

Listening to Sexual Issues

IBCD Conference

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The Biblical Nature of Sexuality

A Means of Covenantal Union

Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

1 Corinthian 6:15-16

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."

An Expression of Marital Love

The erotic is meant to be a bright expression of mutual loving kindness. Sex thrives in a context of commitment, safety, trust, affection, giving, closeness, intimacy, generosity. The erotic flourishes as one normal, everyday expression of genuine love within marriage.

David Powlison, "Making All Things New"
in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*

Genesis: Vulnerability and Intimacy

Song of Songs: Enjoyment and Ecstasy

An Expression of Christ and the Church

Ephesians 5:31-32

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Defining Sexual Issues

Pornography

Pornography is an overwhelming problem in the church among both men and women. Sexually explicit materials are easily accessible through multiple kinds of media, and especially the Internet. Pornography is generally a private sin, which many people commit in secrecy.

Individual Masturbation

Aside from the underlying issue of lust, Masturbation is probably the most widespread sexual issue in the church. Whether it is accompanied by other issues, like pornography, or not, it is something that is experimented with and habitually practiced by many.

Fantasies

One of the most secret sexual issues that take place in peoples' lives are fantasies. These can be fantasies lived out in computer games, or simply fantasies lived out in our own heads. People will oftentimes repeat their fantasies over and over in their heads oftentimes adding to them as time goes on.

Fantasies can involve imagined characters, or even more often, real people that one knows in their life. Sexual fantasies are always, inevitably, more erotic or "ideal" than real sexual activities because the person can imagine receiving exactly what they want without any awkwardness or communication.

Fetishes

While a fetish may sound like one of the more unusual sexual issues, that is only when it is assumed to be in its most radical form. The truth is that fetishes exist along a continuum, and may be far more common than we realize. They may include things such as lingerie or particular items of clothing. The continuum looks something like this:

Mild Preference Strong Preference Necessity Substitution

Homosexual Practices

Same-sex attraction is a consistent problem for many men and women in the church. While this attraction may take different forms and degrees, the existence of it can oftentimes be devastatingly confusing for followers of Christ who are well aware of what Scripture teaches regarding same-sex attraction.

However, just because practicing homosexuality is a sin, does not necessarily mean that temptation towards that sin was an identifiable choice for those who struggle. Most who struggle with same-sex attraction will feel that they were far more passive in the temptation than active.

Adultery

While explicitly biblically condemned, adultery is another significant problem in the church. It may be one of the rarer sexual issues, but it is still present nonetheless. Men or women who are caught up in extra-biblical affairs may seem simply disobedient, but the same could be said for any of the other issues listed above. The truth is that adultery is the tip of an iceberg of events and decisions. Sometimes, a person may be even walking into the trap without even realizing it.

Lust

Scripture identifies the heart-issue of lust as a significant sexual issue, even if it doesn't have any outward manifestations.

Matthew 5:27-28

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Listening to Sexual Issues

You cannot hope to answer these questions, or to understand someone's sexual struggle by diagnosing or defining their problem. You must listen to them.

Sexual Issues are Caused by Suffering

Fallen Bodies

Fallen Culture

Satan

Others' Sin

Sexual Issues are Caused by Sinful Responses to Suffering

Anger

Pursuit of Affection

Distorted Messianic Desire

Pursuit of Relief and Rest

Sexual Issues are Caused by Sin

Ultimately, our worship of either ourselves or God is at the root of all of our thoughts, behavior, and emotions. This worship, however, is made manifest in the form of our desires. It is for this reason that the New Testament repeatedly refers to our “desires” as the cause of our temptation. Our desires determine the different manifestations of our worship.

James 1:14-15

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Ephesians 4:20-24

But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

In fact, the idea of “desire” is even what is meant when we use the term “lust.”

In English the word lust generally connotes lurid sexual fantasies....The same Greek word is used to render the Hebrew word translated covet as in, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17, NIV). Here we strike at the heart of the problem of lust as the Bible conceives it: We want things that don’t belong to us. Leave sex out of it entirely for the moment. We are not content with what we have. We want something more – and that desire drives us.

Tim Stafford, “Getting Serious About Lust,” JBC (Spring 1995)

The Gospel and Sexual Issues

Change is Possible / Expected

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The Gospel and Suffering

James 1:2-4, 12-14

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Why is the struggler with sexual issues called to "joy"?

What does steadfastness look like in the midst of sexual issues?

1 Peter 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Why is the struggler with sexual issues called to rejoice?

What could the rejoicing of a struggler with sexual issues entail?

The Gospel and Sin

Colossians 2:13-15

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

What does this passage declare about the struggler with sexual issues?

Colossians 3:1-14

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Three Instructions for Addressing Sin in the Sexual Struggler

1. Set your mind on things that are above
2. Put to death what is earthly (idolatry)
3. Put on Christlikeness