

1992

# On Spirituality... and Human Sexuality

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## Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "On Spirituality... and Human Sexuality" (1992). *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies*. 318.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/318>

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# On Spirituality ... and Human Sexuality

**S**PIRITUALITY AND sexuality. An unlikely coupling. Many Christians assume that, like oil and water, the two simply do not mix. And yet, spirituality and sexuality occupy the most personal and intimate parts of our beings, and this is why they deserve to be addressed together instead of apart.

Sexuality has often been regarded by Christians as a problem to be dealt with instead of the wondrous gift of God that it is. Reasons for this are understandable. Of all the drives we have, the sex drive is one of the strongest and potentially one of the most destructive. But it's every bit as constructive in its potential, and it's a good thing it is strong. It ensures the continuance of the species and calls us out of isolation into relationship with others (Genesis 2:24).

However, with the average age of marriage increasing, and the age of physical maturation decreasing, this generation faces ever-growing challenges regarding how to deal with God-given sexual drives in ways that are both pleasing to God and constructive for us personally and societally. In past centuries, young men and women were expected to get married shortly after reaching puberty. Nowadays, however, "settling down" must be postponed until after one's education is completed and one's career under way. This fact has been complicated by the increasing accessibility of sexual experiences, especially among single adults and young people.

It's not until the recent threats of AIDS and STDs that the naiveté of the "sexual revolution" has begun to be reversed. The nation is finally coming to see, albeit slowly and painfully, that the ethos of unreflective hedonism during the last three decades is a lie. Unbridled eroticism is a trivialization of human sexuality, and a harmful one at that. But why be trend-followers when we could be trend-setters? What the world needs most is not simply a rever-

sal of societal expectation, but the empowerment to be transformed into the Newness of Life. This is where spirituality and sexuality meet.

Spirituality is to our religious selves what sexuality is to our physical selves—the inward core from which outward expression has its source. In that sense, to speak of spirituality is to discuss the ways we open our lives to God—sharing with Him our hopes, our fears, our longings. It is that sacred place where Holy Communion occurs, transforming a sunset or an otherwise mundane meeting for worship into a present-day Sinai experience. The Divine Lover calls to us, the beloved, and awaits a response before addressing us again.

To set one's affections on God is to challenge the tyrannical reign of one's passions. And conversely, enslavement to one's passions displaces one's loyalty to God. A few guidelines may clarify the Christian perspective on the matter.

- Because sexuality is a gift of God it deserves to be explored and enjoyed within the divinely ordained contexts. Reserving full sexual expression for the marriage relationship is not a parental directive given out of spite—to keep us from having fun. It is rooted in God's love for His children—a part of the Creator's design for the created. Unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual "robbery" or abuse, and the sense of having squandered the irretrievable parts of one's innermost being are not God's "punishment" for wrongdoing. They are the very stuff of human heartache from which the loving and divine Parent wishes to spare us—*because* He loves us.

- There is great freedom in setting limitations *before* one is thrust into the throes of "opportunity." The time to get clear about one's standards is in the quiet hour of prayer, not in the heated passion of the moment. A great deal of

spontaneity is forfeited when people are unsure of their "limits." Conversely, when one is absolutely clear about what actions and thoughts are *not* an option, temptation has no foothold, and emotions may flow freely and naturally.

- God knows our needs even better than we do (see Psalm 139). We may think we need the affection of a particular, desirable individual, or a particular sort of love relationship in order to be whole. But prayers requesting our own plans for need-fulfillment tend to go unanswered (and when answered, tend to be problematic). Conversely, when we simply lift our needs to God, praying something like, "Lord, here's what I think I need, but you know my needs far better than I. Would You please meet my needs in the way and time that are pleasing to You?" we often find our selves delightfully surprised by God's provision. Sometimes our needs even change.

- God always gives us what we need to walk in the Light and to live in the Truth. Rationalizations abound for allowing self-centered and exploitive behaviors, but the Spirit of Christ convicts us of sin and righteousness. The lust for power—revealed to be a wistful aphrodisiac. The exploitation of sexual appeal (one's own or that of another)—exposed as impurity, not genuineness. The fear of failure—dispelled by the empowering Spirit of Christ. Just as a good relationship is a gift from God, so are the gifts of faithfulness and celibacy. The good news is that God not only shows us how the abundance of life may be maximized, but He also gives the spiritual empowerment to make it a reality in our lives. This, of course, hinges upon our willingness to live under His Lordship—living responsively to the voice of the Divine Lover.

**P**ARADOXICALLY, the intimate relationship with God enhances our ability to be intimate with others. And, the right stewardship of the gift of sexuality, far from making us less spiritual, provides a pattern for receptivity and responsiveness to the loving initiative of God—whether one is married or single. In an age when sexuality is reduced to eroticism, and spirituality to religious activity, may God teach us true love—the language of which is learned in communion and prayer. **EF**

*Due to the potentially controversial character of this issue's subject matter, the editor will remain P.A.—Presently Anonymous."*