

On Sex and Sexual Activity

Preface

This paper is a presentation of the teaching of Holy Scripture on sexual activity, God's intended purpose for sex and the consequences of violating that purpose. This teaching from God's Word is upheld by the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America without compromise.

God created men and women as sexual beings. He bestowed upon mankind the gift of sex. As an expression of God's most holy love, it is intended to bring only joy and blessing to all mankind. The tragic fact is that that which was created to be a great blessing is frequently perverted by Satan and the selfishness of sinful humanity so that it becomes a means of great oppression, idolatry, self-indulgence and the destruction of the very fabric of our society. This exploration of God's gift to mankind of sex is intended to present the clear teaching of Scripture and the implications of that teaching for humanity: individual, family, church and society. It is imperative in this day and age that the Church of Jesus Christ uphold God's perfect standard of righteousness in this matter. May this teaching strengthen the Church and all her people to not only maintain this standard, but also proclaim it joyfully and vigorously in this dark and perverse age.

Fundamental Standard

The fundamental standard may be expressed as follows:

Human sexuality was created by God for the primary purpose of begetting, bearing and raising children within the family and thereby extending the image of God on the face of the earth. Sexual activity is to be conducted within the bounds of Holy Matrimony. Any other sexual indulgence is contrary to the will of God and is, therefore, sin.

This is a simple statement of the standard. Let us now examine the assumptions behind, the ramifications from, and the consequences of violating this standard that we may be strengthened and strengthen others to keep it.

The Image of God

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we read of the creation of mankind. There are several things to be learned from these passages, both from the simple statements and from the ramifications of them.

As we all know, men and women are created in the image of God. They are commanded to fill the earth and subdue it. Let us examine the passage that teaches this to us.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

(Genesis 1:26-28)

And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:23-24)

God created an orderly universe out of emptiness. In creating order, He executed a plan. Anything contradicting this plan, anything foreign to the order God created, is an affront to the Creator, contrary to the will of God. It is sin, or the result of sin; sin being any action (thought, word or deed) contrary to the will of God.

Next, within this order, we see that all creatures reproduce after their own kind. Cows bear cows and sparrows do not come from eagle eggs. With Man there is a slight difference. Following the creation of plants and animals, God makes man in His own image. It is male and female together which make up the image of God.

The clear implication of this is that man and woman together bear the image of God. They are therefore able to pass that image along through childbirth. Mankind is the kind of God. Man's imperative is to spread the image of God.

The Family

In Genesis, we see that the couple, man and woman, form a unit. We call this unit "the family". Genesis 2:24 makes this unity explicit and points out that it is to take precedence over all other human relationships. What relationship could be closer than that of a person with the parents that begot, bore and raised him? The Scriptures teach us that the relationship between husband and wife is to be closer. Jesus affirms this in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7, restating the passage and commanding that this bond not be broken. St. Paul also repeats that sexual union is an integral part of the oneness of man and woman coming together.

When a man and a woman do so come together, what is the normal, expected result? Children. New individuals added to the family. One might say that in the productive union, the family with offspring, is the complete image of the Holy Trinity. Ephesians 3:14-15 teaches us that God the Father, through His very essence, defines fatherhood and through that defines the family. God the Son, only begotten of the Father before creation was made, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can be seen to define the family as that which produces offspring. In this way, the human family strongly resembles the Holy Trinity.

There are those who say that this is little more than "anthropomorphic"* terminology. That is, that our ideas about God and the terms we use to describe Him come from our own experience and knowledge. They believe that we "create God in our image." Actually, the truth is quite the opposite. The human family is really "theomorphic"† and our terms reflect (not define) a heavenly reality. One need only look at the Pagan mythologies to see deities modeled after mankind, and where that leads! The truth is ours by revelation from God in contradiction to that which might be deduced by observing fallen humanity.

The Family as Love

The most important aspect of the concept of family is love.

Love is not an object. Love is a communication between lover and loved one. The Scriptural statement that God is love is one of the strongest arguments for the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. One alone cannot love. A thing is not love. Only when there is an object, another to be loved, can there be love. God is unchanging. If He is love now then He has always been love. He *was* love before He had created anyone or anything to love. God did not *become* love when He created the universe and mankind to be objects of His love. In fact, it was out of the love that He had and *is*, that He created the universe and mankind. So how could there be love before God created any objects of His love? Because there are and always have been three persons in the Holy Trinity. Love can be seen as the communication between persons which brings about their unity. In this way the Holy Trinity, one God in three Persons is love. Father, Son and Holy Spirit love one another. This divine love is the very essence of their existence. Without love, there would be no God. At the most there would be impersonal, unconscious forces. One might say that it is love that defines the nature of God.

The human family, taking its definition from God, the Three in One, bearing the image of God, is the source of love in creation. It is here that the love of God enters creation. The love of a man and woman for one another, the love of parents and children for each other, the love of siblings, these are expressions of the image of God. It is within the family that we learn love. It is from the family that we extend love back to God, to other human beings and to God's creation. Each family is a workshop, a laboratory for learning, testing and practicing love. Each family is an image of the Holy Trinity.

Another aspect of the love within the Trinity, reflected in the family, is the mutual dependence and communion exhibited by the relationships among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is demonstrated throughout the Gospels and

* "in the form or shape of man"

† That is, the family is formed after the form of God. Our ideas of God are not created in imitation of mankind and human experience.

expressed in Genesis 1:1-3 and John 1:1-3. The work of creation was carried out by the Father, the Word and the Spirit. It required cooperation, but more than cooperation, it required community. The Greek word *koinonia* (*κοινωνία*) expresses this relationship. It is used in the Bible for the relationships within the Holy Trinity, within the Church and between the Trinity and the Church. This Greek word, often translated as fellowship or communion, is also used in the Bible for the relationship between husband and wife. It means full commitment, the sharing of all things.

Marriage and family mirror the life of the Trinity as they portray the mutual dependence, total sharing and eternal commitment of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the visible expression of the love of God, of the God who is Love.

This reality of the family is so important that it provides the model that God the Son, Himself, uses for the relationships among His people, the Children of God, brothers of the Son of Man. The images of family and marriage are abundant throughout Scripture culminating in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. St. Paul's great teaching in Ephesians 5:21-33 draws on the relationship of husband and wife to teach about Christ and His Church. Again, this is not anthropomorphic terminology. It is the explicit use of that which is familiar to teach the deeper truth. These things could not serve us in this way if they did not already reflect the eternal reality.

The Family and Society

The family is the fundamental unit of human society and of the Church. As such, strong families mean a strong community, society and nation. Strong Christian families mean a strong Church.

Young men go off to war, not so much to defend some idealistic state, but to defend their mothers and their sisters; to defend their homeland, the land and society that their families need to prosper. They are able to function under orders because they have learned to obey their elders within their families. They are able to trust their comrades in arms because they have learned to trust their siblings and parents within their families.

As families work together to prosper, they form cooperative bonds with other families for mutual prosperity. This process continues on until we have every level of society.

We can see that anything which endangers or weakens the family has profound consequences for Church, society and nation.

Sex and the Family

God created sex. What God created, He created good. *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31a) These are fundamental statements that no orthodox believer would deny. Even though there have always been heresies that look on sex as inherently evil, the result of the Fall or some such, these heresies are not true. Before the Fall, all creatures reproduced after their own kind¹. God commanded the man and the woman to fill the earth². This is what God looked on and saw as being "very good."

God also created sex to be a wonderful and delightful experience; one which He intends to be enjoyed on every level: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

The primary purpose of sex is to bring into being new life. This, in itself, is to be a joyful thing.

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They shall not be ashamed, When they speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

¹ Gen. 1:21, 24

² Gen. 1:28

We can also see that sex plays a very basic roll in deepening the relationship of love between the man and the woman. The Scriptures indicate this clearly in many passages such as:

When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken. (Numbers 24:5)

Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. (Genesis 24:67)

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him. (II Samuel 12:24)

Sex, in and of itself, and through its fulfillment in conception and pregnancy, is to promote trust and protection. These are two vital components of love. The act of love itself (our terminology, though vastly cheapened by current usage, is still correct), carried out as God intended, requires great mutual trust. It also engenders a desire to bring pleasure, to bless the other. The wooing which leads up to it is an exercise in giving, of blessing, of eliciting trust and of protection. When conception occurs, the pregnant woman is dependent upon the man, trust is called for. For the man, there is the responsibility to care for, protect and provide.

Whether sexual activity brings about conception or not, it is still intended by God to bring pleasure and to build love between the man and the woman and to be an expression of that love. The love between a man and a woman that has as its natural fulfillment a sexual relationship is indeed a blessed and wonderful gift that God has given to mankind. Witness the words of the beautiful Song of Solomon:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. (Song 1:2)

A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is [luxuriant, shaded]. (Song 1:13-16)

My beloved spake, and said unto me, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land... Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." (Song 2:10-14)

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. (Song 6:4-5)

(Quoted from the King James Version.)

God created sex as the strongest human drive to be the biological cement holding the marriage together.

Not only is the family blessed by the practice of sexual love between husband and wife (what blesses the parents also blesses the children), it is also blessed by the disciplining of sexual appetites. As we practice sexual self control, we grow in strength, maturity and selflessness. As parents are faithful to and thoughtful of one another, tender to each other, deferring to one another, and reserved in their behavior, their love grows and they teach their children fundamental lessons about love.

Sins Against God and the Family

We can now see how destructive sexual sin is, and understand how hateful it is to God. Sexual sin is often a selfish and perverse indulgence in physical gratification. But, beyond this it is intimately linked with rebellion against Him and worship of our own selves. Because human sexuality is so closely linked with our whole being as creatures of a holy God, formed in His image, and dwelling in families created by Him to reflect His glory, the perversion of sex becomes a horrible mockery, a destructive force. Rebelliousness leads to sexual perversion and sexual indulgence

leads to rebellion against our most holy heavenly Father. If these things are not halted by repentance and a return to righteousness, they lead to individual death and the destruction of society.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Therefore you are without excuse, every man *of you* who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. (Romans 1:18-2:2)

When cement is broken the things joined are damaged. When sex is broken all involved are damaged. This most powerful human drive, created to build human society, to spread the image of God, becomes Satan's favorite weapon for destroying human relationships and human society.

Homosexual Sin

The fact that man and woman together bear the image of God and are therefore able to pass that image along through childbirth, that mankind is the kind of God and that man's imperative is to spread the image of God; this fact is the fundamental basis for rejecting homosexuality. Homosexuality is a flat contradiction and a mockery of God's will. It is, in essence, a refusal to spread the image of God. It can never be productive. To be created in God's image means to be a creative being. This refers to more than man's ability to think and act creatively. It also applies to mankind's ability to reproduce the image of God. Since they cannot produce offspring, homosexual unions are rejections of man's creative ability, his partaking of the creativity of God. This can never be changed even if mankind's ability to manipulate reproduction progresses to the point of bringing forth asexually by cloning or some such. This, itself, becomes further rebellion against the pattern established by the Creator.

Not only is homosexual sin a mockery of God's intention for mankind, it is a self-serving abdication of responsibility for one another. The partners to a homosexual union may have some idea of mutually supporting one another or of caring for one another but there is, implicit in this type of union, the rejection of fully caring for another, bonding to another so as to be willing to lay down one's life for another. The two partners are so "equal" that there can be no true yielding to the other. Such a union will not bring forth little ones so totally dependent upon their parents that their parents must give up their own desires completely. There is no dying to self. There is only selfish indulgence.

The clamor to regularize homosexual relationships through "marriage," etc., is not only a mockery of God's intended relationships, a corruption of the image of God, a selfish indulgence and a perversion of all that Scripture teaches about God's relationship to His people and His people to one another, it is also a faithless denial of our heavenly Father's ability to provide for our emotional needs. He, the Creator, has set the standard. It is rebellious and faithless to maintain that we cannot keep it or that we would suffer by keeping it. Children caught up in or brought into such a relationship will be greatly harmed by the false images portrayed. The love they are taught will be deeply marred, even if on the surface it appears to be caring, solicitous and sensitive.

Heterosexual Sin

But of course, homosexual activity is not the only form of sexual sin. Heterosexual sin consists of any heterosexual practice that cheapens either person involved, attacks trust, weakens or denies self discipline, promotes selfishness, undermines family unity, ridicules love, brings pain and suffering to the other, adulterates the marriage bond, projects a false image of the relationship of Christ and His Church, or any thing else along these lines. This list includes private, internal thoughts as well as outward, public actions. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But I say unto you, "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

The harm that comes to victims of sexual sin is great, occurring on many levels. Selfhood is stolen. Physical and emotional pain are inflicted. The other is caused to sin. These are the results of rape, child abuse and seduction. There is the destruction of trust, love and faith as with promiscuity and unfaithfulness. There is bitterness, depression, self loathing, etc. In all these things, false images of God's relationship to His people are taught to others, especially to children; false images bearing eternal consequences. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.* (Matthew 18:6)

Fornication and Adultery

Sexual intimacy between any two who are not already joined by God in the bonds of Holy Matrimony is fornication and adultery. It is a denial of God's law, His will and His work in joining two together as one. It is sin. (Committed marriage among non-believers still fulfills God's purposes for mankind. It is still a union brought about by God. Of course this is not to excuse unbelief. It is to show that God's law is effective and beneficial for all mankind. The greatest benefit is enjoyed by those who are also united to Him in faith and enjoy the fruit of salvation.)

Pornography

Indulgence undermines self discipline. It weakens a person's ability to obey man or God. It promotes rebelliousness. Pornography, a particular form of self indulgence, also glorifies evil, cheapens and betrays love, teaches lies and promotes further sin. The making of pornography involves the malicious exploitation of the weak such as children or financially pressed women.

Other Abuses of Sex

In addition to the sins described above which are primarily of a sexual nature, there are other grievous sins which include the abuse of sex but are primarily of a non-sexual nature. Two of these, rape and abortion, are touched on below. These sins are compounded and aggravated, in that they incorporate and pervert God's gift of sexuality, making it an instrument for all that He abhors. Instead of using sex as a blessing, it becomes a vehicle of domination, oppression and murder. The sin is also directly, overtly, emphatically against another, one who is weaker and defenseless.

Rape

To use God's gift of sexuality to dominate another, one who is weaker, as is the case in rape, is particularly heinous, a crass exploitation of God's gift to oppress one of the beloved of God, of the very ones we are commanded to respect and to protect. Every man has the God given responsibility towards every woman and towards every child, to cherish, respect and defend them. When a man abuses his own wife or any adult, his or her own child, the sin is especially aggravated. Here are two passages of Scripture which show this clearly.

But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her. (Deuteronomy 22:25-27)

When she brought *them* to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." But she answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing! "As for me, where could I get rid of my reproach? And as for you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." However, he would not listen to her; since he

was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go away!" But she said to him, "No, because this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you have done to me!" Yet he would not listen to her. (II Samuel 13:11-16)

Abortion

We can see that abortion, in addition to being murder of the defenseless, is also a sexual sin, an extremely heinous and aggravated one at that. It is, to begin with, a supreme act of selfishness, to destroy another's life for one's own benefit. It is often an attempt to hide sin by removing its consequences. It is a refusal to pass on life, love and the blessings of God to another. It is a rejection of God's plan of creation. Finally, but most importantly, it is the destruction of the image of God; that is, it is attempted deicide, a Satanic attack on God through His beloved children.

Although the Church does not prohibit the use of contraception to prevent fertilization, any contraceptive technique or other procedure that destroys a fertilized human egg or causes it to be discharged is abortion and is prohibited.

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These sins mock God, harm individuals, destroy families and severely weaken society itself.

A little reflection on these things will show how dangerous the tolerance of sexual sin is to the sinner, to victims, to families, to society and to Christ's own Body, the Church.

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is the sacrament whereby God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, takes two individuals, a man and a woman, and makes them one. In this God creates a new family. It is because God, not man, does this that we are assured of His creative power and redeeming love to strengthen the marriage. The success of the marriage depends, not so much on the couple's ability to keep their word, on human weakness, but on God's strength, His work of creation. This knowledge leads the couple away from reliance on themselves and to reliance on Him. It serves to keep them humble before God. This is demonstrated clearly in the Eastern Church's marriage ceremony, especially as it is contrasted with the Western tradition.

In the West, the man and the woman are considered to be the ministers of the sacrament. They perform the marriage through the exchange of vows and consummate it through sexual intercourse. The part the Church is to bless the marriage invoking God's strength and grace for the bridal couple.

Not so, our Eastern understanding. We see that the family is God's creation from start to finish. The minister of the sacrament is the priest who performs it through a prayer of consecration similar to the Eucharistic Prayer. The couple joining themselves to one another in the marriage bed is the natural follow-through and enjoyment of what God has done through the sacrament.

In the nuptial prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked to do the sacramental work of transformation. The prayer ends with the couple sharing a consecrated marriage cup and the exchange of rings (an external token of what God has done). The ancient Jewish practice of crowning the couple is followed. The crowns signify the new reality. The new couple reign within their new domain, their family. The crowns also bear witness to the coming of Christ the King to claim His Bride and make her, the Church, His queen. Finally, the crowns are understood to be crowns of martyrdom, signifying the ongoing death to self which gives life to the marriage.

The vows, rather than being the primary focus of the marriage, also following the ancient Jewish practice (cf. Mt. 1:18ff), are exchanged during the betrothal, prior to the marriage.

The fact that the marriage is performed by God within the Church and not by the individuals through the exchange of vows provides a succinct answer to all questioning of the need to have a wedding in order to be married. It also

makes clear that simply pledging privately to one another is not sufficient basis for establishing a marriage or for living together. It also moves the marriage out of the private realm between the two (their own private business) and makes it the affair of the whole Church.

The Church sees that she has a vested interest in each and every marriage as a fundamental unit within the Church and the portrayal of the relationship between Jesus and His Church. It is in her interest to uphold and maintain a right portrayal of this relationship.

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is a sacrament of ministry. It is a ministry of begetting life. It is a ministry of raising and training children for God. It is a ministry of instruction. As the family reaches out to others in need, it is a ministry of love and shelter. It is a ministry that embodies all that the Scriptures teach us about marriage.

Summary

God has established a standard that promises nothing but good to those who maintain it. He makes it abundantly clear that violation of that standard will bring misery and death. He also gives repentant sinners the grace to turn from their sin and embrace His righteousness, to yield their weakness and receive His strength.

The Church of Jesus Christ is empowered to bind and to loose, to retain and to forgive. She is the context, the Family where these things are to be practiced and taught. As we carry out our responsibilities to one another it is important that we remember that it is within the Church that we are able to draw on God's wisdom and strength to the fullest.

We bear a great responsibility before God to teach Truth and to uphold His standard of righteousness.

Sexual sin is a grave matter. Unfortunately, we live in an age that has little if any understanding of this. Our responsibility is to educate, to exhort, to discipline and to love. Let us continue to seek a deeper understanding of these things, searching the Scriptures, learning from our experience and praying to God for clear knowledge and wisdom to carry out the task. Let us pray that it is not yet too late to reclaim the Church, our society, and our nation from corruption. We need to understand the seriousness of the reality.

Promulgation

This teaching, *On Sex and Sexual Activity*, is hereby promulgated by the Episcopal Synod of the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America, this 25th day of February, 1996. It is to be received by all members as the teaching of the Church.

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