

Week Five - *Should Christians update their attitudes about sex to the 21st century?*

1 Timothy 1:8-17

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Every culture has different attitudes about sex. In fact, according to Drs. Ford and Beach in their seminal work, [citation required], even something as mundane as kissing is not the norm! “Although kissing on the mouth is one of the most basic sources of sexual arousal in Western society, it is uncommon or completely absent in many other cultures. In a survey of 190 societies, it was found that only 21 of these engaged in kissing on the mouth.” What other sexual behaviors are common in our culture but might not be common in other cultures?
2. Since so much about sex is culturally based, is it fair to say that some of the Bible’s teachings about sex may be culturally based? Why or why not?
3. Many contemporary pundits dismiss much of the New Testament’s teaching on sex because they believe it merely reflects dated attitudes based on Judaism and Ancient Rome. For example, look up 1 Corinthians 11:4-6, 13-15. Would you say this is a timeless truth or a cultural custom?
4. When trying to understand Scripture, it’s important to look for the theological principle behind the specific example. Even though none of us are shepherds, we can still understand that when Psalm 23 calls God our shepherd, it ultimately means He takes care of us. Even though Paul’s position on hair might be cultural, what do you think his universal underlying principle might be?
5. Look again at 1 Corinthians 11, but this time read verses 7-12. What does Paul give as the reason for his cultural opinions about hair?
6. While cultural norms about sex may change, God’s design for sex goes back to the beginning - before cultures existed. If you need help answering the last question about Paul’s reason, turn to Ephesians 5:31 and 1 Corinthians 6:16. What book of the Bible is Paul quoting? From where does our ultimate understanding of sex and gender come?
7. Close in prayer, thanking God for his design for sex. Ask Him to reveal to you in the coming week what He desires for your sexuality as you study His Word.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

8. Yesterday we looked at some New Testament verses about God’s design for sex. But today, let’s look at the original passage that shows us what God intended for our sex lives at the dawn of creation. Read Genesis 2:18-25.
9. Put in the simplest terms possible, what is the picture of how God wanted our sex lives to be? From your 21st century perspective, does this picture still seem like a good thing or does it seem like an old-fashioned, constrained thing?

10. Is this description from before or after sin entered the world? Why might that matter?
11. When sin came through Adam and Eve, it ruined everything, including God's original design for sex. How long do you think it took, after eating the fruit, for humans to screw up God's intention for sex? Read Genesis 4:19 to see the answer.
12. It's easy sometimes to think that our culture is more sexually immoral than ever, but it's helpful to remember that people have been messing up God's ideal for sex since the beginning of humanity. Do you happen to know the stories of the women Tamar or Rahab? Look them up in a concordance or on Wikipedia. What were their stories?
13. In short, Rahab was a prostitute and Tamar was forced to pretend to be a prostitute to get pregnant (it's a long story). How did God redeem these two women's lives? Look up Matthew 1:1-5 to find the answer.
14. God has wholeness in mind for you and for your sexual life. While your past might not have lived up to God's ideals, He can redeem even the most damaging past sins, just like he did for Tamar and Rahab. If there is anything in your past that is still burdening you today, pray and surrender it to God who loves you and wants to restore you.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

15. Who are laws made for? Bad people or good people? Why do you think so?
16. The apostle Paul had an interesting take on this question. Turn to 1 Timothy 1:8-11 and read it aloud.
17. For years in our country, people who were divorced, experienced same-sex attraction or became pregnant out of wedlock were driven to the outskirts of society, shunned and shamed. Is that how the law is supposed to work? Why or why not?
18. Nowadays, being divorced does not seem to be such a big deal in Christian circles; being in a gay relationship is still generally a problem in Christian circles. Is this hypocritical? Should these two things be treated the same way or is there a reason that Christians should treat them differently?
19. Ultimately, God's law is not to shame or punish. Read the rest of the 1 Timothy passage (verses 12-17). What is the ultimate goal for sinners through God's law?
20. How does being reminded of the goal change how we apply God's law to those around us who have sinned sexually?
21. Thank God for the many ways He has restored you in spite of your sins. Ask Him to use you to speak truth and grace

to those who need His law so that they may receive eternal life!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

22. Timothy Keller says in The Meaning of Marriage that there are three common cultural views about sex: 1) sex is merely an appetite to be fulfilled, like hunger; 2) sex is “a degrading, dirty thing, a necessary evil for the propagation of the human race;” or 3) sex is “primarily for an individual’s fulfillment and self-realization.” Which one would you guess is closest to the biblical view? Why?
23. Regarding the first option, that sex is an appetite, look up and read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13. How does Paul compare sex to an appetite like food?
24. Now think about the second option, that sex is dirty. Compare that to Proverbs 5:18-20 and Song of Solomon 5:10-16. How does the Bible describe sex with and physical attraction to one’s spouse?
25. We’ll talk more about the third view tomorrow. In the meantime, what are the implications if sex is more than just a mere appetite and not dirty, but a special gift of God to a husband and wife?
26. One implication is that the Bible will have advice on what holy sex would look like. And it does! Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.
27. Have you seen this verse before? Heard it preached or studied? How should this verse affect the way we think of sex? The way we practice sex?
28. Close in prayer, submitting your sex life, whether you are single or married, to God. Ask Him to show you ways to honor Him through your actions.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. Yesterday, we studied two false views about sex: that it is merely an appetite, and that it is dirty. Today let’s look at a third common viewpoint: that sex is primarily for individual pleasure and fulfillment. Do you agree or disagree with this common view?
30. Here’s another of way of asking this question. Is a person’s sex life private or public? In other words, is it anyone else’s business besides the people involved? Explain your answer.
31. What are the implications of these two opposing views? What happens to marriage and family if sexual activity is nobody else’s business? On the other hand, what happens to culture when sex is treated as a public covenant between two people, their church and their society?

32. Wendell Berry, in his book Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community says this:

“Lovers must not, like usurers, live for themselves alone. They must finally turn from their gaze at one another back toward the community. If they had only themselves to consider, lovers would not need to marry, but they must think of others and of other things. They say their vows to the community as much as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well, on their behalf and its own. It gathers around them because it understands how necessary, how joyful, and how fearful this joining is. These lovers, pledging themselves to one another "until death," are giving themselves away, and they are joined by this as no law or contract could join them. Lovers, then, "die" into their union with one another as a soul "dies" into its union with God. And so here, at the very heart of community life, we find not something to sell as in the public market but this momentous giving.”

A healthy sex life within marriage is a public benefit. Berry goes on to say that there are public social costs when sex is used only for individual fulfillment outside of committed marriage, including disease and children being raised outside of a stable family structure. What other consequences to the privatization of sex do you see in the communities around you?

33. Graphic details about a couple's sex life are not other people's business, but the fact that a couple has a healthy, God-pleasing sex life sure is! How comfortable are you about the thought of letting close friends, or family or your pastor know that your sex life is going well or poorly? If that makes you a little uncomfortable, what do you think would be a practical way for couples and singles to be held accountable to God's desire for their sex lives?

34. This way of thinking is not meant to be voyeuristic, but to show the importance of a great mystery that Paul talks about in Ephesians 5:25-33. Read that passage now.

35. A healthy sex life within a healthy marriage is not just about marriage or the public good. In some supernatural way, it points us to the mystery of how God loves us! Husbands, how does using Christ as an example change how you might approach your wife? Wives, if your husband makes sacrifices for you in different areas, how does that help you feel closer to him? Singles, how could reading about this parallel change the way you approach your own sexuality?

36. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer. Thank God for the gift of sexuality that He gave to us, not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of our families, the Church and our communities. Ask Him to build up and strengthen your marriage, your future marriage and the marriages of those around you, so that we might better understand His love for us, and live out His design on this earth.