

The Nature of the Act of Sex

I believe sex should be viewed inseparable from its purpose and the motive attached to that purpose. Is sex merely for the pleasure of the act, or is it more closely tied in with reproduction, or a closer bond in marriage? And as a Christian, how does its purpose relate to having a better relationship with God and His people?

I think a most obvious function of sex is reproduction, which God has granted in multiple Scripture verses such as Genesis 1:28, Genesis 9:1, 1st Timothy 3, and 1st Timothy 4:1-5. In the Genesis passages, God gives the command to be 'fruitful and multiply'. In 1st Timothy 3, Paul describes the requirements for offices in the church of bishops and deacons, both which allow a man to have married a woman and have children. In 1st Timothy 4, Paul mentions that a command forbidding marriage would be contrary to God's teaching. (Marriage is often equated with having sex and bearing children, so for the moment I'm assuming this is the case.)

In Genesis 1:28, God tells them to "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." He also tells them what they can eat in verse 29, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food." Later on he gives similar commands to Noah in Genesis 9, except at this point He explicitly permits the eating of meat. Here we have two instances where God has declared for the man and women to perform the act of sex (implicitly) because it's necessary for them to increase in numbers. However, God does not bless them and tell them to enjoy the act of sex for its own pleasurable sake, although it's clearly something that's a part of their physical being since they are human. The only other thing He mentions is the allowance of food to be eaten. One question I have is, why did God not mention the pleasurable aspect of sex if it's assumed to be so critical for close and intimate relationships of today? Is it the direct pleasure that makes sex unify a pair?

One could say it is assumed through Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." However, sex is a periodic 'joining' and not a continuous one, so a continuous union is more properly described by marriage. It also doesn't explicitly suggest that the pleasure of sex is a critical part of the union. I believe the union is meant to be far more than sex,¹ and Eve is described as a *helper* for Adam, something covering more than sex and procreation (Genesis 2:18). Sex may be a physical sign of the union, the covenant between husband and wife. This would be similar to Communion (the Eucharist) in Christian churches which acts as a physical sign of our unity with Christ and His church. So, just as you take Communion recognizing and enjoying the relationship it symbolizes between you and God, if sex is viewed similarly, sex should be accomplished recognizing and enjoying the relationship it symbolizes between you and your spouse, with the

¹ At this time I'm not certain how the pleasure of sex works into marriage. I'm reminded by some articles I've read not to think of it in too much of a functionalistic way, although my own thoughts tend to it. Eating food when you are hungry often has a satisfying feeling, but just because you are hungry doesn't necessarily mean you eat. There is a purpose for eating whether it be sharing company or staying healthy. The most prominent use of sex is to promote child bearing. The big question is whether the pleasure that goes along with sex is separate from the pleasures meant for child bearing or not? I wonder whether the pleasure is in some ways an incentive (or reminder) to multiply or has some other significance, and is not an end in itself.

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corresponding thanks given to God for the life he's given both of you to enjoy in so intimate a way. (Proverbs 5:15-20 describes the delight and exclusiveness meant between a husband and wife.)

In 1st Corinthians 7:1-9, St. Paul describes marriage between a man and a woman as being a way to deal with the 'temptation to immorality', and outlines what marriage means on the part of the man and woman since they are no longer individuals simply living only for God, but must live for each other as well. He suggests that it would be better to remain unmarried so that you can have a better focus on God. This immorality he's talking about is sexual immorality, which he condemns in 1st Corinthians 6:15-20, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh.' But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

So, the problem St. Paul is dealing with is sin related to sex. He's saying that if you must have sex just for the sake of sex (because no one has sex with a prostitute for children), then the only proper way to have it is with a single woman, who, under the best circumstances, will also be a comparably good temple for the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by 1st Corinthians 7:5, "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." I don't think anyone has any trouble having self-control over seeking children (use of contraceptives and pills makes that evident), this is about the act of sex.

There are two reasons St. Paul gives for not marrying in 1st Corinthians 7:28-33, "But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife." The first is that time is short (something we sometimes don't understand because it's been nearly two thousand years since then) and second is that having a wife distracts from God.

Because time is short, St. Paul argues that there needs to be a certain detachment from the things of this world and reliance upon things of this world. In a way, we should still live as though time is short to make the most of those opportunities that we would miss otherwise. Some people place all their hopes in a worldly future that will never come. If we marry, then the question needs to be asked, how will it affect our ability to do God's will? If we cannot abstain from sex, can we function properly if it was necessary to abstain? Or would our attachment cause us to hold too strongly to things of this world?

Just as Paul says, “he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.” However wouldn’t it be different if the wife is pleased by things that please the Lord? Unfortunately, I know that having that focus for anyone can be quite difficult, so we are sometimes pleased by worldly things, and, if that is the case, we become an obstacle to whomever we marry. But, if we marry someone who is equally capable of being detached from the world and able to live a life for God, it’s much better. If we are overly attached to worldly things and marry some woman who is godly, we would also bring her down, which is also not good. Understanding and balance seems to be the best way to protect our self and the one we love.

St. Paul lays down the appropriate context for sex. That ideally we would not be focused on the pleasurable act, but if it is necessary, “let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” [1st Corinthians 7:2-4]. This eliminates the possibility of having sex with prostitutes, with multiple partners with whom no dedication is shown (as in premarital sex or adultery), or homosexual partnerships. It’s troublesome enough that anyone should crave sexual contact just for sex’s sake, but anything beyond the marriage that St. Paul describes would, in my opinion, constitute a serious lack of self-control which goes outside the bounds of what God has made properly available to us.²

Even Jesus said the sexual bond between people is supposed to be exclusive. Christ says, “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” [Matt 5:27-28], and “It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” [Matt 5:31-32]. The first passage condemns adulterous thoughts, and the second passage condemns any reason for divorce except unchastity. The divorced woman becomes an adulteress because, since the divorce was false and unaccepted by God, her remarriage becomes an adulterous affair³.

Oral/anal sex is also an abomination according to the Bible and is on the order of bestiality because it’s a sexual act committed contrary to proper design⁴. Just as man was not made to have sex with an animal, he was not meant to have it orally or anally. Leviticus 18:22-23, “And you shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.” Leviticus 20:13,15-16, “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. ... If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the

² The motives we carry with us when we do things are important to God. Do we just see people as *pleasure partners*? Or as actual human beings with abilities, gifts, character traits, and physical features, which make them unique and valuable not only in God’s sight, but also just as valuable in our own sight?

³ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

⁴ The Bible does not directly mention oral or anal sex, however I believe a case can be made that suggests they are improper.

animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them.” and Romans 1:26-27, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”

One way to see how these relate is to consider the modes of sex for a homosexual man. Because men do not have a vagina, sex must be committed either anally or orally.⁵ Possibly one may think that because it’s described as “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman” that it must have been common practice for men to perform anal and oral sex on women. However, Paul says, “For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.” And this could only be referring to either oral/anal sex (unnatural usage of mouth and anus) or a homosexual practice of sexually stimulating each other. In any case, I believe it covers both because there doesn’t seem to be a case to indicate that anal/oral sex is the natural order of things. Certainly the act of oral/anal sex is what allows the passion of homosexuality to flourish in men.⁶

It is also clear that St. Paul did not suggest masturbation as an alternative. Masturbation is not proper because it lacks the binding associated with sex and marriage. It takes sex out of its proper usage in being a part of ‘becoming one flesh’. Masturbation is a completely self-serving pleasurable act which does not serve God in any way. Within the proper context of marriage, sex is a mutually shared act.⁷

At the core of a proper act of sex is motive. Why do we do what we do? Is it an act of love for God, an act of love for our neighbor? Or is it something benefiting only ourselves?

The most deceiving relationships are those that follow the saying, “If you scratch my back, I’ll scratch your back,” because it describes a relationship contrary to charity and the love shown by Christ. Christ gave himself up for us even though we are sinners and could do nothing for Him. The motive for sex must be seeking out for the other, not the self. One cannot say that sex is appropriate because two people get what they want out of it, as in scratching each other’s back, but should say it was done through the care of the other. This is a critical distinction because many could easily confuse themselves, through their own lusts and desires, to believe what they do is okay because everyone gets what they want. But, it’s not true that what we want is always best, so satisfying another person’s desires does not make it good. In fact, such a view is inherently selfish because it is used to justify the satisfactions of your own lustful desires. A proper relationship for sex would be one where each partner does not give in to excess (for pleasure’s sake) that brings the other’s relationship with God to ruin, but one where they

⁵ I suppose anal sex *is* closer to lying with a man as you would a woman than oral sex. But I’m not sure how one could be appropriate and the other inappropriate.

⁶ There’s also a matter of contraception. There may be those who believe using contraceptive devices (condoms, diaphragms, pills) are wrong, but believe that oral/anal sex are okay. But, isn’t oral/anal sex a form of contraception? How are using contraceptive devices different than oral/anal sex? The goal in each is to thwart the reproductive process by diverting the reproductive elements from following their proper paths. From what I’ve seen, there doesn’t seem to really be much use for anal/oral sex because if it’s used as a form of contraception, why not just use contraceptive contraptions or other more natural contraceptive methods?

⁷ I’m curious about how equivalent oral/anal sex is for the woman in relation to normal vaginal sex. Would it still have the mutual sharing of the act? Or would it be mostly experienced by the man?

seek to bring their partner closer to God (one possibility is through helping them escape sexual immorality).

Christ told Satan in the wilderness, “It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'” [Matthew 4:4]. The quote is from Deuteronomy, “All the commandment which I command you this day you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that *man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.* ... Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' ... Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God” [Deuteronomy 8:1-3,17,20]. At all times we need to be humble before God, remembering that he gives us all good gifts. There is danger in becoming dependent on worldly things because they can ultimately take possession of us. Christ showed His dependence on the Father over food by not turning stones into bread. If He had given in, it would have shown the food had a measure of control over him. Someone could control him by simply withholding a material object. In the same way, sex cannot be something we depend and build our lives upon because it is passing. It should never take the place of God in our lives. It's not bad, but it's not as dependable as God.

In conclusion, these many observations have shaped my own beliefs concerning proper sex. Sex is exclusive. Sex is meant to be a part of the bond between a man and a woman. Sex must be a mutual act, like communion between the members of the church, allowing the possibility for each member of the pair to enjoy it fully as their own form of communion together. Sex is dangerous if it impedes our relationship or our partner's relationship with God. I could find no real condemnation of contraception except for an improper motive that might be associated with it. And finally, sex must have the element of giving one's self to the other for the other's sake and not have a greater weight given to personal gratification at the other's expense.