

Discipleship in Real Life

Week 3 - Jesus + Sex

All right well good evening! Awesome to see so many of you here tonight! We are in week 3 of our discipleship in real life class. And we have had some awesome discussions together...talking about the cost of following Jesus, considering what it means to surrender to him in every aspect of life and also last week talking about our finances. How do we follow God with our money? So I've been encouraged see you wrestling with these questions.

Tonight we are going to talk about sex, specifically what is a Biblical view of sex and sexuality. So here's the thing, tonight is going to work a lot better if we are all open and honest with one another...I know for some of you, churches you grew up in or Christians just didn't talk about sex. And so it might feel uncomfortable to be in a church discussing sex but for me I go "Where else do we talk about it? The church should be the place where we engage our cultures ideas of sex and sexuality and as Christians we need to openly discuss these things in stead of just trying to wade through the messages our cultures gives us. So you need to hear, I do not embarrass easily, this is what we tell all of our pre-marital couples and any question is completely legitimate tonight.

I thought to start it would be good around your tables to take 5 minutes or so and answer the following questions:

1. When did you first hear about sex? (have it explained to you?)
2. Who explained it to you? (parents/teachers/friends?)
3. Growing up was sex taught in a negative or positive way?

A Biblical Definition

Okay so tonight we want to talk about 3 views of sex that are prevalent in our culture and how the Bible speaks to all 3 of them. But first I thought it would be good to lay out a Biblical definition of sex just so as we engage these cultural views we know where we're coming from.

The Biblical view of sex is that it is a gift to be enjoyed only between 1 man and 1 woman in the context of a marriage covenant. Genesis 2:24 is really clear about this. Adam has been created, God looks at him and says it not good for him to be alone, so he creates Eve as a helper for him and then what takes place really is the first wedding and verse 24 says: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Now it's interesting because the word "flesh" here actually goes so far beyond just your physical body....becoming one flesh means the personal union of a man and woman at all levels of their lives. It is so profound that according to the Bible they virtually become a new, single person. They are a single legal, social, economic unit. They lose a lot of their independence and in love they devote themselves, wholly, to the other.

When the Bible calls marriage "one flesh", it means that sex is understood as both a sign of that personal, legal union and a way to accomplish it. Tim Keller says this: "The Bible says don't unite with someone physically unless you are also willing to unite with the person

emotionally, personally, socially, economically, and legally. Don't become physically naked and vulnerable to the other person without becoming vulnerable in every other way."

This is sex defined by the Bible. To take place in the covenant relationship of marriage between 1 man and 1 woman. Now our culture has very very different standards and views on sex. And like I said we want to look at 3 views and how the Bible speaks to them. Now it is interesting because many people reject Christianity because of its teachings. So its not necessarily theology or doctrine that turn people off of Jesus but what Christianity says about sex and money and life. Many people find the Bibles teachings on sex oppressive, antiquated, and needing to be abandoned. It is seen as old-fashioned or outdated and obviously we as a culture have evolved much further than when the Bible was written and we can't be expected to follow what it says.

In our culture people do not want any restrictions on their sex life and for many people they view that as an interference of their human rights. And it has to do with the individualism and worship of our autonomous self. I deserve rights and the Bible is interfering with my basic human rights. There is an assumption in our culture, and it is a completely false assumption, but an assumption that God is anti-sex. That God hates sex and Christians hate sex and the Bible teaches anti-sexuality. Now the truth is that sex is one of the great joys of being a human beings and we don't usually equate God with joy and pleasure. Most people see God as a mean old man putting restrictions and rules on our lives and we usually don't view God as being about our joy and pleasure.

This has led to 3 myths about sex that we want to cover tonight. And then like I said, how does the Bible speak into those 3 myths. So the myths are: sex as bad, sex as god, and sex as appetite. So just so you know where we are going, I want to explain the culture's view of each of these myths, where they came from, and then what the Bible actually says.

1. Sex as bad

The first myth is that sex is bad. And unfortunately the church has often preached and taught this view. And I can remember that this was my experience in youth group and growing up through high school. It is almost as if the church focused on all of the negative things that could happen in order to scare us into remaining virgins. I remember youth nights where it was "don't have sex because it's bad....you'll get pregnant or get an STD....God doesn't want you to have sex" Sex is taught as this bad thing or even worse churches or Christians just refuse to talk about it all and remain blissfully ignorant.

Now this is not a new phenomenon and in the history of the church there have been those who have had a "sex-as-bad" view.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) - taught that intercourse was sin except when it was done to make babies.

Origen (AD 185-254) - so concerned about sexual immorality that he castrated himself.

Chrysostom (AD 347-407) - taught that Adam and Eve couldn't have sex before the Fall.

Augustine (AD 354-430) - taught that sexuality was a form of animalistic lust.

So this view of sexuality is not new. Even the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 was dealing with this kind of view. The church in Corinth was dealing with some weird sexual sin (a son sleeping with his step-mother) and because of that the view that sex was bad was seeping into the church. And Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 which says: "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' Okay so this was the mindset....look at the sexual sin we see so the answer must be sex is bad and a man should not have sexual relations with a woman.

What is Paul's answer? "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourself to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

What is Paul saying here? Paul is saying husbands and wives should be having lots of sex. Paul is saying no sex is not bad and in fact couples need to be fulfilling that sexual desire in one another. The husband for the wife and the wife for the husband. I love that he says "fellows you actually don't own your body anymore, your wife does. And ladies you don't own your body anymore your husband does." So don't deprive one another of sex. I love that he says even if you decide to not to have sex so you can focus on prayer, make sure you have sex again!! So that Satan doesn't tempt you.

A question that maybe some of you are having and are too afraid to ask is "How regularly should we be having sex as a couple?" On average, married couples have sex 58 times a year....so roughly once a week. And 15% of married couples have not had sex in the past 6 months - a year. The Bible does not give a specific number but clearly Paul is pointing to the importance of it. And Martin Luther famously said: "Twice a week seems to be enough to stave off the Tempter."

The Bible is very pro-sex when it comes to husbands and wives. And sex does serve a number of purposes, one of them being procreation but actually the main purpose in the Bible for husbands and wives to have sex is pleasure.

Deuteronomy 24:5 - "When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken."

Proverbs 5:18-19 - "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love."

Song of Solomon 7:7-8 - "Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit." (the Songs of Solomon was seen as so smutty and explicit, Jewish boys were not allowed to read it until they reached a certain age)

Song of Solomon 7:2 - "Your belly is a heap of wheat..." Guys do not compliment your wives like this.

This is how the Bible talks about sex...that it is not a bad thing. It is an incredible gift to be enjoyed and celebrated in marriage. God designed us for pleasure. Christians need to redeem sex in a way that celebrates it as a gift to the glory of God. This changes how we teach our kids about it...that first off we do talk to our kids about sex...and how it is amazing and how God designed it for marriage and flourishing...not simply scare our kids into remaining virgins but help them to see the incredible vision God has for sex within a marriage. So sex as bad does not hold up to the Biblical view.

2. Sex as god

The second predominant view of sex in our culture is sex as god. And this is massive... we live in a very over-sexualized culture where sex has been taken from being a good thing to being the ultimate good thing....and really our culture worships sex as a god.

Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood said this: "Sexual liberation is the only method to finding inner peace and security and beauty. Remove the constraints and prohibitions, which now hinder the release of inner energies and, most of the larger evils of society will perish. Through sex, mankind will attain the great spiritual illumination, which will transform the world and light up the only path to an earthly paradise."

That is worshiping sex as a god. And this is why sex is seen as the ultimate thing to chase after. Sex is in our magazines, on television, in movies, in books, in the music we listen to...messages about sex being the most important thing in life are everywhere. And really it is not a new message. People worshiped sex since the beginning and that is why there are over 65 warnings in the New Testament about the dangers of sexual immorality. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 says: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God."

A massive indicator of our worship of sex is the pornography industry. Porn is a \$60 billion dollar a year industry. 90% of children aged 8-16 have viewed pornography. 80% of issues in marriage counselling are pornography related. It is affecting our view of sex and being worshipped as the ultimate aim of mankind.

Now we need to ask when the Bible talks about sexual immorality what does that mean? Are Christians just being too uptight? Is the Bible outdated? Because actually there is no verse in the Bible that says: "Don't have sex before marriage." But here's the thing the Bible doesn't need to say that because all of the other verses about sex and marriage clearly show its intention to be enjoyed in marriage.

The word sexual immorality used over 65 times in the NT is what we call a "junk drawer" term. The greek word is "porneia" (where we get the word pornography from) and it means anything that causes sexual arousal outside of marriage....it is a catch-all term meaning anything outside of the Biblical covenant of marriage is sin. And Christians and people try and play tricky games of "oral sex isn't sex" (Bill Clinton made this argument famous) but the Bible says sexual immorality (any type of sexual arousal or pleasure outside of marriage is sin).

This would often come up when I was working with teens because they would ask "How far can I go?" How far can we go before it's a sin....what's the line...and the Bible really does

answer there is no line. And how I would explain it to them is this....you're asking the wrong question...how far can I go is such a wrong question to ask. Imagine that there is a bonfire blazing over there....and you are doused in gasoline...you could ask "How close can I get to that fire before I catch on fire...." But why on earth would you play games like that....and with sex were asking the wrong question when we try and justify our actions as not sin or see how close we can get to sin without it being sin....

So how do we demythologize sex? How do show people that sex isn't god but was designed by a good God who gave us it to point to himself. Behind the things we worship (sex, money, comfort) is a good God who wants to use those things as pointers to him. So as Christians I think a way that demythologize sex is explaining the context in which God gave sex to us....upholding the Biblical view of sex at all cost....modelling a healthy sex life. (being open and not shying away from talking about it - madly loving your spouse and serving them and really living as one flesh in all areas of life).

And lastly I think how Christians live as singles is a massive testament to our culture about a healthy view of sex. In our culture being single is seen as a bad thing or as a way to pursue sexual desires without responsibilities attached to them. But the Biblical view of singleness is much bigger....

Matthew 19:10-12 - "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.'"

1 Corinthians 7:7-9 - "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry."

The Bible upholds singleness as a blessed way to live life....being single is not a curse and I think one of the ways Christians can redeem a Biblical view of sex in our culture is how our singles live. The ultimate way to challenge the dominant ideologies of our culture, single or married, is to live in such a way that shows Jesus, not sex or any other temporary pleasure as our ultimate satisfaction.

So sex as god doesn't work...sex is a gift from a good God designed to be a pointer to him.

3. Sex as appetite

The third view in our culture is that sex is an appetite. Just like being hungry and thirsty is an appetite, sex is just an urge we need to satisfy. Your hungry so you eat, your thirsty so you drink and your horny so you have sex.

Paul confronts this thinking in 1 Corinthians 6:13-20.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality - but for the Lord. Sex is not just an physical appetite.

Vs. 15-16 - Sex is so much more than just a physical act...Paul is saying don't you know that if you have sex with a prostitute you are becoming one flesh with her. Sex is not just a physical urge but it actually engages the whole person - emotions, body, soul. This is why Paul says to flee sexual immorality....don't even dabble in it...because sex is not just an urge or an appetite.

Sex is supposed to be other-centred, not self-centred. Now here is where a lot of people push back in our culture and say "That's so restrictive!!" but what they aren't realizing is that those restrictions are actually for our flourishing...fish are restricted to water but its only when they are in water that they are free to flourish...if you take a fish out of water it will die...so yes they are restricted to water but its life.

This is why Paul says in verse 18 that every other sin a person commits is outside the body but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. God puts these restrictions on sex within marriage because he knows the damage that comes when sex takes place outside of that. Physically how it actually rewires and messes your brain up when you have multiple partners or look at pornography. How emotionally it is devastating outside of marriage where trust and vulnerability can take place. Spiritually how damaging it is because sex is literally two becoming one including a spiritual aspect of that. Sex is not just an appetite or an urge to be filled.

Conclusion

The job of Christians is to redeem the cultures we live in. Redeem sex to its rightful place. Not as bad....not as a god...and not as an appetite but an incredible gift that God has given men and women in the covenant of marriage. Sex and marriage are designed to be a living narrative of the gospel...to be a marker or pointer to God...its a gift that points to the giver of the gift. Which is why is Mark 12:25 - "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage..." The reason is not because God has a low view of marriage but we won't need it because we will have someone better....the pointer isn't needed anymore because we get Jesus....I think following Jesus with our sexuality and marriages is pointing people to the reality of what the Bible says...it is teaching our kids the beauty of sex within marriage...teaching them properly about sex. And I think it is confronting our culture's misshapen ideas about sex and showing them the truth with how we live our lives.