affirming this longing for completion as something that exists regardless of marital status or sexual experience; it is fundamental to what it means to be human. We long for the other, for completion, and even marriage...only points to the eternal or transcendent. realition of completion in another.”⁴⁴

Sexual difference and union is a type of Christ and the church. In our Secular Age, “we think we know what sex *really* is. We have outgrown romance and now know that sex is no more than a clash of bodies and an an orgasmic exchange of fluids. There is no magic, no mystery; only friction and technique and lubricants and devices. Our sex toys have become so sophisticated that we no longer need two to tango. One partner is robotic...lacking emotional needs to meet.”⁴⁵

“More than a change of law, we need a re-enchantment of sex. Scripture enables us to” understand that sex is more than biology and chemistry. The sacramental reality of sex is not about adding something to sex. This is part of the truth of sex. “The lover’s enthrallment to his beloved is the *Lord’s* enthralled fascination for his people.”⁴⁶

Sex “is a reflection of the joyous self-giving and pleasure of love within the very life of the triune God.” And furthermore, “sex is glorious not only because it reflects the joy of the Trinity but also because it points to the eternal delight of soul that we will have in heaven, in our loving relationships with God and one another.”

In **Romans c7** God tells us that “the best marriages are pointers to the deep, infinitely fulfilling, and final union we will have with Christ in love. No wonder, as some have said, that sex between a man and a woman can be a sort of embodied out-of-body experience. It’s...[an] ecstatic, breathtaking, daring, scarcely-to-be-imagined look at the glory that is our future.”⁴⁷

In the words of Philip Yancey, “If humanity serves as your religion, then sex becomes an act of worship. On the other hand, if God is the object of your religion, then romantic love becomes an unmistakable pointer, a rumor of transcendence as loud as any we hear on earth.”⁴⁸

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, teacher, and environmental activist. She’s perhaps most famous today for writing a novel entitled, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, that has been made into a TV series that seems to be all the rage. I’ve not watched it, so I don’t really know much about it.

Another novel she wrote is entitled, *Oryx and Crake*. It’s set in a horrific world, a dystopia. Lots of things have gone wrong, and sex is one area in which brokenness shows up in a particularly powerful way.

Okay, so the main character, Jimmy, is in love with a woman named Oryx. Oryx has an unspeakable past, one of abuse and exploitation, in which she was cruelly used by child pornographers. Jimmy wants to know exactly what happened, and he keeps pressing Oryx for details.

Jimmy asks, ‘It wasn’t real sex, was it?...In the movies, it was only acting. Wasn’t it?’

Oryx shuts him down with her answer. ‘But Jimmy, you should know. All sex is real.’

And Beth Felker Jones, in her wonderful little book on sex (*Faithful: A Theology of Sex*), responds to this scene by saying, “I believe this insight is exactly right: ‘All sex is real.’ [And so] much of what goes wrong around Christian understandings of sex has to do with our failure to connect sex to reality. We fail to see that the way we do — and do not — have sex has to do with who God *really* is and who we *really* are.”⁴⁹ Sex is sacramental, you see.

Conclusion

Okay, to wrap this up. Please find **Psalm 119:107**. Here we have the psalmist praying something we need to learn to ask God our, **“Give me life according to your word!”**

This is the prayer of a faithful Christian. This is the prayer of someone who is ready to take the risk of living by the Creator’s design. It doesn’t mean we know everything about Scripture or about the challenges of life. It doesn’t mean we have the answer to every question. What it means is that we’re willing to “rely on Scripture, **to receive it on its own terms**, questioning and being questioned by it, in the expectation that” God’s way really is the best way.⁵⁰

Recommended Resources

Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Regent College Publishing, 2003)

Christopher Ash, *Married for God: Making Your Marriage the Best it Can Be* (Crossway, 2016)

Addendum for O&A

The nuanced difference between the Protestant and the Roman Catholic Position.

Roman Catholics and Protestants agree that procreation is one of the divinely intended ‘goods’ of marriage. And therefore, we **agree** that:

1. a deliberate decision without justifiable reason, to exclude procreation from a marriage is a rejection of this good and a contradiction of the nature of marriage itself. We all agree on this.
2. We are in full unity in opposing the ‘contraceptive mentality’, that is, a selfish preference for immediate satisfaction over the more demanding good of having and raising a family.

Where we disagree is this:

- Anglicans and most Protestants, for that matter, understand the good of procreation to be a norm governing the married relationship as a whole.
- Roman Catholic teaching, on the other hand, requires that each and every act of intercourse should be ‘open to procreation.’⁵¹
- In other words, “for Anglicans, it is sufficient that this respect should characterize the married relationship as a whole;
- whereas for Roman Catholics, it must characterize each act of sexual intercourse.
- Anglicans understand the moral principle to be that procreation should not arbitrarily be excluded from the continuing relationship;
- whereas Roman Catholics hold that there is an unbreakable connection, willed by God, between the two ‘goods’ of marriage and the corresponding meanings of marital intercourse, and that therefore they may not be sundered by any direct and deliberate act.”⁵²

¹ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, third ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1996, 2005] 2013), 1.

² Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 56.

³ O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis*, 55–6. For this view, O'Donovan references John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, *Current Issues in Theology* 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17–39.

⁴ Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 28.

⁵ Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of Human Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 86–7.

⁶ Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2015), 17. E.g., Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983); Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998); Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Estancia, NM: Alamo Square Press, 2000); Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007); James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014)

⁷ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 18.

⁸ Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 19.

⁹ Psalm 119:97

¹⁰ Bridget Eileen Rivera, *Heavy Burdens: Seven Ways LGBTQ Christians Experience Harm in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021), 15. Citing “Facts about Suicide,” The Trevor Project, accessed August 19, 2020, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/facts-about-suicide>.

¹¹ Rivera, *Heavy Burdens*, 15. Citing “LGBT Suicide Statistics in Teens,” Newport Academy, May 6, 2019, <https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/mental-health/lgbt-suicide-statistics>.

¹² Rivera, *Heavy Burdens*, 15. Citing “LGBT Suicide Statistics in Teens.”

¹³ Rivera, *Heavy Burdens*, 15. Citing Haeyou Park and Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, “L.G.B.T. People Are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/16/us/hate-crimes-against-lgbt.html>.

¹⁴ Jones, “Embodied from Creation through Redemption,” in Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, eds., *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 21.

¹⁵ First conspicuously present in Goethe, Schiller, and Herder.

¹⁶ Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

¹⁷ Smith, et al., *Lost in Transition*, 23–4.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Mere*, 38.

¹⁹ Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2021), 68–69. Citing W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988–97), 111, 10.

²⁰ Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York; London: Continuum, 2006 [1986]).

²¹ Matthew Mason, “Man and Woman He Created Them: God’s Gospel Plan for Male and Female,” a talk given at the Diocese of Christ our Hope Synod, November 3–5, 2016.

²² Mason, “Man and Woman He Created Them.”

²³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 112.

²⁴ Oliver O’Donovan, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy* (London: SCM, 2009), 99.

²⁵ Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 197. “Sex is a life-uniting act. It’s much more than just an exchange of bodily fluids, even if the two people engaged in the act insist otherwise. The act itself is tied to transcendent meaning that exists quite apart from the intentions of the people involved” (Mark A. Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, Questions for Restless Minds, D. A. Carson, ed. [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022], 10.)

²⁶ Craig Bartholomew, “Spirituality, Mission, and the Drama of Scripture,” in Nathan Finn and Keith Whitfield, eds., *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a Vision for the Missional Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 33.

²⁷ Sam Allberry, *Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?* (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2020), 38. Sex can be like a “glue that seeps ever deeper into the fabric of a relationship, working out the commitment [of a husband and a wife] to progressively become ‘one flesh’” (Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015], 41).

²⁸ Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 225.

²⁹ Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 277 n 4.

³⁰ Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 225.

³¹ Keller and Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 223–24.

³² Gilbert Meilaender, "Sweet Necessities: Food, Sex, and Saint Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29:1 (Spring, 2001): 16.

³³ Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 223–24.

³⁴ Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 109. See also, Gordon Wenham on Genesis 2:24, "'They become one flesh.' This does not denote merely the sexual union that follows marriage, or the children conceived in marriage, or even the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, though all are involved in becoming one flesh" (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Dallas Word Books, 1987], 1:71).

³⁵ Mark A. Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, Questions for Restless Minds, D. A. Carson, ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 9.

³⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Paidogogos*, 2.10.83; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 3.9.66. Cited in Harper, *From Shame to Sex*, 110.

³⁷ Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sex: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 110. Harper is summarizing the views of Clement of Alexandria.

³⁸ Scott Hahn, *The First Society: The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Restoration of the Social Order* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018), 89.,

³⁹ Dale S. Kuehne, *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 44.

⁴⁰ Meilaender, "Sweet Necessities," 13.

⁴¹ Ross Douthat, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 237.

⁴² Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 47. "Most people have probably always married at least partly because of prior affection" (Ash, *Marriage*, 47).

⁴³ Beth Felker Jones, *Faithful: A Theology of Sex* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 42–3.

⁴⁴ Mark A. Yarhouse, *How Should We Think about Homosexuality?*, Questions for Restless Minds, D. A. Carson, ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 10.

⁴⁵ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 385.

⁴⁶ Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, 385.

⁴⁷ Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, 235–36.

⁴⁸ Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth are We Missing?*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 88.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Faithful*, 13.

⁵⁰ O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis*, 58.

⁵¹ “This difference of understanding received official expression in 1930. Before this, both churches would have counseled abstinence for couples who had a justifiable reason to avoid conception. The Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, however, resolved in 1930 that ‘where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence...other methods may be used.’ The encyclical of Pope Pius XI (*Casti Connubii*, 1930), which was intended among other things as a response to the Lambeth resolution, renewed the traditional Roman Catholic position. In 1968 the teaching was further developed and clarified in Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. This was itself subjected to adverse criticism by the Lambeth Conference later the same year. The Roman Catholic position has been frequently reaffirmed since: for example, in documents *Familiaris Consortio* 1981, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1992. This teaching belongs to the ordinary magisterium calling for ‘religious assent’ (ARCIC, “Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission,” paragraph 80.)

⁵² ARCIC, "Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission," paragraph 81. See also paragraph 82. The two primary critiques of the RC position that I know of are: (1) The RC position is predicated on the Augustinian view that in paradise there was only one good of marriage, procreation, and therefore sexual pleasure was not to be separated from that good. Once we acknowledge, however, the other goods of marriage (unitive and sacramental), we are freed to consider the relation, and the separation, of these goods in new ways. That is, the unitive good of marital coitus is itself one of the goods of marriage, rather than simply a part of an act aimed at procreation. This is well argued by Gilbert Meilaender, "Sweet Necessities: Food, Sex, and Saint Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29:1 (Spring, 2001), 3–18. See also, in the same edition of the journal, the responses to his article and his response to those responses. (2) The sexual life of a married couple "should be viewed as a whole, not in terms of its distinct acts of intercourse... To break marriage down into a series of disconnected sexual acts is to falsify its true nature... The two ends of marriage [procreative and unitive] are held together in the life of sexual partnership which the couple live together... It is artificial to insist... that 'each and every marriage act' must express the two goods equally. What is at issue... [is] not the unity of procreation and relation [unity] as such, but the Moral Theological tradition known as 'strict act-analysis', which tends, in the eyes of its critics, to atomize human activities in ways that defy their inner structure" (Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, [1984] 2002), 77. See also, Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1986] 1994), 210). For a third way of accounting for the Protestant position, see Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, third ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1996, 2005] 2013), chapter 2, "Procreation versus Reproduction," especially p 17. Note: I have recognized in my own circles that many people who bemoan small families (whether the quiver-full movement, or it's more mainstream versions), as they account for causes they fail to account for the theory of "demographic transition": as countries develop and life spans increase people have fewer and fewer children. I.e., the impact of sharply increasing life-span and the sharp decline in infant and childhood mortality on birthrates. ("For most of recorded history, average life expectancy at birth was about twenty-four years. In the United States, this had risen by about half, to thirty-seven years, by 1850; nearly doubled to forty-seven years by 1900; nearly tripled to sixty-eight years by 1950, and by 2000 averaged seventy-seven years [eighty for women and seventy-five for men]" John D. Mueller, *Redeeming Economics: Rediscovering the Missing Element* [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010], 218). The rapid increase in life expectancy has deeply impacted birth rates. Put bluntly, "Parents typically respond to higher mortality rates, particularly in infancy, with higher fertility. Fertility, therefore, is positively related to mortality and inversely related to life expectancy" (Mueller, *Redeeming Economics*, 232). ("There are persuasive arguments to be made that increased chances of survival for one's infants deeply affect the need and ability of mothers (and fathers, to a lesser extent) to conceive more children" (Radner, *A Time to Keep*, 26). Put simply, "because more children now survive to adulthood, parents have been having fewer children than when this was far less likely" (Mueller, *Redeeming Economics*, 219).). Artificial contraception's widespread use actually followed the tendency toward lowered birthrates in transitioning societies, it did not precede it. And yet, as John Mueller shows, there are two primary reasons that the birth rates in developed countries of Europe and Asia have fallen sharply: "First, insofar as they benefit the parents rather than the children, both high per capita government social benefits and high per capita private saving act as economic substitutes for children, diminishing fertility. Second, countries like China, Russia, and those in Eastern Europe that have been long governed by totalitarian governments have birth rates depressed further by an average of about 0.6 children per couple (This could be because totalitarian government is associated with lower rates of weekly worship, which are positively related to fertility in a linear fashion. Also, abortion rises exponentially as rates of weekly worship decline.) Finally, after taking all these economic and political factors into account, countries in which the population regularly worships God tend to reproduce themselves, while those that don't, don't" (Mueller, *Redeeming Economics*, 241–42). "The choice to have children because we love them rather than because of the benefits they confer upon us... [is] positively related to the frequency of worship in all cultures... Acting on belief in God and some kind of afterlife makes the crucial difference as to whether people reproduce themselves.... The personal gift of time and resources involved in worship is closely systematically associated with the personal gift of having children for their own sake rather than for the pleasure and utility of the parents" (Mueller, *Redeeming Economics*, 238–39). "Most variation in the total fertility rate is explained by just three basic factors: per capita social benefits, per capita national saving, and frequency of worship" (Mueller, *Redeeming Economics*, 321).