

Tough Questions: All Things Sexuality

Hard questions!

Does anybody really like hard questions?

Think back to the time when you were in school—or are currently in school—and a test was coming...

Anybody happy when some really hard questions were on the test.

I think not...

BUT I think it is still true in life—

We really don't like HARD QUESTIONS...

Hard questions can create a crisis of faith...bring doubt...

Answers to hard questions can be divisive...controversial...fighting words...

Which might be the reason—the church so often stays away from the Hard Questions.

That could be the reason—the church is eerily silent on some hard questions—

BUT what you won't find—is the world...the academia...the media...the music...culture and society quiet and silent on these same hard questions...

Which is why I believe it is important to ask and deal with some of these hard questions...

So this morning—I want to ask a hard question—

I want to look at ALL things sexuality...

Pornography...Adultery...Sex Before Marriage...Homosexuality...Transgenderism...

All Things Sexuality...

© 2023 Sammy Elliott

Published with permission for Baptists Preaching column on www.baptiststandard.com

I think I understand how tenuous this is...

I can already feel the tension...

I can understand why the church doesn't preach on this topic often—this is NOT easy...it wasn't easy to prepare...and it sure is NOT easy to preach...

It is MUCH easier just to stay quiet on this topic...

BUT as I have said—the world is NOT staying quiet on this topic...

Everything else in the world is chiming in on this topic...

EVERYTHING—

And I just think the church must speak to it as well...

BUT I also know—

That this topic will hit all of us...ALL of us...

And will hit us differently...

If statistics are right—the majority of people in here are caught up in looking at pornography...

Adultery has hit some of you—directly—some of you perhaps have been cheated on...or for some of you—your parents had an affair and ripped your family apart...

Sex before marriage is so common these days—it is not even questioned anymore—so I know that will probably hit a LOT of people...

Some of you have been dealing with homosexuality...

It could be that you have a friend that is gay...a family member that is gay...or you personally may be dealing with same sex attraction...

AND some—perhaps are having to deal with transgenderism...

Gender dysphoria...

Maybe you know someone who feels like they are trapped in the wrong body...a woman trapped in a man's body...

OR

Maybe you feel that way...

THIS topic hits all of us...

And a lot of emotions come with this topic...

And a lot of opinions come with this topic...

And a lot of guilt/shame come with this topic...

SO

With much fear and trepidation—let's wade into this topic...

ALL THINGS SEXUALITY...

Let's start by articulating where we are as a society with SEX...

AND I would say—

IN all most ALL areas concerning SEX—

Everything is permissible...

Pornography—permissible

Adultery—permissible (the TV and movie world glamorize affairs...and actually you and the spectator will start rooting for the affair)—permissible...

Sex before marriage—normal...common...expected...permissible

Homosexuality—permissible (why deny one from their true feelings...and true passion...and true attraction)—it is time people have the right and the permission to be their true selves...their authentic selves...and if that means you are gay—then you have the right to express your true self)

Transgenderism—becoming more permissive (encouraged to take hormones and even go through surgery—to become your true self—so that what is going on in the inside of the brain finally matches what is going on outside the body...

So what's not permissible:

- Sex Trafficking—out of bounds...
- Rape—out of bounds (needs to be consensual)
- Sex with a minor (out of bounds)—but I would argue that this is starting to change...do you know now they are encouraging us to not call people who target minors pedophiles (that is becoming taboo)...they want us to call them “minor attracted persons”

Pretty much outside of that—

I would say—all things are permissible...and encouraged...

BUT

Let me ask—

How did we get here?

I would say—it goes all the way back to Plato

Plato put forth a dualistic philosophy...

AND this philosophy drew a line between spirit and flesh...between the mind and the physical world...

The immaterial and the material...

Visualize an upper room and a lower room...

AND

The upper room always supercedes the lower room...

In the upper room—you have spirit...you have mind...reason...the immaterial...

And it always would trump the lower room...in which you had body...flesh...physical...material...

AND in Plato's world—

The Body was a necessary evil...

The body—you will one day leave behind...
The goal of humanity is to have your true self—independent from your body...

In Plato's day...
In the Greco-Roman World...
In Jesus' day—and the apostle Paul's day...
The Human Body in the physical world would have been deemed irrelevant to your true self...

SO what counts—is NOT my sexed body (lower room) but solely my mind/feelings/desires(upper room)

As a result—
Feelings---emotions---mind determines who you are...your true self...your authentic self...
And it doesn't matter if it contradicts...is counter to what the body says...

So in the days of the early church—

Gay sex—was not uncommon...
It was not considered disgraceful if you were the active participant...
It was disgraceful if you were the passive partner in the sexual encounter...
WHICH is why slaves were often used in this sexual encounter---and the slave took on the passive role...
This is why men often had sex with boys—15 years old...of course the boy took on the passive role...this is known as pederasty—and it was common...and accepted in the culture...

Sexual Permissiveness—was the rule of the day...
Many of the temples—has temple prostitutes...

You would go to church—have sex—as an act of worship to the deity being worshiped at that temple

Honestly—we have much in common with the Greco-Roman world in how we see life (emotions/feelings trump everything material)...
How we approach sex—be true to yourself—emotions determine true self—nearly everything is permitted...

Plato's dualism is defining so much of the world we live in today—and has shaped our culture's mentality and thinking on ALL THINGS SEXUALITY!!!

I know that was quick—and SO much more could be said about this...
I am indebted to the work of Nancy Pearcy in her book entitled *Love Thy Body*.

BUT with that as the background of where we are as a society and culture on sex...

I want to ask—
Does God have anything to say on this topic?
AND if so—
What does God have to say on all things sex?

My answer to that question is YES He does...

AND I want to start at the beginning...
All the way back to Creation—when it all began...

God was creating...
Beginning with cosmos...and the universe...and water and land...the earth...the stars...trees...fish...animals...

And finally—humans...
Adam and Eve

So let's pick up there—
Gen. 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

Genesis 1:26a, 27 (CSB)

God created them male and female—he created them...

With specificity—he created male...and
With specificity—he created female...

And with that creation—he gave them a physiological identity...

Biologically, Physiologically, Chromosomally...
God created them male and female...

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed.
Genesis 1:31 (CSB)

I believe we must start by tearing down this lower room/upper room thinking...
We must stop thinking the body is a necessary evil...
That the body and the physical are irrelevant...immaterial to truth...to essence...to real...

God said—I created them male and female—The different Genders have entered the world...
AND this is VERY GOOD!!

Biology—Our Physical Bodies—Our Chromosomes should have something to say to our identities...

© 2023 Sammy Elliott

Published with permission for Baptists Preaching column on www.baptiststandard.com

Who we are as a sex...

So when our thoughts and emotions are telling us something different than biology is telling us...we should NOT dismiss biology so quickly...we should not override biology so fast...

Biology matters...Chromosomes matter...

I'm not saying that Gender Dysphoria is NOT real...
I believe that there are some who truly feel trapped in the wrong sexed body...
BUT I am saying—that the physical world should NOT be dismissed...

But let's continue...

In Genesis 2—we take a closer look at Adam and Eve...
In chapter 1—we have a zoomed out picture—God created them...male and female he created them—and this was very good...

In chapter 2—we zoom in a little bit...

Adam named the animals—still after all of that—he did not find a suitable helper...

So God caused Adam to fall asleep—out of Adam's rib—God created Eve...

AND when Adam saw Eve—he knew immediately—this is the one for me...
His hormones were flying off the chart...

"This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called 'woman,' for she was taken from man." This is why a

man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they became one flesh. Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

Genesis 2:23-24 (CSB)

We have the institution of marriage spelled out for us in the second chapter of the Bible...

One man—One woman---leaving father/mother—coming together to pursue each other as man and wife...husband and wife...

He had already given them the encouragement and command to go forth and be fruitful...multiply...

Sex was in the PICTURE from the beginning...

AND SEX was a GIFT—a GOOD GIFT—

That is to be celebrated and cherished and enjoyed within the marriage union...

AND this too—is very good...

From the beginning—

God set out the norm...

Male and Female—the norm...good

Man and wife—the norm...good

AND Jesus confirmed this when he restated what was said in the book of Genesis...

Jesus was asked a question about divorce...

And Jesus' response goes right to Genesis 1 and 2

Haven't you read...that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female...For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Matthew 9:4-6a (CSB)

© 2023 Sammy Elliott

Published with permission for Baptists Preaching column on www.baptiststandard.com

Nature tells us male and female—is God's created order...intent and order...

Just look at the animal world—

Male and female sex—is the created order

Humans have tried to change this...have tried to change the order...

Therefore God delivered them over in the desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. For this reason God delivered them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men...

Romans 1:24-27 (CSB)

Exchanged natural for the unnatural (that is contrary to nature)

Again—

I'm not saying that folks don't have emotions and feelings for the same sex...real emotions...real attraction...

But I am saying—that we don't throw away the natural so fast...we don't go contrary to nature so fast...

And by the way—that includes more than just transgenderism and homosexuality...

Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,...

1 Corinthians 6:9b (CSB)

Sexually Immoral—

This a broad term—comes from the Greek Word—Pornos...

Yes—this is the word we use to get pornography...

BUT

This is a wide net—that includes all sexual activity OUTSIDE of God's design...God's plan...

Outside of marriage (before marriage...adulterous affair in the marriage)

Includes pornography...

Anything outside God's design in nature...

Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on elements of the world, rather than Christ.

Colossians 2:8 (CSB)

So this is God's intent:

We were created male and female...rooted in biology—we are a race of males and females

We were created to enjoy the gift of sex in the marriage relationship between male and female—We were created—by nature—that way...

A Big Timeout:

What makes this topic worse...

And specifically in the area of transgenderism and homosexuality is that there has been so much judgment and hate directed toward these folks—from the church...

© 2023 Sammy Elliott

Published with permission for Baptists Preaching column on www.baptiststandard.com

That is a shame...

If you have gender dysphoria and feel like you are trapped in the wrong body...

If you are gay—and attracted to people of your sex...

You matter to God—

Created in His Image...

Dearly Loved by Him...

Enough love that Jesus died on the cross for you...

YOU ARE DEARLY LOVED by God...

YOU MATTER TO GOD

AND

I want you to know that You Matter to me...

Bacon Heights is a church that has been known for being a church full of love and grace...

A church where people can come messed up...hurt...scarred...with all the baggage...

And typically—a church who has her arms opened wide—

Ready to love...ready to demonstrate grace...ready to demonstrate kindness...

Leslie was born a girl and from the time she was four years old, she experienced life as a boy. Leslie felt like a boy, dressed like a boy, played like a boy. At the age of 4 she proclaimed that Wonder Woman was going to be her wife and they would have super powered children.

Leslie also remembers loving Jesus with all of her heart at an early young age. Her earliest memories were of the church nursery and Sunday School and she always knew that she was a beloved child

of God. She cannot remember a time when God's truth was not an integral part of her life.

But as she aged she found it harder and harder to fit in. She started to feel a keenly distance and difference between herself and other girls—she couldn't relate to her emerging womanhood. As they spent hours putting on makeup, styling their hair, talking about boys—she could not have been more disinterested. Like most people wrestling with her gender identity—Leslie was wrestling with this alone. No one to talk to. No one to listen. No one seemed to care. She sank into dark periods of depression. Suicidal thoughts quickly followed.

Finally, Leslie summoned the courage to go to her pastor for help. Leslie explained her dysphoria to him hoping for some pastoral guidance. Instead, he kindly escorted her out the back door of his offices and told her to never come back again. And as you can imagine—she didn't. She didn't step foot in a church for the next 18 years. She hated Christians and especially pastors from that point on.

People need love...they need community. And if they can't find it in the church—they will search for it elsewhere. Leslie found that love and acceptance in the LGBTQ community. She fell in love with a woman named Sue and they got married. Sue had a rare disease where her hands shook. One night she went outside for a smoke—and her hands were shaking so bad that as she was lighting the cigarette, she accidentally lit herself on fire. Leslie was inside doing the dishes as she heard Sue screaming outside. Sue died three days later.

The crushing below of losing someone she loved was just unbearable. In a dazed state, Leslie tried to find a church to do Sue's funeral. After not stepping into a church for 18 years, she

called the only church she was aware of which was a church that Sue served in in years past. It was a conservative church in town.

She was finally able to reach one of the pastors she said—Hi—my name is Leslie. My wife just died. We're lesbians. But I want to know if you would please do my wife's funeral.

The pastor did not say—Well let me think about that. He didn't say—well—maybe but you need to first know where we stand on these issues. No with compassion and conviction he just said we would be honored to serve you during this time of grief. He went on to say I'm so sorry for your loss. You must be truly grieving right now—I can't imagine what it would be to lose a loved one. So please—Leslie—let us take care of all the details of the funeral. And whatever you need—let us love you through your pain.

The church then surrounded her with love. Something Leslie had never felt from Christians. It was this simple embodiment of Christian kindness that altered the trajectory of Leslie's life from that point on. She began once again to have a passion for Jesus and brought Leslie back to Christ in faith.

Those who know her today say that Leslie is one of the most beautiful, compassionate, Christ-like people they have ever met. She may still struggle with aspects of her dysphoria—perhaps even to the day she dies. But she has brought that under the leadership of Christ and is fleshing out of life in a way that honors him.

As I read that story awhile back...I had two initial thoughts...

First...

Thank God for a pastor...Thank God for a church who demonstrated love...when most churches have typically demonstrated judgment and hate.

Take a poll of folks in the LGBTQ community of what they think about the church—and it is NOT good...this does NOT poll well for the church.

Yes—there is a MAJOR disagreement in lifestyles and beliefs... BUT what we also see is a lot of rhetoric of hate...rhetoric of judgment... What you see—so much of the time—is ANYTHING but LOVE...

AND
Yet—the church has been called to LOVE and to LOVE WELL... In fact—it is even part of our vision...to love as Jesus loved...

I'm glad there was a pastor who said—yes—how can I serve you during this time of loss and time of grief...

I'm glad there was a church who stepped up and surrounded her with love/compassion/kindness...

If we pattern our love for others after the love that Christ had for others...

We will LOVE outside of our comfort zone...Jesus did

We will LOVE outside of our belief zone...Jesus did

We will LOVE when it's easy—and love when it's hard—Jesus did

We will LOVE...

- Generously—pour out love like we will never run out
- Selflessly—understanding that it is NOT about us—it is NEVER about us
- Extravagantly—
- Sacrificially—love and then some—second mile type of love

May it be said of the church...May it be said of THIS church—Bacon Heights Church...

Man—the love in that church...the love that that church demonstrates...is out of this world...

Indescribable type of love...

It's long and high—wide and deep...

AND

They don't agree with everything that I believe...

They don't line up with everything I confess...

BUT

Their love is OUT OF THIS WORLD...

Bacon Heights Baptist Church—

Let's Love That...

EVERYONE...

Everyone who walks through those doors—LOVE THEM LIKE THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN LOVED BEFORE...

AND

Those who would never even think about walking through the doors of a church---

Let's LOVE THEM LIKE THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN LOVED BEFORE...

WHICH

Means—to love those folks—who won't darken the door of the church—well

We will have to LOVE them OUTSIDE these doors...

OUT THERE—Some other time than Sunday morning—LOVE...

I'm glad Leslie found a pastor...Leslie found a church—that demonstrated that type of LOVE...

Second...

Leslie found herself at a place where she is fleshing out her life in a way that honors Christ...

And that really is the bottom line in following Christ...in every area of LIFE—not just in the area of sex...

BUT

Yes—also in the area of sex...

- To the person who has an orientation—and I believe many times it is an orientation of being sexually attracted to the same sex...
- To the person who has a dysphoria—feeling like you are trapped in the wrong body...

To you—I would want to ask—

How are you going to live in a way with that orientation or with that dysphoria?

In a way that honors Christ or in a way that dishonors Christ.

By the way—

- that question could be asked of the married husband who is feeling drawn to have an affair on his wife...
- That question could be asked to the college student or single young professional who is dating and really likes this person—and is being tempted beyond to have sex before marriage
- That question could be asked of the man or woman who feels tempted to click on that website to see pics of naked women or men...

How are you going to live in a way with that temptation...

In a way that honors Christ or in a way that dishonors Christ.

God loves you as a person—made in the image of God—created in His image...

And there is an acceptance of you as a person and the real struggles you face...

BUT that does not mean that there is a blanket affirmation of the various ways you can respond to those struggles you face

Here's what Jesus wants for all of us...

He wants to heal everything and anything that is broken...

AND

We are all sexually broken in one way or another and we all need Christ to bear on that brokenness...

We are all spiritually disabled and things in our life that are not as they should be...this is not the way it is supposed to be...

Our brokenness is not immoral but we have moral choices in how we respond to that brokenness...

In my brokenness—in this area of sex and sexuality—and beyond this area of sexuality...

BUT in my brokenness—

HOW WILL I LIVE?

WHAT WILL I CHOOSE?

Choose to honor Christ by my life and my choices...

Choose to dishonor Him by my life and my choices...

One of those paths is...

Rooted in Choice...

Rooted in MY Choice...

BUT the other path is...

Rooted in the Creator...

Rooted in My Creator...

Bacon Heights Church—
May we Love in a way—ALL PEOPLE in a way—that brings
HONOR to our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ...

AND

To the you and me...us as individuals...
Sexually Broken individuals—all of us...
May we decide and choose to live in a way...to respond to our
brokenness in a way that brings HONOR to God...

AND both of those challenges—are for all of us...

To LOVE better...
To RESPOND better...