



Secrets

/ Have A Sexual Secret (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

By Pastor David Hillis, 24 August 2014

BIG IDEA: Sex and sexual desire are generous gifts from loving God. He loves us so much that He gave us these gifts with strings attached.

- God gave us sex. Not only did He make sex, He gave us sexual desire, a powerful set of emotions that are so powerful they can be hard to contain.
- God's not stressed out about that. He's not wishing for a do-over in that area. God created our appetites, though sin distorts them.

Why God's Amazing Gift Has Strings Attached

1. **Because it's powerful enough to enslave and destroy us.** (vs 12-14)

- Paul is writing to a bunch of fairly new Christians in a town in the Roman Empire called Corinth. This was a city that was given over to the worship of sex. The greatest building in town was the Temple of Aphrodite, where a thousand priestesses served as prostitutes for the town's pleasure.
- The soul was all that mattered and was all that would survive death, so what you did with your body really meant nothing. So they had these phrases like "everything is permissible" or "anything goes".

- Another phrase they use to say back then, Paul records in 1 Corinthians 6:13, was "food for the stomach and the stomach for food". In other words, food, sex...we should just follow our appetites; it's just meant to be.

- Paul also says "No! It does matter! Just because your laws say 'anything goes' doesn't mean that anything you do with your body is good for you!"

God says "I know you think you can handle it; that you can be the exception. But you aren't. The damage and the shame that comes from going outside my safety rules are not worth it. It can master or overcome you." 1 Corinthians 6:12

2. **Because sex when misused drags Christ into the act.** (vs 15-20)

- Believers are so closely joined to Christ on every level of their being that even their physical bodies are united to him, to the point that when you have sex, for example, with a prostitute, or you are using pornography, you are literally bringing Christ into it too.
- Because God lives in you, your body is a dwelling place, a temple, for God. As a Christian, you gave Christ ultimate say in your life. You trusted Him, you gave Him your heart as well as your body.
- Christ gave everything for you to give you life, a future after this one, and He asks you to trust Him not only with your life, but with your body, and the decisions you make with it.

Are you willing, because you want your love for God to be greater than even your love of sex, to deal with the secrets?

Seeking a biblical approach to homosexuality

by Pastor David Hillis

Over the last half century, a divide between those who identify themselves as followers of Biblical Christianity and those who identify themselves as part of the LGBT community has become more and more entrenched. Many who have felt drawn into both communities have been especially hurt by both communities.

God is full of both grace and truth (John 1:14), but human nature makes it easy to gravitate toward either grace or truth on various hot-button issues such as these. Now, more than ever, I believe that the Church needs a solid, biblical approach to homosexuality that is full of both grace and truth. Followers of Christ should not only learn how to hold the two in tension, but how to speak to the balance so that others can more fully reflect the heart, plan and purposes of God.

God's plan distorted, delayed by the Fall

From the beginning of Creation, God has had a good plan for our lives. Ever since the fall of humanity into sin, the enemy of God has tried to convince us to substitute his own distorted plan for God's plan (Ephesians 6:11-12). God is the source of all thoughts that are in line with His will.

Sin originated with Satan, the enemy of God, who was the first to rebel against God, and entered the world through Adam who likewise chose disobedience. Ultimately, since Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the father of lies (John 8:44), all evil originates with him (James 1:13-17). However, our own selfish nature is an ally of Satan's. We need no prompting from Satan to entertain sinful ideas.

Jesus was tempted with ungodly thoughts, yet did not sin (Matthew 4:1, Hebrews 4:15). Likewise, we are not held to account for having ungodly thoughts, but for whether or not we embrace them, act on them, and make them part of our identity.

Those who are not followers of Christ — those who have not, in other words, surrendered control of their lives over to the plan of God — are free to determine which thoughts they choose to embrace and act on. Because they have consciously or unconsciously decided to be the master over their own lives, they are free to live as they want and to decide for themselves what is good or right.

Those who are followers of Christ are called to "take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). God is renewing our minds; we are learning to hear God and are being challenged to conform to God's instruction. As our relationship with God becomes stronger, we learn to determine if our thoughts are part of God's plan for our lives or not, and accept or reject them accordingly.

As we continually do this, we train ourselves to handle thoughts outside of God's plan more quickly and easily, just as an athlete learns to resist urges to be lazy or to eat things that are outside his fitness plan. With time, following a plan for fitness and strength becomes more and more routine; yet, the urges which are counter to that plan never fully go away. In the same way, it's unreasonable to think that a follower of Jesus has the power to eliminate all urges to sin (Romans 7:17-25). A mind being renewed in Christ helps us to get closer to the plan of God, but we will never fully arrive there on this side of Heaven.

Understanding differences in terminology

Before going further, it is crucial to understand the difference between homosexual orientation, identity and behavior, for a lack of understanding causes us to rush to judgments and misunderstandings that only hinder honest, helpful discussion¹:

- **homosexual orientation or predisposition:** The understanding a person has that he/she has ongoing sexual feelings and urges toward persons of the same sex. Though science doesn't fully understand the physical and/or psychological origins of these urges, most recent studies indicate that 2-3% of Americans fall into this category. While a person's inner response to these urges can vary widely, such an orientation is a product of the Fall and is not fully under the control of the individual.

- **homosexual identity:** The self-perception a person has that his/her life is defined by homosexuality, including the decision to be molded and shaped by others in the LGBT community in order to find significance and meaning in life. People are not born with sexual identities, including this one, but rather choose to live into them to explain themselves to themselves and to others.
- **homosexual behavior:** A person's acting out of his/her homosexual urges by engaging in physical intimacy with someone of the same sex. Like identity, behavior is also a choice.

Understanding homosexual orientation

Many believe that homosexual orientation isn't ours to make because it's chosen for us at birth. This has fueled much of the controversy with the Church's stance on the issue. If that theory is true, what does that say about God, and our identity and behavioral decisions?

Some people have theorized that there is a "gay gene" (i.e., that some are biologically predisposed to be homosexual). The line of reasoning goes that "if someone is born that way, he/she shouldn't fight it, but should accept it and embrace it." Proponents often then say that one who acknowledges a homosexual orientation also has to embrace a homosexual identity.

Similar research has been done around an addictive personality or gene, where some are predisposed to much more easily become alcoholics or compulsive gamblers. If that is true, will everyone born with that predisposition become an alcoholic or compulsive gambler? Should he/she just embrace that as a lifestyle behavior, or even as a personal identity? Would it mean that God is OK with someone becoming an alcoholic, despite drunkenness being described in the Bible as outside of God's plan?

The answer to all these questions is "no." A person's predisposition (whether acted upon or not) is going to pull him/her throughout life in that direction. It is a tragic and destructive consequence of the Fall.

Such natural predispositions do not mean that God doesn't exist, or that God is cruel or malevolent. It also doesn't mean that science has shown God's unchanging truth to be in error, or that the Bible was only relevant to a specific period of time. It simply means the world is broken, humans are broken, and both are in need of a redeemer and restorer. God is our redeemer and restorer, but complete restoration will not happen as long as we live under the effects of the Fall.

Do we choose an identity, or is it chosen for us?

Some in our culture believe that sexuality is, and rightly should be, a defining characteristic and the primary source of our identity. Therefore, those who have homosexual urges would have no choice but to embrace their homosexual identity and live into them. In fact, the view on the street is that to do otherwise demonstrates a lack of integrity and a refusal to accept ourselves as we really are. Is there any other option?

God sees things very differently. While each of us have natural inclinations that do not align with God's intentions because of the Fall, the Bible asserts that our identity need not be found in those inclinations. Romans 6:18 says that when Christ sets us free from sin, He binds us to God. That means that as followers of Jesus, we are given a new identity that reigns over everything else, and that redefines who we are. In Christ, our true identity is to be found in nothing other than our relationship to Him, as a child of God (2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 6:15-18, 2 Peter 1:3-9, 1 John 3:1-3).

If I call myself an alcoholic and build my identity around that fact because of a season of my life when I gave into those temptations and/or a predisposition toward alcoholism, I am certainly acknowledging something true about myself, but I am also failing to see myself as God sees me. Likewise, if I call myself an adulterer because I have enjoyed sleeping around, or a liar because I've been dishonest and feel very tempted to be untruthful in those moments, I am defining myself in an unbiblical way. So it is with adopting the identity of "homosexual," or any other sexual identity the Bible says is outside of God's plan.

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we surrender all of our former chosen identities and agree to take on one new identity, one given to us by God. We each become a child of God; we are adopted into God's

family; we are made co-heirs with Christ (Galatians 2:17-20, 3:26; Romans 8:14-17; 1 John 3:1-3, 9-10). In fact, we are no longer even to hold on to identities based on race, ethnicity or nationality (Galatians 3:26-4:7); they have no meaning in Christ. None of these natural identifies are relevant to how God sees us in Christ.

God created the human race to have sexual relations male with female. God gave us a sexual identity that is coded into our physiology. He also created a plan for living out our lives sexually within the safety of a marital commitment, an institution He created for our good. Therefore, any other identity that we embrace — sexual or otherwise — may put us in conflict with the identity God has given us. If we take on two identities that are in conflict with each other, one or the other will ultimately win out (Mark 3:25).

Can we just erase these conflicting predispositions from our lives?

A fundamental problem of thought by many in the ex-gay movement, and the reason why reparative therapy through organizations like Exodus International has been largely unsuccessful, rests in a false way of thinking. The underlying principle and hope in the ex-gay movement has been that counseling and therapy can stop homosexual urges and a predisposition or orientation toward homosexuality could be cured.

If our temptations and inclinations are products of the Fall, no such work to eliminate temptation can be done through our own efforts, any more than an alcoholic through enough AA meetings can eliminate the urge to drink. Such a change in orientation is only possible through the power and grace of God, who can and does at times work such miracles, but more often tends to show His strength through our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:5-10).

Historical positions on LGBT issues in the Church

The Church has usually taken one of 5 positions on LGBT issues. After much study, prayer, and counseling with those I have pastored over the years, I have landed on the 3rd position:

1. **Condemnation** – homosexuality is not Scriptural and its practice should be condemned outright;
2. **Change** — homosexuality is not Scriptural but can be fixed through healing & recovery (ex-gay movement stance);
3. **Celibacy** — homosexuality is not Scriptural and we are expected to abstain from it, as with all other things outside the will of God;
4. **Accommodation** — homosexuality isn't sanctioned by Scripture but may be morally acceptable today; therefore, acceptance of monogamous homosexual relationships should be morally tolerated;
5. **Affirmation** — homosexual relationships are affirmed as a positive good.

A proper response of the Church

What should the response of the Church be to someone who declares him/herself to be part of the LGBT community? The answer depends on whether or not they have made a decision to be a follower of Jesus.

1. If this person has not made a decision to follow Christ, the mission of the Church is to help him/her understand the Good News of the Gospel. The Gospel is good news to all humanity, regardless of how any person has chosen to live. He/she also needs to understand that having an inner pull toward homosexuality does not disqualify anyone from being able to receive or live out the Good News, just as it does not disqualify them from God's love. Condemning, casting judgments, or pulling away from those who consider themselves to be homosexual is not only misguided but damaging, and prevents self-declared members of the LGBT community from finding a place in the family of God.

2. For self-identified homosexuals who have made a decision to follow Christ, the Bible indicates that as a part of ongoing discipleship and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church is to help them come to understand what it means to have their identity rooted in Christ as children of God, forsaking all other identities. The Church does so not because of personal preferences, but because God in His Word instructs us in this way.

Discipleship includes explaining the difference between predispositions and lifestyle choices, or between the thoughts we have and the mindsets we lock ourselves into. Doing so helps us understand and be at peace with the reality that we are not in control over sinful thoughts and desires, and we are never judged for having them. The Church must help people understand that through the power of Christ, as children of God, we are able to set aside our old identities and embrace God's identity for us. (2 Peter 1:3-4).

3. Furthermore, as the Church seeks to fully embody truth and grace, individual churches need to become places where abstaining from sin is encouraged, supported and celebrated. The Church should be a safe place where individuals resisting these urges can work through their struggles in a pursuit of celibacy. Today it is generally accepted that the Church can be a place for those struggling with addictions, as we see with Celebrate Recovery ministries in churches across the country. In recent years, the Church has finally started creating spaces for those struggling with unbiblical heterosexual urges. We need to develop the same sort of purity/accountability groups for those struggling with homosexual urges as well.

4. As individuals we cannot minimize the power of listening well, by asking open-ended questions and paraphrasing back what we think we understand. We should make it our goal to defer giving our opinions with those who consider themselves to be homosexual, until he/she genuinely wants to know what we think God says about the issue. Virtually everyone in the LGBT community already knows what the biblical view is. Rushing to God's view from the Bible or our own convictions can unintentionally hurt the trust-building process and push someone away. The time to answer those questions is after trust is built and the other person has been fully heard and understood.

5. As members of the Body of Christ, we must love those who identify themselves as part of the LGBT community and remember that the transformational work of God is a work He is doing in all of us to strengthen us and help us to reflect Christlikeness in our world. Through prayer, we can help bring God's plan to pass in our own lives, in the lives of those we love, those who find their way into our lives and those who find their way into the Church.

Footnotes

¹ This separation and explanation of these terms was handled well in *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* by Dennis P. Hollinger, p172-73.