

Special Challenges

The origins of same-sex attraction (as well as many other traits a person might have) are not entirely understood. They seem to be different for males and females, but there is evidence that poor body-image, and rejection or neglect by the same-sex parent are commonly associated with the experience of same-sex sexual/romantic attractions. There is also mounting evidence that exposure to pornography can gradually transform sexual appetite. Indeed, developing same-sex attraction can be a “normal” response to certain personal realities and behavior. Therapy, however, can often help individuals build healthy responses to, for instance, the rejection and neglect they may have experienced and to some of the resultant consequences, such as depression and anger management issues. This is not therapy aimed to change someone from gay to straight, but therapy to help a person move past prior issues in their lives.

Having sexual attractions for members of one's own sex presents special challenges. Many who experience such challenges feel they were “born this way,” though there is no evidence that same-sex attraction is genetic. No one, however, should deny the strongly felt impression of many homosexuals that they “did not choose it,” or that it “cannot be otherwise.” Many people, in fact – regardless of the attractions/inclinations experienced, regardless of their marital status – struggle throughout their lifetimes with unruly sexual desires and a whole host of other tendencies to sin such as greed, laziness, the habit of gossiping, over-eating, slovenliness, etc. *Some of these struggles result from our temperament and/or life-experiences, and some of these struggles may have arisen due to bad habits we have formed because of our sinful choices.* Whatever their origins, we must not allow any of our seemingly ineradicable tendencies to sin to guide our decisions.

Those who experience sexual and/or romantic attractions to persons of their own sex are called to the same radical plan of life, the same moral standards, as are all God's children. Like others, they must prayerfully discern God's will for them and live it, though God will never draw someone to counter His order of creation. Some people who experience same-sex attractions will in fact marry an opposite-sex spouse and have children. In spite of some troubling, remaining desires for persons of their own sex, they nonetheless experience love and sexual attraction for a member of the opposite sex and come to enjoy (and struggle with!) all that marriage has to offer. Others may join the many people who never marry or who lose their spouses through death or divorce, and being unmarried, come to experience the riches of living their lives “single-heartedly” in service of the Lord.

For some, same-sex sexual and romantic attractions diminish over time, as a consequence of their pursuit of holiness and through their cooperation with God's

call to re-focus over and over on Christ. The journey of learning to live with same sex attraction can be a long one and involves crosses of many kinds, but, as always, when one unites one's cross with Christ, there is an advance in holiness and happiness.

Those of us who have friends and family members who experience same-sex attraction should work hard to show them the love that all of us crave and deserve. As the Catechism teaches, they “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition” (CCC 2358).

The Truth Will Set You Free

The Catholic Church does not attempt to “impose” these teachings on others, but to “propose” them. It seeks to be faithful to the teachings of Christ and to Scripture. These are not arcane or strange teachings; reason, experience, as well as science demonstrate that these teachings are in accord with what is good for the human person.

Jesus knew that the right use of the gift of sexuality would be hard for us, so he found ways to help us every step of the way: He gave us his example and those of the Saints, established a Church with clear teachings, and instituted a set of sacraments that would provide the grace and help needed. *Those who want to live as radical Christian disciples need to learn their Bible inside and out; they need to learn how to pray and meditate (usually done most powerfully in front of the Blessed Sacrament), and participate reverently in the sacraments; they need to learn how to share the Gospel, and how to regularly serve those in need.* Living this way can be done. Many do it, and have learned from experience that “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Further Reading:

www.stpaulse.com/sexuality

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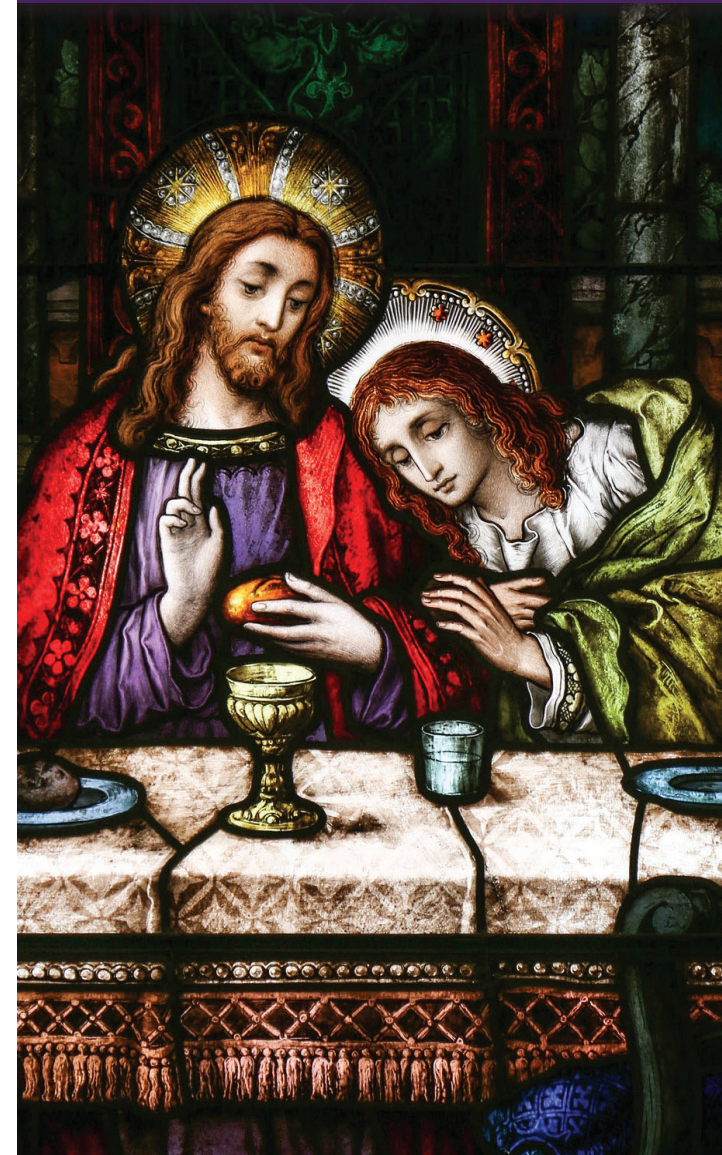
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God's Plan for Sexuality: Homosexuality and The Teaching of the Catholic Church



SAINT PAUL
STREET EVANGELIZATION

Introduction

Our bodies reveal God's plan for the human person; they reveal that we were created to give and receive love. There are many kinds of love: the love between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, teachers and students, siblings, friends, coworkers, soldiers, and, of course, husband and wife. Obviously, all of these can be intense and committed, but only one should be romantic and sexual. We too often forget that love and sex are two different things.

No one can deny, however, that sexual attraction adds zest to life, and can be part of profoundly intimate, loving, and committed relationships. *But we must also admit that sexual activity can lead to heartbreak, loneliness, despair, and even deadly disease.* Its promise of joy and intimate companionship can be deceptive. To avoid the emptiness, pain, and even degradation that come with seeking sexual pleasure outside of healthy boundaries, everyone must learn to correctly govern their sexual desires so they can lead to true goods.

In this pamphlet we address same-sex attraction and God's plan for sexuality. As it is written into the order of creation, sex is meant to be between a male and female who have committed themselves to marriage and who intend to build a family (or have the structure suitable for a family). All other uses of our sexual faculties do not honor this plan. From this fact alone, it should be very clear that it is not only homosexual relationships that fall short, but also many of the most common sexual actions and relationships in our culture.

How do we discern the order of creation? There are many ways. *Perhaps the clearest indicators, confirmed by the Bible and Christian teaching, are the physical and psychological differences between males and females;* these reveal that men and women were created to complement one another and to procreate together. This is a matter of nature itself, what God has written into the order of creation; not a matter of what "feels" natural, comes easily, or is observed in behavior.

As fallen creatures, we are susceptible to all sorts of deceptions and misdirections of the sexual inclinations that God has written into our being. As noted, we can too easily mistake romance and sexual attraction for love. We can too easily allow our natural and laudable desire for companionship and love, combined with loneliness that is a very real and frequent part of this life, to lead us to make choices that we know are not good for us, are not moral. Our dignity requires that we live in accord with the truths that we know – we need to learn how to put our sexuality in service of something greater than the desire for sexual pleasure and self-fulfillment. We should not let our genuine need for love lead us to misuse the great gift of sexuality.

God's plan for sexuality is ultimately not hard to understand; but it is very challenging to accept and live. It is not surprising that Christians should experience resistance to it, for Jesus and the Apostle Paul experienced a great deal of resistance when they taught on sexual matters. From the time of Jesus until the present time, God's plan for sexuality has been very much at odds with the values of the culture. With God's grace, however, we can live up to the challenges of this plan. That grace comes in walking with Jesus, taking up our crosses, and being self-denying. *If we are unwilling to suffer with Him, then we are not fully open to following Him.* But we are never alone in this challenge; God provides us with abundant grace, opportunities for growth, and ultimately great inner peace, joy, and a meaningful life.

Sex, Self-giving, Marriage, and Single-Hearted Dedication to the Lord

Too often, those who experience same-sex attraction believe that if they follow Christian teaching on sex, they are going to be denied the happiness found in marriage and family life. Certainly there is immense happiness to be found in marriage and family, but it is a hard-won happiness, requiring considerable self-sacrifice.

Marriage is no guaranteed path to happiness, but it is a guaranteed opportunity for personal growth in virtue. Since all human beings are laced with a huge dose of selfishness, doing marriage well requires ongoing transformation. The married need to learn to put their sexual desires in service of the relationship and of the family. *No marriage will be happy unless the spouses move past trying to sustain the relationship by depending upon the feeling of love.* Spouses must work at becoming *truly loving*, that is, patient, kind, forgiving, enduring, generous, and self-sacrificing – by relying upon God's grace for help.

While most people marry, many do not. Many. This does not mean, however, that those who do not marry must resign themselves to a life of dismal loneliness. This is especially true for Christians who, married or not, are to live lives of complete self-giving – of service to others. Indeed, all Christians, even if they don't have a natural family of their own, are called to be fatherly and motherly. After all, the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, St. Paul, St. John, and, of course, Jesus himself willingly sacrificed all sexual activity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Countless saints since have forgone the comforts and challenges of marriage to live "single-heartedly" for the Lord. Instead of dismal loneliness, Christians who live this way are offered an on-going adventure of joyful service. With Christ at their side, their lives dedicated to serving others are also rightly understood as "spousal": they involve a deep intimacy and partnership with Jesus; and in a spiritual way, give life to many people.

Those who embrace a life of celibacy have more opportunity for prayer, devotions, pilgrimages, and the like. The demands of family life can often make it extremely difficult to spend time with the Lord. The unmarried should rejoice in the possibilities they can pursue to enjoy great intimacy with the Lord. They can also build a wide range of relationships for meeting their own needs for friendship and support, as well as helping others meet their needs. They too must develop all the virtues needed for happy marriages, but through other kinds of relationships. *A celibate life is not a matter of denying one's sexuality; it is another version of living out one's sexuality.* Though there is no sexual activity involved, one still "gives one's body" – one's very self – so that others may experience love.

God's "High Bar" for Sexuality

The Church does not teach that homosexuality is some monstrous disorder; rather, *it is one of many sexual disorders to which human beings are inclined and which are incompatible with human dignity.* Outside of marriage, sexual intercourse and arousing "sexual play" conflicts with God's plan that a person's sexual acts express a lifetime commitment to another and a willingness to become a parent with them. Masturbation seeks sexual pleasure in a selfish, non-life-giving way. Pornography similarly cheapens and degrades both those portrayed and those who view it. Adultery betrays pledges of lifetime love. Contraception interferes with an action that allows spouses to become co-creators with God. All of the above actions are "disordered" behavior, even when they involve mutual consent. That is, they are behaviors that use the sexual faculties in ways that are not "ordered" – not open to how they were originally designed. They all inflict wounds of some kind – big or small – within our hearts, and within the hearts of others.

It is very important to understand that *the Church does not teach that it is sinful to experience same-sex attraction or to be tempted to engage in unchaste behavior.* It upholds the truth that engaging in same-sex behavior goes counter to how we were created. We must acknowledge that those who experience same-sex attraction often feel more acutely than most people the lack of intimacy and emotional connection in their lives, and may be tempted, as are many heterosexuals, to seek intimacy and emotional connection in relationships that abuse the gift of sexuality. *Everyone, regardless of what attractions or inclinations they experience, must learn to build intimate and emotionally rich relationships that do not involve sexual activity.* Recourse to the sacraments, reading scripture and the lives of saints, reading about the challenges of living with unruly sexual desires, building strong non-sexual friendships and other relationships, and sometimes even joining support groups can be very helpful.