

Some Thoughts on Our Peculiar Sexual Ethic

Today, we are picking up another Hot Topic.

Before we launch into it, I need to say a couple of things.

As a church,

1. We whole heartedly, fiercely believe that our motivation in all things should be love. If something comes out of my mouth today that seems unloving or unkind, I surely will not intend it to be so, and I would ask your forgiveness ahead of time. Love for God and love for the people around us is my motivation, and it is the motivation of this church.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. That's what he said and that's what we should do. We should never discuss these topics or any others without love being at the center of our motivation.

Paul said that we are to speak the truth in love.

We don't care about winning arguments as much as communicating truth in love to those that we love.

This is such a big part of who and what we are that I need for us to take just a moment to pause and remember how God defines this Word.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

When we say we are motivated by love, this is what we mean. We intend in every situation and in discussing every topic to be patient, kind, humble, eager to honor others and build others up, selfless, forgiving, and we do not delight in evil, **(it is never compassionate to condone another person's sin, in fact it is often cowardice)** but we rejoice in the good and beautiful.

We want to protect people from harm, and we trust if we can, giving people the benefit of the doubt, we never give up hope, and we are tenacious in our loving of others.

We are motivated in all things, and in our ethics and moral choices by love and a desire to see all people, our culture, and community thrive. We

want to see an end of suffering, and for people to flourish in God's good world.

Love is the thing for us.

Satan knows this, so he has tried to silence Christians with a diabolic lie that is widely believed today. The lie is that if I disagree with you, I hate you, and that's simply not so.

Rick Warren's meme has gotten many reposts as of late. He actually said this in 2012:

"Our culture has accepted two huge lies: The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear them or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don't have to compromise convictions to be compassionate." ~ Rick Warren

Today I want to assert that we shouldn't compromise our convictions or give up on our commitment to compassion.

So how do we know what is true and right and best?

As a church,

2. We rely on God's Word for knowing what is right

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

History is full of bad ideas, trends that take off and everyone is just certain that they are the best way to go.

Remember shag carpet and the fat vibrator?
(Pictures)

Or how about this:

In the 1950s, Chairman Mao Zedong of China set about reforming his new communist country with the Great Leap Forward. As Chairman Mao looked over his new communist country, he noticed that the population still suffered from animal pests. Especially angering were the sparrows which ate grain from the farms. Chinese scientists concluded that for every 1 million sparrows killed, there would be enough surplus food for 60,000 people. The course was clear; the sparrows had to go.

Chinese persons destroyed any sparrow they found. Sparrows were shot out the sky, their nests destroyed, and their eggs broken. Cities went on anti-sparrow hunts, mobilizing their whole

population to kill the birds, and they were extremely effective. Hundreds of millions of sparrows died, making them almost extinct in China. It all seemed like a great idea, and everyone was in on it. But then Chinese leaders slowly became aware that they had made a terrible mistake. It turns out that sparrows form an important link in the ecology of China. They do eat grain, but the main part of their diet is locusts, which are much more destructive to the farms.

So, yes, with the sparrows dead, the locust population skyrocketed and invaded the Chinese fields. Grain production was devastated, and the country fell into a famine that lasted three years. By the time food supplies got back up to normal levels, 30 million people were dead from malnourishment.

My point is that we humans (a lot of us who think we are very smart) often come to the wrong conclusions about things. Societies have done it over and over again throughout history.

Hundreds of thousands of people used to think that it was ok to just abandon unwanted children. Millions happily lived in a system that profited from slavery. People rejoiced over human sacrifice or even sex slavery as a part religious practice. Just

because everyone in a culture seems to be in support of a thing, doesn't make it right or best.

But across time, the Bible has proven to be trustworthy to help us rightly understand matters of the heart. It has a proven track record for showing us what is the best and healthiest pathways for a culture or a people, even when dealing with tough topics. There is an amazing consistency in Scripture about the nature of who and what we are. It speaks authoritatively about what we ought to do with our bodies and most especially how we ought to handle our sexuality.

We believe God inspired the Bible, and we follow it even when we don't fully understand it, or it bucks the culture. This has been our pattern for hundreds of years.

That's certainly true when it comes to the way we express our sexuality. We promote a pattern of Biblical sexual expression because we believe it's what's best for everyone. You may think we're wrong, but you shouldn't assign a negative motivation to us. When we call the nation back to a biblical morality, we surely aren't doing it because we are being judgmental or self-righteous. No, we think we are holding out a cure to a disease

that's hurting a lot of people deeply and can hurt you and your kids.

We think it is best for us and our kids and you because the Bible says so, and because we see the carnage all around us. What has been the cost to our culture of rejecting God's standard for sexual ethic?

Did you know that according to the CDC right now, the American population of 350,000,000 people carries over 110,000,000 active sexually transmitted infections. If we followed God's standards that number would be dramatically less.

For the amount of money that it took for us to treat all those diseases in one year, we could have provided clean water to every person on the planet who doesn't have it.

Did you know that we have killed 60,000,000 babies through abortion over the past 50 years? Many of those unwanted pregnancies began with sex outside of marriage.

Did you see that hundreds of thousands of children in our nation are negatively impacted by divorces brought on by infidelity?

Do you know what a mess we've made of dating for college students and young adults?

Do you know how icky Tinder is?

How cheap we've made the holy gift of sex!

Do you know that almost 70% of our inner city kids are being born out of wedlock and being raised without fathers in the home?

Do you know the broad range of social issues that arise from fatherless children?

Do you know that people who engage in same sex physical relationship are much more likely to die young than those who don't?

Do you know that research clearly shows that children who are raised by same sex parents are much more likely to pursue same sex relationships themselves?

Do you know that sex trafficking, and the sexual abuse of children is still a horrible blight on our nation?

Do you know that the porn industry made more money last year than Major League Baseball, The NFL and The NBA combined?

That's enough I suppose. We should all just be honest that the generation of people who promised us that "sexual freedom" would make for a happier nation was really horribly wrong, and irresponsible. Their intentional and militant shift away from God's truth concerning the healthy expression of human sexuality has hurt 100s of millions of people worldwide. I wish there were a way to hold them accountable.

Ideas have consequences. Our nation is feeling the real emotional, social, and financial pain of our rejection of God's sexual standard. And might I add that the poor, the uneducated, the marginalized, are always the ones who feel the most pain when a culture rejects God's standards.

If you care about social justice, liberal ideas about the expression of human sexuality hurt the poor and vulnerable the most.

In light of all this, as Christ-followers we are called to follow an ethic of compassion and to be different, to think differently, and to act differently. But it's not easy when we and our children swim in this hyper-sexualized soup that is our current culture.

In this particular area, our culture thinks that we are so modern and sophisticated, but going all the

way back to Leviticus 18, we can see that human beings have been sexually attracted to all sorts of things and people. The Bible doesn't celebrate every attraction or desire or suggest that just because we want a thing, we should have it. Sometimes what we want isn't what is right or good, and the proper path is to say, "no" to our lust.

And you know, this was a pretty common Americana sort of expectation about the way things worked best until the rich kids of the 1960s decided that they needed a new god.

That god was their own personal satisfaction and enjoyment. One of the demigods was lust and the act of sex itself. They set out to change the way everyone thought about sex, to promote their new god.

If you listen to them or buy into their myths, you would think that having sex is the most incredible and amazing part of being a human being, the ultimate goal of every day of our lives.

Friends, sex is great, but there are hundreds of experiences that God has given us that are more important to you being a full and thriving human being than those connected to your sexual glands.

And that is especially true about the cheap sex that is outside of marriage.

So, our culture is hyper-sexualized, but the reality it paints is rarely if ever realized. And as a result, sex is a big disappointment for a lot of people. It's not God and it doesn't deliver all the rainbows and unicorns that it advertises. People think that sex will bring the relational fulfillment they are seeking. It's a lie.

Sex in and of itself doesn't bring a certain, positive connection. It doesn't deliver a deep and meaningful relationship. It doesn't make you a better person. It doesn't make you more important. It doesn't make you smarter or more emotionally wise. It doesn't do any of those things.

No, sex doesn't make you a better human or even give you a better life. That was the promise of the free lust movement of the 1960s, but they lied.

And by the 1980s pretty much everyone except the church was bought in to the idea that sex outside of marriage was no big deal and that if you were attracted to someone, you should go do what feels good. Sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, emotional trauma, and divorces skyrocketed.

So, how is a Christian to think and respond to these big cultural waves?

This morning I want us to listen to the words and actions of Jesus on these topics.

Let's start in John 8.

Sexual relationships have always been a point of conversation. This morning, we are going to see two occasions when people tried to trip Jesus up on the topic. Here is the first one:

At dawn Jesus appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

John 8:2-11

There are 30 sermons in this passage. Would you just see this with me? Look at Jesus's attitude toward this woman who has committed adultery. He loves her. He protects her from the mob. He cares about her future. Before we go any further, this is our spirit. It's the spirit of this church toward anyone who struggles with sexual temptation and sin. This is Jesus. This should be all of his followers. We know God loves us no matter what, and we know God loves the person next to us no matter what.

Got it? Good!

Second story:

Jesus is about to begin his ministry. The first sermon he preaches in Matthew 4:17 is, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Repent. Repent means, stop going the evil or foolish way you’re going and choose to turn and go a different way. In this case, choose to go in God’s way. And this wasn’t a call to just a few people, but a call to everyone. Everyone needs to repent. We don’t all repent of the same things, but we all have gone the wrong way. All of us. Every one in this room or listening online.

The next story is in Mark 7:20:

Some pharisees confront Jesus because his disciples didn’t wash their hands well before they ate a meal. They are worried about the things on the outside that can make us unclean, but Jesus says, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

Now there are a lot of ways that our hearts can be evil, and bad things can come from them. There’s greed, slander, pride, theft, and there’s also sexual

immorality. The greek word here is “pornae.” It’s the root of our word pornography, and it would certainly have included sex outside of marriage, before marriage, sex with relatives, and sex with anyone of the same gender. Jesus says that all this sin, greed, slander, pride, theft, and all the forms of pornae come from one place, the human heart. Your heart and mine is the source of some really dark things. All of us have to contend with this, and as a result all of us have to repent. If you’re honest, you know that you and I have to repent a lot because there is a lot of this stuff that is in us and wants to come out from time to time.

The church is full of people who have and who often need to repent. As Tim Keller once said, the church is more like a waiting room at the doctor’s office than the waiting room for a job interview. In a job interview everyone tries to fool you into believing they are full of strengths and no weaknesses. Everyone in a doctor’s office knows he is sick.

That’s the church. Humble and broken and honest about our imperfections and the attraction to sin that comes from within all our hearts.

Everyone agree with me? Yes!

Ok, final story. This one also finds the Pharisees trying to trip Jesus up.

Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is

given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

Matthew 19:1

Two really big ideas here.

One. It was and is the very clear teaching of Scripture that it is only permissible to have sex with your wife or husband. If you were a woman, there were no options, and if you were a man and you want to have sex with someone else, you had to divorce your wife. And surprisingly, in Jesus's time, there were those who were really pushing a pretty low bar for this. Like, if your wife cooked you a poor breakfast, you could write her a letter of divorce. Really! That's what we find in the writings of some of the most important Rabbis of the day.

So Jesus pushes back against all that nonsense, and he points back to the most foundational Scriptures. There's value in us going back there, too. Jesus says, "God created them male and female." I think this is still a really important matter that Jesus underlines, and we will discuss it more tonight. But these are the only two categories, male and

female. You're one of the two and what you are, you will be in eternity. Feelings often have validity, but how you feel can't change what you are.

Two. Now these final things in this passage are important, too, and no one ever preaches on them.

The disciples respond to the high standard of fidelity that Jesus sets for marriage, by saying, "Wow! If marriage means a big commitment for a lifetime, even if she can't cook a good breakfast, maybe it would be better just to stay single."

Now, to be clear. Single meant celibate to everyone in that conversation that day. If you weren't going to get married, you weren't going to have sex. So the disciples are saying that with all the possible things that can go wrong in a relationship, burnt toast, etc., maybe it would just be better to stay celibate, to stay away from marriage.

Please note! Jesus doesn't correct them!

Again, he says, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made

themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Strictly speaking, a eunuch was someone who had been castrated for the purpose of making sure it was safe for him to serve in the queen’s court. But Jesus is using the term more broadly here to talk about people who remain single and celibate.

Singleness isn’t for everyone, but he says there are three reasons why someone might be celibate.

1. They have been born with some sort of physical or mental, or psychological or hormonal issue that makes having sex inside marriage with a member of the opposite sex impossible. I think this includes homosexual inclinations, and we can pick this up in more detail tonight.

2. They have been made eunuchs, literally, someone has castrated them, or perhaps someone has psychologically or emotionally injured them in such a way that they don’t want to or can’t have sex inside a marriage.

3. They have chosen to be chaste because it seems to them that this is what God has called them to do so they can better give their time and

energy to the things of the Kingdom that matter more to them than sex.

People tend to act like chastity and purity are just crazy, unreasonable ideas.

But did you know that 23% of all American adults didn't have sex last year? Shocking huh! If you watch TV or Netflix, you would think everyone, everywhere, all the time. But no, and more shocking yet, the reality is that 28% of men between 18-30 chose celibacy last year. And, gasp, they lived to tell about it! And you know what? A lot of those people lived really happy, productive lives. They had great friendships and did awesome things. They weren't less because they weren't on Tinder getting some kind of disease.

And by the way, please remember that Jesus chose to live a celibate life. His life was fully human without having sex.

Some people say that Jesus never says anything about sexual identity or homosexuality, but I think they are clearly wrong. This teaching in particular, is so positive and respectful toward women and marriage, and so clear for the rest of us about all these important issues that face our culture today.

Here, Jesus is stating what is true. Not even that, God planned it all this way. But moreover, that this is the way it is.

It points to the fact that we live in a broken world, a sinful world, and at times a world where men and women are capable of great nobility and self sacrifice.

It also is unwavering in the assertion that Christians are called to a unique relationship with sex.

It is holy and purposeful, and its highest purpose isn't recreation or personal fulfillment. Its purpose is to serve as a unique bond for marriage, an illustration of Jesus and the church. Surely procreation is a part. Sex can be pleasurable and fun, but lots of other things in life are, too.

All the forms of sex that we see in the news and in the media that seem so progressive or new or modern are as old as humanity. And from the beginning, God has called us to have a particular ethic about how we handle our bodies and these drives and desires. The Bible is clear that much that we can do or want to do or feel a desire to do with our bodies, aren't what is best or right for us or others to do.

That Christians were committed to being so narrow in their sexual practices seemed crazy to the ancient Romans, too, causing one ancient historian to note that Christians won't share their wives. That was a peculiar and strange thing for them to get uptight about. Everyone else did this sort of thing in those days, and of course the woman had no say in the matter. As you read Diogenus's writings on the topic, you can almost hear him saying, "Those Christians won't share their wives with us and seem to think we should limit our freedom as well. **Isn't that hateful of them?** We like to share our wives and those Christians have some moral code about it. They are so weird, so peculiar, those Christians."

Eighteen hundred years after Diogenus wrote about the Christians who wouldn't share their wives, things haven't changed. We still have a particular sexual ethic. We Christians are weird again. We seek moral purity. We encourage our children to wait until they're married to have sex.

We believe that sex is only to be known inside the bonds of heterosexual marriage and we call every one who isn't married to choose to be chaste. From our teenagers to our senior adults and all in between, this is our pattern. This is our way. This is the way Jesus instructed us to live and this is the way we seek to live.

And in 2019, we are peculiar again. It's not the first time.

So, this is what we hold to as church today. It's the same as Christians for the past 2000 years. We modern people know a lot, but we don't know really know anything more about this topic than what they new 2000 or for that matter 4000 years ago. Not everyone who lived before us was stupid, and God's ideal has never changed.

A few final ideas before we wrap up today.

1. Sex is a good gift that God has given to husbands and wives. It is destructive when misused.

2. God loves us all and Jesus died to forgive every sin, and heal every hurt, even the deepest darkest most hidden ones. There is freedom and restoration from the affair, the porn addiction, the same-sex involvements, and the abuse of your past. If you need to repent of something today, don't put it off any longer. See Jesus dying for your sins, and then hear him lovingly say, "Repent, the kingdom of God is near. It's for you. You can know a clean conscience and make a fresh start. And you can trust me that anything you give up for the sake of my kingdom you'll receive back a lot more in this life and the next."

3. Contact a member of our staff if you feel like you need help. You are surrounded by people this morning who have overcome the same stuff you are up against and you don't even know it. We would love to connect you with someone who can help you.

4. We should all be aware that there are powerful, even supernatural forces that are at work to shape your and your children's attitudes about human sexuality and everything else. Those forces aren't always concerned about what's best for your kids and they often hate God and are in rebellion toward Him. Holding on to the Biblical pattern isn't easy and it's often not popular. We have to work at it as a community, and be solid about it as a church.

5. God loves everyone.

6. Everyone has issues. Everyone is broken. We are called to always act and speak out of love.

7. The Bible does lay down a clear sexual ethic and every person in this room is called to it. There is a right and a wrong way to handle your desires and your attractions. Some things are forbidden in Scripture and when you are tempted, you have to make a decision about whether you will trust God and his Word or the currents of our culture.

8. Sometimes being a Christian means being weird, peculiar, unusual, and not like everyone else.

Husbands and wives, I know everyone else has affairs; you shouldn't. God says fidelity, even when it's hard or seems unfair is the path for you. Some of you are in marriages where you can't have sex, and the temptation is huge, and you feel justified in looking elsewhere. Trust God that perhaps now, chastity is the path for you, and may be for the rest of your marriage. Trust that chastity is better than sin.

Teenagers and single adults, I know everyone else is having sex with the people they date. God loves you and he knows best and he says purity is the path for you. You should choose to wait for marriage. I know it's unusual and it narrows the field. It may make ending a few dates awkward because you don't live up to expectations, you should trust God, and wait.

Friends in this room who are same sex attracted, and only same-sex attracted, I know that there is a lot of pain in this point of brokenness. I know the whole culture is telling you that there's nothing wrong with having same sex encounters. But you are a Christ follower, and he loves you, and his word clearly says that fulfilling this desire is wrong,

just like incest, or adultery or premarital sex is wrong. I'm saying this to you because if it's been forbidden in Scripture, it's wrong, and if God has forbidden it, even if I don't understand why, it's harmful to you even if you can't see how. I can't explain why you have the feelings you have. Nobody seems to be able to, but I would say that you are not what you feel, and you are not alone. Your feelings are not your identity. They represent what you feel and not who you are. You are far more than your sexual interests. We love you. We are glad you are here. We are willing to walk beside you.

Every person in this room has things that they feel and want that they should not pursue. We all are broken. We all are struggling together. This is a doctor's office and not a job interview. If these are the only romantic feelings you ever feel, chastity is the path for you, too. Millions of others have chosen this path. Jesus chose it. He can help you do the same and to live a big and fulfilling life without sex being the center of it.

As we close, I want you to know that tonight we are going to further this conversation by hearing from some fantastic people who have walked down this path and know things that I don't. They will be honest about their journey and the light and hope they have found in Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father, we all love you, and we all want to live well and flourish in your good world. But we would confess today that we are human. We are all tempted in one way or another, and we all need your strength and your grace to live good and holy lives.

Would you help us?

In Jesus's name,

Amen