

SEXUALITY AND LOVE

LESSON 1: WHERE DID SEX BEGIN?

Main Idea: God invented sex to teach a man and woman about their relationship with Him. In this lesson, you will learn some important things about the biblical link between sexuality and spirituality.



SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

In the ancient Greek world, people had a saying that described their understanding of what it means to be human. They would say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food.” They understood a person to be a collection of biological needs—you’re hungry and there’s food to satisfy your hunger, you’re tired and there’s sleep. And they viewed sex like they did food. So, when a man was hungry, he would go to a prostitute saying, “Food for the stomach . . .”

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, the apostle Paul talks about this way of viewing the world. He confronts his readers with a challenge: Can they live for a higher purpose than just fulfilling their urges? He says the body is not just

a receptacle for pleasure. Then he makes an amazing claim. He says in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

A temple was a holy place, a place where gods lived. Paul specifically uses this temple language to challenge the readers with the idea that a human isn’t just a collection of urges, but a being in whom God wants to reside. He’s trying to elevate their thinking, open their eyes to a higher view of what it means to be human. There’s more to life than the next pleasurable experience.

But this *food for the stomach* perspective continues to be a dominant worldview even to this day. The problem with it is that it’s rooted in a very low view of human nature that is based on the assumption people are going to have sex because they are nothing but mammals who can’t help themselves.

That’s the driving force behind a lot of sex education curriculums that are founded on the premise “kids are just going to do it anyway.” Unfortunately, this sends a hopeless message. Who decided that kids—and anybody else for that matter—are unable to abstain? Think about how abstinence-based programs are viewed in the news. Usually, they are laughed at or dismissed with a roll of the eyes. So, too, are those campaigns in which students commit themselves not to have sex until they’re married. And people who promote these campaigns are most often viewed as hopelessly naive hangers-on to a way of life that no longer exists. Critics of the “save sex for marriage” view are usually presented as having the voice of *reality*. However, it is not realism. It’s the voice of despair, throwing up its hands as it asks, “Aren’t we just animals?”

Men must be wary of another impulse: On the other end of the spectrum from the animal impulse is the angel impulse. The Bible and in church tradition describe angels as asexual beings. Angels don’t have sex; angels don’t need sex. But humans aren’t angels—nor were we ever intended to be. Yet it’s possible to accept some strange ideas when they’re presented as religiously pure.

For example, some medieval theologians warned couples that the Holy Spirit left the bedroom whenever they engaged in sexual intercourse. Eleventh century Bishop Yves of Chartres counseled the devout to abstain from sexual intercourse on Thursdays in remembrance of Christ’s rapture, on Fridays in remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion, on Saturdays in honor of the Virgin Mary, on Sundays in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection, and on Mondays out of respect for departed souls. That may have made for some exciting Tuesdays,



but it left the church with the feeling there was something less spiritual about our sexuality. It implies that if you're really holy, you won't have sex—or at least not much sex.

We can accept this view without even realizing it. Living like angels can be just as destructive as living like animals. If denial is one end of the spectrum, indulgence is the other. It's a pendulum, and people at one extreme are liable to swing to the other. As humans, we were created to live in the tension between the two. When you lose the tension, you lose something of what it means to be human. We see this back-and-forth pattern in individuals, families, cultures, and churches. When a parent or church or school paints sex as a horrible, unclean thing, what are they making kids want to do? Go have sex, of course! It's the pendulum swing.

Our tendency when faced with tension is to try to come up with a sure-fire formula that will make the tension go away. However, one of the marks of someone who has experienced spiritual growth is their ability to live amid tension. What often happens when we try to release the tension is that we end up swinging to one extreme (i.e., Just don't have sex and you'll be fine.) To simply tell men to ignore physical urges and be like an asexual angel puts them in the unnatural position of trying to ignore something very real, powerful, and central to who they are as humans.

Between the two extremes of denying our sexuality and being driven by it exists a vast open space. We're not animals. Neither are we angels. We are something much more special.

Which brings us to the beginning, to the creation story of Genesis. The story begins with God creating the world and then creating people. That order is important, so we'll come back to it in a minute. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The word for *image* here is *tselem*, which has a specific cultural meaning. The stories of Genesis emerged out of an ancient Near Eastern culture where a king was said to rule in the image of a particular god. The famous King Tut is an Egyptian example of this. His full name was Tutankhamen, which is translated "*the living image of the god Amon.*" The king was seen as the embodiment of a particular god on earth. If you wanted to see what the god was like, you could look at that god's king. The writer of Genesis makes it clear that out of all of creation there is something different about humans. They aren't God—and they will never become God—but in some distinct, intentional way something of God has been placed into them. We reflect who God is and what God is like. A divine spark resides in every



single human being—everybody, everywhere. Humans are bearers of the divine image, not animals.

In the creation poem of Genesis 1, God creates animals before humans. But the animals don't get the divine spark. They don't get the image of God. The writer of Genesis wants us to see the distinction between what it means to be human and what it means to be an animal. Have you ever seen a dog concerned that its life just isn't going anywhere or a cat reflecting on the meaning of existence or a horse trying to find inner peace? Animals have a physical body but no spirit.

Angels don't bear the divine spark either. They were around before creation. The Book of Job says that while God was creating the world all the angels shouted for joy. So, what are angels? Hebrews 1:14 declares, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" A spirit is a being with no body, no physical essence. Now it starts to become clear why sex and marriage are outside of the existence of angels: An angel is a being with a spirit but without a physical body. But a human being is both body and spirit.

When we deny the spiritual dimension of our existence, we wind up living like animals. When we deny the physical, sexual dimension of our existence, we end up living like angels. Both ways are destructive, because God made us human. We sometimes hear people say, "I'm only human," as if that's a bad thing. But being human is a good thing. At the creation of the world, God said it was a good thing. Humans are the capstone of God's creation.

After God made man and woman, He gave them this command in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Because we are made in His image, God gives humanity the task of continuing to care for the earth. The universe isn't a dead, finished thing—it's alive and ongoing. The question is, "What kind of world are we going to make?" Either we're acting in ways that move the world away from the darkness and chaos or we're contributing to the darkness and chaos.

In Genesis 1, we learn people were created after animals. And from the rest of Scripture, we learn people were also created after angels. The order here is significant. The movement in creation is away from chaos toward greater harmony, order, and beauty. Angels were here before us. Animals were here before us. When we act like angels or animals, we're acting like beings who



were created before us. We're going backward in creation. We're going the wrong way.

Our actions then aren't isolated. Nothing involving sex exists independent of or disconnected from everything around it. How we act determines the kind of world we live in. With every action we affect its ongoing development.

How we live matters because God created us human, which means we aren't angels and we aren't animals. We are created in the image of God—body and soul. Our sexuality is a key piece of that divine image. The following lessons explore in more detail why that is and what we need to do with it. For now, it is foundational to understand we can use our sexuality to bring chaos into the world or to bring order and goodness and joy.





CROSSHAIR: Focus on Your Target

Today's culture says human sexuality is nothing more than biology. There is an element of truth to this mindset. Every spring thousands of students converge on the beaches of America to party, hook up with sexual partners, and let themselves indulge whatever cravings and urges they have. But beyond the many physical risks that accompany such behavior, these scenes raise a deeper question about what it means to be human. The world sees sex as just another appetite, a function of biological need. But that is just part of a bigger truth. The New York Times recently ran an article stating that despite all the evidence of the inherent physical, emotional, relational complications of free sex, the casual sex hookup culture continues unabated. Each generation looks at the previous generation's warnings and says, "You had yours, so we're going to have ours. You had your own good time, so don't tell me what I should do with my body."

Sex is not just another simple appetite. You may have a taste for sugar. But let's say you find you have diabetes, and the doctor says, "Sugar is wonderful, but you can't have anymore, or it will kill you." What do most people do when they are told they can't have sugar anymore? Do they say, "Listen here, you had your sugar, so I'm going to have mine! I want sugar, and if I die, well so be it! I don't want to live another 30 years without sugar." No, they just stop eating sugar—because no appetite is worth dying for.

Sex is obviously far more important than just an appetite, despite what modern culture would claim. It's far more powerful. If you treat it like just another appetite, you're going to be ambushed by it.



BULLSEYE: Zero in on Your Target

1. How is the *food for the stomach* perspective manifested in today's world?
 2. What thoughts come to your mind as you read some of the medieval theologians' view on sexual union?
 3. What does the *divine spark* mean to you?
 4. What does it mean that our actions aren't isolated?
 5. Why is sex more than an appetite?
- Take some time to listen to the Lord about what you just studied. How did this study help deepen your love for God?
 - As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate what you have learned to your family and to others around you?

USING MY *FIREBIBLE*

Read the *FireBible* note, on 1 Corinthians 6:19.

- Why must our bodies never be defiled by impurity or evil?

- How should a believer live and care for themselves?

Read the *FireBible* article, “Human Personhood: What It Means to Be Human.”
(Look on the Contests: Articles page for the page number of the article.)

- What are the three different aspects of God’s image in humanity?

- How was the image of God damaged in Adam and Eve after they sinned?

- Describe the three aspects of being human in your own words.

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