

Jason Upchurch - Selected Scriptures - What Is the Christian Sexual Ethic?

This morning we come to an extremely sober passage about the dangers of sexual immorality. And sadly I think we probably don't have to think too hard about someone who has absolutely shipwrecked their faith because of sexual immorality. There's a reason we are warned over and over throughout the Bible against it.

And as we look at it here this morning, there's just no easy way around this issue. There's no way to lighten the mood and do any justice to the warnings that Paul is giving us here.

He lists 3 sins we need to put off: sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness. Then ties those sins to 3 related sins that might come out of our mouths: filthiness, foolish talk and crude joking. These are related in their sexual nature.

Those are all the sins we are to put off. the truths that we use to renew our minds are very sober as well. **Read 5-6**

He says "let no one deceive you." There's a lot of people who try to deceive themselves and others into thinking that sexual immorality is no big deal. They try to play it off, pawn it off or downplay the dangers. These are empty words, beloved.

Unrepentant sexual sin is deadly dangerous. If your life is characterized by these sins you have no inheritance in the Kingdom of God. And the wrath of God is squarely on you. Christians simply do not live our lives walking in these sins.

Because of how pervasive this issue is, I want to spend two weeks working through it. Today, I want to look at sexuality in a larger context. Paul says sexual immorality must not be named among us, which means we need to be a people committed to sexual **morality**. But what is that? What does the Bible say? We need to define that positively before we can define it negatively.

Big Picture this morning is simply: God designed sex to be a good thing, don't corrupt it.

Many pastors tend to stress sexual immorality in their sermons rather than sexual morality. And I'm sure I've done this as well. Partly because the Bible's own emphasis on prohibiting immorality. But also because teaching a positive sexual morality can make people feel uncomfortable too.

But given Paul's command here, I think it's important that we are honoring the Lord in every area of life, and especially in the most intimate area of our life, which is the sexual union within the confines of marriage.

We need to know both sides. Here, God designed sex to be a good thing, don't corrupt it. So I want us to look at the Bible's teaching on morality, then we'll tie it together briefly at the end, then come back next week and talk more in depth about immorality.

Turn to Gen. 2 for a moment. The Christian sexual ethic throughout the Bible is that God created sex as a good thing to be enjoyed within the marriage union. There are at least 3 benefits to the sexual union that we see in the Bible. It is pleasurable and brings unity and creates children. All three of those are good and are to be enjoyed by married couples. There's nothing shameful about any one of those statements.

Sadly, many people downplay or undermine all of them. "Well, we can't have sex just because it feels good." Have you read Proverbs or the Song of Solomon? It's the Bible calling us to enjoy our spouse. Pharaoh found out Isaac and Rebekah were married because they were being sexually playful with each other. God put a bunch of nerve endings around our sexual organs on purpose. He didn't have to do that. But he did on purpose for our enjoyment.

Sex also creates unity within the marriage, or it should. Garth Brooks has a song called "Two of a Kind, Working on a Full House" and one of the lyrics is "sometimes we fight just so we can make up." Now, I don't encourage fighting of course, but he's getting to a reality when he says "just so we can make up." He's saying

there is a unity that is restored and refreshed in marriage when we're intimate with our spouse. That's a wonderful gift.

Third, God designed marital sex to create children. God told both Adam and Noah to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Those commands have never been deleted, and in fact are repeated in similar ways in the NT.

There's a lot of people, including Christians, who think having children is just optional. That's not true. In the NT Paul tells young widows to go get married and have babies so the devil doesn't revile them. There's a reason that the most intimate and enjoyable act we have also produces the very children God commands us to be having anyway.

Obviously there are sad situations of barrenness or medical conditions that might prevent children. At some point bodies break down. We certainly never go down the road of IVF because of its blatant murder of babies and other moral problems. But children are a good thing and Bible continuously calls us to have them.

I don't think you have to have as many children as possible. But I think it is wrong to simply say you don't want children - or you want just a couple - as a matter of simple choice. No, God designed us to have children as a good thing for his glory.

Here, we see the institution of marriage and there is an immediate connection to intimacy. **Read 23-25**

So God created us male and female - only two genders - and he created us with cravings for intimacy. Even the words Adam says about Eve when he first sees her after God makes her seems to be an exclamation of enjoyment in her. It's good for our bodies to be attractive to our spouse.

And then Moses describes marriage as a leaving of our father and mother and a creation of a new sovereign family unit. And intrinsic in that creation is "they shall become one flesh." One flesh is literally what happens when the marriage is consummated on the wedding night. The physical act of intercourse unifies the couple, consummating the marriage, creating them as a new family unit.

In fact, throughout history, if either spouse fails to consummate the marriage it has been grounds for annulling the marriage because it was never finalized. People in all cultures and ages have understood, by common grace, the importance of the conjugal union. God assumes and commands sexual intimacy. **Turn to Proverbs 5:15-23**

This section is in the context of warning against the adulterous woman. We need to be reminded that both women and men fall into sexual sin. We often think of the man who gets caught in sin - but he's committing that sin with a woman. We need to get out of this mindset that only men commit sexual sin. Proverbs 2, 5 and 7 warn young men against what women say and what they do and even what they wear. Usually in Proverbs it's the women who are the temptress and seductresses.

And I feel the need to just pause and say, ladies: how you dress affects the men around you. Tight clothes, spandex pants, tight tops, short shorts, low cut whatever, bathing suits in the summer that are just basically underwear...ladies, these are just not a help to the men around you. Your husband might really like it - that's great if it's in your home or away from others. "Well, they shouldn't be looking" - you shouldn't be showing.

Ladies and men are called to wear clothes as a display of godly modesty. Men and women: are you wearing stuff where no one could stumble over? The first part of Proverbs 5 and 7 addresses those things. I want to focus on the second part which is the goodness of the sexual union. Notice the expectations here. **Read 15-23**

He uses the analogy of a well. Wells were rare in ancient times. And so to have your own well and cistern meant you were very rich. Your spouse is where you are to draw your water. Go have sex and enjoy it. He names specific body parts to enjoy.

Let your fountain be blessed. That's a euphemism for the act of sex creating children. The female reproductive system is like a fountain and the blessing that comes is the children from the union.

And I want to be clear, this is not a theoretical passage. Except for a few exceptions, both spouses should be cultivating intimacy regularly in the home. It is a spiritual thing, a matter of following the Lord Jesus faithfully in marriage.

Usually, but not always, sexual desire is uneven. Sometimes husbands have a higher desire, sometimes wives do, but the idea is that we both can go to one another for satisfaction. We can go to the well and draw all the water we want. That's the whole reason we got married.

Men, the old joke is that we are like microwaves and our wives are like crockpots. We get heated up quickly. It takes them a while. If you are waiting around for your wife to initiate intimacy it probably won't happen. Just like you had to go win her over when you asked her out on a date, that's what you had to do when you asked her to marry you, and you often have to do that with intimacy. And that really starts with loving her and cherishing her all throughout the day but initiating intimacy is usually on you.

Wives, because this is God's design you are called to be open to his advances. An cold marriage where you're ambivalent to intimacy is not glorifying to God. Refusing to have intimacy or refusing to ever initiate intimacy is not honorable. I think it was episode of the Bright Hearth podcast where they said that the wife should be sexually hospitable to her husband. When you think of good hospitality, it's welcoming and inviting and gracious.

Sometimes, the roles are reversed and the wife has more desire than her husband. That's fine, husbands you are called to be there for her.

This is the goodness of what God has created. And it should happen no matter the circumstances. **Turn to Jer. 29:4-9** This is Jeremiah speaking the Jews who had gone into exile. They were hauled out of Jerusalem, forced to walk 500-600 miles away and reestablish their lives in Babylon - a pagan country. If ever there's reason to not have intimacy and kids and be involved in society this is it, isn't it? No. **Read**

The people of God were to be a blessing even in the radically pagan country of Babylon. It was important that marriages were maintained, households built up. God mentions over and over marriage and making children to be a benefit to society. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out how children are made. God wanted marriages and families to thrive.

I hear so often - even from Christians - well I wouldn't want to raise children in this world. We're so evil. And really what that tells me is that these people have literally never read a history book even once in their whole lives. They have no idea what they are talking about.

We have every convenience, every safety, every medical advancement. We have clean water, clean food, no fear of constant war. We go down to Yokes and walk into a veritable Garden of Eden where all the world's produce has come to our backdoor and we have 5 varieties of apples along with 500 different kinds of meat.

Really, all of our houses are equipped with with luxuries no king 200 years ago could even fathom. And somehow this is society something people can't imagine raising children in.

Goodness, I sound like a postmillennialist.

There's never been a better time in the history of the world to have children. If the people of God were to obey the command to be fruitful and multiply while in slavery in a pagan nation 2,700 years ago, we can do it here in our air conditioned houses with Amazon Prime and 55" tvs. Intimacy and the children that follow is the design of God. **Turn to 1 Cor. 7:1-9**

This is the NT teaching on intimacy. And it's the same. **Read 1-4**

So Paul is responding to a question about sexual intimacy. Back in chapter 6 he had just said that Christians can't go to prostitutes. That's not a thing we can do. But the Corinthians thought maybe that they shouldn't get married or have sex at all. Paul says that's not what he's saying.

He says because of temptations to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. God has built into almost every human a sexual desire. A sexual drive. And if that desire is not satisfied within marriage it is a temptation to immorality.

That immorality was rampant in Ancient Rome and it's still rampant. It's porn and masturbation and sleeping with your girlfriend and one night stands and homosexuality and all kinds of other sinful acts.

Paul says that because there's a temptation to immorality go get married! Get married and be intimate there to the glory of God. Do you get that Paul is saying the marriage bed is away to keep you and your spouse from sinning? It's a God-given way to reduce immorality.

That doesn't mean sin won't ever occur. There are times when there's intimacy in the marriage and one of the spouses still commits immorality. But it is a massive safety belt for immorality.

Which means men, if you're not doing the hard work of pursuing your wife in marriage and ladies if you're not being hospitable - or the other way around - you're opening up massive temptations for you and your spouse. Because the marriage bed is where God designed these desires to be satisfied.

This also means, unmarried men and women - you need to go get married. There's no biblical reason to put off marriage for a long time. Young men you should get a job that can provide as fast as possible. It doesn't have to be your dream job, but it does need to provide for you and a potential wife. And you need to make it your job - and I'm not kidding - to go find a wife.

If you think about any other sin, you wouldn't just hang out for years while you're getting tempted. If you're a drunkard you wouldn't just hang out in bars for years on end. That's a recipe for disaster. Well, so is not vigorously pursuing marriage.

Single ladies, you need to be learning what it means to work at home, raise a family and if you need to go get you a Christian man then go do it. You can initiate too, it's okay - we've talked about that in the past.

We spend a lot of time waiting for Mr. or Mrs Right to check a ridiculous amount of boxes that the Bible never tells us to check. Are they a Christian pursuing Jesus who's stable? Put a ring on it.

But once the covenant is made you need to understand that your body is his, his body is yours. And Paul is literally talking about intimacy being a prevention for immorality. **Read 2**

This is why Paul exhorts us to get married. Because the temptation is real and dealt dangerous. **Read 3-5a**

It seems simple when we read it, but that's literally the deal when you got married. We often think that sexual immorality is doing something we shouldn't be doing. That's true. Sleeping around, looking at porn, secret relationship.

But sexual immorality is also not doing the things we should: here, being intimate with our spouse. Your body is not your own, it's your husbands. And husbands, your body is not yours, it's your wife's.

Your body is hers, she has a claim to your body. She has conjugal rights. So does the husband. God has made marriage so that the man can call on his wife for satisfaction and for the most part she should be receptive. Same with the wife.

And I'm just gonna go there because we're all past the Christmas season and probably made some New Year's resolutions: most of us could stand to lose some pounds of our body in service to our spouses. Gluttony is a real deal and really does have effects in the marriage bed. If this is what God has designed, we should seek to

serve our spouses the best way possible including our health and weight. If your older and you're libido is down, go talk to your doctor.

I get that there's a certain age where stuff just stops working - I understand that. But that shouldn't be happening too early. **Read 5**

So to round this out, the only time there should be a pause in marital intimacy is by mutual agreement. One spouse doesn't get to decide. It's mutual. It's brief - for a very limited time. And it's for the explicit purpose of prayer. It's a sexual intimacy fast, is what it is.

But then you come back together. Why? **Read 5**

Marriages where there is little or no intimacy are ripe for satanic temptation. Men's eyes wander, women start connecting with other men. It's tragic. Usually if there's coldness in the marriage bed it's because there are other problems that need to be dealt with.

Well, then deal with those problems. Work those things out. Because the end result - the lack of intimacy - is going to be devastating when Satan gets a hold of you.

There are studies out that when men and women get divorced they generally start going to the gym, take better care of their appearance, become more social and invest in relationships. Why? Because they're on the hunt again. Sadly, had they just put that effort in their marriages sooner they wouldn't need to be on the hunt again. But Satan often uses our laziness for temptation.

Paul states this whole thing again because it is so foundational. **Read 6-9**

Married people, by definition, are those that have sexual desire. That's what they signed on to with their spouse.

There are some people who don't need sexual satisfaction and therefore really don't need to be married. This is pretty rare, which is why Paul calls it a gift. It's literally a spiritual gift that some people can go their whole lives and not really feel a desire for sexual intimacy. Great.

But that's not the case for most of the world. Most people have a sexual desire that is very hard to control outside of marriage. So if you have that desire go get married.

And by all means, if you have questions about any of this please come talk with me. My wife and I have been married 22 years and let me tell you we've been through about every season you can go through in this department. And because of the sensitive nature of the topic it's hard to talk about. But your marriage - and intimacy in your marriage - is a spiritual issue. God cares about it. He's not uninterested.

I think I've encouraged about every one of you young guys when you tell me your wife is pregnant to love her even though it's hard. She's pregnant and glowing and radiant and all you want to do is touch her. All she wants to do is vomit and sit down and take a nap and everything is sensitive. "How'd you know things are hard?!" Cause I've been there.

Now, why go into all of that for **Ephesians 5**? Because you have to have a rock-solid foundation of what God wants for sexual union in marriage in order to properly understand what he doesn't want.

These desires are powerful. God designed them that way on purpose for our good and our flourishing. You can't just say "sex = bad" - that's not the Christian ethic at all. Christians shouldn't be known as prudes in our marriages. We shouldn't be shy about talking to our kids about these topics in an age appropriate way.

You should be encouraging your kids and grandkids that their mission in life is to follow Jesus, get married to a Christian spouse, have a family, teach them the gospel so that they can go love Jesus, get married, have a family, teach them the gospel, so that your grandkids and great grand kids and great-great-grandkids who you

will never meet will grow up, get married, have kids, teach them the gospel and so forth and so on forever amen.

In fact the best thing that you can do for your kids to show them the gospel in your home and marriage is to love you wife or your husband richly and intimately. They should see genuine affection between you and your spouse.

If that's not there, beloved, you need work on getting it there. The relationship between Jesus and the church is not icy cold. It's not roommates. It's warm and affectionate and tender and kind. And since our marriages are literally a living, breathing picture of Christ and the church if your marriage isn't like that then they're not seeing the gospel. You're teaching them a skewed version of the gospel that's not true.

Every one of my kids when they were small when they saw me kissing on my wife, or cuddling her, flirting, whatever, comes over and tries to get in the middle of it. They have no idea what is going on but they know it's good and they know dad and mom love each other and they want that for themselves. That's a good thing. Because it rightly shows the affectionate love between Christ and the church.

Listen, not only do we have to fight against sexual immorality, but we have to do the hard work and fight for sexual morality. We have to fight for the good thing that God has called us to.

If you're not married, prepare for marriage.
If you're prepared, go find a spouse. Make that your mission.
If you're married, make sure you're pursuing your spouse how God wants you.
If you've got issues, get them solved.
If you can't solve them get help, I'd love to help and I know others would too.

I don't say these things as someone who has never had difficulties in marriage. There have been low points in our marriage. Low years. Very hard times where we simply had to do the hard work of making our marriage what God calls it to be.

If that's you, don't give up. Do the hard work of bringing God glory in your marriage as you imitate the love between Christ and the Church.

Pray