

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Biblical Responses to Cultural Messaging

Glorify God in Your Body

(Genesis 1 and 2; 1 Corinthians 6:20; others)

Study #3

Introduction: Culture...

Our current sermon series is titled, Biblical Responses to Cultural Messaging, which begs the question, *“What is culture?”*

As I understand it, culture is the water we swim in, the air we breathe.

In the current American culture, there are enough necessary elements present that breathing is possible. Very often, the cultural air we breathe is sweet and fresh.

There are, though, some aspects of our culture that are like cedar pollen. Nobody is in love with mountain cedar pollen, but for some of us, cedar pollen can make life miserable. So also with some aspects of today’s culture

And then, in our 2022 culture, there are traces of toxicity that make breathing dangerous. We regularly receive these toxic cultural messages that run counter to the messages we find in our Bibles.

We are taking four Sundays to give some biblical responses to some of these faith-challenging cultural messages.

Review

Jeff took the first two weeks of the series to point out that our culture tells us: (1) that the key to finding ultimate truth is to look inside; that WE are the source of ultimate reality; and (2), that however we choose to live is A-OK, so long as we don’t hurt someone else by our choices.

Jeff showed that these two messages run smack into the fact that there is a God who is the source of ultimate truth, not us. And that this God has given us instructions for how to live, and any way we might choose to live is not necessarily A-OK.

I’m taking weeks #3 and #4 in this series to address two additional themes. Our culture has a lot to say about these two themes, but so does God in His Word.

Next Sunday, I’ll focus on the prevalent view in our culture that committed, loyal, covenant-based relationships are to be avoided. I want to show, from Scripture, the value of loyalty, commitment, and even covenant in our closest relationships.

Today, though, I’m focusing on sexuality. I’ll be aiming to provide a biblical response to our culture’s message about ordering our intimate lives.

Preview / Orientation to today’s message

The general theme of sexuality is an important theme for us to think about at this moment in our culture. And it is important that we think about it biblically.

Over the weeks of preparing for this morning’s message, I have not gained expert status on this topic. I have, though, studied and read and thought. I’ve turned to books and podcasts and journal articles.

I have broadened my understanding of some of the issues involved in the cultural messages we hear about sexuality.

In all my preparation, though, I have relied most heavily on Scripture.

I am going to do my best today to present some of what the Bible has to say about some very personal issues that will contrast with what we are hearing from many voices in our culture.

To say that addressing the theme of sexuality is fraught with pitfalls is an understatement.

I am sure that this morning, I will say more than some would prefer I say, and less than others might have wished. Some of you may disagree with some of what I will say or with the way I say it.

I'll simply ask that you weigh what I'm saying against the standard of Scripture, which is our guide.

If the last few years of Covid, social turmoil, and political rancor have taught us anything, they have taught us to love each other even when disagreeing, and to talk with each other.

To that end, I am extending an invitation to you - as Jeff has - to speak with me if my messages leave you with concerns or questions. Please feel call or write me a note.

I also want to make clear that I am not speaking *to* the culture today.

I care deeply about our broader culture. I love a lot of things about the culture we live in. And, yes, some of it breaks my heart.

Today, though, I am speaking *to* the church. This message is given to inform those who follow Jesus about some of the essential biblical messages when it comes to sexual matters.¹

¹ Our dealings with people outside the church (there is no cause for denouncing them; See 1 Corinthians 5:12-13) will differ from how we will deal with people inside the church.

Some of what I am saying may be new to you. You may find yourself wrestling with some of it. But since I am speaking from Scripture, be assured that I am bringing good news. Jesus' message about sexuality is good news. It leads to our flourishing.

First, what does our current American culture say about human sexuality?

Our Culture's Messaging About Sexuality

The Defining Message

The message that I believe we are all hearing is that we are each free to follow our own path when it comes to sexual matters.

We are free to make up our own minds about how we identify sexually, how we express ourselves, sexually, and with whom we will be involved, sexually.

Broken down into components, I hear at least three messages.

Components of the Message

First, we are told that freedom of sexual expression is a crucial element of our core identity. In colleges and universities, in educational settings for younger students, in the media, and even in government, the message is that our core identity is to be found in being able to express our sexuality in whatever way we desire.²

Second, we hear that gender is neither fixed nor finite. It is fluid. It fluctuates. Gender identity exists on a scale and may move on that scale based on the situation a person is in or even their mood.³

² Further, we are told that to place limits on our sexual expression is harmful to our identity and to our well-being.

³ The message is that this freedom to choose is to be celebrated as is illustrated by the month of June's designation as Pride Month (recognizing LGBTQ+ choices).

Third, major voices in our culture are telling us that a whole range of sexual behavior and identity options are available and may be chosen, regardless of the biological realities of our birth.⁴

Summary:

Again, the essential message is that we are each free to express ourselves, sexually, in whatever way we wish.

This message is all stunningly new and very different from even decade or two ago, much less from a generation or centuries ago.

If you have come of age in the past decade, you should know that this is a uniquely 21st century model.

It leads to confusion, because we are being asked to think about and to talk about sexuality in ways previous generations never have.

What was once nailed down has come loose. Everything is up for grabs, all options are open, nothing is defined.

And except in the case of doing actual harm to someone, anything goes.⁵

But then, into this world of cultural messaging comes the message of the Bible that tells us that there is a God-ordained plan for the expression of human sexuality.

⁴ Based on my own reading, I (along with others) believe that this introduction of new paradigms for how to think about gender and sexuality has resulted in an avalanche of *gender dysphoria* - a tragic term that refers to someone who is ill at ease with their biological gender. This confusion and un-ease may lead to radical and regrettable surgeries and has led to a stunning increase in suicide rates.

⁵ To illustrate what I'm talking about - actually all three of my main points - one example may be helpful. A couple of weeks ago, Kathy and I were watching a popular performance-oriented TV show. Before one contestant presented his talent, he identified two women in the audience who were there to support him, referring to them as his "wives," telling everyone that the three of them were in a very happy, long-term *polyamorous* relationship. The response of the crowd to this announcement was an immediate and enthusiastic standing ovation.

The Bible claims that it is best for us to submit to this order. Obeying God's order is for our own good. God's path for sexuality is best for our own flourishing.

So, it is to the Bible that we now turn. And to get to the heart of what the Bible has to say, I will turn to the start.⁶

The Bible's Messaging About Sexuality

Humanity at Creation (Genesis 1 and 2)

Male and female image bearers

The creation of everything except humanity by a word

We read in Genesis 1, "***In the beginning, God created...***" God created it all: the heavens and the earth, the dry land and the sea, vegetation, lights in the heavens, water creatures and land animals.

After each creative act, God saw that "***it was good.***"

The creation of humanity was deliberate, intentional

The grand finale of creation was different. This creative work required intentionality, forethought, and a joint effort among the members of the Trinity.

This final creation - [***Genesis 1:26***] "***Let us make mankind in our own image...***" - resulted in a creation different from the rest of creation. And the creation narrative ends with God's observation that the whole work, start to finish was "***very good.***"

Embedded in the account of God's creation of people is this: [***Genesis 1:27***] ***So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***⁷

⁶ I have long been amazed at how much we can learn when we are informed by the opening chapters of Genesis.

⁷ You will notice in the close-up view of the creation of the male (Genesis 2), God did not create a soul and then craft a body to put it into. He built a body and then

We are all God's image-bearers. And inseparably linked to that image-bearing role is our sexuality. That is a part of God's **"very good"** creation.

Humanity consists of male and female

Throughout, the Bible consistently affirms this binary human distinction: male and female. The Genesis accounts give us two genders. Not any other number. Not a spectrum.

According to the Bible, maleness and femaleness are physically grounded, not psychologically determined. Scripture says that biology is meaningful.

Genesis 2 gives us a close-up of the creation of, first, the male, the man, Adam. Then, after God noted that Adam's aloneness was **"not good"** (a first), we read of the creation - out of the man - of the first female, the woman, Eve.

We read on to learn that the man and the woman became **"one flesh."** Moses, who recorded this account in Genesis long after the event in Eden, tells us that this scene in Eden established marriage, always and only the union of two sexually different people.

And both sexes display the glory of God with equal brilliance. As theologian N.T. Wright says, *"Male and female have unique, non-interchangeable glories."*

From creation forward, each man and each woman are an image-bearer. The male and the female are alike, but not identical; different, but not opposites.

Equal and different

Equal

breathed soul / life / spirit into the body, thus elevating our understanding of the goodness of the human body.

For the similarities between the two genders, look through Scripture and you will find that most of what God has to say to people, He says equally to men and to women.

We are far more alike than we are different. We are all commanded to pray, to love, to serve, to give, to trust God.

There is fundamental equality of worth and value for female and for male.

But, again, that is not to say that male and female are identical. Biologically, they are clearly different. And I think that there are probably differences that go beyond biology? But...it is tricky.

Different

When speaking or thinking of the differences between the sexes, we are to be careful to not say more than what the Bible says.

We must be careful to not define masculinity or femininity in ways that the Bible does not. For instance, the masculine soul is not always enthralled by hunting and fishing, nor is the feminine soul best pictured as dainty.

And clearly, male and female distinctives and roles vary from culture to culture and from time period to time period.

As a thought experiment, though, might it be possible to suggest that when the Bible gives explicit warnings to men and explicit warnings to women, it is highlighting a uniquely female and a uniquely male temptation?

For instance, Paul writes that men are **[1 Timothy 2:8] to pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger and dispute."**

Are men, generally, more likely to quarrel and to be angry, to be aggressive? Maybe...

Paul then urged women **[1 Timothy 9] to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or expensive apparel...**

Are women more likely to be tempted to ostentatious dress? Maybe...

But the key idea we get from Genesis 1 is that God didn't just make people. He made *male* and *female*.

Everything God made at the beginning was good and very good, including - especially! - the male / female image-of-God bearing people He had created.

And then came the event that wrecked everything.

And I'm going to spend a bit of time here because I think that understanding the implications of Genesis 3 is crucial to understanding the brokenness of our world, generally, and in particular, sexually.

Broken (Genesis 3)

The event that wrecked everything

The damage done by the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was global.

When they disobeyed the one command God had given them and ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, they impacted far more than their own lives.

Their sin took a wrecking ball to God's "**very good**" creation and set in motion a brokenness that is obvious today.

The first sin wrecked the physical world.

Broken world

The good world God made no longer runs smoothly.

Oh, sure. There is still lots of natural beauty, but the hydrologic and biologic and climatological systems don't work according to original design. The creation is a mess.

And, of course, damage has been done to the physical world by us, the image-of-God bearers who were given stewardship over the earth. We have often not been terribly good stewards. (See Romans 8)

The world is broken. But most pertinent to our theme for today, the first sin wrecked the human race. We are all broken, sinful people.

Broken people

Totally broken / Totally sinful

When I say that we are "totally sinful" or "totally broken," I don't mean to say that all of us are as broken or sinful as we might be.

The message of the Bible to each of us, though, is that our brokenness and our sinfulness extends to every part of who we are.

Brokenness extends to our bodies.

Brokenness extending to

OUR PHYSICAL BODIES

Our bodies are the wonderful gifts of God, but they are now broken gifts. We have been "**fearfully and wonderfully made**" (Psalm 139), but our bodies cause us pain.

The Apostle Paul wrote that our bodies are like "**earthen vessels.**" (2 Corinthians 4:7) On the one hand, Paul meant that our bodies are humble, lowly things; we are clay pots compared to gold and silver vessels.

But he also meant that our bodies are weak and fragile things. Our bodies do not work as they were designed to work. They get sick. They break down. They deform. They age and decay. We all die.⁸

⁸ God does sometimes heal. But He doesn't promise to always heal. Physical suffering is to be expected in this broken world. "*The teaching that Christians are shielded from sickness and infirmity is a wicked denial of what the Bible says.*" (Sam Allberry)

Bodily redemption awaits, but that is later. After this life is over.

Brokenness also extends to our emotional and mental life.

OUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL LIFE

Our internal life is just as impacted by sin, just as broken, as our bodies are.

We make decisions that we later look back on with deep regret. We wonder, *“What was I thinking?”*

Our thinking is clouded by bias. We fail to consider all the facts. We don’t think carefully. We don’t leave room for nuance.

Our emotional life is all messed up, too. We want things that aren’t good for us, enjoy things we shouldn’t, and dislike that which is truly beautiful. Our inner lives are unreliable and off the rails.

And brokenness also extends to our relationships.

OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER

We fight and argue, are selfish and snippy, get jealous and resentful. So often, our relationships don’t work. Even when we work hard at them and want them to work, they still fracture.

Not surprisingly, given the level of our brokenness, we struggle. We struggle to make life work well at all levels: domestic life, friendships, work relationships - and in our sexual experience.

People whose bodies, minds, emotions and relationships tilt toward dysfunction will struggle sexually. We’ll move in directions that seem right to us, but which are actually wrong for us.

We need God’s guidance in this realm, as in all others. And thankfully, God has provided great guidance.

The counsel we find in Scripture for handling our intimate lives is good news. Following this counsel leads to our flourishing.

I couldn’t possibly say all the good things that could be said about God’s counsel concerning sexuality, even if we put together a year-long sermon series.

So, I’m going to limit myself to highlighting two fences we find in Scripture that God has given to protect us from harm.

Here is Fence #1.

Sexual Rights and Wrongs

Context for sexual expression

It goes without saying - but I’ll say it - that God was the One who thought up the whole idea of sex. He created male and female bodies for physical oneness, and He designed immense pleasure into the sexual act.

But God has also set a limit on the context in which a man and a woman are to be sexually involved.

Sexual activity bonds two people beyond the physical. It creates an intimate, extremely personal, one-flesh union. *“No strings attached”* sex leads to pain and regret. It overpromises and underdelivers.

So, sexual intimacy is to be reserved for the context of a covenant of marriage.⁹

This is not because God wants to limit our pleasure.

It is because sexual intimacy is the ultimate relational act between a man and a woman, and it requires the ultimate covenant relationship to protect it.

⁹ N.T. Wright writes, *“Sex was created by God to be a way to mingle these strengths and glories within a lifelong covenant of marriage.”*

The establishment of this union is behind the great biblical passages that deal with sex. Some time soon, check out Genesis 2. Proverbs 5. Ephesians 5. 1 Corinthians 7 and you'll see that God's plan has always been that only married couples enter into sexual union.

Within that context of committed love, God blesses sexual union.

That is not to say that the characters in the Bible always followed God's plan. Far from it. There are, sadly, many stories of those who strayed outside the lines of marriage in their pursuit of sexual pleasure.

The Bible includes the stories of what happened, a combination of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

For instance, we read about Joseph's godly fight for purity in Potiphar's house (Genesis 39) and King David's ugly sexual sin against Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

But the misbehavior of some of the Bible's best-known characters doesn't negate that God's design for human flourishing includes a fence surrounding sexual activity. The fence is the covenant bond of marriage.

In God's Word we find another fence that promotes human flourishing. This fence is good news, as are all of God's truths. But the cultural messaging we hear today is that this fence is bad news.

Same-sex sex

This has to do with same-sex, sexual relationships.

There are a limited number of biblical texts that address this topic.

It is mentioned in the Old Testament narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and in the Mosaic Law. (Leviticus 18 and 20)

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes about male and female homosexuality in Romans 1 and addresses it again in 1 Corinthians 6 and in 1 Timothy 1.

In all these passages, same-sex sexual relating is spoken of negatively. Never positively. This leads me to conclude that same-sex sexual relationships are not God's plan. They do not promote human flourishing. They are sinful.

I am not saying that all same sex, sexual relationships are dysfunctional. Not at all. But they are not God's plan.¹⁰

Clearly, there are lots of different views and opinions on this theme. But when I take the passages I've listed at face value and read them in a straightforward way, and when I take the broad arc of the Bible's story of male and female into account, I land convinced that same-sex sexual interaction is out of God's will.

Our broader culture certainly doesn't see it this way. But, as I said earlier, I am not speaking to the culture. I am speaking to the church, from Scripture.

There are many things I would say to anyone who is same sex attracted if we had time, and if we had a chance to speak privately.

I would say all of them with great compassion. And if this is a part of your story, I would welcome the chance to speak with you.

But I would always urge that a Jesus-follower not climb over this protective fence.

The fence is good news. The decision to not pursue a same-sex sexual relationship may be very difficult, but to do so is to follow a life-giving path of following Jesus.

¹⁰ I have come to have great respect for Pastor Sam Allberry, who is same sex attracted, and celibate. Sam writes honestly, compassionately, and clearly from the Scriptures. You may find His writings (like [What God Has To Say About Our Bodies](#) and [Why Does God Care Who I Sleep With?](#)) helpful.

Beyond out of marriage and same-sex sexual involvement, there are other themes that our culture is experimenting with. All of them deserve our attention and careful, biblical consideration.

We are keenly aware of gender dysphoria¹¹, transgenderism, and other behaviors and mindsets. We know that pornography¹² is as pervasive as it is destructive.

It isn't on my radar to address every sexuality issue today, but to say that following God's truth is truly liberating. And there are consequences if we don't follow God's path,

Consequences of sexual sin for the believer in Jesus

Consequences in this life

Paul writes, ***[1 Corinthians 6:18] Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.***

All sins - robbery, murder, selfishness - do their own unique damage.

Sexual sin uniquely damages US who commit it. We harm ourselves by engaging in sexual sin. When we use our bodies in ways God never intended, the damage is physical, personal, mental and emotional - and long-lasting.

Paul even says that when we Christians sin sexually, we not only lose out on experiencing Jesus' abundant life here and now, we suffer consequences in the life to come.

Consequences beyond this life

¹¹ Gender dysphoria refers to someone who is ill at ease with their biological gender.

¹² The Bible's clear teaching is that sexual involvement outside of marriage - whether physically or virtually - (Jesus covered this in the Sermon on the Mount) - is out of bounds. This puts pornography out of bounds.

[1 Corinthians 6:9] 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 homosexuals, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor those habitually drunk,¹³ nor verbal abusers, not swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

In the life to come, there is great reward for those who follow Jesus into obedience in this life. In fact, we will receive reward for self-control over our bodily appetites. (Philippians 3:12-14).

But if our lives are characterized by the sins Paul lists here, we will have no reward, we will not have an inheritance in Jesus' kingdom. We will still have eternal life (It wouldn't be very eternal if it could be taken away because of our sin, right?), we will still be saved. But we won't reign with Him in glory.

To this point today I've summed up what I hear as some of our culture's messaging about sexuality. And I've highlighted a couple of particulars from Scripture that directly respond to our culture's messages.

I'll end with a couple of comments about the messaging the church of Jesus can provide that will be helpful with regard to this topic.

First, love. First, last, and always. Love. That's what God has done.

The Church's Messaging About Sexuality and Discipleship

Aim to Love (Romans 5:8)

[Romans 5:8] But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

¹³ This "*those habitually drunk*" is an odd and forced translation. Better to render simply "*drunkards*" as is done with the references to others caught up in various sins.

God didn't wait for us to morally improve before lavishing us with His grace.

No, He loved us while we were in rebellion by sending Jesus to die for us. So, church, love!

Look at how Jesus loved. Notice the care and concern He showed to outsiders and to those who were not leading sexually pure lives.

One of the knocks against Jesus by His enemies, and one of the things we love most about Him, is that He was **[Matthew 11:19] a friend of sinners.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our culture was always making fun of us Christians for being such great friends with people who live contrary to our own convictions.

Folks, let's love and serve without regard for lifestyle. Give and help and show the love that has been shown to you.

The insights the Bible gives us into God's original plan and the tragedy of the brokenness of our world should make us, of all people, compassionate toward anyone who is struggling with any sort of personal brokenness or sin.

Yes, there is always personal responsibility and personal culpability for sin, but this doesn't justify a cold attitude or a lack of sympathy.¹⁴

Healthy Christians are aware of sin's workings in their own hearts. That gives us the ability to be compassionate toward others who are struggling and sometimes failing.

Without disparaging what is known as the "Me, too" movement, a movement that has brought attention to lots of women and some

¹⁴ Pastor Tim Keller points out in *What God Says About Our Bodies* that even though, yes, the feelings are wrong when someone same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, the pain is very real, and the person is deserving of our compassion.

men who have been sexually taken advantage of, in Christ, we say, "Me too," too. I am a sinner, too.

And let's each one of us agree to take whatever next steps with Jesus we need to take in our pursuit of holiness and as growing disciples.

Aim to Take Next Steps with Jesus

Remember that you were once a slave to sin. What a horrible image! Owned by and controlled by the power of sin.

The situation is different, now, though. Jesus paid the ransom, and you are free from the mastery of sin. He redeemed you.

So, Paul writes, **[1 Corinthians 6:20] For you have been bought for a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.**¹⁵

All of this means that we are to do what God tells us to do with our bodies - including sexually - trusting that what He commands is meant for our flourishing.

We are called to holiness. So...what will your next step into holiness be?

Are you tempted to climb over the fences we've seen in Scripture today? Are you tempted...

...to become sexually involved with someone to whom you aren't married?

...to become involved, sexually, with someone of the same sex?

...by pornography? Does porn have you in its grip?

What "next step" will you take today away from the fence God has put up to protect you?

¹⁵ Elsewhere, Paul writes, **[Romans 12:2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** We are to present ourselves **[Romans 6:13] to God as those who are alive from the dead, and [our] body's parts as instruments of righteousness to God.**

The call to sexual purity today is a call to on-going graduate-level discipleship.

It may seem painful to take a step back from acting out, sexually. But once you do, it will feel like freedom.

And, while the flesh has its own fleshly ways to deal with fleshly sins, God provides wonderful helps.

He provides us with the help of **prayer** where we will find the support of our High Priest, Jesus. He thoroughly understands what it is like to be tempted. (See Hebrews 4:15-16)

He provides **Scripture** which will serve you and me as a reliable guide into a flourishing life.

And He provides **community**. Through the church, where there are brothers and sisters in Jesus, you will find support and help in your walk into holiness.