

## The Goodness of Sex and Sexuality

Some say that the Church doesn't speak enough about sex – that it has a gloomy, negative attitude to the subject. Others complain that the Church has too much to say and should keep its opinions to itself! Christians should not be stuffy and uptight when it comes to sex, because the biblical view of sexuality is very positive, and is much broader than sexual intercourse itself.

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created the first man and woman and seeing what he had made, declared that it was 'very good'. Although the writer of Genesis (and indeed the Bible as a whole) does not go into detail about the distinctions between female and male, it is clear that each was an intentional creation and both were in 'the image of God'. They were made not to be identical but complementary. This is a good feature of our creation as men and women, and goes far beyond sex itself. Men and women who do not have sex are still sexual – because they are male or female. It is a good feature of how we are made.

In Genesis 2:18, God gives Adam a 'ezer kenegdô: literally a 'helper like the opposite of him'. (The word 'helper' is often used for God helping humans, so carries no connotation of subordination but more of complementary cooperation). When the man sees the woman for the first time, he waxes lyrical about her otherness and sameness. She is clearly like him and unlike any other creature, yet she is intriguing and different – she is an equal partner. This is the original context for sexual intercourse, and shows that God has designed this wonderful thing to be expressed within a lifelong marital relationship between one man and one woman. Indeed, Jesus earths his teaching on sex and marriage in these words.

The divine image is expressed in both male and female and so the man and woman are equally human despite their physical, anatomical and procreative differences. As they are joined together as husband and wife, their unity and diversity is expressed – and in some profound way they together reflect the image of their creator. However, the moral framework of the Bible is countercultural in our current context and so questions of identity, gender, sexuality and morality feature prominently in public discussions of faith. This is not a new development. The early Christians preached their faith and planted churches in the Greco-Roman world – a philosophical context far removed from the teachings of Genesis and Jesus. Likewise, here in Britain discussions about God have for a long time gone hand in hand with questions about sex. Aldous Huxley wrote quite openly about his reasons for believing that life had no meaning and that there is no God:

'I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently I assumed that it had none... For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation... from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.'

So, the fact that we are all sexual beings is a good thing. Our sexuality (in the sense of being made male or female) is a good gift to be received from God. In this positive vision of sexuality, sexual intercourse is also a good gift. But, according to the teaching of Jesus himself, it is a gift given for a particular purpose, namely to unite wife and husband into one flesh in marriage. Living according to the way God has made us is, ultimately, the way to a meaningful life of freedom and flourishing.