



# THE CITY GATES CHURCH

*Love God. Love Others*

## **Romans 1:18-32 When Sex Is God Part Two**

**Summary:** We must know the boundaries of sex, know our spouse, and know that sex is not God.

We have paused our verse-by-verse study through Romans in order to take a hard look at sexual sin. We're doing this because sex and sexuality are so important Scripture presents them as emblematic of a life of rebellion against God if done wrong. Of all the sins God could have used to represent a life completely given over to selfish pursuits, He chose to highlight sexuality.

Romans chapter one makes an argument and you need to understand it's flow. First, God reveals Himself to everyone, everywhere. All throughout time and all around the world, God calls out to people. But the default reaction of the human heart is to suppress what we can know about God – to ignore, resist, explain away, or just flat out deny Him and His ways instead of listening and seeking Him. By default, people want to be their own God – make their own decisions, do their own thing, their own way.

Fortunately, God is patient – He endures rebellion and resistance to a point, persistently nudging people to see Him and recognize Him. He wants you to confess your need for Him and move toward Him. But if you continually refuse and reject Him, He will eventually give you over to your sin and allow you to run headlong toward destruction and eternal judgement. Characteristic of that kind of life is sexual sin, specifically homosexuality. So, notice, here is

### **The Problem: Misshaped sexuality is characteristic of suppressing God's truth**

Look with me at

**Romans 1:26** For this reason [because they suppressed the truth they knew about God] God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

This is why we say, sexuality is always an issue of authority over attraction. That's the principle that determines the Christian view of sex and sexuality.

### **The Principle: Sexuality is always authority over attraction**

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Our sexual boundaries and behaviors are not determined by what we're attracted to, aroused by, or encouraged to do – the question is always, who or what tells me which urges, impulses, or ideas I should follow? Whose authority am I under?

You're going to go along with someone. It might be yourself – once puberty hits we all start to wake up sexually, we have certain drives, impulses, and interests. What will you do with them? Do you follow whatever desire enters your head, or do you put boundaries around those desires?

Do you allow your boyfriend or girlfriend or hookup to determine what's OK? When they pressure you, invite you, or lure to do things, do you go along or resist?

Do you listen to the culture allowing it to mold you and tell you what you should and shouldn't do, when, and with whom and how?

Do you let your friends pressure you – do they get to decide what you should be doing, with whom, when, and how?

*Someone will be the authority.* Someone will set the standard. Someone will say what's OK and what's not OK. Someone will make the rules. Why not let it be the God who created you, the God who created the very possibility of sex? Why not go by the manufacturer's instructions? Which brings us to our goal:

### **The Goal – Sexuality submitted to Jesus**

If sexual sin is called out in Romans One as the apex of suppressing truth and resisting God, our goal should be to turn around, to repent, and bring sex and sexuality back under His authority, to receive what God reveals about sex and to accept it and embrace it, to recognize His authority over our sexual interests and activities – not my urges and impulses, not the pressures of my friends, or my boyfriend or girlfriend, not the pressure of the culture I live in, but God. Let God be your authority.

Sexuality to submitted Jesus, is really the goal for all of life. We want to bring every aspect of life under His authority. By God's grace and with His strength we want to resist temptation on all fronts – and that's a battle God wants to help us win. He doesn't just cheer for us, He instructs us, equips us, and strengthens us for the effort.

We want to bring each of our impulses, ideas, and feelings to God and say, I will serve You, not these. I will serve You and not my anxiety. I will serve You and not my anger. I will serve You and not my pride. I will serve You and not my greed. Friends, again, the goal for our sexuality is the goal for all of life – to be submitted to what God has revealed, and not to suppress the truth.

We want to ask God to be our daily bread and to give us that bread when we need it.

So, what does sexuality submitted to Jesus look like? What should be the goal of every human being when it comes to sex? We'll cover three answers this morning – know the boundaries, know your spouse, and know that sex isn't God.

Last week we established the fact that God invented sex – and He made it both productive and pleasurable, for procreation and recreation. Sex and sexuality are inherently good, they were made for a good reason, by a good God. Do you know that? Do you believe that? Do you have a healthy, proper, God-exalting view of sex?

That's a wild and disorienting thing to say, isn't it? No one talks like that, but you *can*, and you *should* have a God-exalting view of sex.

You're going to think about sex, are your thoughts accurate? Are they right? Whether you think about it all the time or you try not to think about it at all – when you think of sexual intimacy and sexuality, do you ever think about it in light of the fact that God designed it, God intended it, God put it right at the center of human experience - and the Bible says God gives good gifts?

So, yes, you should have a God-exalting view of sex and that comes from seeing it, appreciating it, understanding it, in the boundaries He created for it, so you need to know the boundaries.

### **Know the Boundaries**

And those boundaries are celibacy outside of marriage and chastity within it. That means your sexuality is only to be shared with one person, the person you make a life-long, covenantal, commitment with.

Probably the best illustration I have ever heard of this is that of a fire in the fireplace. People are drawn to fire. It's so relaxing and soothing that we have gas fireplaces so you can make it look and feel like you've got a fire going with the flip of a switch. Even if you don't have a fireplace, you can go on YouTube and find a continuous loop of logs burning, complete with the occasional crackle and snap.



Fire is also a useful tool. Several winters ago, we lost power in a large storm but I was able to build a fire in the fireplace in our living room, rig a sling to hold a pot, and boil water. We made coffee and oatmeal and huddled near the hearth for warmth. That fire made our lives better when we needed it.

But what happens if you move that exact same fire two feet outside the fireplace, into the living room? Disaster. You still have flames. You still have heat. You still have crackling. But now it's coming from the couch, and that's not good.



You've probably seen something like this before. A house burns down and what's the only thing still standing? The fireplace and the chimney – the place where the fire belonged. Let that thought settle in.

So, we see two different ways to experience the same thing – fire can be good, enjoyable, even helpful, when it's in the right place or it can be devastating, destructive, and consuming when it is not.

Now consider this – fire can start inside the house – you might not be involving anyone else physically – you're just looking at stuff. Or it might come from outside the house, say a wildfire for example that comes from involving someone you're not married to. Either way, fire that is not contained by the fireplace will lead to destruction.

We'll talk about pornography next week but let me take a minute to talk about hookup culture – the attempt to normalize sex without commitment. According to Scripture we should practice celibacy outside of marriage and chastity inside marriage, now the latest studies and exploration in neuroscience back this up.

My wife introduced me to the work of Dr Joe Malone through some podcasts she came across at work. He holds a Ph.D. in Health and Human Performance with a minor in neuropsychology and a specialization in women's health and sexual wellness. He's been a professor and guest lecturer at several schools including Vanderbilt and Princeton. One of the things his research has uncovered is the damaging aspects of an open and free attitude toward casual sex.

Dr Malone's research shows that the faster sexual intimacy enters a relationship, the less likely the relationship is to last. He explains it in neurological terms that I'm not smart enough to summarize, but basically it takes at least four months of exclusive relationship between a man and a woman before sufficient attachment has been formed in the man's brain leading him to want to remain in the relationship.

If they rush to physical intimacy before that, before at least four months of non-sexual emotional bonding, those connections will not properly establish in his brain and neither will his sense of commitment. The research shows, the relationships in which sexual intimacy is achieved most quickly, also end the fastest.



And, the rush toward intimacy damages future relationships too. According to his research and other research I reviewed this week from the National Institutes of Health, one of the top indicators of adultery and divorce in later relationships is the number of premarital partners a person has had – as that number goes up, the likelihood of a permanent, pure, life-long marriage goes down.<sup>1</sup>

It turns out there really are consequences baked in for those who misuse what God has created, for those who [suppress the truth \(Rom 1:18\)](#). You can kick and push against it all you want, you can deny and ignore it, you can make excuses for why you should be able to do it your way, but you can't completely disarm the consequences – when you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters.

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<sup>1</sup> Re-Examining the Link Between Premarital Sex and Divorce. Published online 2023 Feb 12: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10989935/>

So, here's what you have to remember – God never said don't enjoy the fire – He just said keep it in the fireplace. Boundaries are good things.

God's best plan is for most men and women to pair up, get married, and for sexual intimacy to be a part of that exclusive, life-long commitment. God's best plan is for both man and woman to be surrendered to each other, to enjoy and delight in each other, to fully and completely trust the loyalty of each other. In God's best plan, the man and woman are able to be naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25), the marriage bed is undefiled (Heb 13:4), there are no regrets and no baggage – both he and she are fully known and fully loved.

And now, here's something interesting – that phrase, that you are fully known and fully loved, is something I've only ever heard used in light of the gospel. It's used to convey the idea that God knows everything about you, and loves you anyway. There's nothing you can hide and no way He'll reject – you are fully known and fully loved.

But when Scripture makes the first reference to sexual intercourse, it's described as a man “knowing” his wife.

Which brings us to our next point – you need to know the boundaries for sexuality, but you also need to know your spouse.

### **Know your spouse**

Listen to what the Bible says:

**Genesis 4:1** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”

**Genesis 4:17** And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.

**1 Samuel 1:19** And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.

In the book of Judges a virgin is described this way:

**Judges 11:39** She knew no man.

Many translations over simplify it.

- NIV – lay with
- NASB – had relations
- NLT – slept with

But the Hebrew is *yadah* and it means ‘to know’ to perceive, to discriminate or distinguish, to know by experience. Intercourse is an expression of intimacy, but something more than physical is happening – the Bible says two are becoming one

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(Gen 2:24) and something is being learned. There is a knowledge and experience of each other that no one else is ever meant to discover or share.

Think about that, because here's what it means: you are made to be *known*, fully known – and you are made to be loved, fully loved, by God and by your spouse and sexual intimacy, within the bounds of marriage is one way you know and are known. My friends, this is God's good, good plan!

The problem is, instead of accepting God's good plan for sex, people [suppress the truth](#) and try to turn sex into god. Which brings us to our third point this morning, you need to know sex is not God.

### **Know that sex isn't God**

We live in a confused culture that says sex is everything, and sex is nothing.

Sex is everything. You can't suppress it, or deny it, or tell anyone else what they cannot do. Sex and sexuality must be liberated, set free from all boundaries. I am my sexuality and my sexuality is me - and that's everything from transgenderism, to homosexuality, to the need for unrestricted access to contraception and abortion, which is really just another way of saying the same thing.

The whole argument behind access to abortion is, if contraception didn't work, or wasn't used before pregnancy, then terminating the life of an unborn child should be a substitute for a condom or the pill. And the argument is, people should be able to have that access because, if you suppress my sexuality, or punish me for having sex, you suppress me. Sex is everything.

But then on other the hand, the message is, sex is nothing – there are no borders, no boundaries, no restrictions, because it doesn't really mean anything or do anything. You don't need to be in a relationship, you don't need commitment, you don't have to be chained down by any of that and you shouldn't expect the other person to be chained down to you. All that matters is consent, so if you're both in the mood, go for it.

The problem is: it can't be both at the same time. Sex cannot be both everything and nothing at the same time. But this is kind of situation we create when we suppress God's truth and ignore His boundaries, when, instead of submitting our sexuality to Jesus, we make a god out of it, we submit to sex and let it run our life.

When we do that, sex begins to undo us. It begins to reverse everything we were made for. Instead of bringing two parties together as one or creating new life, my sexuality says this is all about me - my desires, my wants.

I suspect this is why it's pictured in Romans one as emblematic of a person given over to their own desires. It's because allowing yourself to be driven by your impulses and urges ultimately drives you away from God and your spouse.

Let me show you how this works and how your sexuality can actually put on a religious mask and lure you into thinking you're righteous.

You might be single and saying, I can't wait to get married so I can finally have sex and all the sex I want and then I won't have such a struggle with lust.

My friend, that way of thinking is a trap. Sex is still controlling you, you just want to worship it in a "better" place.

You're asking your future spouse to be your buffet so you can satisfy your appetite. You're looking forward to the day when you can use your spouse for your own selfish desires and say it's OK, because, after all, you're married. Perhaps you're already married and this is exactly what you're doing.

Listen to this:

**Eph 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

And now think about what you're expecting your spouse to do and be for you physically – do the two match up?

What's your driving impulse as you view your spouse? Are you hoping to sanctify her, cleanse her, and sacrifice yourself for her? Or, are you asking her to be an outlet for your urges and desires? Are you loving her when you say you're 'making love to her?'

Friends, here's the truth: your expectations of your spouse might not always be loving. Even if your spouse deeply cares for you, there will be times when they can't be available due to travel, illness, injury, or pregnancy. If you rely on them to keep yourself in check, what will you do when they're unable to support you?

And, what kind of burden are you putting on them? Are you asking your spouse to carry the burden of keeping your sin in check? Do you make them feel guilty or coerced into what should be the defining act of intimacy in your marriage because you can't control yourself?

You're actively undermining your spouse instead of supporting their growth in holiness. You need to repent to God and your spouse for expecting them to bear such heavy burdens – for the damage you cause by allowing sex to become your god.

I want to say again, our sexual desires can be good *if* they are properly shaped and formed – they are a powerful impulse and urge to point us toward our spouse, to point us into the relationships we are meant to have with God and with each other. Desire

can be a blinking light on the dashboard of our lives that says go, spend time with your spouse, be fully known and fully loved.

And if you're single, it's telling you – go, find a spouse – not a soul mate, but someone who also loves Jesus and can do life with you, that you can help each other on the path to holiness, and not just by satisfying sexual desire, but by being fully known and fully loved.

No matter who you are, married or single, male or female, young or old – look to God for your ultimate satisfaction and don't make a sad, shameful little god out of sex. Don't take it upon yourself to satisfy all your desires and don't shackle anyone else with those burdens either. If you make a god out of sex, it will never satisfy you. Only God is able to provide ultimate, enduring, satisfaction – way down deep at the level of our soul.

Consider the testimony of Scripture:

**Ps 73:25** Whom have I in heaven *but You?*  
And *there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*  
26 My flesh and my heart fail;  
*But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

**Ps 63:1** O God, *You are my God;*  
Early will I seek *You;*  
My soul thirsts for *You;*  
My flesh longs for *You*  
In a dry and thirsty land  
Where there is no water.  
2 So I have looked for *You in the sanctuary,*  
To see *Your power and Your glory.*

**Isiah 58:11** The LORD will guide you continually,  
And satisfy your soul in drought,  
And strengthen your bones;  
You shall be like a watered garden,  
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

**John 7:37** On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Imagine that – you're thirsty, you're driven by desire – so you come to Jesus, and He doesn't just fill you, He fills you until you overflow. You are wholly and completely satisfied in the God who made you.

This the life you were made for. This is what your life can be. You don't have to be driven by your sexuality or by the sexual desires of someone else. God gave you gender and sexuality, they are good gift to be used within proper boundaries – to enable you

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to know and to be known in an exclusive, permanent partnership by someone who loves God and loves you. Don't get it twisted. Submit your sexuality to God, don't turn it into your god.

Maybe you've made a mess of things by trying to look out for yourself – scheming and conniving to get what you want. Confess and repent. Submit your sexuality to Jesus and let God give you what you need.

Maybe someone else made a mess out of you as they tried to satisfy themselves for a moment. That's not what you were made for. There is something better instore. Take your tears and your shame to God. He knows, and He cares. He really loves you.

Remember the promise:

**1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

If you've messed up, if you struggle, whether it's every now and then, or all the time – you can be forgiven, you can be cleansed. You can repent. You can receive what God reveals instead of suppressing the truth. You can walk in the Spirit instead of the flesh. You can move toward God's blessings instead of His wrath.

There is nothing you have done, and nothing that has been done to you that God doesn't know about.

There is no thought in your mind or desire in your heart that He doesn't know about.

And yet, you're never too dirty for Jesus - whether you did it yourself or someone did it to you.

So, talk to Him about it. Ask for forgiveness, ask for strength, ask for healing, ask to be made new. Ask to be made holy. Whatever you need, ask God for it. He wants to give.

Let's pray.



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## **Romans 1:18-32 When Sex Is God Part Two**

### **Sermon Application and Discussion Questions**

**Summary:** We must know the boundaries of sex, know our spouse, and know that sex is not God.

1. What are some common challenges or pressures that make it difficult to submit our sexuality to Jesus? How can we overcome these challenges with God's help?
2. How do you personally respond to the idea that sexuality is a reflection of our rebellion against God?
3. In what ways does culture influence our understanding and practice of sexuality? How can we discern and resist cultural pressures that conflict with God's design?
4. What are some specific ways that friends, media, or societal expectations have influenced your views or behaviors regarding sexuality? How can you evaluate and adjust these influences to better align with God's truth?
5. How can studying Scripture and seeking God's wisdom help you better understand and appreciate His design for sexuality? What specific passages or teachings have been particularly impactful in shaping your view?
6. According to the sermon, how should sexual intimacy be viewed within marriage? What are some ways couples can cultivate a healthy, God-centered approach to their sexual relationship? What are practical steps to practice celibacy and manage sexual desires before marriage?
7. How does the concept of "knowing" your spouse extend beyond physical intimacy to emotional and spiritual dimensions? How can couples work towards a deeper understanding and connection with each other?
8. When faced with sexual temptations or desires, how can you remind yourself that God's authority should guide your actions? What practical strategies can help you stay aligned with His guidance?
9. How can couples ensure that their sexual relationship enhances their marriage rather than becoming a source of conflict or unrealistic expectations? What are some healthy practices for fostering intimacy and mutual respect?
10. How can studying Scripture and seeking God's wisdom help you better understand and appreciate His design for sexuality? What specific passages or teachings have been particularly impactful in shaping your view?

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **1 John 1:9***

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