



**Class: Ethics of Sex in the Bible**

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Handout 1

**Part One:**  
**Considering Biblical Sexual Ethics in the Context of Modern Culture**

**I. From the perspective of modern culture, biblical sexual ethics will inevitably seem odd, old-fashioned, bizarre, out of touch, and uncool.**

- A. As a matter of fact, biblical sexual ethics is *radical* and *revolutionary* relative to modern cultural attitudes.
1. Moderns will typically view biblical sexual ethics as an “unhealthy” repression of sexuality.
    - a) MODERN MINDSET: If one has “old-fashioned” values and beliefs about sexuality (ideas that are out of sync with the modern, culturally accepted values and beliefs about sexuality), then it is because one’s values and beliefs are purely and simply the product of a culture that was overly narrow and restrictive, uninformed, and irrationally prejudiced against newer and hipper values and beliefs that are, in fact, based on a more rational, better informed, more moral, and truer basis.
      - (1) However, it is just as possible, if not more possible, that the newer values are the outcome of propaganda, prejudice, and acculturation as it is that the older values are purely and simply the outcome of prejudice and acculturation.
      - (2) And, the following principle is simply invalid: the set of values and beliefs that is newer and more recent is always more enlightened than the set of values and beliefs that is older and less recent. (This is the essential principle of Progressivism.)
  2. Fearful repression of sexuality results in a very different set of moral values than does courageous, radical obedience to God’s purposes.
    - a) Biblical ethics is the latter—courageous, radical obedience to God’s purposes.
    - b) Radical Islam (and some forms of Christianity) are very possibly an example of the former—fearful repression of sexuality.
    - c) There is a universe of difference between the sexual ethics of the Bible and the sexual ethics of a self-righteous, hypocritical value system rooted in fear and sexual repression.
    - d) Judaism in the time of Jesus and the apostles had gone beyond sexual righteousness. In some respects, perhaps, it was more like the modern Taliban than it was like an ideal biblical sexual ethics.
      - (1) Acts 15:29, unnecessary sexual scruples: “fornication” = marrying beyond certain boundaries (e.g., a Gentile?).



**Tob. 4:12** Beware of all whoredom, my son, and chiefly take a wife of the seed of thy fathers, and take not a strange woman to wife, which is not of thy father's tribe: for we are the children of the prophets, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember, my son, that our fathers from the beginning, even that they all married wives of their own kindred, and were blessed in their children, and their seed shall inherit the land.

- B. For the person who has a need to conform culturally, nothing the Bible says could possibly convince him of its sexual ethics and neither will its values resonate with him.
  - 1. Biblical sexual ethics and modern cultural attitudes and beliefs about sexuality are mutually incompatible.
- C. The Bible is teaching a perspective on our sexuality that will only resonate with those few courageous, fiercely independent individuals who want to honor their creator with their lives and have no regard for the favor of the other people around them.
  - 1. Those interested in following biblical sexual ethics today must necessarily form an "under-culture."
  - 2. Not a "subculture."
    - a) A subculture utilizes social and cultural pressure to effect conformity. The follower of Jesus does so out of free, existential obedience. The Bible never advocates cultural conformity for its own sake, where no free, existential choice is involved.

**II. With regard to a moral judgment about sexual behavior (or any other behavior), the Jesus-follower is interested in what the Bible teaches.**

- A. The Jesus believer conforms his beliefs to what he is convinced, by sound reason, is true, not by what "appears" to him to be true.
  - 1. We "walk by belief (faith), and not by sight" = we live and think in accord with what we know, by reason, to be true, not what appears true to us because of our ill-considered and uncritical perception.
    - a) Typically, our unreflective perception will be a reflection of the culture that has shaped me.
    - b) 2 Corinthians 5:7
  - 2. Coming to grasp a worldview or paradigm rationally can be likened to a rock climber climbing the face of a sheer rock cliff. He makes his way up to one foothold from which he can then ascend to the next.
    - a) All too often, we become rationally convinced of an intellectual or philosophical foothold, only to return to the familiar lenses of our uncritical prejudices and perceptions in order to resume thinking about the topic. Accordingly, we make no progress toward a rational conclusion in which we have confidence.



- B. The Jesus believer grants authority to the Bible above any other authority. The Bible is his primary source of instruction with regard to matters of morality, theology, philosophy, and spirituality.
1. The Jesus-follower is not impressed by what is or is not acceptable to his culture; he is interested above all else in what the Bible actually teaches.

### III. What is the “Teaching of the Bible” with regard to sexual ethics?

- A. To understand what the Bible “teaches” on sexual ethics, one must understand the entire biblical worldview and the ramifications of that worldview for sexual ethics.
1. I will not know what the Bible “teaches” simply by discovering what I take to be a decisive verse. I know what the Bible teaches only when I understand the entire, coherent worldview of the Bible
  2. To make moral judgments consistent with what the Bible teaches, my moral judgments with regard to sexual behavior must be made on the basis of the theory of human sexuality that is taught in and/or assumed by what the Bible asserts.
    - a) The Bible teaches more on sexuality than what can be found in the explicit assertions of individual verses.
      - (1) I cannot find a “verse” that teaches that adult-child sex is a sin. Yet, in the context of a biblical theory of sexuality and sexual ethics, adult-child sex would clearly be considered evil from the perspective of the Bible, even though there is no “verse” that says so.
      - (2) There is no “verse” that tells me it is perverse to have an erotic attachment to my automobile. That does not mean that the Bible would consider it morally acceptable.
      - (3) If it were the case that no “verse” tells me it is wrong for “marriage” to occur between two human beings of the same sex, would that fact entail that the Bible would consider same-sex marriage morally unobjectionable? The answer is “no.”
    - b) What the Bible asserts in individual verses must be understood in the light of the Bible’s theory of marriage and sexuality, and in the light of its entire worldview.
      - (1) “Love your neighbor” clearly cannot be construed to mean “have sex with your neighbor” (as the followers of Moses David taught).
      - (2) To construe the handful of relevant verses as suggesting that Jesus taught that divorce is NEVER morally permissible is to ignore several facets about the biblical worldview.
      - (3) Some seek to defend the legality of “gay marriage” on the grounds that to deny the legal possibility of marriage to gay people is to violate the Bible’s supreme ethical principle—love for our neighbor. This argument disregards several facets of the biblical worldview.



- (a) This argument assumes that relationship is the supreme principle in life, as well as in sexuality. Truth, moral purity, one's relationship to God, and, hence, sexual purity—these must never be allowed to take precedence over authentic, loving relationship (as a modern would define love).
- (b) Does love for my neighbor require that I want my neighbor to have and do whatever he wants to have and do? Clearly not.
  - (i) However, that is exactly what we unthinkingly assume in the context of debates like "gay marriage."
- (c) The above argument "begs the question." It assumes the very point at issue: that there is nothing morally objectionable about homosexuality as such.
- (d) To love my neighbor is to promote my neighbor's well-being. Don't I have to know what is truly good for my neighbor in order to love him? Isn't the entire scope of the Bible's teaching relevant to answering that question?

**IV. Biblical perspectives that are completely at odds with modern perspectives and that must be grasped in order to understand the Bible's view of sexual ethics:**

- A. God created a purposeful, *telic* creation. Everything has a *telos*, a purpose, and it has a design to facilitate that purpose.
  - 1. Human sexuality constitutes an objective reality to which human beings are accountable. Human sexuality is not something that I can make into whatever I want it to be. It is what it is (that is, it is what God designed and purposed it to be); it is not mine to do with as I please.
  - 2. The Biblical worldview is completely compatible with the notion that "natural laws" exist (if the concept of a "natural law" is understood in the right sort of way).
    - a) To speak of something as being "against nature" means to speak of something as being at odds with God's purpose and design for what he has created.
      - (1) Therefore, to speak of sexual behavior as being "against nature" means that that sexual behavior is at odds with God's purpose and design for human sexuality.
      - (2) Romans 1:26–2:2
    - b) When we consider what might be "natural" with regard to human sexuality, we must ask what is "natural" with regard to human sexuality.
      - (1) We cannot judge what is natural for human sexuality by observing what is "natural" in animal sexuality.
  - 3. Given that this is the biblical worldview, it makes no sense whatsoever to reject the idea that "natural law" (if that is understood to mean whatever coherence to



the created order would dictate) gives us important information about how we humans ought to behave.

a) Accordingly, the fact that homosexual sex is incompatible with procreation is an important datum in one's reaching a rational conclusion about the morality of homosexual behavior.

(1) Because it gives us important information about God's purpose and design for human sexuality.

B. A moral judgment with regard to sexual behavior (as with regard to any and all behavior) must be made on the basis of a rational moral judgment (grounded in the biblical worldview), not on the basis of what *feels* right, natural, or acceptable.

1. The moral judgment we place on any behavior (including our sexual behavior) must NOT be made on the basis of what seems right to us, for what seems right (and natural) to us is derived from our acculturation in and by a particular culture. It is not typically a function of our rational, moral judgment.

a) To the member of a tribe of cannibals, eating his enemies (though they are human beings) feels comfortably "right" and "natural." Why wouldn't it? That is all he has ever known.

b) From a biblical perspective, it is important that we be willing to have our cultural attitudes and perspectives completely undermined and overturned.

(1) "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" > Romans 12:2.

C. My physical sexual nature is not an essential element of what I am as a human being—it is not an essential facet of what I am as a creature created in the image of God.

1. In the biblical worldview, I transcend my body. My physical body, in general, is not an essential element to what makes me "me."

a) I will eventually have another, wholly new "physical" body. I don't require being in this present body to be me.

2. When it comes to my sexuality, it is helpful to think of myself as a person—a being created in the image of God—given an animal-like body through which to act and express myself.

a) The animal-like body through which I do and must express myself is a less noble, less eternal, and less beautiful facet of who I am.

b) It is my true identity as a "person" that constitutes the ultimate, eternal, noble, beautiful, and essential facet of who I will be.

3. Sexual desire per se is not spiritual, transcendent, eternal, or even ennobling. It is not an ultimate good. Indeed, being connected with an inferior animal-like facet of who I am, it has the potential to be demeaning.

a) So long as the expression of my sexuality is kept within the bounds of its God-given purpose—it can be an expression of what is good, noble, right, and



- of God. But, if it is not kept within the bounds of its God-given purpose, then it will become evil, dirty, demeaning, and unclean.
- (1) While it is true that sexual desire and sexual behavior is not necessarily “dirty,” neither is it “transcendent,” beautiful, and a higher aspect of my being.
    - (a) Sexual desire and behavior can readily become “dirty,” when they transgress their created purpose.
  - (2) While it is true that sexual desire and sexual behavior is not an inherently good and ennobling facet of who I am as a human being, yet it is nonetheless true that sexual desire and sexual behavior can become an expression of and a part of that which is good, righteous, beautiful and noble.
    - (a) Our physical sexuality is NOT inherently noble and good, but it can be taken up into that which is noble and good.
    - (b) This is where the biblical worldview parts company with the Platonic worldview that has infused so much of Christianity.
4. If I choose to act sexually in a manner that is inconsistent with what is morally good, then my sexuality has become beast-like.
    - a) It is not the God-created person inside of me that is determining what I do with my sexuality; rather, it is the animal-like body I have been given that is determining what I do with my sexuality.
  5. The physical (animalistic) nature of my sexuality is, in and of itself, morally undiscerning and does not discriminate between various sexual behaviors. (That is, there is not a class of sexual behaviors that is inappropriate to the animal in us.) Hence, physical sexual response can be influenced, trained, or channeled to respond to anything.
    - a) Therefore, the things in which human beings become sexually interested should come as no surprise to us. Just because a human being finds something sexually interesting does not make it “natural” and, therefore, moral.
- D. Sexual desires are learned and, ultimately, chosen. They are not the necessary, mechanical result of the biological machine that I am. Hence, sexual behaviors are freely chosen acts for which I am morally accountable. They are not the necessary, biologically-caused actions of an organic robot.
1. MODERN MYTH: Homosexuality is an act of creation, just like left-handedness; or, in any case, it is not a choice but something that comes about (somehow [who knows or cares how]) apart from free human choice.
    - a) If it is biological, why is it not as present in some cultures as in others? It was not as prevalent earlier in America, for example. Why is it more prevalent in a sexualized culture than it is in a not-so-sexualized culture?



- b) How does one explain “biologically” the sexual obsession of certain men with their automobiles?
2. The “gene myth” is the culturally-accepted myth that shapes most modern attitudes toward sexuality today.
    - a) The biblical worldview and the half-baked, incoherent materialistic worldview of modern culture are mutually incompatible. Either modern culture has it right, or the Bible has it right. But, if the biblical worldview is right, then it is impossible for sexual behaviors to be biologically determined such that a person cannot be blamed for his sexual choices and preferences.
    - b) The Bible would advance an existentialist account of human sexuality. What kind of sexual being I am is the result of my becoming the kind of sexual being that I have chosen to become. I define myself sexually by what I choose to desire, what I choose to be interested in, and what I choose to do, sexually.
      - (1) It goes without saying that biology, body chemistry, hormones, etc., have a powerful influence on various aspects of my sexual urges and attractions. That is undeniable. But my biology, hormones, body chemistry, etc., do not make me act on my urges or attractions. Nor do not they compel me to validate my urges or attractions. If I validate an urge or attraction, it is because I have chosen to do so, not because my “genes” (my biology) made me do it.
        - (a) Body chemistry (and genes) may compel a man to be more effeminate. But being effeminate is not the same as being a homosexual. Homosexuality is chosen, even if effeminacy is not.
          - (i) Being “effeminate” is never considered evil and perverse in the Bible. It is choosing to engage in homosexual behavior that is considered a perversion.
        - (b) Body chemistry (and genes)—likely in conjunction with cultural factors—may compel a man to find other males sexually attractive. But finding other males sexually attractive is not the same as being a homosexual. Homosexuality is chosen, even if sexual attraction to males is (or seems to be) not.
          - (i) CONTRASTING MODERN MINDSET: Whatever sexual desires and urges one experiences are self-defining urges: to experience homo-erotic urges is to “BE” a homosexual.
          - (ii) A male’s being sexually attracted to other males is never, in and of itself, considered evil and perverse by the Bible. It is my choosing to validate that sexual attraction by my attitudes or behaviors that would be considered a perversion.
      - (c) It is difficult, in retrospect, to know what is and what is not a choice in the desires, preferences, and attitudes of our childhood. Many children could say that they had a proclivity to lie (in order to escape trouble) from the time of their earliest conscious experience. What



should we conclude? That they did not “choose” to be a liar? Are they somehow not morally accountable for lying?

3. The history of modern attitudes toward sexuality makes a “lie” out of the gene myth. The sudden popularity of bi-sexuality on the heels of the greater cultural acceptance of homosexuality had all the earmarks of a cultural phenomenon, not a biological phenomenon. (Or was there a sudden mutation in everyone’s genes?)
  4. Sexual orientation is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the culture tells me that certain features that I do have out of biological necessity make me homosexual, then I will be inclined (taking my cues from my culture) to make choices consistent with my culturally-shaped self-concept as a biologically-determined homosexual. My self-defining choices will then define me as a homosexual and mold and shape my sexual orientation and desires.
- E. Some sexual behaviors (and sexual desires) are *morally disgusting*.
1. The Bible would seem to hold that there exists a category of behavior that it classifies as “morally disgusting” behavior.
    - a) Cannibalism
    - b) Sadism
    - c) Conspicuous consumption; an extravagant, luxurious lifestyle
    - d) Pedophilia
    - e) Certain sexual fetishes
    - f) Homosexuality
    - g) Excessive greed
    - h) Excessive cruelty
    - i) Complete lack of empathy or compassion
    - j) Etc.
  2. To be “disgusting” is to be viscerally repulsive to a person.
    - a) This seems to be the sense, in the Mosaic Covenant, behind calling something “an abomination.”
      - (1) *bdelugma* / *sheqetz* = a thing to which one has a visceral aversion.
      - (2) The Mosaic Covenant seems to have identified certain things (e.g., possible foods) that the Hebrews would have found repulsive to eat as “unclean.” They were not to eat them. The didactic purpose was to say something like this: it is inappropriate to try to overcome your aversion to those things to which you have a visceral aversion. Why? Not because it is wrong to eat “disgusting” things, but because those aesthetically disgusting things, within the purposes of the Mosaic Covenant, are representative symbols for “morally disgusting” things. Since it is always wrong to acculturate oneself to morally disgusting things, God



- made it “unlawful” to acculturate oneself to aesthetically disgusting things.
- (3) Rev 17:4 > *akatharsia* = the *bdelugmata* of his *porneia*.
- b) Some things are viscerally repulsive to a person for aesthetic, psychological, emotional, and/or physical reasons.
- (1) Some things seem to be viscerally repulsive to a person quite naturally.
- (a) One “overcomes” the disgust of that thing only through training, acculturation, experience, and/or maturity.
- (i) Young boys and girls who have not gone through puberty typically find the idea of sexual intercourse “yucky.”
- (2) Other things seem to be viscerally repulsive to a person because of culture or some other personal (idiomatic) cause.
- c) Other things are viscerally repulsive to a person for moral reasons.
- (1) If something is repulsive for moral reasons, it will be so quite naturally.
- (a) However, one could “overcome” the disgust of that thing through training, acculturation, and/or experience.
- (b) If one has the ability to overcome such disgust, the fact that one has that ability does not entail that that particular behavior is NOT morally wrong.
- (i) Having the ability to overcome such disgust does not imply that it is right and good to overcome such disgust.
- (2) Morally disgusting behavior causes a visceral reaction precisely because the behavior is in violation of one’s rational moral judgment to an outrageously high degree.
- (a) The level of moral disgust seems to be in proportion to the degree of perversity involved in the behavior (that is, the degree to which the behavior involves a “twisting” of divine purposes and design).
- d) The fact that human beings have the ability to overcome visceral disgust with respect to a particular behavior is not proof or evidence that that visceral disgust is merely cultural. It is not proof that the aversion one feels is not an objectively valid response.
- (1) From a biblical perspective, it is the nature of human depravity that human beings can become accepting of things that ought to be repulsive.
- (a) This is an aspect of the “suppression of truth” that Paul talks about in Romans 1.
3. From a biblical perspective, behavior that is morally disgusting is behavior that is objectively, universally, and obviously perverse, and hence immoral.



- a) Whether a behavior is “morally disgusting” is a matter to be decided by rational moral judgment, not by whether I do or do not “feel” disgust.
  - (1) How I “feel” toward a behavior is malleable and changeable.
  - (2) The correct rational assessment of whether a behavior is or is not moral is not malleable and changeable.
    - (a) When one’s views on gay marriage “evolve,” it is because cultural forces have molded and shaped those views, not because one has “discovered” the rational validity of a different moral judgment.
- F. Going without sexual intimacy is NOT the ultimate in deprivation.
  1. Ultimately, the essence of our humanity is to be the sort of being who reflects the likeness of God—that is, to be godly in who I am.
    - a) The human being who loses out (who is deprived) is the one who fails to achieve godliness.
    - b) For the person who is not at all interested in being godly, there will likely be little interest in conforming to biblical sexual ethics.
  2. From the standpoint of biblical teaching, sexual satisfaction is not an ultimate—and hence not an essential—aspect of our humanity.
    - a) Our ultimate destiny would appear to be that we become physically sexless beings.
      - (1) The Bible does not explicitly say that we will cease to be male and female.
      - (2) However, Jesus does say that we will become like the angels, neither giving nor being given in marriage.
    - b) Hence, to go without sexual satisfaction is not to be deprived of anything ultimately significant.
      - (1) Note, by way of contrast, the sentiment often expressed in the gay-marriage debate currently: Are you saying that the person who is not attracted to the opposite sex HAS TO DO WITHOUT a sexual relationship??
        - (a) What, are you saying that the single man who has never been married HAS TO DO WITHOUT a sexual relationship?
- G. A desire is not a license to act to fulfill it; neither is it a prima facie justification for any action.
  1. Self-control is no less essential or important with regard to our sexual desires than it is with respect to any of our other desires.
  2. Self-control is the choice to do what is morally right at the expense of not satisfying some desire that one has—whether that desire is physical, emotional, or psychological in nature.



- a) Self-control is an essential aspect of righteousness in the biblical view of morality.
3. It follows from the intrinsic nature of righteousness and from the intrinsically sinful nature that characterizes us human beings that to want something is never, in and of itself, a license to act in such a way as to satisfy that want.
  - a) In the context of biblical sexual ethics, no human being is free to simply “follow his desires.” The Bible does not place this limitation only on some sexual desires; it places this limitation on every sexual desire of every person. For the desires of each and every one of us are all too often evil.
4. Contrasting modern mindset:
  - a) Whatever sexual desires and urges one experiences are indicators of objective relational truth: to experience sexual attraction to a person (e.g., to a woman I am not married to) is an indication that I am meant to have an intimate relationship with that woman. That is, either (1) I am meant to divorce my wife and marry that woman, or (2) I am meant to have an extra-marital affair with that woman—I am meant to break my marriage vow and pursue the direction my desires have pointed me toward.
  - b) Whatever sexual desires and urges one experiences are urges that could and should be fulfilled.
    - (1) Or, at least, one must consider it invalid to restrict or limit the fulfillment of such urges per se.
    - (2) One can rightly create boundaries within which to fulfill such urges; but one cannot rightly invalidate the urge in and of itself as being intrinsically wrong to fulfill it.
      - (a) We can require homosexuals to have a life-long committed relationship; but we cannot require them to consider their homosexual desires as being desires that should never, under any circumstances, be acted upon.
  - c) There is no real value in saying “no” to our desires (our passions) and in choosing not to fulfill them. There may be value in restricting or channeling those passions such that we only fulfill them in a particular way or in particular circumstances, but there is no need to say “no” to them altogether.
    - (1) This has always been a “temptation,” throughout all of human history. What is different today is that the loud voice of culture has joined the voice of the tempter.
- H. Not all sexual desires are equal. Even to be interested in a sexual act that transgresses the bounds of morality is an indication of my depravity and perversion.
  1. Jesus teaches that wanting to commit adultery is the moral equivalent of adultery itself.
    - a) Matthew 5:27-28



2. Paul explicitly describes desires as “evil.”
    - a) Col 3:5 > *porneia*, *akatharsia*, *pathos* [passion {=*eros*= romantic love}?], *epithumia kake* [evil desire], *pleonexia* [??], *eidolalatria*.
  - I. Biblical ethics is not a consequentialist ethics. That is, a behavior is wrong not because it has harmful consequences. It is wrong because it is an act of rebellion against God and his purposes in the created order. Even if there is no obvious identifiable “victim” of my behavior, it may still be evil and unrighteous.
    1. In the context of biblical ethics, there is such a thing as a “victimless” evil.
    2. Sexual behavior willingly engaged in by two consenting adults may be utterly evil and depraved regardless of the fact that the participants are willing.
  - J. Not all sexual behaviors are acceptable. Sexual perversion within the context of marriage (or a consenting partner) is still sexual perversion. Being sexually perverse with one’s spouse (or a consenting partner) does not somehow make it moral.
- V. Two important clarifying issues with respect to the Bible and human sexuality:**
- A. The tension between two elements in human sexuality and the ramifications of that tension:
    1. Animalistic, biologically driven sexual response is one aspect of human sexuality; rational, moral judgment about what I will allow myself to desire and how I am going to behave sexually is another aspect of our sexuality.
    2. Sexual response versus sexual desire:
      - a) There is a difference between an instinctual, animal-like sexual response and a sexual desire.
        - (1) To respond bodily and physically (like an animal) is natural and in keeping with how God created me. (I am not morally culpable for such a response.)
        - (2) But to allow my bodily, physical response—unchecked by the issue of what is right and good morally—to become my desire (in the sense that I allow it to define a behavior in which I am interested) becomes an evil for which I am culpable.
          - (a) I am culpable for a desire whether I am prepared to act on it or not.
        - (3) Physical (animalistic) sexual response involves an adrenalin rush.
          - (a) To seek the adrenalin rush for its own sake (through casual sex, pornography, perverse sexual behavior, etc.) is an improper use of my sexuality. Hence, it is perverse.
    - B. The fact of human sinfulness / depravity and the ramifications of that reality:
      1. I should expect that my sexual desires and behaviors will be immoral and perverse.
        - a) Nothing else can be expected of a morally depraved sinner.



- b) It is invalid to reason that my desires and/or behavior must surely not be immoral because they are ...
  - (1) unavoidable, and because it is unrealistic to expect me to avoid them.
  - (2) universal, or common to human beings.
- 2. The realistic expectation for my existence is not sexual purity; it is
  - a) true and accurate self-knowledge.
    - (1) Through my sexuality, I can expect to come to know that I am a morally depraved sinner.
  - b) a profound understanding of God and his promise of mercy.
    - (1) Through my sexuality, I can expect to come to know and understand God's forgiveness and mercy.