

## **A pastoral letter about Human Sexuality**

To the body of Christ at Grace Fellowship Church,

We live in an age of many gifts and blessings, for which we thank God. As with every age, there are also many obstacles to living for God and enjoying the close fellowship with him that he created us for. There are numerous areas in our culture that pull Christ-followers away from him, deaden our pursuit of him, and bar our enjoyment of him. One such area is our culture's view of sex and sexuality.

***The purpose of this letter*** is to remove some of these obstacles and speak a voice of hope and redemptive grace into the discussion of sex. Secondly, it is to invite and urge all people, but especially Christians, into the fullest embrace of sexuality possible, that which God intends for us.

It is clear that the world's counsel on this is a dead-end. Our culture's thought-leaders say things like this about issues of sex and sexuality:

- It's your body, do what you want.
- Love is all you need for sex... or just consenting adults.
- Adolescents are going to experiment anyway, let's help them protect themselves.
- There are no off-limits for sexual activity, except for consent.
- You can't hold off too long without sex.
- Experiment and figure out where you should end up/who you should end up with.
- Children are a choice.
- I'm born this way and can't help it.
- My sexual identity is mine to define. I can define my orientation, my gender preferences.
- Isn't marriage is a committed love-relationship? How could anyone deny it to another?
- Porn doesn't hurt anyone.

Stop to consider these bullet points and you'll see that each of them focuses on sexuality from strictly a personal point of view: what it means for me, what it does for me, what it says about me. Absent is consideration of the role it plays relative to others around us, to society at large, and to God himself.

### **Part 1: Four facts about sex**

There are four key facts about human sexuality. First, it's pleasurable in its normal usage, and this is a God-given pleasure and joy. Second, it is the means through which children enter the world. Third, God has a compassionate and healthful guard-rail for its use: it is reserved for marriage, in order to bond a husband and wife to each other and provide the best environment for raising children. There is a fourth, lesser-known fact about sex and marriage: this unique, God-given togetherness is a signpost of the gospel. Let's consider each fact in turn.

**First**, it is pleasurable. Humans have a desire for sexual experiences. For men, that desire is quickly aroused (and often!), for women it's aroused in the context of relationship and security. When experienced well, sexual expression is a delight and encompasses the couple. This helps explain why it is such a pre-occupation of many cultures, including our own: we're drawn to it strongly.

This pleasure and intensity are by God's design. God wants us to enjoy sex, to be ravished by our wife

or husband. God created our bodies with the capacities to enter into sexual excitement. “And God saw that it was good.” Mistakenly, it used to be thought that “sex is dirty” or that “God didn’t make this”. However, we disparage God’s thoughtful gift when we attribute this intricate physiology and emotional intensity to “the results of the Fall into sin.”<sup>1</sup>

**Second**, children are created by the sexual act. The fact that the only future for humanity is the combination of a father and mother must be included in our discussion of the purposes of sex. Indeed, if pleasure is the *momentary* delight of the sex act, children are the *long-term* delight. It is through sex (and then parenting) that we fulfill our calling from God: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). Surely, then, children are a prime purpose for sex.<sup>2</sup>

**Third**, the God who gave us this gift—of unique pleasure, and of the resulting joy of children—is the same God who shows us its best and only proper use: within the context of marriage. Sex is so powerful and consuming that to make use of it elsewhere leaves a trail of wounds and brokenness.<sup>3</sup>

With all of Scripture, we affirm that marriage is the only place for sexual expression. As we say often at Grace, “Sex is God’s Wedding Gift.” He gives it to a bride and groom on their wedding night, even as they have given themselves to each other in their vows. It bonds them, seals their marriage, and consummates it. Moreover, a healthy sex life throughout marriage will be cultivated, in large part, through conversation and mutual agreement between husband and wife (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

**Fourth**, Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is a signpost of the gospel. A husband woos and wins the love of a wife, covenants with her to live with her and *then* becomes one with her. This reflects how God has wooed, won and covenanted himself to his people. We are now one with him, united with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Human marriage and all its joys glorifies God, both as a gift from him for our earthly pilgrimage, and as a reflection of his great and everlasting love for us, making us one with him.

To sum up, God has designed and given sexual expression for three “earthy” reasons: to bond a husband and wife together in a unique way, to be the means through which children are created, to give us deep and intense joy & pleasure. Moreover, marriage and its ensuing unity also holds a spiritual element: it is a picture of the gospel. Contrary to the world’s understanding, human sexuality is far more than “me-centered.”

## **Part 2: God’s intentions for sex are under fire**

Let us consider how each of the four facts are being undercut in our world today. **First**, on sex as a unique bond for husband and wife, we see several lines of mis-use that diminish its value. Our

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 5:18f, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth... may her breasts fill you at all times with delight...” is God’s instruction to a husband. God is not shy about how fun this gift is; nor are we. See The Song of Solomon for one of the ancient world’s greatest love poems, amazingly included in Holy Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> See Psalm 127 & 128: “Children are a heritage from the Lord; Psalm 139:13-16; Malachi 2:15 – God gives his Spirit into our marriages, why? So that our children might be godly!

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:18-25 show God’s intent for the delight and exclusivity of marriage sexuality: Adam is alone and God gives him the ‘perfect companion’ (vv18-22), Adam rejoices at the gift of Eve (v23), God blesses their union in marriage & invites them to become one flesh (v24), they are naked and unashamed (v25).

culture's thought leaders encourage multiple partners, experimentation (by youth or adults), romance alone as the driver for sex, and "consenting adults" as the litmus test for it. All of these run counter to the one litmus test God has given us: that a husband and wife have taken vows to each other, and *then* give themselves to each other in a unique way. Marriages and homes are weakened by this culture of casual sexual encounter.

**Second**, children are created (for eternity!) through God's gift of sex. Yet, our world that has demeaned the sexual act has also diminished the value of children: 'to have them is a choice that must fit in with my lifestyle.' And so the world promotes the careless use of contraception or abortifacient drugs, and a recourse to abortion itself, in an effort to put humans in the driver's seat of pregnancy. To the world, children are too often the dreaded outcome of sex, not the hoped-for outcome. Surely this is 100% contrary to the feelings God designed to accompany this experience.<sup>4</sup>

**Third**, the God-given pleasure and joy of sex are undercut by misuse and abuse throughout our fallen world. Think of the countless millions who have been coerced and forced sexually. For them, wounds and shame are now associated with this gift God has given. A pop culture that has preached "free sex" can hardly turn around and say (with a straight face) "Restraint! Don't hurt anyone! Only use it properly."

Moreover, porn is a perfect storm in our world: we have private & portable screens, infinite opportunities and an entertainment industry that produces porn & near-porn by the boatload and calls it "PG-13". It's horrifying. Men and women are being eaten alive by an addiction that can start with a hapless click, and end with a web of deceit, shame, and helpless turmoil. Boys are being entrapped as young as elementary school, girls and women are increasingly entering this arena. Men and women are constructing a fantasy world that a real spouse can never hope to live up to. Ultimately a healthy sexual outlook is increasingly impossible for greater numbers of people.

Statistically speaking, at Grace there will be dozens who are hooked, chronically struggling, or dabbling. We need to help each other; you are not alone. Moreover, as believers, we will need to step further and further out of the mainstream of culture's offerings if we are serious about the purity and wholeness that God intends for our good. And if we are serious about reflecting the gospel.

**Fourth**, as we have said, Sex is God's Wedding Gift. Thus, it is inextricably linked to marriage and the picture of the gospel. Sexual experience outside marriage is both a misuse of the gift and an undercutting of marriage. Why? Pre-marital & extra-marital sex breaks faith with our covenant partner. Sexual expression is, for husband and wife, the unique seal upon this union that God has created. Again, a husband and wife in loving covenant unity, total intimacy, and loyal priority is meant to display the gospel, God's redemption of us. Marriage is a gospel billboard. We vandalize God's gospel signpost when we misuse his gift of sex or marriage.

Rather than demean marriage or muddy the gospel, we are called to uphold both the holy estate of marriage and the gift of sexuality within it according to God's intentions, not our definitions.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that a 'careless use of contraception' is different from a 'prayerful use of contraception.' Many Christian couples have been led to make a good use of contraception before the Lord.

### **Part 3: So what is our commitment as the people of God?**

In short, we want to reflect Christ's character in our lives, to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our days, and to strive for holiness and purity in every way. In the area of our sexuality, our commitment before God (as his children through Christ) means, brothers and sisters, we will reserve for the married state the gift of our bodies and every kind of romantic/sexual movement. Similarly, we are committed to cultivate minds that are pure and noble in their thoughts and focus. Moreover, we are committed to reveal Christ and the gospel to the world. How can we do this if we are not acting or thinking differently than the world?

Practically speaking, this will mean that if you are sleeping with someone you are not married to, stop. If you are fooling around with a girlfriend or boyfriend—such that it “awakens love before its time”—stop. (“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?” Prov 6:23) If you are looking at or reading porn, stop. If you are too relaxed with the movies or shows you watch, it's time to be prudent. If you are fantasizing and self-gratifying, it's time to change. None of these are God's intention for us. These are all a result of the Fall into sin. They are sin. And they grieve the Holy Spirit in you.

And, none of these will be easy to stop! But there is grace and power in the gospel. The God of grace forgives us when we fall short of his glory. And the Lord of life gives power to triumph, because he himself triumphed in temptation, and then triumphed over death and sin and the devil. His grace and power are ours for the humble and heartfelt asking!

Moreover, we will still stumble. But a stumble is different than a habit/regular practice. While all of us struggle with temptation, we embrace that God's grace and mercy are deeper than we'll ever know. And he will lead us through it: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. When you are tempted, he will provide a way of escape, so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Cor 10:13)

On the other hand, where we habitually practice sin, either celebrating it or being resigned to it, we are no longer walking as children of the light. Don't believe the enemy's lies: there is victory available for all sin, including sexual sin. There is power over temptation. There is forgiveness and hope. There is life-transformation. And there is a deeper joy in a life ravished by Christ, than anything else!

### **Part 4: Here is a journey of healing and ongoing victory**

- Come clean before God: Freely confess to him your sin, your sorrow, and your desire to be healed. Ask him to forgive you. If your sin is with another person, together confess to God and each other. Purpose to please him, no matter what. “Father, I'm sorry for \_\_\_\_\_. Will you please forgive me? Will you give me power to change? I need you and you alone! In Christ's Name I come. Amen.”
- Tell one other Christian about this: when we hold things alone, Satan treads us down. A sense of isolation is a standard tactic of the enemy: “don't tell anyone, no one is as bad as you.” When we get a co-fighter with us, there is greater victory, for there is greater power: “Where two or three are gathered, there I am,” Jesus promises. Don't let a sense of shame, guilt or hopelessness win; start the long walk to healing and holiness with a friend in Christ.

- Perhaps you had a past habit or practice that you now see was not God’s intent (e.g., sexual activity before you were married). Though not in your present, you have a sense of failing God or some shame/regret from that. Take this opportunity to confess your past sin specifically, ask his forgiveness, and thank God for his grace and mercy in leading you out of that.
- Everyone, remember Romans 8:1 – “There is therefore no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The Gospel is GOOD news. Rejoice that God forgives those who ask, and there is no condemnation before him now! See also 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- Dive into The Word. Commit yourself to a HouseChurch or Youth group community, and to regular and engaged presence at church. These are not just “items to check off,” these are our lifelines to holiness and victory. God’s people, striving together to seek him, are exactly the kind of people you want to link up with. (And exactly who the enemy wants to keep you from.)
- Change your practices and routines, know your weak spots and temptations, live your life on a “battle-footing,” knowing this is a battle for your soul and future. “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you,” John Owen said.
- Ask Christ to remove and replace the idols of your heart with the deeper joys and affections in him. Sex is a great gift, but a horrible master. Purpose to fill your mind and thoughts with the glories of Jesus; let him dethrone those imposter idols.

In our culture of sexual ease, our call is to embrace of God’s intention for all of life, including sex. We want to reflect God’s goodness in our character and actions (including sexual expression). Are your life and patterns, then, more like the world’s or like God’s?

Brothers and sisters, thank you for reading this, and taking it to heart. May God grant us repentance and an increasing pursuit of holiness, for his glory and honor, for our greater joy, and for the world’s salvation.

With great hope and joy,  
 The Elders of Grace Fellowship Church  
 July 31, 2016

*For more study:*

- God-intended pleasure of sex & how it bonds husband and wife: Gen 2:24-25, Prov 5:15-20, Song of Solomon, Matt 19:4-6, Heb 13:4
- Children: Gen 1:28-29, Mal 2:15, Psalm 127-128
- Forgiveness and cleansing: 1 John 1:9, James 5:16, 2 Cor 5:21, Acts 3:19-20
- Power to live for him: 1 Thes 4:1-8, 5:24, Gal 5:16-25, Rom 6, 8:1-11, Eph 4:17-5:21, 1 Cor 10:13
- Adultery, fornication, homosexuality: 1 Cor 6:9-11, Eph 5:3-5, Gal 5:19-21
- If fantasizing regularly: use the measuring rod of Phil 4:8 and Eph 5:3 to guide and guard your thought life.