

One Flesh: Sexuality, Scripture, and the Church

Session 4 - Sex and the Single Savior: Ministry in the
Way of Jesus

Review

- Session 1: An exploration of different worldviews concerning sex
- Session 2: A look at different views of marriage - the prevailing view vs. the historic Christian view
- Session 3: The presenting questions surrounding the Bible and homosexuality
- Session 4: Examining the life and ministry of Jesus as a way forward for the church in a sexually charged world

Jesus: Fully Human, Fully Divine

- Humans were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)
- Jesus is the God become flesh (John 1:1-18)
- Jesus is the perfect image of God and the perfect image of humanity (Colossians 1:15-20)
- Jesus is the new Adam, who changes the trajectory of humanity (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28)
- In Jesus, the one true God and true humanity are revealed and reconciled

Truly Human

- Nicene Creed: “For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human.”
- Fully invested with God’s Spirit and yet fully human in every way
- Philippians 2:1-11 - “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...” - Jesus is thus the model for true humanity

Jesus and Sexuality

- If Jesus was fully human, did he have human sexual desires?
- Media: *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *The DaVinci Code*
- Docetism: Early heresy that claimed Jesus only *appeared* to be human
- Origen: a sexless Jesus
- Most Christians don't have a problem with Jesus being fully human, except when his fully humanity is too much like ours!
- And yet, Jesus was "tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15)

“When in the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* Mary Magdalene sings, ‘I don’t know how to love him,’ she expresses the general frustration we all seem to experience regarding our view of Jesus. We’re uncertain of how to—or whether to—view him as a sexual being.”

– Michael Frost

“Social Sexuality”

- We have primarily defined “sexuality” as something that we *do* with our genitals rather than something that is one part of human life in general—our maleness and femaleness.
- Marva Dawn - we also have a “social sexuality” - a longing to be completed in the other
- “If indeed Jesus’ nature (and body) is just like ours (and God’s nature for that matter), then we must assume that there exists a similar compulsion to connect with others.”
- Deb Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex*

The “Social Sexuality” of Jesus

- Jesus did not choose to express sexuality genitally, but expressed his social sexuality in intimacy with a wide variety of people in a wide variety of contexts
- He was attractive to people, not because of his looks but because he exuded real intimacy with God and with others
- Jesus was attracted to them as much as they to him—especially those whom others rejected
- He had intimate relationships with both men and women (disciples, John, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene)

Jesus and Sexuality

- If Jesus is the perfect image of God and the model of our humanity, his expression of sexuality should inform our own
- Jesus was able to be passionate about and intimate with people without the need for genital sexuality
- This challenges our modern Freudian assumptions that one can only find fulfillment in genital sexual relationships
- Being fully human may include genital sex, but doesn't require it
- But being fully human does require intimacy and community. It is "not good for [people] to be alone" (Genesis 2:18)

The Great Commandment

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)
- To be fully human is to love God and love others
- Reflects God’s image in community, mission
- Holiness (love for God) and humility (love for others)

A Sexual Identity Makeover

Holiness (v. 1-2)

- The goal of the Christian is to live a life that is “holy and pleasing to God” - a life that reflects the image of God
- This is our true worship, our true identity
- Living that life requires a “living sacrifice” —presenting our bodies, individually and collectively, to God. After all, our bodies belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- In order for us to live that identity, we need a “renewing” of our minds—no longer living according to the patterns of this world
- Instead, we focus on the things that most matter to God—what is good, pleasing, mature, perfect
- Wesley—“holiness of heart and life” - a life that imitate and reflects Jesus- a costly way of life

Humility (v. 3)

- “[Do not] think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”
- When the goal is Christ-likeness, no one can claim moral superiority over another—only Christ can
- Jesus himself demonstrated this humility, even though he was God in the flesh (Philippians 2)
- Humility is expressed in service, in caring, in lifting others up—loving our neighbors as ourselves

The Problem:

- We tend to focus on holiness *or* humility, rather than holiness *and* humility
- Conservatives: tend to demand sexual holiness without repentant humility
- Liberals: tend to demand humility without call to sexual holiness
- This is a falsely constructed binary
- We find the perfect balance of humility and holiness in the way that Jesus related to people, particularly those on the margins

The Relational Pattern of Jesus

- **Connection** - Jesus sees people
- **Invitation** - Jesus invites them into relationship
- **Intimacy** - Jesus spends time with them
- **Challenge** - People's lives change, sometimes because of what Jesus says or teaches, but mostly often because they have simply been with him
- For Jesus, approaching people is always about humility *and* holiness, and *posture* before *position*

Some Examples

- Calling of Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)
- Woman at the Well (John 4)
- Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- The “Sinful Woman” (Luke 7:36-50)

Posture and Position: John 8:1-11

- Adultery - a crime of genital sexuality
- A double standard - male partner nowhere to be found
- A focus on judgment and punishment - holiness as destruction of offender
- A trap question - If Jesus says “no,” they can accuse him of violating the law of Moses; if he says “yes” he could be charged with violating Roman law
- So, here is a clear violation of the biblical rule, someone who was caught in the act, and an ethical demand for judgment

Jesus' Response

- Bent down (posture), wrote with his finger on the ground
- Didn't answer right away
- Writing - many interpretations, but remember that God wrote the commandments with his finger (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10)
- The implication: the only one there who has the ability to enact judgment is the one who wrote the commandment in the first place!

Holiness and Humility

- Holiness code - demands justice, Jesus still questioned
- Straightens up and gives them a humility test: “Let anyone among you without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”
- Bent down and began writing again—maybe the other commandments?

The Result

- “When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders.”
- Jesus confronted their holiness with humility; the one who is most holy takes a posture of humility
- Jesus straightened up again - standing to look at her face to face - “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” - No one, sir
- *“Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”*

Contrasts

- Pharisees - focused on the law; Jesus - focused on the woman
- Pharisees - holiness without humility; Jesus - holiness via humility
- Pharisees - would have eliminated opportunity for repentance and restoration; Jesus - always looking to restore a sinner with forgiveness
- Jesus loves the woman enough to confront her with her sin without condemning her

Observations

- Notice that Jesus doesn't change his position; indeed, he took the sin of adultery seriously (Matthew 5:27-30)
- Doesn't downplay the seriousness, but believes that grace is the best path to redemption, not condemnation
- He offers grace so that she can live in the light of it— grace that is costly because it calls us to change our behavior, but grace that is also freely given out of love

A Situational Story

- Invites us to find ourselves within it. With whom do we most identify?
 - Woman - caught in cycle of sin, feeling condemned, used, unworthy
 - Pharisees - self-righteous, holier-than-thou, bent toward punishment
 - Jesus - offers mercy and grace while encouraging holiness

John 8:12-18

- Jesus is the “light of the world” - brings light to those who walk in darkness
- v. 15-16 - judgment by human standards
- The key for followers of Jesus—bring in the light!

Holiness and Humility: Striking a Balance

- Hugh Halter: “Whimsical holiness” - the ability to hold on to personal values of Christlikeness while being deeply in relationship with people who do not hold your same convictions
- “Like a middle linebacker who effortlessly shunts aside three-hundred-pound offenders coming at him so he can get to the quarterback, Jesus shunts off sins to win the heart of the sinner.”
- People with Jesus’ whimsical holiness win the lost because they’re the only ones who hang out with the lost.

Holiness and Humility in Jesus

- When Jesus encounters people, he is not concerned about his reputation or being made “unclean” by associating with them
- In Judaism, associating with unclean people made one unclean; but when Jesus associates with unclean people, his holiness makes them clean
- Luke 8:43-48 - The Woman with a Hemorrhage

An Incarnational Focus

- Jesus became human and entered the mess of human sin in order to redeem all of humanity
- Jesus entered into my own sinful mess
- As one who has “put on Christ,” I must be willing to enter into other people’s mess as well and enter in meaningful relationships
- Redemption, liberation, and sanctification are dirty jobs
- “To follow Christ is to jump into pain, hell, and all kinds of sinful [situations] without an arrogant, finger-pointing, judgmental thought.”

Jesus on Judgment

Matthew 7:1-6 - Five important lessons for confronting sin:

1. The way we judge others is the way God will judge us.
2. Conduct a rigorous self-examination of sin
3. Confront sin in others with humility and grace
4. Seek restoration and reconciliation
5. Leave ultimate judgment in the hands of God

Pulling Weeds or Sowing Seeds?

- Matthew 13:24-30 - The Wheat and the Tares
 - Don't pull up the weeds, will damage the wheat
 - It's often hard to know the difference!
 - God makes the judgment at the harvest
- Matthew 13:1-8 - The Sower
 - "A sower went out to sow" - broadcasting the good news of the Kingdom indiscriminately
 - Pray for good soil to receive the seed of the Kingdom!

**Some practical
considerations...**

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Seven Relational Do's and Don'ts

- Listen, Listen, and then Listen Again
- Use Humanizing Language
- Don't Be a Hypocrite
- Be the Reward that Jesus Promises
- Recognize that Sanctification is Not Linear
- Commit to Love, No Matter the Choice
- Trust the Power of the Gospel

Should I attend a gay wedding if invited?

- Affirming: Of course
- Traditionalist: Wouldn't that indicate that I approve?
- An invitation indicates that you are in a deep enough relationship with people to be valued and loved by them
- The model of Jesus would suggest that it's not our reputation or approval that matters, but rather our presence as representatives of Christ
- Staying in relationship with people offers opportunities for the Holy Spirit to work in unexpected ways

What about using someone's “preferred pronouns?”

- We lose nothing when we treat people with respect
- Again, we engage in a posture of humility so that the holiness of Christ can shine through us no matter what position we might take

What about leadership in the Church?

- People rarely fit neatly into categories - we need to listen to people's stories
- Balancing holiness and humility in pastoral conversations - we must get to know people
- Standards must be uniformly embraced—policies must apply to all
- Be clear about what you believe while pursuing authentic relationships
- Membership covenants are the future

The Denominational Situation

- We can hold deep convictions while maintaining deep relationships
- Assume the best of people. Most people want to do the right thing, but we have different ideas of what that is.
- Give space and time for people to wrestle
- The Paul and Barnabas example
- We should treat others in our congregation like we would treat our family

Next Steps

- Participate in listening sessions and other events put together by our Next Steps Task Force
- Stay informed on denominational events (umc.org)
- Get to know LGBT+ people - listen and learn
- PRAY!

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