

Under Construction

Week 3: Sex and Identity (ProP)

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Well after talking about politics last week, I'm looking forward to something much easier today...sex. So, if you have a Bible, or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6.

We're in week 3 of our series, Under Construction. And, the idea is that our faith is always going through a bit of a renovation process. We're always putting up, or tearing out, pillars in our faith. And sometimes, we put up pillars that aren't in the blueprints. At best, they're unnecessary. At worst, these pillars can actually become the first thing people see when they look at our faith and they get in the way of people finding and following Jesus.

And so last week, we looked at politics, which I think is one of those places where a lot of people have put up pillars in their faith that aren't in the blueprints. Their politics is the first thing people see when they look at their faith, and it's keeping them from Jesus.

On the flip side, there are also those pillars that ARE in the blueprints, but we've decided that they're out of date, or in the way, and so we've removed them. But, when you remove pillars that are in the blueprints, it's not long until cracks start to form and the walls come crashing in. It's why so many people who have deconstructed their faith often times end up with no faith at all. They just took a sledgehammer to all the pillars, even the ones in the design.

And so, while the temptation with politics is to maybe put up pillars that aren't in the blueprints, the temptation with sex is to tear out the ones that are. To remove what Scripture says about sex and marriage and sexual identity because those things feel dated and out of touch with today's culture. What we're seeing in our world is that **We've torn out the pillars in the blueprints and put in new ones that say, "My sexual expression is *the most* important thing about me."**

Even inside of the Church body, we've stopped listening to God on this topic because, if we're honest, we just don't like what He has to say. But, my conviction is that, in a culture that is absolutely obsessed with sex, that talks about it all the time, God's voice ought to be heard, too. I mean, after all, sex was HIS idea! He created it! In fact, the first command he gives Adam and Eve is **"Be fruitful and multiply..." (Gen. 1:28 ESV).** God basically turned on the Barry White music, closed the door and said, "I'll leave you two alone."

Not only was this His idea, but He created us physically, and physiologically, to not just use sex for procreation, but to enjoy it in a way that binds two people together physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. God didn't have to create sex to be so enjoyable, but He did because He's a good God! It kind of sheds new light on **James 1:17 that, "Every good and perfect gift is from above."**

But listen, like all of his gifts, the gift of sex is best experienced in the way He designed it. Within the boundaries He set around it. And, these boundaries were not set to *limit* our enjoyment of sex, but to maximize the joy and satisfaction it brings. These pillars that God put in the blueprints of our bedroom are meant to protect us from the guilt and pain, even shame, that so often accompanies sexual sin. God set boundaries around sex to provide for us and protect us.

And, what we see from the beginning of creation is that God's design for sex and marriage is for this gift to be enjoyed between one husband and one wife for one life. God established this relationship between sex and marriage in the Creation of the world and says, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24)

And so, God created sex, and then He set boundaries around it to provide the most joy and satisfaction, but to also protect our hearts from the pain and brokenness that can come when it's used outside of His design. But, as we see with everything else in creation, Sin destroys what God designs. What God meant to be this beautiful, enriching, enjoyable act between a husband and wife, sin has distorted it, and led to so much brokenness and pain in our lives.

Many of us in here have experienced that pain. You've experienced a broken heart. You gave yourself to someone who promised they'd never leave, someone you thought cared for you, and now you're left with all kinds of regrets. Maybe your sex life with your spouse isn't what you'd like for it to be and it's a constant source of tension between the two of you. It's left you feeling unwanted and unloved.

Maybe you've experienced broken relationships because of your sexual sin, or someone else's. Your husband or wife cheated on you, and now you're living with that pain. Many of us carry around wounds of either our own, or someone else's, sexual sin. Maybe you have broken trust because someone forced themselves on you and it left a scar that affects the intimacy in your marriage today.

Pornography is rampant in our society, accessible anywhere at any time, and it's robbing marriages of intimacy. It's causing men and women to objectify people for their own satisfaction. People made in the image of God. People Jesus died to save. Casual hook-ups turn sex into a selfish act that meets MY needs and satisfies MY desires.

And, you may be asking yourself right now, "Why does God care about what goes on in my bedroom?" I think it's because God cares about what goes on in your heart. It just so happens that, for many of us, there's a direct link between our bedroom and our heart. And the same God who created you, also created sex, and He knows that sex outside of His design will cause brokenness and pain in your life.

I've shared this analogy before, but our home has a fireplace in the living room. And, on those cold, winter evenings, that will be here before we know it, we love to sit around the fireplace and watch a movie. There's just a peace that comes from the warm glow of the fire; the popping

and crackling of the wood. Fire in the fireplace...where it's supposed to be...is a good and beautiful thing!

But, now imagine that same fire in the kitchen. That's a different story, right?! If there's a fire in the kitchen, it's not peaceful! There's chaos and screaming. Smoke alarms are going off and you're trying to learn on the fly how to use the fire extinguisher! People are running out of the house. There are damages that have to be repaired.

What's the difference? They're both fires. The difference is that one fire was burning where it was designed to burn and the other wasn't. Sex, in the way God drew up in the blueprints, brings warmth and connection. It draws two people, who are fully committed to one another in marriage, together into a deeper level of physical and emotional intimacy. But sex outside of God's design is like a fire raging out of control that causes damage and destruction wherever it goes.

THAT is why God cares about this topic so much. Because He cares about YOU. From the moment of the Fall, when sin first removed a pillar that God had put in the plans, He's been trying to draw us back to how we were created to live because He knows it's in that space we will find the joy and satisfaction that our souls desire. So, He's given us some very clear teaching on this subject through the Apostle Paul. Look at our text. 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 12..(READ vs. 12-13)

So, Paul starts here by clearing up some misconceptions the Corinthians had adopted from their own culture. Like so many today, they treated sex as an appetite to be satisfied and not a gift to be cherished. He quotes their own philosophers and basically asks, ***"Who are you going to listen to here?"*** Are you going to buy into your culture's understanding of sex and sexuality or are you going to submit to the One who created it AND created you?

And, I think that question is still so relevant for us today. We are very well versed and indoctrinated in our culture's narrative of sex and sexuality. And many people, even those who are followers of Jesus, have bought into that narrative. And what Paul is doing for the Corinthians, and even us today, is he's challenging us to take a step back and see this topic from God's point of view. Take another look at His blueprints.

He says our bodies were ***not meant*** for sexual immorality, which means they ***were meant*** for something. It means that, God the Creator, has a greater meaning and purpose for our bodies and our lives than just our sexuality. Your sexual expression or identity is not the most important thing about you, but our culture has absolutely idolized it and elevated it above everything else.

I think it's interesting that both Jesus and Paul, who writes this, were both happily single. Scripture even celebrates singleness, but unfortunately, our culture views it as a deficiency. Like, you're not able to express who you truly are unless you express it through your sexuality. But, Paul is saying, "That's crazy! You have so much more value than that." Whether you're married,

or single and celibate, your life has greater meaning and purpose and value than just your sexuality. There is so much more to you than that.

And yet, in our culture, it seems to be the most important thing about you. It's a person's identity. But, the truth is, God has greater meaning and higher purpose for your sexuality than just a bodily, physical act. He goes on in verse 14...(READ vs. 14-20)

Paul uses the practice of temple prostitution to highlight the spiritual component of sex. That it's not just a physical act, like we often believe. And, he emphasizes this by rooting his argument in four areas.

First is the **Creation narrative**. In vs. 16, Paul points back to God's original blueprints laid out in the Genesis 2 passage I read earlier.

Second, in vs. 14, he points to **Christ's resurrection and our own**. He says that our bodies are united with Jesus in this life and the next. That whatever we do with our bodies, we do it with the body of Christ as well. It's why he says your body is not your own; you have been united with Christ.

Third, Paul points to **the Gospel**, reminding us that we were bought at the price of Jesus' body and blood, so our bodies do not belong to us, but to the one who redeemed us, so we are to honor God with those bodies.

Finally, Paul roots his argument for sexual holiness in **the character and nature of the Trinity**. He appeals to us to consider God the Father who created our bodies, God the Son, who redeemed our bodies and make them a part of His own. He appeals to God the Spirit, who indwells our bodies and makes them the temple of God, the place where he takes up residence. Paul points to the Trinity to urge us towards sexual holiness.

Author Philip Yancy takes this connection to the Trinity one step further. He says...

"In one sense, we are never more Godlike than in the act of sex. (That's an interesting statement. What does he mean by that? He means...) We make ourselves vulnerable. We risk. We give and receive in a simultaneous act. We feel a primordial delight, entering into the other in communion. Quite literally we make one flesh out of two different persons, experiencing for a brief time a unity like no other. Two independent beings open their inmost selves and experience not a loss but a gain. In some way...this most human act reveals something of the nature of reality, God's reality, in his relations with creation and perhaps within the Trinity itself." Phillip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World*

Listen, sex is not just a physical action between two consenting adults in whatever way they want to experience it. Sex is a reflection of the intimate character and nature of God. And so, it makes sense why Paul pleads with us in verse 18 to flee from sexual immorality and implores us in verse 20 to honor God with our bodies.

And, in those places where this topic has caused brokenness and pain, we want to be a part of what God is doing to redeem, restore, and renew what sexual sin has destroyed. It's why we partner with ministries like Rapha House in Thailand, who rescues young women out of sex trafficking and slavery. It's also why we partner with ministries in our own backyard like Hope Resource Center in Bedford, who's doing an incredible job raising awareness, support, and education of alternatives to abortion. Check out this video [...\(Hope Video\)](#)

When it comes to sex and sexuality, there's a lot of pain that can be caused. And, unfortunately, some of that pain has been inflicted by the Church. Maybe not this church, but the "capital C" Church. And, if the Church has added to your pain in this area, I'm so sorry. I know how difficult and confusing that can be.

At Sherwood Oaks, we want to be a place that lovingly stands on God's truth, but leads people to His grace. I believe that grace is the root from which holiness grows. And so, if you've experienced hurt, or judgement, or shame in this area of your life, our desire is for you to experience the grace of God here.

And one of the main groups that has been beaten up by the Church is the LGBTQ+ community. If you identify as LGBTQ, I want you to know that you are welcome here. God loves you. We love you. You can belong here. And, I'll be honest with you...Sherwood Oaks is not an affirming church. Our position is that the practice of homosexuality is outside of God's design for marriage and sex. And so, we cannot affirm that lifestyle, just like we would affirm any lifestyle that is outside of God's design.

But, please hear me, while that's our position, our posture is one of love and grace for those who find themselves with same sex attraction. We hope that Sherwood Oaks is a place where you feel like you can belong and, alongside all of us, grow in your faith and surrender to Jesus in all aspects of your life, including your sexuality.

I know, this is such a difficult topic. And it's maybe caused a lot of pain for you or someone you love. So, I want to share some resources with you as we close today. There's a website that I've found so helpful in my own life and have pointed others to. It's centerforfaith.com. The ministry is Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender and it is the best ministry I've found when it comes to this.

And, they have three studies that I want to point you to in case you're interested in taking a deeper dive into this topic. The [first one](#) is for people who identify as LGBTQ+. It's a free course designed for LGBTQ and same-sex attracted people who are interested in Jesus. You can find it on their Online Courses page.

The [second one](#) is for parents who need help navigating the journey of raising and walking alongside of their LGBTQ child. It gives some great insight and super practical tools for how you can faithfully love them well.

The **third resource** is for Connect Groups and it's called Grace/Truth. It does a great job helping followers of Jesus develop a Biblical worldview on faith, sexuality, and gender.

Any of these studies can be done on your own, and that might be what you need right now. But, if you'd like to go through them with a group, reach out to **Beth Long** at blong@socc.org. Let her know what study you're interested in, and if we get enough people to form a group, we will.

Let me close with this...I know that keeping the pillars in God's blueprints for sex and marriage is hard. It's why so many people, even followers of Jesus, have removed them. This is an emotionally charged subject that's deeply personal for many of us. And, I imagine all of us, in one way or another, we're wrestling with it.

And so, yes, by keeping these pillars in when so many others are ripping them out, it puts us at odds with our culture. But many of us have seen what happens when you take them out. We've seen the hurt and the pain it causes. And so, we unapologetically stand on God's design for sex and marriage as a gift to be enjoyed in the way He designed it. And we do so because we trust Him and believe that He knows what's best to protect our hearts.

But, with that said, we will always, ALWAYS, take a posture of grace and humility, recognizing that so many of us carry around wounds in this area. And with all of the pain and brokenness that sexual sin causes, we will stand on God's truth and fall on His grace. We will take the posture of Jesus, and humbly come alongside of you as you pursue sexual holiness and healing.

And we will do it without judgement, because grace says, no matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, or what's been done to you...God loves you and has not given up on you. And we won't either.