

Dear brother or sister in Christ,

This is now the fifth article in a series exploring how it is that single men and women relate to each other in light of the fact that most single men and women will one day be married. In other words, we are investigating what God has said that gives direction to how single men and women go through the process of finding a marriage partner and relating to other single men and women in the process. In the previous article we examined God's purpose for marriage, which is to reveal the glorious love of Jesus for his bride, the church. I ended that article by briefly reflecting on what it means for single men and women to live in such a way that the glory of marriage is protected and honored. In this article I want to more fully examine the specific things that God says about one of the chief features of married life as stated in God's first word about marriage in Genesis 2:24, "...and they shall become one flesh." In short, we are going to talk about sex in this article. This month I want to address God's positive purposes for sexual intimacy and next month address the issue of what is sexual immorality.

It is important to make a careful distinction between the acts of sexual intimacy and our sexuality. Our sexuality is our maleness or femaleness. God made us in his image male and female and thus our sexuality is part of our being, of who we are as human beings in the image of God. Every human being will be either male or female forever, whether in heaven or in hell. However, sexual intimacy will not exist in the eternal state because marriage will not exist in the eternal state. We know this from Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees as recorded in Matthew 22:23-33 (see also Mark 12:18-27 & Luke 20:27-40). In his correcting of the Sadducees denial of the resurrection Jesus says this about human beings: "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." (Please note, we will be like angels; we will not become angels. Angels are a different category of creature from human beings. They are not made in the image of God as we are.)

We will still be male and female but we will not be married which is defined by God in Genesis 2:24 as including sexual intimacy. Marriage is a "this creation" institution and will end at the resurrection. Clearly, one of the reasons for this is because what marriage portrays, the relationship of Jesus and his church, will be fully revealed and experienced in heaven and thus there will be no need for the illustration of that relationship.

Having made the distinction between our sexuality and the acts of sexual intimacy we can now ask for what purpose(s) did God make the acts of sexual intimacy? The first thing to note is that God made sex. Thus sexual intimacy is a part of the created order that God called "very good" as recorded in Genesis 1:31. Therefore, sexual desire itself is not evil or wrong. This leads to the second thing to say and that is that due to sin the good gift of sex has been distorted and perverted. Thus sexual desire is wrong when it is directed at any object other than one's spouse, as just one example of the numerous ways that sex is corrupted due to sin. Again, I will discuss this in next month's article.

The first purpose of sexual union is the expression of the union that Jesus Christ has with his church. Hundreds of times the NT says that Christ is in us and we are Christ. We are

united to him by faith or we are one with him. His life is our life. His destiny is our destiny. The act of sexual union expresses in marriage, which is God's parable of Jesus and his church, that union that exists between Jesus and his bride. The fact that it is a physical act also communicates that the union we have with Jesus, while it is only spiritual in this age, will be expressed physically in the new heavens and the new earth in that we will live as physical persons in the presence of Jesus who also will be physically present forever. In addition the intensity of the physical pleasure associated with sexual union illustrates the pleasures that will be ours forever as Psalm 16:11 expresses: "You have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

The second purpose of sexual union is the bearing of children. It is God's will that human beings be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it in this present age. And even more so it is God's will that the new heavens and the new earth be peopled with a great company of those whom Christ has redeemed as expressed in Revelation 7:9, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." Every one of those individuals who make up that great multitude will have been conceived through the sexual union of a man and a woman. Thus God has determined to fill his holy place with a holy people whom he has brought into existence through sexual union and then made fit for heaven by uniting them to Christ by means of the Holy Spirit, through faith. In many cases the instruments of salvation in these lives will also be the parents who were the instruments of their existence as well. The bearing of children is not primarily for the benefit of promulgating our species or meeting the relational needs of parents or providing workers to keep the economy going. Rather God aims to populate heaven through the bearing of children.

There is more that can be said about God's purposes in the acts of sexual intimacy. Yet, even from this very brief discussion we can begin to see why it is that God is so insistent that we resist engaging in every form of sexual immorality. God is not a cosmic "spoilsport" in his fierce denunciations against those who engage in sexual impurity but he is seeking to protect and promote the proper use of one of his greatest gifts to human beings.

In his mercy,