

JESUS-SHAPED ETHICS

Jesus and sexuality, *1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

It seems that our culture talks about sex and sexuality all the time. Our culture's apparent lack of shame find counterbalance in the embarrassment that often accompanies discussions about the topic in the church. However, even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals that it also has a lot to say about sex and sexuality, indicating that it is an important topic that we should not avoid. So, we will use this morning's lesson to consider a few features of the Bible's portrait of sexuality that will serve as a starting point for this evening's discussion about practical applications of the Bible's teachings.

Beginning considerations

- God created us to be sexual beings; it's part of His "very good"¹ design (*Genesis 1:26-28, 31*).
- Human selfishness has perverted God's plan for human sexuality (*Romans 1:18-32*).
- The amount of attention that sexual matters receive in the Bible indicates its danger.
- However, sexual sins are not 'more evil' than other sins (*cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21*).

A basic picture of biblical sexuality

- To begin, we must recognize that a close connection exists between sexuality and spirituality; it is not merely a physical activity.
 - The Bible indicates that a sexual relationship is more than just a physical act; it also has a spiritual element (*1 Corinthians 6:12-20*).
 - Consequently, a direct connection between one's sexuality and their relationship with God (*cf. Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11*).
 - Even though the Bible establishes the connection between sexuality and spirituality, our world often reduces sexuality to merely an animalistic instinct, wrongly arguing that we cannot transcend our 'basic instincts' and that repressing them creates unfulfilled and unhealthy people.
- God designed the connection between sexuality and spirituality to offer insights into our relationship with Him. For example:
 - God designed humanity as two physically compatible beings whose survival depends upon their union (*Genesis 1:28*).
 - The co-dependency of that relationship reveals that God did not intend humanity to live alone (*Genesis 2:18-25*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- God's design for sexuality, therefore, ought to raise our awareness of the reality that we are not complete just by ourselves, an understanding that God employs through His use of sexual imagery (i.e., marriage, adultery) to picture humankind's relationship with Him as a way of reminding us that we are not complete without Him (*Ecclesiastes 12:13*).
- Unsurprisingly, the God-designed connection between sexuality and spirituality extends moral obligations to sex. For example:
 - **Sexuality is a relationship-oriented activity.**
 - The Bible presents sexuality as part of the co-dependent, committed relationship God intended to exist between husbands and wives (*Genesis 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5*).
 - Because of its relationship-oriented character, God expects sexual faithfulness between husbands and wives (*Matthew 5:27-32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5*).
 - **Sexuality is natural but must be controlled.**
 - Even though God designed humans as sexual beings (*cf. Genesis 1:28*), He expects people to control their sexuality (*Leviticus 18:1-30; 20:10-21; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9*).
 - The sexual relationship between a husband and wife can be natural and beautiful when controlled. However, its beauty becomes unnatural when practiced outside the limits set by God (*Romans 1:18-32*).
 - **Sexuality has limits.** God limits sexuality to men and women and the marriage relationship (*Leviticus 18:22-23; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Matthew 19:1-9*).

Applications

- Sexuality, when practiced as God intended, is a good and beautiful thing for which we do not need to feel embarrassment or shame (*cf. Song of Solomon*).
- Sexuality, when practiced outside of God's expectations, becomes a debasing and endangering practice (*cf. Romans 1:18-32*).
- Do not underestimate our culture's pressure on us to adopt its sexual norms. We must become aware of its influences on us and find ways to safeguard our minds.
- We must be clear:
 - The restriction of sexuality to marriage excludes all sexual activity outside of marriage.
 - The boundaries God places on sexuality do not merely limit physical activities; they also restrict non-physical sexual acts like, for example, sexting, viewing pornography, or engaging in lewd, suggestive, or provocative behavior (*cf. Matthew 5:27-28; Ephesians 5:3-5*).



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Discussing Jesus and sexuality

Sexuality, when practiced as God intended, is a good and beautiful thing for which we do not need to feel embarrassment or shame (cf. Song of Solomon).

The Song of Solomon offers a lengthy love poem describing the erotic love between two figures. Rather than providing some voyeuristic tale, the poem tells of love's passion, longing, and anticipation that must be controlled (cf. *Song of Solomon 8:6-7*). Given the place God created love and sexuality to occupy in human lives, we should not be surprised that His Bible would include a book describing the power wielded by love and sex and the importance of controlling that aspect of one's life.

How can we properly, tastefully, and clearly cultivate a biblical worldview of sexuality in our homes and the church? How do we define "properly" and "tastefully," especially considering culture's changing standards (cf. *1 Corinthians 11:2-16*)?

What additional insights do you think we can take from the place God gives to the Song of Solomon in the Bible?

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In Matthew 19:1-9, the Pharisees tried to leverage two competing views of divorce in Jesus' Jewish world to turn the crowds against him. Jesus responded with a cutting response – "have you not read..." (*Matthew 19:4*). His answer indicates the Pharisees allowed cultural



understandings rather than God’s plan “from the beginning” to shape their thoughts about marriage, divorce, and sexuality.

God announced His plan for marriage and sexuality in Genesis 2:24-25. Deviations from his plan begin in Genesis 4:19 and plague humankind through the Bible. Why do you think sexuality offers such a persistent and strong temptation? What consequences attend deviations from God’s plan?

What things characterize our culture’s understandings about sexuality and how might they influence us? What practical things do you think we can do to safeguard ourselves from our culture’s influence?

What additional insights do you have about how we are to interact with our culture in the area of sexuality?

Sexuality, when practiced outside of God’s expectations, becomes a debasing and endangering practice (cf. Romans 1:18-32).

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Paul addressed the issue of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church, warning the Corinthians that they should not "associate with anyone who bears the name brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 5:11). Paul's comments offer an uncomfortably hard standard that, if followed, puts one in direct opposition to our culture that praises (its redefined) tolerance as a virtue.



Why do you think Paul offers such a strict standard for sexual accountability?

How do you think we should deal with sexual sins in the church family? How can we do it in ways that maintain "the weightier matters of the law" (*Matthew 23:23*)?

What additional insights do you think we can take from Paul's comments about sexual sins in the 1 Corinthians?

