

Glorify God with Your Body: Ethics of Sexuality

A Study and Discussion Guide for Digging Deeper

by Keith Stanglin

In this guide, each lesson is summarized in a couple of sentences. Then a longer outline helps viewers follow along some of the main points. Discussion and reflection questions are also provided. Embedded in the discussion questions are instructions for outside reading. Readings without hyperlinks may be downloaded separately.

Episode 1. Introduction

Summary

Sex, always an important topic and a constitutive aspect of what it means to be human, has become a cultural obsession in recent decades. Sadly, Christians and churches have not always done a good job of explaining sexual ethics or dealing with the questions and controversies related to sex.

Outline

First, our modern society is obsessed with sex. Our late modern culture has taken this natural obsession farther than ever before.

How did this happen? The reasons are deep and complex, and this is not the place to dig into all the root causes. In short, elite culture in the West has turned against Christianity, explicitly from the 17th century on. The so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s was one episode in the long revolution and overthrow of standard Christian ethics in Western society.

Second, the church has often failed to speak and act responsibly or helpfully with regard to sex. Christians have not always done a good job of explaining sexual ethics.

On a less drastic but also wider scale, especially in the face of the new anti-Xn sexual culture, Christians can incline to negative talk about sex and engage in scare tactics when warning of its misuse. And perhaps, the most common failure is simply to ignore any talk about sexuality. The topic seems too sensitive or too volatile for a church conversation, or we may feel unqualified to talk about an area where we ourselves mess up so badly.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does it seem like sex has become more of a cultural obsession during your lifetime? If so, in what ways?
2. The topic of sex is frequently avoided in churches. What do you think is the most important but neglected thing that churches should be teaching about matters related to sexuality?
3. How can churches do a better job of welcoming and incorporating single people?

Episode 2. Jesus and the Old Testament Teaching on Sexuality

Summary

Jesus' teaching on sexuality is rooted in the Old Testament—especially the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 and the prohibition of adultery in the Ten Commandments. His teachings and applications on sexuality were generally more rigorous than those of his contemporaries.

Outline

When we as Christians have a question about our faith and practice—in fact, even if an unbeliever inquires about Christian beliefs—we go to Scripture, which is our primary authority for faith and practice. And, as Christians, we are especially keen to know what Jesus Christ taught about any particular issue. See Matthew 19:4-6.

Jesus appealed to Genesis 1-2 to explain not just the way things are, but the way things ought to be, at least when it comes to marriage and sexual relations. See Gen. 1:27-28; 2:20-25.

We should consider what these passages indicate about the purpose of sexual relations. Why is there sex? Scientifically speaking, the sexual act is part of the body's reproductive system. It is for reproduction. The reproductive system is the only human biological system that requires two people to function properly—and not just any two people: one male, and one female. No more, no less. Based on these verses, we can point out three purposes of sexual relations:

- 1) Procreation. Gen. 1:27-28. There's no mystery about the meaning of male and female together: Be fruitful and multiply. Theologically, we are co-creators, participating in and reflecting the *imago Dei*.
- 2) Union. Gen. 2:23-24. There is a separation (from rib/side) and a re-uniting. There is also a social leaving and cleaving; i.e., forming a new social unit. And there is a theological, biblical meaning (Eph. 5:32).
- 3) Intimacy, belonging, pleasure, and enjoyment. A suitable helper, yes in many ways, but also as a sexual partner. Gen. 2:18, 25. Sexual pleasure, at least one's own, is not an end in itself. Sexual pleasure is also not the means to a good or godly marriage. Physical pleasure is part of the natural design. But pleasure can and should go deeper than a momentary physical feeling.

Matthew 5:27-28; 19:10; John 8.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think it is a common idea that Jesus had a relaxed attitude about sex? Where does this idea come from, and why is it so popular?
2. The video notes three purposes of sex. How does a consideration of the purposes help you understand sex and its proper context?
3. Read J. Budziszewski, "[The Natural Laws of Sex](#)." What do you find to be his strongest and most compelling points or arguments?

Episode 3. The Apostle Paul's Teaching on Sexuality

Summary

Like Jesus, the Apostle Paul also took sexual ethics very seriously and rooted his teaching in the creation accounts and the theological meaning of the body. The body is the holy temple of the Holy Spirit, and with it we are to glorify God.

Outline

See 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Some observations about 1 Cor. 6.

One is the repeated phrase, a rhetorical question, that he asks three times: "Do you not know?"

Second, Paul, like Jesus, quotes from Genesis 2 to make a point about the unity of one man and one woman in a sexual relationship.

Third, in this passage, Paul gives a clear and authoritative command: "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). He's not just offering an opinion or something he regards as debatable. The command is strong and unequivocal. Flee means, Don't be near it. Avoid it.

Fourth, notice that Paul gives many reasons to strengthen his authoritative command. In addition to the command, he also offers at least four distinct reasons for fleeing fornication:

- 1) Since God raised Christ's body, he will raise ours, too. So bodies matter, and what you do with the body matters. It says something.
- 2) Since we are members of Christ's body, and since sex has a unitive function (v. 16), we should not unite members of Christ's body with a prostitute. Based on Gen. 2:24
- 3) Your individual, physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Your body is a holy vessel, a sacred sanctuary.
- 4) Your body is not your own. You belong to another Lord and master, so glorify your Lord with your body. Rather than slaves to sin, slaves to the Lord.

See Ephesians 5:3; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 John 5; Ephesians 5:21-33; Genesis 2:24.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you were growing up, were you warned against premarital sex? What reasons were offered in favor of abstinence or sexual purity?
2. What reasons would you give to encourage people to preserve sexual relations for marriage?
3. In what ways are all sins equal? In what ways are some sins more serious than others?
4. What is sexual immorality, and where do you think it fits on the scale of "seriousness"?
5. Read Jeffrey Peterson, "The Nuptial Vision of the Christian Bible and Its Opponents" (see separate attachment). What insights or applications from Scripture are especially striking?

Lesson 4. Modern Challenges to Sexual Ethics

Summary

Just as the emergence of the modern world was characterized by a struggle against traditional Christian thought and practice, the modern secular age has also generated an anti-Christian sexual revolution. In the mid-twentieth century, this revolution was reflected especially in the separation of sex from procreation and marital union, enabled by widespread oral contraception.

Outline

It took a few centuries, but this biblical way of thinking sparked a Christian sexual revolution in late antiquity that differed from the mainstream pagan ways of thinking about and using bodies. For pagan Greco-Roman men, there was little or no expectation of sexual restraint. For Christians, sex was about sin and holiness, and it was especially about the dignity of all persons. So, of course, sex outside marriage, as well as any same-sex practice, were now considered sinful, according to Scripture. Slaves were no longer to be sexual objects. There was now a Christian sexual culture in the West.

So where are we now? The purposes of sex have been disordered. The third purpose, pleasure—now defined as one’s individual physical pleasure—has become the primary or sole reason for sex.

How did this shift happen? Widespread contraception was a major factor. But Scripture says, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Now a healthy couple (even Christian couple) marries and says, “Should we have children?”

What happens if you make individual “pleasure” the goal or main motivation for sex, even in the context of a committed relationship? When “sex primarily/only for pleasure” became the accepted cultural norm for marriage—even for Christian marriage—it planted the seeds for what we now see all around us. It spells the end of a culture of traditional marriage and the beginning of a culture of easy divorce.

Discussion Questions:

1. If our ancestors from 150 years ago time traveled to the present day, what do you suppose would surprise them most about today’s culture of sexuality?
2. Watch the Austin Institute video, “Economics of Sex,” at <https://youtu.be/cO1ifNaNABY>. How has the birth control pill cheapened sex?
3. How does popular culture build unrealistic expectations about sexual relationships?
4. What are the consequences of making pleasure the sole or primary motivation for sexual relations?

Lesson 5. Homosexuality

Summary

The anti-Christian sexual revolution has led to the cultural acceptance of, among other things, homosexual practice. What does the Bible teach about homosexuality, and why?

Outline

The decades-long rise in the social acceptability of sexual practice outside of heterosexual marriage rose to new heights with the U.S. Supreme Court's *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision of 2015, legalizing same-sex marriage at the federal level. Many Christian denominations are struggling with how to assess these cultural changes.

Scripture speaks mostly in POSITIVE terms, explicitly and implicitly, about sexual relations between a man and woman. Some passages regulate sexual practice very specifically. See Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Genesis 19.

In the context of Romans 1:18-32, Paul is claiming that humans have a natural knowledge of God and of the moral order. We know, but we sweep the knowledge under the rug, and end up ignorant. So God "gave these people over" to sin. A downward spiral. In Romans 1, Paul emphasizes the situation that, to reject the truth about God and his created order, including moral design, is to go against nature and to reap bad consequences. One example is in Rom. 1:26-27.

Consider also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Before their washing, justification, and sanctification in Christ and the Holy Spirit, these pagan Corinthians were involved in all kinds of sinful practices that would exclude them from the kingdom of God. Included in that list are two words that together describe, respectively, the receiver and the dominant one in a male on male sex act. The dominant role is signified by the word, *arsenokoitai*, which literally means "lying with a male," a compound word Paul coined based on the prohibition in Leviticus, do not lie with a male as with a woman. See also 1 Tim. 1:10.

Some interpreters try to negate the force of these Scriptures, but to no avail. See Acts 15.

Discussion Questions:

1. For those who support homosexuality, where do you think they would draw the line on acceptable sexual activity? On what ground?
2. What's the problem with affirming what seem to be anyone's natural sexual inclinations?
3. Read Keith Stanglin, "Christian Moral Reasoning and the Question of Homosexual Practice" (see separate attachment). What are some other arguments for or against homosexuality, not mentioned in this article?
4. How can Christians and churches balance showing love without endorsing homosexual practice?

Lesson 6. The Christian Vision of Sexuality

Summary

God intended sexuality for human flourishing, and his design is discernible through Scripture and in nature. The benefit of a Christian sexual ethic is also corroborated by health and social sciences. How, then, should Christians live and be a testimony to the world?

Outline

To summarize all the premodern evidence, the world bestows meaning that we are to imitate and learn from. See Romans 1:27. Only moderns are presumptuous enough to think that we can live against nature with impunity, or transgress every boundary, and always get away with it.

According to Pat Fagan, in comparison with intact marriage of biological parents, those children living in these other situations suffer more emotional problems by the following degrees:

- “Biological parents cohabiting”: 44 percent more emotional problems;
- “Divorced-single parent”: 73 percent more;
- “Always-single parent”: 86 percent more;
- Stepfamily, married parents: 111 percent more;
- Stepfamily, cohabiting: 186 percent more;
- Same-sex parents, cohabiting: 234 percent more;
- Same-sex parents, married (has the worst outcome): 443 percent more.

According to Fagan, “After five years of marriage almost all (95 percent) of those who have had sexual intercourse only with their spouse were still married. For the rest, the more sexual partners before marriage, the greater the likelihood of divorce.”

What are some practical points we should glean from this entire study? 1) Let us learn and appreciate the vision for human sexuality that is taught and exemplified in Scripture.

2) Christians would do well to share this gift with others, that is, to model this positive vision to others in what we say and do.

3) We must be instruments of God’s healing, forgiveness, and help for those who struggle.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some negative consequences you have seen around you when people transgress the boundaries of the Christian sexual ethic?
2. Read “The Gift of Children,” at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/11/the-gift-of-children>. Discuss any interesting points you find there.
3. How has this study of the ethics of sexuality changed or enhanced the way you think about sexuality?