

Why Does God Care So Much About Sex?

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Alex. Good morning, everybody. Glad that you are here with us. Got a hopefully not too long, but a bit of a longer sermon than I typically do, so kind of want to really jump into it. And we are in our believable series, and we're just answering tough questions. Today we are talking about sex and looking at the traditional Christian sexual ethic. So I want to start out this way. As we approach this topic, I'd like us to consider G.K. Chesterton's fence principle. And G.K. Chesterton, he's this like great Christian thinker of the early 20th century, and he says this, when one comes up to a fence, say an institution or a tradition, rather than tear it down, it would be wiser to first understand why it is there. So here's the thing. For many of us, when we think about sex and sexual ethics and the Christian sexual ethic, we either ignore the fence altogether. That is, although we might call ourselves Christians, we've not really sought to know and really understand the Christian sexual ethic very deeply or in a very meaningful way at all. And then there's others of us who've come up to the fence and find it as an obtrusive obstacle and simply tear it down. And before I begin an explanation of the Christian sexual ethic, let me help us find some common ground, because there is some common ground, whether you hold to that or don't hold to that. Here's our common ground. Sex is beautiful. Sex is enjoyable. And nearly all human beings have sexual desires. That's something we all share. We can also agree that when sex is abused, it causes those victimized by it much physical and psychological pain and distress.

And we would all agree that, therefore, when it comes to this, consent is a very important thing. Mutual consent is a very important thing. So there's our common ground. But after that, we can agree that popular culture today has a very different vision and ethic for sex than Christianity's vision and ethic for sex. And my hope for today is to present the Christian sexual ethic to show that it is a fence that should be deeply understood and not torn down.

And I hope to address some misunderstandings, some false assumptions, and it may surprise some of you to learn that the Bible is very pro-sex. Why? Because God created it. So we're going to jump in. Our text we're going to be working from today is from Genesis 2, chapter 2, verses 18 to 25. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 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. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. This is God's word. There it is. God invented sex right from the beginning. But why? What is it for? And that question is the right place to start. Too often we start by asking what we should or shouldn't do, or what's okay, what is prohibited. But that's not where the Bible starts. God couches it in his creation narrative, and that's the helpful context to begin with because throughout the creation account we see God bringing to, as as he creates, he brings together these contrasting elements, these dualities, right? He has light and dark and day and night and sun and moon and sea and land, male and female. And the primary purpose of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 is to show us that everything had a created, ordained purpose to it. It was created for a reason, and it was given a moral designation. God, whatever he created, he looked at it and said, this is good. As he created it, and he said it was good because it was doing the purpose, and it was fulfilling the purpose for which he created it for.

And so when we think of the creation narrative, when we think of like, okay, coming to this idea of like God created male and female, and then we read in this Genesis 2 account that out of that comes sex, we have to realize that God has a purpose for that.

And we have to say, why is that? What are all the purposes of these created things that God did in the beginning? And we see right from the beginning and all this stuff like previous to even Adam and Eve coming into being, God was creating order from chaos. He was bringing life from emptiness.

[5 : 42] And as God's creation functions in accordance with his purpose, that's exactly what happens. Order happens. And beauty happens, and harmony happens, and life begins to come out of the void, out of the emptiness. We see that with the sun and the moon and how they establish time. That is a orderly thing.

We can have time and no time because of those things. Sea and land, they establish boundaries and places in which different creatures can live and thrive and multiply. And in this way, these things are good.

But though they're good, consider what happens when these dualities, these different things come together. Think about this. What is the most beautiful times of the day? It is when dark meets light. Think of that. Dusk and dawn. What is the most valuable and sought after places to live in the world? Isn't it where the land meets the sea? That's where everybody wants to be. Why? Because there is a beauty there. See, it's in the coming together where two good things become magical and make a very good thing.

And that is true of man and women as well. When God made Adam, he said, oh my goodness, Adam is alone. God said, that is not good. First time in the whole creation account. Everything God created, good, good, good, good, good, good, good. Very good. Sees Adam alone. There's no corresponding duality there. He says, and this isn't good. Why? Adam had no counterpart. Day had night, sun had moon, sea had land, Adam had no eve.

[7 : 26] So God makes that happen. And think about this. How does Adam respond when he beholds Eve for the first time? The first words out of his mouth is this, at last, this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

And that is a Hebrew poem. And what he is doing, he is using words that describe kinship. It isn't sexualized language. Actually, it's covenantal language. And that tells us something. The biblical context for sex is within the covenant relationship between a man and a woman. Today, we call this covenant making a marriage. Now, what is the expected consequence of this covenant making? Well, verse 24 tells us right on the heels of Adam saying that. It says, this is the reason why a man leaves dad and mom, holds fast to his wife. And then it says, the two become one. This two flesh becomes a one flesh union. And a part of that oneness defines sexual intimacy. But another part of it is just, is another type of intimacy that we all crave. We long to be known. We long to be loved. And we need that. Now, let me do a quick sidebar here. Marriage and sex aren't the only means to get this kind of intimacy. You can be single, and you can experience intimacy through covenant friendship and kinship.

And you know what? That's the beauty of the church. We are a covenant people. We are kind of brothers and sisters in Christ. We share a kinship one another through Christ. We can say to one another, you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh because of what he has done, because Christ says that to us.

More on that later. Back to the Genesis narrative. Notice the order here. God makes Eve, brings her to Adam. Adam declares the covenant. Then they are one. Then they are naked and unashamed. And this gives us one of the answers for what sex is for. Sex is an expression of covenant faithfulness. When a man and women come together sexually, they are symbolizing the oneness of marriage. Think about that. I don't want to get too graphic here, but their bodies are intertwined. They are enmeshed with one another.

This is the beauty of sex that points to the beauty of the oneness of the marriage covenant. But it is the covenant that gives this elevated significance to sex. It isn't sex that makes the covenant more significant. And here's what I mean by that. When you take sex outside the covenant relationship, outside of that faithfulness, you end up in a mix of pleasure and pain.

[10 : 09] Compare these two examples. Mary wakes up Sunday morning after her wedding night. She had sex with her husband. It was fun and awkward and a bit uncomfortable all at the same time.

But she knows he loves her and is committed to her for life. And she looks forward to learning and growing and enjoying this part of their relationship together. Now imagine on the other side of town. Susie wakes up Sunday morning after hooking up with a guy she really likes. And the sex was good, but she's thinking, man, was it good enough? It seemed like he was enjoying it, but she really couldn't quite tell. And she hopes he will find her desirable and beautiful enough for there to be a further relationship. Those two scenarios, which can be defined as cultivating security and love, and which cultivates insecurity and fear? It's pretty obvious, isn't it? The sexual revolution's message was that marriage sex is boring and predictable, but detach it from that faithfulness and play the field and it becomes exciting and adventurous and interesting again. The sexual revolution's message is the real sex, the best sex can't happen with the same person for the rest of your life. Really, what the sexual revolution's message implies is something that should be quite offensive to all of us because it's saying, you know what, your body isn't good enough to satisfy one person for very long. So when I get bored with your look or your shape or just you as a person, it's time to move on to something different, something better. And our culture says it is no big deal to treat each other that way, but the Bible says, whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on a second. People are not things to swap out like commodities. People are God's image bearers. They aren't just kind of good or kind of beautiful to use and throw away. They are infinitely good. They are infinitely beautiful. And that kind of beauty and goodness deserves the dignity of absolute faithfulness. A casual approach to sex is a betrayal of that dignity. But the Bible, the Christian ethic, has a high regard for faithfulness when it comes to sex because it has a high regard for people because you know what? We are all made in the image of

God. And here's something to ponder. When we detach sex from faithfulness, we pursue the pleasure of sex while detaching dignity from people, even ourselves. And that is not a people-honoring, human-dignifying, life-giving view of sex. But God made sex to be life-giving. In its right context, it is. And not just in the joyful, emotional, psychological sense of life-giving, but in the natural, physical, new life-making sense as well.

Sex is meant for fruitfulness. Think about it. The typical outcome of sex between a man and a woman is the beginning of a new life. Now, let me tenderly say, I realize that this kind of fruitfulness isn't always the outcome. And that is painful. There can be a lot of shame and hurt connected with infertility. I have close friends that have walked that journey. And it is heartbreaking.

[13:32] And in no way am I trying to make anyone feel like, if you can't have kids, then you are some kind of failure and shame on you. You aren't less of a person. You aren't less of a marriage. But we do weep with you, and we mourn the fact that your good desire for kids goes unfulfilled.

And frankly, I want to say to you, that is not how it was meant to be from the beginning. Right? And this, that part of pain is a result of the curse of sin.

Because before that, fruitfulness was a given. God's purpose for the male and female he created in Genesis 128, it tells us, be fruitful and multiply. But fruitfulness is a significant part.

It's an important part of marriage that we should be pursuing. Psalm 127 verse 3 says, sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. In the Old Testament, just about the worst thing that can happen to you was to not have children. And that's the traditional view of why sex exists. In part, it's for the legacy of children. Now, I would say this, this is less obvious to us today. Right? It used to be pretty obvious to everyone. Not so much for us today. At first time in human history, we're seeing like married couples just not wanting to have children. They'll get married, but they will say like, no, I'm not really called to be a mom or a dad.

So they avoid that altogether. But the reality is, this is a huge part of God's design for sex. And it's really only been within the last century that people have disconnected sex from reproduction. And actually, the only reason we'd be able to do that is some of the technology, medical technology that has come available to us.

[15:17] Married people who say not called to have children, we're not called to have children. No one in human history would have thought about that. Or that was even possible or a thing you should do to the last hundred years.

Now, you might ask, what's the big deal whether or not my spouse and I choose to have kids? But again, it's not asking the right question. Marriage sex was God's design. And so it has a good purpose to it. And central to that good purpose is having kids, if you can. And to simply choose not to do so is to go against God's good purpose. And if we're honest, the reason not to is selfish. The people that usually tell me that like, yeah, not called to have kids, the reason they don't want to is

because they want to have more money to spend on themselves. And they want to keep the freedom they have so that they can do what they want when they want. So who's at the center of that world? You're at the center of that world. We need to understand the privilege and the purpose of that world. And so we're going to have a good place to be able to do what they want. And so we're in this way of making new life. And this new life, kids have a way of making us more like him too, because I'll tell you what, if you're like me, I didn't realize how selfish I was until I got married. And then I thought I was doing pretty good until kids came along. And then I was like, I guess I still have a long ways to go, right? Man, kids have a way of exposing our selfishness and they call us to live sacrificially. They just do. Well, all this sacrificial talk can really feel like a wet blanket, right? The wet blanket that some of you may be like, there it is. There's the Christian thing about sex that just kind of ruins the whole thing for me. But fruitfulness shouldn't be seen that way. Kids are an absolute delight. The Bible calls them a reward, not a bummer. Yes, they are difficult. And kids in the room, we love you. And we were you one time, so don't feel bad. We're all in this together. They're difficult, but nevertheless, God says their fruitfulness in the final analysis is way more delight than it is demand. And that kind of delight is a possible consequence of sex. But here's the other thing. Sex itself is meant to be a delight.

Sex is meant for our pleasure and our delight. I want to tell you this. The Bible wants you to have pleasure-filled, satisfying, creative marriage sex. It does. God designed our bodies to enjoy it. Just think about it. That joy and pleasure builds. And I'm sorry, I'm going to say this, and this is probably the most awkward statement of this sermon, so we're going to get on the other side of this and you can breathe again, right? That joy and pleasure builds until it's full experience, which is the orgasm. And that's an amazing experience. There is a whole book in the Bible dedicated to the delight of sex and marriage, the Song of Solomon. It was the first and only book of the Bible that I read through before I was 16. It was just like, my parents are handing me this book, and this is in here, and it's like, you're okay with me? All right, here we go. Here we go. Get to the end, go back to the beginning. All right. That whole, I mean, that whole book is about this romantic pursuit and playfulness and erotic desire between a husband and a wife, and it is anything but prudish. In fact, our English translations, like, they really tone it down. The translators, they struggle with some of it. Some of the Hebrew imagery, when you get into it, it will make you blush. But it's this beautiful poem. It's this beautiful poetic story of a husband and a wife belonging to one another, pursuing one another, delighting in one another's body, delighting in one another. And here's what's interesting about the

Song of Solomon. When you read it, the place of their intimate fulfillment, they're like wedding chambers and what they're talking about. It is described as garden-like places. It is fascinating when you read it, how much garden imagery is in that book. It's like it is filling in the gaps of Adam and Eve's experience pre-sin. One of the lessons from that amazing book is that your spouse is your standard of beauty. They are the one you are meant to delight in. Delight in your husband. Delight in your wife.

[20 : 19] Your spouse is God's gift to you, and you are God's gift to them. And what a gift that is. The Bible says to delight in your spouse at all times, not just when you get the urge, right? Men, like I needed to learn this as a husband. I needed to learn that a hug can just sometimes be a hug. It doesn't have to lead to anything else, right? Kissing can just be kissing. It doesn't always have to lead to sex. Husbands, especially, hear this. Words matter. Let your wife know how beautiful she is to you. Husbands, especially, hear me out, learn to delight in all of her body, not just in the three places our pornified culture objectifies. The husband and wife in the Song of Solomon were flipping out over each other's hair and teeth and legs and necks and cheeks that are on the face and belly buttons and everything. I mean, it just goes on in detail. When you delight the right way, it blesses your spouse as it's blessing you. And the Bible cares about your delight in sex. And it wants you to know that sex is given for you to enjoy. But also that it's not only about you. Sex isn't only about you.

It's an opportunity to serve your spouse. And so in this way, sex can be a sacrifice of love. Now, before we get into this part, I do have to preface this with some caution.

I've been a pastor too long and I've heard too many stories. If you use sacrifice as a manipulative means of pushing your spouse to demeaning and degrading sexual acts, that is abuse.

Okay? Don't do that. Stop it if you are. You can't say, I want you to do X, act, and the Bible says you need to because you got to be sacrificial.

Again, our culture has been so utterly corrupted by pornography that it has shaped and distorted our sexual appetites. It's normalized what is often oppressive and demeaning and especially to women.

[22 : 45] But in a faithful, fruitful, delightful marriage, sex should be creative, but it should always be safe, honoring, and consensual. So when we say sex is a sacrifice, it never means that you have to do things that make you feel ashamed or disgusted. So what does it mean that sex is a sacrifice of love sometimes? Well, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 7, 1 to 5. Now concerning the matters about which he wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer. But then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. So there is a lot here, and you're probably going to like be a little like, oh, that's nice. And some of you might be like, oh man, that's a bit of a bummer. I was hoping that it meant something else. I've seen this taken out of context and used selfishly to justify sex on demand. And that's not what this is about. This isn't your body belongs to me, so you got to give it up whenever I want it. That is not what Paul's talking about here.

We have to couch this in its context, and again, we also have to see everything else the Bible has to say on these kind of matters. So this verse was written to a people living in a city full of confusing and contradictory messages about sex. You had one side saying just about anything goes. Religious ceremony, they were in a place where religious ceremonies included sleeping with temple prostitutes. On the other side, you had religious asceticism. That said, the body equals bad. Anything that is material is less than, and spiritual things are the ultimate thing to go after. So any of your body's desires and wants and needs, they should be denied as much as possible, and that was to include sex and sexual desire. So in that place, the Corinthian church, the people of God were very confused because all of that is happening at the same time, and quite possibly Paul is speaking to marriages where one spouse may have leaned into religious asceticism, and the other spouse is feeling guilty and shame and desire, having desires unfulfilled about sex with their spouse. And what these verses do is they first start by honoring the fact that people have sexual desires, and it normalizes them.

And it says that withholding sex isn't right. Actually, it can be a different form of selfishness to sex on demand. The Bible says no to both forms of that selfishness. And yes, our bodies are not our own. They belong to someone else as well. Paul talks about this in another place when he tells husbands specifically that to love your wife and to cherish her is actually to love yourself and cherish yourself.

He says that in Ephesians 5, and Paul's teasing out that oneness language again from Genesis. Sometimes when you're... Guys, we need to hear this. Sometimes when your spouse isn't in the mood, what do you do? You sacrifice, and you give a back rub with no expectations. Other times, that sacrifice should go the other way too though. But you do this for each other's sake.

[26 : 37] Don't put each other in a situation where it's been so long that lust and temptation turns into a real problem. Now, I want to say this. There is some nuance here because Paul talks about in that, at the end of there, that verses, those verses we read, Paul talks about not withholding due to your lack of self-control. And in one sense, he is saying this is a concession to immaturity, spiritual immaturity. You don't get to blame your spouse for your lust problems.

That's in your heart, and you and God got to deal with that. But on the other hand, God made us sexual beings, and he gave us... He said, hey, marriage is a good place to fulfill those sexual desires. And married folks, you are one body. And when a marriage is healthy because of faithfulness and sacrifice, spouses tend to be joyful, should be joyfully willing to help each other route in this way. And that kind of sacrifice leads to your spouse's joy and satisfaction because you're a one body unit. You get to rejoice when they're rejoicing. When we listen and obey God's rules and wisdom for things, to include sex, we flourish. But the counterpoint to that is true as well. Obeying God has its positive consequences. It does. But disobeying has its negative consequences. Sex is a good thing. And sex is a powerful thing. And when powerful things aren't used the right way, bad things happen. The more powerful the thing is, the greater damage can be

done by it.

Let's just think of nuclear fission, right? That is a powerful thing. Good when it's harnessed for energy that produces electricity, for powering our lights and HVACs, amen, praise the Lord, TVs, stuff like that. Not so great when it's weaponized, right? Or when we don't take proper care and ignore the warnings, think Chernobyl. There are real consequences when we disobey God and detach sex from faithfulness, fruitfulness, delight, and sacrifice. It breeds insecurity. It breeds fear. It breeds shame. It can lead us to feeling alone and isolated, unwanted, and perfect when we are abused by it. It can create all sorts of trauma and just, man, so many issues in our lives. And those are negative character and emotional consequences that we endure. But there's also real bodily consequences when we don't follow the Christian sexual ethic. There are diseases that get transmitted.

[29 : 20] There is unexpected pregnancies that produce financial hardship. Those are real things. Those are physical, natural consequences. And avoiding these negative consequences is a good reason to be obedient. But for the Christian, there is an ultimate reason. When we obey God about sex for the sake of the gospel. And this brings us full circle. All the way back to Genesis 1 again.

Remember all these duplex corresponding pairs, night and day and land and sea and man and women. And that's where, when these things meet, that's where the magic happens, right? That's where the good things become like amazing things. Well, there is one more pairing, not so obvious, and probably the most important corresponding pair. And that is creator and creation.

And what we're waiting for is the greatest union of them all, when the creator and the creation come together. And to make sure we don't miss this point, the Bible uses overwhelmingly bridal imagery for this idea. Jesus is the bridegroom. The church is the bride. And when he returns, there is going to be celebration and wedding feast. The whole Bible is building up to this. In fact, when you compare the Genesis 1 story and Genesis 2 story to other ancient creation myths, it's remarkable for many reasons. But the most remarkable thing about it is that Yahweh, the Hebrew God, this creator God, he has no female counterpart in this story. It's very likely any early hearer of that story would have thought and wondered, wait, where's the bride of God in all of this? And the Bible ends by saying, here she is, the church. What does this have to do with sex? Actually, everything. Ephesians 5, 31 to 32 says, 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.

Your marriage, your choosing that one above all others, your faithfulness, your promises to love no matter what the other person does, your total intimacy with one person, your sharing of all your possessions, at its best, all of that is just a symbol. And symbols are powerful. Flowers are symbols for love. Signatures represent promises. Fireworks are about celebrations. And marriage is about the gospel.

Who makes the promise? Who makes the covenant vow that he will never leave or forsake us? Jesus does. Who says that all his possessions are ours and all our shame is his? Jesus does. Who does scripture say is the true and ultimate bridegroom? It says Jesus is. And if you're a Christian, perhaps the greatest reason for honoring what God has said about sex is because he has said those relationships, that is part of how the world understands what he is like. And that's true if you're married or single. If you're single, if you aren't having sex, you aren't missing out like some people say you are. Man, sex is a gift, but it isn't everything. It doesn't define you as a person. It doesn't, it doesn't make you into, you're not a less than or a half person because you're not having sex. Jesus didn't have sex. You are treating sex and marriage for what they are, sacred symbols. And you can know that what they point to, that greater thing, the thing for which we are all anticipating and waiting, Jesus coming for his church, the bridegroom coming from his bride, you are going to participate in that. You get to be a part of that just like the rest of us do. And that is going to be so much better than sex. Why was Jesus so content to live as an unmarried carpenter in Israel? Because he knew what was coming. That doesn't mean you can't be sad that you're single. If you want to be married, that is okay. But it doesn't mean that you are less.

[33 : 39] You're, you don't have to, you're not waiting for your life to start. Marriage, it's about the gospel. Sex, it is about the gospel. And if you're single, you're honoring of sex by staying celibate. Says something great about the gospel too. He's worth waiting for. He's worth living for. And one day you're going to get what sex merely hinted at.

So don't let the bully, don't let the culture bully you into insecurity. You have nothing to be ashamed about. Whether you're married or single, sex points to oneness. It points to intimacy. It points to union.

And that union points to and anticipates the full and forever union we're going to have with Christ one day. As the band comes up and we respond in a moment, we're going to take communion. Union, which is a symbol that points to our union with Christ, that union that we anticipate one day. And I want to say to you, if you're in the room, you've been, you're not a follower of Jesus. The invitation isn't to, to the communion table. It's to come to the one who all this points to. It's to come to Jesus. Because you can't earn your way into union with Jesus. You have to realize that actually you don't deserve to be married to him. You didn't choose him. Actually, he chooses you. [35 : 02] He comes after you. He pursues you. Because none of us have been faithful to him. He had to come and he had to die for our sins. That we could be saved and we could become a part of his church, his bride.

And the joy of knowing Jesus, the joy of being united to him, the promise of heaven, that forever delight with him and his faithfulness only comes one way. You have to let go of living life on your terms. And you have to come to him as Lord and Savior. In a moment, there is going to be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray to do that. Now, I want to say to the rest of us that are followers of Jesus in the room, we have a lot to celebrate. We do. Communion is that symbol celebrating our union, anticipating our bridegroom coming one day. But it's also a moment that God calls us before we come to the table. He calls us to discern and check our hearts and our lives. Where have you and I been obedient? Where have we been disobedient to God's sexual ethics? Today, we can draw near to God to find mercy and grace and to make a change with his help. And before you come to the table, go to God in prayer. If it's to celebrate, then celebrate. If you need to repent, repent. If you just want to give thanks, give thanks. When you're ready, go to the table nearest you.

Take the communion back and take it when you're ready. Let me just bless this moment with a prayer before we begin. Lord, as my brothers and sisters in this room come to you in this time, as they draw near, they would really feel a sense that you were drawing near to them. In whatever manner they're coming, be with them and meet with them and hear them. May they know that you're there. We thank you, Lord, that you are a God who desires union, intimacy with us. [37 : 08] Forgive us where we've gotten it wrong, where we've been selfish, maybe even where we've been a bit abusive. Pray this in your name. Amen.