

SGSR Series Slide

It was 2009.

I was a college pastor in Raleigh-Durham, NC.

A young man that had been a part of our church, we'll call him Jeff, had scheduled a time to sit down and talk with me. I had no clue what it was going to be about.

Jeff sat down in the chair across from me, looked me in the eyes and said, "I'm gay."

Since that time, God has put me in the lives of other, mostly young men, who have trusted me enough to tell me the same thing- sometimes as the very first person they've ever told.

I don't remember all the things I told Jeff that day. I'm sure I put my foot in my mouth more than once. I think we were both 2 confused young men trying to make sense of something that, frankly at the time, a lot of people weren't talking about. Especially not in pastors offices... and definitely not on a Sunday morning behind the pulpit.

That was the start of a calling for me. Because in that moment, being gay was not an ideology...it was not printed words on a page...it was not a category of people or an agenda to fear...it was- Jeff. And I loved Jeff. And he loved me. I trusted Jeff. And he trusted me.

Now almost 15 years later, the LORD has sustained my desire to love and minister to anyone who sits in a chair across from me and feels confused and alone- with the words "I'm gay" either spoken out loud- or rolling around inside of them somewhere.

I'm not here to get pats on the back or rah-rahs from any group of people. I'm certainly not here to hurt or pick a fight with anyone. In as much as I possibly can- and with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit- knowing how deeply I am loved by the Father through the death and resurrection and promise that comes from Jesus the son- I am here today- like I was for Jeff 15 years ago.

In love. Not to take a side- other than Jesus.

I'm here in love. But the difference between me now- at 45 and 12 years into pastoring City Church- is I've spent A LOT more time with the LORD- I've read a TON, I've sat across from a lot of Jeffs over the years- and so I stand before you today not confused...or not knowing what to do. I stand before you as a shepherd, entrusted to lead you to the Chief Shepherd- and to walk in his way of love.

That is not just my aim this Sunday and next Sunday- Its my aim every Sunday- through Saturday. To always lead you to Jesus- and to walk in his way of love- not just with sermons, but with my life.

Before we get to the Scripture today, I think its important for you to know some things up front- especially considering, for some of you, this may be the first time you've ever been in a worship gathering with City Church. And you're thinking "I picked a heck of a day."

First, I want you to know that you are coming in to the middle of what will end up being more than a year long journey where I am preaching on Sex, Gender, and Spiritual Renewal every 6 weeks or so. So we've laid a lot of groundwork in understanding the big picture of how our sex and gender relate to Who GOD is and what he is doing in the world. I want you to know that this is not a sermon out of the blue- neither is it some direct response to Pride Month- or any "hot-off-the-presses" culture-war news.

If today is your first day, know that you have missed a lot that has helped lay the foundation of what I'll say today. Please understand me in context.

Second, There is no possible way even in 2 sermons that I can answer every question, or respond to every objection that you have yourself- or that somebody you love has, or that somebody on Tik Tok has led you to wonder. So- like every sermon I preach- its never a one-and-done. If you have a question- you can ask me directly, or you can email our elders at elders@borocitychurch.com.

Third, this is not the first time, nor will it be the last time that I preach about LGBTQ issues. This isn't a "Shew now we've said what we need to say...no need to bring it up for several more years." Day after day after day- you are disciplined in the area of sex and gender by people on both sides of cultural and political aisles. My calling is to bring you back to Jesus- to his death, resurrection, and promised return- and let that inform every thing in this life. Sexuality and gender matter to Jesus. He is Lord of our sex and our gender.

Fourth, the church has a pretty poor record on loving LGBT people. But its not because we've been following Jesus- or really understanding our Bible. Its because we haven't. City Church is going to be a church that loves human beings. That shows hospitality and cares. Now, gay or straight- loving doesn't always mean saying "Yes" to everything you want me to affirm. You can love someone deeply, and disagree with them. You can be close to someone, and not approve of what all the choices they make. But I can guarantee you loving doesn't mean ostracizing or bullying or speaking hatefully. It means sacrifice. It means putting your own comfort second for the sake of someone

else that is searching or hurting. And that is exactly the kind of church that we are... and will continue to be.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that uses “Choice Architecture” to serve up a false dichotomy that pushes you into choosing a desired outcome.

“Are you affirming of gay marriage or a hateful bigot?”

I reject that framing of the question outright.

Instead, I want to gently, and humbly, with respect and without a self-defensiveness- I want to speak the truth in love.

I want to seek understanding- and I want to be understood. That takes sacrifice and patience- 2 things that our current cultural climate is missing.

Finally, because I know many gay and lesbian people appreciate a church being honest and up front about their beliefs on sexuality, because its much better than a bait and switch,- That’s exactly what I’ll do.

We believe marriage is a self-sacrificing lifetime commitment between one man & one woman. Sex is an act that is reserved by God for that context- not arbitrarily, but because in the physical act itself- it serves a sign of a covenant- and promise. Therefore- any sexual act- gay or straight- outside of the covenant of marriage tells a skewed story about humanity and God.

Title Slide- “From the Beginning: Why Sexual Difference is Necessary for Marriage”- Get 1-2, Col 1:15-20

Now- I know that some of us will have a hard time reconciling being a church that loves all people- with being a church that holds to the historical view of marriage. But I’ve read a lot about the way Jesus loves, gets close to, and invites a lot of people who not only didn’t understand or approve his beliefs- they didn’t understand or approve of him. And yet- he always loved.

Since that day with Jeff almost 15 years ago- I’ve committed to being a person that refuses the choice architecture. That I either affirm and celebrate what the larger society tells me I should or I must be hateful, defensive, and play the persecuted card.

I am committed to following the way of Jesus. And I’m committed to leading this church in that way.

Today- I need to start with WHY I think the church must be committed to what I'll call the historic view of marriage. Then next week- I aim to give us more on how our church can follow Jesus in loving and ministering to gay and lesbian people that Jesus deeply loves.

First, we're going to dive into what is often known as "clobber scripture" because it has been used over and over as stick to hit gay people over the head with. But instead of jettisoning this Scripture because its been hatefully used, lets treat it as the revelation of God and understand what it says and what it doesn't say.

Genesis 1:27

**27 So God created man in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.**

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." 19 The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:

**This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called "woman,"
for she was taken from man.**

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

Colossians 1:15-20

**15 He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.**

**16 For everything was created by him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities —
all things have been created through him and for him.**

**17 He is before all things,
and by him all things hold together.**

**18 He is also the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
so that he might come to have first place in everything.**

**19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

1) Expressive Individualism, Negative Freedom, the Buffered Self, and the New Gnosticism are contrary to Scripture.

Before I started preaching this series of messages on Sex, Gender and Spiritual Renewal- you might recall back in August of last year I opened with 4 messages on the way we think in 21st century American culture. Because to understand how we see sex and gender- we're going to have to understand the way we have been shaped to think over the course of the last 200-300 years.

We talked about "Expressive Individualism". This is the idea that we typically see ourselves more as Individuals, instead of as a community. Expressive Individualism says that the truest thing about you is deep inside of you and you have to go in there and find it, then express it to the world.

It is the plot of countless movies and songs over the last 30 years. This idea is in contrast to what the Scripture says about you. That you are a part of his people, his humanity- and our role as humans is not to look INSIDE of us for our true meaning and identity- but to look to God, our creator for our identity and purpose.

We also talked about our understanding of Freedom. Largely, freedom for 21st century American is removing restraint. Its throwing off external people and systems that keep you from self-defining and you can be what you want to be and do whatever you want to do.

The reality of freedom is that it is not only freedom from- but freedom FOR.

True freedom as the Scripture describes it is becoming more fully what God created you to be. Its not freedom FROM restraint- rather its giving yourself to the right restraints and limitations that come from God.

Third, we talked about the buffered self- and our lack of transcendence. As modern Americans- we have been taught to live inside of a bubble that cuts out the spiritual. So we have trouble comprehending meaning outside of what we can see, and touch, and feel inside of these self-constructed bubbles that keep us from seeing where God is at work, even in the mundane things in our life.

Scripture on the other hand- presents us with a world alive with the presence and activity of God.

Finally, we talked about the new Gnosticism. In 21st century America, we live in a society that has disconnected the spiritual from the physical. In other words, you get to choose whether what you do with your body matters or doesn't. But there is no inherent or necessary connection to what you do physically and who you are spiritually. Those worlds can be separated or fused together as you want them.

Scripture however does not separate the whole person. A soul is not something inside of you, it is you. Body and Spirit.

In the passages we read today, each of these ideas is confronted.

Gen 1:27-28

God created the physical- and continually interacts with his creation. The crown of which is humanity. Through which our purpose is given to us by our creator. We don't look inward to find meaning and purpose...we look upward. Our purpose is not self-actualizing- its giving ourselves to the fruitfulness of the world. To spreading the goodness of God's creation to all.

Col 1:16

All of creation was created THROUGH and FOR Jesus. He is above all. He is the good king that humanity is created to serve. I don't belong to myself- I belong to Jesus. I am not my own. And in that truth- I actually find true freedom. The freedom to be who I am created to be. And that means limitations. Freedom is not getting rid of restraints, its putting myself under the right restraints that accord to the human I am created to be.

Col 1:18

To live into this- my primary question is not- "What do I feel like being or doing?"- and anything that stops me from that stops my happiness- rather its "How do I make Jesus first place in everything?" Answering that question is where deep contentment- true joy lies. And over and over and over in the Scripture- we get the idea that doing that is not only not easy- often times its painful. We often let go of the temporary- in order to take hold of a joy that is eternal.

Back to 1)

Not only that- but another big part of the story is the story of the fall. Our own sin and brokenness. Where the spiritual effects the physical. Our desires are twisted. They are, in a sense, often untrustworthy. So we desperately need God, our creator, to reveal to us who HE is- and who we are in light of that- lest we follow our own desires into twisting who he is and what he says about himself.

All 4 of these ideas are a result of the fall. The way our mind twists the truth about God to justify ourselves so we can have our twisted up desires.

Now- I'm telling you all this not merely because it has to do with sexuality- but because it influences everything we do.

Transition: So, what I want to do now is show you what the Scripture says outside of these patterns of thinking- particularly what it says about Marriage.

2) Marriage is not self-actualization for maximum happiness. Its a union between two sexually different humans designed to say something good about God and bless the world.

An understandable and oft-repeated question in our world today is “What’s wrong with two people that love each other getting married? Love is love, right? So why should you limit someone’s happiness by preventing their marriage?”

Well- there is a major assumption wrapped up in that question. That is: Marriage is merely the union of two people that love each other.

If two people consent to it, then thats all that it needs to be a marriage.

But, the question is- Is that what marriage is? Or is there something baked into marriage that makes it MORE than two humans that love each other consenting to be married?

Scripture teaches that marriage is a union between two sexually different humans. That without that- what you have is not a marriage.

The first definition is full of those late modern ideas- Expressive individualism and the view of Freedom that says Freedom is removing restraint. Its full of the buffered self-cutting the definition of marriage off from the transcendent reality of God and Gnosticism that separates the function of our bodies from who we are spiritually.

Scripture teaches the latter definition- that sex difference is crucial in marriage.

All through the first chapter of Genesis- God makes the world in pairs. Heavens and Earth. Land and sea. Light and Dark. There are these binary pairs meant to complement each other.

Gen 1:27

Then at the climax of creation, God creates humanity- as male and female. Fully equal-together meant to image him. Show him off. Say something about who he is to each other and the world.

An image represents something. So if humans are the image of God- then we are not created to belong to ourselves- rather to belong to God. And our maleness and femaleness- and the way we steward male and female- is the very first thing that is mentioned about our humanity in the Scripture. The equality and the difference.

Gen 2:24

Then, in a parallel account of creation in Gen 2:24- we are told that the way humans will image God in being fruitful and multiplying- will be in the context of a one-flesh union called “marriage” in which sex difference is baked in.

Notice- there is nothing explicit here about how much the first man and woman love each other. Rather- marriage is grounded in sex-difference that images or tells a story about God’s love and faithfulness through his creation.

In fact- in the one place in this account where we do get this overwhelming sense of what might resemble our modern understanding of romantic love...

Gen 2:23

Also with it, baked in- is sex difference.

The Hebrew word for “man” here is “ish” and for woman Adam coins this term “isha”- again showing the sameness- bone of my bone flesh of my flesh she is human co-equal with me— but also the necessary difference She is not man, ISH, she is like man but with something different- ISHA.

Gen 2:18, 20

In fact, this word “suitable” is a word that is only used 2x in Scripture- and you are looking at them right here in these verses.

First, helper here is not a weak word- like “daddy’s little helper”. Its a word on multiple occasions used of God- for his military intervention for Israel when Israel is out manned and out gunned. They need God as a strong helper to come deliver them.

But the word I want to look at is this word “corresponding” or “suitable”.

Its the Hebrew word “Ken-neg-doe”

Its a combination of two Hebrew words.

Ki- which means similar or same and

Neged- which means opposite or different

Gen 2:22-23

When Eve is created from Adam’s side (not his head as an authority, or his feet as a under him)- the word used there is not “rib”- thats actually a really disappointing

translation. It is Side. Its a tabernacle word that typically refers to the building of a holy place for God. The SIDE of the tabernacle or the SIDE of the ark of the covenant.

So Eve is created as a Sacred Equal...Ki- but she is also created different- Neged.

She is female.

This sex difference is built into the creational definition of marriage. Remember from Colossians- all things were created THROUGH Jesus. So this is not separate from the NT- its not separate from who Jesus is.

Matthew 19:4-5

So lets look at Jesus referencing these passages in the NT.

Notice- Jesus splices together Get 2:24 & 1:27.

He keeps the opening phrase “for this reason”- only now he brings in Gen 1:27- even more explicit about sex different.

“The two”- which two? The male and female of the previous verse.

In this passage, He is addressing serial “non-monogamy”- and his reasoning is that the sex difference is baked into marriage.

Back to 2)

This doesn't even yet touch on further NT passages, like Ephesians 5 that speak of marriage not mainly in terms two people who romantically love each other making a consensual commitment- rather about specially how male and female inside of marriage are intended to show off Jesus' relationship to his people.

Additionally, I don't have time to mention the theme that runs through the entirety of old and New Testament that are constantly pointing us back to the first 3 chapters of Genesis to understand both God's intent for humans and the way that we twist and break hist commands- that all starts with twisting what his word says to suit our desires.

So as we think and talk about what marriage is both within the church and with our friends and neighbors- its important to ask 3 questions, humbly and truly seeking understanding.

(all on same slide)

1) What is your definition of marriage?

2) Where did you get that definition from?

3) How does Scripture inform your definition of marriage?

Obviously- the third question is going to be one that we ask of people who hold Scripture as some sort of authority. But the first two will be seen as important for everyone. You can't say "marriage" without some understanding of what you mean by that- so lets be clear. And we don't just make up word definitons- especially of institutions that have been around for thousands of years.

Now- let me finish back in that passage from Colossians

Col 1:19-20

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself,

whether things on earth or things in heaven,

by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

None of what I've shown you today should ever, ever, ever be used as a weapon of defense for yourself, or as a method of attack to show off your self-righteousness. Next week- I'll have a pretty stern word for the church and I want to show you how God beautifully uses gay and lesbian people IN the church for his Glory.

And remember- heterosexuals- we all had a hand in twisting marriage to be something it isn't. We made marriage a free for all. We divorced it from its meaning. Even the church at times has made marriage about finding a soul-mate- or sexual fulfillment or the only path to true happiness. None of which is presented to us in Scripture. All of us have fallen captive to the spirit of the age with marriage.

And- I'll say this clearly today, and next week, and on and on until I die.

Being gay- being attracted to the person of the same sex is not a sin. It doesn't condemn you it doesn't eliminate you from following Jesus or being a deeply important part of our church. There are broken desires involved in it- YES. But Im here to tell you if you are a human- you are full of broken desires and broken physical bodies that God is redeeming for his wonderful purposes.

Because God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in his son, Jesus Christ. And Christ came to reconcile to himself the people that were lost in their own twisted

desires. He brings humanity, gay and straight, back to God by dying on a cross in our place. Receiving the just punishment for the way we let those desires give birth to sin, instead of submitting those desires to him and yielding to the calling of his Holy Spirit.

His blood covers gay and straight. No ones sin is so great, that the grace of God through the death and resurrection of his son- is not able to forgive you.

Jesus didn't die to make gay people straight. He died to make people dead in their sins alive in him.

And the diversity that he creates in his church- with people who were rescued from all kinds of sin and ongoing temptation- will be a beautiful testimony to the world of the way Jesus loves his bride- the church- forever.

Lets pray.