

Ephesians 5:1-14

Week 10 - "Sex and the Gospel"

5/23/21

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. **Ephesians 5:1-14**. Mark that and then hop over to **Genesis 1**. I want to spend some time there first this morning because before we jump into the Bible's teachings on the restrictions and boundaries around sex, I want to first lay some groundwork for God's original design for sex.

Pray.

Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."

Pause there. So up until this point in the story God has been creating - night and day, sun, moon, stars, plants, animals, all of that. But then there's a pinnacle moment in the creation story, something is totally different from the rest of His creating work - and that is the creation of human beings.

God says - Let us (reference to the trinity) make man in our image -- and it says he created them **male** and **female**. We'll talk about this a ton next week.

But then look at verse 28 - the very first command God gives to this man and this woman together → **be fruitful and multiply**. God's first command is to go make some babies. Being fruitful means much more than just having kids, but certainly does not mean less than that. God wants the earth He just created to be full of humans bearing his image, giving Him glory, but instead of just immediately creating a whole bunch of us, he instead creates 1 man and 1 woman and he says - "You guys do this". And he could have chosen any means by which they would make this happen and yet he chooses this means - **sex**.

God is the creator of sex. And He gives it as a gift to Adam and Eve with one of the goals being **procreation**.

Skip down to Genesis 2:23. The creation of Adam and Eve is so important Moses gives a whole extra chapter to expound on what and how it happened. God had created Adam from dust, and said it's not good for him to be alone. Everything else is good in creation, not this. Makes him fall asleep, takes out a rib, creates Eve. Adam wakes up and says this:

23 "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

This beautiful epic Hebrew love poem over this new creation of God, who is also created in the image of God just like Adam, and Adam immediately knows - she is special! He's just gushing.

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Here we see more of God's design for sex → We already said it was a gift, He created it and gave it to humans for procreation. But here's two more aspects → One, immediately we have the first marriage in history. "A man...will hold fast to his wife." **God gives sex within the confines of a marriage between a husband and a wife.**

And then vs 25 - They shall become one flesh...and they were both naked and not ashamed. **So sex is not just designed for procreation but also for intimacy - an acting out of this new "oneness".**

But this is all pre-fall. Keep going to Genesis 3.

God told Adam and Eve there was one thing they couldn't do in the garden - they couldn't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are tempted by the devil in the form of a serpent, eat from the tree, sin enters the world and look at what happens.

Genesis 3:7

7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Sin enters the world and it corrupts everything - including sex. Where they used to be naked and unashamed - with deep intimacy - now they are hiding, covering themselves up. Shame has entered the world. God's good design for sex has been broken.

So even before we get out of the first three chapters of the Bible we see that:

- **God has a good design for sex. That it is a good thing. It is a gift from Him.**
- **Sex was meant for procreation and intimacy between a husband and a wife. Two people, within the covenant of marriage, giving themselves away to one another.**
- **Sex has been corrupted and distorted by sin.**

Lust vs. Love

With that as our foundation, let's head over to Ephesians 5 and see what the this passage has to say to us about sex. Let's start in vs 1:

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul starts, like he has this whole book with how much God loves us. He grounds the obedience we are about to be called to in the reminder that we, in Christ, are beloved children of God.

And then out of that he commands us to **walk in love**. That's the call of a Christian - as beloved children of God, we imitate Christ in how we too sacrifice in love for others.

Love is the giving of oneself. Love is a posture of - what can I do to bless you and serve you? Which is important because he is going to go on to contrast that with something completely opposite:

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Paul uses three terms to describe the opposite of the self-giving love of a Christ follower: **sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness**. Let's define these terms:

- **Sexual immorality and impurity** are two words that often go together in the bible. Together, they describe any sexual interaction with someone you're not married to. If it is sexual in nature and it's not with someone you're in a marriage covenant with, it's included here.
- **Covetousness** is a word throughout the Bible which addresses wanting something that isn't or shouldn't be yours. In this context, it's describing any sexual thoughts or desires towards someone you're not married to. Any sexual or objectifying thoughts, whether it's towards a person you know, a random person out in public, or via things like porn or fantasy.

For simplicity sake, let's refer to those ideas collectively as "lust".

Lust is a disordered desire for or expression of sexual pleasure.

It can be disordered in the **who** - a desire for someone other than YOUR husband or YOUR wife.

It can be disordered in the **why** - a self-seeking desire opposite of the self-sacrificing love of God's design.

Paul sets these two up against one another. Two options - Love via sacrifice. Lust via self-seeking gratification.

This is how Pastor Tim Keller says it:

Lust says, "What can you do for me?" Love says, "What can I do for you?"

In God's design, as the creator and author of sex, sex was meant to be a physical act of self-giving. One flesh, naked and unashamed. Giving all of yourself to another person.

It's why over and over again the Bible explicitly calls for sex within the boundaries of a Christian marriage. This relationship which is a picture of the gospel to the watching world in how two people die to themselves - where it is no longer you + and me but us. Two become one flesh. A surrender of all of you to the other person, and sex is a part of and representation of that. That's why marriage is so crucial.

Keller continues so perfectly here...

"The modern world sees sex as a commodity to be consumed, enjoyed in relationships conducted contingently on a profitable cost-benefit relationship. But marriage requires mutual self-sacrifice, the giving up of independence for the deeper joy of interdependence.

Pushback: Now, maybe some of you would take issue with this line of thinking. Maybe you would say "but my boyfriend and I aren't taking from one another when we have sex—we love each other." And to that, Paul I think, 1 Cor 7, would say "great. Then you should get married." "Well, we're just not ready to get married yet." Well then you're not ready for sex—precisely because you're not ready for the type of all-encompassing sacrificial love that sex is about.

Within the Christian worldview, sex was meant to be doing with your body what you're already doing with your life—giving yourself fully to another person. Sex is intended to be consistent with all other parts of the relationship. That all of me, belongs to all of you. And by definition, sexual interaction and sexual desire outside of marriage, can't be that. Because you're not giving yourself fully, completely, and forever to them.

Paul says lust is anti-that. Anti all-of-me type giving forever.

Not a Hint

So he continues - these things **must not even be named among you.**

What he's getting at here is the idea of **association**. You guys, church at Ephesus, believers, followers of Jesus and sexual immorality, impurity, lust - they shouldn't even be thought about in the same paragraph. Other translations say "not even a *hint* of sexual immorality."

How far is too far? When we first got married, Lindsay and I worked with college students for a few years. And time and time again when it came to the idea of physical boundaries and those types of things the question we would get all of the time is - "how far is too far?" How far is too far? Now I think sometimes it's out of a good heart. Really wanting to follow Jesus. Other times - What's the goal there? Tell me what the edge is so I know how close I can get to it.

And the Bible says → The edge is a "hint". I don't know how little a hint is, but it's not a lot. It's like when a recipe calls for a "pinch". How much is that? I don't know but not a lot. Not even a hint, not even named, not even associated. It's the wrong question to ask - the question is not - how far is too far, the question is how can we glorify Jesus. Not even a hint.

Among the Saints

Then he continues:

3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Let me pause here real quick for one second. If you're new to this whole Christianity thing, you just came because a friend invited you or you're exploring this guy named Jesus, this passage may be confirming every stereotype you've ever had about Christianity.

You might be thinking → Really? I visited a church during the sex sermon...cool. Why do you guys care so much about who I sleep with? Why does God care about who I sleep with?

But I don't want you, or any of us to miss who Paul is saying he's talking to → **the saints**. Which in the New Testament is followers of Jesus.

So Paul's assumption isn't that everyone in the world would abide by this sexual ethic. His assumption is that followers of Jesus would abide by it. That's different.

So if you're not a follower of Jesus, I hope you feel welcome here, find this to be a place where you can ask questions and wrestle with who Jesus is. I also want you to know that we wouldn't necessarily expect Paul's instructions here to make any sense to you. We would expect them to seem a little weird and unnecessary and overbearing. Because you're missing the most important piece of the puzzle—**who Jesus is and why He would ask something like this of us.**

And as you consider what I'm saying about the call to surrender to Christ, even when it comes to our sexual desires, that you would understand that **Christ calls us to surrender our whole lives to Him, but only in response to Him first loving us and laying down His life for us.** All of this is rooted in the gospel, and I want you to know and believe that.

How we talk about sex

Alright, hop back in. Paul says not even a hint of lust, sexual immorality, etc. among the people of God. Then he takes it a step further:

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place,

Now just how we engage in sex, but how we talk about sex. Just like we shouldn't **participate** in sex in a way that cheapens it, we also shouldn't **talk** about sex in a way that cheapens it.

Can I just give you a word of caution to be careful about not just how you talk about sex, but how the media you consume day in and day out talks about sex. That affects you. That sitcom, that reality show, that song...it affects how you start to think about this stuff.

New Girl. I heard a story this week about someone, not in our church, but who realized that she had to quit watching New Girl. Hilarious show, but she felt like every other episode was driven by hookup culture, and it was twisting how she was thinking about the place of sex in her life. That's not legalism, that's beautiful.

4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

It's interesting to me here that Paul doesn't say - let there be no foolish talk, crude joking, but instead practice self-control. He says → Instead, let there be thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving (gratitude) is a key to the fight against lust.

Why? **Because lust is driven by discontentment pushing us to want and take more.** Thanksgiving is gratitude for what we have. Whether single or married, when we stop to practice thanksgiving for who God is and what He has done for us and given to us, we don't have to be driven to reach for more and more and more.

"Child of God". Talking to a guy in our church a few weeks ago who was sharing about how he's been seeing real victory lately over sexual sin, and I was asking him what was helping and he said - waking up everyday really fighting for an awareness and rootedness in the fact that I'm a child of God. That He loves me, died for me, calls me His own, so I don't have to go looking for fulfillment in all of these other ways.

Thanksgiving is a tool to fight discontentment that drives us to lust.

Weight of this Sin

5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

I want to say something really strongly, and then I'll back it down just a bit.

If you are living in habitual and unrepentant sexual sin (if this is who you are, you're settled in it, no big deal) **the Bible would give you good reason to believe that you're not a follower of Jesus.**

- Now, I'm not elevating sexual sin as being worse than other sins. Paul, elsewhere in Scripture has similar statements about sins like envy, idolatry, greed, drunkenness.
- I'm also not saying if you struggle with these things, even to the point of sexual addiction, but are fighting, repenting, confessing that this applies to you.

But there is a difference between **struggling with** and **being settled in.**

- If you can't seem to stop sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but you're living with them, or sleeping over all the time, or alone at 1am just you two in the apartment - **you're not struggling, you're settled in.**

- If you can't seem to gain ground in your porn addiction, but you have no filters or blockers installed, haven't confessed it to your spouse or community, or you're still on social media which you know is triggering you - **you're not struggling, you're settled in.**

And the Bible doesn't play around about this. This is a big deal to God. Sin, as a whole, and sexual sin is a big deal to God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words...

Let no one deceive you...Not the world. Not your boyfriend or your girlfriend. Not your friends. Not yourself.

The world is going to tell you that a Biblical sexual ethic (created by God, given as a gift to husbands and wives, meant for the boundaries of marriage) is not just wrong but repulsive, harmful, and oppressive to your desires and wants as a human being. This is true today, this was true in the city of Ephesus, where their number one god was Artemis, who people worshipped because they thought she would give them better sexual fulfillment and fertility.

Your sinful nature is going to tell you this is not a big deal. It's your body, do what you want, it's natural, etc. etc. etc.

There is no shortage of internal and external justifications when it comes to sexual sin. And the biggest lie that is being screamed at us right now is this: **Why would anyone have the right to tell you to deny yourself and what you want?**

Church - self-denial is a marker of a follower of Jesus. That's what this whole thing is about - we die to ourselves and live to God. Self-denial is at the core of what it means to be a Christian. **AND** it's not repressive to entrust ourselves to the one who created us and created sex. If you create it, you know how it's supposed to work.

iPhone. It'd be like if you met Steve Jobs 14 years ago, when he first invented the iPhone. And he handed it to you and was like - "It's called the iPhone. It's a beautiful, powerful tool that's going to one day take over your life and the life of everyone else around you. (That's a joke)." And then he said - here's how you use it, you turn it on, get a service provider, you make calls - but it's also very delicate so you need to be careful with it. Use it correctly. And you ran off and said - "Who are you Steve Jobs to tell me how to use this, That's harmful and repressive. I want to use my iPhone as a coaster on my coffee table!"

God design for sex is not meant to withhold for the sake of withholding, He's the author of it, creator of it, giver of it. He knows how it's designed to work. It's not meant to be repressive, it's meant for greater and deeper fulfillment. Do we trust Him enough to believe that?

for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

His design is too perfect and the disordering too destructive to ourselves and to others to leave it alone. Sex is a big deal to God, which is why he cares so much about the proper boundaries surrounding it.

Summary:

- Sex is a gift from God given to husbands and wives for intimacy and procreation.
- Sin has broken that gift, and now instead of self-sacrificing love, we are pulled and tempted towards self-seeking lust.
- The call for the believer is to put this away, not even a hint in our lives - in practice or in speech.

Three Applications:

But this is no joke. So what do we do? I've got three applications for us as we close. Three ways to fight lust. None of these are silver bullets. This isn't a quick fix thing. This is going to take time, effort, the Holy Spirit, the grace of God. But let me just give you a couple of things to step into this evening.

1. Flee sexual immorality.

7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,

Do not become "partners" with them. It means don't partake, don't join in, don't believe the lie that everyone else is doing it. Take no part.

I love the way it's phrased in **1 Cor 6:18 - Flee from sexual immorality.**

Lust is the only sin in the Bible we're told explicitly to flee.

Run. Don't stay and try to fight, run.

Don't fool yourself → "You know this is really tempting, but I can fight it/we can fight it." NOPE. Get out of there. Flee.

We have to take this sin seriously.

For some of us, that means we need to take some serious and drastic measures. We've been battling sexual sin, sexual addiction, and the invitation for us is to ramp up the fight. Take the internet off your phone, get connected to a sexual addiction recovery group, break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend.

Flee. Sexual sin is too powerful and too dangerous to play games with.

Dating or engaged folks in the room: Marriage won't fix your porn problem. It just won't. Don't believe that lie. Don't wait on getting married to figure this out. Start killing your sin now. Start learning to flee now.

And please, please, please, do not miss why he says we should live like this. Here's the reason he gives for avoiding lust: because in Jesus, that's not who you are anymore.

8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Listen to me here: **the command to put off lust is not a call to simple behavior modification—it's a call to live into who Jesus has made you.** Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has made you an altogether new human being.

So we don't just run *from* sexual sin, but we run *to* Jesus. We find our rest in Him. We find our delight and joy in Him. We find our satisfaction in Him so we don't have to go running after all the things sex promises but doesn't deliver on.

St. Augustine, way back in the 4th century - 1600 years ago, who had been a sex addict before he came to Christ, said it like this: **"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee."**

Flee sexual immorality - run from it. And run to Jesus.

2. Confess sexual immorality

8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no

part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Few sins make us want to hide more than sexual sin. It brings with it a level of shame, a level of hurt.

The invitation is to bring it into the light. To confess it. To walk in the light because we are now children of light. To not hide in the darkness where sin can grow, where addiction can grow, to bring it to the light. To confess it to God **and** to confess it to your Christian community.

If you are in the room right now and you have hidden sexual sin, there are two things I immediately know about you. I know them because of the Bible, but I also know them because I've been there before.

- **I know you feel isolated from others.** Maybe in big ways, maybe in small ways. You just have this feeling that the only way people like you is because they don't know the real you. And if they knew *that thing*, they would reject you.
- **I know you are isolated from God.** I'm not saying in regards to your eternal standing before Him, I'm saying in regards to intimacy and communion with Him. Whether you feel it or not, you are isolated from Him. Because (1 John) “in God there is no darkness at all.”

But here's what I'm telling you, and more importantly the Scriptures are telling you: **those can both be over with today.** The isolation from others and the isolation from God can be finished this evening if you will bring your sin to the light. If you'll just expose it. Confess it to God and other people.

And here's what I promise you will find:

- You'll find a community of people more than willing to meet you right where you are. A group of people ready to respond without shaming you, without condemning you, but by embodying God's grace and compassion towards you. And you'll probably find a bunch of people whose stories sound a lot like yours and are more than willing to tell you about it, and walk with you through it, and help you find freedom from what's enslaving you.
- And even more important you'll find a **Savior whose blood is more than enough** to cover every bit of your sin. Every single thing you've been caught up in, whether it's been for weeks or months or years or decades, doesn't matter—all of it can and will be forgiven.

Bring it into the light.

***Can I say a quick word to our married couples →**

- 1) confess to your spouse.
- 2) If you guys are struggling in the area of sexual intimacy. Whatever that struggle may look like - brokenness, not having sex, whatever the case may be - will you bring that into the light as well. This stuff shouldn't be an off limits part of our lives with Christian community. Bring it to trusted friends who love you and love Jesus and can remind you of the gospel, pray for you, counsel you from the Scriptures.

****If you can't talk about this in Christian community, where are you gonna talk about it??**

3. View sex Biblically

I want us all to elevate our view of sex. Too often throughout church history, in response to the culture making sex into a god, making it everything and all important, the church has rebuffed by talking about it like it's gross. Don't do it. It's bad, it's dirty, you'll be dirty. Until you get married then suddenly it's a good thing.

But all of us in the room, single, engaged, married - we all need to hear this → **sex is a gift from God. Created by Him. Given to a husband and wife for intimacy, for procreation. Value, important.**

As we learn to elevate our view of sex, this helps us fight against lust. We see it for the good gift that it is, we give God thanks for it, and fight against a cheap view that leads to cheap talk and cheap actions.

To fight against sexual sin, don't lower your view of sex, raise your view of sex.

1. Flee sexual immorality
2. Confess sexual immorality
3. View sex biblically

Conclusion

For this sermon, with so much to say and so much ground to have to cover I've continued to be focused on two goals:

I want some of us to take our sexual sin more seriously.

It's crushing you. It's not what God designed. It's wrecking your soul, wrecking your mind, wrecking your body. I'm praying the Holy Spirit convicts you, in the kindness of Christ, to make some drastic changes to flee from your sexual sin and put it to death.

My second goal is that I want some of us to take the gospel more seriously.

Some of you are wrecked by the shame and guilt of your sexual sin. You're refusing to receive the gospel of Jesus as good news for you. You have an offer of forgiveness at the foot of the cross by the God of the universe.

- Who in Christ Jesus does not define you by what you've done or not done with your body.
- Who does not define you by the images you've seen or not seen.
- Who does not define you by your fantasies, by your actions, by your impurity.

Who, through your faith and faith alone in Christ and Christ alone, does not view you as impure, tainted, messed up, marked → But declares you and washes you **white as snow**. Forgiven, holy, pure, righteous.

Your identity before the Father is not - Christian but full of sexual sin. It's Christian marked by the blood of Christ. He sees you as He sees Jesus. I'm praying that Holy Spirit would soften your heart to actually embrace that, that some of you might weep at the goodness and mercies of God to wash you clean, forgive you, and make you new.

Pray.

Communion

Confess - CG Leader/Member, Prayer Team

Worship + Weep