

Biblical Sexuality Part 3

This is the third message in a four part series on Biblical Sexuality. I've referenced this passage from 1 Thessalonians in the previous messages. Paul writes, **“Finally brothers and sisters we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living...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/her own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or sister or take advantage of him/her. The Lord will punish men/women for all such sins as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

God's call to holiness and sexual purity is for all of us, men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, married or single. We are called to flee sexual immorality and live a disciplined, holy and honorable life. What does the bible mean by sexual immorality?

The word most often translated as sexual immorality in the New Testament is *porneia*. It derives from a word meaning to sell off. It means a selling off or surrendering of sexual purity. It's a broad term that refers to all sexual activity outside of marriage. As we said last Sunday, sex is for marriage. It belongs within that “one-flesh” covenant of marriage between husband and wife. I won't take time to try to explain the reasons why since we covered that last week, but let me say again God created and designed sex and he set the boundaries and parameters for its use. The bible makes it clear it belongs in marriage, so any sexual expression outside of marriage, whether pre-marital sex, casual sex, co-habitation, whether heterosexual or homosexual behavior, the bible considers it to be outside of God's design and order. It is sexually immoral and according to the scripture such behavior places you under God's judgment and punishment.

My goal is to explain what God's word has to say about sexuality and to point all of us to Jesus and to his forgiveness and his healing, saving and sustaining grace. I'm not saying one kind of sexual sin is worse than another. I'm not pointing a finger at anyone or any group, but simply trying to “instruct you how to live in order to please God.” Let me add, being tempted to sin sexually is not sin. To be attracted to someone of the same sex is not a sin nor is being sexually attracted to someone of the opposite sex. It is what we do with the temptation, the attraction that determines sin. God's word calls us to purity, to abstain from sexual sin and control our bodies in ways that are in keeping with his commands, holy and honorable. That's

how we are to live, single, married, gay or straight. With that said, I want to look at some of the most frequent objections to God's commands concerning sexual immorality and because homosexuality and same sex marriage has become a point of division within the church world, I want to begin with a look at what the bible says about homosexuality. (Let me mention, if you want to look deeper into what the bible has to say about homosexuality, I would recommend Robert Gagnon's book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* by **Robert Gagnon**. Also, *Homosexuality and the Bible, Two Views* by **Dan Via and Robert Gagnon**. We have referenced *Mere Sexuality* by **Todd Wilson** and also, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* by **Kevin DeYoung**.)

Does the bible really condemn homosexual acts? Yes it does. There are perhaps ten or twelve passages of Scripture that can be said to reference homosexual acts. Everywhere it is mentioned in Scripture, it is condemned as sin and outside of God's will. The Old Testament passages most often quoted are found in Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 20. **“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 18:22** God isn't just pointing out this one sin. The entire chapter of Leviticus 18 deals with unlawful sexual relations. Prohibitions against incest, adultery, bestiality and homosexuality are all included in that chapter.

The Scripture condemns homosexual acts, but the objection to this passage is, “It's in the Old Testament, in Leviticus no less, and there are a lot of things the Old Testament forbids that Christians do today. Doesn't it say we aren't supposed to eat shrimp and pork, and we aren't to mix fabric on garments or get tattoos. So isn't this just another one of those laws we ignore?”

There are three categories of Old Testament laws: civil, ceremonial, moral. We don't live under the civil laws of the biblical nation of Israel. We don't forgive debt on the year of jubilee, we don't stone people for picking up sticks on the Sabbath. We don't live under the ceremonial laws of the covenant God made with Israel because Jesus has provided for us a better covenant. That covenant was pointing to and testifying of Jesus. But we do still live under the moral code of the Old Testament, including the ten commandments and the sexual prohibitions in part because the moral code of the Old Testament was affirmed in the New Testament.

There are eight lists in the New Testament of vices that disqualify us from the Kingdom of God and sexual immorality is part of every list, affirming the Leviticus holiness code. For instance, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, **“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...will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were..." 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. He was writing to Gentiles in Corinth that had engaged in all kinds of sexual sin, but it was clear the expectation was that as believers and followers of Christ, they would no longer engage in sexual sin, including homosexual behavior.

The apostle Paul affirms this biblical prohibition of homosexual acts in Romans. **"God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men..." Romans 1:26-27**

Some argue Paul was referring to homosexual rape and that he knew nothing about committed same-sex relationships. If that is what Paul meant, why didn't he say that? The truth is, the ancient world did know about committed same-sex relationships and yet they were condemned. Repeatedly the New Testament church condemned sexual immorality including same sex sexual behavior.

It is important to note that as the church began to include both Jews and Gentiles, there was concern among leaders because the Gentile world was known for its sexual immorality in comparison to the stricter Jewish holiness laws. When it became apparent that God's grace was being shown to the gentiles, like the believers in Corinth, the Jewish leaders of the church didn't require circumcision of the gentile men or the keeping of all the dietary laws, but they did require they abstain from sexual immorality. The church insisted on sexual purity. The prohibition concerning incest, adultery, homosexuality, co-habitation, sexual immorality of all kinds is still in place.

But what about the argument that says "It's not wrong because we love each other." What's wrong with consensual sex between two people who love each other, regardless of sexual orientation? The bible makes no distinction between "loving" and "unloving" sexual relations. The only biblical distinction is between married and unmarried and again that is referring to the biblical definition of marriage between one man and one woman. Sex outside of biblical marriage is sexual immorality. "But we love each other!" If you love someone, why would you want to involve them in sexual behavior that places them outside of God's will and disqualifies

them from inheriting the kingdom of God? Love one another then in a way that pleases God and that means abstaining from sexual behavior unless you are husband and wife!

Another objection is, “Jesus never said anything against homosexuality.” Jesus never said a lot of things but that doesn’t mean they are okay. In fact, Jesus was certainly not reluctant to speak out when he disagreed with the moral code or biblical interpretation of the day. His silence about homosexual behavior actually would indicate his agreement with the rabbinic teaching which condemned homosexual behavior along with the other sexual sins mentioned in Leviticus. He saw no need to comment.

What did Jesus have to say about sexual sin? Does he care? He actually took what was already a pretty narrow Jewish definition of sexual expression and made it even more narrow. **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Matthew 5:27-30**

“What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean.” Mark 7:20-23

“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness and marries another woman commits adultery.” Matthew 19:8-9

For Jesus, a first century Jew, his reference to sexual immorality would have been based on the Levitical law prohibiting incest, adultery, homosexual behavior, promiscuity, bestiality. He uses that word, *porneia* again, referring to sexual behavior outside of the biblical definition of marriage between a man and a woman. Allow me to quote from Robert Gagnon’s book *Homosexuality and the Bible, Two Views*. “Jesus was virtually without peer in his radical insistence on limiting the number of lifetime sex partners to one. His saying about adultery of the heart severely constrained not only behavior but also thoughts. So seriously did he take sexual immorality that he told people that it was better to cut off the offending body part than to

have the whole person thrown into hell. Most pro-homosexual advocates feel certain that Jesus would never have denied a sexual relationship to two exclusive homosexuals in love with one another. In view of Jesus' unprecedented narrowing of the range of legitimate sexual intercourse, it is hard to think of someone for whom the consideration of 'sexual starvation' as a basis for violating a biblical sex norm would have had less impact." Robert Gagnon

Jesus made it plain he believed what the bible says about sexual immorality. He calls us to sexual purity. He speaks of lewdness and evil thoughts as sexual sin. Pornography, filling your mind with images and thoughts that are against God's will and design. Speaking and acting in ways that are sexually inappropriate toward others. Jesus says all these things make us unclean, impure and he tells us in Matthew 5 that it is the pure in heart that will see God.

But how did he treat sexual sinners? There are three stories in the gospels that give us an idea of his response. The sinful woman in Luke 7:36 that anointed his feet with her tears and perfume; the woman caught in adultery in John 8 and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. In each of these, Jesus didn't reject or refuse them, but openly engaged them, shocking his host and the disciples, speaking and interacting with them, obviously motivated by concern and a desire to see their lives turned around. In each instance he didn't excuse their sin or try to justify or dismiss it. He acknowledged their sin but then forgave them, calling them to repentance. To repent means to turn around and go a new direction. "Go and sin no more" was his instruction. Go, your sins are forgiven, but don't go back to a life of immorality. Live a pure life.

Another objection. "We're under grace not the law. The bible says there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, so since I've repented and believe in him, it's okay that I'm living with my boyfriend or girlfriend, or it's ok we are having sex." What does that passage say you just quoted? **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."** Look on down in this passage. Those who are in Christ Jesus **"...who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God..."** Romans 8:1-9

We are talking about living in a way that pleases God remember and he calls us to avoid sexual immorality. He calls us to sexual purity, to live in a way that is holy and honorable. Are

you living according to the old, sinful nature, or are you living according to the Holy Spirit and what He desires for you? You can't please God if you are living in sexual sin!

John 1 says **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” John 1:14** The word became flesh. Everything I've been trying to say about living a pure life and abstaining from sexual sin, it's not just a bunch of verses and proof texts taken from the bible to build a case. All of this was fleshed out for us and was lived out before us in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived a sinless life, tempted in all the same ways we are tempted, with the same sexual drives and desires, but he chose to remain obedient to God's word. He showed us what it means to be fully human, to live a fulfilled, yet sexually chaste and pure life. Todd Wilson wrote, "...we don't have to engage in sexual activity to be fully human. The life of the Son of God makes that perfectly clear.”

John says of Jesus we have seen him, full of grace and truth. He speaks truth to us, calling us to purity and holiness. And that truth is painful. I wish I could throw the doors open and tell you it doesn't matter, live as you please. I wish I could tell my friends and family that are gay or lesbian that it doesn't matter, but that is not the truth I see in the Scripture. Jesus speaks truth. His word is truth. But we also find grace when we look to Jesus and his grace is there to forgive and to cleanse us, to keep us holy and pure. In our brokenness if we come to him and accept and embrace his truth and then ask for his forgiveness, there is grace to heal our brokenness, grace to pardon and cleanse, grace to carry us through!

I get it that I'm asking a hard thing, that Jesus is calling us to a hard thing. Death on the cross, death to self and our fleshly nature and desire is difficult, but there is resurrection beyond that. We die to self and there is resurrection and resolution.

Allow me to conclude by reading a passage from Todd Wilson's book *Mere Sexuality*. Wilson is referencing and quoting from Wesley Hill from his book *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Page 56-59.

May we accept and embrace his call to purity and by his grace live holy and honorable lives.