

Sexuality and Spirituality

Prepared by David Coltheart, Pastor MCC Brisbane

The integration of sexuality and spirituality remains at the core of Christian living. Both sexuality and spirituality are born of the same impulse to connect with reality beyond us, and both are good. God created us as spiritual, sensual, sexual people. Our sexuality can be a way to deepen our spirituality.

Sexuality is a Gift from God

After creating Adam, the Bible says it is “not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). God then made “a helper suitable for him.” God intended that two people should be partners, helping each other as companions. God created sexual desire because sex has a unique drawing power to bring people together. Sex is much more than just a manipulation of body parts and the interaction of hormones – sex goes beyond the physical to the emotional and spiritual level. Through sexual union, two people become one, and the bond becomes stronger with repetition. The mystery of sex is akin to the union we have to God. We are grafted into the divine character through our communion with God, through Jesus.

Sex provides a unique way to know each other, serve each other, express vulnerability to each other, to give and receive. Although designed for procreation, God obviously intended that sex be pleasurable and enjoyable, and to serve a wider purpose of sheer delight, even ecstasy. Sexual desire far exceeds the needs for procreation – and God created sexual desire so that two people in love can express their love as often as they wish. God gave us a sexual appetite akin to hunger for food and intended that we have sex, and lots of it. Sex provides a means of achieving true intimacy and unity.

What Does the Bible Say About Same Sex Relationships?

Actually, the Bible says very little about same-sex relationships. The Bible does record the famous love story between David and Jonathan, (1 Sam 18:1-4; 20:1-42) but it is pointless to speculate about the nature of that relationship. There is also the record of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth (Ruth 1:15-18), and the possible same-sex relationship between the Roman centurion and his beloved ‘servant’ (Luke 7:1-10).

The only other Bible references to same-sex activity are all negative. But when you examine the context of each reference, it is clear that the Bible condemns specific, and horrific, situations that anyone, gay or straight should condemn.

1. The attempted homosexual rape of angels by a group of heterosexual males at Sodom (Genesis 19:1-10)
2. The degradation of another male to the status of a female, a social and cultural taboo in ancient Israel (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13)
3. The worship of a fertility goddess involving orgiastic rituals and promiscuity by heterosexuals going against their natural instincts (Romans 1:21-27)
4. Sexual exploitation, possibly through prostitution or other financial means, or pederasty (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:9,10).

Everyone, heterosexual or homosexual, agrees with the Biblical condemnation of these activities, whether the acts are performed in same-sex or opposite sex situations.

Mistranslation of a Greek Word

Many versions of the Bible incorrectly translate the Greek word *arsenokoites*, found only twice in the New Testament. St Paul uses the word only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9,10. The word has been variously, but incorrectly, translated as “male prostitutes”, “homosexuals” “masturbators” or “effeminate persons”. The King James Version ambiguously refers to “abusers of themselves with mankind.” The New International Version translates the word as “homosexual offenders” in one place, but in another place translates the same word as “sexual perverts”, which could refer to illicit heterosexual relations. Obviously not all these translations can be correct. No one really knows what Paul meant since he made up the Greek word. If he had meant “homosexual persons,” he could have used a perfectly good but different Greek word. It is significant that he did not use the word that really does mean “homosexual.”

The best guess is that the word may refer to a pimp who profits from selling the services of prostitutes. Or the word might refer to a man who pays for the services of a prostitute. Or it may refer to a prostitute (male or female), possibly in a religious context such as a temple where fertility gods were worshipped through sex. Although we cannot be absolutely sure of the meaning, the context of the word refers to a specific kind of exploitive behaviour. The word does not necessarily condemn same-sex relations.

To sum up the evidence, there is no passage in the Bible that condemns committed, faithful same-sex relationships or same-sex marriage.

Coming Out is a Sacrament

A sacrament is an act that mediates the grace and mystery of God – some examples are baptism and the Communion service. Coming out is a sacrament for LGBTIQ people of faith because it sets us on a lifelong path of showing God’s grace in our lives. Coming out as “gay” or “lesbian” or any other sexual identity is a key moment in the lives of LGBTIQ people. Coming out is crucial to our spiritual development because it starts us on a journey of integrating our identity into our whole life. Embracing our identity is an invitation to go deeper in our spiritual journey.

Coming to terms with our sexuality is to acknowledge who we truly are and have been created to be. Coming out is one of those “break-in” moments in our spiritual life. We begin to see a bigger picture and receive an invitation to participate in an honest and open life, free from guilt, shame and hypocrisy. We see God working in us and catch a vision of our authentic self, made in the image of God.

God calls us out to live authentic lives as LGBTIQ people. When we say yes to God, we start on a life-long path of transformation. We leave the old identity of the closet behind. Even when we are afraid of the unknown territory of our new identity, we are invited to trust God’s leading for the rest of our lives.

Living the Complete Life

According to the Bible, we are “living souls” consisting of three parts: the physical body, the mind or intellect, and the spiritual life. Each aspect of our being must be in balance with every other part. All parts of our lives must be integrated with each other in order for us to live successfully as Christians.

1. Our physical bodies need to be healthy, nourished by only the best food and drink, exercised to the optimum level and operating effectively on all levels. This includes our sexual identity and expression. We should view our bodies as God’s creation and take care of our bodies.
2. Our minds need to be sharp, educated and well-trained. This means that we will not diminish our brains by harmful substances or abuse ourselves with negative thoughts. We will banish such destructive practices as hate, envy, lust or pride. We will let our minds dwell on positive ideas that will enlarge our intellects.
3. Our spiritual lives should be fed by God’s word, enriched by His knowledge and enhanced by faith in God’s power. Our Christian lives are directed by God’s command to love one another, to serve our fellow man, to have compassion on the sick and the dying, and to care for the poor and homeless. Our Christian love extends to all fellow human beings, regardless of ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity.

The goal of living as an authentic Christian is to integrate every aspect of our life into a harmonious whole so that we are living at our peak. When we realise that God made us as a complete creation – body, mind and soul—and that in Christ we are whole beings, we take the first step in integrating all aspects of our lives.

We should treat our physical bodies as God’s temple (1 Corinthians 6:19,20); we must ensure that our minds are operating at their most effective level; and should develop our spirituality to know God to the fullest extent. Our sexuality is just one part of our body, but if our sexuality is out of harmony from our mind or our spirituality, we are doomed to a life of uncertainty, fear and guilt. Living a secret life does emotional and spiritual damage that may affect us the rest of our lives. It’s not a healthy way to live. Only when our belief system is in harmony with our sexuality, and our body, mind and spirit function as one will we find true freedom in Christ.

No one chooses their sexual orientation. Our identity is an innate orientation that is *recognised*, not chosen. We are not sick or mentally disordered and we don’t need curing or fixing. Nor is being “gay” all about sex. Being LGBTIQ is part of your emotional, psychological, physical, romantic and spiritual identity and your true identity is a combination of all these factors. Together, they make up one unique person – You!