

What Is Sex?

There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. (I Corinth. 6:15, *The Message*)

Fifty years ago, as a high school freshman, I saw a girl's knee when she bent down to gather books from her locker, and couldn't wait to tell the other guys in P.E. class about it. Recently, I visited the local high school my 14-year-old son will enter this fall, and was startled to see girls prancing around in miniskirts, below-navel jeans, and tight, low-cut tank tops.

A college basketball fan (and Duke grad), I sought *Sports Illustrated* during the recent NCAA playoffs for reports, only to find displayed in the drugstore magazine rack the annual "Swimsuit" edition—a misnomer, as the cluster of young women on the cover were basically without swimsuits.

March Madness I enjoy; year-round insanity I can do without.

Fifty years later, clearly something has happened—or not happened—which has left us at the mercy of animal desires and glossy fantasy. My generation has suffered—to name but a very few examples—a President having sex with White House interns, US Embassy military guards seduced by female Soviet spies into revealing classified data, priests molesting children, TV evangelists cavorting with prostitutes, online pornography as a billion-dollar industry, prime-time homosexuality, and a deadly plague of sexually transmitted diseases.

Today, as always, our view of sexuality is trapped between two demonic strongholds and blinded by their ping-pong charade. On the right/conservative side, the spirit of Religion hammers us with unmitigated truth: "God's Word says No. So don't do it or you die!" On the left/liberal side, the spirit of Universalism lures with cheap grace: "Our nice God doesn't judge anyone. Do whatever feels good!"

Without Jesus, whose sacrifice in our behalf alone brings the vital balance of "grace *and* truth" (John 1:17), we scorn the shackles of shame-filled legalism and strut into the jaws of shame-less licentiousness. Like Harry Potter, we're engaged not in a righteous battle between good and evil, but a diversionary scrimmage between two evils. It's the Devil's distraction. Indeed, this diabolic "contest" frames the prophesied end-times threat of both Rome and Babylon, in which people are drawn away from Jesus—either crushed by Law, as Rome, or seduced by lust, as Babylon (Rev. 14:8).

Our Brave New World has escaped Rome, only to wallow in Babylon. Fifty years ago, we were locked in a moral log cabin. But are we any more free today lost in the woods?

Where, indeed, does this strange and compelling power of sexual desire come from? Does it serve any purpose beyond animal pleasure and reproducing the species?

Typing this letter is a physical act. I touch the keyboard and the keys move. But when a man and woman see each other a hundred yards apart, without touching and with nothing but air between them, nevertheless something can stir in their hearts and bodies. In fact, it can stir long after they're out of each other's sight, much less beyond touch. Oh, I forgot to mention: there's no wire between his belly button and hers; as a good rational, modern thinker, that's what you probably thought. Not even.

With no natural explanation, a mere mustard grain of humility would lead us to confess that sexual attraction is a *super*-natural force—in fact, a spiritual phenomenon, which originates not in our bodies but in the spirit realm (Prov. 30:18-19). As such, it can't be understood apart from surrender to the God who created it and rules over both material and spiritual reality—who, in fact, made us "male and female in His image" (Gen. 1:27).

In the Beginning, humanity was comprised by the one body Adam (meaning “humankind” in Hebrew). But God declared that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Why not? Because God is a loving Father who wants relationship with His children. How can Adam (that’s us) learn relationship with another if there’s (a) no other like him, and therefore, (b) no inherent desire for that other? So in pure genius, God takes out a part of Adam’s body, and in the final, crowning act of creation, He shapes the other with it. When the now-fragmented “he” sees “her,” in a glorious freeze-frame moment of history, the man recognizes and celebrates the woman as the missing part of himself: “At last! Here is one of my own kind, bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh!” (Gen. 2:23) And here, at last, is the genesis of sexual attraction--why boy meets girl, why “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

The woman and man, that is, both contain within their hearts an organic, ecstatic memory of having been one body (Adam) in Paradise, fully surrendered to, trusting, and enjoying God. In this glorious emotional/spiritual place of innocence, “humankind” found its created purpose—to worship and serve Him. This memory chip in our psychic software, this primal recollection, this archetypal recall of our very Genesis—and thereby, of how and for what we are designed—remains unto today in your heart and body, as sexual desire. That’s why the Enemy of God is literally hell-bent to distort it.

The biblical faith understands that this world is not our home (Heb. 11:8-16). The longing to return home at last to Eden, to escape the brokenness of this fallen world, to be whole again and no longer fragmented by its diversions, is what drives man and woman back together. Hence, “ecstasy,” meaning “to stand outside of” (the world). Amid life’s demands in an alien world and the shame of our inability to measure up to God’s call to restore it to Him, sexual desire grieves and moans, it promises and hopes, it pleads, it sighs, it coos and croons from top-40 ballads and burns bold red in Valentine cards, “Come join to me and return to Paradise! Don’t leave me! *No me dejas solo!* Together we’ll go home at last to the peace and joy of being one body again, under God’s blessing and care!”

Sexual desire is the ultimate homesickness. But this nostalgia bears no sentimentality, for the Home it beckons is real—as real as the desire of a loving God for relationship with His children.

To amnesiacs who fancy being at home in this world, the Enemy of God creates a false reality of sexual fantasies, as in movie star trysts, pulp romance novels, pornography and “alternative sexual expression” of all sorts. **When a materialistic culture, to cover the shame of powerlessness, decrees that there is no supernatural reality, sex becomes the only avenue for spiritual connection and experience.** And so at last, like the Canaanites whose lascivious Baal cult seduced Israel away from God and His purposes (Hosea 2:6-13), we worship sex as an idol--attributing to the fold-out Sex Queen and celluloid Hunk saving power to deliver us from our awful aloneness in this alien world.

Because sexuality is at its root spiritual, sexual relations cause a spiritual bond between the partners (1 Corinth. 6:15ff), which lasts “for better or worse, ‘til death do us part.” This is not morality; it’s reality. Any honest person knows it. It’s why a person can think of an earlier sexual partner long after that relationship has ended and even later with someone else. It’s why a loving Father God does not want His children to have sexual relations apart from marriage--because **acts that bear eternal consequences are not designed for temporary relationships.** Rather, He wants His son and daughter to protect their hearts so they can stay open to His destiny for them. To join human hearts without the Father’s covering in an alien, often heartless world, is self-destructive. Thus Paul warns, “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—the kind of sex that can never become one” (1 Corinth. 6:16-17 *The Message*).

A loving Father is calling this lost generation back to the Trailhead—which is His heart for relationship with us. Let’s lead them.