

What's Love Got To Do With It?
Sex in the City
August 3, 2008

Last week, Pastor Aaron led off this series called "What's Love Got to Do with It?", which is about the book of I Corinthians. He gave us a lot of good background last week; that the letters of the New Testament were written in response to situations or questions or issues; that Paul – who wrote I Corinthians – spent about 18 months there establishing this church before going to a town in Asia Minor called Ephesus and that it is from Ephesus that he writes this letter; that Corinth is a major crossroads of trade, transportation, culture, ideas; that Corinth was renowned for its hyper-sexualized culture.

The major themes of I Corinthians are (1) That we are called to holiness (which Aaron defined for us last week as being devoted to God and God's purposes), (2) the church has to learn healthy ways of dealing with conflict (because this church seems to have lots of it), and (3) Demonstrating God-like love (not sappy, touchy-feely love) trumps everything else.

I've already said that it's ironic for me to be preaching this topic. My family was never very open about sex. The only information I ever remember getting from my parents about sex happened the day after I came home way past curfew from a date. It just so happened that the very next day there was an article in the STL Post-Dispatch about teenage sex. They made me read it. That's all I got from them. So I'm not the most comfortable preaching here today, because I'd really rather preach about something else.

There are reasons we are dealing with it today. We're dealing with it because not to would be to skip the majority of three chapters in I Corinthians. Paul wrote those chapters because he knew that his friends were confused about sexuality and he wanted them to know what God thinks about it. And I think in our highly sexualized world, it might bring some clarity into our lives to review what God thinks about all of this.

So Paul does not just come up with the topic of sexuality and decide he's going to teach on it. He's responding to their request for guidance. They brought this issue to him. In fact, there is one situation happening in the church that they brought to Paul that he says is so bad that even the pagans think it's abhorrent. So before we go any further, let's take a look at SEX IN THE CITY of Corinth.

Now I think we live in a hyper-sexualized culture. Sex sells. Sex sells it all. It helps to sell the products we buy, draws viewers to TV shows. It sells the music that gets on the air, it sells hits on Internet sites. It's everywhere we turn. I mean, we even use sex to sell ilss to improve our sex.

Sex in the city of Corinth, and most parts of the Greco-Roman world, was at a completely different level. It was much worse. They saw sex very differently than we do. And one source of their understanding of human sexuality came from their gods.

I was never really big on understanding all the Roman and Greek gods, but I do remember that almost all of them had hyper-active libidos. So if the religious structure that helps you understand the world and the nature of human beings is filled with stories of gods having sex (with each other and with humans) then it is very probable that the culture would reflect that promiscuity.

We learned from Aaron last week that Corinth had a temple to Aphrodite – the goddess of love. And that temple had as many as 1000 temple prostitutes that came down into the city every night. Engaging in sex with one of the temple prostitutes was one way of worshiping or appeasing the goddess Aphrodite. In addition to the temple

prostitutes, many other brothels existed to serve the needs of the thousands of sailors who came through the port.

Pornographic images are not new to the world. They painted them on clay pots and all kinds of things. They even carved directional signs into the stones of the road to help travelers find the brothels. I know we have paid advertising that will direct drivers to seedy video stores, but just imagine if you will that the Modot sign for services at the next exit include the usual universal signs for food and fuel and lodging along with symbols of places to buy sex.

Married women in the ancient world were to dress modestly and remain faithful to their husbands, but there was no expectation of the same for the husband. Men were free to act on their sexual impulses not only with their wives, but also with mistresses or prostitutes.

There was another practice of sex in the city of Corinth that we need to talk about. Paul mentions male prostitutes and the homosexuals who were their customers in chapter 6. What he is talking about was a common and accepted practice throughout the Greco-Roman culture of older men visiting male prostitutes. These male prostitutes were pre-pubescent boys (9-13 years old). The men who frequented these boys did not consider this to be a homosexual act. Plato and Socrates did this. 13 out of the first 14 Roman emperors had wives, mistresses, and male prostitutes. Nero, an especially sadistic and hedonistic man, found one beautiful boy, had him castrated, put a wedding gown on him, held a marriage ceremony and paraded him through Rome to show off his beautiful prize.

This is the world during Paul's lifetime. All of this shapes the understanding of human sexuality in the city of Corinth. All of these ideas and freedoms about sex are the baggage that comes along with the converts to Jesus in the church at Corinth.

So as all this filters down into the life of new Christians in Corinth, they tended to polarize their views on sexuality into two different camps. The first camp are the Hedonists. Now Hedonists believed the highest value in life was pleasure. The purpose of life was to get as much pleasure as you possibly could. So they had a tendency to over-indulge in just about everything, including sex. For the hedonists, it was all about the experience. I searched around this week to find the right theme song for the Hedonists. I think I came up with a good one...it conveys the spirit of hedonism.

Barry White – Can't get enough of your love baby

Hedonists were attracted to Christianity because they heard about a God who loves them (not punishes), so that's pleasurable. This God forgives them, so that's good, you get everlasting life (cha-ching) and this God promises an abundant and joyful life and there's this freedom in Christ.. So they were attracted to Jesus, but they brought their hedonistic lifestyle with them and just like we do with things, they found ways to justify keeping it.

"God loves me and if God loves me then he would want me to do what feels good, right? God gave me these desires so it's OK to act on them, right? I have freedom in Christ, not bound by the Jewish law, so it's permissible, right?" It was difficult for them to see how the call to holiness applied to sexuality because for them, sexuality had never been connected to anything other than physical pleasure.

You can look at this passage from **I Cor 6:12-20** TNIV, you can hear Paul talking directly to the Hedonistic group.

12 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.

They are saying, "I can do whatever I want" "I'm free in Christ". Paul's response – just because it's legal in your city, doesn't make it right. Paul's saying, "If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims."

13 You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."^[a] 17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.^[b]

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins people commit are outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Paul is trying to teach them what sexual holiness is. They have separated the physical act of sex from any meaning or significance. Paul is telling them that when they gave their heart to Jesus, they also gave their body. Holiness is not just about having a heart that is devoted to God, it is also devoting your body to God's purposes. They belong together...that's the way God designed it. They cannot be separated. It's all one treasure. Not like the treasure is in here (points at heart) and the rest of this doesn't matter. It all matters, it's all one treasure.

The King James Version uses the word "fornication" where this version uses sexual immorality. Now there's a word for ya...fornicate! I don't think I've ever said fornicate in a sermon! Sounds pretty ol timey gospel revival, doesn't it. Although it's not too tough to figure out the general meaning of the word "fornicate" from context, I never really new until this week that it literally means "to sell cheaply something that is to be treasured".

Ahhh. It's all one treasure. So is what you are doing with your body honoring God? That's a question for single people and married couples.

Now on the other extreme from the hedonists, we have a group who have embraced the Greek philosophy of Stoicism. The stoics believed that our passions will lead us into trouble so we have to suppress and tame our passions and not allow them to lead us into action. Since passion and desire are pretty significant aspects of sexuality, you can probably guess what they thought about sex. They didn't. They didn't think about it, talk about it, do it. They suppressed sexuality and called it evil. The only time you could engage in sex (even if married) was when it was time to have children. Then it was a necessary evil. You could do it then, but don't enjoy it! Suffer through! This is your sacrifice for the greater good of humanity! Now, I believe I have found the perfect theme song for the stoics "**Don't stand so close to me**" the Police

Now we can see Paul addressing this group as well when we turn to chapter 7:1-5. TNIV

Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote

yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

So Paul is trying to get these extremists to move to a more holy place. He wants them to see that in marriage, sex is a good thing. It's an awesome gift that should not be kept from one another. Do you hear the mutuality in this passage? Sex is part of the ministry of marriage. Marriage is ministry! Marriage is servanthood. Marriage is demonstrating selfless love to your spouse. That's a ministry. And sex is a beautiful part of loving and serving each other. If you want to abstain for a little while as a prayer focus, that's OK, but this idea that sex is evil and should be avoided is for the birds. Celebrate the gift...go have sex! With your marriage partner, of course.

So it's time for the question that this message series is built upon. This is the place last week where Aaron asked to you say the question out loud. I'd like to do this a little differently today...just something a little more fun than reading words off the screen, and it kind of stays with a theme of playing music in this message. Why don't we sing along with Tina Turner today? Are you ready?

What's love got to do, got to do with it?

I'm glad you asked...

Some people think that Christianity has a low view of sexuality and that the world has a higher, freer view. But I believe it's just the opposite. I believe the Christian view of sex is a high and exalted view. Sex has meaning and purpose and contributes to health and joy of a marriage relationship. In the world, sex is just a physical act – that's it. It's empty...there's no meaning.

Paul reminds us of the Biblical picture of sex...that it's a beautiful gift of God inside the marriage covenant. We were created to share and enjoy this gift. Back in chapter six Paul quoted Genesis, "and the two will become one flesh". That's from the story of Adam and Eve and that from the beginning God's design was that sex unifies a man and a woman not just physically, but also spiritually.

Remember in the story of Adam and Eve that they were in the garden and they were naked and they were not ashamed. Sex in the marriage relationship is meant to recreate that more perfect and unbroken relationship of the garden. It's giving yourself totally and wholly to someone – to someone who has already promised to love you just as you have already promised to love them.

Even when the body parts begin to sag or the wrinkles start showing up, or the hair turns grey, or just migrates... Nothing is hidden. And you can be secure in that openness or exposure or nakedness, and not ashamed, because love's got everything to do with it.