

PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2025

A Christian
Sexual Ethic



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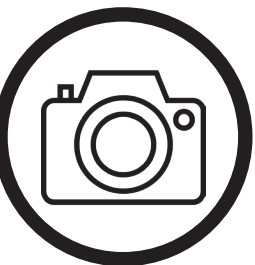
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BIBLE READING PLAN 7

Take Up & Read

March



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Collin Ireland, Ryan Lavender, Courtney
Sizemore, Michael & Brooke Tice*

A Christian Sexual Ethic

When thinking about a yearlong emphasis on masculinity and femininity, it is not hard to see how the idea of sex (male/female) immediately impinges on sexuality. Part of understanding biblical masculinity and femininity is having a firm grasp of a Christian sexual ethic. As our cultural understanding of sexuality is increasingly detached from the reality of man and woman, masculinity and femininity, it is important to be reminded of the fundamental building blocks of a true, God-honoring sexual ethic.

Rome was sacked in 410, ushering in the collapse of the empire. Sixteen hundred years later, an entire cottage industry still exists debating why this happened. Was it economic reasons? Political? Military? Moral? The proper answer probably lies in acknowledging all of them in some way.

Similarly, we live in a moment in which a Christian sexual ethic is rejected out of hand. This didn't happen overnight; yet, it can feel like we've woken up to a whole new world of questions and confusion. Much like Rome, the situation we find ourselves living in is hardly explainable through one factor or one issue. Rather, pressures and changes have worked together to produce a time of confusion, licentiousness, and carnality. I could spend this entire article working through the modern moment and thinking through cultural analysis, but we may all wake up tomorrow and refresh our news apps to find the discussion irrelevant. Instead, we need to think seriously about sexuality in a way that withstands every cultural tidal wave. To do this, we must actually not focus on sex first but on true covenantal marriage. If our starting point in thinking through sexuality is to answer the world's claims, we will find ourselves engaged in a perpetual game of whack-a-mole. Said another way, we'll never understand sex and sexuality, issues of gender, and, for that matter, even issues of procreation if we do not first understand covenantal marriage rooted in creation and explained through Christ.

A MARRIAGE-PRINCIPLE SEXUAL ETHIC

Why must we start with marriage to understand sexuality? From the outset, Scripture presents marriage before it presents sex. In Genesis 2, God makes Adam a helper, a wife, who is fitted to be his companion and helpmate (Gen 2:18). These two are by nature made for one another to be suitable and relationally bound (Gen 2:23)—one man and one woman united in a common bond, a lifelong covenant with one another under God. Their physical union is a downstream effect of this covenant (Gen 2:24). Sex is not presented as the unifying feature of man and woman but as a blessing or gift of the covenantal union they already have in marriage. The natural

order of creation points to the way that sex is to follow marriage. Sex is not the only blessing of this union; it is just one of a myriad of blessings God has bestowed on the covenant of marriage.

The effects of the sin in Genesis 3:1–7 are disastrous to this covenant designed and instituted by God. Only a few verses later, we see the curse that sin brings on all things, including the marriage union (Gen 3:16). Yet, Scripture consistently appeals to God's created design for marriage as the normative pattern and righteous institution in which the blessings of this union, like sex, are meant to be enjoyed. The perversion of sex and wrenching it from the marriage covenant are condemned because of their inconsistency with the created pattern of marriage. Any deviation from the pattern of sexuality between one man and one woman in the context of marriage is a violation of the created order given in the earliest pages of Scripture. Sex is a good gift meant to be enjoyed in the context of marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, Paul succinctly explains the primacy of marriage rooted in creation as the overarching sexual ethic of the Christian life. When discussing the immorality of sexual union outside the covenant of marriage, Paul explains that members of Christ should never be joined to a prostitute (one could easily sub here any form of sexual perversion). Paul pulls from Genesis 2:24 in order to explain the pattern of proper sexual conduct that starts with a right view of marriage rooted in creation (1 Cor 6:16).

I want to take a moment here to address my single brothers and sisters. Admittedly, it is difficult for the person who has rightly-ordered sexual desires to be unmarried. Yet, we must remember that God is not out to deprive his children whom he loves. Instead, he is working all things, including your singleness, for your good and his glory (Romans 8:28). He richly blesses his children with his gifts as he sees fit, and by God's grace, we can persevere in cultivating a heart of contentment with the station in life he has given us.

Whatever our station in life, we ought to flee immorality knowing that these are sins committed against our own bodies, and we ought not sin against ourselves by denying the pattern given in Genesis. Rather, we should remember that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, a gift given from God, and should therefore seek to live righteously, remembering the created order, as a way we glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19–20).

Today, our culture seems to invent ways to praise any sexual ethic. Sex is seen as a pleasure-driven desire with good in itself, regardless of the context in which it is practiced. The times we live in preach that the only moral standard related to sexuality is

one of pleasure; as the phrase goes, “If it feels good, do it.” This is the peak sexual application of what Carl Trueman has called “expressive individualism,” or the idea that “authenticity is achieved by acting outwardly in accordance with one’s inward feelings.” At the root, every expression of sexual immorality in our society takes the good gift of sex—meant to be a blessing within marriage—and uses it for the purpose of self-gratification. Pornography, homosexuality, cohabitation, adultery, fornication, and a plurality of partners are all symptoms of human pride, making the individual participants the authority for what is right and wrong in their sexual relationships. The normalization of these practices is the natural outworking of people committed to the idea that personal feelings define right and wrong. Though they manifest in different ways, these sins spring from the well of the haughty, god-making heart that seeks to make man over in the image of his own choosing. It should be clear at this point that the reason these physical acts are wrong is because, at root, they deviate from the covenant union God has designed in marriage. As our culture continues to praise sexual sin, we have a firm foundation to stand on to discern right from wrong when we uphold covenantal marriage.

A clear example of our modern culture’s attempt to reassign the authority over sexuality from God to self is the current moral standard of consent. The importance our society puts on consent shows the lack of an authority outside the self and leaves moral arbitration of actions to the individual. This is one expression of the self-gratification our culture has embraced when thinking about sexuality. When sex is wrangled away from a marriage union, the next best thing is consent or willful engagement. This standard is a cheap imitation of the standard of morality presented in the Scriptures. While consent is a part of the marriage union, on its own, it is subject to the whims of the culture and cannot be a true standard with any stable moral weight. It reduces sex to shared agreement in pleasure. This is because, at root, consent makes the sexual encounter about the physical act itself rather than part of a transcendent union. It makes sex transactional, exclusively physical—only about the physical pleasure the parties engaging in these actions will obtain. Our culture continually discusses what consent is and tries to redefine sexual codes through the lens of consent. Christians should instead be clear that devoid of the context of marriage, a sexual ethic of consent will only continue the confusion and chaos of sexuality in our culture.

So, in sum, as believers, we are called to live chaste lives of sexual conduct. By thinking clearly about the marriage covenant rooted in the created order, we have a transcendent view of sex that rightly places it

next to all the other blessings of marriage. Sex is a good that comes from the greater good of marriage. Anytime we seek to enjoy the good apart from the greater good, we will misuse the gift. We are to practice chastity amidst carnality, knowing that the plan of God for human sexuality is far better than any self-pleasure we could obtain through our own imaginations.

FROM CREATION, FOR CHRIST

A sexual ethic that sees sex reserved as a good to be enjoyed in the context of marriage is not only for church folks. Rather, it is rooted in creation in such a way that we ought not be ashamed to proclaim it to the broader culture. There is a uniqueness to the union of one man and one woman that sets this relationship apart from all other relationships in creation. As Andrew Walker points out, this “plan for sexuality is not arbitrary or restrictive.” Rather, all of creation is called to live consistent with the principles of human flourishing baked by God into his created world. In principle, the marriage union is the only procreative union and therefore is distinct from every other potential kind of human relationship. On this basis, we can say that our sexual ethic is not just reserved for the church but applies to all of creation. The lifelong union of one man and one woman is different in kind from all other unions such that societies from the beginning of creation have recognized it and protected it as a relationship distinct from all other relationships. It is not an intense friendship, plurality, or anything defined by the individuals participating. Instead, it is definitional, centered on the oneness that is unique to a union of a man and woman.

In our sexually confused age, we ought also to follow suit in keeping with created order and advocate for an understanding of marriage rooted in creation that is generally applicable to all people. The basis for which we can advocate for laws that protect true marriage or a social understanding that prizes the marriage relationship as the basis for a sexual union is the created order explained in Genesis. Though not the only way, one way we care for those around us is to uphold a pattern of marriage and sexuality that rightly orders these goods in society.

At the same time, a Christian sexual ethic centered on covenantal marriage flows straight from the powerful witness of the gospel. Paul teaches Timothy that the good gift of marriage (and by implication sex) was created by God to “be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:3). In a special sense, marriage and sex were created for those who love God. There is a depth and richness to the marriage union that is found in a Christian worldview (Eph 5:22–33). When we practice chastity

amidst carnality, there is more at stake than the marriage itself. Rather, the marriage we participate in is saying something about Christ and his church. Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, demonstrates clearly that the marriage between a man and a woman is to point beyond the marriage itself to the union Christ has with the church. With great joy, we should remember that our marriage relationships point us to the way we are united to Christ, encouraging us to hold fast to the day of our redemption at his return. Understanding this depth gives meaning to marriage far beyond that which is found in creation alone and should press us toward faithfulness as we seek to glorify God in our marriages.

REPENTANCE WITH REAL HOPE

Wading through a culture that has experienced severe sexual carnage, we must also always keep our eyes fixed on our Savior, Christ Jesus. You and I probably know at least a handful of people personally who have been put through the wringer, churned up and spit out, sin-inflicted and guilt-ridden because they bought the lie that “if it feels good, do it.” Our culture sold them a false bill of goods that promised, through sex, that which it could not deliver. After taking the bait, hook, line, and sinker, they realize there is nothing but death and darkness in their midst. In that moment of peril, our culture peddles more lies, proclaiming that one can be free from this darkness if one only believes in oneself enough, quits being weak, stops apologizing, and embraces pride. Oh, how binding and soul-killing is that advice.

Our strong view of marriage and universal sexual ethic must also stand under the banner of a clear and ringing gospel. Amid sin and destruction, we have the only message of restoration to answer the sinful sexual perversion of our age. Unlike the world around us, our sexual ethic does not define us. Rather, Christians understand that a sexual ethic is downstream of what we worship. What we worship is upstream of who we understand ourselves to be. We hold fast to our convictions on marriage and sexuality because it is the love of Christ that compels us (2 Cor 5:14).

It is not fun or pleasant to be in cultural battles over sexuality, but we understand that our gospel message is the message standing opposed to the sinful self-centeredness of the world, and it is the only message of hope. Why? Because Christ died such that “they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Cor 5:15). For all those who have been afflicted by the lusts of the flesh, the corruption of sex, the twisting of God’s goods, and the self-centeredness of personal pleasure, our message is simple: “Be reconciled to God. He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our

behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).

The power of the gospel is that every sin, sexual sin included, can be laid at the foot of the cross such that anyone in Christ is a new creature; “the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17). The desperation, unfulfillment, brokenness, corruption, and wickedness of our hearts and actions are damnable to an eternity apart from our Creator. Yet in his kindness he is “reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). Our gospel message is more powerful than any self-determined personal pleasure, more freeing than any sexual liberation ideas, and more glorious than any fleeting satisfaction found in our own desires. Freedom in Christ is more than forgiveness in Christ. It is submission to the Word of God. To repent and believe the gospel should include submission to Word of God such that we come to embrace the Christian sexual ethic with great joy.

The chain weight of shame associated with sins of sexual immorality is a weighty burden. Paul speaks clearly on this reality. In 1 Corinthians 6: 9–10 he writes, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor those habitually drunk, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” Yet, this is not a burden too much for Christ to bear. The believer in Jesus Christ can lay the burden of guilt and shame at the feet of Jesus and experience freedom and forgiveness in the Redeemer. Paul does not end the passage in verse 10 but continues in verse 11, “Such were some of you; 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.” The believer who stumbles or is often drawn back to the guilt of living inconsistently with the call of Christian sexuality can rest secure in the grace of our Lord. Sexual immorality is not a sin that Christ’s work on the cross cannot cover.

The yoke of our sin in chasing fleetingly after the carnality of our age is heavy, tiresome, and deathly. The yoke of our Savior is light and easy. The paradox is clear; to chase personal gratification and pleasure will only result in pain, but to submit to denying oneself and living in Christ is to find life everlasting. As John reminds us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our sexual sins are sins indeed, yet in his work on the cross and resurrection, Jesus Christ provides the only atonement for our sins to be forgiven and souls made clean.

The Christian sexual ethic must begin with a strong view of the marriage covenant. One man and one woman living in a lifelong union as husband and wife provides the foundation for a biblical understanding of sexuality as a gift of the marriage union. Amid a culture that craves pleasure, Christians can resolutely practice chastity amidst carnality by trusting God's plan, pattern, and purposes for marriage and by eagerly looking forward to the day in which the marriage feast of Christ and his church is celebrated in the heavenly realm.

– John Weichel

¹Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022) 23.

²Andrew Walker and Christian Walker, *What do I say When...?: A Parent's Guide to Navigating Cultural Chaos for Children and Teens* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024) 39.

³Helpful here is a discussion about “homosexual orientation” and “gay Christianity.” Through these terms, the culture generally and evangelical Christianity specifically, have adopted a form of identity marker found through sexual acts rather than sex (i.e. male / female). This terminology is not consistent with the pattern of sexual ethic advocated for in this article. Very helpful here is Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023) 65-110.

God, You, & Sex *A Profound Mystery*

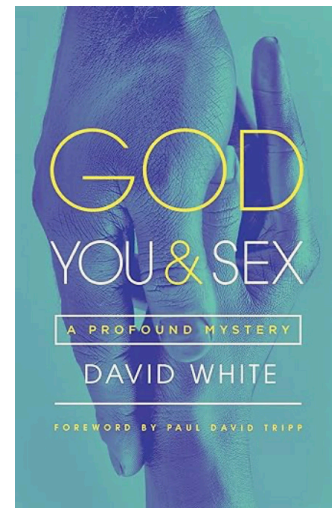
Written by David White

In *God, You & Sex*, David White seeks to explore the profound mystery and purpose of sex as intended by the God who created it, not just so we can avoid harm but so we can celebrate it in a way that brings worship and honor to God. He spends the first few chapters painting a beautiful, God-honoring, and biblical picture of God's purpose for marriage in a way that I found captivating. Once the foundation of God's purpose in marriage is established, White then discusses the challenges and questions that typically arise on the topic of sex against the backdrop of God's divine intent. In reading White's response to common objections to Christian sexual ethics, you come to realize that these objections quickly wilt away without much of a fight as you grasp God's purpose for marriage.

There were many great takeaways, but one that stood out was the discussion of God making Adam a helper fit for him. God in His perfect wisdom and power could have made for Adam a helper who was a duplicate. He however decided to make a woman who although equal in value, is very different from man. The all-wise God declares that this woman is "fit for Adam." In a sense, this is applicable to husbands in that their wife has been chosen by God as "fit for them" despite her differences as a woman and her unique individual strengths and weaknesses. God considered these differences, which sometimes cause friction when He declared this woman "fit for you." Knowing your unique strengths and weaknesses, God gave you your spouse to cause you to grow in conformity to Christ in ways you wouldn't if you were not married to that person. Once I caught this glimpse of the Creator's intent, it gave me a new appreciation for marriage and even the blessing of conflicts that might arise because of differences.

White argues that marriage and sex are intended to lead us into deeper worship of the God who gave us these gifts. As such, I think both singles and married couples would benefit from absorbing the compelling view of the glory of God in marriage and sex as outlined in this book. This book left me very thankful to be blessed with the gift of marriage and deeply encouraged to grow in stewarding this gift well to the glory of God. I highly recommend it.

— Recommended by Nana Agyekum



Excerpts from the Book

1

The delights of sex invite us to approach the God of sex. Yet most of us do not take off our shoes to worship; instead, we pursue earthly pleasures, oblivious to the Giver of gifts.

— "Sex and God," p. 14

2

To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God.

— "Sex and God," p. 20

3

The tragedy of replacing God with any created thing is that the intended blessing of the gift will continually elude you. The thing you most want to embrace will keep sliding through your grasping fingers.

— "Sex in a Broken World," p. 146

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall.

Dating with Discernment

12 Questions to Make a Lasting Marriage

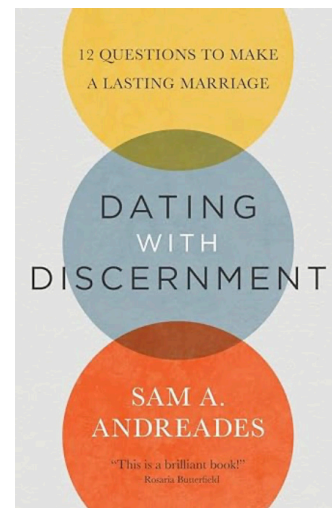
Written by Sam A. Andreades

I was so thankful I was asked to read this book! Our oldest son just married his lovely new bride and, before they dated, we encouraged him to reach out to five godly men to get advice/perspective on dating to enter into this season well. Andreades says, "How you date lays a foundation for your marriage." One of the men offered a system of thought and a step-by-step approach. Our son confidently entered into this new season, having a plan that was couched in wisdom. We were beyond thankful as his parents. I began to read *Dating with Discernment* and realized the book clearly outlined this man's approach. Rosaria Butterfield is listed on the cover saying, "This is a brilliant book!" and it is! I recommend it to everyone, not just those dating or preparing to date, but parents, grandparents, married couples, and singles. While reading, I was so encouraged, reminded, and challenged in aspects of being a godly wife after 26 years of marriage. I'm also thankful to have this insight for our other children before they enter their own dating seasons.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part gives the wisdom and mindset needed to think well about dating before dating. The second and third parts provide three foundational questions the couple can ask of each other and also ask of themselves. He even includes forty first-date questions! Marriage for a lifetime is serious business. Therefore, jumping to conclusions, short-circuiting the process, or being sloppy in thinking can lead to disaster and a lot of heartache. In each section, he provides many other questions to help a couple be thoughtful in the process. These questions would be great fodder for dates as well as in a discipleship relationship.

The book ends with the reality that all who accept Jesus's sacrifice for them and have His love supplied to their souls, regardless of their relationships on earth, will be in a real wedding, as a member of His bride! "One guarantee that I can make for you," Andreades assures, "you will not miss out on a wedding day!"

— Recommended by Charity Roe



Excerpts from the Book

1

...spouses need a pattern of movement toward each other that draws them closer in fair weather and foul...more helpful is knowing how to agree or disagree and still move toward each other.

– "How to Date Wisely," p. 51

2

Your call to make rest comes out of God. With the right man, you have the power to renovate his world, to turn his deserts into a garden, to prolong life for him and fill him with delight.

– "Can I Secure Her?/Can I Give Him Rest?"
p. 179

3

Dating is a dance displaying your willingness to sacrifice desires for the sake of the marriage and future family.

–"Can I Take Charge for Her?/Can I Esteem Him?" p. 197

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall.

MARCH

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

March 1	1 Timothy 3	March 17	Romans 16:17–20
March 2	Romans 16:1–2	March 18	Matthew 7:15–23
March 3	2 Samuel 9	March 19	2 Timothy 4:1–5
March 4	1 Samuel 18:1–5	March 20	2 Timothy 1:1–18
March 5	1 Samuel 20	March 21	Genesis 3:8–21
March 6	2 Samuel 8	March 22	Titus 2
March 7	Romans 5:1–11	March 23	Romans 16:17–20
March 8	Romans 5:12–21	March 24	Ephesians 3:20–21
March 9	2 Samuel 9	March 25	Ephesians 4:1–16
March 10	Romans 16:3–16	March 26	Ephesians 4:17–32
March 11	1 Corinthians 16:19–24	March 27	Ephesians 5:1–21
March 12	1 Thessalonians 5:12–28	March 28	1 Chronicles 16:8–36
March 13	Philemon	March 29	Ephesians 3:1–19
March 14	Psalms 136:1–12	March 30	Ephesians 3:20–21
March 15	Psalms 136:13–26	March 31	Romans 16:21–27
March 16	Romans 16:3–16		

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



Olivia Davis



Gabrielle
Disanza



Adam Hewitt



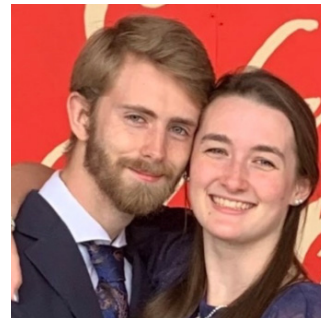
Collin Ireland



Ryan Lavender



Courtney
Sizemore



Michael &
Brooke Tice



MOUNT VERNON

BAPTIST CHURCH