



THE CITY GATES CHURCH

Love God. Love Others

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

Summary: God has a plan for our sexuality and it's a good one.

One of the commitments we have made in this church is to allow God to speak to us through Scripture, and to listen to *everything* He has to say, the stuff that is encouraging and comforting and the stuff that is challenging and difficult. We go verse by verse, for better or worse.

That commitment brings us to Romans chapter one where the apostle Paul explains why the whole world needs Jesus. He says God reveals Himself to people everywhere – but the default reaction of the human heart is to suppress the truth when it gets in our way.

Fortunately, God is patient with us. But, if people persist in their rejection and resistance, something terrible happens: God gives them over to their sin. He stops pulling them back, and Romans gives us a list of behaviors which result, chief of which is sexual sin. Specifically, homosexuality.

Look with me at

Romans 1:24 Therefore [because they suppressed the truth they knew about God] God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason 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.

Friends, here is something we don't often think about: there is something eternally significant about our sexuality. Of all the sins that could have been spotlighted here, sexual sin is emphasized as the epitome of a life resisting God. And so, we're going to pause our verse-by-verse study for a few weeks in order to think about our sexuality in light of Scripture.

We're going to take on subjects like pornography, adultery, homosexuality and premarital sex. We're going to look at what God has to say about who we sleep with and what we do in our bedrooms. It will be awkward and uncomfortable at times.

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But here's what I hope we get out of this. I hope we see hearts pointed at Jesus, hearts that are satisfied and full of joy. I hope we all grow closer to God, become more satisfied in who He is, what He is doing, and why He has made us. I hope that if God is calling you to give something up, you will do it, by faith, believing that you will gain even more.

I hope to see satisfied, confident, single men and women – some waiting and praying for the spouse they will share life with while others are surrendered, intentionally, and willingly, to a life with only Jesus.

I hope to see this sanctuary swelling with marriages that feel like a source of strength, unity, joy, satisfaction and peace even when the world outside is falling apart.

I hope to see deep connections among people who carry each other's burdens - the kind of bonds that happen as you help one another put the flesh to death, kill old habits and addictions, restore what is lost and heal what is broken.

I hope the cynical and the tired become willing to try again believing, with only the remaining fragments of their faith, that maybe God really can and really will help them change and if so, they're willing.

I believe that all of this is attainable- it's all offered through Jesus, it's what we were meant to have.

Why are we doing this?

I'll give you four reasons.

First, because sexuality is a big deal. I want to emphasize again, that of all the sins that God could highlight as the epitome of being given over to sin, He chose sexual sin.

This isn't something we can agree to disagree about. This is a first-tier issue. Romans 1 isn't the only place sexual sin is addressed, and it's not the only place to say clearly that sexual sin has eternal consequences. Take 1 Corinthians 6 as just one example, it says:

1 Cor 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Ten sins are listed here. Four of them have to do with sexuality – and there is no prejudice or discrimination – it lumps together homosexuals and heterosexuals and says they're all wrong. Eternity is at stake. Sex and sexuality are a really big deal.

Second, this is a discipleship issue. These subjects are prominent in our culture, our families, and our church. Sexual sin is not just something they deal with over there, it's

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something happening in here and it's happening to all kinds of people. Teens are tempted sexually. Women are tempted sexually. Old men do not grow out of their temptations. We all need to know what God says about sexuality and how to respond to the ideas, images, and impulses that come into our minds.

And if this isn't you – if sexual desires and temptations have never been a challenge for you, or if this is a dragon you've already conquered, I hope you'll be equipped to minister to others. Imagine a congregation full of people competent to counsel in this issue - to help their kids, siblings, friends and coworkers think clearly about these things *and overcome them* through the gift of the gospel. Who does God want to reach through you? Who can you help?

Third, this is a relationship issue. Obviously, your sexuality affects your relationship with God. It also affects your relationship with your spouse. But here's something you may not be thinking of: the choices you make regarding your sexual behaviors affect your relationship with your kids and your grandkids.

It's multi-generational – because your inability to control yourself sexually may impact whether you even have kids or whether your marriage stays intact. One day your kids may have to try to explain to their kids why grandma and grandpa aren't married anymore. When that day comes, I don't think you'll say that satisfying your sexual urges were worth it.

Fourth, this is a gospel issue. After listing all the sins we read in 1 Cor 6, the next thing Paul says to the Christians in that church is

1 Cor 6:11 *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

Here's the good news: your past doesn't have to trap you or define you. Jesus can make ANYONE clean.

In this church we celebrate transformation. And, we talk about things that separate us from God and things that separate us from each other - that means we talk about sin. It's OK to not be OK. But it's not OK to stay there.

I recognize the coming weeks will be hard for us at times, it's going to cut close and feel personal, so I want to share some things up front, some general principles, in order to shape our time together and help you know how to take what I'm saying and where I'm going. So let me give you some general principles that will guide us.

General principles

#1. I'm speaking as a pastor. I'm not a professor presenting a paper at a seminar. I'm not an expert in all the finer points of these issues. I'm also not a therapist addressing your specific circumstances. One of the greatest challenges of being a pastor is

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speaking to a room full of people with diverse circumstances – I might not address your specific situation very well. That's OK – we're here to talk about what's true for everyone. If you want to discuss the details of your personal situation there are better settings for that and I encourage you to seek them out. Having said that, I do warn you against thinking you're the exception to what is true for everyone else.

Finally, I'm not a politician – I'm not here to address public policy – I know what the law of the land says about the issues. But I'm here as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God to tell you what Scripture says no matter where you land personally.

#2. My goal is to speak with both clarity and kindness, truth and grace, justice and mercy. Jesus said hard things, but sinners came to hear Him. I can't stand here and tell you all your sexual impulses and experiences are OK. I can't tell you that's it not a big deal. But, I'm here to draw you in, not push you out.

#3. Distinctions matter. If you're going to understand these issues well, you need to know there's a difference between temptation and sin – there is a line between impulse and behavior. You can be tempted without sinning. That's what happened to Jesus in the desert after His baptism.

Scripture says it like this:

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

When you have an intrusive thought, an impulse or a memory, you're being tempted. But you have not sinned, yet. Sin requires intent and action. You absolutely must appreciate this distinction because while God judges your sin, He sympathizes with you in your temptation and, as we will see, He helps you resist.

There is also an important distinction between conviction and condemnation. Both occur after we've messed up, after we've sinned – but they come from two different sources and lead in two different directions.



Condemnation is soul-crushing, self-defeating negativity that comes from Satan, who Scripture describes as our accuser. Condemnation drives us away from God to sulk in our failures and tell ourselves how much we suck. Conviction comes the Holy Spirit. He also says what we've done is wrong, but He pushes us toward Jesus to find forgiveness and restoration.

When you read the Bible, you don't find Jesus crushing people caught in sexual sin. He's hard on the self-righteous, but to people stuck in their sin – prostitutes, people having affairs, people sleeping around outside of marriage – He is gentle and merciful offering forgiveness and a way out.

If you feel a sense of shame about your actions and choices, do not let it drive you away from God, let it push you toward Him. Don't go around moping about your

weakness. Don't believe the lies. You were made for more than this, and you can overcome it. Which brings me to our fourth general principle.

#4. You can change. Some of you may have been dealing with things quietly and personally for years, deep down you might doubt that God will change you. I'm here to tell you, He can, and He will. God does not want to leave you in sexual brokenness. The same gospel that saves your soul will set you free from this sin – maybe not the *temptation*, but the *sin* of acting on it. God doesn't want you half-saved - He wants you filled with faith, love, and truth. But here's the thing – that transformation might look like a miracle, or it might be a mud run.

Long before Spartan races were invented, I ran my first Mud Run at Camp Pendleton in Southern California. It was 10k, so 6 miles, running over, under, and through all sorts of obstacles including deep, sticky, mud. We literally duct taped our shoes to our feet so they didn't come off in the muck. It was a challenge, but that's why we felt so good after it was over – we did it!



Well, when it comes to your fight with sexual temptations and sins, God might miraculously pick you up, clean you off, and set you down six miles later. Or, He may lead you through six miles of sweat, struggle, and strain. You may stumble and fall. You may backslide. You may need to repent all over again. You may wish God would make it easy for you. That's not a bad wish. But, for most people, it's going to be hard and that's OK. God is walking with you. People are ready to help you. By God's grace and with His strength, *you can change*.

Alright, that's a lot of introduction but it's important to get some of these things in place because they're going to shape the way we understand everything else we talk about.

So let me back up for a minute and say again why we're looking at this issue in depth – it's because Paul lays out a pattern in Romans: God reveals Himself, people suppress the truth, and then God gives them over to their desires and sin, and characteristic of that release is a movement toward sexual sin.

So, if you remember nothing else, I hope you will remember that our attitudes about sexual issues of all kinds – every sexual expression you can think of boils down to this: at root, it's not an issue of attraction, it's an issue of authority.

Sexuality is an issue of authority, not attraction.

I'm never interested in having a conversation about who or what someone is attracted to, or how strong their desires are, I don't doubt those things happen – they happen in me – pastors have sexual desires and temptations too. The question is not who or what am I attracted to, the first question is always, *whose authority am I under?*

When I feel an impulse, an urge, a sense of excitement or arousal, who or what determines whether that's something I should follow? Is it, my body, my choice? Or is it thou shalt not commit adultery? Do I determine my own truth and ethics, or does

someone or something outside of me tell me what I should pursue and what I should deny?

Friends, this is the central question of sexual ethics – it's not what do I feel, it's *what do I believe*? Sexuality is always an issue of authority before it's an issue of attraction.

But, you also need to know, God is good. He sets boundaries, but He sets them in good places. There are reasons for the things He says yes to and the things He says no to.

You need to know: God invented sex. That seems so basic I feel stupid saying it. But we forget it at times. We don't want to think theologically about sex. But the fact of the matter is, God designed the boy parts and the girl parts and He made them to go together. God is the one who said this is what men and women are going to do together. This is how you're going to make babies. And if you remember, the command in Genesis chapter one was, 'Go, make a lot of babies.'

I don't want to be scandalous here, but I've got to be real and in a weird sense give God the praise He deserves: not only did God invent sex, He made the whole thing fun and feel good.

So think about that – think about sex theologically – you think about it enough on your own, I'm just asking you to think about it in light of God – everything you enjoy about intimacy was made possible by God. He didn't have to give you those nerve endings in those places. He didn't have to design you to react the way you do and feel the things you do.

Let me say it as plainly as I can – it's not essential for you to enjoy being aroused. But you do, because God designed you that way. He gave you that capacity. He wanted to bless you.

Many years ago, I had a slice of cheesecake from a place in New Jersey that was so good, it led me to fast from eating as an act of worship to God. Here's why – as I was eating that delicious, creamy slice of desert with caramel and apple woven into it and a thick graham cracker crust, I realized – the only reason I enjoy this is because God gave me tastebuds, and He didn't have to!

There's no reason for me to enjoy eating – I just need calories and nutrients, and I could get them many other ways – including chewing bamboo like a panda. But God gave me the capacity to taste and to enjoy what I'm eating!

Friends, God didn't just give us the Ten Commandments, He also gave us the capacity to enjoy, to experience delight and pleasure, including sensual pleasure. We might misuse the gift, but the gift itself, the original capacity was put in place by the generous, joyous, God who loves us.

I know this going to sound wild to some of you, perhaps even scandalous or blasphemous, but if you're under His authority and following His commands, you should be able to praise God for the pleasures you experience, even sexually.

I'm going to be honest – that's super awkward for me to say, as a pastor, from the pulpit, but here's the thing – people talk about sex and sexuality all the time, and God is almost always left out of the conversation. Even among Christians, we don't often reflect on His role, if anything, we just reflect on His rules – and sometimes that's in order to avoid them or get around them.

So we come to this strange moment in time when I feel like it's my obligation to say, almost everything you enjoy about sexuality and arousal was designed by God *and you may not be giving Him the glory for it.*

Maybe, if you could see and understand it all the right way, you could appreciate that God really does have a good plan and purpose for you. Maybe you could see and appreciate that not only does He give you appetite, but He also wants to guide you in how best to satisfy it. Maybe, if you understood how good God is, you would be more open to trusting and following Him.

So, let's take a look at what Scripture teaches about intimacy.

We read in the first pages of Scripture, regarding Adam and Eve, before the first sin:

Genesis 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

The book of Proverbs, written thousands of years ago warns of the dangers of sexual temptations and commends faithfulness to your spouse:

Proverbs 5:18 Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.

The Song of Solomon has repeated descriptions of two lovers:

Songs 7:1 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a skillful workman.

7 This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts like its clusters.
8 I said, "I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of its branches."

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The message continues in the New Testament. The apostle Paul gives practical instruction for marriage:

1 Corinthians 7:3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Heb 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

What's the point? God designed you with the capacity for sexual arousal and pleasure. You're not supposed to suppress it, or deny it, but you're also not supposed to let it run wild. You're supposed to use it according to His plans – within the confines of marriage and when you do, God's intent is that you be fulfilled, satisfied, AND connected to Him and your spouse.

If we will see, hear, and accept God's revealed authority – if we will live in it and under it instead of suppressing it, we won't shrivel and starve. We will thrive in safe and secure relationships.

People will be satisfied sexually within the bounds of their own marriages. In a healthy marriage the husband and wife enjoy each other and intimacy is frequent. Not only that, it's safe – there's no fear of unwanted pregnancy or disease, no shame of getting caught. There's no betrayal or baggage because the person you gave yourself to is now telling everyone else what they did or won't text you back. There's peace in your soul and in your bed. Imagine that.

The problem with most of our sexual sin is that instead of being under God's authority, we pursue our pleasure and attraction and that often leads toward isolation – we break out of the relationships we were designed and created for as we seek self-satisfaction.

Do you see how this all fits in with Romans 1? God reveals His plans and purposes, but people suppress the truth that can be known, and so eventually He gives them over to their desires, characterized, fundamentally, by a corruption of the purpose and design for sex.

So here's our goal in the coming weeks – **sexuality submitted to Jesus.**

The question is not how far is too far – it's what direction am I headed? It's not what can I do with my girlfriend or boyfriend? It's not how much nudity and sex can I watch in this show, or read in this book? It's not what really qualifies as porn and what's OK for me to

look at? It's am I looking to God? Am I walking in the light? Am I submitting to what He says or suppressing it? Am I moving toward His blessing or His wrath?

We're going to dig further into our sexuality in the coming weeks, but we need to start here – laying the foundation and understanding God's good gift – He's not against sex, He's the designer of it. The problems occur when we suppress His truth and treat sex as God – looking to it to satisfy us - instead of receiving our sexuality as a gift from the God who made it and us.

We want to bring all of our desires to God and say, I will serve You, not these. I will live under authority instead of attraction. I will pursue celibacy outside of marriage and chastity within it.

Lots to think about today. I hope, and pray, it's been helpful.

If you're on the wrong path, or something from the past is nagging you – whether it was last week or three years ago, remember God's promises.

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.

Ps 103:11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the LORD,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

You're not so lost He can't find you. You're not so broken He can't fix you. You're not so dirty He can't clean you. Jesus specializes in rescue, renewal, and restoration – if you will surrender to Him.

God has a better plan for your sexuality – so surrender it, and every other part of your life, to Him.

Let's pray.



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Love God. Love Others

Romans 1:18-32

When sex is god Part One

Summary: God has a plan for our sexuality, and it's a good one.

1. Reflecting on Romans 1:24-27, what are the ways in which you might be tempted to suppress the truth of God in your own life? How can you actively seek to overcome these tendencies?
2. How do you personally understand the difference between temptation and sin, as outlined in the sermon? Share a specific example of a temptation you've faced and how you navigated it.
3. In what areas of your life are you currently resisting God's authority? How might embracing His authority lead to better outcomes in these areas?
4. The sermon highlights that God's design for sexuality includes both pleasure and boundaries. How do you reconcile the enjoyment of sexuality with the need for boundaries according to Scripture?
5. The sermon speaks about the impact of sexual sin on relationships and future generations. How might your current actions or attitudes towards sexuality affect your relationships with others, including your family?
6. How can the church support individuals who are struggling with sexual temptation or sin while maintaining a balance of truth and grace? What practical steps can be taken to create a supportive environment?
7. Discuss the notion that sexuality is an issue of authority rather than attraction. How does this perspective shift the conversation around sexual ethics within the church and in broader society?
8. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's design and purpose for sexuality. How can a deeper theological understanding of sexuality enhance your personal faith and relationships?
9. Consider the four reasons given in the sermon for addressing sexual issues: its significance, discipleship, relational impact, and gospel implications. How do these reasons resonate with you, and which one do you find most compelling or challenging?
10. The pastor encouraged seeing sexuality through the lens of God's authority and good design. How can you practically apply this understanding in your everyday life, and what might it look like to offer your sexuality as a gift to God?

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