



Sex as a Picture of the Inner Life of God

God creates man and woman as reflections of the image of the Trinity.

by Glenn Stanton

When God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness (NIV)," and then created Adam and Eve and bid them to be sexually fruitful, it tells us something important about who God is.

I don't want to draw too sharp a comparison here, because the persons of the Trinity don't have physical bodies as we do and therefore don't manifest their love for one another as humans do. But notice the close connection in the tight space of two short verses (Genesis 1:27-28) of God's desire that we reflect the image and likeness of the Trinity and how God directs Adam and Eve first to commune with each other as sexual creatures.

We can't overlook the significance of this: God creates man and woman as reflections of the image of the Trinity and the first command is to engage in the sexual embrace.

This means that when a man and woman come together in marital sexual intimacy, somehow—mystically—they mirror the wonder, beauty, and creative power of God like no other part of creation. Again, this is far from "nothing."

As poet-farmer Wendell Berry explains, "The sexuality of community life...is centered on marriage, which joins two living souls as closely as, in this world, they can be joined."

He continues, "This joining of two who know, love, and trust one another brings them in the same breath in the freedom of sexual consent and into the fullest earthly realization of the image of God. From their joining, other living souls come into being, and with them great responsibilities that are unending, fearful, and joyful."¹

Beautiful! This is the glory of family life.

Linger on how great this reality is. When Jackie and I find a quiet moment from our little ones, and we're not too exhausted (Jackie often wonders if that is possible for me), and we come together in that time of special communion, it's remarkable to think of what image we're reflecting. It can be overwhelming. No other faith has such a powerful and dynamic view of sexuality.

How Do We Love God in Our Sex Lives?

For Christians, single or married, this is one of the most important questions we can ask, because our sexuality is so central to who we are.

It always made me laugh inside when I was a teenager and church leaders would talk to us about sexual health and encourage us not to be sexually active until we were married.

Of course, this was smart and godly advice. But I found it funny because, even though I had never been intimate with a girl and didn't plan to be until I married, I was a healthy teenage boy. I was so hugely active sexually—on the inside, even if there was no external expression.

Things were churning in me like a volcano. I had to govern my feelings and desires constantly. I had to keep my mind from wandering where it shouldn't. I had to be careful how I related with girls and of the images I saw in magazines and on television. Mentally, I was very sexually active. And my sexual, physical, and spiritual health demanded this deliberate, internal discipline to ensure that my outward behavior was in line with what God desired for me.

What I'm saying is that we have to see "sexual activity" as so much more than just "doing it." It involves how we appreciate and live out our own God-entrusted sexuality. We are all sexual beings.

I can see this in my preschool-age children. They've already come to a place where they're instinctively shy about family members seeing them naked. When they go from their baths to their bedrooms, they're sure to wear a towel or dash as fast

as they can and try to cover themselves by putting one hand in back and one hand in front of them in a futile attempt to keep anyone from seeing their bums. They've become aware, all by themselves, that certain parts of their bodies should be kept private. This is healthy, age-appropriate sexual activity.

So, not only married people should be concerned about loving God in their sex lives. We all have an awareness of our sexuality and how we express it. It's part of our thought life, the way we dress, the ways we interact with boys and girls in our youth and men and women when we're older. It's even a part of how we view and interact with God.

How do we love God in our sex lives? We love God in our sex lives by making sure they reflect the nature and qualities of the relationship shared by the Trinity, the image we and our sex lives were created to reflect. This requires that we understand some primary characteristics and qualities of the Trinity.

- The Trinity is a community of lovers who are relationally active, not static. They are, from all eternity, giving to and receiving from one another in unconditional, loving intimacy. It's their very nature to do so. It's who They are!
- This community of loving persons is permanent, for They have always exhibited this giving and receiving of love for each other and always will. These are not merely convenient or passing relationships.
- This community of loving persons is committed, for Their relationships are not dependent on how fulfilled They are or on what They can get out of the relationships.
- This community of loving persons is exclusive, for there have always been three specific members and there always will be three. No more, no less. They don't invite other gods into their intimacy nor do They swap partners. They are each for the others.
- The persons of this community are self-giving, for They seek to serve and to give to one another and glory in doing so. They're not self-seeking. While They glory in receiving love from one another, it's not about what They can get but what They can give.
- This community of persons is one, but also distinct and complementary. This means that while the members of the Godhead are one in essence (each is fully God), They are also distinct from one another and complement one another. Each person of the Trinity can't be fully appreciated apart from the other two. Each needs the others because They are distinct from the others. They complement each other in their uniqueness.

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¹Wendell Berry, *Sex Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) pp. 138-139.
