



Sex

A Real Issues Service

Sunday 16 March 2008

Introduction



- “Let’s talk about sex”
 - What are you thinking as we come to this topic?



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Introduction



■ “Let’s talk about sex”

- What are you thinking as we come to this topic?
- We’re Christians: should we talk about it?
 - Yes: the Bible does – often – so we should obey God’s word and speak it to others.
- We’re embarrassed: do we have to talk about it?
 - It was never easy! “There has never been a time in recorded history when the relations between the sexes have not been highly problematic.” (Gillis)

Introduction



■ Let's talk about *godly* sex:

- ... because sexually our culture is marked by “an ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure” (CS Lewis, quoted in Piper)
- ... because time is short and the task is hard:
 - “We speak into a confused culture in which our paradigms for thinking about sex have shifted radically. We speak from a marginalized church. And we seek to root our ethics in a challenged Bible.” (Christopher Ash, *Marriage*)

Sex ... in the Bible



- **The Creator's context** for sex
 - in marriage alone
- **The prophetic purpose** of sex
 - pointing to Christ and his bride
- **The godly practice** of sex
 - from the garden to the city
- **The joyful duty** of sex
 - obligation and passion mark godly marriage
- **The dangerous power** of sex
 - substituting itself for God

The Creator's context for sex



- The Bible's definition of marriage:
 - "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2.24)
- Marriage means ...
 - Leaving: one's spouse comes above all others
 - Uniting: marriage is permanent and exclusive
 - Becoming: "One flesh" means what it says: **sex**
 - And much more, too! "'One flesh' entails a life-long, exclusive clinging of one man to one woman in one life fully shared." (Ortlund)

The Creator's context for sex



- The Creator determines the context for sex:
 - The (one) right place for sexual intimacy:
 - Lifelong, exclusive, monogamous, heterosexual marriage.
 - The wrong place for sex:
 - Anywhere else!
 - Why? Not because God is a killjoy, but because sex is so precious and powerful that its use elsewhere will devalue and damage those who misuse it.

The prophetic purpose of sex



- In the Bible, sex points beyond itself to the relationship between God and Israel, Christ and the church.
 - Powerful language:
 - Wonderful – when God's people are faithful
 - God the passionate, faithful lover of his people.
 - Terrible – when we are not faithful
 - God's unfaithful wife becomes a whore.

The prophetic purpose of sex



- The Law of Moses: eg, **Exodus 34.11-16**
 - ‘The Lord’s jealousy for his wife Israel requires that she offer her devotion to no other lover, just as a man will share his wife with no other.’
- The prophets: eg, **Ezekiel 16**
 - The Lord takes Israel as his bride (v1-14)
 - She had no noble heritage (v3), no one to love her (v4-5). **The Lord gave her life** (v6): this is the gospel!
 - She grew into sexual maturity (v7) and the Lord married her (v8). The Lord lavished his love on her (v9-14): this is the foundation of the gospel!

The prophetic purpose of sex



- Israel “played the whore” (v15-58)
 - She used her God-given beauty to engage in prostitution – pagan rites and other idolatrous practices. She forgot all the Lord had done and her prostitution increased – but the Lord will humiliate her and his anger will subside.
- The Lord promises a new covenant (v59-63):
 - “I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an **everlasting** covenant. ... when I **atone** for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.” (v61,63)
 - An eternal covenant secured by God-given atonement – this is the New Covenant in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophetic purpose of sex



■ The New Testament:

- Like the prophets, Jesus describes spiritual faithlessness in sexual language:
 - “A wicked and **adulterous** generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” (Matthew 12.39)
 - “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this **adulterous** and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.” (Mark 8.38)
- **But now the husband-saviour has come!**

The prophetic purpose of sex



- Jesus is the bridegroom ...
 - “How is it ... your disciples do not fast?’ Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?’” (Matthew 9.14-15)
- ... come to invite us to his wedding banquet:
 - “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.” (Matthew 22.2)

The prophetic purpose of sex



- The church, therefore, is the bride of Christ:
 - “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” (2 Corinthians 11.2)
- Our “wedding day” is yet to come:
 - “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 21.7,9)

The prophetic purpose of sex



- “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’” (Revelation 21.1-3)

The prophetic purpose of sex



- “This is a profound mystery”:
 - Having taught husbands to model themselves on Christ and wives on the church, Paul writes
 - “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery – **but I am talking about Christ and the church.**” (Ephesians 8.31-32)
 - **Marriage (with sex at its centre) is fulfilled in the eternal intimacy between God and his people.**

The godly practice of sex



- At creation, sex was pure joy.
 - “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (Genesis 2.25)
 - There were (literally!) no barriers between man and wife: total intimacy, trust, acceptance.
- When Adam and Eve sinned, their intimacy was compromised:
 - “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3.7)

The godly practice of sex



- Their sin led to God's curse:
 - "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. **Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.**'" (Gen 3.16)
 - "Her controlling impulse is matched by his lordly ego." (Ortlund)
 - Every marriage, and every marriage-bed, is subject to this curse.

The godly practice of sex



- Under the wrath of God, sexual sins multiply:
 - Contrast sexual sins with Genesis 2.24:
 - (“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”)
 - **Polygamy:** but the Creator’s intention is “a man … *his* wife” – not wives!
 - **Adultery and divorce:** “*be united* … one flesh”
 - **Homosexuality:** “a man … *his wife* … one flesh”
 - **Prostitution:** “a man will be united *to his wife*”

The godly practice of sex



- Paul makes the connexion between sexual sin and the curse, or wrath, of God:
 - “¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... ²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ...”

□ ... ²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen. ²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In 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, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” (Rom 1.18-27)



The godly practice of sex



■ Finally ... good news!

- Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5.32)
 - Narrowing our focus to sexual sins, Jesus calls the *sexually* repentant, not the *sexually* self-righteous.
 - Repentance, not virginity, is the way to heaven!

The godly practice of sex



□ Jesus and the “sinful woman”:

- “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7.44-50)

The godly practice of sex



■ 1 Corinthians 6.9-20

- Sin – including sexual sin – keeps us from God.
 - “⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the **sexually immoral** (AV: “fornicators”) nor idolaters nor **adulterers** nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders (ESV: “**men who practice homosexuality**”) ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were.”
 - Remember Romans 3.23: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

- ❑ But Jesus Christ *brings* us to God:

- “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.”



- ❑ And now we *belong* to him:

- “¹³The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ... ¹⁷he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do 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; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.**”
 - As Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do I condemn you. ... Go now and leave your life of sin.”

The godly practice of sex



■ What is God's will for us sexually?

- “³It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no-one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

The godly practice of sex



- Though it is unromantic, this is why Paul says:
 - “²since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ... ⁸Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. ⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” (1 Co 7.2,8,9)
 - Marriage, “was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body.” (*Book of Common Prayer* Marriage Service)

The godly practice of sex



- A final word about sex and singleness
 - Sexual faithfulness in marriage is an anticipation of the “wedding supper of the Lamb”
 - BUT sexual abstinence in singleness is also an anticipation of that day ... because at that “wedding supper”, we will all be single!
 - Jesus said, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22.30)

The godly practice of sex



- Jesus on singleness:
 - “For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and **others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven**. The one who can accept this should accept it.” (Matthew 19.12)
- Paul on singleness:
 - “**I wish that all men were as I am** [ie, single and celibate]. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.” (1 Corinthians 7.7)
- Both our Lord and his apostle were celibate: sex is *not* integral to our humanity or faith!

The joyful duty of sex



- **Duty:** Paul the (celibate!) apostle commands:
 - “³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For 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. ⁵Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Cor. 7.3-5, ESV)

The joyful duty of sex



■ Joy: Song of Songs

- An entire book of the Bible celebrating passionate, sexual love in marriage.
- The language may not be directly usable in marriage ... but the careful, creative, complimentary attitude of lover and beloved is for husbands and wives to imitate!
- Two sample passages:
 - The beloved: 2.3-6
 - The lover: 7.1-9a (NB “vine” in v8)

The dangerous power of sex



■ Warning!

- “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.” (2.7)
 - The “gazelles and … does” are symbols of passion: ie, for the sake of good sex, do not anticipate sex.
 - The Song of Songs is not a celebration of sex: it is a celebration of sex *within marriage*.
 - So: stay away from sex until you are married!

The dangerous power of sex



□ Proverbs concurs:

- “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife?” (Proverbs 5.18-20)

□ The problem starts within:

- “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” (Job 31.1)
- It is a covenant every man – married or single – is called to make.

The dangerous power of sex



■ Jesus warns:

- “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. And 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)

The dangerous power of sex



■ And Paul writes:

- “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality (AV: “fornication”), impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3.5)
- Positively, “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Romans 13.14)
 - ESV: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

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