



Asking For A Friend

Does My Sexuality and Gender Define Me?

2 Corinthians 5:11-21
Week of February 7, 2021

Before Connect Group

- 2 Corinthians 5:11-21
- Watch the sermon by going to <http://switzerlandcommunitychurch.org>

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21, ESV

Sermon Notes

Mankind is not able to shape the fabric of existence through wishful thoughts or feeling but we are bound by the laws of the universe that God put in place throughout creation for our benefit and enjoy and His glory!

We are in the middle of a sermon series called "Asking For A Friend" where we look at questions our friends or our friends who name rhymes with ours have about the faith and look to tackle the issues biblically. Pastor Joseph is visiting his family for the weekend and has asked me to step in to answer the easy and non-controversial question of "Does my sexuality and gender define me?" So, for when I undoubtedly offend somebody in this, I have enjoyed my time here...

Some of you are laughing at that, but I know who I'm going to probably offend the most here.

We cannot deny that our current cultural context that we find ourselves in has a real sexuality problem. As a culture, and to a certain extent, as a Christian culture, we have allowed sexuality and gender identity to be defining issues in our lives. And while a majority of the sermon will focus on the particulars of homosexuality and choosing our gender based on our personal feelings, I do not want to let everyone off the hook. The overall trend of the culture is that we have become more and more sexualized. The best comparison would be to compare and contrast television from the 1960s, 1990s and today. Things that would have been unheard of occurring on television now happen on a regular basis. Furthermore, our culture has begun viewing sex and sexual expression as a commodity not a treasure and gift that God has given to His people as a blessing. Sex has become something we take for our own selfish gratification rather than something to be shared between two committed, married people. This is most obviously seen in hookup culture that doesn't view sex as a big deal but just something people do.

This, of course, has had numerous problems on society as a whole, contributing to the idea that sex is something I should take and my urges are something that should not be tamed but that I should give in to just as something "natural." And this effect has rippled through every facet of our lives. Average age of exposure to pornographic images from various studies range from 11 years old... to 8. This is no longer the issue of the youth pastor but the issue of the children's pastor and due to our societal emphasis of weaving sexuality into the DNA of a person identity, we have altered the minds of our most vulnerable who do not have the framework or capacity to process and understand the images they are seeing. Now, we have children in elementary school needing to determine their sexuality and gender identity rather than simply being a child worrying about dodge ball, long division, and what sandwich mom packed for lunch.

We have a sexuality problem in our culture, but not the one you think. The issue is not that our culture has become overly sexualized, although this is certainly a problem, but that we have decided that our gender and our sexuality are integral to our personhood and our identity. We have decided we are sexual beings who may perhaps worship God rather than come to the true conclusion that we are spiritual beings who may perhaps have sex.

The Old Has Past The New Has Come

- For everyone, there is the battle of their old self and the new self in Jesus Christ. The only way the New Self can thrive is when the Old Self is put to death, having been crucified with Jesus Christ.
- Sexuality is an intended gift given by God in the proper context. Where our culture has fed the old self mentality, the new self embraces a God-centric understanding of sex and sexuality.
 - From the outset of creation, sexuality was given to the married couple for the sake of procreation and recreation. The command of God to be fruitful and multiply is a blessing given to people before the fall.
 - Yet, like most things, we sought to take the blessings of God and alter them according to how we sought the world and according to our flesh. We rejected the mind of Christ for our own and sought after our own
 - *Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*
- Gender is a part of God's glorious and intentional design.
 - *Psalms 139:13-14 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*
 - The way God created you was an intentional act to put you in the body you were put in.
 - Yet, because of the fall and the rampant effects of sin in the world, we have people who feel out of place in their own body, thinking that the way they were created was a mistake.
 - Mankind is not able to shape the fabric of existence through wishful thoughts or feeling but we are bound by the laws of the universe that God put in place throughout creation for our benefit and enjoy and His glory!
- As we work through these two sins, and these are sins, we cannot fall into the trap that these are the only two sins in existence currently. So, let's look at the list. Let's take an honest look at things listed alongside of homosexuality.
 - *Romans 1* Idol worship, lust in our hearts, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, bitterness, deceitfulness, maliciousness. Gossips, slanderers, haters of God, the insolent, the haughty, the boastful, disobedient to parents, foolish, heartless, ruthless.
 - Did any of us make it out of that list okay? Or, better question, how many of us identify ourselves as any of those things?
- Before our lives with Christ, we were identified by these things. Our actions laid down the foundation of our identity and placed us in opposition to God. At no point could we stand with God on our own standing and in our own righteousness but could only stand before God fully and absolutely condemned.
 - No matter what a person's actions may be, may have been, or maybe will be, none of those actions do not define a person. The same is true of every other struggle we have faced, not just the issue of sexuality and gender.
 - These, and none of our other sins, serve as a marker or identifier of our identity, but rather have been paid for and bought by the blood of Christ.
 - If we are truly a new creation, then we are no longer under the law that only leads to sin and condemnation but
- If I cannot rightfully say that I am defined at the core of my being by my sinful past, that

I cannot heap those burning coals on the head of someone who earnestly seeks the Lord.

Regarding Not By The Flesh, But By The Spirit

- Everyone has given up something to follow Jesus Christ. The Gospel is good news. And No one is ever too far gone.
 - Ephesians 2:1, ESV And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.
 - If anyone comes to faith, they do so having been dead in their own trespasses and sins. This is not something that does not apply to someone. That means, everyone, in their sins, was dead until God intervened in their life.
 - We do not look for the cure to bad behavior but the cure of life itself.
 - The Gospel should represent this goodnews to people, not just to condemn them for their actions.
 - *Ezekiel 37:4-6 Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord . Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord ."*
- You are no longer identified as a cold black hearted sinner. You are a new creation in Jesus Christ, having been given a new heart and the word of God being placed on your mind. And you happen to commit cold black hearted sins. Your identity has changed and the old is gone. It is this new identity and this new belonging with the Holy Spirit having been placed inside of you, that you are even able to pursue holiness and righteousness.
 - Identity deals with the core of our being, our very essence. Other things may change, but our identity is what makes us fundamentally us.
 - Whenever we define our identity in anything other than having been made in the image of God and having been reborn by the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we force an identity upon ourselves that God fought hard for us to not to have.
 - We must stop with ourselves and others, defining our identity based on our actions, our inclinations, and our desires but on the power of God to rescue sinners from the hands of death and restore souls for His glory.

Ministry of Reconciliation

- *2 Corinthians 5:18-19 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*
- Paul tells the church that their ministry on this earth is a ministry of reconciliation not a ministry of condemnation.
- The question is not in the truth of what scripture says about actions and sexuality, but whether we truly believe that the Gospel is good news.
 - The Church should be a place for people struggling with sin, sexuality, and identity come and find the Gospel.
 - When the Gospel becomes good news, a lost person hears the hope that Jesus saves, loves them, and desires a relationship with them. Not that they will spend an eternity in hell.
 - If we cannot love the lost and hurting stranger then I fear we have no concept of the Gospel and are as lost as the person who we condemn.
- This ministry of reconciliation gets infinitely easier when we start with ourselves.

- Remember, everyone gave up something we held to dearly for the sake of the Gospel.
- All of us have struggled with the giving up things for the sake of the pursuit of God.
- All of us once stood condemned until someone shared the Gospel with us.
- When we understand the depth of our forgiveness and our complete inability to have earned it,
- I have had too many conversations with people I care deeply about, weep tearfully in front of me, struggling deeply and feeling as if there was no safe place to struggle.
 - I have friends scared of return to church fearing the judgment they will receive from those who supposed to believe in a God of grace.
 - And I have friends who will not walk back into church or even talk to me, because of how the church has treated those who struggle with sexuality and gender.
- Do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that we just start being permissive towards these sins or say that the sins are simply fine. They aren't. They are killing people. But to stand and only proclaim that this particular sin is unforgiveable while refusing to apply the same standard to our own is no form of reconciliation.
 - Sins have faces
 - These are not theological concepts or actions, but the lives of people who despartely need a Savior and who need to feel like someone loves them.
 - Those who are hurting and confused need a family that will welcome them in despite the reasons that they give us not to, because THAT is what Christ did for us.
- The Gospel is that, even though we were dead in our sins, that Jesus Christ died for us, paying the penalty of our sins, and that all who put their hope and faith in Him will be with Him for all eternity. The Gospel is that we have a hope that we are more than our actions, more than our sins, more than our gender, and more than our sexuality but that we have worth because God is worthy and loved us first.

One day, we will stand in judgment with God over all the world. As a part of our new identity, being founded in the person of Jesus Christ, we will stand with Jesus Christ having been united with Him by His blood and work on the cross. For now, we demonstrate the grace of God to the world around us that they too might join us in Christ. Our sexuality and our gender identity do no define our worth as a person, but, like everything else, we submit them to the will of the Father who is good and who crafted everything by His righteous and holy hand.

Connect Group Discussion Questions

- How does Jesus give us a new identity? What things defined our old identity? How is our new self defined?
- What is the ministry of reconciliation? How did Jesus inaugurate the ministry of reconciliation? Why do we continue in this ministry?
- What biblical examples can you think of how Jesus treated the outcasts of society? How does this model our response to those in our world who struggle with sexuality and gender identity?
- Why do we sometimes judge others harsher than the standard that we apply to ourselves? Why is this difficult to extend the grace we receive to others?
- Does understanding the grace God has given to us first help us to show grace to others? Why or why not?
- How has God showed you grace? Tell your story of when you came to know Jesus and begin a relationship with Him.

Challenge For The Week

The question of what we do with our guilt and shame find their answer rooted in the Gospel. For the believer, it is an invitation to respond to the work of Jesus Christ. To the non-believer, it is an invitation to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

- Spend some time in prayer considering the depth of forgiveness that God has given to you. Thank God for the gifts of His grace.
- Who is someone in your life that you are easily annoyed by or disagree with their lifestyle choices? Pray for them that God would reveal His grace and love to that person.

