

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 16**

**A BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF SEXUALITY**

*For He says, “The two will become one flesh.”  
But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.  
1Corinthians 6.16-17*

In the past, the subject of sexuality did not have its place among the important Christian doctrines. Like the act of sex, this subject was left to the privacy of marriage and marriage counselling. As long as sex was safely kept as the secret of marriage, this secrecy and privacy on the matter was understandable and even to a certain extent justifiable. But, modern society has abandoned God and sought to base ethics and law on human nature. One result has been that the issue of sex worked its way to the surface. It broke away from marriage and now is out in the open like an untameable beast that bolts in every direction and leaves no ground untrampled. Sex now must be dealt with where it is—in the open. In this we are going back to where things were at in Paul’s mission. Due to idolatry, Gentiles lost their moral compass. The gospel that brought them to the knowledge of God in Christ gave them the moral correction involved in redemption, and the subject of sex had a certain priority here. The apostle faithfully gave the correction and the needed teaching. The result is that we have an apostolic doctrine of sexuality.

The Spirit who breathed the scriptures did not first put the spotlight of truth on the subject of sex when the gospel confronted the Gentile lifestyle. The spotlight was put on this area of life from the beginning. The creation narrative of Genesis 1 comes to a moment of pause in Gen 1.27. Here the creation of mankind is set off from the creation of animals by focusing on the two relationships in which man was created: the special relationship with God as his image and the sexual relationship of male and female. This is stated poetically, and poetry is a literary style for celebration and meditation. The focus on the sexual relationship is sharpened in the second creation narrative. Here the union is the climax of the narrative. All moves toward the creation of the woman and Adam’s poetic naming of her. The focus is on the unique relationship that is entered in marriage by the act of sexual union. The Song of Solomon follows up on this lyrical celebration of sexual love and union. This song of love is called The Song of Songs (1.1), which means that it is the highest song. The climax of the Bible is the vision of the appearing of a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21.2; 9). Marriage union is the climax of creation and of history.

We will take the doctrine of sexuality from Paul’s letters, but this does not mean that this doctrine is narrowly Pauline. The apostle expounds the subject in the light of the full revelation of God in Christ in which all scriptures are fulfilled. We will see that through the apostle’s teaching we get a thoroughly biblical doctrine of sexuality.

**A. THE PLACE THAT THE SUBJECT OF SEXUALITY HAS WITHIN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

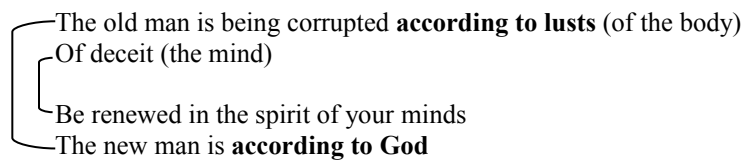
When it comes to ordering the presentation of doctrine, we must decide on what we are trying to achieve. If the concern is to gain a systematic treatment of doctrine and a logical unfolding of the whole, we will begin with the doctrine of God for all begins with God and flows from the truth of God. Paul’s letters show that he thought in this direction. If the concern is with teaching in the church, we will order our presentation of doctrine according to the needs of the church for, as the apostle taught, the goal must be the edification of the body as a whole. But, the apostle also shows another way of ordering the presentation of doctrine. Young converts who have just come out of a pagan way of life need to be taught the truth that guides them to make the change from their former way of life into the new way of living. Paul gave this kind of teaching in his baptismal instruction. In this course of teaching, the subject of sexuality got priority.

The clue in tracking Paul's baptismal instruction is given in Gal 3.27 which states that all who were baptized into Christ clothed themselves with Christ (they put on Christ as a garment). The teaching given for this is presented in Eph 4.17-24. In this passage the apostle refers to the way the Christians learned Christ when they "heard him and were taught in him, just as the truth is in Jesus" (v 21). They were taught that in reference to their former manner of life they were to lay aside the old man (human being) (v 22) and put on the new man (v 23). Here we have the baptismal theme of Gal 3.27 opened up.

The focus in this initial teaching of the Lord is first put on the old man "which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit" (v 22). The expression, "the lusts of deceit," draws on the description of the Gentile way of life in vv 17-19. There Paul points out that they walk in the futility of their minds, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart (vv 17-18). This amounts to deceit. Their minds are deceived. The result of this condition of mind is stated in v 19: "And they, having become callous have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." The lusts of the old man refer to this.

In contrast to the deceit, the Christians were ordered to be renewed in the spirit of their mind (v 23). The spirit is the way we are related to God. The mind is to be renewed in its spirit, in its connection with God by the Holy Spirit. The converts were also instructed to put on the new man (v 24). In contrast to the corruption of the old man *in accordance with the lusts* (v 22), the new man *is according to God* and has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (v 23).

We can lay out the issues as follows:



Paul is linking the mind with either a life according to lust or according to God.

The apostle is working with a fixed pattern that is seen in his proclamation of the gospel and in his understanding of the key issues in the conversion of Gentiles. His gospel message to the Athenians in Acts 17 is the example Luke gives of his proclamation to a Gentile audience outside of the synagogue. In this message, he addressed the Gentiles' ignorance of God. The fact that world in its wisdom did not know God lay at the basis of his mission to preach the gospel to the world (1Cor 1.21). In his proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul focused narrowly on the first issue raised in Eph 4.17f., the ignorance of God. In this evangelistic setting, he did not deal with the consequences of this ignorance of God, the lust-driven life and the moral issues. Paul took this subject up in his instructions for baptism.

The connection between the ignorance of God and the lust-driven life is worked out in Rom 1.18-32. Paul's analysis of the Gentile problem begins with God and the mind (Rom 1.19-23). In light of the knowledge of God, the Gentiles did not glorify God as God or give thanks and ended exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible creatures. The mind generated this ignorance of God. Paul points out that the Gentiles "became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (vv 21b-22). The result was that they were given over (as a judgment of God) in the lusts of their bodies to impurity. The impurity was sexual impurity and the lust was burning sexual lust (vv 24-27). The whole crop of vices flourished in this condition (vv 28-32).

Paul gives a brief account of the Roman Christians' conversion in Rom 6.17-19. He thanks God that they became obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which they were committed (v 17). Then he reminds them that in their former life they presented the members of their bodies as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness (v 19). Here he is no doubt referring to his description of the Gentile way of life in Rom

1.19-32. In the spirit of his baptismal instruction, he calls them to the opposite action: present your members as slaves of righteousness resulting in holiness (v 19; compare Eph 4.24, “in righteousness and holiness of the truth”).

In Col 3.5-14 Paul again rehearses his instructions centered on the baptismal theme of putting off and putting on. Here we see a connection made between the act of putting away sexual sin and putting on love. The whole passage is enclosed by these two themes. Paul begins with the command to put to death the members of our body on earth, and the first things to put to death are fornication, impurity and passion (v 5). He ends by calling the Christians to put on love (v 14). The connection between the command to love and the command against sexual immorality is also made in Eph 5.1-4. In Eph 4.25-5.2, the apostle builds up to the height of virtue in love. We are to be imitators of God by walking in love as Christ loved us (5.1-2). Paul moves from this love to its direct opposite—sexual immorality and impurity (5.3). The fact that sexual immorality is the direct opposite to the love that the Christian is called to is reflected in the lists of the works of the flesh and of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5.19-23. The first group in the list of the works of the flesh is fornication, impurity and sensuality (v 19). The first item in the fruit of the Spirit is love (v 22). We see this link made again in 1Thess 4.1-12. In v 1 Paul turns to exhorting the Christians in the Lord Jesus to walk and please God. The concern he takes up is that of sexual sin and walking in the passion of lust like the Gentiles do who do not know God (vv 4-5). The contrast to this is stated in (vv 9-12). God has taught them to love one another. Here again we see the pattern of not knowing God, being driven by lust and committing sexual sin in contrast to being taught of God to love.

We see in Paul a clear ordering of themes. The ignorance of God, which is a matter of the mind, was his first concern addressed in the proclamation of the gospel. The apostle makes a direct link between this ignorance and a life driven by lusts, and foremost among the lusts was sexual lust. He then set the sexual immorality in direct contrast to that love which is taught of God, to which the young converts were called. We might conclude that Paul gave the priority to the problem of sexual sin due to the fact that the Gentile way of life was systemically immoral. There is some truth to this. The initial instruction for converts must be focused on the pressing issues involved in the transfer out of the old life style into the new way of living. But, this practical insight does not tell the whole truth. For this we must look deeper.

Jesus established that the two commandments to love God and to love one’s neighbour are the sum of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 22.34-40). The apostles took this up and saw love as fulfilling the law and as the definitive virtue of the Christian life (Rom 13.8-10; Jas 2.8; 1Pt 1.22; 2Pt 2.5-7 and 1John). Paul’s teaching was not a mirror or reverse image of the Gentile way of thinking and living as if he simply wanted to replace the vice of fornication with a corresponding virtue. His teaching was the very teaching of the Lord Jesus (Eph 4.20-21). His thought moved out from the love of Christ shown at the cross to the way believers were to live (Eph 5.1-2). We should look at the order of Paul’s teaching from the point of view of Christ. Paul was commissioned to preach Christ and him crucified, and this was the act of his great love. This set the focus of his proclamation and teaching. The focus on love put the spotlight on the problem of sexual immorality, lust and impurity as the corrupt counterpart to pure love.

We must press further to understand the order of Paul’s teaching. The apostle taught the believers to have an intense love one for another within the churches, but the source of that love was not in human beings but in God. The gospel brought people to the true knowledge of God and brought them into a living relationship with him. Within this relationship in which God loves them, they were to love one another. The apostle read the Gentile situation as the reverse image of this reality. They were ignorant of God and excluded from the life of God. As a result they were controlled by the sexual lusts of the body.

The reverse image of the truth of life in Christ represented the reality of Gentile life. It was idolatrous, and it was sexually immoral, i.e., immoral from the standard set in creation and affirmed in Christ. There is a profound insight in this. When human beings fall, they have to fall according to their created constitution. That is why we can match the pattern of the fallen way of life with the pattern of the true way of life. The one is a perversion and a corruption of the other.

Our analysis of the pattern of Paul’s initial instruction of Gentile converts brings the subject of sexuality into the foreground of Christian doctrine, at least for Gentile Christians. The first theme is the knowledge of

the true and living God. This must be set in contrast to idolatrous notions of deity. The second theme is the ethical demand of the knowledge of God in Christ, and that is love. Our understanding of love as the pure and spiritual desire for others must be freed up and purified from the corrupt desire for others—sexual lust. This need is not far from any of us. After all, the problem is not confined to Gentile culture. It is within our bodies. To think clearly on this subject, we have to come to a clear understanding of what we really are. We can thank God that the Spirit who moved men to write the scriptures moved Paul to speak from God on this subject (1Pt 1.21).

## **B. WORKING OUT THE DOCTRINE OF SEXUALITY – 1 CORINTHIANS 6.12-20**

Paul's most extensive teaching on the subject of sex, both in and outside of marriage, is found in 1Corinthians 5 to 7. Before we look into Paul's doctrine of sexuality, we should place his treatment of this subject in its context.

The theme development in 1Corinthians reflects the pattern of Paul's teaching that we have taken note of. Paul first takes up the theme of the knowledge of God given through the gospel in 1.18-4.21. Here he deals with God's wisdom which is proclaimed in the message of Christ crucified in contrast to the wisdom of the world. Paul moves from the evangelistic proclamation of this wisdom (1.18-25) to the conversion of the Corinthians by the call of God (v 26-31) through his preaching (2.1-5). Then he proceeds to the subject of the teaching ministry in the church (2.6ff.).

In chapter 5 Paul turns to the themes that were taken up in baptism—the moral issues. By morals we mean the norms that govern relationships between human beings. The moral teaching of the letter is given in chapters 5 to 10. Interestingly, Paul begins with the subject of fornication (chapter 5 and 6) and ends on the subject of the practice of love (8.1-11.1). After this Paul turns attention to church life (chapters 11 to 14), and then he ends on the theme of the resurrection of the body (chapter 15). The order of the whole letter shows that Paul is following the order of Christian experience: 1) themes in the proclamation of the gospel, 2) the moral themes which were raised in baptismal teaching, 3) themes concerning church life and 4) the end in the resurrection of the body. I point this out to locate the doctrinal treatment of the subject of sexuality in 6.12-20 within the set pattern of Paul's missionary instruction.

The Corinthians were all baptized (1.13) and, no doubt, received Paul's full baptismal instructions. Paul refers to the change they underwent in 6.11. He says, "And such were some of you," i.e., fornicators, adulterers, effeminate (taking a feminine role in homosexual relationships) and homosexuals, among other types of people who live sinful lives. He points out, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." At the close of the list of the works of the flesh in Gal 5.19-21, Paul tells the Galatians that he had forewarned them. This suggests that Paul gave very clear teaching and warnings in his basic missionary teaching to young converts. In light of this, it comes as a surprise that the Corinthians had a man in the church who indulged in a type of fornication that was not even practiced among Gentiles, and they were puffed up about it (5.1-2). What caused them to become puffed up about a member of the church living in sexual sin? Paul points to the answer in 8.1: knowledge puffs up. This is what Paul deals with in 1Cor 6.12-20. The Corinthians rationalized fornication based on a piece of knowledge that they had, that they most likely received from Paul. Such "Christian" rationalization of fornication moved Paul to present a doctrinal discussion on the subject of sexuality.

Our study so far has only placed the subject of fornication within the pattern of Paul's proclamation and teaching of the gospel. This gives the subject of sex a place within the scheme of Christian teaching. In the passage that we are taking up now, this subject is opened up for us. We will go through this passage in note form, and then we will draw on what we gather for a doctrine of sexuality. Treat this section as a Bible study.

## 1. All things are lawful for me (v 12)

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.  
All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

Paul begins with the maxim: “All things are lawful for me.” Taken in isolation, this maxim could be used (and no doubt was used at Corinth) to argue that the Christian is at liberty to commit fornication. Paul’s concern is to show that the maxim is not to be taken in this way.

This saying appears four times: twice in 6.12 and twice in 10.23. We will begin by analysing what Paul does with this maxim.

### a. What is Paul getting at?

The fact that he uses the first person, *me*, shows that Paul accepts the maxim for himself. Where he stands apart from the Corinthians who are using this maxim to justify their sinful behaviour is not in denying the principle of liberty but the way it is to be understood and used.

Each time Paul states the maxim he checks it. In both passages (6.12 and 10.23), he begins by citing the maxim and then adds, “But not all things are profitable (*sumphero*).” Then he repeats the maxim and adds another qualifier to the statement of liberty. In 6.12 he adds, “I will not be brought under the authority of any;” and in 10.23 he adds, “But all things do not build up.”

Paul’s intentions in 6.12 and 10.23 are clear. The Corinthians were taking up the maxim that all things were lawful to the Christian. Paul is pointing out that this truth must be checked by the fact that all things are not profitable, and then he points out two things that are not profitable: if the person is brought under authority to anything by his own action (6.12) and if a brother is not built up by the action (10.23).

The first check (I will not be brought under the authority of anything) raised in 6.12 governs 6.13-7.40. Paul shows that sexual union makes one the property of a prostitute. But it also makes one’s body the property of a marriage partner so that the partner has authority over one’s body (7.3-4). Being joined to a prostitute is incompatible with being a member of Christ and the property of God (6.13-20). Marriage union is compatible, if it is in the Lord.

The second check (all things do not build up) raised in 10.23 governs 8.1-11.1. This theme is struck up in 8.1 which says that love edifies. Paul is teaching that we should not use our own liberties if the action will cause a brother to stumble (ch 8). He extends this principle to all people, Jews, Greeks or the church of God (10.32).

The maxim introduced in 1Cor 6.12 covers the entire discussion from 6.12-11.1. Paul is correcting the Corinthians’ notion of their liberty. In 1Cor 6.12 and 10.23 he points out the two concerns that must govern our sense of liberty. These two texts provide the two ends of the discussion.

### b. What does the maxim refer to?

Paul’s basis for the maxim is given in 10.26 where he cites the scripture that the earth is the Lord’s and all that it contains (10.26). The “all things” refers to all things in creation.

The context of 10.23-26 shows that this maxim addressed the question about food laws, the Jewish restrictions on food. We see this emphasis on the acceptability of all things for the Christian in several scriptures.

Rom 14.2: eats all things

Rom 14.14: “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself....”

Col 2.21-22: the all things (v 22, “which all...”) refers to all things that are destined to perish with the using.

Mark 7.19: Thus he declared all things clean.

In 1Tim 4.3 food and marriage (sex) are declared good and to be enjoyed. Verse 4: “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.”

These scriptures show that there was a stress on making all things that God created available for human use. The initial concern was the restriction on food. This issue arose from the Law of Moses and Judaism. It was understood that the principle extended to everything created by God. In the Lord Jesus, nothing in creation was taboo. This is true to the creation account. The creator declared all things to be good (Genesis 1). The only restriction placed on Adam was eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Christ restored things to their created value.

God made all things for man to be used by him. But, this does not leave man without direction. He is responsible for the effect that his use of things has on himself and on others. The Christian must use things in a way that is compatible with Christ, and this means that he must be true to the fact that Christ owns him and died for his brother.

### c. Lawful?

The word translated “lawful” is *exestin*. The idea of law is not at all present in this word. Since this word is the key word, it is worth trying to get a more accurate understanding of it.

In v 12b Paul uses a play on words. The word translated in the NASB with the phrase, mastered by, is, *exouiaesthesomai*, and this word is related to the word *exestin*. The word, *exouiaesthesomai*, means to be brought under *authority*. Unfortunately, it is not possible to make a literal translation of Paul’s statement that preserves the wordplay. But, if we want to express the wordplay we can render the line as follows: “I am *authorized* to use all things, but all things are not profitable. I am *authorized* to use all things, but I will not be brought under the *authority* of any.”

This idea of authority is important to what Paul says about sexual union. In 7.4 he applies it to marriage. To have the authority of one’s body (*exousiazō*) is to be in the position to decide on the use of one’s body for sex. Paul’s concern in 7.4 is with the right to exercise one’s will over the body. He is saying that the person in a marriage is not authorized to make the decisions over his/her own body. The partner is authorized to carry out his or her will through the other’s body. This agrees with 7.5. The person in a marriage is not to turn away the other, to deny him/her his/her right. The idea in *exousia* here is to be authorized to make use of something.

We can further sharpen our understanding of *exousia* from 9.4-6. Here Paul affirms his authority or right. The first item is food, and this is the subject at hand. Paul is in the position to receive food when he needs it. He is also in the position to take a wife with him on his mission, which would mean that she would be supported with him. He is also authorized to receive his wages and so not to have to work manually for a living. Paul used his right or the fact that he was authorized to be married and to take wages by not taking a wife or taking wages. This is the point that Paul presses: *exousia* gives one the power of decision, to take or not to take, and often the proper use of authority or one’s rights is not to take.

In 1Cor 6.12 Paul is setting up the perspective from which he will deal with the question of fornication. In his baptismal teaching, he tied sexual immorality to idolatry and forbade it in the name of the Lord. 1Corinthians 5 shows that Paul never left that ground. But, now he will give an account of this prohibition from the point of view of the Christian’s position in Christ. His liberty in Christ to use all things that God created cannot be extended to fornication because through this act he brings himself under authority contrary to his relationship with Christ.

## 2. Thinking through the issues (vv 13-20)

### a. The relationship in which the body is defined (vv 13-14)

13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. 14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.

Since the maxim was coined for food laws, Paul begins his argument by showing why it applies to all foods. The logic is as follows: food (in the Greek text this is in the plural referring to all foods) is for the stomach and the stomach is for food. Food does not take in the heart or the whole person. God will destroy both it (the stomach, fem. sing.) and them (the foods). The food passes through and the stomach turns to dust with the body. In the resurrection, we will not have our present stomach. The stomach is only for the present mode of existence. This confirms the maxim for food: I am authorized to use all things.

The principle involved in the reasoning about food is that what passes away is not spiritually and eternally detrimental. Jesus used this logic in Mark 7.18-19, and Mark drew the conclusion: if food simply passes through so that it cannot defile a person, then all foods are clean.

After showing why all foods are lawful for me, Paul turns to the subject of fornication. The sudden shift of subject implies that the Corinthians reasoned by analogy from food to sex. Their argument would have run as follows: just like the stomach is for food and food for the stomach and both will be destroyed by God so the body is for fornication and fornication for the body. From 1Corinthians 15 we learn that the resurrection of the body was being denied by some. In that case it would follow that just as in the case of the stomach and food, the body will be destroyed in death with the result that fornication has no lasting significance.

Paul proceeds to show that the analogy with the stomach and food does not hold. First, he points out that the body is not for fornication (satisfying an appetite like eating food to satisfy the stomach) but for the Lord. Second, he shows that while God will destroy both the stomach and the food he will raise the body as he raised the Lord. Stomach and food share a common end—destruction. The body of the believer and the Lord share a common end from God—resurrection.

Paul is dealing with the question of purpose by design. The stomach was designed for food, to take in food and to digest it, and food is intended for the stomach. Paul is denying that the body was designed for fornication as if fornication was its purpose. Rather it was designed for the Lord. This truth is rooted in creation. God made man in his image, and the body of man was essential to this. Man was to be part of the physical world and represent God within it. But, due to sin the human body is cut off from God. If our vision stopped with death, the body would be seen as an organ that is to be disposed of. But, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus opens up the vision of the true purpose and destiny of the body. That is why the connection between the body and the Lord is made in resurrection (v 14). God raised the Lord (in his body) and he will also raise us (in our bodies) through his power. The Lord is for the body because in him our bodies will be raised; and the body is for the Lord in that it is destined to share in his resurrection life.

The believer must understand his body in light of the destiny of that body—to be raised as Jesus was raised.

### b. The body as a member (vv 15-17)

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

In v 15 Paul moves from the future (our resurrection) to the present: our bodies are members of Christ. Our bodies are for the Lord not simply in their destiny but also in their present relationship with Christ. This fits the pattern of Paul's teaching on the indwelling Spirit and the resurrection of the body. The Spirit indwells

our bodies and holds them in a current relationship with Christ, and through this he holds our bodies for their future redemption in resurrection.

In Romans 6 and 7 we see how Paul viewed the members of the body. The members are associated with what we actually do in this world. They are the organs of our action by which we act out our will. In Rom 6.12 the members are the instruments of action. In Rom 6.19, they are seen as slaves that must carry out their master's will (Rom 6.19). In Rom 7.23 the law in the members is the law of sin that determines what the members of the body do in contrast to what the mind does. We must carry this view of the members of the body over to 1Cor 6.15. As members of Christ, our bodies belong to Christ, and their role is to carry out his will.

In vv 15b-16 Paul proceeds to show that fornication amounts to taking one's body and making it the member of a harlot. This is incompatible with the fact that our bodies are members of Christ.

In v 16 Paul gives the reason why committing fornication is an act by which one makes his body the member of a harlot. Through the act of sexual union, the man and woman become one flesh. This is based on Gen 2.24. Paul rightly takes the Hebrew word, *flesh*, to refer to the body.

Paul points out the full force of the sexual union within marriage in 7.4. The body of the husband belongs to the wife and she has the authority or power of decision over it to express herself and carry out her desire through it. His body is the member of her action. It is from this point of view that Paul sees fornication. In the language of 1Cor 6.12, the man comes under the authority of the harlot. His body, which is inseparable from his person, is at her disposal, and it is the instrument through which she carries out her function.

On the surface it may seem that Paul is creating a tension here. Paul said that he will not come under the authority of anything (6.12). He applies this to fornication. But, in 7.3-4 he tells the married Christians that in the act of marriage they have placed their bodies under the authority, the power of decision, of their spouse. Does this mean that the Christian should not marry? This may in part lay behind the concern of 7.1: is it good for a man not to touch a woman?

The tension is removed when we understand how Paul understands the identity of the individual. The Christian is not his own (6.19). He is a member of Christ (v 15) and is purchased to be God's property (v 20). When a Christian gets married, he puts his body under the authority (the power of decision) of his wife. This is not incompatible with him being the member of Christ, for he marries in the Lord (7.39). Because his wife is in the Lord and the marriage is in the Lord, the fact that he is joined to his wife does not take away from the fact that his body is a member of Christ. By entering a Christian marriage, he does not come under the authority of another for he remains wholly under the authority of Christ.

In 1Corinthians 7 Paul makes it clear that the single state is preferable from the point of view of complete and undistracted devotion of service to the Lord. But, if a person does not have the gift to be single (7.7), he will be tempted to fornicate, and this is incompatible with him being a member of the Lord. Also, without the gift to be single, he will burn (v 9). Marriage for all of its distractions is better than burning when it comes to serving the Lord. If a person needs to be married, he can take it from God that he has the gift to be married.

To return to our text, so far Paul has explained that the man who commits fornication gives his body to be the member of a harlot. Now in v 17 Paul will show the other side: how the Christian's body is a member of Christ.

We should begin by noticing the parallel: "he who joins himself to a harlot" (v 16) is matched by "But the one who joins himself to the Lord." Paul is looking at two acts of union. We must be clear in our thinking here. Paul does not have in mind some special spiritual act of union that the believer has to attain to. Every Christian is a member of Christ, and that means that every believer has joined himself to Christ. This takes place by faith.

The two different acts of union (the one sexual and the other by faith) bring about two different types of union. Through sex two become one flesh. It is a union of two bodies in the act of the body. Paul does not and could not say that the believer becomes one flesh with the Lord. The notion is horrific. Rather, he says that the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit. What does this mean?

The believer's life and nature in Christ are supplied by the Spirit of God who dwells in him. In the language of Jn 3.6, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The word spirit here is set in contrast to flesh, not now flesh as a term for the body, but as a term for the mortal nature of the body. The resurrection body is not a body of flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor 15.50). It is a spiritual body given to us from the risen Christ who is a life-giving spirit (vv 44-45). The incorruptible, heavenly and spiritual nature of God is in mind.

We have a body. It is flesh by nature and can be joined to another human being via the act of sex. The same body can also be joined to the Lord to be his member, and this union is put into effect by the Spirit who indwells the body. Through the indwelling Spirit, the Lord has the ownership of the body to carry out his will through the body as his member on earth.

### c. The two commands (vv 18-20)

18 Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

In this closing section, Paul begins and ends with commands: flee fornication (v 18a) and glorify God in your body (v 20b).

The command to flee fornication is given a special urgency due to the unique nature of the sin of fornication. It is the only sin that is a sin against one's own body. To understand this, we have to keep in mind Paul's whole argument on the subject. When a man commits fornication, he comes under the authority of the other person (v 12). This act of sexual union redefines his body as a member of the harlot (vv 15-16). When the Christian does this, he is sinning against his body as the member of Christ. He is taking the member of Christ (what his body is) and making it the member of a harlot.

Fornication is not uniquely a sin against the body because of the unique bodily lusts involved or because of any physical damage that may result to the body. It is a sin against the body because the body is defined relationally through the act in a way that contradicts and violates the body's God-given relational identity. We should add that one can only see this in light of the creator's decree under which people have sex: two will become one flesh. But, the human experience of sexual union is true to this. In this act, people do not know themselves as simply dealing with a specific organ of the body. Their whole being is involved and in the act they use each other to carry out their own bodily functions and carry out their will and desire through each other. The converse is also true. They give themselves to each other. But, while experience matches what the Bible teaches, the only basis for what Paul is teaching is the creator's decree.

Paul begins v 19 with, "Or do you not know...?" This refers back to the command, "Flee fornication!" He gave a reason for this command in the fact that fornication is a sin against one's own body. Now he will give another reason, another perspective on our body that makes it imperative that we not sin against the body but glorify God in it.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who indwells the body. As a result we are not our own. The temple belongs to the deity that inhabits it. In v 20 Paul shifts the metaphor over to slavery. A slave was purchased and became the property of his master. His body was there to do the will of his master. Since God purchased us to be his property, we are to glorify him in our body.

By pressing the point that the Corinthians are not their own property but belong to God, Paul is getting to the bottom of their faulty thinking. When they quoted, “All things are lawful to me,” they thought of themselves as being their own to do with their body what they pleased. Paul, on the other hand said that all things were lawful to him as a person who belonged to the Lord and to God. He defined himself by his relationship with the Lord.

In 1Cor 6.12-20 Paul is addressing two issues in the Corinthian’s thinking. First, they are to see that fornication brings them under the authority of another in a way that is incompatible with what they are in Christ. Second, they do not have any right to do with their bodies what they please. Their body belonged to Christ as his members, their body belonged to the Spirit as his temple, and they have been purchased by God to be his slaves.

## **C. DOCTRINAL ISSUES**

Sex belongs to marriage, and must be defined by the decree of marriage in Gen 2.24. In light of this, one might expect the doctrine of sexuality to be worked out for the marriage relationship. This, however, is not the case. The doctrine is opened up on the subject of fornication, sex outside of marriage. Within marriage, sex is natural and does not have to be turned into a doctrinal issue. Here the love of the husband and wife are the rule. When sex is taken outside of marriage, then the need arises for doctrine to correct the wrong thinking. But, in dealing with fornication, sex can only be properly understood in terms of the decree of marriage (1Cor 6.16). Fornication isolates the act of sex from its created setting, and as such it forces us to examine the nature of the act of sex to see how it impacts our identity and why it only belongs within marriage. This leads us to take up the injunction to flee fornication. Where the need for sex arises, the Christian is to take refuge in marriage (1Cor 7.2-5).

To gain an understanding of the scriptures, we often have to overcome the chapter divisions. This is the case with the break between chapter 6 and 7. The discussion on fornication in 6.12-20 sets the background for what Paul teaches about marriage. As Paul shows why fornication is not allowed, he is laying the ground for his instructions on marriage. Through this connection between 6.12-20 and chapter 7, the subject of sex is tied to marriage.

Paul’s teaching shows that the subject of sex touches on two areas of doctrine. The two areas are pointed out in 1Cor 6.13: the body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body. This subject touches on the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the body. We will begin with the latter, for the issue is very much a matter of the body.

### **1. The doctrine of the body**

#### **a. The distinction between biology and the relational identity of the body**

The first point Paul makes in his discussion on fornication is that the question of sex is not simply a matter of biology in the way the stomach and food are. Sex is not simply about an organ. It is about the whole body, and the body is not understood in terms of its biological functions but in its relationships. We might say that the subject of sex is about the person rather than about biology. This points to a key difference between animals and human beings.

Like human beings, animals are sexual creatures, but in animals sex is simply a matter of biology. Animals do not get married. This is because animals are not made in the image of God. Their bodies are not the organs through which God is represented in the physical world. Human beings are different. In their bodies, they are part of this material world. But, in their mind and will they transcend the physical world. As a result humans are not to simply act within a stimulus-response relationship with their physical environment. They are to use their bodies as the organs through which they represent God and reflect his character. This means the sexual union is to be an act of love that is spiritual and of God. The sexual relationship is not a mere physical interaction. It is covenantal.

The fact that animals are sexual creatures enables us to see the distinction between the biology involved and that side of the human sexual relationship that is part of us being in God's image. That the spiritual side of the sexual act is the definitive one for us is established in the covenant of marriage. For the Christian sex is the act of marriage, and in this it is never just a matter of the physical and experiential side of sex. It is a relationship in the Lord.

#### **b. Gender and sexuality**

Gender is a fact of the body. It specifies the way a person is oriented for the sexual relationship. A male is designed for the female and the female for the male. This relational definition is given in the created fact of gender. To engage in sexual activity contrary to this created orientation is to exchange what is natural for what is unnatural, the natural being defined by what is the fact of nature by creation (Rom 1.26). The degradation of people's bodies in this is seen as "receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error" (v 27). Again we see that sexual sin is sin against the body, and the change of a person's gender function in the sexual relationship is seen as degradation in one's own person.

The fact that gender defines a person's God-given place within the order of the sexual relationship throws light on the question of gender. Gender like the body is not a mere biological fact. It is relationally defined within the created order. Gender comes with moral definition. To strip gender of this relational definition is to remove the basis for seeing that a man is only to enter into a sexual relationship with a woman and the woman with a man. The biblical understanding of gender is inseparable from biblical sexual ethics.

#### **c. Spiritual union in body**

The body is created to be related in two directions. The lateral relationship of union is sexual, and this is to be carried out only in marriage. The vertical relationship of union is nonsexual. It is the union with the Lord entered by faith. Faith accepts for oneself all that God has brought about in the risen Christ, and that involves the resurrection of the body. This union in spirit is made real by the gift of the Spirit who indwells the body of the believer and makes his body the member of Christ for Christ to carry out his will on earth through the body of the believer.

The union of a person and the Lord in one spirit is only a reality in Christ. It is beyond what we read of in Genesis 1 and 2. However, it builds on creation and fulfills the created nature of man. Man was created in the image of God to represent and reflect God. This is realized in a higher way in the union with Christ, and it will be realized in the fullest way possible in our resurrection bodies. Then we will have spiritual and heavenly bodies that share in and reflect the divine glory.

Jesus stated that in the resurrection people will not marry but will be like the angels in heaven (Matt 22.30). Since the act of marriage is the act of sex, it means that we will not engage in sexual relationships in our resurrection bodies. This does not negate or depreciate the sexuality that God created. Rather, it will be the fulfilment of what marriage represents. The great event when all believers receive their resurrection bodies is seen as the marriage of the Lamb. It is the union of being between Christ and us. The marriage union is a type of this greater union.

The fact that the ultimate union is not the sexual union in which a man and wife are one flesh but the union with the Lord to be one spirit opens up a new view on remaining single. According to the creation account, man was created to be married. This dominates the OT. In these scriptures, there is no vision for a single state. This changes in the NT. In 1Corinthians 7 Paul says that where God gives the gift the single state is to be preferred because it allows for fuller devotion to the service of the Lord. The apostle does not envision a believer choosing the single state simply to be by him or herself. Rather, he only envisions this state within the relationship with the Lord because he does not contemplate the body as existing outside of relationship. His preference for the unmarried state is shaped by the revelation given in Christ. The union in the flesh, which is necessary for most now, is limited to this world, while the believer's destiny is for full union with

the Lord in resurrection. By the Spirit he is already united with Christ and he is to use his body only within this union. This means that the purpose of our body is not fulfilled simply in marriage but in the spiritual union that is above marriage. Thus a Christian can remain single to devote himself to the ultimate purpose of the body as being for the Lord. So, out of his doctrine on the relationships in which the Christian's body exists, Paul presents a vision for the single life. In light of Genesis 1 and 2, the single life would be seen as lacking. Now it is seen, if it is lived for the higher union of the person with the Lord, as having a real advantage.

We must guard our minds against drawing faulty conclusions from Paul's teaching on the single state of a Christian. He does not teach that a Christian can replace marriage in the flesh with a spiritual marriage to the Lord. All Christians are joined to the Lord in one spirit. Paul does not in any way indicate a special spiritual or mystical union, and he does not allow for seeking a spiritual replacement for sexual need. A sexual need can only be fulfilled in marriage. It cannot be replaced with religious obsession. The apostle also does not allow for a dichotomy between union in the flesh and union with the Lord in spirit. Christians who marry are to marry in the Lord and that means within their union with the Lord. The Christian husband and wife are to give their bodies to each other as members of Christ. The Christian who stays single does not get from the Lord a replacement for marriage. Rather, he or she has received the gift of not having a need for a sexual relationship and that means that he or she can easily do without marriage. Paul had this gift and preferred it. But, he also sees that most Christians have another gift which is equally from God, the gift to be married. In Ephesians he points out that this gift involves the stewardship of a great mystery, the mystery of Christ and the church.

## **2. The doctrine of God**

The biblical doctrine of sexuality highlights aspects of the doctrine of God.

### **a. God's relationship to the human body**

In Paul's missionary teaching, this theme is first opened up negatively in the analysis of the corruption of the Gentile way of life. To be ignorant of God and separated from the life of God is to give oneself over to lusts, and sexual lusts tend to dominate (Eph 4.17-19). In the language of Romans, not to give God his glory results in coming short of God's glory (Rom 1.21; 3.23).

This analysis of human corruption points to an understanding of the relationship between God and the body. The human mind and will stand between God above and the physical world including the human body below. The body has its desires which are stimulated by the physical world. But, the mind is not to be controlled from below. Rather, by glorifying God and keeping the knowledge of God active, the mind and will control the body so that the incorruption of God's character is expressed through it. When the relationship with God is neglected, the stimuli of the physical world and the lusts of the body arise to drive the human being from below. Sexual lust has the ruling part here. Of all unleashed lusts, it is the most powerful and controlling.

The relationship between God and the body is not just seen negatively. It is seen positively in the theology of love. The highest revelation of God is in his great act of love in Christ. This spiritual and nonsexual love is to be taken up in the mind, and by this we know God. This will result in love, the imitation of Christ's love, and this love is the fruit of the Spirit. In marriage, this divine love is to rule the relationship (Eph 5.22-33).

Sexual ethics are not a matter of rules and taboos. The apostle Paul taught that sexual ethics is a matter of the relationship between God and people. Where God is known in the mind, the life of the body is freed from the rule of lust and governed by divine love. The doctrine of God's relationship to the body is the key issue.

The incarnation of the Son of God began the great movement of the union of deity with the human body. The death of Jesus removed the separation between God and mankind and opened the way for the Spirit to indwell the body and to claim it for full redemption. This will be fully carried through in resurrection. There is no created aspect of the body that is excluded from this union with God. Whether we eat or do not eat, we do all for the Lord; whether we live or die, we live or die for the Lord (Rom 14.6-9). Sex, which involves the strongest desires of the body, is not excluded from this union. Our bodies are members of Christ, and we are free to enter the marriage union as members of Christ. God sanctifies the entire person, spirit, soul and body (1Thess 5.23).

We must grasp the significance of this total union between the Lord and our body. From our end, it makes the body awesomely important. But we must also see what this means for the doctrine of God. God is such that his ultimate purpose is to give corporal (bodily) expression to his life and glory. The whole work of Christ in which God is fully revealed is about this.

## **b. God and sexuality**

God is Spirit and mankind is flesh. This difference in nature means that God is nonsexual whereas human beings are sexual beings. The human mind has been very confused on this point, and it is important that we sort out our thinking here.

The angels are spirits and so like God have a spirit nature. Jesus pointed out that the angels do not marry, which means they do not have sex. Spirit beings are asexual. Animals like human beings are flesh and so are sexual. But, there is a key difference between animals and human beings. Animals do not have a nature for spiritual relationships whereas human beings as the image of God are created within and for a spiritual relationship. This means that we can both relate in flesh (like animals) and in spirit (like God). For human beings, the physical relationships are to establish spiritual relationships. Our relationship to the ground and to animals is to express and establish the fact that as the image of God we rule over the ground and over animals. It expresses God's relationship to creation. Our sexual relationship is to express the spiritual and interpersonal relationship between God and mankind.

The Bible is very consistent in keeping the divine nature nonsexual. This is very significant in view of the fact that in the idolatrous view of the Gentiles, the divine nature was seen to be like animal and human nature, and part of this was that the gods had sex. The Spirit's judgment on this is that the Gentiles did not glorify God as God 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" (Rom 1.23).

In pagan mythologies, creation was seen as procreation. In the biblical account and understanding of creation, God does not bring things into being through sexual union. He created all by his word, and this is a foundational article of faith (Heb 11.3). The world came into being through creation and not procreation.

In pagan mythologies, the gods have sex with human beings. This is wholly alien to the scriptures. The miracle of the incarnation took place in the virginal conception (Lk 1.34-35; Matt 1.20). This conception was not the result of a sexual union or a marriage between God the Father, the Father of Jesus, and Mary his mother. The conception was brought about by the Holy Spirit coming over her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her (Lk 1.35), and the Holy Spirit is never called the father of Jesus. Mary's act in receiving this work of God was in no way a sexual act of union or even some mystical experience of union. She received when she said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word" (Lk 1.38). By the Spirit Elizabeth pronounced her blessed "...who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1.45).

God gives spiritual birth to us, but this is by the seed of God's word (1Pt 1.23-25; Jas 1.18; Gal 3.2). The human side of this process is faith that comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom 10.17).

The sexual metaphor is used for the consummation of the relationship between YHWH and Israel at Mt Sinai (Ezekiel 16). But, this is just a metaphor. The narrative of this act is given in detail in Exodus, and the

union took place by God declaring the words of the covenant and Israel accepting those words. The union was the making of a covenant.

The nonsexual nature of God is eternally sealed in the revelation of God as a trinity. There is no male-female relationship in the Godhead. The trinity presents to us the highest reality of union. The three persons are one. But, they are not one by an act of marriage. In marriage, two persons of the opposite gender who are separate from each other become one through the act of union. Nothing in marriage applies to the relationships within the trinity. First, there are three persons and not two. Second, they are eternally one and did not begin as separate beings who became one. Third, they are not flesh and do not have gender distinctions.

In the order of relationships, all three persons are represented by the man in contrast to the woman since they are all heads within personal relationships. 1Corinthians 11.3 brings this point out. The Father is absolute head and never subject. The Son is subject to the Father, but he is also the head of man as well as of all creation. The Spirit is also in a subject role in the Godhead but is above all creators, one with the Father and the Son. Man is subject to Christ but within the personal relationship between male and female he is a head. In this order of relationships, the woman is a subject and is not a head. She received her being from God through the man, but she was not made the source of a being in creation. This order is not a matter of sexuality but of the order of relationships established in creation. This means that God is only represented by the man in contrast to the woman in the order of relationships but not in sexuality. However, since in mankind sexuality functions within the order of relationships, the sexual act can be a metaphor for the relational union between God and mankind.

In the Bible, there is no god and goddess. There are not two gods who are separate in their being but become one. This type of union in which two separate parties become one in an act of union only applies to the divine-human relationship. God created mankind as separate from God. This is sealed in the fact that man was given a will with the ability to decide contrary to God and as flesh he could die. Through the work of Christ and by the Spirit, deity is involved in the marriage union of two becoming one. In this union, Christ takes the place of the husband and the church is the wife. The roles are irreversible.

### **c. The end of all things**

The creator pronounced the blessing of procreation on the sexual union between male and female (Gen 1.28). This blessing puts the whole weight of society and history on the sexual union. The building block of society is not the individual person. It is the couple in sexual union. This is the first social unit out of which the family comes, and then from the family the other social units are built. Also, it is through procreation that history is made possible. Under the universal law of death, the human race continues in God's purpose through the divine blessing on the sexual union (Gen 3.15-16, 20). This historical role of the marriage union is reflected in the OT focus on genealogies and inheritance.

The blessing placed on the marriage union and the weight that is put on it makes this sexual union extremely important, but it is not to be taken as the reason for the union. At the outset of this study, we saw that the two creation accounts pause in celebration of the creation of man for this sexual union. The theme of procreation does not come into this. This subject is only introduced to Eve and Adam as God points the way ahead after the fall. Only after the Fall does Adam discover that his wife is the mother of all the living. This is significant for the biblical doctrine of sexuality. The sexual relationship is an end and not a means to an end. We see this in the marriage decree of Gen 2.24. The married couple have children to raise them so that they will leave the parents and enter the union of marriage. In this view, marriage does not have its reason in procreation. Rather, it is the other way around. Procreation has its reason in marriage.

The fact that the marriage union is not a means to an end rings throughout scripture. In the Song of Songs, the sexual love in marriage is celebrated without any reference to having children. Love is its own end. This is sealed in the revelation of God in Christ. The marriage union between Christ and the church does not have any purpose outside of the realization of that union. The Bible's vision of the eternal state presents this. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. We do not see the church as the bride of the Lamb

existing to achieve something in the new universe. Rather, we see the universe existing for the bride to be eternally one with her groom, Christ. The achievement is announced in Rev 21.3: “Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.” The goal is the union of God and mankind in the church as the bride of Christ. This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17. All this shows that God’s goal and our destiny are fixed in what God ever was, is and will be. He is the God of relationship. Sexual union is the shadow of what is to come (Col 2.17). That must be our final word on the biblical doctrine of sexuality.