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## God Loves Sex and Sexuality

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## God Loves Sex and Sexuality

### Abstract

"We have to be careful to not only say that sexuality is a gift from God, but to live and model that behavior."

Posting about a Christian perspective on sex from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/god-loves-sex-and-sexuality/>

### Keywords

In All Things, sex, marriage, man-woman relationships

### Disciplines

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### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# God Loves Sex and Sexuality

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 [allinallthings.org/god-loves-sex-and-sexuality/](http://allinallthings.org/god-loves-sex-and-sexuality/)

Neal DeRoo

A few years ago, I was lucky enough (though some of you certainly wouldn't think this lucky!) to teach a course section about sexuality here at Dordt. For six weeks, I and about 30 college students got together for 75 minutes twice a week to talk about sex. During one of our first sessions, I was talking about 'the talk' I received when I was in high school, the one where your parents talk with you about sex. As I was telling the story (which I thought was pretty hilarious), I noticed a lot of blank stares from my students. So I asked them: "How many of you have had 'the talk' with your parents?" Three students put up their hands. Only three out of thirty college students had ever had a serious conversation with their parents about sex.

Perhaps this was just a fluke, but I don't think so. For a church that talks a lot about God's will for sex, we seem to have very few conversations about it. Or, rather, it seems that we're more comfortable talking about rules for sexual behavior than we are about sexuality itself.

This is not to say we don't talk about it at all. In recent years, sex is becoming an increasingly popular topic for Christian books and websites. These have done a lot to spread the word among Christians that "God loves sex and sexuality." But, without further conversation, this message is easily lost or distorted. "God loves sex, but only within the confines of marriage" is not the whole message of God-honoring sexuality, but, I fear that for the most part, this is as far as most churches go.

Such a message perpetuates several myths about sexuality:

## **1. Sexuality is primarily about particular sex acts**

In the church, we tend to think of sexuality primarily in terms of particular sexual acts, especially intercourse. This is why we often stop our conversations about a Christian view of sexuality after we've laid out the rules of what types of sex acts are permitted when and with whom. "Once the sex acts are regulated," we seem to think, "our sexuality is covered."

But sexuality is a much broader category than merely sex acts. Sex acts are discrete, particular actions we do with our bodies, usually concentrating on some specific parts of the body. Sexuality, on the other hand, is a particular way of relating to ourselves and other people that manifests itself in many different kinds of things we do. Whether someone is 'sexy' or 'cute,' for example, is a question of sexuality that has nothing to do with particular sexual acts.

Sexuality highlights a certain type of bond or intimacy between people, a way of relating to others and, ultimately, to God. Sex acts are a dimension of our sexuality, but certainly not the whole of it. This is a key claim to developing a healthy, Christian understanding of sexuality.

## **2. Saying 'no' to premarital sex is saying 'yes' to God's will**

Emphasizing the difference between sexuality and sex acts helps us see why saying 'no' to premarital sex (acts) is not the same thing as saying 'yes' to God's will for sex(uality). To merely abstain from engaging in certain types of sex acts does not mean that one is necessarily engaging in, or moving toward, healthy expressions of their sexuality. Indeed, often the emphasis we put on the act of intercourse *undercuts* a more holistic view of sexuality: if all we tell people about their sexuality is that they shouldn't have sex until they're married, then can we be surprised when their view of the opposite gender comes to focus so much

on having (or wanting to have but refusing to have) sex with them? If all we care about is whether our kids remain virgins until they are married, can we be surprised if they think sex is the be-all and end-all of relating to the other sex?

Instead, we have to re-emphasize the role that sex acts play in a broader, more comprehensive web of relationships. We celebrate God's gift of marriage in church (sometimes probably a little too much), and happily talk about how spouses are a gift from God. We reinforce this by celebrating weddings communally, honoring people's wedding anniversaries in church, and talking often with people about how the love for a spouse mirrors, in certain ways, the church's love for Christ. We do not hesitate to talk to our children about how we love our spouse, nor do we hesitate to explain that one needs to demonstrate that love through concrete actions. Why, then, do we hesitate to talk about our sexuality in similar ways, and demonstrate healthy expression of that sexuality for our children? We tell our kids how much we love our spouse, but don't let our kids see us flirting with our spouse. If our kids only see us physically treat our spouse the way we treat our mothers, can we be surprised when our children separate sex from love? Isn't that exactly what we've modeled for them?

### **3. At marriage, the 'switch' flips from 'not OK' to 'OK'**

The problem with emphasizing abstinence as the whole of sexual virtue, then, is that doing so does not adequately help people understand and embrace their own sexuality. Not only does this lead to a reduced view of sexuality as mere sex acts, but it also means that, if sex acts are bad, so too must be sexuality as a whole. As a result, many people who come to abstain from sex begin to think sexuality itself is dirty and gross and that wanting sex, or enjoying sexual behavior, is itself a perversion and a sign of depraved sinfulness. Every sexual desire and every sexual expression is punished (internally, if not externally), and equated with that which must be avoided.

Yet we somehow expect, after years and years of reinforcing the dirtiness of sex, that people will immediately embrace healthy sexuality once they get married. Marriage becomes the green light that allows us to (finally) let loose our restrained sexual desires. However, these desires have by this time long been equated with sin, perversion, and shame. Letting them run rampant only causes people to think they are giving credence to perversion and shame. Their spouse—with whom they are now expressing these desires—therefore also becomes intimately associated with sin, perversion, and shame. That which was designed by God to draw people together into a deeper type of intimacy instead tears people apart.

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I know many Christian couples who spent years of their marriage feeling guilty about having and wanting sex. Some came to think less of their spouse, who was a 'pervert' for always wanting to indulge these 'animalistic' tendencies. Others came to hate themselves for 'forcing' their 'perversions' on their pure and innocent spouse. Many merely went through the sexual motions, unable to enjoy sex (because of their guilt and shame) but unable to avoid it because of internal desire or the desire to please their spouse. For many, it took a decade or more of married life to finally come to see their sexuality as a gift from God designed to draw them into closer relationship with their spouse and with God.

Examples like these show that the sexual education people receive from the church—though it may be successful in preserving virginity until marriage—is not very successful in helping people live their lives with a God-glorifying sexuality. So how do we instead encourage healthy, God- and creation-honoring sexuality?

First, I think we have to be careful to not only say that sexuality is a gift from God, but to live and model that behavior. This involves treating sexuality with respect—but also with flirtatiousness and fun. If we think sexuality has no place in the church, then we must not think it's much of a gift from God.

Second, I think we have to be careful to avoid suggesting that sexuality is shameful. This requires us to emphasize the distinction between sexual desire (which is a God-given part of our created being) and lust (which is a perversion of God's gift of sexual desire): that a person makes me feel desire need not mean that I therefore must lust after them. That a person is physically beautiful, even sexy, need not mean that they are causing other people to sin.

We must, therefore, also find ways to appropriately celebrate and honor the beauty of the human form so that people will acknowledge and revel in the God-given gift that beauty is. We have to avoid repeatedly telling people (and especially women and young girls) that they have to hide their bodies and beauty away because their very presence may lead others to sin. If the only message people hear is "Put that away, it makes people think bad thoughts," we have failed to honor the beauty of the human body and of human sexuality.

Finally, and probably most importantly, we cannot let the conversation about Christian sexuality stop at the regulation of sexual activities. While it is true that God created sexual intercourse exclusively for cases where "the two have become one flesh," this is but one small piece of a God-honoring sexuality. We have to be willing to talk about and share our sexuality with others in the Christian community. This does NOT mean swapping sex stories as if the church were an oversized locker room. But it does mean beginning to talk about the goodness of sexual desire, and how it is different from lust. It means acknowledging to each other—and even to our young people—that we are all sexual beings with sexual feelings. It means exploring ways of expressing our sexuality that are appropriate for non-married relationships. And it means not only encouraging, but also modeling healthy sexual exploration (which, again, does NOT mean engaging in various forms of sex acts) in the same way we encourage and model emotional, intellectual, and vocational exploration.

If we do, in fact, think that sexuality is a gift from God, then we must steward this gift well. We must rejoice in this gift, and celebrate it together as the community of God.