

Redeeming Sexuality from Selfish Confusion

Genesis 2-3; Romans 1:18-32

Introductory Goals/Principles:

- **We need to speak because the Bible does -**

Silence can be golden, but it can also be deadly. There are times when wisdom would tell us to be quiet, to listen, and to wait (Prov. 17:28). But other times silence leads to loss, to error, and even to death (if I'm walking off a cliff, don't remain silent!). We believe the Bible has a lot to say about everything, including the cultural norms of our day. Often out of fear, laziness, or folly the church universal has stayed silent on things that would be deemed *controversial* and that would seem out of step with the thinking around us. In the name of not offending unbelievers we are trying to reach, we remain silent. In doing so, we cannot display what God has said about the virtues of marriage, singleness, and sex, and we **leave a void that others will gladly fill**. When we remain silent, someone else is speaking. So we endeavor to lay out, holistically, what the Bible says, both **positively and negatively**, about sex.

This means that we have to overcome both **fear and relativism**. Some of us this morning react *fearfully* when we talk about things such as sexual immorality and homosexuality. Fear causes us to move away from people, to view things through the lens of an *issue* rather than a person, and can easily write people off. Others in this room are such a product of cultural thinking that we think loving someone means NOT speaking the truth, content with letting people "live their own life", and see speaking about sin, judgment, and even hell as being **judgmental and intolerant**. Both of these are polarizations we want to avoid and neither is Biblical.

"Many in the millennial generation are committed to what some scholars call the "eleventh commandment", or our culture: *thou shalt not be intolerant*. Christian convictions on human sexuality are now seen and dismissed as out of date, out of step, and out of line. In response, many evangelical parents, pastors, and leaders are seemingly retreating into silence, if not total surrender. As one pastor told me a few weeks ago, 'I have a position on homosexuality, by my church doesn't know what it is.'"¹

We must speak. We must speak loudly. We must speak lovingly. We must speak wisely. But we must speak.

- **We need to speak because immorality is rampant (and always has been) & destructive -**

Why is this such an important issue to tackle? Is it worth potentially offending some? Sexual immorality is nothing new, nor is the normalization of immoral practice. Not only are we compelled because of what God says, but because we know what is at stake:

"What good Christians don't realize is that sexual sin is not recreational sin gone overboard. **Sexual sin is predatory**. It won't be 'healed' by redeeming the context of genders. **Sexual sin must simply be killed**. What is left of your sexuality after this annihilation is up to God. But healing, to the sexual sinner, is death: nothing more and nothing less. I told my audience that I think too many young Christians fornicators plan that marriage will redeem their sin. Too many young Christian masturbators plan that marriage will redeem their patterns. Too many young Christian internet pornographers think that having legitimate sex will take away their desire for illicit sex. **They're wrong**. And the marriages

¹ Albert Mohler, *"We Cannot Be Silent"*, p. 134.

that result from this line of thinking are dangerous places. I know, I told my audience, why over 50% of Christian marriages end in divorce:: ***because Christians act as though marriage redeems sin.*** Marriage does not redeem sin. ***Only Jesus Himself can do that.*** The audience seemed a little shocked to hear this."²

We know that sexual immoral practice is one of those enslaving sins that prohibits mankind from inheriting the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8). Our culture has normalized sexual practice to the degree that professional athletes who commit to chastity in dating are questioned (see: Russell Wilson and Tim Tebow), those who stand for convictions are marginalized, and those who don't experiment with different practices are ostracized (see: our local high schools).

- **We need to speak because the gospel of love demands it -**

"The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). To truly be loving means we make sure the main thing stays primary. We emphasize the gospel here, and though we do not live it out perfectly or maybe explain it clearly, we will not waiver on this point. The gospel is the good news for those who are broken, who are destitute, who are tired, and are seeking satisfaction. We understand, as Bruce Marshall wrote, "*The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God.*"³ We offer the gospel because we know that sexual immorality brings misery. We offer the gospel because we want people to be reconciled with God, which is the true and deepest need of all of mankind. We offer the gospel because we know it was offered to us and God's grace was greater than our sin. This is more important than morality, changing governments, or repealing laws. This is the heart of our mission because it is the heart of our Savior (Luke 19:10).

- **When we seek, we are wary of the pendulum of dealing with immorality -**

We are often a product of reaction, and too often of overreaction. On one hand, we see in our culture that sex has lost all meaning. We are told that everyone is doing it, must do it, and it validates humanity to do it, yet it basically without meaning. When Hollywood stars (or anyone) are dating and sexually active, it does not make news. What makes headlines is, "they actually profess to be in LOVE"! What! Now that's a big deal. We have separated out love, commitment, and covenant from sexual relationship, and sex now is simply a **selfish function** of life. We under react to this when we **say nothing, or worse, believe the same thing and act the same way.** Sexual immorality is rampant in our churches among those claiming to be believers, we have simply sanitized it with saying there is at least commitment. In this we have not shown the world ANYTHING different about sex, marriage, and God's design.

The other end of the pendulum is that sexual immorality is so vilified that someone involved in this sin is ostracized, feels hated, and too far gone for redemption. Sexual sin is a big deal. It is not, however, unforgivable. We cannot grow our condemnation so large that there is truth but no longer grace. When this happens, and this becomes our message, it usually ends badly. The truth is sin is sin, and there is always a call to turn from sin because there is always forgiveness for sin.

- **Homosexuality, as well as homosexual union, is not our biggest dilemma -**

This is large. This is true on two levels. Level one is the fact that hetero-sexual sin is more pervasive in our church and world than battling homosexual desires and actions. This does not diminish the latter, it simply reminds us to keep things in perspective. Level two is the fact that no one's presented sin is the

² Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, "*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert.*" p. 83.

³ John Piper and Justin Taylor, "*Sex and the Supremacy of Christ.*" p. 15

ultimate, their heart is. The passion and mission of this church is not to end homosexual union, it is to relentlessly present the gospel to a dying world, to win hearts and minds, and in that, to see lives radically changed. This means our goal is to reach those sinning in the areas of sin, addiction, idolatry, misplaced morality, and lying. We are called to reach all sinners everywhere, no matter the specific sin.

- **We recognize there are those in here with past regrets, present struggles, and future hopes -**

As with topics of marriage and singleness, I want to make sure we are understanding of the pain that this topic can bring up. To those with past sin, we continue to cling to the hope of forgiveness in the gospel, that our identity is NOT in that sin but is now in Jesus. To those presently struggling, with desire, what you are looking at, what you are acting on, whether you are single, married, or whether you are struggling with the same sex or opposite, these next few weeks are for you. This is really what Christmas is all about. The fact that God would send His Son into the world to live our life for us, becoming sin for us on the cross, offering Himself as a substitute, and giving us His righteousness, being accepted by the Father. This is our past, present, and future hope.

Divine purpose of sex (and gender)

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. **21** So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. **22** And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said,

*“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”*

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall **become one flesh**. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- **Fulfill a divine mandate**

To fully understand why God made sex, we first must remember that we yield to His design, not our own, culture, or popular science. We intend to see how God made this from the beginning, what happened to this plan, and how it can be redeemed.

God made mankind in His image (Gen. 1:26) and charged him to have dominion over the earth. To accomplish this, God made mankind both **male and female**, in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). This was a blessed created order, and God designed that through a covenant of a man and woman that they would be *fruitful and multiply and fill the earth* (Gen. 1:28).

Now, does this mean that procreation is a main part of sexual intimacy? The answer is: not necessarily, since not all married couples are able to have children. This in no way diminishes the gift nor invalidates the union. However, it is clear that marriage --- by nature, design, and aim --- is the union that will produce children.

“While it would be wrong to say procreation is the *sole* purpose in marriage or that sexual intimacy is given *only* as a means to some reproductive end, it would also be wrong to think marriage can be properly defined without any reference to the offspring that should (and normally does) result from the one flesh union of a husband and wife.”⁴

- **Celebration of a covenant**

⁴ Kevin Deyoung, “What does the Bible Really Say about Homosexuality?”, p. 30.

Entering the covenant – We stated earlier that marriage is not a contract but a covenant. This means it is binding, lifelong, and closed to all others. Notice the sequence of entering the covenant: a man shall leave father and mother, cleave to his wife, and they **will become one flesh**. Sexual activity, then, is a marker, a sign, of the covenant to be entered into. That is why Paul said one that joins himself to a prostitute becomes “one body with her. For it is written, the two will become one flesh” (1 Cor. 6:16). When we have sex outside of the covenant, we join with someone like a spouse who is not our spouse, covenanting with them. This is why sexual immorality is enslaving and emotionally magnetizing.

Remembering the covenant – This means that each time a husband and wife enters into sexual union, it is a vivid reminder of the covenant we entered into. That is why at its core sex is NOT selfish or simply personal satisfaction. There is no closer moment for a couple than when two become one flesh, expressing love, vulnerability, trust, service, and care. This is why marriage is no place for celibacy.

The pointing of the covenant – The point of marriage is that marriage is not ultimate, Christ is (Eph. 5:30-32). The same passage reiterates that sex in marriage is not ultimate, Christ is. As we understand sexual intimacy with our spouse, we have greater understanding of our longing to leave all others and cleave to Christ. Though there is a level of satisfaction in sexual relationship, it is not **ULTIMATELY SATISFYING**, which creates a longing for our future with Christ. John Piper said, “God means for humans sexual life to be a pointer and foretaste of our relationship with Him.” Sex is so much more than physical enjoyment.

- **Glorifying God in thankfulness by enjoying His gift**

Yet, in saying that, sex was created **as a gift** to be enjoyed. It is created by God, it is therefore **good**, and to be enjoyed when it is received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4 – along with all good things created by God). There is a whole book in the OT, the Song of Solomon, devoted to upholding the pleasure, joy, communion, and celebration of physical romance in marriage. As in anything, when we enjoy the good gifts He gave us properly, we are actually **worshipping and glorifying Him**. We can have physical enjoyment without it being selfish because sex is not about serving ourselves, but seeking to be intimate with another. When this fact is lost there is actually very little satisfaction in sex. Sex is not ultimate, Christ is.

The way that the Bible lays this out, that sex within marriage is satisfying, good, worshipful, intimate, and full of meaning, why do we struggle so much with believing and acting on this? Good question, and the Bible answers it.

Distortion of sex from the Fall (Rom. 1:18-32)

- **Sin's affect on all of humanity (Genesis 3)**

In Genesis 3, everything changed. Humanity was forever distorted, not simply in activity but in thinking. A woman's desires would be set against her husband (3:16). A husband would no longer lovingly lead but would be prone to selfishly leaving or tyrannical behavior (3:12, 16, 19). This not only destined mankind to death, but distorted the union of marriage, the understanding of gender, and the practice of sex itself. That is why we have passages for Israel in **Leviticus 18 and 20**, not simply for homosexual behavior, but for all kinds of sexually immoral behavior that mankind was prone to. **Genesis 19** and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were not simply speaking against homosexual practice, but to vast levels of sinful practice that culminated in the desire to perversely rape a stranger, but also displayed Lot's daughter's sexual perversion with their father. These were not simply condemning one type of sexual

sin, but all kinds. Every expression of sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage was seen as sinful, and still is.

- **Sin's affect on our minds and hearts (Rom 1)**

Where does that leave us today? Sins affects are seen and felt by everyone, everyday. Paul set out in the book of Romans to prove to everyone that they are by nature sinful, thus stand condemned, and are in need of a Savior.

Two fold revelation of God (1:16-20)

First, God's righteousness is upheld and revealed in the saving message of the gospel:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it **the righteousness of God is revealed** from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Second, God's wrath is revealed through His punishment of ungodliness. Notice that both revelations depend on knowledge, one of salvation, and the other of judgment. God has made Himself known since creation by creation, but mankind has continued to suppress the truth about God. God does not condemn the innocent or ignorant, and all mankind know there is a God and know about His law in our heart (Rom. 2:14-15). This is the height of depravity, that we know the truth yet reject it. The rest of the chapter gives detail how God's wrath is revealed by **giving people over to their sin**, and why it will be revealed in the day of judgment (Rom. 2:5). The point being: the truth is there, and all are sinful, thus all are united by their need.

For **the wrath of God is revealed** from heaven against **all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**. 19 For what can be known about God is **plain** to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the **creation of the world**, in the things that have been made. **So they are without excuse**.

Exchange #1 – God for Idols (1:21-23)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became **futile in their thinking**, and their **foolish hearts were darkened**.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man** and birds and animals and creeping things.

The first exchange has to do with our thinking and heart. Tying this with creation (and the Genesis narrative), Paul points out the overt nature of idolatry (and why God hates it). We exchanged something immortal with something tangible and futile, and all the while thought we outsmarted God. Sometimes these idols are visible, but often they are much more destructive because they are unseen, like money, position, or power.

Exchange #2 – God for a lie (1:24-25)

Therefore **God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they **exchanged the truth about God for a lie** and **worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Notice God's judgment: He gave us over to our idolatry, which lead to greater sin. We were given our hearts desire which lead to impurity, which is always associated with immorality, especially sexual immorality. We end up worshipping the gifts God gave us instead of Him. What we worship is also what we serve, so we are left chasing after satisfaction in something (like sex) that was never meant to ultimately satisfy.

Commenting on *Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, Ben Patterson made the following observation: "The devil's grand strategy against pleasure is to twist it, to get us to misuse it. 'All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at time, or in way, or in degrees which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of nay pleasure to that in which it is at least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. *An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula*' **I think that formula is exactly what is going on in our culture --- an ever increasing craving for an every diminishing pleasure.**"⁵

This is why sin does not stay stagnant but continues to grow more and more insane, chasing after experiences that can NEVER deliver on what they offer.

Exchange #3 - Natural for unnatural (1:26-27)

For this reason **God gave them** up to dishonorable passions. For their women **exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature**; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

This is really what sin and idolatry does: *it flips what God has made, makes it unnatural, but convinces us its natural*. In other words, sin's desire is for us to think sin in itself is normative, and those who uphold God's standard are weirdo's. When Paul brings up homosexual practice here, he is doing it purposefully to show this flip (especially bringing up female relationships).

"Paul's burden is not to rank the relative heinousness of homosexual sin. Although he would have embraced the OT distinction between unintentional sins and high-handed sins (Num. 15:27-31), his point is **more illustrative than evaluative**. In Paul's mind, same-sex sexual intimacy is an especially clear illustrations of the idolatrous human impulse to turn away from God's order and design. Those who suppress the truth about God as revealed in nature suppress the truth about themselves written in nature. **Homosexual practice is an example on the horizontal plane of our vertical rebellion against God.**"⁶

Our sinfulness is so pervasive, so ingrained, and we are so depraved that we are all prone to this type of exchange. All sexual sin is a result of believing a lie and is idolatrous, and homosexual practice is a step into that lie. It flips the script on what God created and made good. It perverts God's design and falls short of His glory, leaving us condemned (Rom. 3:23).

Consequence for ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE (1:28-32)

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a **debased mind to do what ought not to be done**. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers,

⁵ Piper and Taylor, p. 48.

⁶ Kevin DeYoung, "What does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?", p. 52.

haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 *Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

Notice, however, that this is NOT the end of the spiral. There is a greater “giving up” to sin, and Paul gives us clear principles to close the chapter:

Our minds are corrupted – The problem with sin is it makes us irrational (sin will make you stupid). We begin to justify our sin, but since we are left with guilt and shame (Rom. 2:14-15), we had to get others to approve, helping us feel better. There is a reason evolution, abortion, easy divorce and contraception are prevalent in our country. We have to get rid of God and consequence in order to assuage guilt and shame. That is why persecution will be inevitable, because the darkness hates the light reminding them of darkness.

All stand condemned ---- and deserve to die – We are all, at one time, condemned. We need to remember that. No one is better than anyone else. My sin was just as bad as anyone’s. We all start in the same spot before God: condemned by our deep depravity. This should motivate our love and compassion on those who sin differently than us.

We are all tempted to approve of others sin (difference between acceptance and approval) - This is why understanding what the Bible says about these things is so important. **We accept and love all people, but we CANNOT APPROVE THEIR SIN.** This is the crux of the much debate and creates the most tension. My love for someone is NOT diminished when I call their action sinful. In fact, I cannot bring the gospel truly until sin is established. This takes much wisdom, compassion, and love, but perhaps the greatest trait is COURAGE. Courage to be condemned, called judgmental, hated, despised, and rejected. Loving this way puts us in good company with our Savior.

Display of redeemed sexual intimacy (Romans 6; Eph. 5) – Next Week – (and yes, this has everything to do with Christmas!)

Loving Real People: Interacting with broken, struggling, washed, and waiting –
December 27