

Series: Tough Questions

Strapline: Helping thinkers believe, and believers think.

Talk 3 title: Isn't the Bible's sex ethic outdated?

Sources... 1. *Rumours of Another World*, a book by Philip Yancey 2. *Lust and liberation*, a sermon by Tim Keller 3. *Designer sex*, a sermon by Andy Stanley 4. *Sex and the gospel*, an article of Tim Keller 5. *Sex and the supremacy of Christ* by John Piper

Intro...

I'm guessing that many of you are thinking. 'Christians have such a negative view of sex. They get uptight about sex. And for this reason I find Christianity unattractive.' Now I don't know if I'm shooting too high, but I hope that by the message end, you will say to yourself, 'Okay, I didn't understand the Bible's teaching – but now that I do, I find there's something really attractive about it.' I can hope, right?

Let's read three key passages in the Bible that reveal its sex ethic...

Genesis 2

22 Then the LORD ... 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. 25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Matthew 5 – the words of Jesus...

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

1 Corinthians 6 – the words of the Apostle Paul...

16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.

1 Cor 7: 2 Each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own 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. 5 Do not deprive each other...

So there you have the Bible's ethic. Now let me compare it with our culture's ethic in 4 points...

POINT ONE...

Our culture tends to...	The Bible teaches...
Downplay the significance of sex	Sex is a sacred, beautiful gift from God

In our culture, we generally treat sex as something far from being a sacred gift. Think of popular culture for starters:

- The words we use for sex in our culture: shag, hump, screw are the milder ones, and then there are ones that I can't repeat here.
- maybe you remember that song by Bloodhound Gang? 'You and me aint nothing but mammals, so let's do it like they do it on the Discovery Channel'.
- Recently Ashton Kutcher and Natalie Portman starred in 'No strings attached' one of many movies that explore the concept of *friendship with benefits*, those friendships where we can service each other sexually without any pressure to become anything more than friends.
- A few years back the movie 'The 40 year old virgin came out' which mocked a grown virgin man. Just recently a new one has come out: 'The 18 year old virgin' a movie about a girl who is too embarrassed to graduate from high school as a virgin and has one weekend to get rid of her embarrassment.
- Or how about Katy Perry's latest hit song: 'Last Friday night Yeah we danced on table tops And we took too many shots Think we kissed but I forgot. Last Friday night Yeah we maxed our credit cards And got kicked out of the bar So we hit the boulevard Last Friday night We went streaking in the park Skinny dipping in the dark Then had a menage a trios (*that's a threesome*). This Friday night. Do it all again.' In fact over 20 million have watched the Youtube video. My point? Our culture tends to downplay the significance of sex.
- But it's not just popular culture, it's academia: Social Evolutionary Theory has really taken off in the last decade and more and more academics argue that sex, like the bloodhound gang suggested, truly is nothing more than a species way of reproducing itself. In this camp a recent book: 'The Natural History of Rape' has caused quite a stir as it has argued that even Rape is not such a bad thing – because it is one more way the Human Species has learnt to perpetuate itself in the world. My point is this: in our culture, sex is so often treated as no big deal.

In contrast, sex in the Bible is a big deal... and a beautiful one at that.

- In Genesis 1, after God makes male and female and speaks of their ability to reproduce, he delights by saying, 'It is very good.' God delights in one of his most remarkable creations – the gift of sex! So God makes a big deal about sex!
- Then in the next chapter, which we read earlier, we see Adam waxing lyrical about sex too. Naked Adam sees naked Eve and the first thing he does is sing a rapturous song of love – and all in the presence of God who himself delights that his kids delight in his gift of sexuality! So both God and Adam make a big deal about sex.
- Remember the words of Apostle Paul that I read earlier... 1 Cor 7: '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. 5 Do not deprive each other.' God commands frequent sex in marriage. In fact there is a whole book in the Bible called Song of Solomon that details the joys of sex in marriage. Parts of it are enough to make you blush... especially chapter 7, where the wife does a bit of strip tease for her husband, and there

comes a moment where he just can't keep his hands off – let me read it to you... The aroused man, looking at his naked wife dance for him says, ‘7 Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. 8 I said, "I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit." A study of the Song of Solomon reveals some keys to a great sex life in marriage.

- One of the tragedies in Christian history is some of its leaders who took the Platonic thinking about sex and filtered it into their teachings about sex. One guy Origen taught that Adam and Eve only had sex after they fell into sin, and that sex is a kind of necessary evil for the sake of procreation. In fact he practiced what he preached and castrated himself. How unnecessary! He believed that somehow bodies are instruments of sin, and all that matters is what we do with our souls and spirits. In this view sex is bad, but prayer is good. Martin Luther counter-argued like this: This idea that sex because it's bodily is bad is disproved like this: Jesus – who is totally perfect - has a body – and the devil- who is totally evil - doesn't.' Good point.
- Alan Hirche a famous author and pastor tells how every wedding he does he asks everyone who invented the orgasm? Was it the devil? Or was it God. Then he asks, ‘Would you like to meet the God who invented the orgasm?’ Now, he's not being blasphemous. His argument is sound. Sex is God's idea and it's his beautiful gift to the human race.

POINT TWO...

Our culture tends to...	The Bible teaches...
Throw off sexual restraint	Sex needs the boundary of marriage.

Our culture throws off restraints with abandon...

- In 1783 the Futurist John Mills said that as he looked to the future he believed that society would become more and more sexually controlled – he said that the human race would bring the sex desire completely under the control of reason and conscience. How wrong he was... Today – on average we watch 14000 sexual acts on TV every year. In fact, between the years 1995 and 2005 the amount of sexual imagery on TV doubled.
- The teachings of Sigmund Freud focused on the conflict between – as he defined it - an internal “id,” the innate sex drive, and an external “superego,” the socially formed conscience developed by our culture and upbringing. But this is not science; rather, it is borrowed from romanticism. How does Freud know the conscience to be a totally external, social artifice, separate from an innate, internal basis? He doesn't, of course, but by setting up the conscience as an external influence and the sexual instinct as an internal influence, he can call all sexual ethics “repressive” and “artificial.” In actuality, Freud's thesis is wrong: evidence shows that the sexual appetite is shaped significantly by the *external* forces of media, peer pressure, and cultural values.
- But in the 60s, in the so-called sexual revolution, Freud's idea of sexual repression took off. And along with it came a new sex ethic: as long as 2 or adults consent, they can do whatever they want. Of course contraception is also encouraged.

In contrast, the Bible says sex needs the boundary of marriage.

- It teaches that sex, like a river needs bank. Ever seen what happens when a river floods its banks. It brings destruction! It's the same with sexuality outside of

bounds.

- Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 says that if we let lust run wild in our lives, we will be thrown into 'hell'. The Greek word for hell is 'Gehenna' which is the name of the trash heap outside of ancient Jerusalem – the place of disintegration. His point is that – when we don't restrain the id – it is like throwing our lives, our relationships and society as a whole upon the trash heap of disintegration. Far from bringing us the freedom sex promises, it brings us pain. So teaches Jesus.
- Let's go back to the way the sex revolution embraced Freud's idea of repression. But ideas have consequences, don't they? Yeah, lots of people have had lots of fun. But what are the love children of the sexual revolution? Here they are: skyrocketing divorce rates (1 in 2 marriages) and unfaithfulness in marriage rates (8 in 10 marriages) - and think how this all leads to broken hearts and broken families. And then think how sex outside of marriage leads to unwanted pregnancies (and 55 million abortions a year) and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV AIDS wreaking havoc (Since the beginning of the epidemic, more than 60 million people have contracted HIV and more than 25 million have died of AIDS). In short, so many of us have tasted Gehenna ourselves.
- If we just stick to the Bible's simple boundary / riverbank: 'Save your sex for marriage – and keep it in the marriage' very little of this pain would have come about. Sex would not be in flood.
- On this point of God's boundary for sex being the marriage covenant, let me briefly answer 4 FAQs...
- *Most people who think through the simple implications that there is a God and that this God is interested in how we live conclude ... yeah, promiscuous sex is out. 1. But what if two people really love each other? Surely that's enough?*
There's a problem in our culture. The average person, before they get married has several serious relationships where they are in love, but each time – for various reasons - that love comes to an end. So – you end up having several sexual relationships with people who are most times destined to be another person's wife or husband.
- *2. What if two people are engaged to be married? Surely then they can have sex.*
First, that's like trying to open your Christmas presents in November. It's worth the wait. But second, there's wisdom in delaying sex. Many people get married because of amazing sexual chemistry, and naively think that somehow this sexual passion will guarantee a life-long marriage, which of course it doesn't. At the end of the day it's not sex but deep intimate friendship that holds a marriage together. So here's God's wisdom: the engaged couple get to rely on and build the non-physical intimate friendship – a great foundation is laid.
- *3. But what if you marry someone with whom you're not sexually compatible?*
Well, I challenge the assumption behind the question. The assumption is that sexual compatibility is either there or it isn't. The truth is that – in most cases – it takes years to develop sexual compatibility, which is part of the adventure of sex. Besides the most key ingredient to a great sex life is that two people deeply love each other. Everything else can be learned.
- *4. Isn't married sex the least satisfying sex there is?* I can't believe how many people think this. It's such a common myth. Though a small percentage of marriages have real sex difficulties, in fact all the research says just the opposite to the myth: The Scientific American has shown again and again that the people having the best, most regular sex are – believe it or believe it - married people!

POINT 3...

Our culture tends to...	The Bible teaches...
See sex as merely body on body.	Sex is soul on soul.

Our culture treats sex as something physical, something that can be disconnected from relationship...

- In the movie No Strings Attached, after the two friends have sex, the one says to the other, 'No cuddling. That's weird.'
- Think about adult sex shops, and sexpos, and strip joins, and peep shows and internet porn, and one-night stands, and swinging – in all of these things, sex is separated from relationship.
- Think about the article titles on Magazine covers: 7 steps to dazzle her tonight, 5 ways to get the sex you want, 3 ways to guarantee orgasm. All these articles focus on technique: 'Just push these buttons and expect these results.' My point? Sex and relationship are detached from each other. Sex is just physical – body on body.

In contrast, the Bible has a much deeper view of sex. Sex touches the depth of our soul, and of our person. Sex is soul on soul.

- Remember we read Genesis 2? 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.' Here sex is more than just physical. Sex is about the union of two people. Sex is given by God as a bonding agent – that connects the depths of you to the depths of another person.
- Mind you, I think you already intuitively knew that right? You knew that sex is deeply personal. From experience. If you're not persuaded let me ask you some questions to prove to you just how deeply part of us our sexuality is...
- 1. Do you know of someone who was sexually abused? Apart from being healed, they tend to carry that around with them for life. What is it about someone touching your genitals that has the ability to also touch the depths of your person? If sex was just physical, that wouldn't be the case, would it?
- 2. Why is it that very often it's the men who have the least involved fathers who grow up and tend to more easily get sexually addicted? So there is this deep emotional void. How can it be that sex – which is meant to just be physical – provides some kind of attempt to fill ourselves up emotionally? If sex was just physical, that wouldn't be the case, would it?
- 3. Do you know anyone who struggles with a sense of entanglement with sexual partners of the past? Perhaps they're married – or soon to be married – to someone they love, and yet they feel this pull, this connection with a previous lover, one that pulls on them though they don't want this pull at all? Now, as a pastor, I have prayed with many men who are soon to be married who've confessed just that to me. They say, 'I don't understand. I slept with this girl 10 years ago, yet I can't get her out of my mind. I still feel hooked to her. And I can't unhook.' If sex was just physical, that wouldn't be the case, would it?
- 4. Why is it that for most of us our biggest regret is sexual? Over the years many people have made an appointment with me as a pastor. Then they say the words, 'I've never told anyone this before...' And 9 times out of 10 they tell me about sexual regrets. If sex is just physical, that wouldn't be the case, would it?

- Here's the point: our culture is absolutely silent on the most obvious thing there is about our sexuality: *that sex is not just body on body - it's soul on soul*. Which is why sexual sin inflicts upon us some of us the deepest wounding many of us carry. Now, you might be sitting there thinking, 'If that's true, why do I never hear about it?' The answer: it's not a marketable idea. Who's going to make a movie about the way sex unintentionally gives away a deep part of you to another person?
- Hang on, every now and then the media *does* reveal that sex is soul on soul. Here's two examples: 1. Remember Vanilla Sky? Cameron Diaz' character says to the friend, Tom Cruise with whom she had so called sex without strings attached: 'When you slept with me, your body made a promise to me, though you did not know it.' 2. Remember Rick Astley? Years ago his hit song was: 'I'm never got to let you down'? Well, in early 2011 he had another hit, Lights Out, about what happened when she let him down: 'The dark is creeping up on me again. In between these sheets where I lay you down I tried to find some rest so I reach out for the switch but why pretend. Cause I can't turn the lights out now I see your face. No, I can't turn the lights out now. My heart will break. Cause everything I see will end up killin me All over, all over again so I can't turn the lights out.' He's experiencing the grief of having a had a sexual relationship with a girl. But now she's up and left – and taken the depth of him with her.
- Can you see why the Bible teaches – and I argue that our experience corroborates - 'Sex is such a powerful bonding agent that it needs the strongest possible commitment to make it safe to do.' This is why the Bible forbids sex before or outside of the marriage covenant. It needs the riverbanks of covenant to bring blessing not harm.
- Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6? He said that 'All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.' He is explaining that sexual sin is in a category of its own because of its immense ability to bring destruction into our own lives.

POINT 4...

Our culture tends to...	The Bible teaches...
Worship sex	Sex is a poor substitute for God.

Our culture has done just what Jesus said we shouldn't. We have surrendered to lust. Let me explain...

- Sex is one of God's greatest gifts to the human race. Which means that – if we're not careful – we can become obsessed with it. In Matthew 5, Jesus said, 'Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully...' Now that word 'lustfully' does not mean 'with sexual desire'. There are plenty other Greek words Jesus would have used if he was trying to speak about finding someone sexually attractive.
- No the word 'lust' is the Greek word 'epithumea'. It is used over 60 times in the New Testament and only twice is it used of sex. It basically means 'an exaggerated desire.' It means we want something too badly. It implies an idolatrous relationship with something – the belief that whatever it is we're lusting will satisfy us, complete us, give us meaning. And that's Jesus point: we're in danger of thinking sex will give us more satisfaction, completion and meaning than we think. In short we try find in sex and in love and in the love partner what only God can give. And that is what our culture has done...
- There's something called 'Google trends'. It tells you what the world is searching

for. Amazingly it reveals that the most common words typed into the Google search bar are sex and porn. In fact for every one person that types in the word ‘God’ another 200 people type in the word ‘sex’. There’s hard proof: *our culture worships sex*.

- In fact people use sex as a kind of religion. For example, when Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 6 about how some of the men in the church had slept with prostitutes, he is referring to temple priestesses in a nearby temple where people worship the goddess Aphrodite, by sleeping with one of the more than 1,000 temple female prostitutes and priestesses. And still today sex is the closest many people get to a sense of transcendence. Sex is the thing that gives people a sense of the cosmic and apocalyptic. GK Chesterton famously said, ‘Whenever a man knocks on the door of a brothel, he really is looking for God, though he knows it not.’
- But the truth is that sex – as much as it promises – cannot ultimately do for us what we - in our culture - hope it will. Sex is good, but it’s not God. And it is a poor substitute for God.

Conclusion...

Our culture tends to...	The Bible teaches...
<i>Downplay the significance of sex</i>	<i>Sex is a sacred, beautiful gift from God</i>
<i>Throw off sexual restraint</i>	<i>Sex needs the boundary of marriage.</i>
<i>See sex as merely body on body.</i>	<i>Sex is soul on soul.</i>
<i>Worship sex</i>	<i>Sex is a poor substitute for God.</i>

If you came in here thinking, ‘The Bible’s ethic on sex is outdated’, I hope I’ve got you thinking. In my view the Bible’s sex ethic is exactly what our culture is missing. The Bible’s sex ethic is on the money – perhaps more relevant now than ever before.

Let me wind up by taking a few minutes bringing Jesus into the picture, and say 3 things about the difference he can make in this area...

1. What about making Jesus your Saviour?

Honestly, I didn’t come into this message trying to make anyone feel guilty. I just wanted to show the wisdom of God’s way. But I’m not naïve about the fact that this room is full of people who have sinned in so many ways – including sexually, with me right there in the mix. That means that a talk like this tends to shine a light upon areas of darkness in our lives.

But here’s the good news – Jesus only puts his finger on those sins in our lives that he wants to forgive us of and set us free from. He died on the cross so your sins and shame can be removed and you can have a new slate. But there is one condition – you got to take your sin to Jesus. Don’t deny it. Don’t excuse it. Just take it to him. See him there on the cross. Put your sins at the foot of the cross. That’s what his death does – it does away with our sin. Cling to the cross – and let him wash you clean.

2. What about making Jesus your Lord?

I’ve got to be honest with you. The reason I stopped having sex outside of marriage was not primarily because I saw the wisdom in it, but because Jesus said I should cut it out. Though I haven’t explored whether Jesus has the right to tell us what to do with our lives in this talk, let me come out and say it, ‘I’m totally convinced that the sanest approach to life is to take Jesus seriously.’ After all, he claims to be Lord – and has

backed up the claim in some amazing ways.

Now, there might be some of you who say. 'If trusting in Jesus as Saviour and Lord means I might have to make changes in my lifestyle then I don't want to trust him as my Saviour and Lord.' But hello, that's like going to a doctor who gives you medicine to cure you – but some of the medicine tastes yucky. So you say, 'I'm not going back to that doctor – his medicine tastes bad.' In the same way you wouldn't taste-test the credibility of a doctor so you shouldn't taste-test the credibility of Christ.

3. *What about making Jesus your water?*

Let me explain. In John 4 Jesus, while sitting at a well, comes across a woman who slept around. He then says to her that the ways she's trying to satisfy her thirst will never work. He then holds up before her himself as the Living Water who alone can satisfy the depths of her heart. Hear what he's saying? 'Sex and romantic love – as wonderful as they are – are poor substitutes for me. Unless you make me your heart's true love you will never find what you're looking for.'

This echoes Jeremiah 2:13 where God says: 'My people have sinned against me in two ways. First, they stopped drinking from me, the Spring of Life-giving Water. Second, they have dug up broken wells to try satisfy their thirst.' I put it to you that our culture has run from God and has substituted sex and love for him.

But the same way he invited the woman at the well, so he invites us to come to him and drink. Be satisfied by his love, his reality, his presence, his completeness, his power, his commitment. Make him your heart's true love.

As we do this, you know what happens? The lie our culture believes about sex being everything breaks off of us. We get free. Listen to how John Piper puts it...

The worship of Christ enlarges the soul so that sex and its little thrills become small - as they really are. Little souls have little lusts that exert great power. The soul, as it were, expands or shrinks to encompass the magnitude of its treasure. The human soul was made to treasure Christ, to see and savour his majesty, beauty, power, grace and supremacy. Only treasuring Christ will enlarge the soul as God intended. And only treasuring Christ will make the little lusts lose their power over us. If we fail to find our fill in Christ then we will inevitably seek to find our fill in something much smaller, something like the buzz and thrill that sex brings.

The choice is yours. Drink from the Spring of Living Water that Christ is. Or drink from whatever broken well you choose.