

WHAT'S GOD'S DEAL WITH SEX?

Why Would God Say Sex is to be Between a Husband and Wife Only?

The Bible gives these reasons:

Creation - God's design for sex isn't an arbitrary rule handed down to spoil something fun. It's a set of instructions that come with the gift, because sex was built to carry meaning far bigger than physical pleasure. When Jesus was asked about marriage and divorce, He didn't start with Moses' law, instead he went back further, to Genesis, to how humanity was made in the beginning. Sex within marriage reflects the created order itself. "So God created man in his own image... male and female he created them" (**Genesis 1:27**). And then text goes on to say, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very good**." (**Genesis 1:31**) The sexual union of a husband and wife isn't an add-on to creation - it's part of how God structured humanity from the start, and Jesus points straight back to this text when asked about marriage (**Matthew 19:4-6**).

'He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,"⁵ and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"?⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'" - **Matthew 19:4-6 (ESV)**

The purpose and pattern for sex and marriage aren't a product of Israel's national law, and it isn't just a cultural convention either - it's built into creation itself.

Complementarity - "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him (*ezer kenegdo*)" (**Genesis 2:18**). In Hebrew, *ezer kenegdo*, means a helper corresponding to him: similar enough to relate, different enough to complete. Adam's response to Eve - "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (**Genesis 2:23**) - is the Bible's picture of two distinct and different, yet complementary halves forming a whole. Sex is presented as the physical expression of that completing union, not a stand-alone appetite.

Covenant – "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (**Genesis 2:24**). **Malachi 2:14** calls marriage a covenant witnessed by God himself. Sex is the covenant's consummating sign which is exactly why Scripture treats sex outside that covenant bond (fornication, adultery) as a violation of something sacred, not just a broken rule.

Marriage is repeatedly described in the bible in covenantal terms. God even uses marriage-covenant language for His own relationship to Israel (**Ezekiel 16:8**). Every biblical covenant carries a sign that seals it: the rainbow for Noah, circumcision for Abraham, the blood and Passover meal at Sinai, the bread and cup for the New Covenant. Marriage's covenant sign is sex itself which is exactly why we call the first act of marital intercourse "consummation." It doesn't create the covenant (the vows do that), but sex functions as the consummation and embodiment of the marriage covenant.

The aspect of "covenant" is often missing from most non-biblical world views on sex. Many view sex more as a "contractual" issue. A contract is transactional: two parties exchange defined goods or services, and either side can walk away once the terms stop being met. A covenant is relational: it's sealed by a binding act, meant to hold regardless of whether the other party is currently "performing," and oriented toward the other person's good, not just personal benefit.

Much of modern culture, often without anyone consciously deciding it, has slid toward treating relationships, dating, cohabitation, and even marriage itself in contractual rather than covenantal terms: bound only as long as it "works for me," an exit always kept in reserve; sex is treated as a low-stakes way to test compatibility or find gratification rather than as a covenant-sealing act. "Covenant" isn't part of the modern vocabulary for relationships the way "connection," "compatibility," or "chemistry" are and hence, why many question the importance of marriage at all. For some, sex along with lasting commitments, isn't what they are looking for.

Yet Scripture's picture of sex cuts the other way: God's own faithfulness to His people is covenantal even when Israel is not faithful in return (Hosea is the extended case study). Marriage is patterned after that kind of loyalty. When sex is unhooked from covenant, it doesn't just violate a rule — it's stripped of the very thing it was designed to mean, the way a wedding ring means nothing if worn by someone who was never married, or communion means something false when taken in willful, ongoing rebellion against Christ.

Children - "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (**Genesis 1:28**). The marital union is the God-given context for procreation and for raising the next generation within a stable, committed household. The two-parent, covenant-bonded family unit Scripture consistently assumes as the norm.

God designed the male-female sexual union to be capable of producing children, and Genesis places that reproductive purpose within the context of marriage. Some may counter that "not every male-female union results in children". That is true. Just because sex doesn't always result in children doesn't delegitimize the reality that such unions are the only way children come about - the same way a digestive system is still the right kind of

system even during a fast. Two men or two women can't biologically have that kind of union even in principle, regardless of fertility.

Some may argue but we can now have children by IVF/surrogacy and can separate conception from the sexual act itself, but that doesn't change what the act is *for* by design – just how other technological workarounds don't redefine the natural function they route around.

Christ - *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32)*. When Jesus returns for the church – the language used to describe this is that of a wedding banquet:

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." – **Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)***

Marriage, including its sexual union, is meant to function as a living picture of Christ's covenant love for his people: exclusive, sacrificial, and permanent (see the story of Hosea for how God views this covenant with us). It reflects different partners – Christ and his church. Sex outside that framework distorts the picture it's meant to display.

Command – After reading the biblical reasons above which focus on “design” for why sex is reserved for marriage between a man and woman, someone may ask “why does the *descriptive* fact that sex carries these meanings require the conclusion that it may only should happen within marriage?” The case outlined isn't pure natural-law inference from design alone. Its design **plus explicit command**. Scripture doesn't just describe what sex is for; it directly commands chastity outside marriage:

*“God wants you to be holy and to stay away from sexual sins. ⁴He wants each of you to learn to control your own body^[a] in a way that is holy and honorable. ⁵Don't use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God. ⁶Also, do not wrong or cheat another Christian in this way. The Lord will punish people who do those things as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷God called us to be holy and does not want us to live in sin. ⁸So the person who refuses to obey this teaching is disobeying God, not simply a human teaching. And God is the One who gives us his Holy Spirit.” – **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (NCV)***

“Surely you know that your bodies are parts of Christ himself. So I must never take the parts of Christ and join them to a prostitute! ¹⁶It is written in the Scriptures, “The two will become one body.”^[a] So you should know that anyone who joins with a prostitute becomes

one body with the prostitute. ¹⁷But the one who joins with the Lord is one spirit with the Lord. ¹⁸So run away from sexual sin. Every other sin people do is outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. ¹⁹You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit who is in you. You have received the Holy Spirit from God. So you do not belong to yourselves, ²⁰because you were bought by God for a price. So, honor God with your bodies.” – 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 (NCV)

The term sexual immorality (in Greek – *porneia*) meant, at the time of Jesus and the apostles, any sexual act outside of those committed by a husband and wife. In Judea, these would have been linked with the covenant sex prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20. So when Jesus talked about sexual immorality – that included pre-marital sex, adultery, same-sex sex, and any other sexual act outside of those between a husband and wife.

Is Sex Before Marriage a Sin?

The argument often goes that “everyone is doing it” and “well, if we plan to get married anyway, how can having sex before marriage be a sin?” If sex is the sign that seals and consummates the marriage covenant, then having sex before marriage performs the covenant sign without the covenant itself existing - a counterfeit enactment of something real. It's the sexual equivalent of exchanging wedding vows to no one or wearing a ring while unmarried.

Someone might argue that there is no verse that says, “don’t have pre-marital sex”. While true, the consistent message of the Bible is that it is a sin. Sexual immorality (*porneia*), in its Judean usage, included sexual relationships that violate God's revealed sexual boundaries as stated in the Levitical code, including sexual relations outside marriage. The Bible commands us not to engage in sexual immorality:

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. – Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. – Ephesians 5:3-5 (ESV)

The idea of free sex (without covenant commitment) goes against what the Bible teaches. In the Old Testament, if a guy convinced a girl to have sex with him, then he was obligated to marry her, and if the woman’s father would not permit the wedding, he still owed the bride price:

If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. – Exodus 22:16 (ESV)

How Could Loving Someone of the Same-Sex Be a Sin?

The biblical position isn't that sexuality itself is the problem - **Genesis 1:31** calls the whole of creation, including human sexuality, "*very good*." God made humans embodied, desiring, relational creatures on purpose. The claim isn't "sexuality is bad" - it's that sexuality, like every good gift, has a design and a *telos* (purpose), and human flourishing is found in living according to that design rather than against it.

This is the same logic as Scripture applies to every other appetite. Hunger is good; gluttony is its disordered expression. The desire for possessions is not inherently sinful; greed is. Attraction and desire are part of being human but lust is a sin (**Matthew 5:27-28**). An involuntary flicker of attraction is not itself sin. What Scripture calls sin is the cultivated pursuit of desire outside its created boundaries - whether that's heterosexual lust, adultery, or same-sex sexual activity. The person is not reduced to, or condemned for, having a body that desires; the ethical claim is about where desire is rightly enacted.

Same-sex unions can not fulfill God's design of becoming "one flesh" (See the discussion above about marriage between a man and woman).

NOTE: There is an important distinction between sexual attraction and sexual behavior. In modern usage, homosexuality refers to one's sexual attraction. The bible's focus is on sexual behavior. These are distinct and different things. Experiencing same-sex attraction is not itself treated in Scripture as a chosen sin in the way that acting on it is.

The bible explicitly says same-sex sex is a sin in 5 places (**Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10**). And it indirectly speaks of same-sex sex as a sin when the term "sexual immorality" is used in the New Testament (about 25 times).

Some would argue that "they didn't have loving same-sex relationships back then." While many same-sex relationships were hierarchal (pederasty, older/younger, or master/slave) there is no evidence that these were the only same-sex relationships. The focus of the text is not on the status of the individuals. The sin deals with the sex act itself. In **Leviticus 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10** – both active and passive partners are condemned for the sex act:

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination – Leviticus 20:13 (ESV)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners (Greek – malakoi), practicing homosexuals (Greek – arsenokoitai), ¹⁰thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. – 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NET)

“But same-sex sex isn’t hurting anyone. Why does it matter?” – this is a question often asked. This assumes that God’s view of sex is a horizontal issue (does this damage another person?) when the biblical focus is a vertical one (does this conform to what God made this act to mean?). Even a version of the act entirely free of harm can still miss what it was made for.

“There are homosexual animals in nature. So doesn’t that mean that homosexuality is natural and a part of God’s created order?” – This another common argument. This is the naturalistic fallacy: observing that a behavior occurs in nature doesn't establish it as a moral norm for humans. Animals are known to rape and cannibalize. Are we then to emulate all these actions? The biblical case was never built by surveying animal behavior in the first place (that’s not what is meant by the creation argument) - it rests on God's revealed design for humans specifically, who (unlike animals) are addressed in Scripture as moral agents made in His image (**Gen 1:26–27**).

Is Masturbation a Sin?

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that the physical act of touching yourself is a sin. Some have tried to claim that Onan's sin in **Genesis 38:9–10** is about masturbation. It is not. Onan’s sin was that he did not want to fully fulfill the levirate duty to raise up an heir for his deceased brother (see **Deuteronomy 25:5–6**); the text says God struck him down for refusing that obligation not for spilling his seed.

While the physical act of touching yourself is not a sin, it is a physiological act where no “union” with another occurs, for many people the real issue is the lust and sexual fantasies that often accompany the act. And according to Jesus, lust is not a physical issue, but one of the heart:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. – Matthew 5:27 (ESV)

And he said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,

wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.' – **Mark 7:20-23 (ESV)**

If one has sexual fantasies about someone, they are not married to, that's lust and lust is a sin. So, if masturbation becomes part of that sin process, it should be avoided. But we must not call something "sin" that the bible has not specifically called "sin".