

Glorify God in Your Body, Part 3: Q & A

Ephesians 5:1 ESV (Pg. 569) Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

- I. For the last 2 weeks we have been discussing the attitude we should take regarding the physical body. Because I wasn't able to address every nuance of sexual holiness, I invited you to write questions for me to answer as they arose from my message. Today I'll attempt, with the Holy Spirit's help and the guidance of scripture, to answer your questions.
 - A. The Ephesians 5 passage we read this morning is complimentary to the one in 1 Corinthians 6 we've looked at for 2 weeks. Let's Briefly compare them...
 1. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”
 2. In Ephesians 5, he says “**For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has *no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.***”
 3. The Corinthians passage points to the gospel by saying, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.
 4. Similarly, the Ephesians are reminded that, “**at one time you *were darkness, but now you are light* in the Lord.**”
 - B. Ephesians 5 points to a fundamental, gospel-oriented shift in their identity. Therefore, Paul appeals for holiness in **every** arena of their lives, including the sexual arena. ***Walk as children of light*** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and ***try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*** There are three things Paul is instructing:

1. First, because they are not “darkness” anymore, as when they were in sin, they should walk in a way that is consistent with their new identity; as “children of light” rather than “darkness”.
 2. Second, the fact that they are not “darkness” anymore is evidenced, not by church affiliation, religious ceremony, or pious thinking, but only by a life that is filled with the fruit of “all that is good and right and true.”
 3. Lastly, following Christ demands the relentless pursuit of personal holiness as we “try and discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”
- C. It is from this framework that I will answer the questions from last week...
- II. The first question was *“How do we best understand the cultural context of all types of sexuality and immorality? Some issues were very different in the gospel times and it makes a big difference to our current reading.”* When you say the “cultural context of all types of sexuality and morality”, I’m not sure if you mean the cultural context of the biblical times, or of the 21st century, therefore I will try to address this question from both sides.
- A. In the 1st century Roman world, if anything, the **entire** sexual ethic was even more depraved than what you find anywhere in the western world (at least on a large scale) today. In fact, some actions that people today consider to be the most debased in modern culture, were considered as “virtues” in Rome¹.
1. “Prostitution was legal, public, and widespread. “Pornographic” paintings were featured among the art collections in respectable upperclass households. It was considered natural and unremarkable for men to be sexually attracted to teen-aged youths of both sexes, and pederasty was condoned as long as the younger male partner was not a freeborn Roman.”²
 - a) Additionally, “Sexuality was a “core feature” of ancient Roman slavery. Because slaves were regarded as property under Roman law, an owner could use them for sex or hire them out to service other people.”³
 - b) “When it came to sexual mores, women were held to a very different standard than men...A woman’s value was largely in her ability to bear children and if she could not do so, she was quickly cast off.”⁴
 2. All of these things were the norm of Roman culture and considered signs of masculine and national strength. When the church brought a new sexual ethic, it was considered to be subversive! No one “agreed to disagree”.⁵
- B. But is what we see in the history of Rome really that much different than the world of 2018? While certainly pederasty and pedophilia are considered to be taboo, they are still widespread; and in certain other ways the sexual landscape of today is very similar to the Roman world of the New Testament.
1. Same sex relationships have been deemed normal, commendable and legal; with the advent of the #metoo movement, we see that predatory sexual misconduct is alarmingly common; and if our spouses fail to satisfy us we can discard them easily through the tragedy called “no-fault” divorce.
 2. And when the church insists on a higher value for the sexual dimension of our lives, we’re branded as naive prudes at best; bigots and hate mongers at worst. We can’t disagree with certain people or activities, or even to offer to live in a spirit of civil tolerance.

- a) The culture of today demands **full endorsement** of their sexual ethic, as they did in the days of Rome. Failing to fully support that ethic is often seen as destabilizing to the fabric of society, being on the “wrong side of history”.
 - b) If you don’t believe me, ask the Christian owners of Hobby Lobby about when they resisted the Affordable Care Act’s requirement to provide abortifacient drugs to their employees against their religious conscience⁶; or the private business owner in Colorado had to go to the Supreme Court because he declined to make a cake celebrating a same-sex union, in conformity with his Christian beliefs⁷.
- C. So if you assert that “Some issues were very different in the gospel times and it makes a big difference to our current reading.” I would simply ask, what exactly has changed? I see only three options.
1. First, we must ask if **the Bible** itself has changed. If so, who gets to say which parts are still valid? If only some parts are valid, what authority has superseded it? Science? Cultural trends? Politics? If it’s not still all the unchanging Word of God, I would conclude none of it is. **Matthew 24:35 ESV Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**
 2. Second, has the nature of **what is and isn’t sin**, or the consequences of sin changed? Again, to argue that, you would have to disqualify all of the Word and do so from some reliable standard in order to make that claim.
 - a) But the things listed in scripture as sinful (lying, murder, pride and selfishness, etc.) are **still** considered sinful by most; at least as we apply those standards to others! Why would the sins in the sexual realm have to be removed from the list? Have we evolved past their sinfulness?
 - b) And if we can agree that, based on the Bible’s teaching, the nature of sin hasn’t changed, surely we can agree that the consequences of it haven’t either. **Ezekiel 18:20a ESV The soul who sins shall die.**
 3. Lastly, perhaps you would suggest that **human nature** (or our understanding of it) has changed.
 - a) Hopefully you will see by our very brief investigation into the history of 1st century Rome that humanity is no more or less sexually broken than it was 5, 100, 2000, or 10000 yers ago.
 - b) As far as our understanding of human nature goes, I will concede that there is more understanding about the psychological complexity of life than there ever has been. I would also not deny that it is not helpful because of this to tell sexually broken people to simply “knock it off”.
 4. The Bible never **ignores** who we are, or how we got to be that way. It never encourages us to simply **understand** our brokenness; but it also never tells us to **indulge** our brokenness. What’s left for us when we see our ugliness? **2 Corinthians 5:16 ESV From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

- a) As followers of Christ, we don't look at our flesh as it is and conclude that that's all there is. In fact, we don't regard the flesh at all anymore!
 - b) We believe **by faith** that God has made us brand new! He doesn't remodel us, working with what we've got, he resurrects us from scratch!
 - D. For all of these reasons, I respectfully (but strongly) disagree that there is any fundamental thing that should make a "big difference in our current reading". I believe that this is a large, unreasonable and dangerous assumption.
- III. Our second question is tough, but it gets asked frequently, and it is not an easy one. *"What do you say to a person who was born with both male and female parts (Hermaphrodites)?"* Another term for this somewhat rare condition is called "intersex", referring to persons "born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical pattern for female or male."⁸
- A. Not only does this condition, and the psychological, emotional and physical confusion that accompanies it, give cause for deep distress and confusion from those who experience it; for some it calls into question the very nature of what it means to be male or female, created in the image of God.
 - 1. So before I tackle what to say to someone who is experiencing this, let's talk just a little more about it. First, it is a stretch to assume that someone can be **absolutely** both male and female simultaneously. Let me explain.
 - 2. "Intersex" actually describes "a whole range of conditions affecting the development of the human reproductive system"⁹. What usually happens is that instead of normal XX (female) or XY (male) chromosomes, there may be additional or missing chromosomes in people with these conditions.¹⁰
 - a) Beginning in the 1950's, the treatment protocol was to determine the cause of the condition, and assign a sex for the child, surgically modifying the infant's body to conform to the assigned sex. Parents were encouraged to show no ambiguity about the child's chosen gender and to raise the child accordingly, as either a girl or boy.¹¹
 - b) This caused a lot of frustration on the part of children who may not agree with the assessment of the doctor, because this approach assumes that gender is merely social construct, not something we fundamentally are.¹²
 - c) More recently, doctors have shifted away from this, looking at the essential chromosomal makeup, believing the chromosomes don't lie about the essence of a one's gender; hence, "If there is a Y chromosome, you have to very worried about raising the child as a female."¹³
 - B. With all of that said, what should we say to someone, perhaps even our own child, who is born with this condition? Whatever we say should be covered in the love of God, and regard the sacredness of all human life. But there is more...
 - 1. The larger culture makes a mistake when they look at things like intersex, same-sex desires, and gender confusion, no matter their legitimate origin and assume that **as things are** must be the way they **ought to be**.
 - 2. The Bible on the other hand, doesn't look at the world from either a Pharisee's perspective or through "rose-colored glasses". It doesn't condemn people merely for being broken, it calls them to recognize their brokenness. But it also doesn't put a positive spin on our brokenness either.

- a) **Romans 8:19 ESV** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
 - b) The Bible speaks of a time when everything (every birth defect, injustice, sickness and disease, etc.) will be set right. Until then, we wait in broken bodies, and with corrupted hearts for the day of our deliverance.
 - C. But that doesn't suggest that we're just stuck and that God isn't doing anything in us **now**, it just means that we won't experience the restoration of all things until that day. And even that shouldn't discourage us! God has promised to bring glory out of the worst of our trials and difficulties, no matter how ugly.
 - D. **2 Corinthians 12:7 ESV** So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. **9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10** For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- IV. Our last question for today is this, *"What do we do with relationships that are sinful not just sexually, but also romantically?"*
- A. I believe the question being asked is about the spiritual benefit or weakness of our relationships. This is a great question, especially after we have examined many aspects of sinful behaviors over the past 2 weeks. What about the relationships themselves?
 - 1. If I am at liberty to restate the question, I might ask, "is there ever a time when the sexual behavior in a relationship can be outwardly moral, while the relationship itself is displeasing to God in one way or another?"
 - 2. In response to this I would point out that anything in our lives has the potential to become an idol to us, even things that would be otherwise good.
 - B. The highest ideal of a relationship between two human beings is heterosexual, covenant, Christ-exalting marriage between one man and one woman. When God established that highest of human relationships in the garden of Eden, he had stated that "It is not good that the man should be alone (Gen 1:18)."
 - 1. He ordained that human life would be satisfying through the coming together of the sexes in monogamous, lifelong commitment. It would also be the means of their being fruitful, multiplying and subduing the earth. (Gen 1:28)
 - 2. **Proverbs 18:22 ESV** He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

- C. But Paul goes even further in Ephesians 5 and tells us that marriage was designed from the very beginning, to portray, in an ongoing act of living proclamation and worship, the submission given in love by the church to Christ, and the sacrificial love perpetually given to the church by Christ as well.
- D. But while marriage is the highest ideal of human relationship, it is not the highest human relationship of all by any stretch! Jesus prayed to the Father the night before the crucifixion **John 17:3 ESV And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**
 - 1. This is why single people are not to be regarded as second class citizens in the kingdom, because they can know God and Jesus Christ, experiencing eternal life both here, and in the hereafter.
 - 2. Christians believe that, whether single or married, knowing Jesus (obeying, serving, honoring, and communing with him) is the highest goal of life.
- E. So the way we determine whether our relationships are healthy or idolatrous is by looking at how well they propel us toward the goal of knowing Christ, not by the presence of sexual purity alone (as important as that is!).
 - 1. I can honestly say that I wanted to marry Ginger because I never knew anyone who loved Jesus like she did, and who inspired me to love him as much as she did!
 - 2. So ask yourself, “what is it that I am trying to get in this relationship?” Ask yourself (and be honest!), “If they disagree with my convictions (sexual or nonsexual), or if they infringe on my devotion to Christ, who wins? That person or Jesus?”
- F. If there is something in that person that propels you toward Christ, the relationship may be God’s design for you. But if it pulls you away from Christ, beware! You might be giving yourself over to an idol with an attractive body, a charming smile and a winsome personality! You should also know that a healthy relationship can become an idolatrous one with a subtle change of attitude.
- V. So that’s enough for today. If you have more questions, feel free to leave them in the offering box, and we will get to them soon, or if you’d like I can call you personally to discuss it with you.
 - A. I want to leave you with a couple of thoughts. Remember that sex is God’s design. He never intended you to restrain it, or ignore it, but to enjoy it in the most satisfying way possible, within the context of the marriage.
 - B. A prohibition on anything outside of his perfect design is not prudishness, but protective. Anything that God has decreed, he has done so for our good, and never for our punishment or to deny a need in the human makeup.
 - C. Our sexual purity is vitally important to our Christian witness. Without it, as Paul told the Corinthians, we open the possibility for the Name of Christ to be blasphemed. He will not fail to hold us accountable for that.
 - D. Though some things about our sexual desire and departure from God’s design coupled with our naturally sinful condition can be painful, but faithfulness to God’s decree, even when it’s difficult will be rewarded. **2 Timothy 4:7 ESV I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord,**

the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexuality_in_ancient_Rome; under heading "Male Sexuality"; "During the Republic, a Roman citizen's political liberty (*libertas*) was defined in part by the right to preserve his body from physical compulsion, including both corporal punishment and sexual abuse.^[145] Virtus, "valor" as that which made a man most fully a man (*vir*), was among the active virtues.^{[146][147][148]} Roman ideals of masculinity were thus premised on taking an active role that was also, as Williams has noted, "the prime directive of masculine sexual behavior for Romans." The impetus toward action might express itself most intensely in an ideal of dominance that reflects the hierarchy of Roman patriarchal society.^[149] The "conquest mentality" was part of a "cult of virility" that particularly shaped Roman homosexual practices.^{[150][19]} In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, an emphasis on domination has led scholars to view expressions of Roman male sexuality in terms of a "penetrator-penetrated" binary model; that is, the proper way for a Roman male to seek sexual gratification was to insert his penis in his partner.^[20] Allowing himself to be penetrated threatened his liberty as a free citizen as well as his sexual integrity.^{[151]"}

² *ibid*; direct quote from introduction

³ *ibid*; under heading "Master-slave relations"

⁴ <https://www.challies.com/articles/3-awful-features-of-roman-sexual-morality/>; direct quote

⁵ <https://www.challies.com/articles/sexual-morality-in-a-christless-world/>; "And then Christians showed up. Christians began to teach that men were to be chaste, that homosexuality and pederasty were sinful, that men were to love and honor their wives, that wives and husbands had equal authority over one another's bodies. Such teaching was not only seen as repressive, but as full-out destabilizing to the Roman system. No wonder, then, that the whole culture turned against Christians. "Though Christian morality promoted genuine self-emptying love and was positive for society, it nonetheless set Christ's people against the prevailing culture. Romans did not like being told that some of their favorite activities were displeasing to the Christian God, and they pushed back." And here is where we can draw important lessons for our day, for today, too, Christian sexual morality is seen as destabilizing to the culture around us, as a serious societal sin."

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burwell_v._Hobby_Lobby_Stores,_Inc.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masterpiece_Cakeshop_v._Colorado_Civil_Rights_Commission

⁸ Burk, Denny; *What's the Meaning of Sex?*, Wheaton IL, Crossway © 2013; pg. 20

⁹ *ibid*; pg. 173

¹⁰ *ibid*; pp. 173-174

¹¹ *ibid*; pg. 175

¹² *ibid*

¹³ *ibid*; pp. 175-176