

Mark 8:27-38

The God I Don't Understand (How can the Biblical Sexual Ethic be good for Everyone?)

Introduction: Good morning - If it's your first time, welcome! We are getting back in to our series within our Year of Biblical Literacy - The God I Don't Understand.

In this series we are talking about some of the really difficult issues/problems we have with the Bible - whether culturally or theologically. We talked about the problem of the picture of God in the OT compared to God in the NT, then we talked about violence, and this morning we're gonna talk about sex.

I've said this before but I think for the first time maybe ever - people are leaving the church - not because of spiritual abuse or hypocrisy or any problem they had with their particular local church community being unloving - but plainly because they could no longer believe in the Bible and the God of the Bible.

The argument or objections to the Bible go something like...
"If God is a God of love, then how can the Bible teach this.....?"

Christians are rocked by this stuff, and don't know how to answer it - We have a Biblically illiterate culture that is using the Bible to critique a Biblically illiterate Church. Most Christians if anything have a very general understanding of what the Bible teaches (We know, or think we know, Jesus) and so we simply ignore these things or try to put them out of our minds because we can't see the consistency between a certain teaching and the person of Jesus - but with our deconstructionist culture of #metoo and down with the Patriarchy and other mantras - you can't do this anymore. And that's actually a good thing. It's time for the church to recapture the authority and beauty of scripture and to rediscover the incredible story of God - the most high God who enters into time and space to redeem his creation at the cost of his own life - and to find our story in that story.

One problem we have when talking about the subject of sex and sexuality and Bible's teaching on it - is that you can't separate the OT teaching from

the NT teaching on this one. - The NT assumes and teaches the same sexual ethics as the OT. Many object to the Biblical sexual ethic because they say that this historical Christian and biblical view is harmful to certain people - especially LGBTQI people

So here is the question I want to tackle this morning - ***How can the Biblical Sexual Ethic be good for everyone?***

Disclaimer - I know that for some of you this subject is deeply personal. That might be because of your own struggles with sex and your sexuality, or maybe because of a loved one or dear friend who is gay, transgender or dealing with gender dysphoria or other sexual identity. My desire this morning is not to place a brick wall in front of you, and say this is the end of the discussion; Here is the truth - deal with it. But instead to start a conversation and dialogue that should already be going on in the church. How do we wrestle with God over these issues of sexuality that are so personal and so relational sensitive?

For many, this debate is framed as a choice between either Scriptural faithfulness or love of neighbor. The gospel doesn't pit love versus faithfulness; truth versus grace. Love, of course, is the supreme command of God. We are called to love and serve God, while also loving and serving our neighbor. And that's what I hope that this conversation will be and what it will lead - Faithfulness to both these commands
So let's begin the conversation..

1. **What is the Biblical Sexual Ethic?**

1. Most modern western people would say that sex is about pleasure, self expression and exploration, novelty, and spontaneity. And as far as I know the one rule of our culture's sexual morality is mutual consent.
1. The sexual liberation viewpoint says: Desire + consent = freedom. But are we more free? The increase in violent pornography, Open sex, cohabitation has not made us more free or more fulfilled. All the free open sex and access to pornography is not producing bonding and connection it's producing loneliness. In fact, last year Britain appointed a loneliness minister because of this very reason. So this narrative looks more like this: Desire + consent = disillusionment.

2. Then there is the Moral Narrative or Fear Side viewpoint: Moral standards + will power = holiness. The anti-Nike slogan - Just don't do it. But it hasn't worked. Statistically when you look at the Church compared with the culture it's really not far different in its practice of premarital sex, cohabitation, lust and the usage of pornography. So the way this really works is: Moral standards + will power = failure. And this has produced incredible shame and guilt.
2. God's view of sex is neither of these, and contrary to popular belief the Bible does not have a low view of the body and sex but in fact a very high view of it.
 1. Of course God invented the body and sex. He made the first humans male and female; sexually complementary, he called them to be fruitful and multiply - modern translation - have lots of sex, make lots of human covenant partners who will fill the earth with God's image.
 1. The first man and woman become a biblical prototype for marriage and sexual relationships - so that when Jesus is questioned, thousands of years later, about marriage or divorce he always references Genesis 2 and the story of the first marriage - highlighting the fact that they are male and female and that they become one flesh (united), and that in their relationship they are naked (open transparent, trusting) and unashamed (without fear, total vulnerability). God's ideal is that sexual relations would be exclusively between one man and woman in a committed covenant relationship for life.
 2. Paul says in Ephesians that Marriage and sexual intimacy are not an end in themselves - but are a picture of what God's covenant love is like. Marriage is a sign first and foremost of God's covenantal love with his people. It's not really about us; therefore we have no right as humans, especially as followers of Jesus, to redefine that. This is about God and his never stopping, never giving up, un-breaking, always and forever love that is ultimately displayed in Jesus sacrificing himself for us on the cross. That's why marriage is life long commitment of faithfulness to one's spouse.
 1. Sex in marriage therefore is the way that we say to our spouse - I belong to you and you alone. It is away to know our spouse

deeply. It is a way to serve your spouse; a way to give pleasure rather than to get pleasure. There is obviously an intimacy and vulnerability that comes with being sexually exclusive.

2. Jesus' followers abstain from extramarital sex, and fight lust in order to witness how God works in the gospel. God calls his people into an exclusive relationship with him, a marriage covenant, and to give him anything less in return is unfaithfulness. The Bible is basically saying - you should not give yourself sexually to anyone until you have committed every part of yourself to that person; Just as God does not give his intimate love to people outside of a covenant with Jesus. Our lives are to pattern God's life and love in every way.
 3. Finally, sex outside of a marriage covenant undermines the character quality of faithfulness, which builds community, and which is a huge marker of God's people. Chastity, we forget, is not a state but a form of the virtue of faithfulness that is necessary for a role in the community. Therefore, it is as crucial to married life as it is to the single life.
 1. Jesus calls his followers that are married, not just to sexual fidelity, but to total and complete fidelity to one's spouse - in thought, word and deed. Whole-hearted or whole person devotion. Anything outside of whole heart, whole life, commitment to our spouse is out of sync with the way of Jesus.
 2. Anything outside of or less than this the Bible calls sexual immorality - The term is used like a sexual junk drawer - In multiple places we are told that those who practice sexual immorality in any or all of it's forms - will not be part of God's kingdom
- 3. How can this definition of sex and sexuality be good for singles, same sex attracted people, Trans people, or people dealing with gender dysphoria?**
1. I mean doesn't this feel like a big tease from the Bible? We hear pastors and christian books celebrate the goodness of only a certain version of male and female (Hyper femininity and hyper masculinity) - You think, Where do I fit in?

2. We hear people talk about the greatness of marriage and sex and for everyone who doesn't fit into those categories - too bad. Where do the rest of us fit in?
 1. Is this an accurate depiction of Biblical teaching? It's actually not. It's more of a depiction of our culture being over sexualized and it's previous views of hyper Masculinity and hyper femininity and now it's rejection of that - because it is toxic! and unfortunately all this has shaped the church more than the Bible.

4. Who Get's Sex and Sexuality 100% right?

1. Something we don't talk about enough is the sexual brokenness of human nature. We are sexual creatures and this is something created by God - it is good, but because of the fall (Genesis 3) - sin has tainted everything. So even something good like sex, and sexuality is tainted by sin, we have "unnatural desires", gender dysphoria, misdirected desires, We objectify both the male and female sex, we use and abuse, we make sex a totally selfish and self fulfilling act.
2. All of us suffer from sexual brokenness, some of us will experience healing, all of us will struggle to some degree with sexual brokenness - but the good news is that one day we will be made whole...this is something we need to remember, look forward to, and to remind one another of often.
3. The Bible is also full of sexually broken people - No one get's it 100% right after Genesis chapter three - there is incest, rape, polygamy, adultery, divorce, perversion, heartache and so on.. the Bible is filled with sexual brokenness and yet the story doesn't stop there. God comes into the world to meet us in our brokenness and to heal our brokenness and to make all things new through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

5. Common Missteps -

1. The Bible holds marriage up as the ultimate relationship - God's best for people.

1. The Bible doesn't ever say this - And unfortunately our culture, and especially the church, wrongly held up marriage as the only relationship in which we can experience love and intimacy. No wonder we legalized same sex marriage - if this is the only relationship of love that's out there - how could we not. The Bible actually celebrates many and varied intimate and loving relationships that people can have. In the Bible, though marriage

is held up as something good, that God Created - Marriage is still penultimate - Only God is ultimate - Therefore the Biblical sexual ethic does not refuse or bar people from God's best. God's best is has been offered to everyone through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. *"To be single is not to be alone. If someone asks if you are in a relationship right now, your immediate response should be that you are in dozens. Our range of relational options is not limited to getting married or to living in the sound-proof, isolated booth of Miss America pageants. Christian growth mandates relational richness. The only time folks talk about human covenants is in premarital counseling. How anemic. If our God is a covenantal God, then all of our relationships are covenantal."* - Paige Benton, *Singled out for Good*

2. If I don't have sex I'll die.

1. Not true. Many virgins or celibate people have lived very long, very full lives.

3. If I don't have sex I'll never have intimacy with another human being.

1. This is not true. It is our western culture that has defined intimacy in this way. King David said that the friendship that he had with Jonathan was better than the Love of woman - could it be that David and Jonathan had such an intimate bond that it was more meaningful and powerful than anything David did in bed with the multiple spouses he had? We need to rediscover the true nature of intimacy and friendship in the church by celebrating all the varied relationships and relationship dynamics that God has given to us... God is not banning anyone from deep intimacy or covenant relationships - The Problem is we define intimacy to mean only one thing - Sex. The church needs to put marriage and sex back in it's proper place.

4. If I don't find a spouse and have children I will never be or have a family.

1. God offers us in Christ all the love and security we will ever need, practically found in his family community - the church. Church we probably need to expand our idea of family - to include friends, singles and couples as surrogate aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, grandma's and grandpa's.

2. Not only that, but in the new heaven and the earth there will be no marriage except God's eternal covenant with his people, and no family except the family of God made up of every tribe, tongue, nation, and people. - Maybe start with our definition of family with that idea - God's forever family

5. If I don't find "my other half" - I'll forever be half a person.

1. No, It's not half and half make one; it's one and one make one; Also the Bible never uses those terms. When God says in Genesis 2 that it is not good that man should be alone - God isn't talking exclusively about marriage - but about community - God created humanity in his image - our God is himself a community - Father, Son and Spirit.
2. The lack of wholeness (Inner black hole) that every human feels is due to a broken relationship with God our creator - Jesus offers all people a healed and intimate relationship with God where we can experience human wholeness and flourishing.

6. I'm the only one who has to deny myself sexually -

1. Not true - all followers of Jesus (Just like Jesus) must submit and sacrifice their sexuality (body) and sexual expression (will) to God.
 1. Jesus lost the love of the Father so that we could have it for all eternity
 2. Jesus rejected the desires for sex and a human wife - because he looked forward to his eternal bride - the Church
 3. Jesus rejected the desire to have his own children so that his inheritance might fall upon us so that we might become the children of God.
2. All Christians are called to practice sexual fidelity and self control either in marriage or in singleness and in this way we all have to go against our selfish, autonomous nature that wants to do life our way and on our own terms... And in that way we follow the way of Jesus, share the fellowship of his suffering, and become more like him.

7. I was born this way

1. As much as people make this statement there is at this time no scientific proof of a gay gene - But Christians of all people should resonate with the fact that because of sin we are all born into brokenness with broken and wrong desires - and that God holds us morally responsible. We all have different manifestations of this brokenness of sin - some have deep desires to hurt people -

we must withstand those desires and bring them under the control of the Spirit, likewise with what the Bible calls sexual immorality and so on.

2. What God offers all people - who suffer under the brokenness of sin - is the offer to be born of the Spirit and be given a new nature with new desires (Galatians 5) - desires to love God, to obey God, to please God. Does this mean those other desires will go away? - maybe not - the Bible never promises that in this life - One day we will be freed from sin and sinful desires - when God makes all things new.... The Bible does teach though that we can be renewed in our minds and be given new desires by God and that those old desires can begin to lose their power and control over us — this is the call of every Christian to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the desires of our past or natural self.

8. **This doesn't seem fair**

1. What do we mean by fair? What parts of life on this fallen planet are fair? I will say - it is unfair that we often call same sex attracted Christians to deny themselves in order to follow Jesus all the while we court porn addiction, marital unfaithfulness and divorce, or if we're single - we hook up and somehow justify our sin as being more okay or sanitary than theirs. It's unfair and unrighteous anytime we call others to costly follow Jesus while neglecting that same call in our own lives.

1. *“For some reason, in our generation, following Jesus is no longer about our sacrifice and suffering. Western Christians have, by and large, stopped denying ourselves - we now more talk about our right to be ourselves. Our Christian lives are more about self-gratification - seemingly denying the existence of Jesus' words (About taking up our cross and following him). They are a continuation of our previous lives, with a thin Christian veneer: just being nicer to a few more people..... The crosses we bear are the small annoyances we haven't yet managed to rid ourselves of rather than any significant suffering we intentionally embrace because we are following Jesus and want others to follow him too. We've chosen to ignore that fact that Jesus calls his disciples to make to make a conscious and costly decision to sacrifice ourselves, to say no to things we might want, even deserve or need, because that's*

what it means to follow his example.” - Ed Shaw, Same Sex Attraction and the Church

6. Is the Bible’s sexual ethic - good?

1. I think part of the issue is the definition of Good - Is my definition of what I think, or what our culture thinks goodness is, actually good? Isn't this how humanity got into the whole predicament that we're in now? Adam and Eve judged for themselves what was right, good and true, rather than listening and obeying God who had created them, knew what he created them for and had richly given them all things to enjoy... Their pursuing autonomy and self determination, rejecting God's limitations on them is what brought sin and brokenness into the world - So when we talk about the Bible's sexual ethics being good for people - what we mean is that God defines goodness for us as our loving creator and he has put restrictions and limits on our freedom not to keep us from blessing but to preserve us for blessing. That we might become what we were created to be.
 1. *“Escaping from Egypt is only half of the exodus. It is easy for us to forget this, in an age where freedom is understood as merely being freedom from: oppression, from constraint or whatever. This aspect of liberation, as wonderful as it is, is only half of the deal. In the scriptures, more emphasis is placed on the freedom for: for worship, for flourishing, for growth in obedience and joy and glory. Human beings are not designed to be free from all constraint, slaves to nothing but our own passions, triumphantly enthroned as our own masters, even our own gods. Everybody serves somebody. So the point of the exodus is not just for Israel (or for us) to find deliverance from serving the old master. It is for us to find delight in serving the new one.” - Alastair Roberts, and Andrew Wilson, Echoes of Exodus*
2. God desires to give us a restored Identity - as his image bearer, he wants to bring us into covenant partnership with him - through the work of Jesus and restore our original purpose - to live under his rule and guidance - which will ultimately fulfill our heart longings - If you've experienced sex you know it's not really what you are looking for - all the sex and all the "intimacy" and all the love and affirmation from men or women, hook-ups and whatever else can never fulfill you. You were made for God - and your soul and body long to be

- reunited to him - you are searching for him in all the wrong places - and in the person and work of Jesus - he offers himself to you.
3. Jesus in his teaching here in Mark 8 is defining for all people that offer looks like, what it means to follow Him -
 4. **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” - Mark 8:34-38**
 5. Jesus is not offering us a way to save ourselves or find ourselves - His offer is totally different - He’s offering us salvation, from sin and it’s destruction, and from ourselves. He says lose yourself for my sake, kill what you think is right, good and true, and then you will find the new life in me, a new identity in me and a new understanding of rightness, goodness and truth. A new understanding of what it means to be human, of what it means to be a sexual creature created by God, what it means to live in community and intimacy with others...
 6. Jesus says, Come and die in order that you may truly live. And that’s a really good thing when you feel dead inside, lost, and lonely, purposeless and directionless.
 1. This isn’t the end of this conversation but I think it’s good place to begin.