

SG/SR Slide

This year, we're devoting ourselves to better understand what the Scripture says about sex, gender and spiritual renewal. So every 6 weeks or so- I preach a sermon relating to that subject.

Today is one of those sermons. If you are new to this series, I'd encourage you to go to the resources page of our App or Website and find all the messages in this series.

These messages build on one another- so if you've missed some- you aren't going to get the whole picture. And since I don't have time to recap every week- you'll have to go listen to catch up. **(MOMENT OF SILENCE)**

Nothing puts together Sex & Spirituality like music.

From Madonna's "Like a Prayer" in the 80s, to Hozier's "Take me to Church" and Taylor Swift's "False God" to Lizzo's "Worship"...and new for me during my research- Florida Georgia Line's acronym "H.O.L.Y." which stands for High On Loving You.

Here's the thing about all of those songs about sex and spirituality.

They all end up deifying and worshipping a person, a sexual act, or a feeling. They never transcend to something above two bodies- or two people staring into each others' eyes- or looking at each others' body parts.

Take Taylor Swift's False God for example-

"Religion is in your lips. The altar is my hips. Even if its a false god, we'd still worship this love"

That's 99% of these songs.

But there are two songs that released in the last 3 years that have been different.

The first one is titled "Holy"- its by Justin Bieber and Chance the Rapper (Written by the ineffable talent Jon Bellion)

It was released in 2020.

Here's the chorus to HOLY.

"The way you hold me

Feels so Holy

On God

Runnin' to the altar like a track star

Can't wait another second

Cause the way you hold me

Feels so Holy"

The lyrics are pointing us to commitment. "I can't get to the wedding altar fast enough". In other words, when I recognize that our bodies are holy, and when our bodies touch its something set apart- holy- I'm also recognizing that I'm doing something before God that pulls me into a promise. A covenant.

Then you get to Chance's part...and he cements it.

"Formalize the union in communion He can trust / I know I ain't leaving you like I know He ain't leaving us / I know we believe in God and I know God believes in us."

This song clearly doesn't replace God with sex or a lover or a feeling- rather- their solemn promise to each other is relating them to God. Their marriage is pointing to God. The way God isn't leaving us is the way we must be committed to each other. There is a triangular relationship of deep commitment here. Man, Woman, and God.

Then when you watch the video- the theme comes out even more clearly. In the video, there is no sex. No seduction. No lingerie or heavy breathing. Instead there is poverty, suffering, commitment, service to the community, generosity, hope, hospitality, and prayer. There are even kids and elderly people. In the video- Justin Bieber plays a blue collar hard hat-wearing man who's entire company gets shut down due to the pandemic. His wife in the video is a nurse at an assisted living home where one of her patients dies.

They both come home from disappointment at their jobs to discover they have been evicted from their apartment- and subsequently wander the streets together with all their earthly possessions on their back. Just when it seems that all they have left is each other and their faith in God- an Army soldier on his way home from work invites them to his home for a warm meal. In the final scene, the soldier, leads the young couple in the door of his home, embraces his wife, and holds his children before they all sit down at a table full of food, say a prayer of thanksgiving...and then have a meal together.

Not exactly Madonna- is it?

And its utterly unlike its 2022 counterpart- "UNHOLY"- By Sam Smith and Kim Petras.

A word of caution...that I'm sure will only have the opposite effect, but I need to say it in sincerity- "Don't watch this video."

Here's some of the lyrics to "Unholy"

"Mummy don't know daddy's getting hot/ At the body shop/ doing something unholy"

A lucky, lucky girl

She got married to a boy like you

She'd kick you out if she ever, ever knew

Oh, he left his kids at home so he can get that"

The 'Body Shop' referred to here is a Los Angeles strip club.

The song is about a friend that Sam Smith had who was cheating on his wife...and she didn't know it. He didn't like it, so the song is sort of a judgment on him. He's being facetious when he says "she's a lucky girl" that got married to a man like you who sneaks out to go to strip clubs while he deserts his wife and children.

The video- that I'm recommending you DO NOT watch-is pretty much a celebration of any sort of expression of sexuality- except of course, the kind that is being judged in the video- the breaking of marital vows.

In the final scene of the video, the cheating man lies dead on the floor, with the words Liar, Cheat, and Fumier- which is french for manure- above his body. The wife confidently walks in removes a wig and her trench coat and she is wearing the same seductive clothing that celebrates sex in whatever way you want to do it...except of course- the way her lying, cheating husband just did it.

Essentially- its the entirety of the "sex and gender any way you want it" community judging the man who has broken his marital vows- Saying "This kind of sex- the breaking of a vow without consent- this deserves death."

Do you find that strange?

The thought I had when I saw the video- was "why is that the line?" For the people who have pushed the boundaries of sex and gender until there is almost NO LINE whatsoever? Why is the breaking of a promise deserving of judgment? What is that morality- that sexual ethic- grounded in?

In other words- if you're willing to throw out any and all rules about sex and gender- why is it that you're still bothered by infidelity? Not just bothered- wrathful, vengeful, willing to completely destroy a person because of it.

Title Slide "Holy & Unholy: Why Sex is a Public Good and Consensual Hook-ups are Destroying Us"- Hebrews 12:28-13:5

My aim today is to show you the bigger picture of how God intends sex to function in a community and a society. Both of these songs either intentionally- in the case of Holy- or unintentionally- in the case of UNHOLY- are saying what God has already revealed in the Scripture. Not only that Sex is intended by God to be between a man and woman in life long commitment- but when that happens- all of us benefit...and when its devalued...we all lose.

Hebrews 12:28-13:5

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

1 Let brotherly love continue.

2 Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily. 4 Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. 5 Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you.

Transition: Lets start with God's intent for sex.

1) "Holy" sex overflows to the community in sacrificial love, hospitality, and generosity.

Did it strike you in this passage that though this passage mentions "sex", it doesn't seem to be in a way we currently think of as very sexy.

v 4

There is a mention here of “the marriage bed”. but there is also hospitality, generosity, contentment, and serving God with reverence and awe. In fact its a lot like Bieber’s “Holy” video. Its about marriage and sex, but at the same time- its not very sexy.

So lets talk about what is going on here.

Hebrews 12:22a (end at “Jerusalem”) & 28

in Hebrews 11-12 there’s lots of discussion about a Holy City. What the Bible calls New Jerusalem- its the city of God- what God is going to make the world into when Jesus returns to make all things new. Essentially- the writer of Hebrews is telling these new Christians who feel a bit homeless in their context- you yourselves- in the way you conduct yourselves- are going to represent the City of God. Where everything is done in a way that leads to life and flourishing.

As followers of Jesus in the world- you are going to conduct yourselves in Holiness. Thats why God is so often described as he is here. As fire.

Fire is beautiful. But dangerous.

It warms and cooks food. But you can’t just jump into it. It has to be respected...or it consumes you.

So- if you live in the world with your attention trained on this beautiful and dangerous God- you will live with awe and respect of him...and you will form a City NOW that will lead to the flourishing of your neighbors. You yourselves will be a little fire that people want to gather around. That is what it means to be Holy.

13:1

So when he starts into the list in chapter 13- he’s talking about the way the church lives as a peaceful, holy, dangerous but but beautiful heavenly city.

The first things he talks about is not hot, steamy, sexy love- rather- he says let brotherly love continue. In other words- live like a family. Deeply committed to one another. Providing for one another’s needs.

13:2

Then he says that as this representative of God’s city- we should show hospitality to strangers- this comment about welcoming angels as guests without knowing it does not mean “If you invite strangers into your home, one of them might be an angel” rather- for these Hebrew people- its a reminder of a story in Genesis about Abraham, their forefather...who welcomed in three travelers the turned out to be the Angel of the

LORD, and from that, he received word that his wife Sarah would have a son in their old age. Isaac- It was through that hospitality, that Abraham became the father of many nations.

Take note of that. Because that is a story held in high regard by the Hebrew (and Xian) people. Its a story about a husband and wife, that have sex- have a baby- and it blesses the world.

13:3

Then he commands them to have deep empathy for prisoners. He's talking about those who have been mistreated and thrown in prison because of their faith. He says, don't forget about these people. Tie your heart to them. Hurt with them. Don't let them be out of sight out of mind.

He even says, "imagine how they are suffering physically- bodily. And hurt with them."

Then we have the verse about Marriage and sex...but we'll come back to that.

13:5

Finally in this brief list about Xians conducting themselves as members of the New Jerusalem..the Holy City...he says- "watch out for greed". Watch out for the love of money. He says, "Don't constantly chase adding material stuff to your life to make you happy. That turns into chasing the almighty dollar. Which will keep you from being generous with your home in hospitality- you'll lose sight of brotherly love- you'll forget about the mistreated and suffering prisoners."

He finishes at the end with this beautiful truth about God who told them "I will never leave or abandon you."

Here's the truth.

Most of the destructive things we do come from a fear that God is going to leave us... abandon us.

Because if we don't have a God that loves us unconditionally, that could at anytime withdraw his love and provision from our lives- then we would desperately cling to all the love, all the money, all the pleasure we could muster up for ourselves.

It is the sureness of the closeness and presence of our God- that allows us to open the doors to our homes, open our hands to our money, and doesn't have us running from pain toward temporary pleasures- but willing to take on the suffering of our brothers and sisters- because we know that no matter how bad it hurts- New Jerusalem is on

the way- where there are no more tears, no more death, no more sin., no more mourning or funerals, or diseases.

NOW- lets talk about sex in the middle of all that.

Cuz thats where it shows up in this list.

v4

First- note that the writer here is speaking of both marriage- and the marriage bed. So marriage and sex within marriage.

He says that marriage should be held in honor, highly valued. Like fire- it should not be treated flippantly- or as if it doesn't matter. It should be respected. And like fire- when marriage is honored and valued in a society- it doesn't just benefit the couple- like these surrounding verses show us- it overflows to the community.

Think about all the relationships and relational responsibilities you have like multi-tiered water fall.

First- if a waterfall doesn't have a spring...a fountain, a source- all it is is a bunch of rocks. But once it has its source- each section of the mountain has to fill up with water before it spills over to the next one.

If at any section or tier of the waterfall- the water dries up, or is absorbed by the surrounding terrain...all the other tiers of the water fall dry up to. In other words- each section of rock- each little pool on the mountain has to be filled up to overflow..and make it all the way down the mountain- where all the animals in the valley can drink- and where all the vegetation and the ecosystem at the bottom can flourish.

For all of us, these relationships start with the most covenantal to the least.

My relationship with God is the mountain spring. If my relationship with God is close, intimate, and honoring of him- that is going to overflow to my marriage. An explicit covenant I have entered. Then- if my relationship with my wife is close, intimate, and honoring of each other and the LORD- that will spill over to my children- an implicit covenant I have entered- to love and protect and provide for my sons. Then when my family relationships are full of me loving and keeping promises to my children- that is going to overflow from all 5 of us into our church... and into our friendships....and our schools...our neighborhoods...our work...which will then overflow into city and make a difference in our government and so and so on.

But if my relationship with God has dried up...if I'm not connected to him, intimate with him, sure of his love for me...sure that he will never leave me or forsake me- Instead of

overflowing to my wife and kids, and then my friends, and church and community...i try to take from them.

So I don't open up my home in hospitality to care for others- instead I open it up to network. To do a favor to people who can benefit me...to give me the love or respect or financial security I turn to instead of God.

The truth is, if you have that deep, intimate connection to God...you have all you need to be faithful and love in a marriage- even if your spouse isn't pulling their end of the deal.

Because any time you become deeply secure in God's love for you- it allows you to overflow and love even those who won't love you back.

BUT- if I allow my spouse to control my relationship with God...if she is disconnected from God and treating me horribly...I can lose my focus on the wellspring of Love God is graciously giving me..and focus either on winning her love and approval...or decide its time to go to war...and then my overflow of love to my kids, and my church and my community will dry up too.

Now- imagine an entire society...an entire city...where marriage is devalued...where there are only contentious and self-serving individuals in marriage...where divorce is happening at a higher rate than new marriages...where the birth rate plummets... and people are constantly in to their own little world busy thinking about the hell that they have to go back into when they go home... That is going to hurt a society socially, economically, and spiritually.

Eventually- the overflow of hospitality, and sacrifice and generosity will dry up...and it will be a society of consumeristic individuals all trying to use each other, to take from one another to find their sense of stability and security and love and hope.

In fact, this is already happening in America, and in countries around the world. Where birthrate is down below replacement rate, because having children has been separated from sex- and sex has become consumeristic and individualistic...instead of covenantal and a part of an ecosystem.

In this verse in Hebrews- the writer says inside of a marriage to keep the marriage bed undefiled. or Holy. Set apart. Only for the husband and wife.

Because sex is meant to be an exclamation point on the end of a sentence of deep commitment and intimacy. Sex bonds. Both chemically in the brain and theologically from the Scripture. It is intended by God to be a physical reinforcement of a spiritual and relational reality. That a man and a woman are committed to each other in an

unbreakable covenant for life. That their lives have merged together as one...not in a way that dilutes or weakens their personhood- rather in a way that brings out the best of themselves. So they trust each other deeply with their lives, children, finances, hopes and fears. They have become completely vulnerable to the other person- naked if you will. Sex as a physical act is that vulnerability- intended “pay off” not in harm to the other person- but in two people thinking about the other- serving and giving pleasure to the other- not demanding or taking, but giving in such a way that their minds and spirit tell them “We are one. We are together. I am deeply known and deeply loved. This other person will never leave or forsake me.” There is no trouble I can get into- no disease that can overcome me- no suffering that will befall me- that this other person won’t walk side by side with me.

That is what sex is intended to say and do. It is essentially a renewing of the vows made at the altar. It is a reinforcement of a promise already solemnly made.

That’s why its so important in a marriage- and its so important not to have it outside of marriage. Because sex outside of that promise- that formalized union- is a lie. It confuses the mind and the spirit- and ends up taking- instead of giving.

Back to 1)

But when a marriage has two people intimately connected to God...and intimately connected to each other. In such a way that the marital covenant is consistently being reinforced- undergirded and made more secure...you have what you see in the “Holy” video.

You have a young married couple, just starting out- who are not thinking primarily of themselves- but playing roles in society for the good of others. The wife sacrificially serving as a nurse in a nursing home. Genuinely loving her patients and mourning their deaths.

You have two people that when they go through suffering and deeply confusing times- don’t turn their backs on each other and blame- rather depend on one another and walk through suffering together.

And then- as the love matures and grows. As children come as a natural result of sex in the marriage- strong bonds form from people who can sacrificially serve each other and their children- that cement together the sorts of families who don’t just spend their evenings consuming entertainment as individuals with individual screens in individual rooms- but they look for the hurting- the suffering..and invite them in for a meal. They show hospitality to strangers. They let brotherly love continue. They identify with the suffering prisoner and empathize with them.

Now- let me say something to our single folks right now.

I realize at this point you can be saying “Well, what about me? If I don’t have a spouse where does that leave me- can I not overflow?”

2 things- First- the way you steward your sexuality- by relying on an intimate relationship with the Lord to fill you- is going to make you into a person that can overflow- and be a valuable member of society.

Second, Its also important not to devalue marriage- Keep marriage an honorable calling- even if its not YOUR calling. (BTW- A few weeks ago I preached about singleness in more detail- you should go back and listen)

Likewise- Married people- your marriage should help you to love and appreciate single people- not look at them with jealousy or pity.

At the end of the day- there is no version of a healthy society- a healthy city or church- where marriage is disdained and sex has become a consumeristic effort to get for one self.

In short, the people of the City of God are stingy with their sex- only between one and woman inside a marriage covenant, and promiscuous with their money, time, and resources to the community.

Transition: and that brings us to “Unholy” sex.

2) Consent doesn’t stop the destructive nature of “Unholy” sex.

Just like Holy sex is life-giving- to a marriage...then literally by creating children inside a stable environment- then overflowing to create families that overflow into the community and care for others that are NOT inside of their families,..

So Unholy sex is life-taking.

Our societies current sexual ethic- could be reduced down to one word. Consent.

We have developed this belief that as long as consenting adults agree that some version of sex is good with them- that is all the ethic they need. At that point- they are free to do whatever they want.

See- the bar is so low here. Holy sex has a vision of flourishing for the entire community. Unholy sex, if you will, says “Sex is a thing that an individual can decide for themselves with no repercussions on society.” Whatever you think or believe about it, this has been an ideal heralded throughout the debate on legalizing gay marriage. For

those who cautioned against its legalization, they were met with “If you don’t like gay marriage, you don’t have to have one.”

Again- whatever your support or unsupport of gay marriage is- I’m trying to show you that within that way of thinking is the idea that there is not a public component to marriage and sex. That sex is an act that happens between two or more consenting people- and its effects stop there.

This is the same idea put out by the porn industry. This is just people enjoying themselves. It doesn’t hurt anybody. It doesn’t have larger effects on our society.

Unholy sex is reduced down to consent.

Hook-up culture is a prime example of Unholy sex.

Hook up culture says as long as 2 people agree to it...its fine for them to use sex just for pleasure...or even money.

So, to protect ourselves from the natural and spiritual bonding agent that sex ACTUALLY is- we have doused ourselves in the message that sex can be about anything other than intimacy and promise. It can “Just be fun” or “it can get me what I want”. We keep telling ourselves through songs, and books, and TV and movies that sex can be recreational- or it can be the way you get money from people and establish power and dominance over them.

Millenials and Gen-Z have deeply suffered from this message. Its common for Teens and 20 somethings to have sex- but avoid an exclusive relationship. In fact- the person you are having sex with is the one you are supposed to pretend doesn’t exist. You aren’t supposed to get too close. You aren’t supposed to catch feelings for them. If you do- you lose your power over them or the pleasure you get from them. because you complicate the relationship.

This is why in Justin Biebers “Holy” the bridge goes-

“The pimps and the players say don’t go crushin, Wise Men say fools rush in...but I don’t know.”

In other words- Holy sex that pursues commitment FIRST- is questioning the sexual ethic of the day that says, Hook up- don’t catch feelings. Pimps use sex for money- players use sex for pleasure and status.

13:4

After he says, "Keep the marriage bed undefiled"- he says God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.

Now its right here that you might think- this is what I don't like about God or church. They judges people who don't align with their morality. Why not live and let live.

2 things about that.

Thing 1- is remember a couple of weeks ago I talked about active and passive wrath. There is as much passive wrath and judgment against sexual immorality and adultery as there is active. Because God made the body and society to function according to his design for flourishing. So when we reduce the sexual ethic down to CONSENT- we end up suffering the natural consequences of that. Things like the epidemic of loneliness. The decline in birthrate under the replacement rate that has dire economic and societal implications sociologists are already warning us about. Rampant abuse and and the trauma fall out that is passed on from generation to generation.

Thing 2- Don't you find it odd- that of the 2 videos- Holy and Unholy- its the "Sex is only consent and anything goes" video of UNHOLY- that is vengeful and judgmental against adultery?

Why is that? 2 reasons.

One is because we are all created in the image of God. And despite what we try to convince ourselves to believe- we see commitment and covenant as deep and unbreakable. That's why we have this lingering notion of sexual morality called "consent"...because deep within us our spirit is begging for a boundary. An ethic. That will even hint at commitment surrounding sex. Consent at the very least causes 2 people to enter into an agreement. Its cheap. Its an ugly copy of the real thing- but its a longing coming out.

The second reason why the "Unholy" video ends up so judgmental- is because there is a desire to blame. The "anything goes" sexual community is coming down hard on the "sex is a commitment between one woman and man" essentially saying- SEE- We aren't the immoral ones. YOU BREAK YOUR PROMISES. At least we aren't making promises- so we can't be judged for breaking them. To which I say- you have a point.

This is another reason why its so important for us to keep our promises regarding our sexual ethic as the church. Because a watching world won't take us seriously as long as we just willingly accept no fault divorce and rampant adultery and pornography use while we point the finger outward at the worlds sexual practices and pronounce judgement.

But note here in the Scripture- Its not- “Sex anyway you like it- UNLESS- you have made a marital commitment.”

That phrase sexual immorality is Porneia. It means any sex outside the bond and covenant of marriage- will receive the judgment of God. He says ANY and all SEX outside of marriage will be judged. There is no difference between single people having a good time, married people cheating on one another- or a throuple living in a polyamorous relationship.

13:5

Finally- note the connection to money here.

One of the most deeply harmful thing about embracing the ethic of consent as our ONLY sexual ethic is it leaves open using sex for whatever people agree it can be used for.

Which includes using sex as a bartering chip for money or power. This is perfectly illustrated by Kim Petras’ line in Unholy.

Give me love, give me Fendi, my Balenciaga daddy

You gon' need to bag it up, 'cause I'm spending on Rodeo (woo)

You can watch me back it up, I'll be gone in the a.m

And he, he get me Prada, get me Miu Miu like Rihanna (ah)

He always call me 'cause I never cause no drama

In other words- we can just use sex as a way you get pleasure- and I get material things. And in that relationship- there won't be any drama. You won't have to deal the aspects of a real relationship where there is difficulty and conflict to work through. Where we have to endure suffering together and make sacrifices. You know- all things that make love deep and meaningful and grow us as people.

Back to 2)

Instead- sex work- and porn is being talked about as a way women can gain power over men. But its not. Its a degradation of men and women. Its absolute rife with abuse. And even consent is twisted. You tell me, if a young girl gives a “yes” to filming porn- because she feels she is out of options or she has been manipulated to believe it

won't have consequences...if she is being threatened with abuse. Is that really consent.

13:5