

Biblical Sexuality Part 1

I said last Sunday I was concerned about the drift from our biblical standards. Even in the church we are more apt to base our decisions on our feelings than on the word of God. We certainly see that in the area of sexual practice and behavior, so we are going to begin a month long series on biblical sexuality. What does the bible say about sex and our sexuality?

The apostle Paul writes, **“We instructed you how to live in order to please God...It is God’s will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God...For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

The bible tells us there is to be a clear distinction between how we behave sexually as followers of Christ and how those who do not know God behave. Our view of human sexuality is informed by the Word of God and our standards are set by His Word and not by our own desire or “passionate lust” as the bible says. It matters how we live and behave sexually! Why? The easy answer is because God says it matters! God’s word says it matters! But we will go a little deeper than that.

I want to share **Four truths about Biblical Sexuality** with you. (As we begin I want to mention a book that has been helpful in preparing this series. *Mere Sexuality*, by Todd Wilson, (Phd, Cambridge) a pastor in Illinois.) I will quote from his book several times. Here is the first biblical truth:

Sexuality matters because what you do with your body sexually can determine your eternal destiny. “Seriously? It’s that important?” Yes, that’s how serious this is! The bible says, **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

I know that may be hard to hear, especially given our culture today, that sex outside of marriage is considered immoral, sinful. Sex is no big thing, right? Everyone is sleeping around. People talk about “hooking up”, referring to casual sex, one night stands. As long as it’s consensual, what’s the problem? “It’s just a bodily function, it’s not a spiritual act, right?”

That's an old heresy the bible dealt with long ago. We are more than just physical beings and sexual acts are more than just physical acts. That is how "those who don't know God" view sexuality but we are followers of Christ. The bible says, **"The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord...Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body."** 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18-20. By saying sex is just a physical act and it doesn't matter as long as it's consensual, people have cheapened a gift God designed and declared was sacred, spiritual, something with the potential of being life-giving, life-creating. Sex is something God gave to be experienced between a man and a woman in the safety of a permanent, one-flesh union where it testifies of God's purpose and covenant relationship with his people. There is a deeper meaning to sexual union than what the world knows. The world has attempted to take God's order, God's design and purpose out of human sexual behavior. The result has made us over-sexed and under satisfied and fulfilled. We have thrown out the plain meaning of Scripture and 2,000 years of church teaching and tradition to go our own way and the result is greater confusion and heartbreak and more broken relationships than ever before.

What you do with your body sexually may be no big deal to those who don't know God, but from God's perspective and consequently from the perspective of a follower of Christ, it's a really big deal. One writer put it like this, "It cannot be overstated how seriously the Bible treats the sin of sexual immorality." (Kevin DeYoung in Todd Wilson). It matters to God so it must matter to us! Sexual sin can separate you from God and send you to hell. That's the stark truth. The second biblical truth about sexuality:

There are two ways to express our sexuality as followers of Christ: God's way in biblical sexuality or sexual immorality. God set a pattern, an order in the word of God. Todd Wilson writes, "There is the way God designed our sexuality to function, and then there is every other way that is disordered and deviates from God's good intentions." The Genesis account of creation tells us God created man in his image, male and female he created them. Then with purpose, which we will talk about next Sunday, God brought man and woman together in the "one-flesh" covenant of marriage. God created us and established this order and design for our well-being, for our good, so human beings could flourish, for procreation and the raising of

children in family, for the well-being of society, all of it according to his design. When we move away from God's design, there is disorder and dysfunction. You would think with all the sexual freedom in our culture to go our own way, to make our own choices, there would be more sexual satisfaction and fulfillment. Instead there is more sexual abuse and addiction, more divorce, less committed relationships, more fatherless children and families, more brokenness and dysfunction at every level. Man's way isn't working. We've ignored God's design for marriage and family and sexuality, we've even changed the definition of marriage and now...

...now we are experiencing something new in our culture as people are being encouraged to openly explore and accept other possibilities, not only in sexual practice, but with regard to gender. What is being called non-binary gender identities, identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine. There are multiple categories and terminology: gender non-conforming, gender bending, cisgender, gender-fluid and several others. What was once diagnosed as gender disorder is now called gender dysphoria. I recognize there are legitimate medical cases that produce gender confusion and those cases must be dealt with carefully and compassionately. My concern is with the cultural deconstruction of sex and gender. From the perspective of biblical sexuality, the gender distinction of female and male is something God designed and is to be embraced, celebrated, and appreciated not ignored or denied as oppressive or restrictive. Are we broken by the fall and do some people struggle with these issues? Yes. But aren't we wise to embrace God's design and look for his grace rather than surrendering to our brokenness and going our own way? Quoting from authors of an article in *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*, "While the fall into sin has created distortions in how femaleness and maleness are experienced and expressed, living in the time of grace means that we must seek to redeem gender and sexuality in harmony with God's intentions." (Quoted in Yarhouse, p.49)

The idea that gender doesn't matter pushes against the idea that we were created by God and in his image as male and female. One article I read referred to "the absurd notion that only two possible body types exist, male and female, with only two genders linked to them, man and woman." The author argued for the need to conquer such ideas to "show us the path to a new paradigm that will allow as many bodies, sexualities and identities to exist as those living in this world might wish to have, with each one of them respected, desired, celebrated." (Quoted in Yarhouse p51). It is sad and at the same time dangerous because it says God's design, God's order is restrictive. It is the same argument first heard in the garden. "You won't die. Go ahead

and make your choices and ignore God's design. You know best for you." We can see where that got Adam and Eve and all of us! Beware the argument of the serpent!

God's ways and intentions for us are best. God's way, biblical sexuality calls us to fidelity, to sexual purity and chastity. God's way calls us to a re-affirmation of gender distinctiveness, that God created us male and female, there was divine purpose in that and we can learn to celebrate the difference and distinctiveness rather than curse it. Our calling to follow Jesus calls us to embrace God's intention, his plan, his way, his purpose. It calls us to biblical sexuality for our eternal good.

Look again at the passage we read from 1 Corinthians 6, **"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

In this passage Paul flags several sinful practices that shut us out of the Kingdom of God. The phrase "sexually immoral" is from the Greek word *pornos* which is an umbrella term for sexual sin. It's often translated as fornication, referring to engaging in sex outside of marriage. You may recognize *pornos* as sounding familiar, the word from which we get our word "pornography". Sexual intercourse outside of marriage, pre-marital sex, pornography, homosexual practice, adultery, participating in any or all of these things Paul says will prevent us from inheriting the kingdom of God. Choosing our own way rather than God's way, celebrating our brokenness rather than pursuing God's holiness and purity will only lead to more brokenness and separation from God and his grace. It will ultimately exclude us from the kingdom of God! It's that serious. Todd Wilson writes, "The point is that there are not just shades of gray but a stark moral clarity. For the Christian who wants to live faithfully in this world, there are only two options: sexual immorality or mere [biblical] sexuality." Todd Wilson

Here is the third truth for us concerning biblical sexuality. **Sexual sins aren't the only serious sins.** All sin is serious because sin separates us from God. Notice Paul didn't only mention sexual sin and this isn't the only list of sins in his writings. He mentions greed, idolatry, slanderers and swindlers, thieves and drunkards, those engaged in habitual, sinful living. The church has been accused of condemning homosexuality while excusing other sexual sins. I would have to agree in some cases. We've condemned homosexuality but excused adultery and

multiple divorces and marriages, we wink at pornography and dismiss living together as just what people do now days. Sin is still sin. Quoting Todd Wilson once again he writes, “...**all of these sins are put on a level playing field at least in this one respect: they are equally damning if they become a pattern of behavior in our lives. Biblical integrity calls us to take sin seriously, not to fixate on the sins we dislike while accommodating others.**” ... **Todd Wilson.**

We have all sinned! To approach sexual sin with our finger pointing at others while excusing our own sinfulness misses the point. We are all sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and grace. Is adultery or homosexual practice or casual sex between non-married people, is that sin? Yes, and so is greed and lying and gluttony and gossip and lusting after someone in your heart. Does that make any sin less grievous? No, of course not. It points us all to our need of forgiveness and the salvation we find in Christ. My reason for preaching this series is not to give you ammunition to use against people engaged in a particular sexual sin or to help you win arguments, rather it’s to point us to Jesus and the hope all of us find in him. Which brings me to the fourth truth of Biblical sexuality:

Although we are sexually broken, we can be made whole through Jesus Christ. I would dare say everyone has struggled in some way with issues of sexual purity. In that sense, we can say we are all sexually broken. We’ve all struggled and sinned but there is good news. Look at the next verse in that passage from 1 Corinthians 6. **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

Here is the good news: in Christ, though we are broken, we can be made whole. “Such were some of you”, Paul says. He knew his audience. I can say it about us today, “Such were some of us, but we have been washed and sanctified and cleansed and justified and made whole by Jesus and his saving grace.”

Wherever you've struggled, wherever you've failed, whatever you've done, however broken you may feel, there is healing and forgiveness and cleansing and deliverance and hope for you in Jesus.

Knowing this, that we've all sinned and that sexual wholeness and healing comes through God's grace and not by our own efforts alone makes us approach others with compassion rather than condemnation. I'm not here to condemn you but to call you to choose God's way, to call you to surrender to Him and his better plan for you. I'm not suggesting this is easy. The way of the cross is not easy. I know to follow the Lord in obedience, to live according to this way of biblical sexuality is asking you to go against the trends of the day and even against your own desire. Please hear me. I'm not saying, "So just stop sinning. Just stop having same sex attractions. Just stop having feelings of gender confusion. Try harder." It's not that simple, for any of us. We are talking about putting to death the desire of our flesh, but we are also talking about deciding to live a life of obedience to Jesus and in him there is freedom and hope.

Remember that verse we read at the beginning from 1 Thessalonians, about living in order to please God? That's what this is about. Living in a way that pleases God because in doing so there is eternal life and wholeness and understanding and completeness and peace and purpose and value in life you won't find by going your own way, doing it your way. And I'm saying you don't have to do this alone. I'm not telling you to just act differently, I'm telling you to choose to surrender your life, including your sexuality and all of its expression to Jesus. Let's ask for his mercy, his grace, his wisdom and his help to live the life he has called us to live, holy and honorable, and fully surrendered to Jesus.