

Redeeming Sex and Sexuality

Faculty Lecture given at Southeastern Seminary on March 21, 2012

I. Introduction: What is Sexy?

Is “Sexy” in the Eye of the Beholder?

Perhaps the question that is implicitly asked more than any other in our culture is “What is sexy?” I say implicitly because it was not until recently that the lingerie company *Victoria’s*

Secret explicitly made the question the central element of their ad campaign.¹ And, of course, that same company answers the question (and then capitalizes on it) with an overly physicalistic definition of “sexy” that parades silicon and Botox enhanced, surgically altered, semi-anorexic women around in the company wares. But aside from this rather explicit ad campaign, the question lingers behind and drives advertising for everything from toothpaste to



shampoo, from cars to cookies. ² It is the dominant idea behind the front covers of myriads of tabloids and magazines and recently even a major network television company ran an

ad campaign describing NASCAR as the “most sexy” sport.³



Interestingly enough, when one seeks to find a definition for sexiness at the pop culture level it is virtually impossible to discover any discussion of substance. Instead, one finds publications like *People Magazine* that annually creates a list of “the 50 most beautiful people” or *Victoria Secret* that publishes a list of the people with the most sexy eyes, smile, curves, etc. but none of which actually spell out the measuring criteria by which such lists are determined.

¹ For an interesting discussion of the entire industry related to the exploitation of women see Ariel Levy’s *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2006). While certainly not written from an evangelical position, Levy’s insights into the exploitation of women by women in the name of the feminist movement are fascinating.

² Nonni Inc. has recently begun to market Nonni’s biscotti cookie on television as “The Sexy Cookie” Fall, 2008.

³ Fox Broadcasting, Summer 2007.

Indeed, a person need only do a brief study of fashion trends and models to discover that the iconic views of “sexiness” that prevail in culture have changed rather dramatically over time. For a simple example, Marylyn Monroe, who was considered to be a “sex symbol” in the late 50’s and early 60’s, would by today’s modeling standards be considered overweight and in need of an extreme makeover.⁴

Are we reduced then to think that “sexiness” is merely a fluid term. Like the old saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is “sexiness” just a relative concept to be entirely determined by the personal whims of individuals or the fickle winds of public sentiment?

I am reminded of the story of a man who was undergoing a Rorschach ink blot test given

by his psychiatrist.  The psychiatrist instructed the patient to say the first thing that came

into his mind when an ink blot card was revealed.  In a short time a very interesting pattern began to emerge. Every time a card was held up the patient answered “sex.” Finally, the

⁴ By way of anticipating a conclusion, because God is the fixed point about which the entirety of the universe revolves both ontologically and epistemologically. He is the ground of being as well as the norm and standard of that which is ultimately true, good and beautiful. And because God is both the ground and embodiment of that which is truly beautiful then the statement “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is actually not only biblically, theologically and philosophically inaccurate, it is borderline heretical when not further qualified. A more theologically accurate statement would be “the perception of beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” That is, while each person may have a different idea of what is attractive or beautiful, ultimately “beauty” is not a personally determined element of taste, nor is it a social construct. Beauty in its purest form is found in the nature and function of God himself. Practically speaking, then, if there is one standard or norm, then all our judgments about beauty must be altered so as to be in conformity to that standard. To put the idea simply, what God finds beautiful, we ought to also find beautiful.

Likewise, and more directly to our topic, if the Creator of the universe who is the ground of being and the embodiment and source of all that is true, good and beautiful created sex and sexuality, then because the word “sexy” is an adjective or descriptive word about that part of God’s creation (sex), then that which is most “sexy” is in reality that which is in highest conformity to the nature, function, end and purpose for which God created sex and sexuality. Like beauty, then, “sexy” is also not a social construct. Rather, what God finds sexy, we ought to also find sexy.

psychiatrist stopped the analysis and asked him why this was the case. Without a moment of hesitation the man answered “because you keep holding up dirty pictures.” 

Now of course these ink blots are not pictures of sex. But in an age of relativistic thinking and/or post modern epistemological assumptions that erode the concept of universal norms and truth there are those that would argue that because the man perceives them as sexy – they are “sexy” to him and we should not judge. But are they “sexy” actually? In other words, is “sexiness” in the eye of the beholder or is there a standard of that which is actually sexy to which we ought to conform our ideas?

Overly Physicalistic Notions of “Sexy” That Dominate Culture

What complicates the quest to understand sexiness even more in our present age is the strong influence of over 100 years of Darwinian Evolution and atheistic assumptions that are predominant in the cultural ethos. The denial of the existence of God coupled with the denial of a human soul leaves us with a reductionist view of the human person that is merely physical in nature. It is no surprise, then, that such a context would emphasize an anemic view of sexuality in which human persons and their sexual drives are nothing more than instinctual desires and chemically induced response patterns.

In our day and age these philosophical assumptions do not result in some benign reality that we as Christians must put up with. Rather, they function as a powder keg of ideas needing only a match to explode into a world of sexual craziness and moral vertigo. And of course, the match lighting the powder keg is pornography.

Just a few statistics demonstrate the staggering pornification of culture taking place both here in the U.S. and world-wide. For example in the United States alone, the annual revenue

generated by the porn industry in 2006 was a staggering \$13.3 Billion. That is a larger revenue stream than ABC, NBC and CBS combined. Worldwide, the porn industry generates a staggering \$100 Billion revenue, a total greater than Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple and Netflix combined. There are over 4.2 million porn sites and over 68 million daily pornographic search engine requests – *daily*. 42.7% of all internet users view porn, 34% of all internet users receive unwanted exposure to sexual material, 89% of kids in chat rooms are solicited for sex and 1 in 7 of all youth have received sexual solicitation via the internet. The average age of a child's first exposure to pornography is 11 years old and a heartbreaking total of 90% of children 8-16 have viewed pornography intentionally or unintentionally online. Out of all the countries in the world, the U.S. is the top producer of both pornographic websites and pornographic videos. In fact, the United States has produced 89% of the pornographic web pages world-wide.⁵

Obviously this massive intake of pornography feeds off of the prevailing materialistic assumptions about the nature of human beings and the universe they inhabit. But in addition to feeding off it, it also fuels reductionist views of sex, sexuality and sexiness. Not only does it work to relegate one's understanding of sexiness to the mere physical, it also presents human beings (and especially women) as nothing more than sexual objects meant to be consumed, not loved; used, not respected; lusted over not cared for and cherished.

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of the moral insanity that results from the combination of a materialist world view and the pornification of culture as it relates to our topic can be seen in the confused reaction of Feminist thinkers who weigh in on the problem of pornography. Indeed, pro-feminist thinkers tend to find themselves in a complete conundrum

⁵ Internet Pornography Statistics, <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>. Accessed 3/8.2012.

when dealing with the porn industry for on the one hand some abhor the objectification of women, while others are willing to laud the women posing for pornography as “bold” and “courageous” and “self-empowering” women unafraid of their sexuality.⁶

Of course praising such women is all nice and easy in the ivory tower, but when one considers the mixed messages this sends to our little girls and young women (not to mention the men) such ideas can be seen for the hypocritical and tragic lies they are. Each of us must be cognizant of the vast almost unimaginable suffering tied to the porn industry. For every playboy bunny that parades her body as a form of “self-empowering” there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of little girls forced into human trafficking and prostitution somewhere in the world.⁷ The same fuel of lust drives both engines! Both result from a headlong pursuit to experience something perceived and portrayed as “sexy.”

And if I may speak to the men for a moment, make no mistake, when you indulge in one, you are fueling and financing the other. When fawning in adultery over that picture of a nude model you are by default participating in the enslavement of little girls pimped out by some sleazebag who would just as soon rape them when he wants and dump them lifeless in a gutter when they no longer produce what he desires.

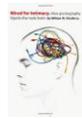
But porn is not merely problematic in that it reflects a materialistic world view or fuels the objectification human persons as sex objects to be consumed. It also serves to literally

⁶ For an interesting article delineating the contours of this “dilemma” among feminists see “Feminism and Pornography: Building Sensitive Research and Analytic Approaches” a paper presented by Natalie Purcell of the Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Cruz on May 8, 2009 at *Sexual Ontogeny: A Lifelong Work in Progress*, The Western Regional Conference of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality. This article was published in the Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, Volume 12, May 11, 2009. <http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/Feminism%20and%20Porn.htm>. Accessed 3.8.2012.

⁷ Estimates vary greatly as to the exact number of women and girls forced into sexually exploitive situations. The FBI estimates 700,000 women and children are trafficked each year. For an interesting discussion on human trafficking and the related statistics see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/slaves/etc/stats.html>

reshape the neurological structures of the brain that perceive sexual input and shape sexual behavior.

One of the more interesting and wretched problems we run into with regard to the effects of the pornification of culture that directly relates to the question “what is sexy?” is the actual affect that viewing of pornography has on the biological and physiological structure of the human brain. Recently William M. Struthers, a bio-psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College demonstrated how pornography hijacks the male brain functioning and reorders the hard wiring of a man’s thinking process as he gazes on



pornographic images.

In his book, *Wired for Intimacy*, Struthers shows that in addition to moral, legal, spiritual matters, pornography is also a *physical* matter, “rooted in the biological intricacies of our sexual design.”⁸ He demonstrates in the book how men in particular are neurologically “hardwired” to see and understand sexuality in a particular way. He then goes on to show that **“Men seem to be wired in such a way that pornography hijacks the proper functioning of their brains and has a long-lasting effect on their thoughts and lives”**⁹ He concludes that through prolonged and consistent exposure to pornography men **“have unknowingly created a neurological circuit that imprisons their ability to see women rightly as created in God’s image. Repeated exposure to pornography creates a one-way neurological superhighway where a**

⁸ William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 15.

⁹ William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 11.

man’s mental life is over-sexualized and narrowed. It is hemmed in on either side by high containment walls making escape nearly impossible.”¹⁰

In other words, a man’s view of “sexy” is literally physically damaged, brutalized and reshaped so as not to see women as a God created gift, but as a sex starved animal whose sexual cravings are merely a reflection of the man viewing porn - but even stronger - so that the man acts as a pre-pubescent male in an adult body who experiences ever diminishing returns of retarded sexual experiences as he undermines his God given call to Biblical masculinity and true manliness.

Thus we see that the view of sexiness championed by Victoria’s Secret and accelerated dramatically by the pornification of culture is actually a reductionism of the human person to an overly physicalistic portrayal of human personhood and animalistic instinctual sexual expression. It is a perspective that emphasizes the physical nature of human sexuality almost to the exclusion of all other aspects of personhood.

On a far more mundane and everyday level, my own family experienced some of the shrapnel from the pornified explosion of ideas and cultural confusion regarding “what is sexy?” on a recent family vacation.

While visiting friends in a rural area outside Boise, Idaho we drove past a street corner that had a rather remarkable coupling of signs. On one side of the street was a marquee for a “men’s club” called the Kit Kat Club that read, “Sports, Beer, Burgers and Hot Women: All of



Life’s Necessities.” Just across the street was a rather large billboard recruiting women for the U.S. Army. On this billboard was the picture of a woman in full combat fatigues looking

¹⁰ William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 85.

purposefully through a pair of binoculars with one large bold word printed underneath her

picture: RESPECT.  While the irony of these signs being placed across from one another has its humorous side, they also provide a rather remarkable example of what happens to a culture when a biblical notion of human dignity and sexuality is lost or forsaken. How we understand sex, gender, and sexuality becomes confused and conflicted to the point of absurdity. Which one of these portraits of a woman should my daughter's aspire to become? And for that matter, which one of these women should my son find attractive or "sexy"?

Christian Gnosticism and Hypocrisy

So, again I ask, "what is sexy?" Testing to see whether my graduate seminary students might have some insight into this question I tasked them to write a paper giving a biblical answer to the question. Fascinatingly enough, the vast majority of the papers I received betrayed heavily Gnostic understandings of human anthropology that predictably placed emphasis on internal/spiritual qualities with an almost complete neglect any substantive discussions of external/bodily elements. No doubt many felt that such a perspective is what they are "supposed to write" for a seminary professor when in fact many of these same students admit in private conversation that they functionally define sexiness almost exclusively by physical attributes.

Unfortunately, because we evangelicals are interested in sex but give such inadequate biblical, theological and philosophical attention to shaping our views on sexuality it comes as no surprise that our answers are convoluted and even tend toward hypocrisy. That is, while many of us have an over-spiritual syrupy Christianized Gnosticism definition on the lips we live and function with the overly physicalistic answer offered by *Victoria's Secret* in our hearts and minds.

It is my fundamental contention here that it is not by choosing between these extremes that a Christian will most honorably and faithfully be able to answer the question “what is sexy?” Rather, while Scripture does not spell out all the details of sexuality, a biblical view of sex and sexuality helps us understand that sexiness is not ultimately something that is relative to the individual’s perception and that both the spiritual and physical aspects of human nature are necessary categories of a coherent biblical understanding of sexiness.

Thus, the remainder of this paper will unfold according to a threefold purpose. First, it will lay out the rudimentary elements of a biblical and theological ethic of worship from which to engage the question of sexiness. Next it will identify nine biblical and theological principles that ought to shape our view of sexiness in light of an ethic of worship.¹¹ Finally, it will give particular attention and application to answering the question “what is sexy?” in light of the conclusions reached in the preceding sections. And in this way I hope to provide a foundation for redeeming sex and sexuality.

II. Foundations: Ethics as Worship

First a comment about the word “Sexy.” Grammatically, it is an adjectival form of word “sex.” That is, it is a descriptive term meant to point out something that epitomizes sex and sexuality. And in simply pointing this out we see the absurdity in calling a cookies or a car race sexy. These things do not depict something about sex, genders or sexuality. Thus, if we are to discover what epitomizes sex and sexuality we must consult the one who created sex and

¹¹ As I understand it, the discipline of ethics is the Spirit-filled use of the intellect, will and affections to discover truth given by God’s grace in both general and special revelation and then the application of that knowledge wisely to particular situations and issues in hopes of conforming our actions, character, community and ultimately our culture to the image of Christ as an act of worship. Thus, because as evangelicals we recognize that the highest source of authority is Scripture it is proper to begin with an analysis of God’s Word to develop an ethic of worship that is theologically grounded as well as philosophically coherent and consistent.

sexuality to discover what things or expressions would properly represent at the highest level the sexual form represented by the gender's God created as well as the expression of those gender's in actions and/or behaviors.

In his lectures on Christology Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly argued that theology must give priority to the question of *Who* over *how*, and that the best and most proper way to understand *how* must be determined in light of *Who*.¹² The first leg, therefore, in answering the question “What is Sexy?” from a distinctly Christian point of view must begin where all good theology and ethics does, and that is with an inquiry about God and his purposes for the world.

In the first two chapters of the book of Genesis God provides, in narrative form, a beautiful picture of His creative process. To fully appreciate the value and purpose of the text one must not overlook the first four words: “In the beginning God...” (Genesis 1:1a). From the very first words the reader is oriented to the fact that not only is God the ground of all existence, but that what follows is a grand narrative that displays the wonders of the Creator. Thus, it is the Creator, not the creation that is meant to be the main focus of the story. Indeed, Revelation 4:11 tells us that God is the ground of our existence and Isaiah 43:7 indicates that we are created for *His* glory.¹³ Once this perspective on the creation narrative is in place then the reader should proceed with the understanding that if the creation is amazing, how much more incredible must the Creator be! Indeed, one's reading of the narrative ought to transform from an anthropocentric perspective where human ability and needs are central to one in which humans – and the entire universe – are meant to exist and live for the purposes of God.

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, ET (London: Collins; New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

¹³ Revelation 4:11 – “Worthy are Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”

Isaiah 43:7 - “Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory; Who I have formed, even whom I have made.”

*** The creation account that follows in the remainder of the first chapter of Genesis, then, is meant to offer a panoramic view of creation that displays in general terms how God pieced into existence each vital component of what was to be a faultless world. And as the narrative in chapter one moves toward its summit, one discovers that it is the creation of man and woman that emerges as the crowning jewel of the masterpiece of God's glory.

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it'... and God saw all he had made and it was very good (Genesis 1:26-30, NASB).

What we learn from these verses is that God set human beings apart from the rest of creation in at least two significant ways. First, He gave them a special nature distinct from all other parts of the creation: He made them image bearers. In giving them this special status, God ensured that all human beings regardless of race, gender or ability would have an inherent dignity. Not to be mistaken with a value they either earn or by which they can actually make themselves autonomous from God, this dignity finds its grounding in the God who put it there and imparted it to each of us as an element of Divine general grace.

The second way God set Adam and Eve apart was by blessing them and giving them a task. Notice that the task had two elements: they were to be *fruitful and multiply* in order to fill creation, and they were to *subdue* the creation *and rule* it as benevolent stewards. The clear

implication from the passage is that it would be in the fulfilling of God's agenda for them that they would experience the promised blessing and presumably its accompanying joys.

In chapter two of Genesis the scene moves from a panoramic view of all creation to a close up of the creation of Adam and Eve. In zooming in on the final element of creation God not only allows the reader to get a more particular look at the finer details of how humans were created but also to see more clearly the reason and purpose for which He created them. Genesis 2: 15, 18 and 19-20 are most helpful for this purpose and read as follows:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.

And out of the ground the LORD GOD formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

First, note that God specifically places Adam in the Garden of Eden to "cultivate and keep it." Why is this significant? Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer highlights an important linguistic nuance about the phrase "cultivate and keep it" that is often lost in translation from

ancient Hebrew to modern English. Many English translations, he argues, overlook the “specific purpose for God’s putting man in the Garden. In most [English versions] man is ‘put’ in the Garden ‘to work it and take care of it.’” Sailhamer objects, however, and argues “a more suitable translation of the Hebrew... would be ‘to worship and obey.’” That is, when reading Genesis 2:15 from the perspective of the language and context of the entire creation narrative it is clear that Adam was not put in the Garden merely to be a farmer. Rather, as Sailhamer comments, “Man is put in the Garden to worship God and to obey him. Man’s life in the Garden was to be characterized by worship and obedience” as he cultivates and keeps it.¹⁴

In the safety of the perfect environment God created for humanity, the Creator not only built Adam to reflect His image in the world, God also gave to Adam an overriding purpose and life orientation: To worship the Creator and fully express proper worship through obedience.

The next passage, Genesis 2:18, adds another important element. The verse indicates that Adam was *alone* in the Garden and God declared that this condition was “not good.” So in His wisdom and grace God decided to create a “helper suitable” for Adam. Of particular interest is the fact that it is God, not Adam that notices and identifies Adam’s aloneness. Again it is vital that we take great care with the text of Scripture here. We must not interpret this passage to mistakenly understand Adam’s being “alone” primarily in the emotional sense of what we in our modern culture understand by the word “loneliness.” I contest that this passage does not indicate that such an emotional need in Adam was what drove God to conclude that Adam’s aloneness was “not good.” Consider this thought: who was Adam’s best friend up to this point? God was! Wouldn’t it seem awful strange, then, to suggest that even though Adam enjoyed the friendship of the most perfect and fulfilling Being in the universe, the One in whose presence he was built

¹⁴ Sailhamer, John H. “Genesis” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary vol. 2, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, ed. by Walter C. Kaiser & Bruce K. Waltke (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1990), 45.

to find meaning for eternity, that Adam was somehow emotionally needy and “lonely?” Having perfect fellowship with the God of the universe hardly lends itself to the idea that Adam was having an emotional crisis in verse 18 that prompted God to create “a helper suitable” to him.¹⁵

As if to reiterate the previous point, in verses 19 and 20 we learn that to raise Adam’s awareness of his state, God has all the animals parade in front of him so that he can name them. Amazingly, it is only after God creates the beasts and the birds and after Adam names them, that Adam becomes aware that there is no “helper suitable” for him. It is only then that Adam realizes he is “alone” as the only one of his kind.

Why is this important? Because it helps to evaporate the prevalent but misplaced idea that Adam was “lonely” in the common emotional sense normally understood today. By doing so it highlights the reality that God’s *primary* reason for creating Eve was not merely to fill some emotive/ relational void Adam had in his life. Instead the text seems to indicate that God’s concern is not so much with meeting Adam’s emotional needs as much as it is with seeing His own agenda for creation fulfilled and Adam and Eve finding great blessing in the pursuit of that agenda. Please be careful not to misunderstand this point. I am not denying that Adam was created as a social being or that a desire for emotional oneness is not present in the text. What I am saying is that the thrust of the story is not meant to place Adam and his need at the center of creation. Rather, we should see that Adam and his soon to be created “helper” had a purpose for existence that was higher than their own fulfillment. He was not looking for his “better half” so that he could be made whole – such an idea comes from Plato’s myth of Sisyphus and has been popularized by Hollywood. But it is not Christian.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note in the literature that many author’s assume God created man with a relational “void” meant to be fulfilled by marriage with a “helpmate” in the garden, but later deny that need in the eschaton.

So then we must ask the question “if the creation story does not primarily reflect God’s fulfillment of Adam’s need then for what purpose did Adam need a ‘suitable helper’?”

Piecing our ideas together from Genesis 1 & 2 we can find the answer. First, recalling Genesis 1:26-28 we know that a central element of God’s purposes in creating Eve was to help Adam “be fruitful and multiply.” It would certainly be difficult for him to fulfill this task alone! Thus, his “aloneness” was “not good.” He needed a companion—a “suitable helper” – with whom he could accomplish God’s desires. Sailhamer’s comments about this passage are once again helpful. He writes, “in what sense was the women created to be a ‘helper’?” It is in “light of the importance of the blessing (‘Be fruitful and increase’) in the creation of the man and woman in 1:28, it appears most likely that the ‘help’ envisioned is tied to the bearing of children.”¹⁶ Clearly, then, God remedied Adam’s aloneness not simply or even primarily because he was “lonely” but because remaining “alone” would make it impossible to complete the task of filling and subduing the earth.¹⁷

Second, consider the following line of reasoning:

1) if God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a Garden of perfect safety and peace in order to worship and obey, and

2) if that worshipful obedience transcended the realm of duty and was instead the highest form of fulfillment and thus joy, and

3) if God created Eve as Adam’s perfectly complementary helper so that together they could fulfill His agenda to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,

¹⁶ Sailhamer, 46.

¹⁷ This is not to say that the companionship of Eve and the vital role of marital union was not a crucial factor in the motive of God to create man and woman together. Surely Genesis 2:24 indicates that oneness is vitally important to marriage and that human companionship is central to the creation of male and female. I have given a fuller discussion of the implication of this passage for marriage in other writings.

then one has to wonder what the world would have been like if Adam and Eve never gave in to Satan's temptations in Genesis 3 and plunged the world into sin. To put it in question form: "What would have happened if they had remained pure, obeyed God, and fulfilled the task to be fruitful and multiply and to rule the world and subdue it? What kind of people would have filled creation? What would Adam and Eve's sexual and fruitful oneness have accomplished?"

The answer is a world filled with God-honoring, sinless worshippers united under one purpose: to subdue and rule the world for the glory of God! From the point of creation on, human beings were created not only to worship, but to be about the mission of spreading of that worship to the ends of the earth.

*** It is not a difficult step from this point to see that based on the very nature of the created order, the purpose of *all* human life is to bring glory to God. As Romans 11:36 puts it "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." And it is in fulfilling that purpose that we will find ultimate value and fulfillment in *all* venues of life (including sex). Every element of creation, simply because it *is* His creation, is meant to reflect back to God the glory He is due. As Jonathan Edwards rightly affirms in his classic work *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, the glory of God is the chief end of *everything*.¹⁸ This is why the Apostle Paul instructs both the Colossian Church and the Corinthian believers that whatever they do, whether in word or deed or in eating or drinking (or having sex), all is to be done to the glory of God (Col. 3:17, I Corin. 10:31). Therefore, by way of initial application, we can state unequivocally that the primary purpose of marriage and our

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. See sections 2.3.142; 2.4.221; 5.10. 238-9; 7.264-285.

sexuality is directly linked to the missional purpose of extending the glory of God to the entirety of creation. Marriage and sex are ultimately about worshipping God and bringing Him glory.

III. Nine Biblical Principles Shaping “Sexiness” that Redeem Our View of Sex and Sexuality

A. Genesis 1: 26-28- Sex and the *Imago Dei*

Having grounded the purposes for which God created the whole cosmos (including marriage and sexuality) in a comprehensive ethic of worship we are a step closer to answering the question “what is sexy?” The next step is to explore the Scriptures to address more particularly how sex, sexuality and sexual expression fit in this ethic of worship so as to bring maximum glory to God. In order to discover this we must return to Genesis 1: 26-28 as well as engage Genesis 2:7 and Genesis 2:24-25.

As for the nature of human sexuality, note that in verse 26 and 27 of Genesis 1, the text indicates that God created all of human kind in His image and then more specifically in verse 27 we learn that maleness and femaleness are the direct design of God for his image bearers.

Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The text indicates that the *imago Dei* is foundational to humanness and that each human being - by God’s design - was created to bear the image of God according to an assigned gender.

Maleness and femaleness is written into our very nature.¹⁹ This does not suggest that the *imago Dei* is defined by maleness and femaleness, rather, that one can only bear the *imago Dei* as either

¹⁹ Gilbert Meilaender “The First Institutions” *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. VI, No. 4.
http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/pdf/Meilaender_Marriage.pdf accessed 11/16/2008.

a male or a female and that one's maleness or femaleness is a designed expression of the *imago Dei*.²⁰

Thus, because human sexual identity is a gift from God closely linked to the *imago Dei*, we can unabashedly state that sexual identity is an inherent quality of humanness and not a social construct. I am not male only because my body has male parts and my society then constructs a pattern for how men behave, rather I am male and have male parts and ought to behave a certain way because God made me a man and desired for me to reflect His image as a male and then gave instructions about how to function as a male. The same is true for women. God created them female with female parts and made them so that they ought to behave as women in accordance with the instructions He gave regarding womanhood. Our sexual identity, then, finds its ultimate grounding in God's creation order and is an inherent part of our make up as image bearers... it is not a construction of societal norms or ideas.

Now if this interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 is a fair representation then the first three of nine principles of sexiness arise directly from the text. **First**, it is clear that God created only two genders: male and female. While some modern behaviorists and social constructionists would want to suggest that empirical data from human sexual behavior or abnormal genital formation might indicate anywhere from 4 to 7 genders exist, we know this to be a misapplication of fact and value categories.²¹ The mere fact that many people do act homosexually, or bisexually and

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of this point see Jack W. Cottrell *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, & Redemption: A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (College Press, 1994), pp. 70-76. http://books.google.com/books?id=92DUzLCCevIC&pg=PA69&lpg=PA69&dq=genesis+1:27,+maleness&source=web&ots=nKy5zH1aLc&sig=8aXMW0KczoPr3Y_Miu4XETs6TiE&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA76,M1 Maleness and femaleness do not constitute the image of God – but male humans and female humans express the image of God by God's design. Thus, ontologically they are equal in value, but ontologically, they are also distinct in nature.

²¹ For Example see Anne Fausto-Sterling “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough” *The Sciences* (March/April 1993)p. 20-24. See also Martin, M. Kay and Voorhies, Barbara (1975). *Supernumerary Sexes*, chapter 4 of *Female of the Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 23.

further claim an inherent orientation based on experience, does not make it by default right, okay or moral. Rather, God built each human with a particular sexual nature: male or female. The irregularities that may come in various desires or even the deformed body parts (such as that of a hermaphrodite) are the devastating effects of the Fall that come to life in our desires, our bodies and even our social structures and ideas.

Second and closely related, God made male and female to correspond to one another. Thus, as the full context of the Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and the entire Bible indicate, the clear default position is that sexuality is designed by God to be heterosexual in nature. Therefore, it is proper to find members of the opposing gender as “sexy” but one ought not be aroused sexually by persons of one’s own gender. Neither should one be aroused by the viewing of two other people of the same gender engaged in sexual behavior as much pornographic material and an increasing number of television shows and movies portray in pop culture. Simply put, homosexuality and homosexual behaviors are *never* sexy. Indeed, if they appear to be to us then we can conclude that our perception of sexiness is deformed and needs to be redeemed by the renewing of our mind through the washing of the Word and the help of the community of saints known as the local church.

Third, because males and females are both image bearers, men and women also carry an equal dignity or inherent value before the Lord. The fact that they will display the *imago Dei* differently does not negate this fundamental equality of value. Likewise, because God gives them both the task to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, we ought to understand that while the part they will play in the grand design will be different, the value of each part is equally important to God. It is sexy, then, when a person understands their inherent value, is

comfortable in his or her gender related tasking or role, and is confident in the importance of living within these differences before God - in the manner God describes - as an act of worship.

B. Genesis 2:7 - Sex and the “Embodied Self”

In addition to the three principles about “sexiness” Genesis 2: 7 also gives added insight into the constitution of human beings as both physical and spiritual which also have rather important implications regarding our quest to discover a biblical answer to “what is sexy?” The ESV renders the passage:

then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7, ESV).

Along with Genesis 1:26-28 this text helps us understand that human anthropology involves both a material or physical element and an immaterial or spiritual/soulful element. Not only are we bodies, but we are bodies that are made alive by the “breath of life” that God gives to all living creatures. What sets humans apart from all living creatures is not the fact that they have the breath of life, but that in receiving the breath of life we also become a unique “soul” that is different because in becoming this living soul human beings alone bear the image of God.²²

In regard to our discussion of sex, sexuality and sexual behavior what Genesis 2:7 helps us to understand is the fact that when God created human beings and gave us life, he made us

²² The Hebrew word נְשָׁמָה (nĕshamah, “breath”) is used for God and for the life imparted to humans, not animals (see T. C. Mitchell, “The Old Testament Usage of Nĕshama,” VT 11 [1961]: 177-87). Its usage in the Bible conveys more than a breathing living organism (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּיָה, nefesh khayyah). Whatever is given this breath of life becomes animated with the life from God, has spiritual understanding (Job 32:8), and has a functioning conscience (Prov 20:27). Human life is described here as consisting of a body (made from soil from the ground) and breath (given by God). Both animals and humans are called “a living being” (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה) but humankind became that in a different and more significant way. The Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ (nefesh, “being”) is often translated “soul,” but the word usually refers to the whole person. The phrase נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה (nefesh khayyah, “living being”) is used of both animals and human beings (see 1:20, 24, 30; 2:19). See <http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Gen&chapter=2&verse=7> accessed 11/15/2008.

what Paul Ramsey described as “ensouled bodies” or “embodied souls”.²³ That is, the immaterial and the material elements are integrally and necessarily linked. As C.S. Lewis puts it “you don’t have a soul, you are a soul. You have a body.”²⁴

This passage, then, highlights a clear point of contrast with Platonic thought regarding the interaction between the body and soul. In Greek anthropological understanding Plato likened the soul to a bird and the body to a cage. As he understood it, not only was the soul the more important element, but it existed independently of the body. His anthropology was a full blown dualism. Thus, as a bird is trapped in a cage, so also is the human soul trapped in the body. This perspective, obviously, renders the body to a status of significantly less value than the soul. In Greek philosophy, then, there was a tendency either to neglect the body and concentrate on soulish matters (ascetic Gnosticism), or over-indulge the body because only the soul mattered (hedonism).

Christian theology, however, understands that while there is a *duality* that exists with body and soul, Scripture indicates an understanding that is clear and distinct from that present within Platonic thought. While each of us has both a body and soul, these elements are not meant to function independently. There is an integration of body and soul, material and immaterial. And it is this integration of the body and soul that God describes in the Genesis text

²³ Paul Ramsey, *Patient as Person* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970), xiii. For an fuller discussion on this topic see Allen Verhey *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003), 68-98. This chapter in Verhey’s book has an interesting comparative analysis between the work of Joseph Fletcher and Paul Ramsey on the question of personhood. Gilbert Meilaender

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

as “very good.”²⁵ Clearly the implication from this point is that not only are spiritual matters important to God, so also are bodily matters. God is pleased to give us both body and soul.

From this we can understand a **fourth** element of sexiness that relates directly to the goodness of the body. That is, if God made bodies and God made bodies with a particularly sexual nature, and further if God declared that sexual bodies are “good” then God must also understand that there is a bodily element to sexiness. By God’s declaration the body is good, and it is right for us to appreciate it as good. To some degree, then, we can understand that *Victoria’s Secret* is not wrong. Inadequate, yes, misdirected, often, but wrong? No.

This ought to free us up a bit when we, in appropriate ways, appreciate the physical qualities of the other gender and, in appropriate contexts, enjoy the physical pleasure that God built to accompany the proper expressions of our sexuality. The question, then, is not *if* we can appreciate the body and bodily pleasures as “sexy” but *how* and *when* it is right to do so.

A **fifth** element of sexiness we must see is that there is a non-physical component to “sexiness” that it is also good and right to appreciate. That is, contrary to what *Victoria’s Secret* ads indicate, issues of spirituality and holiness, character and virtue, personality and disposition are also very important elements in determining “what is sexy”. As Paul expresses it in I Timothy 4:8: “while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Thus, because godliness is of such great value, then we ought to find the expression of Godliness in and through gender appropriate behavior to be very “sexy” indeed. What this means, of course, at least for all of us men is that our mothers were right when we asked them if the girl they wanted us to meet was cute and mom replied “she has a nice personality.” Our mom’s were not giving us the whole

²⁵ For a fuller discussion of this see JP Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

story, but they were onto something important. It also means that my well intended seminary students who attempted to define sexiness in light of the Proverbs 31 woman were also onto a good, right and proper to consideration regarding a biblical definition of sexy. They just did not get the whole picture.

C. Genesis 2:24-25 – Sex in the Marital Context

In addition to these elements the Genesis 2: 24-25 narrative of God’s creation of Eve and the establishment of the marital union indicates several more characteristics of God honoring sexual expression and human sexuality. The text reads:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

As the passage indicates, a man is to leave his father and mother and join with his “wife.” Thus, a **sixth** important element of human sexuality is that sexual coitus is meant –by its very nature– to take place within a marital context that is permanent. The only context in which God finds physical genital sexual expression to be “sexy” is a life long marriage covenant between one man and one woman. Put simply, adultery and adulterous behavior is *never* sexy.

Seventh, not only is the context of that which is sexy regarding sexual behavior supposed to be marital, God designed sexuality to be monogamous. Not only does Deuteronomy 17:17 indicate that it was wrong for the kings to “multiply wives,” but throughout both the Old and New Testaments we see a number of prohibitions on adultery, fornication, prostitution, divorce and remarriage after a divorce. Not only this, but the tradition of the Christian church

consistently affirmed this perspective for all people throughout its history.²⁶ Therefore, it is sexy for a man to remain married to one woman all of his life and likewise for a woman to stay married to the same man as long as they both shall live. Further, and by direct implication, the only proper viewing of nakedness in a sexual context is within this marital covenant.

Eighth, sexual intercourse or “becoming one flesh” is an element of sexuality designed by God and given as a gift to a man and his wife. Thus, sexual intercourse with one’s spouse is supposed to be “sexy.” Directly related to this, of course, is the fact that sexual intercourse is designed to lead to both procreation and a marital bond and companionship in the God given task to fill the earth and subdue it. This oneness is sexy not only because it unites bodies physically and begets children; it also brings a “oneness” or unity between two image bearers that is meant to depict something about the relationship of Christ’s love for his bride the Church. All of these elements and consequences of oneness (pregnancy and rich marital companionship), then, are likewise proper expressions of human sexuality and thus by definition “sexy.”²⁷

Finally a ninth implication is that unashamed nakedness in the context of marriage is also a good and right expression of that which God finds sexy. It is an unfortunate reality of the human heart that we find shameful things enticing, but by God’s ordering, the marital bed was designed to have great freedom and sexual expression without shame. In the eyes of God the naked bodies of a husband and wife together is “sexy” from a biblical point of view.

²⁶ David P. Gushee, *Getting Marriage Right*, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2004), 40-41.

²⁷ John Piper, “Sex and the Supremacy of Christ: Part One” in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* ed. By John Piper and Justin Taylor (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Crossway, 2005), 26. See also Gilbert Meilaender’s “Homosexuality in the Christian Perspective” From “Things That Count” Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Inc. Wilmington Delaware, 1999. http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/WRHC/183_Homosexuality%20in%20Christian%20Perspective.PDF accessed 9/10/2007.

For an interesting discussion of the objectification of female anatomy related to childbearing and sexiness see **Peter Kreeft’s *How to Win the Culture War***.

IV. So “What is Sexy?”

A. The Physical Elements of Sexiness

This brings us, finally, to a place where we are able to make a more particular application of the general principles and guidelines offered by asking very specific versions of the question “what is sexy?” Because our culture’s default understanding of the word “sexy” is heavily geared toward outward appearances, I believe it is wise to first attempt to answer the question in terms of sexiness as it relates to physical appearance.

What is interesting about this question is that while the Bible does indicate that there are things that are beautiful and while it does describe several women as beautiful (Sarah in Genesis 12: 11, 14; Rebecca in Genesis 24:16; and Esther in Esther 1:11) and men as handsome (Joseph in Genesis 39:6, Saul in I Samuel 9:2, David in I Samuel 17:42, Absalom in II Samuel 14:25, Adonijah in I Kings 1:6), it does not lay out the particulars in regard to physical form and beauty of either a man or a woman. Even in the Song of Songs where the writer goes to great lengths to describe how he perceives his lover’s beauty there is not present a suggestion or even a clear standard of what physical beauty should be for all of us. And I think this is a great grace that God has given to each of us. The reason this is so is that it allows us to have individual tastes regarding particular attributes that reflect the larger category of beauty without deifying any one aspect. In a world that was created by God as inherently diverse in physical form and in which, because of the Fall, our physical forms are decaying through time and with age we ought to be glad we are given freedom and grace in this manner.

Note, this is not to say that beauty or sexiness is merely in the eye of the beholder or that it is a social construct, but that because the Scriptures do not lay out for us the particular dimensions, shapes and forms of physical beauty, we are then given freedom within the larger constructs already given to enjoy particular elements of beauty related to personal taste.

The one unfortunate caveat we must make to this freedom in taste is the fact that when we feed our lusts and tastes with ideas that are contrary to the biblical norms described above, our tastes can indeed become warped and twisted. Beauty is not determined by the eye of the beholder, but the perception of beauty is. And that perception can be wrong. Therefore, in a Playboy infested, Victoria's Secret enticed, pro-homosexual pornified context, we must be diligent to constantly guard our hearts and minds, take every thought captive, cast down ideas contrary to those of God and renew our ideas of sex and sexual expression to conform to that which glorifies Christ.

If this is true, then, perhaps what is sexy in terms of physical appearance is more definable by stewardship and function than particular elements of shape, color or form. That is, we are told in Genesis 1 & 2 that part of Adam and Eve's worshipful obedience was to cultivate and keep the Garden as an act of worship. Perhaps we can find in this command the principle of stewardship towards all of creation – including our bodies. Indeed, as we have seen in I Tim 4 physical conditioning is of value and we learn in I Corinthians 6:19 that the body functions as a "temple" of the Holy Spirit. What appears to be the mandate about our physical bodies is that a sexy body is one that is in good physical condition relative to the body type that we have been given and the age that we are.

Further, because we are instructed to use our bodies sexually to bring about both procreation and a unitive bond between a husband and wife, the body parts and body conditions related to fatherhood and motherhood are also "sexy" as they embody the core element of what God created them for. Likewise, because God invented pleasure, those parts of the body that are pleasure zones in sexual expression are likewise created by God and are appropriately seen as "sexy."

This would mean that regardless of whether a person is tall or short, whether they have black skin or lighter skin, whether they are blond or brunette, whether they are big chested or small chested, muscular or thin framed, none of those sizes, shades, or shapes are inherently essential to being “sexy.” Rather, whatever version of these body parts one has, when they are displayed appropriately in light of one’s gender and life context they can all be sexy for another person of the opposite gender. Beyond this, what is sexy in terms of physical form in sizes and shapes and colors does not seem to be of great concern in the Biblical text.

*** But what about those *Victoria’s Secret* things? Is it okay to wear lingerie or find it attractive? Much of the answer depends on the context in which they are displayed and adorned and for what purposes they are displayed and adorned. As we discovered above, “what is sexy?” is that God designed human sexuality to have a male and female correspondence that is inherently marital and monogamous in nature. Thus, what is absolutely right about *Victoria’s Secret* is that men are, and ought to be, attracted to women. What is flawed is that they display these freak of nature, usually surgically created bodies in a sexually charged manner publically and outside the context of marriage. Not only does this type of advertising produce a phantom image that shapes the perspective of a man regarding sexiness, it also entices sexual lust in men. For women, these types of advertisements project a phantom image of particular body type that entices a “possessive lust” to have that kind of body in order to have the attention of men.

Further, while lingerie can be a wonderfully enhancing aspect of marital life if a couple uses it in the privacy of their marriage as an agreed upon form of marital intimacy, the display of *Victoria’s Secret* models all over the windows of malls, television screens and in mailboxes around the world is an inappropriate display of these women whom we are not married to. In fact, these advertisements and catalogues are, in a very real fashion, an invitation for these

women to enter into the sexual imagination of the hearts and minds of most men - a place that should be reserved for a man's wife (or for singles, his future wife) alone. It is the rare man indeed, who can look at a Victoria's Secret catalog and desire the underwear and not the woman wearing it.

In sum, regarding physical appearance, it appears that God allows for a wide variety of tastes and "turn ons". But the things we perceive as "hot" and "inviting" all must be placed under the rubric of how we were created, what all of us were created for, and the proper context in which we are meant to express and explore "sexiness". Tantalization, flirtatiousness, and visual arousal are all created for the marital context and should be pursued with great vigor there as each marriage relationship finds appropriate to the confines of their bedroom.

This does not mean that a man (whether single or married) shouldn't be attracted to a female form that is not his wife, but that he must work hard to understand sexuality from a larger perspective than the physical. He must also guard his eyes and heart from roaming toward that which is not his to enjoy, and seek to avoid contexts in which inappropriate exposure to the female form is overly displayed. The unfortunate reality is that in this ever increasing world of immorality such contexts are harder and harder to avoid.

This also means that men and women ought to be carefully aware of how they dress so as to protect their sexuality for the context of the bedroom. More particularly for women, but increasingly true for both genders, we ought to seek to protect others who are naturally built to appreciate the opposite gender from needless temptation. Indeed, contrary to the messages of today's world, modesty is very beautiful and can be very appropriately enticing without provoking lust. Indeed, when it comes to the public portrayal of our sexuality in regard to dress,

what we ought to find most sexy are those who guard the physical elements of their sexuality for the proper context through modesty and propriety.²⁸

One last comment on the physical element of sexiness is necessary for me to particularly address to women. There is no question that a man's lustful heart is his own sin, but that does not excuse lack of care on the part of a sister in Christ. As I say to my students in class: "Are men jerks when they lust after women? Sure, but help the jerk out by minimizing the temptation!" And men, be aware that as the culture increasingly emphasizes only the physical lusts – it is our responsibility to care for our sisters in the same manner. Women don't think and act in the same way as men do in regard to visual stimulation, but studies show us that they increasingly do so. Thus, we also must be careful to dress modestly to honor our sisters well.

B. The Spiritual Element of Sexiness

As for the spiritual element, I feel it appropriate to reiterate the point that not only are human beings sexually both body and spirit, but as I Timothy 4 indicates it is very possible that because of the fallen nature of the world in which we live, the point of greater emphasis ought to shift in favor of viewing sexiness as it relates to the non-physical point of view. That is to say, we do not neglect or downplay the physical element- in fact we enjoy it greatly, but because it is dependent upon an element that will decay and break down in time (the body) it is vital to recognize that it is only a part of a greater whole. And so we ask the question now, "what ought we find sexy in terms of non-physical elements of a person?"

Certainly we can begin by affirming that, regardless of one's gender, basic characteristics of the moral and spiritual self that align with the nature of Universe as God created it should be

²⁸ The best discussion of this point that I am aware of can be found in Daniel Heimbach's *True Sexual Morality* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2007). Heimbach has an excellent discussion of the idea of Allurement that is very helpful.

attractive. That is, even non believers ought to recognize goodness, kindness, justice, love and other such qualities as attractive.

But our question is not just what is attractive about non-physical qualities in a person, but what qualities in a person are particularly sexy? Because we live in a fallen world a major problem is that as a result of the fall much of our perspective and portrayal of particularly male or female character qualities are terribly bent and defiled both from the structural sin that shapes our society and the personal sin choices we make that shape our character. Thus for this reason, I believe the most basic and fundamental quality that a man or a woman should find “sexy” about a person of the complementing gender is if he or she has been rightly aligned with the One who created him or her as a sexual being. That is, if a man has become a Christian, he now has begun to be properly realigned with the way God created him as a man. Likewise, if a woman has become a Christian, she now has begun to be properly realigned with the way God created her as a woman. Thus, the most fundamental element of sexiness is whether or not one loves Jesus and then strives to live under His lordship.

An obvious implication of this is that while a non-believer may exhibit other qualities both physically and non-physically that are aligned with natural law or general revelation, fundamentally they are disordered to the Creator and the ultimate purposes for which God created men and women. In essence, they do not even have the capacity to become sexy as God ultimately defines maleness or femaleness. Thus, dating such a person or marrying such a person is the pursuit of foolishness and a journey down an avenue that is quite simply a dead end. Again, if the question of sexiness is primarily a question of bringing maximum glory to the King of the Universe in and through both our physical and spiritual elements of sexuality, then

the pursuit of someone who is not a believer is quiet simply “not sexy” (not to mention contrary to the teaching of Scripture and ultimately foolish).

What about a person who is a Christian? What character qualities ought we find sexy in them? Certainly the qualities of discipleship such as the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) and the beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-12) are foundational to discipleship and therefore ought to be generally attractive, but once again we are not asking the question of general attraction, but of what is “sexy.”

This is where we once again return to our general guidelines discovered above that indicate that not only is maleness and femaleness linked to our image bearing status, but that God created them to be equal in value of both person and role, but distinct in our roles. Thus, to discover what qualities we ought to seek that are most sexy, it would be those that highlight particular character traits of men and women.

Beginning with men we see two very clear passages in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In these passages Paul lists the characteristic for men who are qualified to shepherd the body of Christ in worship and lead in the Mission of God. Because worship is the purpose of the created universe it follows that these character traits that qualify a man to lead in worship would be those qualities that are most “sexy.” Further, regarding male sexiness, we find that Ephesians 5 indicates clearly that a man ought to take the role in his marriage and family life of leadership (headship) in which he serves his wife, seeks to present her to Christ more holy and pure and bring the family into a context of more profound life oriented worship of God. Too often the modern man is simply afraid to rise up to these callings from Scripture. The wise woman is the one who waits and seeks this man out. The wise man is the one who fights passivity in an attempt to become the sexy man these passages describe.

For women we see in I Timothy 3, Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 beautiful discussions of what biblical womanhood is and therefore what inner qualities would embody sexiness. Likewise, in Ephesians 5 we see that submission and respect are key elements of the fulfillment of a woman's sexuality. We must be careful here to not suggest that such character traits are equivalent to "doormat status." Nor do we want to place relative cultural forms of these qualities from previous eras or decades on women as scriptural norms. Nonetheless, in a world in which women are being encouraged to play the role of sexual predator, assert their place as relational leader and usurp the role of men (who are far too often wimpy and passive) as leaders in the home and church, the wise woman, the truly sexy woman is the one who seeks the wisdom of Scripture to mold her character and values. Likewise the wise man is not fooled by the counterfeit picture of womanhood championed by the culture, but waits and then strongly pursues in his masculinity the woman who embodies these traits.

One last comment need be added regarding this spiritual element of sexiness. Part of the beauty of God's design is that even in a fallen world in which our bodies break down and decay with time and age, what is glorious and of incredible grace to us is that in a healthy life and marriage, while the body in time will become less "sexy" the spirit can become more and more sexy as it conforms to the image of Christ. Therefore, it is indeed a biblical truth that for an old man the most sexy woman on earth is the woman he's been married to for 50 years and who has grown in her love and heart for the things of God. And for an old woman, the most sexy guy on the planet is the man she's been married to for 50 years and who walked with Jesus throughout their marriage.

Indeed, even when time or circumstances take their toll and a body is reduced to a wheel chair or a bed of infirm, these inner qualities that are more and more conformed to the image of

Christ are rightly perceived as incredibly sexy to the one who understands a biblical view of sexiness.

V. Conclusion: What is Sexy? A Perspective on Victoria's Secret and the Glory of God

So at the end of the day how ought we Christians answer the question of “what is sexy?” and what are we to do with the claims of *Victoria Secret*.

In regard to the latter question, the problem is not that we like to see human bodies or that we have particular tastes, but that we take them out of proper contexts, we make them primary in our understanding, and most tragically, we do not evaluate them in light of the overall and dominating purposes for which we and our sex and sexuality were created.

Victoria's Secret is not wrong in claiming that the human body is attractive and sexy. In fact, in many ways they are exactly right. God did make humans physical and sexual. Further, as Scripture indicates, in the right contexts and from the experience and pleasures of sex and sexuality are meant not only to bring us great joy, but are also seen as *very good* by God himself. In fact, one could say that when we rightly pursue and express our sexuality it not only brings us great pleasure and joy, it makes the Father joyful as well.

But where the perspective of *Victoria's Secret* is woefully inadequate and tragically deceptive is in the utter shallowness of their depiction of what “sexy” is. Divorced from the fuller biblical context of understanding and the great task we are created for, separating out the physical dimension from a richer and more holistic biblical understanding of embodied selves, and rooting the physical enticement in selfish forms of lustful want strips sexiness of its essentials and prostitutes a cheap and anemic imitation for self-oriented lusts to ever consume and never find satisfaction.

The great tragedy is not that it celebrates the human body, but that it does so by taking that which is most subjective and most temporal from the larger, grander picture of sexiness and parades it about as if it were the final goal and highest expression. Thus it is not the body form that is evil, but the context and exploitive nature of its uncovering as well as the disoriented expression of its use that is the counterfeiting thief. In truth, the secret Victoria is not telling us is that she is taking a good and beautiful element out of the beauty of its context twisting it to head in a selfish direction and undermining the higher and more satisfying pleasure.

But God offers something of far exceeding excellence for us to discover to our great and lasting joy. For it is God, the one who created sex, sexuality and sexual expression, it is God who invented pleasure, it is God who gave this great gift to the human race, and it is God who also provides contexts, purposes, and guidelines to enable its fullest expression and meaning. God understands “sexy” better than anyone and it brings Him great joy when we trade in our petty and anemic views of “sexiness” for a much more enticing one.

Thus, if there is a higher and better definition of sexy than the one paraded around in our culture, then even if it is at first hard for us to see or accept, we must trust the Maker of all good things, and seek to alter our perspective in light of His. After all He is the One who declares in Psalm 16:11 that in His presence there is fullness of joy and in His right hand there are pleasures forever. If this verse is true than it must be God’s definition of “what is sexy” that is actually the most tantalizing. And what God finds sexy, we ought also to find sexy.