

Understanding Christian Sexuality

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Session 1: Let's Talk about Sex

The sexual revolution is seeking to redefine humanity in ways in which sexual functions and gender roles are not fixed, but fluid, even changing from day to day. The purpose of this conversation is twofold: first, we must be willing and able to disciple the Christian community; and second, we must be willing and able to engage this conversation outside the Christian community as a public witness.

The issues we struggle with today are not new, but ancient. We are struggling to answer the ancient question, "What is humanity?" As Christians, we believe that a proper understanding of humanity must be informed by the biblical narrative. So, we will begin with the creation narrative in Genesis. The creation narrative was written to challenge the prevailing mythology of the ancient near east. These ancient divinely inspired words challenge the prevailing notions of the secular postmodern world.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule..." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27 NASB).

Humanity is created in the image of God. The image/likeness of God does not speak to human form, but to the sharing of God's spirit. "...the LORD God formed 'adam of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; the human became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Humans are created as the children of God to bear the Spirit and glory of God. Humans were created to rule over the earth as God's vice-regents. Humans are priests mediating God's presence in the cosmic tabernacle of creation (Genesis 2:15 – the Hebrew word translated *cultivate* suggest priestly duties).

Humanity is created as male and female. In the ancient world, the gods were male and female. and it was sometimes assumed that the first human was created as bisexual, possessing both male and female characteristics. The mythological gods of the ancient near east copulated with each other, they copulated with humans, and sometimes copulated as animals or with animals. The Genesis narrative challenges these assumptions. The God of Genesis is of one substance, and is not gendered as male or female. The Hebrew word 'adam is best translated as *human*. The testimony of Genesis is that humans are created as gendered beings – male 'adam and female 'adam. The God of Genesis does not copulate with humans, and humans do not copulate with animals. Male and female humans are suitable only for each other.

Male and female are sexually differentiated, but equally human (Genesis 2:18, 21-23). The female 'adam is "a helper suitable" for the male 'adam, that is, the female human corresponds to the male human, or matches the male human. The female 'adam originates from the side of the male 'adam. The female 'adam is of the same substance - bone and flesh - of the male 'adam. The female 'adam and male 'adam are of equal substance, of equal status. The word *helper* speaks to one as encourager, strengthener, or deliverer. There is no suggestion that the female 'adam is subordinate to the male. To the contrary, she is helper because she is strong

and capable to share in ruling the earth and leading as priest. Male and female are fixed sexual distinctions with unique biological functions.

Marriage is a sexual relationship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24). The Genesis narrative is offered as a theological reflection on the significance of marriage. Sons and daughters leave the families of their origin to form new families. The man and woman “become one flesh”, a euphemism for sexual intercourse. This testifies to the mutual interdependence of male and female, and their mutual equality. Furthermore, the phrase “one flesh” speaks to the permanence of the marital bond.

Male and female were “both naked and not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). This signifies the intimacy and joy of their sexual union. Sex, in the proper context, is not shameful. The Song of Solomon celebrates sexual desire in which male and female share mutual love and joy.

May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine... Draw me after you and let us run together! The king has brought me into his chambers. We will rejoice in you and be glad. We will extol your love more than wine... (Song of Solomon 1:2–4).

The writer of Hebrews declared, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled” (13:4). The Apostle Paul teaches us that husband and wife are co-equal partners who share their bodies for mutual sexual pleasure (1 Corinthians 7:3-4).

The purpose of sex is twofold: intimacy and procreation. “Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth...” (Genesis 4:1). The Hebrew word *yada* (knew) speaks to experiential knowledge. Marital love is expressed sexually. Proper sexual expression is not limited to physical pleasure, but must include sharing life with one’s spouse. Humanity flourishes because of love. The sexual love of marriage causes the marriage to flourish and causes humanity to flourish and multiply.

With the creation of the male and female, God pronounced creation to be “very good.” Sex is God’s very good idea.

Session 2: How Original Sin Disordered Sex

In the previous session we discussed the goodness of sex as ordered in a creation not corrupted by sin. However, with the sinfulness of the first humans, the created order was corrupted. The loss of human innocence is proclaimed in the words “*they knew they were naked*” (Genesis 3:7). This signifies a change in human nature in which nakedness is associated with shame. As we continue to read the biblical narrative, we discover that sinful humans behave shamefully, especially when it comes to sex. The Bible is an “R” rated book. When we talk about sex, we often do so in whispers. But, not the Bible. The biblical writers spoke loud and plain, often in coarse, earthy language.

The first consequence of human sinfulness was a disordered relationship between male and female. The joy of sex and procreation gives way to increased “pain in childbirth”. The mutual love and respect between the male and female gives way to a relationship in which the female is subjugated to the male (cf. Genesis 3:16). Here we must point out that any reading of the biblical text that supports male domination or female inferiority is informed by the curse, not creation, and certainly not by redemption. The disordered male/female relationship is often demonstrated in the imposition of cultural gender roles that distort created order. In some cultures, women have been prohibited from political participation, education, and other opportunities because they have been perceived as inferior or incapable.

Sinful and disordered sexual relationships are carefully documented in the Biblical narrative.

- Monogamy gives way to polygamy when Lamech married two women (Genesis 4:19).
- Abraham, the father of the faith, is married to his half-sister, Sarai, whom he twice offers as a sexual partner to other men (Genesis 12:10ff; 20:1ff). Furthermore, Abraham had sex with Sarai’s slave, Hagar (Genesis 16:1ff) – a practice that was often repeated.
- The men of Sodom demand to have sex with Lot’s guests. In response, Lot offered his daughters to be raped (Genesis 19:1ff).
- Lot had sex with his two daughters and impregnated them, a relationship in which all participants were complicit (Genesis 19:32ff).
- Prince Shechem the Hivite raped Dinah, the daughter of Jacob (Genesis 34:1ff).
- Jacob (Israel) had a concubine named Bilhah with whom his son, Reuben, had sex (Genesis 35:22).
- Onan “went in to his brother’s wife” and “wasted his seed on the ground” (Genesis 38:9).
- Judah had sex with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who posed as a prostitute (Genesis 38:13ff).
- Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph (Genesis 39:6ff).

All this is recorded in the first book of the Bible! There’s more to come. The book of Judges tells us that Jephthah was the son of a harlot (11:1), that Samson loved Philistine harlots (16:1), and

concludes with the horrific story of the concubine who was raped to death and then dismembered (19:25ff).

The household of King David was filled with sexual dysfunction. David was a polygamist. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered (2 Samuel 11:1ff). Later, David's son, Amnon, raped his own sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13:8). David's son, Solomon, epitomized the exploitation of sex for power by taking 1000 wives and concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

Throughout the Old Testament, Israel's lust after the gods of the Mesopotamian nations is surpassed only by her sexual immorality. In exasperation the Prophet Ezekiel cried out, "You... made your beauty abominable, and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry" (16:25).

It's apparent that the innocence and joy of sex in the Garden of Eden has given way to licentiousness, debauchery, and violence. Sex is no longer about mutual pleasure, but has become a tool of deceit, seduction, and oppression. Even many heroes of the faith were sexually immoral and suffered the consequences of their sinfulness. The testimony of Scripture is that humans have a long history of sexual immorality and dysfunction that ultimately leads to "a depraved mind" (Romans 1:28).

In homes across the world today married couples are in conflict. Instead of joy, pleasure, and love, sexual issues cause conflict leading to adultery, domestic violence, divorce, and sometimes even murder.

Presently, there are an estimated 5,000,000 teens worldwide who are enslaved sex workers trapped in a \$100 billion a year industry. Pornography is a \$97 billion a year industry involving thousands of performers and millions of viewers. There are 73 million abortions performed worldwide annually. In the United States, about 40% of all births are to unwed parents, homosexual marriage is legal, and there are movements to legalize polygamy and polyandry.

We must also consider the efforts to redefine human sexuality. It is being suggested that the binary distinctions of male and female are insufficient to describe human sexuality. Instead, human sexuality should be defined across a wider spectrum. This necessitates a new vocabulary of dozens of terms to describe gender identity. In this era, it is said to be possible for one to be chromosomally and anatomically male and be gender identified as a polygendered lesbian. New pronouns are being constructed to accommodate new gender classifications. Humanity is undergoing postmodern deconstruction and we can't yet see the complexity of reconstructed humanity.

Session 3: The Holiness Code

A few years ago, a young man announced to his family, “I’m gay, I’m not broke, so don’t try to fix me.” I replied, “Sir, we’re all broke and we all need to be fixed.” When the Bible tells us of the sexual dysfunction of the heroes of the Faith, there is no effort to normalize, or affirm, their sinfulness. Instead, the sacred text is careful to tell us of the consequences of their disordered behavior. The testimony of Scripture is clear about the corrupted nature of humanity. The Psalmist confessed, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5). Building upon the theology of the ancient Hebrew prophets, the Apostle Paul declared, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The depraved depth of human sinfulness finds its ultimate expression in sexual immorality. Again, the Apostle Paul insists,

God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them... God gave them over to degrading passions and just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper (Romans 1:24-28).

Paul is clear that to disregard the order and purpose of sex in creation is to disregard the Creator. Furthermore, Paul suggests that fallen humans don’t have the presence of mind to acknowledge their sinfulness. In other words, sin is not simply a choice, it is the condition of human nature – a darkened mind and a hardened heart. When talking about homosexuality or gender dysphoria, we often seek for a scientific explanation. Science may indeed be able to explain the causation of various aspects of human sexuality, but it cannot answer the deeper questions of meaning.

Others opt for a theological explanation and assert, “This is the way God made me.” With this statement they affirm their sexual identity and preferences. But can this theological affirmation be supported by the Christian theological tradition? No! First, God created humanity in perfection in which sexuality is properly expressed as a monogamous heterosexual relationship. Second, only the first humans were directly created by God. All subsequent humans have been procreated through sexual reproduction, a process which has been corrupted by sin and which transmits the corruption of sin. So, even if one is born with homosexual proclivities or gender dysphoria, their condition is the effect of original sin. Lest we become self-righteous, let us remember that original sin also effects heterosexual males and females. The tendency to lust, the desire to view pornography, to engage in pre-marital sex, adultery, and divorce is largely the sinful domain of heterosexuals. The best estimates suggest that less than 5% of the US population identifies as homosexual, and less than .3% are transgender. While it is true that a vocal minority seems to be driving the present public conversation about sex, we must confess that the Christian church suffers from a compromised sexual ethic in which pre-marital sex and serial divorce and remarriage have been ignored or excused, and in some cases, even accepted. So, let’s return to my earlier statement, “We are all broke, we all need to be fixed.” So how can humanity be fixed?

As I pointed out in the previous discussion, many characters in the Old Testament were not honorable in their sexual behavior, including Abraham, the friend of God, and David, a man after God's heart. These men model the sexual behavior of the culture of the ancient near east, not the morality of the priestly people of God who are called to express the holiness of God. So, from where does the Biblical sexual ethic come? The Biblical sexual ethic comes to us from the revelation of God's law. The Apostle Paul tells us that "the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24). The purpose of the law is to teach right worship, right behavior, and expose sinful behavior.

The sexual ethic of God's holy people is found in the holiness code of Leviticus 18. The priestly people of God demonstrate their loyalty to Yahweh by living according to the Law. God's people were not to follow the sexual practices of the Egyptians or Canaanites who tolerated forms of incest, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality. Living according to God's law ensured the prosperity of the people. Disregarding the law ensured God's judgement. The holiness code prohibits sexual relationships with relatives including siblings, step-siblings, aunts/uncles, parent/step-parent, grandchildren/grandparents, and in-laws. Furthermore, the holiness code forbids polygamy, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality.

We must ask, "Does the ancient holiness code apply to Christians who are "not under law, but under grace"? (Romans 6:14). And, if the holiness code still applies, then shouldn't the rest of the law still apply? This was the controversy that occasioned the Jerusalem Conference. The conversion of Gentiles to the Christian faith provoked serious questions. Must a Gentile convert be circumcised? Must they follow Jewish dietary laws? Must they observe the Mosaic law? The decision of the apostolic church was "not to trouble" the Gentile converts with the requirements of the law, with two exceptions: all Christians must abstain from idolatry and fornication (Acts 15:20). These were specified because they were the most common offenses among the Gentiles. Jesus and the apostles also reaffirmed other moral requirements of the ancient law, such as prohibitions against murder and stealing. The Greek word translated *fornication* is *porneia* and speaks to various types of sexual immorality including pornography, pre-marital sex, incest, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality. In other words, the sexual morality established in the holiness code is to be the sexual morality of the Christian faith. Paul declared,

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints... For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph 5:3-5).

Session 4: What did Jesus say about Sex?

Before we discuss what Jesus said about sex, we should take a moment to ask how Jesus' own sexuality informs Christian understanding. According to the witness of the Gospels, Jesus was never married and never engaged in sexual activity. Jesus was celibate. Jesus was fully and perfectly human and lived a fulfilled life without being married and having sex. A man doesn't need a woman to be fulfilled. A woman doesn't need a man to be fully human. Men and women need God. Celibacy should be seen as a viable option, and certainly to be preferred over sexual immorality.

Jesus said, "everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). The word *lust* does not refer to appropriate sexual desire, but *to look with intent to engage in immoral sexual activity*. To *lust* is to be shopping for sex, or to be looking for an opportunity for sexual immorality. The most notorious example of adultery in the Bible is David and Bathsheba. David did not sin when he inadvertently saw Bathsheba bathing. He could have simply looked away. David's lust began when he *inquired* about her (2 Sam 11:3). Jesus reminds us that we must guard our eyes: "if your right eye makes you stumble..." Lustful activity includes engaging in pornography. In the ancient world, explicit pornographic images were publicly displayed in wall murals, floor mosaics, and even household pottery. However, there is no evidence of pornographic images in Hebrew culture. Nakedness was not to be uncovered. Sex was not a taboo subject. After all, Song of Solomon is included in the Hebrew scriptures. But sexual images that uncovered the genitals were considered shameful. Also, lustful activities include immoral and vulgar conversations - "filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting" (Eph 5:4).

Jesus insists that the basis of a proper understanding of marriage is not found in the Mosaic law, but in the creation narrative.

Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate (Matthew 19:4-6).

Marriage is not a social construct that can be changed by the political impulses of a changing culture. Marriage is an act of God. According to Jesus, marriage one male and one female. With the words "let no man separate" Jesus is asserting that human law, not even the law of Moses, cannot change the theological reality of marriage.

In the gospels, it was Jesus' teaching about divorce that caused controversy among the Pharisees, and even among his disciples. The Mosaic law made many allowances for divorce. Jewish legal tradition allowed a man to divorce his wife if she no longer pleased him in any way. Jesus shocked his audience when he insisted that there is only one viable reason for divorce – sexual immorality (Matt 5:31; 19:9). Serial divorce and remarriage is a form of adultery. Even

so, Jesus acknowledges that marriage can be difficult because of the hardness of the human heart. The “hardness of heart” is an expression that reminds us of the brokenness of male/female relationships effected by the Fall. Humans come into marriage as men and women broken by the presence of sin. Two imperfect people cannot form a perfect marriage. Divorce sometimes is necessary when one spouse grievously offends or abandons the other. Jesus was so adamant about the inviolability of marriage that his disciples asked, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry” (Matt 19:10). Jesus’ reply suggest that celibacy is not a desired state for many, but necessary for some.

Jesus acknowledges that some people are born with abnormalities that make them incapable of natural sexual function. “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb...” (Matt 19:12). This includes physical deformities, but might also include the psychological proclivity toward homosexuality, or gender dysphoria. Jesus suggests that these persons should embrace celibacy. This also suggest that like Jesus, we must try to be more understanding towards broken men and women.

We must always remember that Jesus, full of grace and truth, extends mercy to sinners. John presents the story of a woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). The Law provided for the execution of those guilty of sexual immorality. This woman was to be stoned to death. But Jesus extended grace with the words, “I do not condemn you.” Jesus did not excuse her sinfulness, nor did he affirm her love affair. He offered an alternative to the wages of sin – he offered life. He commanded, “Go and sin no more.” Grace and truth make new life possible. One more thing... I’ve always wondered, “Where is the man?” I suspect that he was in the crowd holding a stone and that Jesus looked directly at him when he said, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7).

Christian churches are filled with sexually broken and confused men and women in need of truth and grace. The word *confession* means to tell the truth about oneself. We need to tell the truth about the sexual dysfunction and immorality around us. There is another truth that we must tell – that there is no sexual sin beyond redemption, there is no such thing as an unforgivable sexual sin. The apostle Paul declared, “...we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:3–5).

Jesus’ final word about sex is about human sexuality in the eschaton – New Creation. Jesus said, “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt 22:30). Throughout eternity humans will maintain their sexual distinctions – male and female. We will reign with Christ as a “kingdom and priests to God” (Rev 5:10). However, marriage, sex, and procreation are of this present created order and are not eternal realities. Life in New Creation will be radically different from life in this present age. So too, love in New Creation will be radically different. Love will be perfect, and we shall be perfected in love.

Session 5: The Body as a Temple

The sexual morality of the Hebrew scriptures was vastly different from the sexual culture of the Greco-Roman world in which Christianity was born. Brothers sometimes married their sisters to protect family property rights. Bisexuality was taken for granted. Homosexuality was natural, socially acceptable, even idealized, known as “Greek love.” Pederasty (sex with boys) was a particular privilege. Powerful men gathered “herds of boys”. Although women were generally prohibited from “adultery”, they were encouraged to engage in lesbian relationships. Exposure of infants & abortion was freely practiced. Sexual conduct was largely informed by issues of economics and power.

The prevalence of the Greco-Roman sexual culture in the early church is demonstrated in Paul’s letters to the church at Corinth. In the ancient world, to be “*Corinthian*” meant indulgence in every lust and pleasure, and there was no law higher than one’s desires. Paul dedicates considerable portions of his writing to the sexual misbehavior of the Corinthian believers. He rebukes a member of the church for having sex with his stepmother and rebukes the church for its arrogance in tolerating this behavior (1 Cor. 5:1ff). Paul exhorts:

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Co 6:18–20).

A proper understanding of Christian sexual morality begins with a proper theology of the human body. In creation God “formed man ... and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). In the Incarnation, God “was made in the likeness of humanity” (Philip. 2:7), that is, the eternal Word/Son “became flesh” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ “bore our sins in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). Paul declares that “the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” and our “bodies are members of Christ” (1 Cor. 6:13, 15). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell upon and filled the bodies of believers (Acts 2:1ff). Therefore, we are to “present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). Paul exhorts, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body” (Romans 6:6). The body is to be disciplined (1 Cor. 9:27). The hope of believers in Christ is that we shall be sanctified entirely – spirit and soul and body (1 Thes 5:23). In the resurrection, “the body of our humble state” will be transformed “into conformity with the body of His glory” (Philip. 3:21). In summary, God created the human body to be a dwelling of God’s Spirit. God became enfleshed in a human body so that human bodies could be redeemed.

Flee Immorality. I can’t help but think that when Paul penned these words, he had the story of Joseph in mind. In effect, Paul was telling the Corinthian Christians that just as Joseph maintained his sexual integrity in the land of Egypt by fleeing the advances of Potiphar’s wife, Christians must maintain their sexual integrity by fleeing the encroachment of an amoral sexual culture. The use of the word *flee* suggest imminent danger. The two greatest desires of the human body are hunger and sex. Paul acknowledges that “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food”.

His point is that just as eating is a natural desire of the body, so too is sex a natural desire of the body. But the body is not for sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:13).

Sexual immorality dishonors the body. “For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Cor 6:18 NLT). Paul declared, “God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, *so that their bodies would be dishonored among them*” (Romans 1:24). The consequence of impurity is dishonor. Furthermore, for the Christian, the body is united with Christ, “one spirit with Him” (1 Cor. 6:17) to the extent that to commit sexual immorality is to dishonor Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). Therefore, to indulge the desires of the flesh is to incur the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:3).

Human autonomy is a theological heresy. The ancient Corinthians were influenced by Greek philosophies that believed the physical body was morally irrelevant and insisted that pleasure is the highest good. The slogan of the Woodstock era, the sexual revolution and the drug culture of the 1960s, was “If it feels good, do it.” The slogan of secular feminism is “My body, my choice” and reflects a political theory in which each person is free to make independent moral choices. Human autonomy is the refusal to acknowledge God. The apostle Peter reminds us that so-called human autonomy promises freedom, but is “slavery to corruption” (1 Peter 2:19). Paul insists that to be in Christ is to acknowledge that “*you are not your own, you have been bought with a price*” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Outside of Christ, humans are “slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6; John 8:34). Christ has purchased us with his blood so that we may be “slaves to righteousness” (1 Pet. 1:19; Romans 6:18). In other words, in Christ we are freed from sin that we may be “enslaved to God” (Romans 6:22).

The body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. When God created humanity, God breathed the Holy Spirit of life into human bodies. Humanity shared the image and glory of God. Humanity’s rebellion against God means “that all have sinned and *fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). Jesus Christ has redeemed humanity through his death and resurrection and is our divine-human mediator through whom we receive the Holy Spirit. Just before he ascended to heaven, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). On the day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit signifies the restoration of God’s glory and anticipates the glorification of the body. Just as the shekinah glory of God dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the ancient Jerusalem Temple as a sign of God’s presence with Israel, the Holy Spirit dwells within our bodies and testifies that we have been adopted as the children of God (Romans 8:14-16).

Glorify God in your body. The Spirit-filled human body is a sacred place, filled with the glory of God. The purpose of our bodies is to reflect the glory and holiness of God. We are to present our bodies “a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1). This is the highest form of worship. God’s will is that we “abstain from sexual immorality” and possess our bodies “in sanctification and honor” (1 Thes. 4:3-4).

Session 6: Homosexuality & Transgenderism

On June 26, 2015 the United States Supreme court issued the Obergefell decision which legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States and its jurisdictions. Although this is a recent legal decision, the issue of same-sex behavior is ancient. Ancient images depicting homosexual acts date as early as 8000 BCE. Same-sex male lovers are recorded in Egypt as early as 2400 BCE. During the time of Abraham (about 2000 BCE) there is extrabiblical evidence of same-sex male lovers in Mari (modern Syria). The first recorded examples of same-sex intercourse in the Bible is found in Genesis 19 where the men of Sodom attempted same-sex gang rape. In the Greco-Roman world of the first century bisexuality was assumed. Homosexuality was natural, socially acceptable, even idealized, known as “Greek love.” Passive partners, typically slaves, were socially despised. Pederasty (sex with boys) was a particular privilege. Powerful men gathered “herds of boys.” The point here is that it appears that human civilizations have long blurred the distinction between male and female heterosexual behavior. This makes the teaching of Scripture even more pronounced.

It has become common among advocates of homosexuality to search for an example in the Bible where homosexuality is favored. In the Holy Scripture we are told that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself” (1 Samuel 18:1). Later, after Jonathan was killed in battle, David lamented the death of his dear friend: “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. *Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women*” (2 Samuel 1:26). So, does the biblical narrative suggest that David and Jonathan were homosexual lovers? No! The relationship between David and Jonathan is best described as heroic friendship, a friendship that was forged out of deep respect, a friendship earned in the heat of battle. David and Jonathan trusted each other with their lives. This is a love that transcends sexual expression (i.e., the love of women). Their mutual love and trust went beyond being brothers-in-law who were natural rivals for the throne of Israel. They forged a relationship in which they were brothers. The common euphemisms for sexual intimacy in the Bible – *knew*, or *uncover the nakedness* – is never used of David and Jonathan (cf. Gen. 4:1 NKJV, NRSV, et al). Also, both David and Jonathan had wives and children. Even if this is indeed a reference to homosexual love, it no more legitimizes homosexuality than David’s affair with Bathsheba legitimizes adultery. There is no suggestion anywhere in Holy Scripture that homosexual behavior is blessed or sanctified.

The Holiness Code prohibited same-sex intercourse: “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22). The apostle Paul declared that same-sex acts are “degrading passions” and “indecent acts” that lead to “a depraved mind” (Romans 1:26-28). Furthermore, he insists that neither “effeminate nor homosexuals” will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10) and that homosexuality is “contrary to sound teaching” (1 Tim 1:10). When referencing homosexuality, the apostle Paul uses two Greek words: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.

Malakoi – translated as “effeminate” (NASB), and “male prostitutes” (NIV, NLT) is a term used pejoratively to describe passive partners in homosexual relationships. It is from the root which

means “smooth”, referring to the anus being penetrated; or effeminate in reference to cross-gendering (men taking the female role in sex).

Arsenokoitai is a compound word constructed from two Greek words: “men” and *kotiai*, and is a vulgar word for intercourse. Paul is the first person in preserved literature to use this term, a term so vulgar that it was rarely used subsequently. The consensus among scholars is that Paul constructed the term to emphasize the vulgarity of the act. The polite translation of *arsenokoitai* is male coitus, or male copulation, referring to the penetrating partner in the homosexual act. The use of both words together – *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* – clearly indicates that any type of homosexual activity – penetrating or penetrated is irregular and immoral.

Transgenderism is expressed in a variety of ways. Most often it signifies that an individual’s gender identity is different from their birth sex. A person might have a male body but have female psyche. Gender dysphoria speaks to those who suffer distress because of their condition. Some transgendered persons seek sex reassignment therapy. Others cross-dress. Like homosexuality, transgenderism is an ancient problem. Dual-sexed humans are commonly portrayed in ancient Greece and Cyprus as early as 2000 BCE. The prohibition against men and women cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) is likely an early Biblical reference to cross-gendering that was common in Mesopotamia.

In our time, homosexuality and transgenderism are considered psychological orientations that are most likely caused by genetics or environment. The causes are still somewhat uncertain. In other words, homosexuality and transgenderism are not simply matters of choice. Here we need to make a clear distinction. When the Bible prohibits homosexuality and transgenderism, it is speaking to *behavior*, not orientation. According to the doctrine of original sin, all humans have sinful proclivities and are oriented towards sinful behavior. Unregenerate humans are enslaved by the power of sin.

The remedy for human sinfulness is the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. In Christ and Spirit, those with homosexual and transgender proclivities can be saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Like all of us they will still struggle with their sinful nature, but their choice to resist their sinful nature demonstrates the work of sanctification in their lives.

So, what should be the church’s posture towards homosexuals and transgendered persons? They are broken people who need soul care. Just like the single parent, the divorcee, the mother who recently aborted her child, or the adulterous couple; homosexuals and transgendered persons need to find grace in the church – the grace of forgiveness and the grace of sanctification. We should be reminded that Abraham fervently interceded in behalf of Sodom – a city whose men attempted to gang rape two messengers of God (Gen 18). The church should maintain its public witness and promote the sexual ethic of the Christian faith. But we must never forget the mission of God: “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim 1:15).

Session 7: Abortion

The world of the ancient near east in which Christianity was born was harsh towards children. Abortion and exposure were common practices, most often for economic reasons. Even so, the Church has always prophetically spoken regarding the value of every child. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that conception and birth are sacred events in the theology of the church.

The Gospel of Luke gives priority to the conception and the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth reveals the significance of infants in utero.

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:39-42).

It is significant that John the Baptist, while a fetus in his mother's womb, responded to the presence of the Christ child in the womb of Mary. Here Holy Scripture testifies to the ability of children in utero responding to external stimuli, in this case the presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, even in the womb the fetus is formed in the image of God, can respond to the presence of God, and it is certain that God knows the fetus as fully human.

As the church expanded throughout the Greek and Roman world the message of the gospel was consistently pro-life and pro-child. In possibly the earliest post-canonical Christian text, *The Didache*, the theology of the post-apostolic Church maintained fidelity with the ancient teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

*Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not commit sodomy; thou shalt not commit fornication... **thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide...** (Didache 2:2).*

I am aware of the necessity for certain abortive procedures when life is endangered. For example, an ectopic pregnancy in which the embryo attaches outside the uterus. In such cases the death of the fetus is certain and the death of the mother is likely and an abortive procedure may be necessary. These events are tragic. However, an abortion for the sake of social or economic convenience is a crime against humanity. The ancient Hebrew Scriptures warned against the practice of child sacrifice.

You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the Lord (Leviticus 18:21).

The people of Israel were forbidden to follow the Canaanite practice of child sacrifice in which children were burned in fire to honor the Canaanite god, Molech. Such practices combined idolatry with murder and profaned the name of God. The apostle Paul has written that the

highest form of idolatry is self-deification (Romans 1:21ff). We live in an age in which individual autonomy is the highest form of political freedom. The concept of individual autonomy has become the golden calf of the secular age. Abortion is child sacrifice before the idol of human autonomy. Christians must be reminded of the words of the apostle Paul:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

All humans, male and female, are created in the image of God. The human body was created to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, a sacred place. All forms of sexual immorality – fornication, adultery, homosexuality – profane the image of God in humanity. Likewise, abortion is a violent act against a sacred place and a sacred being. Paul insists that child bearing is a sacred act (1 Timothy 2:15). Neither male nor female have absolute autonomy over their bodies. Our bodies belong to the Lord; and in the case of a woman carrying the human fetus, the body she carries also belongs to the Lord.

What's Next? The United States Supreme Court decided that a woman's right to an abortion is protected by the United States Constitution (Roe v Wade, 1973), and in effect declared that "The unborn person doesn't have constitutional rights" (Hillary Clinton). In an article published in the Journal of Medical Ethics (2012) entitled "After-birth abortion: why should the baby live?", the authors suggested that because (1) fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, therefore 'after-birth abortion' (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is.

As humanity embraces the secular religion of postmodernity the future for children appears dire. As reprobate politicians and apostate clergy proclaim the anti-gospel of human autonomy hell rejoices and Heaven weeps. The same Jesus who rebuked his disciples for prohibiting little children in his presence likewise rebukes reprobate politicians and apostate clergy with the words,

And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:5-6).

Session 8: And Such were Some of You

The Gospel of Jesus Christ comes with a warning and a promise: The warning is “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God... neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals...” The promise is: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:9-11).

In previous sessions we talked about the sexual brokenness of humanity and the universal condition of original sin. Paul affirms that sexual sinfulness is common to all of us: “we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). We’ve also talked about how Jesus teaches us to offer grace and truth, to proclaim mercy and forgiveness to sinners, to offer life in the face of death. Sexual sins are sometimes the most difficult to forgive because they tend to be the most grievous, shameful, and treacherous. Sexual immorality is a betrayal of our covenant with God and our covenant with each other. Even so, there is no sin beyond the reach of God’s forgiving and saving grace.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ restores the brokenness of the male/female relationship. The Law tutors us in the righteousness of God but is insufficient in the redemption of humanity. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means that the Holy Spirit is being poured out upon all flesh – male and female, slave and free. The good news is that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are God’s remedy for the curse of sin. In Christ and Spirit, “new things have come” (2 Corinthians 2:17). In Christ and Spirit, “there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). This does not suggest that sexual identity, or gender, is fluid. Rather, the biological distinction of male and female are reaffirmed as co-equal partners in New Creation. The subjugation of female by male gives way to a marital relationship in which husbands and wives are to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph 5:21). Just as Adam and Eve ruled together and served as priest together in the Garden; in New Creation male and female rule together, and serve as priests together.

How does the Gospel fix the sexual brokenness of humanity? Let’s talk about the way of salvation. First, we must understand the depths of original sin. The human mind is depraved. A depraved mind cannot acknowledge God, cannot understand the righteousness of God, cannot comprehend the wisdom of God. Original sin is not a choice; it is a state of being corresponding to death that humans are powerless to overcome. Therefore, salvation begins with God’s gracious initiative whereby the Holy Spirit moves to enlighten the darkened mind and heart of humanity and enables them to respond to God’s call to repentance. To repent means *to turn, or change one’s mind*. To repent is to say, “Yes” to God; to acknowledge God and to live in obedience to God. Therefore, to repent is to turn from a life of sexual immorality and embrace the sexual morality of God’s law.

Paul declares, “you were washed”. This is a reference to water baptism which signifies new birth and initial cleansing from sin. The preachers of the Old Testament insisted that sexual immorality defiles us, or makes us unclean. The unclean person cannot enter the presence of the Lord until they are first washed with the waters of purification (Numbers 19:17-19; Ezek 36:25). Water baptism is called the “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). *Regeneration delivers us from the wages of sin – death.* Water baptism signifies removing the filthy garments of sin and being clothed in white garments of righteousness. Therefore, water baptism signifies new birth, being raised from the death of sin, being cleansed so that we may enter the presence of the Lord.

You were justified. Original sin means that humans are fallen, living under the wrath of God. To use a popular advertising slogan, “Help, I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” To be justified means *to be set upright*. It means that God has pardons us of sin and gives to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In other words, God takes everything that was wrong about us and makes it right. For the first time in our lives the wisdom of God makes sense. The depraved mind is renewed and transformed. *Justification is the remedy for the penalty of sin.* No longer do we live under the wrath of God, but “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

You were sanctified. Original sin means that humans are enslaved by the power of sin and no longer share the holiness of God. Sin reigns in our bodies so that we obey its lusts (Romans 6:12). *Sanctification delivers us from the power of sin* so that we can resist sin and present our bodies as instruments of righteousness. Sanctification means that God’s grace empowers us to choose holiness. Sanctification does not mean that we are delivered from the possibility of temptation. Sanctification does not mean that we are freed from the struggle with sin. Just the opposite. Sinners don’t struggle with sin, they celebrate it. Only the sanctified struggle with sin. Being sanctified means that we recognize the temptation and resist it.

Sexual temptation continues even after sanctification. That is true for the heterosexual, the homosexual, and the transsexual. But the sanctified person acknowledges the sinfulness of sexual immorality and pursues the holiness of God.

So then, is there an ultimate remedy for sexual brokenness; or do we despairingly cry out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). With Paul we exclaim, “There is no condemnation in Christ!” (Rom 8:1) because that which God has started in us God will complete. “...these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, *He also glorified* (Romans 8:30). ***Glorification delivers us from the presence of sin.*** In glorification we will be like Christ. Our corrupted bodies will be raised incorruptible; our dishonored bodies will be raised in glory; our weak bodies will be raised in power; and our natural bodies will be raised as Spirit-transformed bodies that will no longer be subject to sin and death! (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Session 9: Pastoral Care for the Sexually Broken

As a pastor of almost 40 years, I can testify that most of the questions that have been asked of me have to do with sex:

- Is it wrong to masturbate?
- Does the Bible prohibit interracial marriage?
- If it's wrong to be homosexual, why was I born this way?
- Should we have a baby shower for an unwed mother?
- Must I submit to my husband even when he wants me to do something immoral?
- Should a transgender person be allowed to serve as a greeter in church?
- If polygamy is wrong, why did David have five wives?
- Is abortion wrong in all cases?
- How should we greet homosexual couples that are visiting our church?
- Should I attend a homosexual wedding?
- Why is it wrong to have sex if we're in love and planning to get married? (The most common question by far.)

Most pastors don't have adequate training to act as counselors or therapists. And, these questions don't have easy answers. My first advice for pastors is to recognize when you are dealing with issues beyond your field of expertise and training. When dealing with sexual issues we are dealing with biological, psychological, and spiritual aspects of humanity. Also, there may be legal issues to consider. Have the wisdom to refer people to qualified and licensed Christian counselors who can help. Second, get educated on the issues. What we have done here only scratches the surface. These are important issues and we need to be sure that we are properly informed.

I have found the words of Paul to be very helpful in offering pastoral care.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1-2).

The goal of all pastoral care is restoration – the healing of the soul. Proper care requires a correct diagnosis of the ailment and proper treatment. We must speak the truth in love. When Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman about her history of divorces and her existing living arrangement with a man not her husband (John 4), he was straightforward, but not aggressive. When the immoral woman washed the feet of Jesus, he graciously forgave her sins (Luke 7). We must be willing to bear the burdens of the sinful and hear their confessions with compassion and confidentiality. James said, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

We should act as mediators of grace. Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them" (John 20:23). The apostle John declared, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Every action we take must be for the sake of discipleship and sanctification.

Sometimes, we must rebuke the unrepentant. When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered, the Prophet Nathan boldly confronted him and called him to repentance. When men and women of power use their positions of authority to sexually harass or abuse others, they must be confronted. When an adult sexually abuses a child, they must be held accountable. To fail to confront and hold offenders accountable is to become complicit in their sin. Paul publicly rebuked a man in the church at Corinth because of an "immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife" (1 Cor 5:1). He rebuked the Corinthian church because they tolerated the activity and had become arrogant. Jesus rebuked the church at Thyatira because they tolerated a prophetess named Jezebel as she led the church into sexual immorality (Rev 2:20-23). The refusal to repent of immorality will lead to the judgment of God. Christian clergy should never be complicit in promoting sexual immorality. That includes officiating at a homosexual wedding or tolerating sexual harassment in the church.

Many state governments require clergy to report incidents of sexual abuse and misconduct to law enforcement. The wise pastor will seek legal counsel in such matters. Also, we must have proper policies in place to govern our response. Once a man attended our church and informed me that he had just been released from prison for assaulting a five-year-old boy. He asked, "Am I welcome at this church?" I responded, "Yes you are. But be aware that I will notify our ushers about you and they will shadow you while you are on our property. You will not be allowed any contact with our children and should I discover that you have made contact with any child I will report you to the police." He never returned. I remained convinced that I acted in the best interest of my congregation.

Be a public witness to the Gospel. Among the most controversial political issues of our day are abortion rights and the LGBTQI movement. As Christians we have a responsibility to prophetically speak in favor of the rights of the unborn and to promote our vision of public sexual morality. In so doing we must be "shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). In other words, we must be discerning in our advocacy so that we are careful not to incite oppression and violence. I will continue to advocate for the life of an unborn child (and for the flourishing of all born children) and for marriage laws that reflect orthodox Christian teaching. But I will be careful to do so in a manner that is gracious towards my political opponents. We must recognize the basic civil rights of the homosexual community. We should never be guilty of throwing stones at sinners. Instead, we should be ready to turn the other cheek. We must never forget that we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ and ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 5).