



Today we're continuing our series called Trending Now, and this morning's topic is sexuality. In each of these topics we've taken we used a research assistant on our staff and on this message I was helped a great deal by our North Campus High School Director, Adam Darbonne. In fact, he did such a great job that if you have any issues with what I'll say you can find his email on our website! But I know what you're thinking: you're just glad the day has come when the pastor talks about sex.

The reality is, we're bombarded with issues of sexuality all the time. From the rise of dating and hook-up apps like Tinder, to the soft-core porn shorts that are inserted into our TV shows, to debates over who can use what bathroom, we live in a time when sex and sexuality play a major role in our lives, whether we like it or not.

So how should Christ-followers respond to issues of sexuality in this increasingly sex-saturated world?

First, I want to point out two mistakes people in general, and Christians in particular, tend to make when thinking about sexuality, and then I'll give you two pillars that provide a path forward as we engage these issues. But first, the mistakes...

Mistake #1 – Our Sexuality is Bad

The first mistake we can make is thinking human sexuality is bad. Maybe you've heard this before. If you have, it was probably either from your parents or a church leader. This mistake says sexuality is bad or dirty and issues of sexuality, especially things outside our cultural norms, should be hidden away and not talked about.

But that isn't the way the Bible talks about sexuality at all. The Bible holds a high view of human sexuality. After all, God created humans to be sexual beings. The very first chapter of the Bible says this,

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:27-28).

We see here we were born as gendered individuals, male and female, and our gender is part of being made in the image of

God. And just a few verses later the Bible gives us a closer look into the creation of human beings and says,

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called 'woman,'

for she was taken out of man."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Gen. 2:21-25).

Adam breaks out into song when he sees Eve. It's like a real life *High School Musical*; he's so excited. And the intimacy between these two is beautiful. There's no shame when they're together and naked, no twinge of embarrassment.

When God created human beings, he created sexual beings. And what's fascinating is he didn't have to. We sometimes imagine that because procreation happens through sex, sex was just a necessity. But that's not true. God began with a blank slate and could have created non-sexual beings. He could have given us spores, like ferns, to reproduce asexually. Or he could have invented an entirely different way of reproduction that held no enjoyment at all, like in the movie *K-Pax*. Kevin Spacey's character, an alien from another planet, was mesmerized that human sex felt good. On his planet it was just for procreation. And yet, God chose to make us sexual beings. In the process, he invented sex. And he invented it to bring a man and a woman together in a unique and enjoyable intimacy. We'll see more about why he did it that way in a few minutes, but for now, suffice to say that we're inherently sexual beings, that was God's intention, and that's good.

Mistake #2: We Should Express Our Sexuality Any Way We Want

The second mistake we make is on the other side, and it goes something like this: If human sexuality is good and created by God, we should be free with it. We ought to have an "anything

goes" view of sexuality. Those stuffy, prudish, overly religious people think sexuality is bad, but shouldn't we be free to express this in any form or way that we want? If God gave us sexual desires, didn't he mean for us to fulfill them?

But that's mistake number two. And mistake number two has less to do with a bad view of sexuality and more to do with a skewed view of humanity. You see, while we're inherently sexually beings, we've also become inherently corrupted beings.

In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve deliberately rebel against God, and as a result every part of our world, including our humanity, is affected. Theologians call this "total depravity." The idea isn't that everything is totally destroyed by sin, but rather everything is affected by sin. Sin has touched, broken, and distorted every part of our world and our humanity so that nothing is left untouched.

Certainly this is true for our sexuality as well. Sin has deeply affected our sexuality. In fact, one of the first tangible effects of Adam and Eve's rebellion in Genesis 3 is they realize they're naked and they're ashamed of themselves. Their sexuality goes from being a beautiful picture of perfect intimacy between two people, to them covering up and creating barriers between them. It's a tragic loss of intimacy and introduction of shame.

After the Fall things spiral out of control. In Genesis 6, God brings a flood over the whole earth, largely because the sexual sin of the world was so horrendous. But it isn't just the world that this affects, it's God's people too.

- In Genesis 12 Abraham, God's chosen patriarch, offers his own wife to a powerful man to save his own skin, not once but twice.
- Abraham's grandson ends up getting his daughter-in-law pregnant. In his defense though, he didn't know she was his daughter-in-law. He thought she was a prostitute.
- David, the man after God's own heart, sleeps with another man's wife because that's what kings did back then, and then he kills her husband to cover it up.
- David's son Solomon had 700 wives, not to mention his 300 concubines just in case he got lonely.
- And he wasn't even David's most sexually corrupt son. Another son Absalom had sex with all of David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel" to prove he was more of a man than his father.
- His other son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar.
- Then you get into the New Testament and you see a man in the church at Corinth who was sleeping with his step-mother! And the church did nothing about it until Paul rebuked them for it.

There's more, but I'll stop there. The point is, human beings have become sexually corrupt. The biblical data points to a human

pattern of deviant sexual behavior far outside God's intention for sexuality, and the results are disastrous: a loss of intimacy, pain, sorrow, abuse and exploitation that's all part of this brokenness.

But you don't really need the Bible to tell you that, right? Just look around. The world's approach to sexuality leads to all sorts of destruction and pain. Just watch TV for 10 minutes and you'll see all kinds of broken sexuality leading to relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual carnage. We live in a world where:

- Millions of women and children are exploited as sex slaves for the highest bidder.
- Where pornography enslaves an entire generation of young men, while taking advantage of young women.
- Where 20 percent of women in our American universities are victims of sexual assault and misconduct.
- Where we've redefined marriage, which God designed to be between one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant.

Sexuality, which was meant to be beautiful and intimate, has become distorted into something ugly and twisted with colossal repercussions. We don't need to watch TV to know this. We've experienced first-hand something of the destructiveness of corrupted human sexuality in our own life. We know the pain, the sorrow, the shame, the confusion, the loneliness, the anger that comes with it on a personal and visceral level. Perhaps we've been used for our sexuality and thrown away. Or perhaps we've used and betrayed others in a way that disgusts us when we think about it.

And the question that comes out of this pain is this: Is there a better way, a way forward? Is there a way to affirm the goodness of human sexuality without ignoring the corruption of human sexuality? A way to put away our sexual depravity without putting away our sexuality all together? Jesus offers us a path forward.

A Path Forward

Look with me at Mark 12:29-31. This may be a familiar passage for some of you. Jesus is asked by a group of religious leaders which of God's commandments is the most important, and here's his response.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

While Jesus doesn't explicitly address human sexuality in his response, he certainly does implicitly. This offers a path forward for how to address issues of sexuality in our own lives. And this path has two major pillars in it.

Pillar 1: Jesus ramps up sexual ethics

The first pillar on this path is Jesus ramps up the demands of sexual ethics. He says to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”* That is, love him with all you are, every ounce of your being, every aspect of your life, including your sexuality.

And part of that includes embracing the way God designed human sexuality it be experienced and enjoyed. Loving God in this way means we embrace the idea that sexual union was designed to take place between a man and a woman within the marriage covenant (Genesis 2:18, 21-24). We see this in Genesis, but Jesus himself reaffirmed that in Matthew 19:4-9. This means that followers of Christ are to remain celibate outside the bond of marriage, and to abstain from pornography, adultery, incest and homosexual acts (1 Cor. 6:13, 18-20; Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:7-23, 20:10-21; Rom. 1:20-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:17-19; Col. 3:5).

How we express our sexuality matters to God. It's an expression of our love for him. And for that reason, we see Jesus increasing the demands for sexual ethics, not decreasing them. He even said, *“anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matt. 5:27). Jesus radically ramps up the demands for sexual ethics. It matters to Jesus if you watch porn, even if “it doesn't hurt anyone.” It matters to Jesus if you flirt and fantasize about that co-worker. So we must take our sexual purity seriously because Jesus takes it seriously. As Christ-followers, we seek to live within God's intent for sexuality.

But that is hard. I know there are some of you out there that want to live within God's intent for sexuality, but that's a huge struggle.

- Perhaps you're unmarried and have had to accept the fact you may always be so.
- Perhaps you struggle with same-sex desires and you've felt this way as long as you can remember.
- Perhaps you feel stuck in a loveless marriage where sexual intimacy is non-existent.
- Perhaps you suffer from gender dysphoria, feeling your true identity as male or female is the opposite of your biological sex.

Your sexuality is complicated or even confusing, and you're not quite sure where to go. If that's you, will you commit to do two things? First, will you pray and surrender your sexuality to God? God invites you to open this area of your life up to him. He welcomes you into his presence. And second, will you reach out to someone—a friend, a counselor, a parent, a brother or sister? We have both men and women who serve as pastors here who would welcome an opportunity to talk to you. We will not judge you. We will love you, pray for you and try to help you.

So the first pillar of Jesus' blueprint for engaging issues of sexuality is he ramps up the demands for sexual ethics. Maybe that didn't surprise you. But the second pillar may surprise you.

Pillar 2: Jesus ramps up the inclusion of sexually corrupt people into his church

The second pillar of this path forward is that Jesus ramps up the inclusion of sexually corrupt people into his Church. Jesus declares the second most important commandment, so intimately tied to the first that it can't be separated, is to *“love your neighbor as yourself,”* and while Jesus increases the demands of sexual ethics, we also see him interacting with, welcoming, and including those full of sexual corruption and sin.

One of these moments happens in John 8, when the Pharisees drag a woman caught in the act of adultery before Jesus and ask for him to deliver a verdict. These men had no interest in the truth, but rather hoped to trap Jesus into saying something that would get him in trouble. So they threw her down before him and said, *“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”*

Jesus paused for a moment and then said, *“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”*

At that John records they began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left with the woman. Then he asked her, *“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”*

I imagine she looked around, and then replied, *“No one, sir.”*

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Jesus doesn't condemn her. He doesn't even lecture her about her sin. What he does is free her from it. Whatever drove her to seek comfort in the arms of a man that wasn't her husband, he frees her from it. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” I have no doubt she became a different person after this encounter. Why? Because that's what grace does. It frees us.

Over and over again Jesus exposes people like these Pharisees who hypocritically judge others. He also refuses to condemn people like this woman, and invites them to follow him. Even Jesus' own family history testifies to that fact! Matthew starts his book out with a patriarchal genealogy of Jesus' ancestors. (If you've ever read the book of Matthew before, it's the part you skipped over at the beginning.) He starts with Abraham and moves forward, tracing the males in Jesus' family tree, leading through King David and eventually all the way to Jesus.

But what's fascinating about this genealogy is five women are mentioned and all of them have a questionable sexual reputation.

- Tamar pretended to be a prostitute so she could sleep with her father-in-law after her husband died.

- Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who helped Israel win their first battle when entering the promised land.
- Ruth didn't behave in a sexually corrupt way, but she did behave in a sexually suggestive way, leaving a question in the minds of many about her sexual purity.
- Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, commits adultery with King David, and eventually bears him Solomon.
- And finally, Mary is mentioned, Jesus' mother—an unmarried, pregnant teenage girl.

The point is, God regularly welcomes people with sinful, broken, painful sexual backgrounds and reputations to be a part of his church, and not only that, but to play an integral role in his redeeming work in the world!

Let's be honest: the church hasn't always embodied this inclusion of sexually broken people. At CPC we want to be a church where women and men like this are welcomed and loved, the way Jesus loves them. We're followers of Jesus. The church should be a more welcoming place for people with broken sexual pasts than anywhere else in the world, because we're a people who know we ourselves are sexually broken. We've all lived outside God's intent for sexuality, and even as we try to live within it, we fail. Not one of us can throw a stone. It's only by the grace of God that we've been set free, and so we have open arms to anyone interested in being set free as well.

Let's be clear: to err on the side of truth at the expense of grace is not biblical. Nor is it biblical to err on the side of grace at the expense of truth. Jesus was full of both truth and grace. Our church should truly love those who don't fit with God's intent for sexuality, not just in theory, but in practice. We ought to listen better and ask more questions before we start preaching. We should enter into the pain of those who are sexually broken. We should do all of this without compromising the unchanging truth of God's word.

There is a way forward; a way that affirms the inherent goodness of sexuality while avoiding the destructiveness of an "anything goes" approach. It's the way of Jesus. But that still leaves us with the question I posed at the beginning: why make human beings sexual beings in the first place? Wouldn't it save a lot of time and trouble (not to mention emotional energy in middle school) if God hadn't made us sexual beings at all? Why did God make us sexual? What is our sexuality for?

The Mona Lisa is a beautiful painting; a seminal work of art that's admired by millions of people each year. Leonardo da Vinci's

ability to create a life-like painting with atmosphere has made it one of the most respected and famous pieces of art in the world. The Mona Lisa is probably a painting of a woman named Lisa del Giocondo, commissioned by her husband to hang in their home. And for all its artistic genius, this is the part of the Mona Lisa that's most intriguing to me.

The depth that da Vinci deftly communicated with his brushstrokes on his two-dimensional canvas couldn't come close to the actual depth that this living, breathing, three-dimensional woman in his painting depicted. The vibrant and subtle hues he put on the canvas couldn't compete with the real colors that inhabited the room as she sat for the painting. Da Vinci skillfully gave her eyes that always seem to be looking at you, and yet, their pupils can't actually see anything the way Lisa del Giocondo could.

The Mona Lisa is a beautiful and significant piece of art, but it was created not to be experienced for its own sake, but to remind those who look at it of the beauty and significance of the one it depicts.

Human sexuality is the Mona Lisa. It is beautiful and significant, a genius piece of artwork. And yet, it wasn't created for its own sake, but rather to remind all who look on it of a more three-dimensional reality; a more beautiful and significant reality than it depicts. Human sexuality is a painting of God's intimacy with his people.

Ephesians 5 says the relationship between a husband and wife mirrors the relationship of Christ and the Church. Revelation 19 promises a great wedding between Christ and the Church, and in Revelation 21 the moment of God's reconciliation to his people is described as the consummation of a marriage.

God has made you a sexual being to provide a tangible image of the intimacy and faithfulness of God with his people. That's why Jesus can both ramp up the demands of sexual ethics and ramp up the inclusion of sexually corrupt people. Because he's like a husband who deeply desires faithfulness from his bride, and yet a husband who still loves her after she's been unfaithful. Your sexuality is meant to image to the world God's love for his people.

So what if we spent less time thinking about the "do's" and "don'ts" and more time thinking about how our sexuality might better display God's love for his people? What if your sexuality brought glory to God, not because you're obedient to his set of rules, but because it really did paint a picture to people of the way God faithfully, intimately, and sacrificially interacts with his people?

I think we'd find that God still uses sexually messed up people to powerfully carry out his redeeming work in the world.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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