

# THEOLOGY PUB: Faith & Sexuality

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**In the Talmud it says, 'in heaven, there will be Sabbath, sunshine, and sex.' / Deborah Haffner**

## Questions on Faith & Sexuality

- \* What does our culture have to say about sexuality? Any positives? Negatives?
- \* What comes to mind when you think about the church/faith & sexuality? Sex is dirty?
- \* What messages do our faiths teach us about sex & sexuality?
- \* What *SHOULD* religion/faith be saying about sex & sexuality?
- \* What might a modern day sexual ethic look like?
- \* How can we better celebrate human sexuality in our culture...? In our faith communities?

## Some scripture & thoughts on sexuality

**Genesis 1:27** - And God created the human beings in [the divine] image, creating [them] in the image of God, creating them male and female.

**Leviticus 19:2** - Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, God, am holy.

**Rabbi Moses ben Maimon**, (also known as **Maimonides**, 12th century Jewish philosopher and physician): "Bodily health and wellbeing are part of the path to God, for it is impossible to understand or have any knowledge of the Creator when one is sick. Therefore one must avoid anything that may harm the body and one must cultivate healthful habits" (Hilchos De'os 4:1). Our bodies are gifts from God. The body requires respect, care and protection because it is holy.

**John Eldredge** (author of *Wild at Heart*): "You can have sex outside of marriage, as any teenager knows. You can experience orgasm and ecstasy outside marriage. For a time. But marriage is the sanctuary God created for sex, and only there, in the refuge of covenantal love, will you find sex at its best. For a lifetime.

"The coming together of two bodies in the sensual fireworks of sex is meant to be a consummating act, the climactic event of two hearts and souls that have already been coming together outside the bedroom and can't wait to complete the intimacy as deeply as they possibly can.

*"Sex when there is love is the best sex of all. Giving sex without love borders on prostitution. Demanding sex without love is abuse."*

**Barack Obama**: "We should try to prevent unintended pregnancies by providing appropriate education to our youth, communicating that sexuality is sacred and they should not be engaged in cavalier activity."

## Marie Fortune's Five Guidelines (from *Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics For the Rest of Us*)

**Peer Relationships:** Is my choice of intimate partner a peer, i.e. someone whose power is relatively equal to mine? We must limit our sexual interaction to our peers. Some people are off limits for our sexual interests.

**Authentic Consent:** Are both my partner and I authentically consenting to our sexual interaction? Both of us must have information, awareness, equal power and the option to say "no" without being punished, as well as the option to say "yes."

**Faithfulness:** Am I faithful to my promises and commitments? Whatever the nature of a commitment to one's partner and whatever the duration of that commitment, fidelity requires honesty and the keeping of promises. Change in an individual may require a change in the commitment which hopefully can be achieved through open and honest communication.

**Stewardship of Sexuality:** Do I take responsibility for protecting myself and my partner against sexually transmitted diseases and to insure reproductive choice? This is a question of stewardship (the wise care for and management of the gift of sexuality) and anticipating the literal consequences of our actions. Taking this responsibility seriously presupposes a relationship: knowing over time and sharing a history in which trust can develop.

**Sharing of Pleasure:** Am I committed to sharing sexual pleasure and intimacy in my relationship? My concern should be both for my own needs and those of my partner.

## Five Levels of Sexual Relationships (handout from *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships & Sexual Ethics, High School Module, Session 6: Let's Talk About Sex*)

<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Conquest</b> The decision to have sex has been made by one person and is accompanied by violence. Rape is an example of this.
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Healthy Orgasm</b> At this level, the focus is on the individual's pleasure.
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Mutual Consent</b> Both partners share in the decision to have sex. There is no emotional commitment to one another, only to each other's pleasure.
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Love</b> Here there is a private decision between two persons who love only each other; to have sex only with each other. There is no time commitment.
<b>Level 5</b>	<b>Marriage</b> This involves a public commitment between two persons to have sex only with each other, presumably forever.

## True Love Waits (<http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/faq/>)



### What does sexual purity mean exactly?

Sexual purity includes abstaining from intercourse until marriage, but that is not all it means. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). By Jesus' definition, being sexually pure means not even dwelling on thoughts of sex with someone other than a spouse.

Until you are married, sexual purity means saying no to sexual intercourse, oral sex, and even sexual touching. It means saying no to a physical relationship that causes you to be "turned on" sexually. It means not looking at pornography or pictures that feed sexual thoughts.

Sexual purity does not end with marriage. Marriage partners are supposed to experience sexual love with each other in a way that is fulfilling to both. However, purity means being completely faithful to your spouse in thought and deed.

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4).

### Is sex a bad thing?

No. God designed us as sexual beings. He invented sex! He also made a place for it--marriage. In Genesis 2:24 God tells of His plan for marriage, that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." The sexual relationship makes the two become one flesh. The Bible speaks of sexual immorality, so there must also be such a thing as sexual morality, right? That morality is based on God's plan for sex.

### If we're in love, isn't it OK?

God created sex for a lifetime commitment between one woman and one man. Sex outside of a committed marriage relationship violates God's standards. When you are wearing a wedding ring, you won't have to hope your partner loves you; you will have heard your spouse pledge to you in front of God, your families, and your friends. Anything less cheapens sex.

### What if things just happen?

Sex is not an accident. Sex is progressive, meaning one act leads to another. Things won't "just happen" if you set boundaries and stick to them. If you make the decision now to abstain from sex and to live a pure life, then you will already know the answer before you encounter any compromising situation. Plus, the Holy Spirit gives us self-control to use when we are tempted.

## Some Resources to Check Out:

- \* Religious Institute for Sexuality Morality, Justice & Healing (<http://www.religiousinstitute.org/>)
- \* Our Whole Lives (United Church of Christ & Unitarian Church's Sexuality Curriculum (<http://bit.ly/wholelives>)
- \* Union for Reform Judaism's "Sacred Choices" (<http://urj.org/learning/teacheducate/adolescents/sacredchoices/>)
- \* Sex God, by Rob Bell

**Amy Julia Becker**

Tenderness. Ecstasy. Vulnerability. Nakedness. Desire. The Church often ignores the embodied life. The world often forgets the spiritual reality in which we have our being. Good sex brings both together, and in so doing, it mirrors Christ, the one who came as a physical being living in a new spiritual reality. We are invited to experience God as we experience sex -- with our bodies and our emotions, with intimacy and ecstasy. We are invited to experience sex as we experience God -- covenantally, vulnerably, giving of ourselves, and receiving from the other. If only the writers of *Cosmo* and *Maxim* knew...

*Amy Julia blogs at [Thin Places](#).*

**Brian Ammons**

I long for the church to engage in a conversation about sexuality not caught up in the gender of my partner choice, but rather in the practices we claim by which our bodies encounter the sacred in one another. I long for a conversation that is not so concerned about who fits into what category and how they got that way, but instead takes seriously the implications of our incarnational tradition for the holy mystery of sex. I want to talk about sexual practice as spiritual practice, about what it means to encounter God in the sacredness of a partner's touch.

*Brian blogs at [Nekkid Resurrection](#).*

**Carl Gregg**

Find a Bible. Read *Song of Songs*, especially Chapter Five. Your mind is not in the gutter. This biblical poetry invites you to experience God's love through the passion of two young lovers. You are invited to learn what it means to love God and to be God's Beloved through vivid descriptions of love-making. After all, Christianity is about Incarnation: God made known in the human flesh of Jesus. And our sexuality -- when embraced passionately and responsibly -- can teach us how to better follow what Jesus called the "Greatest Commandments": to love God and neighbor with our *whole* self.

*Carl blogs at [Faith Forward](#) at Patheos.*

**Alyce McKenzie**

Christianity needs repeatedly to be reminded that it is not a dualistic religion. We tend to go to extremes of dismissal of or obsession with sex. We can't decide if we want to be ascetics or antinomians. Either error forgets that sex is a good gift meant to unite love and intimacy in a pleasurable combination, not at our disposal to use in violent and manipulative ways. Sex is an inextricable part of our embodied existence. Sex is meant to be sacramental, a means of expressing and receiving love. Sex is meant to be consensual and relational, not controlling and dehumanizing.

*Alyce blogs at [Faith Forward](#) at Patheos.*

**Ryan Parker**

Until I was about 21, the only mention of sex I'd heard from a pastor other than "Wait until you're married," was a joke regarding a celebration breaking out in the waiting line at the Pearly Gates when the newly-deceased found out that sex outside of marriage didn't count against him! This is unfortunate because sex(uality) is one of the most critical challenges facing Christianity today. Disturbingly high rates of teenage pregnancy, marital infidelity, and heated discussions surrounding homosexuality demand a progressive sexual ethic that transcends the "abstinence-only" and "it doesn't count" polarities.

*Ryan blogs at [Pop Theology](#).*

**Tammerie Day**

Spirituality and sexuality are two facets of the gem that is an incarnate soul, a human self: spiritual fervor and sensual fever run through the same veins, excite the same nerves. I didn't learn this until realizing my queerness, an integration that opened floodgates of spirit, physicality, insight, and compassion. Dance came to feel like prayer; intellectual exploration led to fierce arousal; making love and worship brought the same flavor of tears. Some abuse the power of this connection, which is criminal. Because this integration is what Irenaeus called a glory of God: the human being, fully alive.

*Tammerie blogs at [Day at a Glance](#).*

**Barry Taylor**

Dorothy Sayers said, "The Church is uncommonly vocal about the subject of bedrooms and so singularly silent on the subject of board-room." She makes a strong case for renewed focus upon corporate practice and the effects of consumer capitalism, etc., on church and culture. But we can't ignore sexual issues either. Not judging sex by its potential for procreation but by its capacity to promote human flourishing and loving relations (the call to love God and neighbor surely includes our sexuality and the misuse of sexuality has deep social implications) might provide a new starting point for talking sex.

*Barry blogs at [nevermind the bricolage](#).*

**Jim Burklo**

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be completely one. . ." (John 17:22-23.) With my beloved, these words take flesh. Our bodies writhe out of our prisons of ego: I in her, she in me, bursting into glory, aflame with divine Love. Where do I end, where does she begin, when we plunge into this sacred unity? We erupt with the bliss of the burning that does not consume, when We Are dissolves into I Am.

*Jim blogs at [Musings](#).*