

Daniel S. Teefey
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Repetitive, Loveless, Cheap Sex – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

It has been an interesting week after people have heard the sermon topic for this week. There have been some questions and someone last week asked if there were going to be any pictures.

One of our goals at Riverside is to be real and authentic with each other and that also means that we want to be real and authentic with the Bible. This morning we begin a summer sermon series on a passage in Galatians 5 that lists 12 “acts of the sinful nature.”

Chapter 5 in Paul's letter to the Galatians is a powerful chapter because it calls us to recognize that Jesus has set His followers free. We are not forced to adhere to all of the Old Testament laws and we are not judged based upon our ability to follow a whole host of rules. We are called to be free. But Paul still urges in Galatians that we do not abuse the freedom that we have. In verse 13, Paul says, “do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.” He goes on to say, “the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

Paul says we are free . . . we can do whatever we want but we are not to do whatever we want. Then he names the acts of the sinful nature, which he calls “obvious.” He lists them and concludes with a stern warning, “I warn you, as I did before, that those that live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God. “

The first “act of the sinful nature” listed is “sexual immorality.” The Message translation translates this, “repetitive, loveless, cheap sex.”

So what we are going to do over this summer is go through each of these sins and talk frankly about them. But don't expect this to be a legalist rant. We want to discuss each of these sins in the context of freedom in Christ. Sin is not established by some arbitrary standard in the Bible. God did not just throw a whole bunch of actions and thoughts into a hat and draw them out saying, “that is a sin, that is not a sin.” Sins are sins because they are actually unnatural and cause harm to us and others in powerful ways that we do not always notice at first. Sin is always some distortion or perversion of something good. That is part of the reason it tends to be so enticing.

Our method for looking at each of these sins will be to first look at what God wants us to do, then how we distort it into sin, and finally where we go from there.

Let's start off in another passage that Paul wrote specifically about sexual immorality, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. **Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.**

There are a couple things in this passage that we must understand. First, Paul again reiterates that we can do anything, but not everything is beneficial. **Morality or doing what God wants us to do is never about whether or not we can do it, it is always about whether we should do it.** And God's interest is not in bossing us around and showing us who He is and how much more powerful He is than us . . . God's interest is primarily in our living a life that is fulfilling because we have lived the life we were designed to live in relationship with Him.

I had to buy a new string trimmer this week and as I was leaving the store, the salesperson told me to make sure I followed the manufacturer's instructions to start it. I, of course, nodded my head in agreement, loaded the trimmer into the back of my car and went home. When I got home I pulled the trimmer out of my car, tore off the plastic bag with the protective goggles and the instruction manual (this is really why we didn't want kids in the service – make sure your kids were the protective goggles when they trim the yard – don't do what the pastor did) . . . I tear off the bag with the goggles and the instruction manual and I put them on the shelf, go out into the yard and get ready to start the trimmer. I had started trimmers before but not this model. So I pressed the fuel bulb a few times, flipped one of the switches, put on the choke, held down the throttle and started pulling. And pulling. I pulled some more, but nothing happened. It never started. I changed a few switches and pulled and pulled and pulled and still nothing happened. **I eventually gave up and went inside to find the instructions and as I started to read them, I realized what I had done wrong.** It wasn't that complicated, but I had done a step in the wrong order, learned about a little catch under the throttle that was designed to hold it in the exact right spot and I went back outside . . . one pull and it started.

Now I didn't do any damage . . . probably came close to flooding the engine, but nothing permanent except wasted time, but this is the nature of God and sin too. God has provided us with instruction on how to live our lives not because he wants us to do a whole bunch of stupid things, but because he made

us and knows how we work best. The trimmer instruction manual was written by its maker, they know how to make it start. And though I may think I know what I am doing only the maker really knows how to make something perform at its best.

When we don't live the way that God intended for us to live we will do damage to ourselves and others.

If I don't mix oil with my trimmer gas, it will damage it. I can do anything I want to my trimmer, but not everything will be beneficial. In our passage Paul reminds us, **“we can do anything . . . but not everything is beneficial.”**

Let's apply this principle then to our first “act of the sinful nature,” sexual immorality or repetitive, loveless, cheap sex. What is it that God wants us to do?

The answer is pretty simple in some respects. **If you are going to have sex, have good sex!**

Paul helps us initially know what this means in our passage. He says in verse 13, **“the body . . . is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. . . Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?”**

Sex is good. Sex is really good. And it is God's to talk about. I think Richard Foster is right when he says that, **“one of the real tragedies in Christian history has been the divorce of sexuality from spirituality.”**

True, right, good sex belongs to God and His ways. **The church has too often ignored talking about sex or even worse, pretended that it was just a physical thing that was unrelated to God and spiritual matters.**

Let me use two Old Testament texts to help us see the biblical value of sex. First, in Genesis after God has spoken all other creation into existence, God takes some dust from the ground and breathes life into it. Then he takes a rib from that first human creation and creates another, calling them man and woman. God used the rib of Adam to create Eve to underscore their interdependence, **“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”** as Adam expressed it. **The two, man and woman, are interwoven, interdependent, interlaced: no fierce rivalry, no hierarchical oneness, no independent autonomy.**

Then in Genesis 2:24 we get the confessions of the first marital commitment. “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The scene closes with **“and the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”** This is the perfect picture of two people whose sexuality were integrated into their entire lives. There was no shame because they felt whole.

We know that Adam and Eve go on to usher sin into our world and with it perversions of their God-given sexuality. Immediately, they find shame in their nakedness and clothe themselves. After the Fall, humans could no longer look at the naked form and see a whole person, inside and out, now it also aroused a desire to concentrate only on a sexual object with no regard for the value of the person. Since then we have been struggling to find sex’s proper place in our world. **Some treat it as the only thing and universally acceptable and others ignore it as wholly insignificant and perhaps wrong.**

There is another Old Testament text that helps us to understand the high view that God has for sex too – the Song of Solomon. There are several things the Song emphasizes. **First is love's intensity.** At one point the author describes the woman in bed longing for her lover. She gets up in the middle of the night and roams the deserted streets looking for **“him for whom my soul loves.”** Finally, she says, **“I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let go.”** (Song of Solomon 3:1-4)

Alongside love's intensity, we also find love's restraint in the Song of Solomon. In the Song the woman gladly announces to her lover, “I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers.” She had not given in to unrestrained passions with other men and had saved herself for her lover.

The man knows the lessons of restraint too. **In what I presume to be some macho exaggeration, the man recalls all the numerous opportunities he could have had to show his sexual prowess. He mentions sixty queens, eighty concubines, and “maidens without number” that could have been his, yet he said “no” to them all, saying “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.”**

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that sex is good and was created by God. It is an integral part of the union of a man and a woman. It physically unites into one flesh two people that have bound their lives. Sex has many wonderful benefits: the pleasure and satisfaction of becoming an intimate part of another persons body; verbal and physical communication; expressing and desiring pleasure with a partner; uniting the two to become another one, and clearly, the potential for procreation.

So if that is good sex, what is sexual immorality?

If we jump back to our passage in 1 Corinthians the issue that Paul is dealing with is prostitution. In verse 15, he says, **“shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her body? For it is said, “the two will become one flesh. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in Spirit.”**

Paul uses a fairly extreme example of sexual immorality in prostitution, but it is helpful in illustrating the problem with some sexual acts. From some perspectives there is nothing wrong with prostitution. After all it is simply and economic exchange between two consenting adults. **But from a biblical perspective it is wrong because it is a misuse or perversion of God's gift of sex. It is using my new string trimmer as a kitchen mixer.** It might work for a little while, but eventually there will be damage because that is not how it was intended to be used.

Prostitution takes the mutuality, the commitment, the reciprocal intimacy, love, interdependence . . . and all other essentials to good sex and separates them from the physical act. It is not the real thing. Simply having sex with someone for the physical pleasure is a cheap imitation of the spiritual and physical sex in a relationship. And to purchase sex as in prostitution is to turn the purchasee into an object. They are not truly respected, honored and loved as a human being in the image of God, but simply as a body to use for selfish physical satisfaction.

The Bible talks about several other perversions of sex too. It is these that are collectively called “sexual immorality.”

The most obvious is adultery. This is sex that violates the oneness that two people share through marital commitment. This is sex with someone you are not committed to, outside of marriage. It is a violation of the sacred bonds and is universally wrong and condemned. No matter what justifications we may use the Bible thoroughly condemns it.

Related to this, but of which I am not going to spend a great deal of time, simply because most of you are in committed relationship, is fornication or sleeping around. This is sex outside of the marital

commitment that devalues sex and often uses it as a recreational activity rather than a deeply physical and spiritual connection as it was intended. In today's culture the only drawback to sleeping around are the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, but these are not the Bible's problems with it. Its issues run much deeper. **Casual sex is a myth. Regardless of one's intentions, the act itself deeply binds two people.** Our bodies cannot be separated from our spirits. Science is beginning to uncover some of this truth too. With the aid of modern research techniques and technologies, scientists are confirming that sex is more than a momentary physical act. It produces powerful, even lifelong, changes in our brains that direct and influence our future to a surprising degree.

Over time committed physical sexual relationships mature, grow in depth of meaning, grow in intimacy including the physical exploration of each other's bodies because such growing physical intimacy requires a level of trust that takes years to flourish. **Short-term sexual relationships without life-time commitment are cheap imitations of authentic, fulfilling and meaningful sex.**

Perhaps the most subtle sexual immorality discussed in the Bible is lust. Jesus says in his sermon on the mount, **"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."**

Lust is a perpetual sexual stew - it is runaway, uncontrolled sexual passion. Because sex is natural and good, we have a natural appetite for it, but through sin this appetite can become distorted, obsessive and all consuming. We need the appetite for sex because without it there would be no procreation and human life would come to an end, but our appetites must be controlled and kept in their proper place.

C.S. Lewis does a good job of illustrating the problem. He wrote, **"Or take it another way. You can get a large audience together for a strip tease act – that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theater by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, should you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?"**

Perhaps one of the more common forms that lust takes in our society today is through pornography. Pornography is an enormous issue in our world today.

In pornography we see a truncated sexuality concerned only with the physical as an activity of lust and a dehumanizing exercise of power over others. Pornography again cheapens and dehumanizes sex. It treats others as sexual objects for our own purposes.

One tragically negative consequence of pornography is that with today's technology, imperfections are often "photoshopped" and then fantasy scenes are acted out in ways that are unrealistic and can make an otherwise wholesome marriage relationship tedious and drab by comparison. Richard Foster asks, "What woman can compare favorably day in and day out with the voluptuous breasts, sparkling smile, and sensuous legs seen on the screen today? What man can match the bulging biceps and suntanned body portrayed in the modern media?"

Pornography must be vigilantly escaped from. I realize for many, if not most of you, that pornography has and probably is still an issue. **You need to do 3 things. Get a filter for your computers and your cell phone. Tell someone about your struggles and ask them to hold you accountable. And pray for God's grace to overwhelm your guilt and strengthen you into more godly expressions of your sexuality.** This week I will be putting several resources on our website that should help you fight this battle.

There is a ton of stuff we could talk about, so I can't talk about everything, but I want to run through some big things.

One issue of sexuality that always comes up is the question of homosexuality. And let me begin by simply saying that the church, regardless of its conclusions, has often treated homosexuals hatefully and needs to repent of its persecution and discrimination. That said, though, the Bible is quite clear and straightforward that God's intention from the beginning was for sex to be shared between a committed man and woman. **The Bible then makes evident that homosexuality is a distortion of that God-given intention.** This does not, however, give us license to raise homosexuality up as a super-sin and to set aside those that honestly and deeply struggle with their sexual identity. **A homosexual's struggle is very real and an experience that most of us are wholly ignorant of.** We should not pretend that it is a simple choice any more than it is a simple choice for us to stop lusting. We are called to listen and to love.

What about sex in marriage? In 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Paul says, **“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.”**

There is to be mutual giving and receiving. This probably sounds more like an obligation, but in Paul's culture this was particularly freeing for women. No longer were they for their husband, their husband was for them too. Let me let Richard Foster be very blunt for us . . . he talks about men, but it would apply to women as well. **“It is my God-given responsibility to learn the specific rhythms of my wife. How often, how intense, how slow, how fast, what gives pleasure, what offends – these and a thousand other things form the vocabulary of love. I must learn to read the language of her heart and soul, and she must learn to read mine.”**

As long as you are acting out of care for your partner, frequency of sex and variations of sexual technique are simply not moral issues. Married couples are free to do whatever is mutually satisfying and contributes to the relationship. You are free and should explore the sexual realms of tenderness and delight that can lead to deeper experiences of love.

I want to give you a clear message for us as parents too. Talk to your kids about their sexuality and sex. In scientific study after study the evidence shows that young people consistently say that the individuals in their lives who influence their behavior choices the most are their parents. One study even found that an overwhelming majority of teens who talked to their parents about sex rely on their parents rather than peers for information about sex. **The problem is that far too many kids don't know what their parents' values are about sex. We need to be clear. And we cannot simply have “the talk.” It needs to be an ongoing conversation, year after year.**

Finally, I want to say a few words about those that are single, for whatever reason, because of divorce, not getting married, the death of a spouse. You are a sexual being too and though the church has not always done a good job acknowledging your existence, we want you to know that you have a place too.

For some, God does call them to be single for life, but not as a sacrifice, but as an alternative to fulfillment. What married partners might find in a sexual relationship, singles find in the intimacy of their friendships and the additional time they can spend with community activities and work for the Lord.

Jesus declared that there were those who were single “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” And Paul builds on this foundation by suggesting that the unmarried can focus their energies toward the work of God in a way that married simply cannot. **(1 Corinthians 7:32-34)**

Let me conclude by sharing some words of hope and forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

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