



How We Dishonor God in Our Sex Lives

We dishonor God when we fail to mirror the Trinitarian reality and beauty in our relationships.

by Glenn Stanton

We can dishonor God in our sex lives just as we can dishonor Him in any other area of our lives. We dishonor Him when we serve ourselves. We dishonor God in our sex lives when we fail to mirror the Trinitarian reality and beauty in our relationships.

God's instructions for our sexual lives serve Him by bringing Him glory when we obey them, and they also benefit us. God's rules are not limiting prohibitions, but rather ennobling, enriching guidelines.

As theologian George Weigel explains, when we view God's directives for our sexuality this way, "the first moral question shifts from 'What am I forbidden to do?' to 'How do I live a life of sexual love that conforms to my dignity as a human person?'"¹

This explains why Christian prohibitions against certain sexual practices aren't based on reactive moralism in an effort to keep us from having fun. Quite the opposite! They're based on how we can flourish in our God-given humanity and how we best reflect the image of God in us.

As reflections of the nature and qualities of the Trinity, our sex lives should be shaped by the qualities of the Trinity. Three primary principles apply to all of us and, if we keep these in mind, they'll guide us in a life that is pleasing to God and beneficial to our families and ourselves.

We May Never Use Another Person as an Object, Sexual or Otherwise

The members of the Trinity never relate to each other as objects, to be used for their own good. They relate to each other in love, seeking to serve the goodness and glory of the other. Love is a self-donation. It never uses others as things or an end.

When we use others, we diminish their dignity as well as our own. Animals do this. People shouldn't, because it's not what we were created for. It's not what sex was created for. This is why pornography, masturbation, and rape fall outside of God's intentions for us.

Pornography dehumanizes sexuality and depersonalizes people by turning the viewer into a taker and the one viewed into an object. The danger is that we start to see others in our lives the same way we see the object in the magazine, movie, or website: as a nobody, a thing that exists for our pleasure.

It also dehumanizes the user because we are made for intimacy with the other sex and intimacy can't occur with illusory images. It should take place with another person—a spouse.

Similarly, sex is much more than mere physical stimulation. God created it to be a very intimate communion between two people.

Therefore masturbation, like pornography, is incomplete because it doesn't involve the communion of two self-giving people, one to another. It's sex for one and isn't God's ideal for us; it's merely taking from one's self and doesn't mirror the nature of the Trinity.

No member of the Trinity turns in on Himself in any manner.² Their relational expression is always to the others. Remember, God said it was not good for man (or woman) to be alone, and in sexualized form, that's what masturbation is.

Rape isn't about sex, but about control and domination. It's about taking by violence. It's always wrong because it's the complete opposite of what love is. It's one of the most egregious violations of the Trinitarian ideal and, therefore, of human dignity.

The Monstrosity of Premarital and Extramarital Sex

The human sexual embrace, this most intimate and ultimate of all human giving and vulnerability, ought to take place in a union of total and permanent surrender of two people. That's what marriage is: both the public and personal dedication of a man and woman to forsake all others and give themselves fully—body, mind, and spirit—to another.

Therefore, to give someone

- Our body without exclusively giving him or her
- Our mind or will (total, unconditional, willful commitment) or
- Our spirit (emotions, affections, and adoration)

is to isolate one kind of union, the physical, "from all the other types of unions which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union, C.S. Lewis said.³ That's why sex outside marriage is a monstrosity. Extramarital sex dissects us at our deepest level, giving out one part of us without giving all the rest intended to go with it. It's not what we're made for.

Where did we ever get the idea that we can separate our bodies from our minds and spirits and that our bodies could do whatever they like without consequence for the rest of our being? This is why the sexual revolution has been such a dehumanizing failure, diminishing our God-given humanity in painful ways.

Theologian Karl Barth expressed this well when he declared, "Coitus without coexistence is demonic."⁴ We can't connect ourselves with someone sexually without connecting all the rest of our being.

Wendell Berry laments, "Because of our determination to separate sex from the practice of love in marriage and in family...our public sexual morality is confused, sentimental, bitter, complexly destructive, and hypocritical."⁵

Only the sexual embrace within marriage mirrors the nature of the Trinitarian relationship in creation. In the ideal, it's loving, permanent, exclusive, and self-giving. Premarital and extramarital sex can't mirror this reality. This is why it's not surprising research shows that faithfully married people enjoy the deepest levels of sexual satisfaction.

The Challenge of Homosexuality

Male and female are not cultural constructs but God-created parts of humanity made for each other to show forth the image of God in the world. Remember Genesis 1:27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Male and female, together, are the fullest picture of the image of God in creation. That's why they need each other. Adam wasn't complete without Eve.

In everyday terms, this means that only the difference and the complementary interplay of male and female uniquely reflect the image and likeness of the persons of the Trinity in creation. As a result, sexual love between a married man and woman is a life-giving act of mutual giving and receiving that mirrors the Trinity like nothing else on earth.

Homosexuality denies this and falsely states that differences in male and female don't really matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. Homosexuality violates the Trinitarian image of complementarity in a profound way.

All sexual sin is wrong because it fails to mirror the Trinitarian image, but homosexuality does more than fail. It's a particularly evil lie of Satan because he knows that it overthrows the very image of the Trinitarian God in creation, revealed in the union of male and female.

This is why this issue has become such a flashpoint. It will become even more contentious because nothing else challenges this image of the Triune God so profoundly and thoroughly as homosexuality. It's not what we were made for.

We love God in our sex lives by living in the fullness of what He intends for us. This has both positive and negative aspects.

Positively, we're to live fully as the sexual beings God has created us to be. He wants that for us because we mystically show forth a primary part of the nature of God.

But He doesn't give us an unqualified green light. There are stoplights and caution lights we need to pay attention to as described previously. These are not given because God is a killjoy, but for just the opposite: He wants our relationships to mirror His image and likeness. He knows this is best for us, for it's how we're created and what will bring us joy.

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¹George Weigel, *The Truth of Catholicism: Ten Controversies Explored* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 2001) pp. 104-105.

²God is the only One for whom it is permissible, and even necessary, to be self-absorbed because He is the proper focus of the whole universe. But because the Christian God exists in Trinity He is not narcissistic. While He is self-focused, each member is focused on the other members, marking a God who simultaneously reflects both a proper self-centeredness and an other-centeredness.

³C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 96.

⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), p. 133.

⁵Wendell Berry, *Sex Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) p. 140.
