

Real Life Issues 4: Sex

Reading: Genesis 2:18-24

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Introduction.

This is the 4th session in our series on real life issues.

- This morning we are thinking about sex
- Society's attitude to it and God's view of it.
- So I wanted to start at the beginning.
- God created the relationship between man and woman to be mutually beneficial
- A suitable helper taken from his side to be his equal
- To share his life and responsibilities

And God gave them 3 responsibilities to share

- We read about these in Chapter 1: 27-28
So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

So we have three responsibilities

1. The responsibility of being made in God's image
 - Of living our lives as examples of God
 - Of being creative, loving and faithful
2. The responsibility of being fruitful
 - Producing and providing for children
 - Enabling them to grow and thrive
3. The responsibility of looking after God's creation
 - Ruling in God's kingdom is about service
 - As Jesus taught his disciples when he washed their feet

God's View of Sex

This is the context in which we should understand sex

- It is not something for its own ends
- But as part of a mutually loving, caring and faithful relationship
- Because God is an intimate, passionate and faithful God.

Sex is part of the responsibilities he tasked Adam and Eve with.

- Obviously being fruitful and multiplying is to do with sex
- The fact that it is so enjoyable is evidence of God's grace
- That something necessary to life is also created as a pleasure shows his love.
- But sex is also intended to be a special part of a covenant relationship
- Part of living our lives in the image of God
- As a demonstration of his exclusively faithful and intimate love for us.

We see this in the passage from Ephesians sometimes read at weddings (Ephesians 5:21-33)

²¹ *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

²² *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

I like this passage

- Not because it says my wife should submit to me
- But because it expresses what marriage should mean.
- But it is worth noting that submission is something we should all do.
- The passage begins "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*". (Vs. 21)
- And it certainly doesn't say 'Husbands make your wives submit'
- That is something, like love that has to be voluntary to mean anything at all.

The husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loves the church

- How did Christ love the church
- He came to serve and give his life for us
- He told his disciples (Mark 10: 43-44)

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- It was these verses that caused me to promise, when Katie and I got married,
- Not just to Love honour her but also to serve her.
- If you want to know if she promised to obey – you’ll have to ask her afterwards.

So sex is intended by God to be an expression of intimacy, faithfulness and service

- Within an intimate, faithful, and serving relationship
- Sex outside of that mars the image of God in us
- And it loses its unique place as the seal of married relationship

When Jesus was asked about divorce by the Pharisees (Matt 19:4-6)

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

As an aside

- Although God never desires divorce, he does accept it will happen in a fallen world
- And makes an allowance for it as Jesus goes on to say
“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Sex in Today’s Society

This brings us to the real world

- The world we live in falls well short of the ideal creation as God intended.
- None of us can live up to it.
- Even in healthy marriages there is temptation and selfishness
- In this case healthy sexual relationships with our marriage partner can help avoid sin
- Paul tells the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 7:2-4)
² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

Now of course this is no help at all to those who are not married

- Or who have no permissible outlet for their sexual desires.
- This is a very difficult place to be
- And I can’t offer you an easy solution
- All I can do is refer you to our first session
- When we talked about unanswered prayer and unresolved circumstances.

Like Paul's thorn in his flesh

- God's answer was not to resolve the problem (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- But to say "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"

This is where this topic fits in with the other session we have done

- A couple of weeks ago Roger has looked at indulgence
- The Battle between self and Gods will
- Last week I looked at addiction
- And we thought about idolatry
- And the need to have God first in our life as nothing else could fulfil us.

This morning follows on quite well

- Because sex has become so important to our culture
- That it has become virtually a god
- It is almost worshipped as an idol
- It has become an end in itself.

Instead of sex being something to cement and express a loving relationship

- Relationships are formed, often short term
- Purely for the intention of providing sex
- Because it is considered to be something we are entitled to enjoy
- And to deny anyone the opportunity for sex is considered mean spirited and old fashioned.

Sex is paraded as the desirable fulfilment of life

- It is in used to sell everything from deodorant to coffee.
- It seems to be impossible to produce TV drama or film without it.
- And magazines are full of advice on how to have a good sex life
- And the sex lives of celebrities are as much news as the achievements that make them famous.

Yet the more we glorify sex

- The more we try to promote it as our right to be fulfilled
- The more abusive and damaging it seems to become
- More about pleasing ourselves and less about serving our partner
- Our young people learn what sex is from pornographic movies
- And books about abusive relationships are made into so called 'Romantic films'
- How can anyone find something like '50 shades of Grey' romantic?
- Do we really believe a relationship based on abusive sex will result in a happy and stable marriage?

Last week we talked about idolatry as the result of abandoning God

- Let's read again the passage in Romans 1:18-26

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Surely this is where our society is at the moment

- As we have abandoned God
- We have given ourselves over to worship of sex
- The sex industry is huge big business
- Pornography is rife and readily available to all on line.

At the same time we suffer an epidemic of poor self esteem

- So many people, especially young people no longer feel valued for who they are
- But for what they look like
- Or what they are willing to do with their bodies.
- They have become commodities.
- And need to advertise themselves to the highest bidder.

I was reading the other day that it is not uncommon for teenage girls to send explicit photos of themselves to boys

- So they can see what they are getting before they begin a relationship
- I find that horrific
- That they would value themselves in that way.

I also read a report from a university expressing a pastoral concern

- They had noted that students were selling their bodies to help pay their college fees
- This was both girls and boys in significant numbers
- And they were needing to set up counselling to help them cope with the emotional and psychological damage this was doing to them.

In the news this week we heard there are an estimated 85 sexual attacks on children in the UK every day.

- Last week I shared some verses from Psalm 106
 - ³⁵ *but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.*
 - ³⁶ *They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.*
 - ³⁷ *They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to false gods. (Psalm 106:35-37)*

As we read this do we not feel just a little of the pain Father God feels for his lost and hurting children?

- Could we not weep for this lost and hurting generation
- And this leaves us with the question
- What should we do?

What should we do?

I think we need to start with the pain Father God feels.

- It is easy to step back and condemn
- Or shake our heads in despair and walk away
- But God did neither of those things.
- He came to earth to seek out his lost sons and daughters

When Jesus was challenged about eating with 'sinners' his reply was

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17)

We need to be honest

- Acknowledge we too are damaged and guilty of misuse of sex
- Our attitudes are also faulty
- We too objectify and value people according to their looks or sexiness.
- We too 'enjoy' the titillation and excitement of the 'sex' in the media

We need to repent and ask God to give us His heart

- Pray with David (Psalm 51:10)
"Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me"
- We need to live lives that demonstrate God's love,
 - His attitude of service and faithfulness in our relationships
- To love unconditionally
- Yet at the same time do not accept what is wrong.
- Offer value and significance to all – however damaged
- And challenge abusive behaviour or attitudes.
- But humbly, not arrogantly

This is what Jesus did when confronted by misuse of sex (Matthew 8:2-11)

- And with poor attitudes towards sex
- And towards women

At dawn he (Jesus) appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

The Pharisees saw sin

- A woman of no value
- Jesus saw a precious daughter in need of a saviour.

I think it is important to be absolutely clear here

- Our bad attitudes to sex is not the cause of the problems of society
- But the result of society turning away from God
- That was the whole point of Romans 1.
- We should not point the finger at people who have relationships outside the ideal
- There are loving relationships outside of traditional marriage
- And abusive relationships within marriage.

And it's not just sexual relationships

- Today is Father's day
- And Paul talks about the breakdown in relationships between parents and children
- But the problem with young people today is not lack of respect for their parents
- Their problem is that their parents' generation has turned away from God
- And left then to fill the void with other things apart from God

The problem with sex is that it is being used to fill the void of life without God

- This inevitably leaves us unsatisfied and needing to try new experiences
- Just like addiction we talked about last week
- It will never satisfy
- Because we need to have no other gods but God

Conclusion

I want to finish with Good News - This what Jesus brings

- Following Jesus isn't just about finding support to cope with life
- It is a new start, a new life and a new culture

It is a life where we are valued for who we are

- A culture where fulfilment is found in serving God
- Not in seeking self-gratification
- Where we can find healing and restoration for the damage we have done to ourselves and other.

When David repents of his sexual sin with Bathsheba he prays (Psalm 51:10-19)

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Saviour, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem? ¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

When we repent

- When we are humble before God
- He will forgive, restore and heal
- He becomes first again in our lives
- Then we can declare his praise
- And our society may prosper and be built up.

Let's pray our hearts are so full of love for others

- That we see them as God sees them.
- That we weep for the broken lives
- And live such lives that they may know God's love and faithfulness.

Amen