Series: Mere Sexuality

Message: Why Mere Sexuality

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Theme: Human Sexuality

Date: February 10, 2019

Location: Christ Community EFC

Today we begin a new sermon series we are calling Mere Sexuality.

From the title, you get the idea that it has something to do with sexuality. But some of you may be wondering whether this series is really all about homosexuality.

And that might make some of you a bit nervous; perhaps about what I will say, or what I won’t say; or about how others might react, or not react.

Homosexuality is a complex, sensitive, and intensely personal issue; it’s hard to talk about yet, we need to talk biblically about it.

Let me just say, right up front, this isn’t a series that’s all about homosexuality. No, this series is about much more.

Yes, we will address the question of homosexuality, but will cover a whole lot more than just that one issue.

This is a series about mere sexuality. The themes we are going to deal with go way beyond questions of same-sex practice, or gay marriage.

Still, I have to acknowledge the influence of our contemporary context.

In our culture, of course, there has been a huge change of opinion on the question of same-sex practice and gay marriage, culminating in the Supreme Court’s ruling on June 26, 2015.

The US Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges struck down states’ same-sex marriage bans as unconstitutional and effectively legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty states.

In fact, what we’ve seen over the past decade may go down as the most profound and rapid cultural shift in American history. Stunning, really.

Just tune in any primetime TV show that all will at some level promote, celebrate and normalize same-sex marriage.

The next time you are watching TV, count the number of ads that include same-sex couples in their diversity efforts.

But, frankly, what’s more significant in my mind is the rapid change in views on same-sex practice among evangelical Christians.

That may be the most profound and rapid ethical shift in American church history!

At the end of the this month the United Methodist Church will be holding a special national conference at which a vote will be taken to determine that denominations official stance on same-sex marriage.

Over the years I have witnessed this shift take place in the church and in our community as views have changed on this issue.

My point is simply, we live in a very different world than we did just a decade ago. Toto, we’re not in Kansas anymore.

And yet the call to live faithfully for Christ is the same.

But many of us are wondering what this means in light of these new realities; we’re in little boats trying to navigate some murky, choppy waters, not exactly sure how or even where to go.

So, I feel responsible, as your pastor, to speak candidly to these new realities.

Yet let me say this again, this series is not intended so much to critique homosexuality, as it is to cast vision for mere sexuality.

My aim is not to play defense, but offense; I’m not going to devote lots of energy tearing down, but building up.

In other words, I will spend more time telling you what’s good about mere sexuality, than what’s wrong with homosexuality.

This isn’t because I’m merely trying to be nice or diplomatic.

It’s because I’m convinced the dramatic change of opinion on homosexuality, in our culture and the church, is symptomatic of a more significant change of opinion about mere sexuality.

Really, it’s less of a change of opinion, than it is a loss of vision.

We have lost sight of mere sexuality. Over the last fifty years, the church, as well as Western culture, has forgotten mere sexuality.

What used to be something well-understood and widely embraced by Christians of all stripes has slipped from view, lost in the blur of confusion that is our contemporary post-Christian culture.

So, you see, from my perspective, in the area of sexuality, the challenge we face as Christians isn’t one—but many.

As evangelicals, who want to live faithfully in our sexed-up culture, we face all kinds of challenges: high rates of premarital sex, cohabitation, adultery, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, dysfunctional sexual relations between spouses, the hook-up culture on Christian campuses, sexual abuse, —and I haven’t even mentioned pornography.

Here’s a serious question: Which do you think is more tempting to your teenage son or daughter: same-sex practice, or pornography?

My point is this. The embrace of same-sex practice outside and inside the church is a very real issue. But it’s just one issue. And I would argue, not even the main issue.

And if we are going to live in the fullness and faithfulness of the gospel, if we’re going to pursue sexual wholeness and holiness, then we need to recover a vision for mere sexuality.

**So, then, what is mere sexuality?**

Many of you will know of that famous book by C. S. Lewis with a similar sounding title, Mere Christianity.

This series borrows not only the name but the concept from Lewis’s classic work.

For Lewis, mere Christianity was a simple way to refer to the basic themes that have characterized the Christian faith down through the ages.

It’s not Baptist Christianity, or Anglican Christianity, or Presbyterian Christianity, or Catholic Christianity, but mere Christianity, what they all share in common; in other words, what virtually all Christians everywhere have always believed.

By using the phrase “mere sexuality”, then, I have something similar in mind.

It’s a simple way to refer to the basic themes that have characterized the Christian vision of sexuality down through the ages.

By calling it mere sexuality, I’m saying this is what most Christians at most times and in most places have believed about human sexuality.

There is an identifiable historic Christian consensus on these issues; this has been part of the Great Tradition of the church in each of its expressions—Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant; and this consensus has been basically unchallenged, till about forty years ago, since the 1970s.

What is this historic Christian consensus? What, specifically, is mere sexuality?

I am borrowing heavily from Todd Wilson’s book “Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality” (Zondervan: 2017)

In his book he writes this:

Mere sexuality is the belief that sexual difference is theologically and morally significant; that God created human beings male and female, and that this is basic to who we are as God’s image bearers; that this sexual difference between male and female is integral to the social life of human beings, not least in marriage itself; that this difference cannot be ignored or marginalized without undermining our ability to flourish as people; and that this difference between male and female will continue throughout eternity, though in a fully redeemed expression.

This is what the Christian church has meant by mere sexuality through it its history.

Clearly, then, in this series, we will be appealing to Christian history and tradition, to what the great Christian thinkers of the past have taught, and what the vast majority of ordinary believers have always thought to be true.

I make no apologies for this; in fact, it’s especially important in our day and age, when so many in our culture and the church are revisiting and even revising what the church has always believed about human sexuality.

In this atmosphere, it’s good to know where we come from.

But there are also some strong biblical and theological convictions that give rise to this series on mere sexuality.

In fact I would like to suggest: **four core convictions for guiding mere sexuality**.

If you would, turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and we will be looking at verses 9-11 (p. 957).

I’d like to highlight **four guiding biblical and theological convictions**, rooting them in the passage before us this morning from 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Of course, I can ground these convictions in lots of other texts, but this one is helpful. It’s short and it’s clear.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 “**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, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.**

**11 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**.

**The first conviction is simple. Sexuality matters.** What you do with your body, sexually, can determine your destiny, eternally.

Certain sexual practices can shut you out of the kingdom of God. This is the startling truth Paul wants the Corinthians to understand.

Now hold on, I’m not, nor is Paul saying that if you have ever committed one of these sins you cannot be saved.

Listen again verse 9-10: **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, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.** (vv. 9-10)

For many people, sex is no big thing; it’s a recreational activity consenting adults choose to enjoy and, if approached carefully, has little or no consequence, or even significance, like watching a movie together.

The Bible sees sexuality differently. It matters, forever.

Sin, any sin, separates us from God.

**Here’s the second conviction. When it comes to sexuality, there are only two options for Christians: mere sexuality, or sexual immorality.**

We see Paul flags a bunch of sinful practices that shut one out of the kingdom of God.

Topping the list is a Greek word (pornos) that serves as an umbrella term for lots of things.

It basically means what we find in English translations, and refers to the practice of sexual immorality of any kinds.

Note that adultery and homosexual practice are but two expressions; there are others that are outside mere sexuality and exclude one from the kingdom.

But, for the Christian who wants to live faithfully in this world, there are only two options: sexual immorality, or mere sexuality.

**The third conviction brings balance to these first two. Sexual sins aren’t the only serious sins.**

Sometimes Christians are criticized for what looks to outsiders as being overly obsessed with sexual sin; critics sometimes wonder if it’s just a bad hangover from our Puritan past.

But if we’re honest, don’t we have to admit that those who make this criticism have a point?

Isn’t it true that Christians can fall into the trap of making a big deal of, say, adultery or homosexuality, yet seem to care little about, say, about the other vices mentioned in these verses, like greed or idolatry?

But do you know how this strikes outsiders? As hypocrisy.

In this passage, though, we see these sins are all on a level playing field; they’re equally damning to your soul, if they become a pattern of behavior in your life.

Biblical faithfulness, then, calls us to take serious sin seriously, not fixate only on those sins that most creep us out.

**There’s one last conviction I need to mention; it’s at the heart of this passage and sermon series.**

**Although we’re all sexually broken, we can all become sexually whole through Jesus.**

This is the glorious good news about Jesus at the end of this passage.

Look again at verse 11: “**And such were some of you.”**

Paul is not pointing fingers; he’s just reminding them of the moral and spiritual pit from which they came.

And wouldn’t you have been curious to see the look on their face when they heard this! Perhaps a bit embarrassing?

No, not in light of what Paul goes on to say: “**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.** (v. 11)

Friends, there is forgiveness to be found in Jesus! Not only that, there’s cleansing and healing as well. We can be washed in the blood of Christ.

For all of our sexual brokenness, healing is found not in ourselves, but in the blood of Jesus.

Do you know the Savior? Have you turned to him for grace and mercy to help you in your time of need?

Are you ready to be free of the burden of guilt, liberated from your besetting sins?

Jesus is ready to receive you, to cleanse you, to heal you.

Will you come to Jesus, and embrace him by faith?

Only in Christ will we find pardon for sin and the power to live in newness of life. Jesus not only saves, he heals.

For many of you here this morning you are convinced of the Bible’s teaching on sexuality, but you’re anxious about all that’s going on in the culture and the church.

You don’t wrestle with same-sex attraction, nor with the Bible’s teaching on this issue. But you worry about how changes in our culture and church are going to impact you, your children, your workplace, your neighborhood, your country.

If that’s you, I hope you gain confidence and wisdom from this series.

Maybe there are some here this morning who may even though you are convinced of what the Bible teaches about human sexuality, but you have wrestled with same-sex attraction and even same-sex practice.

If this is you, I pray you will hear this series as hope-filled good news; not necessarily easy news, but good news, because it holds out a path toward human flourishing, contentment and joy.

Maybe you are here this morning and you frankly have some doubts about the Bible’s teaching on human sexuality; or at least what has often been thought of as the Bible’s teaching.

You’re not sure what to make of the swirling debate in the culture and certain parts of the church over same-sex marriage.

You’ve watched it unfold, and you feel torn. You may have been raised with a traditional view of things, but since college you’ve had more questions than answers.

If that’s you, then my prayer is that this series will bring greater biblical clarity and conviction into your life.

You may be here this morning and you are someone who feels deep sympathy for those brothers and sisters who are same-sex attracted.

Maybe you may have a close friend, family member, or adult child who is gay, and have worked hard to understand their situation.

You may be a compassionate person who finds it easy to empathize with people and it has caused you to question your view on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and now you support same-sex practice, at least in certain situations.

If this describes you, I hope this series encourages you in your love for those who identify as gay, while at the same time gives you some important things to continue to think about.

Let me encourage you to take up this challenge. Regardless of where you are, I hope this series speaks to you in a way that is both challenging and encouraging.

And all I would ask from you, regardless of where you begin this series, is that you stick with me through this series; and may I encourage you to be open to all that I’m going to say; this doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything.

But I’m asking that you resist the temptation to only listen for what you want me to say, and if I don’t say it—or say it in the right way—that you tune me out, stop listening, perhaps even stop coming.

Instead, may I encourage you to be prayerful and open to what the Lord might want to say to you?

May I share with you my hopes and desires for this important series, indeed my prayers for this church?

My prayer for this series is that you would see the rational unity of mere sexuality, and be overcame by its beauty.

That this series would instill in you renewed confidence in an old fashioned Christian teaching; that you would see its aesthetic and theological beauty, and that even if you remain unconvinced, you would not dismiss mere sexuality as narrow-minded, Puritanical, or Pollyannaish.

My prayer is that this series would, by God’s Spirit, bring about increased humility in the hearts of all of us who affirm what the Bible has to say about mere sexuality.

In fact, might it bring about, where necessary, a sincere repentance, an intentional turning away from attitudes and actions that are belittling to those who struggle with their sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

My prayer is that this series would help foster a climate within the church, and by extension, in our homes and networks of relationships, where we can engage in honest, gracious, thoughtful conversation about sexuality and even homosexuality.

The broader culture has lost its ability to do so. And, sadly, so too has the church, which can often be either silent or condemning, but in the end largely unhelpful.

My prayer is also that those who struggle with same-sex attraction would find strength to walk the path and live faithfully before God, in Christ.

My prayer is that through this series we would grow to love the gospel more and more; that we would know in the very depths of our soul, that:

**None is righteous, no, not one; . . . All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.**

(Rom. 3:10, 12)

That we would know that a:…**person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus.** (Gal. 2:16)

Nor that a person is justified by his heterosexuality, but only by the shed blood of Jesus.

My prayer is that we would realize each and every one of us is ‘in the closet’—that we all have sexual struggles of one kind or another, that we all deal with sexual brokenness of one kind or another, and that we all need forgiveness and healing for our sexual brokenness, indeed our sexual sin.

And my prayer is that we would realize that none of us needs to ‘come out of the closet’, because we know that Jesus Christ, our gracious Savior, is more than willing to come into the closet and meet us right there, in our pain, in our disappointment, in our shame, in our brokenness.

“**Behold,” Jesus says, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**” (Rev. 3:20).

My sincere prayer is that each and every one of us would open the door of our lives to Jesus Christ, in fresh and freeing ways, so that he can come into our lives with his beauty and power and grace, washing us, sanctifying us, justifying us in his own precious name.

Washed in the blood of Jesus! Amen.

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**