

## Male and female

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Humans are sexual beings. This is founded in God's creation work. In His great wisdom, God created two sexes, male and female. Because we are either men or women, boys or girls, particularly for this reason we are different. Our physical bodies are different, and so are our ways of thinking and experiencing emotions. Because of this, we feel interest and attraction toward people of the opposite sex.

Sexuality is a part of every person and, as God's creation, is a good and beautiful thing. In addition to our physical composition, part of sexuality is how we experience our own manhood or womanhood; different people can experience their own sexuality very differently. Scripture and the Holy Spirit's teaching in God's kingdom give us answers to how sexuality can be realized according to God's Word in our own lives.

## Change Begins in Adolescence

"Is it a boy or a girl?" is often the first question asked by parents, siblings, and grandparents when a new child is born into this world. The child's gender is already determined when the new life begins, at the moment of fertilization. Newborns garner admiration from those around them, and, regardless of gender, they need tender love and care from parents. As baby grows and develops, the child gradually forms an image of who he or she is. Gender identity—am I a girl or a boy—also develops and strengthens throughout the whole of childhood. A small child soon notices the difference between girls and boys. Real transformation into a man or woman begins in adolescence, and the process of growing up continues throughout the period of youth.

By adolescence, we mean a time when the body changes physically into that of a man or a woman. At the same time, the mental world matures, social skills develop, and emotions swing back and forth forcefully. Although this process of change is an important and exciting time in life, it can also feel confusing and stressful. In girls, adolescence normally begins at around ages 8–13, and in boys, from 9 ½–13 ½. Growth quickens and the body gradually becomes that of an adult.

At the same time as the body is changing, sexual feelings and thoughts become stronger. A natural interest in the opposite sex awakens, and youth experience strong infatuations—it feels wonderful to "like" another person. The longing for closeness and contact can be powerful, and the sexual feelings and mental images that another person awakens can seem irresistible. Dreams of courting and life together can fill the greater part of one's thoughts. The body's transformation, sexual feelings for, and infatuation with the opposite sex are all part of normal development and are important parts of our process of maturation.

## Sex Education in schools

Human anatomy and procreation are usually covered in elementary school biology. Actual sex education, however, is not taught until middle school health class. In some schools, the school nurse or doctor also informs the students about sexuality.

It's good for everyone to know about sexuality-related matters, and they can be discussed openly. Unfortunately, not all information given in school sex-education and health textbooks is in agreement with God's Word. This can confuse the believing youth's thinking. Awareness of the changes in one's own

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body during adolescence is important and natural. Nevertheless, the omnipresent sexuality and models surrounding us can lead the thoughts and actions of youths in the wrong direction. The self-discovery that belongs to normal development can become a repeated search for sexual stimulation, perhaps compulsive and conscious self-gratification (masturbation). These types of deeds are, in the form of sin, carrying one away from God.

In some school sex-education classes, contraceptive devices may be given out, with the intent of protecting youth from potential sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Youth may even be encouraged to try out different sexual experiences. Physical togetherness is very often a part of the courtship of the youth of this world, and a youth's sex life may begin early on. Dating is directed at fulfilling one's own sexual desires, and the person or "date" may change multiple times.

Premarital relations among adults are also normal in modern times. It's thought that one cannot get to know or commit to another person unless they have sexual relations with him or her. Cohabitation has come to be an almost equal, less-binding alternative to marriage in our society. Divorcing one's spouse is also widely accepted.

God's Word counsels that the only proper form of shared life between a man and a woman is marriage. It is a lifelong covenant ordained by God, which people have no right to break (Mark 10:6–9). According to Scripture, physical intercourse between a man and a woman that happens outside of marriage is fornication, the same as the sin of adultery (Exod. 20:14; Matt. 5:27,28).

The goal of courting, regardless of whether the persons involved are youths or adults, should always be marriage. The right kind of courtship is a beautiful and pure process of getting to know the other person, which creates a durable foundation for possible marriage. The physical actualization of sexuality does not belong to courtship. For this reason, it is good to avoid the closeness that feeds sexual desires.

### **Sexual Deviations**

During recent years, people's attitudes towards different sexual tendencies have changed worldwide. From medical research even there have been, for example, references to homosexuality's possible biological background. The development of deviations in sexual characteristics and sexual identities are also linked to certain genetic changes.

Some textbooks describe different forms of sexual orientations, and their practice, on an equal basis with sexuality between men and women. It is thought that everyone can fulfill their own sexual orientation as they wish. Sexual relations among people of the same sex are becoming more accepted than before, and people want to legalize these kinds of unions. According to Scripture, however, this is not right (Rom. 1:26,27). Homosexual tendencies as a human trait are not in themselves sin, and even believers have them. Nevertheless, fulfilling these tendencies is not in accord with God's will.

Some youth may also experience, during his or her adolescence, random homosexual thoughts and emotions, which may be very distressing and confusing to the youth. Yet, the question here is of a passing thing, even though today's distorted notion of tolerance can empower these feelings, and, as a result, steer a youth's sexual identity in the wrong direction.

### **Sexuality is Fulfilled in Marriage**

Sexuality is a part of every person regardless of how each experiences his or her own manhood or womanhood, or whether he or she lives alone or is married. God's Word, nevertheless, clearly indicates that fulfilling sexual desires belongs to marriage. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,

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and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). To a single person, physical closeness to another and lack of sexual activity in one's own life can be a painful issue. An unmarried person can also still be happy with his or her own manhood or womanhood, as a unique person created by God. Life is greatly enriched if people of the opposite sex are also part of one's circle of friends. Honest friendship and the exchange of thoughts with members of the opposite sex bring joy to life and help in life's difficult times.

Sexuality in marriage is realized in many different ways. The fact that we are men and women, in itself, brings substance and richness to a shared life. The emotional bond between husband and wife is important, and physical closeness and warmth are constructive assets for making it through daily life. One part of the married life is sexual relations, which, at best, strengthen the emotional bond between the spouses. Sexuality and sexual intercourse also have the important function of continuing God's creation work. According to the teachings of Scripture, children are born as gifts from the Heavenly Father (Ps. 127:3).

God does not always give children to a family, but even in this case sexuality and sexual relations have important meaning to help build and maintain the marriage. In marriage, spouses should in all ways honor their spouse, and these matters are good to discuss with one's own spouse. If sexual problems occur in the marriage, it is important to deal with the issue through discussion and, if needed, get help from a trusted friend or professional. One's own and each other's sexuality—manhood and womanhood—are resources about which we can always be joyful, whether our marriage is just beginning its voyage or has already lasted for decades.