**Sex, Marriage, and Same-Sex Attraction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**I. Introduction**

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he began by asking them, “Did God actually say?” His tactic? Get God’s people to doubt God’s Word. Over the years, Satan’s strategy has remained consistent. He is still whispering, “Did God actually say?” One of the things God has spoken about, which some people today find especially hard to believe, is sexuality. Does God actually say you can’t have sex outside marriage? Does God actually say homosexual behavior is wrong?

In brief: Yes, that is what God says. But so often, even as Christians, we can struggle to understand *why*. If our intuitions and instincts aren’t steeped in a biblical worldview, then God’s design for sexuality may seem arbitrary and restrictive. And so the goal for our class today is to examine the Bible’s positive vision for sexuality. This is part of our core seminar on biblical manhood and womanhood because being made male and female means that we are *sexual* creatures. We not only have a God-given gender; we are made with the capability to engage in sex. Sexuality is good! It’s part of God’s glorious design. But that means it is a gift to be received as God intends, rather than something to use according to our own terms.

Today, we’re not so much going to focus on individual laws or commands on sex. Instead, our class today is going to take a step back, take in the whole biblical vista, and try to explain *why* such commands *make sense.* We’ll examine God’s original design for sex and marriage. We’ll look at Jesus and the abundant life he lived as an unmarried man. We’ll look at his teaching about abstaining from sex and marriage for the sake of his kingdom. Then, with all of that in mind, we’ll consider same-sex attraction as a case study for how this biblical vision for sexuality speaks to the brokenness of our sexual condition. Through it all, my prayer is that we would see that God actually values sex *more highly* than this world does. May we come to see the beauty and goodness of God’s design for sexuality.

So let’s start at the beginning: **II. God’s Design for Marriage & Sex**

Turn with me to Genesis 1:27-28. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”* Here we see sexual complementarity – male and female he created them. And we see procreation: God’s command to be fruitful and multiply.

Turn to Genesis 2, and we discover that these things are linked. God creates Adam first, and says it is not good for Adam to be alone in 2:18. By himself, Adam isn’t able to be fruitful and multiply. And no suitable helper is found for him among the animals! Pick it up with me in verse 22: *And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 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. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

This is the first marriage. For Adam, it takes someone who is both *like* him and *unlike* him to be fruitful and multiply. She is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh: they share a common humanity, both made in God’s image. And yet they’re not identical. She is woman, he is man.

What does it mean that marriage is a one-flesh union? Listen to how Paul talks about it in Eph 5:28-32, where he cites this passage of Genesis. *“In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* ***29****For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,* ***30****because we are members of his body.* ***31****“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.”* Human beings are body and soul. And when a husband and wife marry, their lives are united, and their bodies are united through sexual intercourse. Their relationship of union symbolizes the union between Christ and the church. As the bride in the book of Song of Solomon says, “*I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine*” (Song 6:3). In other words, marriage is a relationship of mutual self-giving, a self-giving that isn’t *merely* sexual, but in which sexual union plays a unique role in joining the couple as one flesh.

So what is marriage? Here’s a definition: *A covenantal, bodily union of one man and one woman, open to the gift of procreation, symbolic of the relationship between Christ and the church.*

Let’s unpack this definition:

A. Marriage is covenantal. That means it is exclusive. It is founded on fidelity. It is intended to be permanent, only dissolved at death. Though scripture does provide legitimate grounds for divorce, divorce is to be rare and unusual. Jesus taught, “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt 19:6).

B. Next, marriage is bodily union. “They shall become one flesh.” This means a marriage is normally consummated and sealed by sexual intercourse.[[2]](#footnote-2) Sex both enacts and depicts the one flesh union of a man and a woman. The union of a married couple is more than physical, but it normally includes the physical.

C. And third, on the next page of your handout, marriage is a union of one man and one woman in particular. Gender complementarity is definitional to marriage, not optional. It is of the essence of the thing. Why? Two reasons.

1. First, because as you see in our definition, *procreation* is one of the designed ends for marriage. Again, marriage is the God-given means in Genesis 2 for fulfilling the God-given command in Genesis 1 to be fruitful and multiply. A man and woman are both necessary for procreation. Not only that, but as we’ve seen in previous weeks of this class, God has given fathers and mothers distinct roles to play in the nurture and care of children.

Of course, we must remember that because of the fall, not all couples will be able to conceive. In Genesis 3, the curse on the woman involves pain in childbearing. As the book of Genesis continues on, we see that barrenness is one of the effects of the curse. We should mourn with those who desire children and have not yet received this blessing. But still, the reality of infertility doesn’t mean that procreation isn’t part of sex in its original design. Sex and procreation may be broken, but openness to procreation is still an integral aspect of sex.

2. Second, a marriage is only a marriage as such if it is between a man and a woman because marriage is a picture of *two distinct parties in covenantal union*. This gets us to our phrase “symbolic of the relationship between Christ and the church.” In Eph 5, we see that marriage teaches us about the church’s relationship to Christ because the wife and husband *are* different and fulfill distinct roles. A so-called “marriage” of two people of the same sex wouldn’t have the same symbolic meaning.

With this definition in mind, what have we learned about sex? The lesson we should draw is that **marriage and sex are mutually interpreting realities**. The marriage union is sealed and reaffirmed *through sex*. So, sex is, in part, what ratifies a marriage. At the same time, though, sex receives its meaning and legitimacy *from* the marriage relationship. Sex is not merely an act, but rather it is the union of *a* *married* man and woman.

This means that from the standpoint of the Bible, sex between a man and woman in marriage *is* sex, pure and simple. Every other kind of sexual activity is, properly speaking, not true sex. It may involve sexual behaviors, but outside the context of marriage, it’s counterfeit. It doesn’t bear the same meaning. You can set up basketball hoops on a golf course, and bring two basketball teams onto the grass and play a game that looks a lot like basketball. But if it’s not on a real approved court, it won’t count for the NBA standings. The teams may be going through the same motions, but their activity is outside the proper domain for a “true” basketball game, one that really counts. Basketball on grass isn’t really basketball at all. In the same way, we’re seeing that sex outside of biblical marriage isn’t really sex at all.

That can help us make sense of a chapter like Leviticus 18. When some people read a chapter like this, it just seems like a lot of “thou shalt nots.” This text includes laws against all sorts of illicit sexual activity – incest, homosexuality, adultery, bestiality. Or a chapter like 1 Cor 6, where Paul says that those who commit sexual immorality, adultery, and homosexuality – among other sins like greed and reviling! – won’t inherit the kingdom of God. But really, these chapters are just putting in the negative what Genesis 2 had already put in the positive. These laws are gracious guardrails to help the people of God understand what true sex is. Sex is *marital* union, and everything short of marital union is a hollow counterfeit. God’s design isn’t meant to hinder our joy. To the contrary, his purpose is to maximize it – for us to enjoy his good gifts free from the distortions and perversions of sin.

**QUESTIONS?**

**III. Sex As Fulfillment? The Example of Jesus**

As we’ve seen so far, a biblical view of marriage should help us see that what God has “actually said” about sex makes a great deal of sense after all. Sex *is* marital union. But still, this can be a hard teaching.

One of the reasons the biblical view of sexuality seems difficult to many is because in the last couple of centuries in our culture, we have come to see sex as mainly involving personal fulfillment and pleasure. In past eras, authoritative instruction about life primarily came from some authority figure outside yourself – such as God, your nation, your family or tribe. In this framework, sex is connected to a broader framework for morality outside oneself. But beginning with the Enlightenment and Romantic movements in the 18th and 19th centuries, our culture has moved to a place in which moral authority is increasingly self-determined. Rather than the righteous life consisting of being faithful to your God or your nation or your family, the moral life now means you are faithful first and foremost to yourself – including your desires. That means that personal desires have become elevated to a level of moral authority. According to many people, the greatest sin is to refuse to fulfill your personal desires – especially your sexual desires. But this is at odds with scripture. Scripture nowhere says that our own fallen desires are a faithful guide for what is good and right. Nor does it teach that sexual expression is essential to living a full, abundant life.

To see this, I want us to spend some time considering what we can call the “sexuality of Jesus.” What does the life of Jesus teach us about what it means to be a sexual being?

By “sexuality of Jesus,” I mean two things: 1) First, the fact that Jesus has a sex – he is male. The eternal Son of God took on flesh. He united a human nature to his divine nature. He died and rose again in a glorified body, and he is now seated – as an embodied human man – at the right hand of God the Father. Gender is good! Jesus didn’t come as a genderless person. That’s because there is no such thing. He came as a *real* person with a real body, a man. This doesn’t mean that femininity is less important or valuable than masculinity. The Son of God affirmed the good of womanhood by being born of a woman – literally, he was conceived in and inhabited Mary’s womb. As 1 Cor 11 says, men and women are interdependent; we need each other, and Jesus’ own time as a baby in the womb illustrated this perfectly.

2) Second, by “sexuality of Jesus” I mean that Jesus is himself a sexual being. As a real human person, he took on a body capable of sexual activity. And yet: he refrained from sex. This means that it is possible to be fully human, totally content, *and* abstain from sex for one’s whole life. The term for this is chastity. “Chastity is more than simply abstention from extramarital sex; it conveys purity and holiness.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus didn’t avoid sex because sex is bad, or he was somehow too dignified for it. No! He taught that marriage as a one-flesh union is good, and part of God’s design (See Matt 19:4-6). Rather, getting married simply was not part of Christ’s mission on earth. And praise God: Christ’s example shows that you can live a life of service to God, fulfilled joy, and contribution to the good of others without sex. Sexual activity isn’t essential to being human or to ultimate satisfaction.

Yet it’s important for us to see that Jesus, as a single man, wasn’t just holed off in a monastery living alone. He had committed, intimate friendships. John calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” In John 11:5 we read that Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Jesus didn’t “express” his sexuality within marriage, but he did have many meaningful, loving relationships. In that, too, he should be a model for us.

Now, many of us may hear this teaching about Christ’s life of chastity, and say to ourselves “that must have been easy for him – he’s God!” To which I would first say, of course Christ is the God-man, yet he did live fully *as a man*. His divinity didn’t in any way take over or eliminate his humanity. He knew struggle. He resisted Satan. Heb 2:18 tells us that he “suffered when tempted.” And as one who identifies with us fully in our human weakness, we know that he delights to give “grace to help in time of need” when we are tempted as well (Heb 4:16).

So should we expect that some of Jesus’ followers might live lives of fruitful and fulfilled chastity as he did? Yes. In fact, that’s what Jesus himself said. Listen to Matthew 19:12:***“****For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”*

A eunuch refers to someone who is unable to have sex. As Jesus explains, some people are eunuchs from birth. Due to physical deformities that result from the fall, certain individuals may not be able to engage in sex. Jesus also recognizes there are those who have been made eunuchs by men. In the ancient world, some royal male servants were castrated so that they could serve in the women’s quarters and not pose any threat of sexual assault or infidelity. How comforting that Jesus knows and sees those in these difficult conditions. Yet again, we can remember Jesus’ own example that a life without sex is not a second-class life.

And what he says next reinforces that: “There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” Here Jesus turns and uses the idea of a eunuch metaphorically. He’s saying that some Christians will choose a state of ongoing singleness – perhaps for a season, or for a whole life – for the sake of serving his kingdom. The apostle Paul was one of those who did. He explained in 1 Cor 7 that those who are single are freed from the concerns to care for a spouse and can devote more of their energies to serve the broader kingdom.

Now, of course, there are many single believers who have an unmet desire for marriage. Marriage can be a good desire. We must recognize that not all single believers *experience* and feel their singleness to be the gift that it is. We must empathize with those who are in a season of longing. But still, believers longing for marriage can take comfort that Jesus affirms the value of singleness and chastity, and he himself lived out the goodness of the single life.

So what have we seen so far? We’ve seen that God’s design for sexuality within marriage is good. We’ve seen that sex *is* covenantal union, so all forms of sexual sin fall short of God’s design. And we’ve seen that Jesus, an unmarried man, is our prime example for holy sexuality, though he never engaged in sex.

**IV. Same-Sex Attraction**

How do all these things play out on the ground of the Christian life? Let’s turn briefly to one example – the issue of same-sex attraction. How does the biblical vision we’ve been exploring speak to the very real situation of a person who feels a deep and persistent predisposition toward erotic attraction to people of the same sex?

Here are four things we can say.

**First,** we must recognize the reality that fallen people have fallen desires. Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Paul is clear in Eph 2:3: “We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the **desires** of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Desiring sin is “natural” for sinners. That includes sexual desires: heterosexual lust and homosexual lust alike. In fact, Titus 3:3 says that in our sin we are all “slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Though creation is good, and sex is good, our desires are distorted. We must not (and cannot!) redefine sex according to our desires, but instead we must depend on God to transform our desires (Rom 12:1) in accord with his will. So, we must clearly state that same-sex sexual desires are wrong.

**Second,** scripture equips us to offer an answer to the question, *What if someone is born that way?* Being born with desires that seem out of line with the positive biblical teaching on sexuality and marriage doesn’t invalidate the Bible’s teaching that homosexual desire is sinful. David says in Psalm 51:5, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”* Do same-sex desires come from nature or nurture? It could be both. The doctrine of original sin teaches us that none of us are exempt. We don’t have to be taught to desire sin. Wicked longings are innate to our fallen condition. And at the same time we are raised and nurtured in a sinful world that is opposed to God. Other people may mislead us. They may even sin against us in ways that then make us confused about what is right and wrong.

**Third,** we must on one hand affirm that all sins make us deserving of condemnation. Homosexuality is not the unforgivable sin. There are many believers who experience same-sex attraction and yet are actively seeking to live lives of holiness in submission to God’s will. Such brothers and sisters are not in a different class of Christian. They are not dirtier than the rest of us. *All* of us have perverted, wicked, ungodly desires! At the same time, on the other hand, we shouldn’t forget that homosexual activity is a particularly consequential denial of God’s design for marriage and sex. Homosexual behavior takes the institution of marriage, which is intended to portray Christ and the church, and distorts that picture.

**Fourth,** our posture toward believers who experience same-sex attraction must be one of compassion, kindness, gentleness, and speaking the truth in love. (When it comes to speaking with non-believers, our friends who may have embraced or endorsed homosexuality, there’s a whole other class in the apologetics core seminar about that which may be helpful to you. Here, we’re thinking of how to care for *believers* who are seeking to walk in purity.) The ultimate goal for anyone with same-sex desires isn’t to develop heterosexual attractions and get married, though all things are possible with God. Remember, one could become attracted to people of the opposite sex—and still sin by lusting after them! The goal isn’t necessarily heterosexual desires, but holiness. The goal is singleness to the glory of God, whether for a lifetime or for a season, if God brings a person of the opposite sex into your life to whom you can commit to give yourself sexually in marriage. After all, it only takes one person like that to make marriage an option.

So here’s my question for the class: if a Christian who experiences same-sex attraction is getting to know you, are you the type of person they will be able to trust? Can they confide in you about this? Recognize that experiencing same-sex attraction can be very confusing and challenging. Listen and show that you care. Be aware that the world is sending strong signals about homosexuality. Some of our brothers and sisters, in their flesh, in their weakest moments, would love to believe these lies – just as all of us have lies we are prone to believe. Pray for them to have courage and stand strong. Ask how you can care for them. Perhaps above all, don’t define them in your mind by this one particular desire. Sam Allberry, in his very helpful book *Is God Anti-Gay*,shares his own experience of same-sex attraction, but he also says that by God’s grace this particular temptation doesn’t define him. In fact, he finds that he is more tempted toward pride and greed than homosexual lust. That’s a good reminder that we must see each other as far more than any one particular sin struggle. Our identity is in Christ.

With all of that that said, let me close us with a few general points of **V. Application.**

1. We should honor marriage. Hebrews 13:4 says, “*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”*Pray for those who are married that God would bless them with faithfulness and purity. Pray their marriages would be a witness to the world of Christ’s love for the church. If you’re not married, consider how you can serve married couples – help at weddings, help babysit their kids, etc.
2. We should honor singleness. Paul does! 1 Cor 7:8, “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.” Marriage is a good thing to desire. But the end of the Christian life is not to become married, have 2.5 kids and a white picket fence. The end of the Christian life is to reach the new heavens and new earth where human marriage will be no more. We should never treat single Christians as second-class Christians. In fact, single Christians are a living preview of what every Christian’s condition will be on that final day: not married to any human being, but part of the bride of Christ.
3. We should cultivate strong friendships. Our culture has elevated romantic and sexual love to the exclusion of other forms of friendship and affection. But the church is a spiritual family that should be full of thick relationships where we know and are known, intimately. The waters of baptism are thicker than blood. It is, ultimately, in the church that we see the biblical vision for sexuality lived out as married and single believers alike walk in purity and faithfulness, seeking the world that is to come.

1. **Announcement for core seminar assembly:** This morning in the biblical manhood and womanhood class, we’ll be considering one very particular aspect of being created male and female: what this means for sex and marriage. What is the bible’s view of sexuality? And what does this mean for those who may experience same-sex attraction? That’s what we’ll be discussing downstairs in room 5. All are welcome, but I would encourage parents to use discretion about bringing children along; due to the topic at hand, it will depend on their age and what you think is most wise. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Can we envision a marriage where because of some physical injury or disability a married couple isn’t ever able to engage in sex? Yes, but this would be irregular and a result of the fall. Such a couple could be legitimately married, I think, but it would be like a Christian who never got baptized. You can be a true believer and never be baptized, but normally baptism is the seal of belonging to the Christ in the new covenant. In the same way, normally sex is the seal of belonging to your spouse in the covenant of marriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality: Sex, Desire and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (Multnomah, 2018), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)