

“God Forbids Fornication, But Webster’s Definition Is Limited. Other Sex Okay Then?”

[Editor’s Note: Probe received a lengthy, technical question regarding this topic which quoted the Merriam Webster online dictionary (www.m-w.com). The definitions of the [related terms](#) were unnecessarily graphic, but the gist of the question was this:]

Having read your Q & A section regarding sexuality and your article [How Far Is Too Far?](#), I would appreciate your valued opinion in my response to this article. What is the boundary of illicit (premarital) sexual activity? Does it include orgasms without direct interaction of the couple’s sexual organs, which is basically the dictionary definition of intercourse? Can one engage in sexually pleasurable activities without crossing the line to fornication?

Thanks for the question. Well, the explanation you gave is certainly creative. You obviously spent plenty of time deliberating your argument and giving an inductive explanation. But I do notice some moral gaps that need to be addressed.

First, Merriam-Webster’s dictionary is not a repository of God’s holy standards. A dictionary can only give a brief technical definition of a word. We define right and wrong according to what the Bible says, not the limited definitions crafted by men.

There is no loophole by which we escape the standard of God. A dictionary has a scientifically sterile definition; the Bible is much more expansive. The dictionary focuses what happens

physically for fornication to occur; the Bible focuses on what happens in the heart for fornication to occur.

Jesus gave us our highest standard of sexual sin in Matthew 5:28 when he said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." For Jesus, it was not just about the physical act of sin; it was the mental and spiritual act of sin. The Lord's standard of sexual immorality focused on the person's heart and their intent.

In reading your argument, it appears quite obvious that what you described is a sexual act by merely examining the result. The end game of sexual activity is sexual gratification. In the eyes of God, how you get there is less important than arriving at a place of sin. The touching of one another's genitals while kissing heavily until there is a sexual climax is a sexual act. It is obvious that you are describing the touching of a sexual organ, stimulating it for pleasure, and having a sexual release. That description is a classical physical definition of sex.

In your hypothetical description, you stated there was prolonged and pronounced kissing. I will borrow from the logic of our previous article you cited:

Scripture says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1). One of the meanings for the Greek word for "touch" means "to press against in such a way as to kindle or catch on fire." So another way to translate this verse would be, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman so that they become sexually aroused."

I can guarantee that a person's thoughts will not be pure in those moments of kissing and touching.

What is also obvious from your description is the intent of the act itself. You looked up the dictionary's definition of

sex, and then devised activities that have the same sexual pleasure of sex while avoiding the technical aspects of intercourse. The intentionality of the act is what separates two similar actions from one that is acceptable versus one that is sinful. For example, touching your boyfriend's/girlfriend's genitals would be sin because the touching is for sexual pleasure. By contrast, a nurse touching someone's genitals for a checkup is not sin because of the intent (medicinal analysis).

As believers, we are to honor God; not gratify our fleshly desires. When we try to rationalize questionable actions, we are not abiding by the Spirit of God. We are to control ourselves in a way that is holy and honorable (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). If we ever have doubts as to what is godly or not, we can ask ourselves this question: If Jesus were standing here, would he approve of my actions? The answer to that question will lead us to an answer that upholds God's Word, His Will, and our integrity.

I hope that answers your question.

Nathan Townsie

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“If Those Who Can't Choose God Go to Heaven, Why Give Us a Choice?”

I read at Probe.org some of the answers to the question of [whether babies are in heaven](#), and they still did not answer my

question—IF the mentally retarded and infants are in heaven because of God’s grace (before I go on, please don’t think I am being disrespectful, because I love the Lord), then why did He create US with choice? Will the babies be grown up in Heaven and the formerly mentally retarded be complete? If so, how can God have a perfect relationship with them, if they have never been given a choice to choose against Him, like we were? Why didn’t He just make us all that way?

Thanks for the question. Sorry to hear that the other articles didn’t cover it for you, but your question is one that has no easy “one-size-fits-all” answer.

As earlier established, it is by God’s grace that babies, and those too mentally handicapped to make a choice for or against Christ, go to heaven. One of the rationales for that belief is Jesus’ descriptions of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus used illustrations of children to highlight the kind of character that would be present in heaven. In Matthew 18:1-4, Jesus tells about the humility found in children that serves as a guiding principle for all who wish to enter eternal paradise of God. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus described the sincere faith and genuine trust necessary for those who are in heaven. He asserted that children have a recognized place in the kingdom (Matthew 18:10) for they (and by extension, the mentally challenged who cannot progress beyond a child-like mentality) illustrate the kind of spirit an adult must have to experience a place in God’s kingdom^[1].

Granted, deceased children and the mentally challenged do not have the option of belief; their development ended before the age of accountability where they could make a mature decision of trust^[2]. However, Christ died for all (Romans 6:10); the debt of sin was paid in full once and for all (1 Peter 3:18). Unless someone deliberately rejects that offer of grace, the offer still stands. Children and the mentally challenged cannot believe nor disbelieve, therefore they have not rejected Christ’s atonement. The cancelled debt of sin is

still valid on their account.

But, I think I understand the core of your question. It seems that you are asking this: why do babies, children, and the mentally challenged get a “free pass” to heaven without having to go through the angst and struggle that comes from the life of faith? Why do they get to go to heaven scot-free while adults have to struggle with the issue of choice and the resulting dilemma of eternal damnation?

Every human being is born with the potential of choice. It's in our DNA. It's a part of being human. Babies, children, the mentally challenged—all of us were born with the capacity for choice and free will. When those who cannot believe die, the full potentiality of their choice is cut short and they cannot fully exercise that capacity. They do not have any accountable works to speak against their character, therefore God ushers them into His presence. It may seem that it would be preferable to simply die as a child to assure one's place in heaven. But we must remember two things: First, as humans in the image of God, we were created for more than just heaven. If we were created simply for heaven, we would not have physical bodies, nor would we be resurrected in bodily form. Our created purpose was to be a physical representation of God's presence on the earth. Second, there is a trade-off in the premature death of a baby versus the full life of an adult. Babies and the mentally challenged do not have to experience the angst of choice and the struggles of faith but they also miss out on earthly life itself. A full earthly life can include the joy of a family and the shared happiness that comes from strong lifelong friendships. Adults have the opportunity to find and experience love on many different levels: platonic, fraternal, casual, romantic, and spiritual. Those who are Christians share in the fellowship of their spiritual family and are indwelled with the filling of the Holy Spirit.

People past the age of accountability do have the eternally

crucial decision of choosing rightly of whether to follow Christ or not. They have supernatural assistance from God in the power of the Holy Spirit. In deliberation with our free will, God is there to assist us in our choice and interacts with our spirits to help us make an informed decision (John 16:8-11). Though the choice can be difficult for some, God illuminates the truth and testifies to our spirit that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

Finally, we simply cannot argue with how God decides to give his grace. The classic example is the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), where some of the workers were angry with the justice of the landowner . A landowner decided to hire workers to work in his vineyard, so he hired help throughout the day. The workers who were hired at the end of the day did not work that long, yet they were paid a denarius (a full day's salary). The workers hired in the early morning sweated and toiled in the heat, yet they too were paid a denarius. Those who bore the brunt of the labor grumbled against the landowner and asked why those who performed less labor received the same payment as those who worked all day.

The analogy holds for babies and the mentally challenged. Babies and the mentally challenged have not made a profession of faith or lived a life of struggle against sin and temptation. Nor have they had to face the real possibility of hell, yet they are ushered through the gates of heaven. Adult believers have the task of coming to trust in Jesus and obeying the will of the Father, or face the possibility of eternal condemnation.

The landowner's response to the hired men is the same response that our Father gives us. This is not an occasion for anger or jealousy but an opportunity for grace. God wants to extend his mercy to all and we should be happy with the reward set before us. We should not be envious that those who cannot believe get to experience the same honor as those who have borne the scars of struggles and difficulties. We should celebrate because we

know that those individuals – the babies, the children, and the mentally challenged- are in a better place and are safe in the arms of our Lord when they die.

You asked why God created us with choice. You may find this answer to email helpful: [“Why Did God Create a Flawed World Where Eve Could Eat the Forbidden Fruit?”](#)

I hope that answers your question.

Nathan Townsie

Notes

1. Lightner, Robert P. *Safe in the Arms of Jesus: God's Provision for Death for Those Who Cannot Believe*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000.

2. The age of accountability was the age that God considered a person to be morally responsible for his/her own behavior. In Jewish culture, age thirteen was the age that a person was considered to be a full member of the community and thus responsible for his/her sins. In Christendom, there is no definitive age; it is left to the discretion of the Lord.

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“Is Shopping at Goodwill Thrift Store For Poor Only?”

I shop at Goodwill. The lady who hems things up for me expressed concern about those who take from the poor by shopping at thrift stores. She believes it's wrong to shop there if you're not poor and in dire financial straits. I

believe that Goodwill helps me be a better steward of my resources whether I'm underemployed or not. I chuckle at other shoppers who saunter into the store in fur coats or driving Hummers. I see this as an opportunity to engage in a deeper discussion about Worldviews and ultimately point to my Saviour if handled correctly. What are your thoughts on this?

Thanks for the question. In all honesty, it sounds like your seamstress has some grave misunderstandings about thrift stores. How unfortunate! If I understand their business model correctly, they accept donated clothes and furniture from individuals/companies and then sell the items for profit. The donors receive a tax deductible receipt that can be used to lower their individual or corporate taxes. The proceeds that come from these items are then used to support local homeless shelters and other charitable endeavors.

Everyone has a right to shop where they want. Goodwill is not limited to, or intended for, the poor; if the poor were the only ones who shopped there, Goodwill would not have the financial resources to remain open. The company needs to convert donated items into cash to fund the many generous efforts they support.

As a Christian, we are called to be good stewards of our money. If we can save money by shopping at Goodwill, then by all means, do it. However, we should always make sure that our purchases are meaningful and necessary, not frivolous and materialistic.

I like your idea of using this opportunity to discuss worldviews! It sounds like a good chance to practice using one or more of the "Four Killer Questions" that spur critical thinking skills (see www.probe.org/four-killer-questions-2/).

I hope this helps. Bless you!

Nathan Townsie

“Are There Really Three Archangels in the Bible?”

I guess I was told (and believed) that there were three archangels. In my Sunday School class this past weekend the leader said there is only one, Michael. I see that Michael is the only one explicitly listed in the Bible but I think Gabriel is inferred as an archangel. What do you say?

Thanks for the question. To start, an archangel is a high ranking or principal angel. There are two archangels mentioned in the Scriptures: Michael and Gabriel. The identification of Michael as an archangel is more explicit, as you mentioned earlier (Jude 1:9) than Gabriel. However, a case for Gabriel can be seen implicitly. Gabriel's Old and New Testament appearances come during great moments of salvation history, confirming his important rank in the celestial order. Michael is mentioned in Daniel 10:13, 10:21, 12:1, Jude 1:9, and Revelation 12:7. Gabriel is mentioned in Daniel 8:15-19, 9:21-23, Luke 1:19, and Luke 1:26.

The reason why you might have been taught that there were three archangels is that in the Roman Catholic tradition, they include the archangel Rafael. The mention of Rafael comes from the [apocryphal](#) writing, the Book of Tobias. Apocryphal writings are considered useful and beneficial by Protestants, but not canonical due to their late dates of inscription.

I hope this helps.

Nathan Townsie

