

Dating, Sex, Marriage
RUF, Fall 2012

Sex – What in the World Are We Doing?

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

"... sexual love is not simply an act of fulfillment or gratification, but also an act of renunciation; for it directs us away from ourselves toward both the loved one and the next generation." (Gilbert Meilaender)

Scripture Introduction

We're talking about sex tonight, so you can pray for me. I'm going to be direct, and I'm sure, for some of you, controversial. My hope, as always, is that we would be willing to hear and respect one another even if we don't reach agreement.

Our text tonight comes from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 6, verses 12-20.

In January, 2004, *Time* Magazine opened a 60-page spread on the issue of human sexuality with an article that I think asks some of the right questions. This is what a portion of the article said:

"Of all the splendidly ridiculous, transcendently fulfilling things humans do, it's sex... that most confounds understanding. **What in the world are we doing?** Why in the world are we so consumed by it? The impulse to procreate may lie at the heart of sex, but... bursting from our sexual center is a whole spangle of other things – art, song, romance, obsession, rapture, sorrow, companionship, love, even violence and criminality – all playing an enormous role in everything from our physical health to our politics, our communities, our very life spans.

"Why should this be so? Did nature simply overload us in the mating department...? **Or is there something smarter and subtler at work, some larger interplay among sexuality, life and what it means to be human?**" (*Time*, Jan. 19, 2004, p. 64)

Sex – What in the world are we doing? That's the question I want us to consider tonight.

Scripture Reading

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with

her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Prayer

Introduction

Sex – what in the world are we doing?

We may not know how to answer that question, but that hasn’t stopped us from doing it. Our best data suggests that of unmarried Americans between the ages of 18 and 23 (that’s you!, “emerging adults”), 84% have already had sex.¹

We are having sex often, but what is it? What in the world are we doing?

I think there are at least three prevailing cultural scripts that define sex for us.

(1) Sex is biological.

You’ve seen the Discovery channel. Male lion notices female lion. Male lion chases female lion. Female lion allows herself to be caught. And the show begins.

One way to view sex is to say that what happens on the Discovery channel happens in our bedrooms. Humans are basically animals and sex is no more than an act of physical release. It’s natural, and if you’ve got two consenting lions, then let the show begin.

Friends was a popular TV show when I was in college. I’m old. In one episode, Monica (Courtney Cox) asks her new boy toy, “So, we can still be friends, and have sex?” “Sure,” he replies, “it’ll just be something we do together, **like racquetball**.” That could be a slogan for some of us: *Sex: It’s just like racquetball*.² No big deal. Just another kind of workout.

I want you to think about this angle, however. If sex is just like racquetball, just another biological workout, then why does sex so rarely end in two satisfied people going their separate ways without additional demands or expectations? In other words, if I play racquetball with you, I don’t expect anything after it’s over. You don’t even have to call me. Why is sex not that simple?

Maybe there’s more to it than biology.

(2) Sex is personal.

Here’s the basic premise:

“It’s my body. I can do whatever I want with it. Mind your own business.”

¹ Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America*.

² Lauren Winner, *Real Sex*

In fact, 90% of emerging adults between the ages of 18-23, said that they agreed with this statement:

“I should not judge anyone’s sexual conduct except my own.”³

In other words, sex is personal. It’s a matter of self-expression. As long as we are not hurting someone else, what’s the big deal?

But, if that’s true, **why do we feel that there are certain rules to sex?** In other words, if sex is just a matter of personal preferences, then you would never spend time wondering if your sexual experiences are “NORMAL.” Normal would be however you chose to construct it.

Here are a few more questions to consider: Do you think sleeping with someone after the first date is too early “in principle”? Do you think having multiple partners in the same week is bad “in principle”? Do you think you should be in a committed relationship before having sex “in principle”? If you answered yes to any of these, then you don’t really think sex is personal. You intuitively believe there are relational norms, that there are rules to human sexuality.

Beyond that, that act of sex itself tells us that sex isn’t just personal. Think about it. Sex not only involves another person, but it’s the way that a new life is created. (I’m sorry if you’re just now hearing this from me.) We are all the product of sex. (Gross, I know.) The act of sex points away from itself to the possibility of a whole new being coming into existence. That deeply affects more than just you, does it not?

Maybe sex isn’t as personal as we think it is. Maybe there are rules embedded within our bodies and sex has norms that we don’t construct.

(3) Sex is dirty

This is the view of many religious groups. Sex is dirty and immoral and shameful – so save it for the one you love!

Some of you have heard so many “No’s” when it comes to sex, that you have been robbed of the ability to imagine sex as a glorious, God-given, “Yes”.

But, there’s another reason that many of us imagine sex as dirty and shameful. And it’s because sex has been used against some of you to hurt you in very powerful and painful ways. You’ve been the victim of someone else’s sexual aggression, and now everything about sex makes you cringe.

Maybe you were sexually abused when you were younger, and your body responded to being touched (as bodies are made to do), and now you feel dirty, perhaps unworthy to be loved, or just plain ashamed of physical touch in general.

³ Regnerus and Uecker.

Or maybe, you had a night like Amelia, an 18-year-old from Wisconsin.⁴

At a high-school party when she was a sophomore, a guy asked her to go upstairs. Here's how she recounted the experience in her own words:

“We started making out. And then I didn’t really want to be there, and then I asked, ‘Well, let’s go back downstairs. ‘No, we’re staying. Come on.’ I got up, and then he started getting more aggressive. He said, ‘You’re like such a prude. This is so annoying.’ Then we continued making out, but not really doing much. Then he started taking off his stuff and pushed my head down. I was, like, really nervous, and I didn’t know what to do, so I just did it.”

What happened? Amelia said that she was flattered that an older boy was interested in her, so she went upstairs with him. But she became terrified of the social stain on her reputation that he could deliver to her if she didn’t perform sexually according to his expectations – **he wasn’t threatening to hurt her physically, but he could hurt her socially and emotionally if she didn’t play ball.**

It’s not a difficult thing to see that the very idea of sex can lose all it’s wonder and appeal for someone who has been deeply hurt by another person. And for those of you for whom this is true tonight, I want you to know that there is hope for you to enjoy the glory of sex.

God can heal you. Whatever wound evil has opened in you, God can restore and renew.

Transition

That’s a long introduction to ask one basic question tonight: Sex – what in the world are we doing?

Here’s now what the Bible says we’re doing, and the Christian view of sex basically hangs on three principles.

1. Sex is a good gift from God. (vv. 12-14)

Look at verses 12-14.

Paul begins the passage by quoting two popular Corinthian slogans – both short enough to come across your Twitter feed. See if you recognize them.

The first one is this: “All things are lawful for me.” What does that sound like when you hear it? It was the Corinthian way of saying, “It’s personal.” “Mind your own business.” “It’s my life!” “I am free to do whatever I want.” “All things are lawful for me.”

The second slogan is a little more cryptic: “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” That was the Corinthian equivalent of saying, “It’s all just biological.” When you’re hungry, you eat! When you want sex, go get you some! The body is just a

⁴ Regnerus and Uecker.

collection of appetites, a husk that needs to be satisfied. That was the Greek, Platonic view of human nature.

Well, look at Paul's response at the end of verse 13. This is Paul's basic reply to both of the Corinthian slogans, and to the views that sex is merely personal or that sex is merely biological. He says this: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

And this is where all Christian sexual understanding begins: **Your body was meant for the Lord.** Not primarily for yourself. Not primarily for anyone else. It was meant for the Lord.

And here's the crazy thing about that reality. The first command in all of Scripture regarding the human body is to go have sex.

God says in Genesis 1, to Adam and Eve, go fill the earth. And they've got to be thinking, "Well, how do we do that." And God says something like, "You'll see. You'll figure it out. And I promise, when you figure it out, you'll thank for me it."

Your body is meant for the Lord. And that means this: the Lord is *for* your body. He is *for* pleasure. When God sees a husband and wife having sex, God is pleased.

Sexual Immorality

Now, you'll notice that Paul says there is an exception in verse 13. The exception is translated as "sexual immorality." The Greek word used for "sexual immorality" is the word, "porneia." It's where we get the word, "pornography." It refers to more than just intercourse outside of marriage. Porneia refers to any sexual activity, any sexual release outside of the life-unifying covenant we call marriage.

Now that sounds entirely unreasonable to us. But guess what, it did to the Corinthians too. There was some kinky stuff going on in Corinth even by our standards. This isn't a modern dilemma.

I want you to know why God would say on the one hand, "Go have sex," and on the other hand, "But only have sex within these boundaries."

Why would God build a fence around sex, so to speak? It's because sex is a powerful and precious thing. And you always build a fence around something that is powerful and precious. For example, a fire inside a fireplace on a cold winter night is good; but that same fire can turn relentlessly destructive if it moves beyond the confines of the fireplace, into the living room, kitchen, and bedroom.

God fences sexual activity for marriage because sex is incredibly precious and powerful.

Which brings us to the second biblical perspective on sex... Here's why sex is precious and powerful...

2. Sex is the union of body AND soul. (vv. 15-18)

Sex is the joining of who we are both internally and externally.

Look again at verses 15-18:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is **joined** (highlight that word) to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who is **joined** to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

Here’s what Paul is saying: **Sex is superglue.** That’s what the word “joined” means. The Greek word means, “cemented, bonded, sealed.”

What Paul is saying here is that sex is not merely a means of self-expression, physical release, procreation or pleasure. Sex is designed by its creator as a sealing act... a bonding apparatus... a unity forming event...that seals a relationship between two persons... it is soul-body superglue.”⁵

And if you’ve ever messed around with superglue, you know you got to be careful where you stick it, because if it’s torn apart, it will take a piece of both surfaces with it.

This is why sex is reserved for marriage. God is saying, “Don’t unite with someone physically unless you are also willing to unite with that person emotionally, personally, socially, economically, and legally.”⁶ Unless you are willing to say to the girl or that guy, ‘I belong completely and exclusively to you in every respect,’ don’t do it.

Casual Sex⁷

And maybe you’re sitting there tonight, thinking, “I’m willing to risk it.”

Then I just want you to know what you’re doing. There is no such thing as casual sex. You are engaging in a life-uniting act without a life-uniting commitment, and probably one of two things will happen:

Either, the break-up will be devastating. It will feel like a part of you is being ripped away because it is. Sex actually worked. You were bound, and a part of you was ripped away.

Or...

You’ll have multiple partners, and like superglue, you’ll slowly lose your stickiness, the capacity to be bound strongly with anyone at all. Just as glue loses its welding power over time... the adhesive wears off... sex will become less meaningful for you. You’ll feel less satisfied. And you’ll experience what an old, dead theologian called, “an ever-increasing desire for an ever-decreasing pleasure.” It will be like drinking salt water –

⁵ Rankin Wilbourne, Sermon at Pacific Crossroads Presbyterian Church.

⁶ Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*.

⁷ Rankin Wilbourne.

you'll drink and drink and drink, but only grow thirstier and thirstier and thirstier in the process.

God says, "No" before marriage, because sex actually unites us in body and soul to another, and that sort of union belongs in the context of a lasting covenant.

3. Sex is an illustration of God's love for us. (vv. 15-20)

Look again at verse 17:

"But he who is **joined** to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." That's the same word we hear earlier. Paul is using sexual language.

So, how does that happen? How did we become **joined** or married to God?

Paul tells us in verses 19-20.

"You are not your own, for you were **bought with a price.**"

In other words, God paid something to join himself to you.

I want you to think about how strange that is.

I read a *NY Times* article this summer that reported on rush consultants prepping young women for sorority recruitment. For \$8,000, you can get a Friday to Sunday intensive on how to get into the sorority of your choice – everything from carrying yourself properly to choosing outfits to the art of conversation. \$8,000, and still there are no guarantees. That doesn't get you in; it gets you prepared.

To me, that sounds a little over the top. Maybe it does to you as well. But it's life. We do it in smaller ways all the time. We are constantly paying people to accept us. We shell out resources, personality, resumes, and lineages; we fork over our time, our energy, and our attention; we'll even hand over our bodies – just so someone else will lay claim to us. Make no mistake: We are always auditioning for love and acceptance, either to get it or keep it.

And here is Paul telling you tonight, that the one person you don't have to audition for is God. You don't have to pay him anything. Your resumes and personality and gifts, who your parents are or aren't... your currency is no good here... because he has paid everything to be joined to you... to be joined to your body.

So, how much is your body worth? God actually puts a price on it. God looks at you tonight, in all your glory and in all your ruin, all your shine and all your blemishes, and values your body at the cost of his life. God became one of us in the person of Jesus and died in his body in order to claim your body for himself.

And this is what sex is supposed to be all about. Sex is supposed to be one person giving himself or herself completely to another. God does this for you in a way that makes sex only a shadow of a deeper and fuller love given to you in the Gospel.

Conclusion⁸

I want to conclude tonight by being very practical. Where do we go from here? Let's talk about the past, present, and future very quickly.

First, your past. Don't punish yourself for your sexual past. Hear now the word of the Lord to you from Romans 8:1 tonight:

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In Christ Jesus, you can be clean. In Christ Jesus, your shame can be covered. In Christ Jesus, God can make you new again. Believe in the mercy and forgiveness of God in Christ.

Now, your present. Paul tells you what to do in verse 18: "Flee sexual immorality." Notice he doesn't say, "Avoid it... when it's convenient." Flee! You don't fight a grizzly. You run away as fast as you can. Sexual immorality, pornography, is stronger than you – it will eat you alive. It will enslave you.

Maybe you're dating someone tonight, and you say, "But what if we don't go all the way?" Just foreplay. That's not what it means to "flee." Foreplay is the on-ramp. Cars weren't made to get revved up, accelerate, and then try to come to an abrupt stop on the on-ramp. You are training your body in a way it wasn't meant to be trained. So where's the line? Simple. Don't get on the on-ramp. Don't spend the night together. Don't touch one another sexually. Here's a rule of thumb that's going to make me sound ridiculously conservative: If you wouldn't do it on the steps of Dallas Hall in the middle of the day, then don't do it.

Don't fight the grizzly. Flee.

Maybe you're in a relationship, and you say, "But we're going to get married." And maybe you are. But do you really want to start your life together on a foundation of not honoring God's will for your life? Wouldn't you want to begin your movement towards marriage on the premise that you are not our own, that you as a couple have been purchased at a price – you are under new management... not the management of your own passions?

Don't fight the grizzly. Flee.

Finally, your future. Remember what sex is about. Sex is not about getting some; it's about giving all.

You can start doing that right now. You don't need sex to be fully human. Jesus was celibate and he was fully human. Sex is about self-giving, so keep yourself vital by giving yourself away to others in appropriate ways – serve your roommates,

⁸ Ibid.

connect those who are lonely and estranged around you, join yourself to God's people, to a local church.

And finally, trust. Trust that the God who has given everything to be joined to you is enough for you. He is enough to cover your past; he is enough to strengthen you in the present; he is enough to bless you and keep you and bring you to fullness in the future.