Broken Axes

Mission and Christian Accountability to Love God and All People

Michel G. Distefano | J. Nelson Jennings | Jinbong Kim | Jae Hoon Lee
Editors

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Broken Sexuality: Mission and Christian Accountability to Love God and All People

© 2026 by Global Mission Leadership Forum Inc. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews. This manuscript may not be entered into or used to train any AI system without the publisher's written consent (permissions@wclbooks.com). For corrections, email editor@wclbooks.com.

William Carey Publishing (WCP) publishes resources to shape and advance the missiological conversation in the world. We publish a broad range of thought-provoking books and do not necessarily endorse all opinions set forth here or in works referenced within this book.

The URLs included in this book are provided for personal use only and are current as of the date of publication, but the publisher disclaims any obligation to update them after publication.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NIV 1984 are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSVUE are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Published by William Carey Publishing
10 W. Dry Creek Cir
Littleton, CO 80120 | www.missionbooks.org

William Carey Publishing is a ministry of Frontier Ventures
Pasadena, CA | www.frontierventures.org

Cover and Interior Designer: Mike Riester
Copyeditor and Indexer: Michel G. Distefano
Translator: Seung-hyun (Nathan) Chung

ISBNs: 978-1-64508-664-2 (paperback), 978-1-64508-666-6 (epub)

Printed Worldwide

30 29 28 27 26 1 2 3 4 5 IN

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026932563

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

1 Finding Life in Bodies of Shame

Genesis 2:25–3:11

by Daniel R. Patterson

Introduction: Locating the Right Message

These talks emerge from a place of deep lament over the sidelining of *the* Christian message in conversations about sexuality. When the Christian message is reduced to a list of dos and don'ts, of what one can do with their body and with whom, we tend to lose sight of God's desire to rescue people, not only from eternal damnation, but also from their "bodies of death" in this life.

Prioritizing the Christian message, however, does not mean that we forfeit the right to speak boldly about what godly sexuality looks like. Despite what society and some parts of the church would have us believe, Scripture speaks clearly about how God intends us to use our bodies. There will be ample opportunity in this paper to reinforce and uphold the church's historical views about marriage and sex. But it is my conviction that we must not allow this sexual ethic to replace the Christian message that offers hope to people who are drowning in pain, confusion, and willful sin with no way out but by trying to act, desire, and self-identify differently.

I want to begin, therefore, with a different question. Rather than focusing on *what* is Christian sexuality, I want us to better understand *how* the Christian message makes a difference in the lives of people who are struggling with their bodies of death: *What is the unique Christian message we find in Scripture that sheds light on our broken sexuality*? This question transforms our conversations about sexuality into a distinctly Christian conversation. The difference is subtle yet dramatic because it reveals that everyone, everywhere needs the life-giving Christian message.

When we think about broken sexuality, we usually recall people or groups of people who desire others of the same sex, or those who are struggling

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

with gender identity. But struggles with desires and bodies are not limited to these people. Think also of the married man who lusts after other women; married women who are dissatisfied with their husbands, finding fulfilment instead in books or on a screen; those whose lives have been traumatized by sexual abuse; teenagers who have had sexual encounters of various kinds out of wedlock; a woman who feels unease with her body; a person who's had an affair with a work colleague; the person who is addicted to porn . . . and the list goes on. Broken sexuality is not limited to the obvious transgressor, which means that the Christian message is for many more people than we might assume.

So, in a world that is saturated with bodies of death, what message of hope do we have for ourselves and others? I've been speaking about bodies of death because this is how the Apostle Paul describes his own experience. In Romans 7:24 he says:

> Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this *body of death*?[1]

Here is a man, called by Jesus Christ to be an apostle, who describes his life as a body of death from which he needs saving. The remarkable thing for us to see here is that in the next verse Paul proclaims the remedy for his bodily confliction. This remedy is not a good moral life or successfully imitating Adam and Eve. His announcement is unique but not surprising:

> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (v. 25)

Paul is emphatic that Jesus Christ is God's means of saving him from his bodily troubles. What is *the* unique Christian message that radically impacts people in their bodies of death? *It is the person of Jesus Christ*. This is the Christian message that we need to reclaim, specifically in matters of sexuality.

With this in mind, we turn our attention to the first moment of broken sexuality in the Bible. In the fall account in the book of Genesis, we don't see any particular sinful sexual act but the dramatic arrival of *shame* that impacts how the first man and woman, and the rest of humanity, will experience their bodies.

To determine what is good sexuality, we usually turn our attention to God's design for humanity in the way he created the man and woman in the beginning. He created man and woman and together they form the pattern

1 Romans 7:24–25 and Revelation 3:17–18, 20 are taken from the NRSVUE; all other Scripture quotations are from the default NIV. Italics in biblical quotes are added (i.e., emphasis mine).

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

for how we understand God's intention for marriage and sex. We should affirm this, but we don't want this truth to distract us from how God created the man and woman to relate to each other. Paradoxically, it is shame that provides this wonderful insight, but shame is also what we must find a truly potent remedy for.

No Shame

The first mention of shame in Scripture is in Genesis 2:25, at the surprising high point at the end of the second creation narrative. This creation event begins in verse four when God makes the heavens and the earth. Streams come up from the earth to water the ground from which plants and trees grow (vv. 6, 8–9); animals and birds are formed from the dust of the earth (v. 19), and the man, also formed from the dust, receives breath for life from God himself (v. 7). God gives the man the command not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden (v. 17) and the tasks to keep the earth and name the animals (vv. 15, 20). God finally creates a suitable helper who will also relieve the man's loneliness (v. 18), creating a woman from the rib of the man (v. 22). The woman is the man's delight, driving him to song in verse 23:

> "This is now bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> she shall be called 'woman,'
> for she was taken out of man."

This is the man's ringing endorsement of the woman and verse 25 can be read as God's own endorsement of his creation:

> Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

The news that the man and woman were naked *and* felt no shame is the point at which we see how exceedingly wonderful God's creation truly is. What purity and innocence, trust and commitment, confidence and care, and love and tenderness. We can only imagine what it might feel like to live with bodies without shame. How wonderful it would be.

Too often, however, our wonder ends here. This is unfortunate, because God's wonderful design is not limited to Adam and Eve's material reality—their shameless bodies. God created the man and woman with minds for relating to each other and to themselves. Feeling no shame was not possible without minds. What precisely is this God-designed human capacity that enabled them to feel no shame?

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

The creation of the woman to partner with the man introduces considerable complexity. This new relationship comprised not only bodies, but bodies and minds. In the garden we find two people who exist in a complex relationship where their bodies and minds deeply entangle. They do not simply walk about the garden as bodies, bumping into each other and holding hands. They have eyes and minds with which they see and understand themselves and one another.

First, they look at each other. The man looks at the woman and he is delighted when he sees her naked body. The woman also looks at the man and she is delighted when she sees his naked body. They look at each other with their own eyes, and with their minds they are delighted.

Second, and importantly for our purposes, they know in their minds that they are being looked at. They see themselves through the eyes of the other person. Adam sees Eve looking at his naked body and he is at peace in his mind with what she sees. And Eve knows Adam is looking at her naked body and she is comfortable in her mind to be seen by him. In the words of Scripture, when they look at their own bodies through the eyes of the other, "they felt no shame."

We are learning here that God's creation of the man and woman is not just about bodies and their right functioning. Their eyes and minds are an indispensable part of being God's creatures. Their lack of shame reveals that they *can* and *do* see themselves through the eyes of each other as God intended.

In the first instance, their capacity to use their minds to develop self-understanding about their bodies causes no problems. God's design of form and function is simply wonderful, but this wonder is heightened when we notice the delicate and complex beauty of how God created the man and woman to relate to each other and understand themselves.

This is not pop psychology but a scriptural observation of how God created people to live together in his world. This complex beauty of human existence helps us to see why there is so much talk about *identity* in conversations about sexuality, where we are met with the demand to be seen in a particular way. It is not enough for a person to see themselves in the mirror as a person with a certain body and desires. They demand to see themselves through the eyes of others as they desire to be seen. This desire to see themselves through the eyes of others for self-understanding is not sinful or unnatural but how God created us all—we develop self-understanding, our identity, in part by seeing ourselves through the eyes of others.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

The talk of material bodies and sexual function that dominate Christian conversations about sexuality often does not reflect the complex beauty of human existence. What we talk about and how we address people should reflect this complexity. To be man or woman in the world is to be a body, but it is also to have a mind, which is vital for developing sexual identity. The role of society, local community, friendship group, family, or church is therefore crucial as those around us provide the eyes through which we seek self-understanding.

The beautiful human reality in which the man and woman feel no shame is not merely descriptive of their experience of life in their bodies, but descriptive of how God has created all people to understand themselves through the eyes of others.

New Eyes and New Lives

The complex and delicate beauty of God's creation at the end of chapter 2 stands in radical contrast to the menacing threat that appears at the beginning of chapter 3. Like a scene from a nature documentary—deer peacefully grazing, then the dramatic disruption as the camera pans to show a prowling lion . . . the contrast should be jarring:

> . . . they felt no shame. Now the serpent was more crafty . . .
> (2:25b–3:1a)

We move from the vision of innocent but complex beauty of the man and woman in a garden who feel no shame, to the shocking realization that there is someone else in the garden, who is looking for their downfall.

When we pay specific attention to these few words, the threat is not general. The serpent's presence in the passage does not pose a threat to their perfect existence in paradise, their godly desires, or perfect functioning bodies. The serpent is a threat to their shameless existence. We know that their disobedience will certainly impact their bodies and desires, and life with God in Eden, but we see in this passage that what is specifically under threat is how the man and woman see themselves with their minds. The fall will impact how the man and woman understand themselves through the eyes of the other person and God.

The dreadful saga begins in chapter 3 when the serpent plants a seed of doubt in Eve's mind about whether God really said, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden" (v. 1). Eve initially rebuffs the serpent's inaccurate

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Thank you for reading this preview.
To purchase a copy of this book, visit:

https://missionbooks.org/products/broken-sexuality

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.