

The Faith We Believe, Share, and Defend Part 5 - Isn't All Love Just Love?

"There is a popular claim that "Love is love." When people say this, they mean everyone should be allowed to date and marry whomever they like, regardless of whether they are male or female. This message seems so powerful. We all know love is good, and that the more love there is in the world the better...But the Bible tells us NOT that "Love is love," but that "God is love" (1 John 4:8)."¹

MARRIAGE

Problem: "Marriage is too hard."

"Marriage sounds hard, sounds like work. I'd rather just have a relationship because I enjoy it and if I stop enjoying it I'm able to get out of it whenever I want."

Problem with the Problem

That's not love. That's wanting all the benefits of marriage like friendship, companionship, romance, sex, BUT none of the commitment. That's how a child thinks. It's not love when you can get out of a relationship whenever you feel like it. That's a consumer relationship. Love is not first and foremost a feeling as if you could "fall in love" and "fall out of love". Love is a commitment. Love is an action.

Problem: "Marriage is a dream come true."

"I can't wait to get married and live happily ever after. It'll be like a never-ending honeymoon."

Problem with the Problem

That's not marriage. It's a Hollywood Rom-Com sappy, sentimental lie that marriage is going to make you happy and make all your dreams come true. What the bride and groom need to hear on their

¹ Rachel McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask about Christianity* (Crossway, Wheaton 2021), 113-114.

wedding day is, "Your marriage will be broken before the end of the night. Get used to disappointment. Neither of you is perfect. You can either join the Struggler's Marriage Club or the Liar's Club. The honeymoon was over before you got married."

Who said marriage was easy? Marriage is hard but it's still good because it's about love.

Genesis 2:18-24

This tells us that God created the institution of marriage. Adam and Eve are created not just a man and a woman but are created as husband and wife in covenant. As soon as Eve is created from Adam's rib and brought to Adam it's a marriage ceremony - vows are taken, God is a witness. The marriage covenant is a legal bond.

And the very first marriage WAS perfect. That's what that little phrase at the very end of Gen 2 is saying: "*They were naked and were not ashamed.*" Adam and Eve saw each other completely, no secrets, they were completely seen and known by the other, and there was no shame, no insecurity, no fear.

Genesis 3:6-19

In the Fall we lost something. What marriage WAS before the Fall and what marriage IS now - is different! Marriage was IDEAL but now it's an ORDEAL. Marriage is hard and it's broken, but it's still good and it still works.

Gospel Answer

Marriage is still the foundation of the family and the family is the foundation of society. God gave us marriage because families are really important for society.

And, God gave us marriage as a picture of the union between Jesus and the church.

As the story of the Bible unfolds, we start to see this picture of marriage being used as a metaphor for God's

relationship with his people. Old Testament prophets compare God to a faithful husband and God's people (the Israelites) to a wife (e.g., Isaiah 54:5-8; Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1:2). God desperately loves his people. But his people keep cheating on him by worshiping other so-called gods. Time after time, God forgives Israel and welcomes her back. But it doesn't seem like this marriage is going to work: a holy God just cannot live with sinful people.

Then Jesus comes. One of Jesus's amazing claims is that he is "the bridegroom" (Luke 5:34). Jesus took on God's role as husband. God's marriage to his people in the Old Testament didn't work because his people kept sinning and running away from him. But Jesus came to pay the price for sin, so that his people could finally be with him forever. In fact, as we read on in the New Testament, we find that God's plan for marriage from the very first was for it to give us a picture of how much Jesus loves us.

Paul explains in a letter to one of the first churches that Christian marriage is meant to give us a glimpse of Jesus's love (Ephesians 5:22-33). Jesus loves and sacrifices for his people; he went to the cross to die for us! Husbands are meant to love their wives like that: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). This is an amazing call. A husband could only do this with Jesus's help, and even the best human husband will never fully measure up. But a really wonderful husband who loves his wife and is willing to give up everything for her

gives us a little window into Jesus's love.

What about wives? In this picture, the wife plays the part of God's people, who gladly submit to Jesus and follow his lead: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior" (Ephesians 5:22).² The call to wives to submit to their husbands isn't because women are somehow inferior to men, just as the call on husbands to give up their lives for their wives isn't because men are less valuable than women. It also doesn't mean that all women should submit to all men, or that a wife should never say no to her husband if he is treating her badly. In fact, a husband abusing his wife is the total opposite of the picture the Bible gives us, where husbands are called again and again to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19) and to understand and honor them (1 Peter 3:7).

The call for husbands and wives to play different roles in Christian marriage is not because men are smarter than women, or because women need more love than men, but because Jesus and the church play different roles in the much greater marriage to which human marriage

² Note, when the first woman is created to be the wife of the first man she is given the role as "helper" (Gen 2:18). In no way is that a derogatory role or sub role. Both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are described with same term and as having the role of "helper" of their people (Ex 18:4; Dt 33:7, 29; Hos 13:9; Psa 20:3; 70:6; 89:20; 121:1-2; 124:8; 146:5).

points. It's like two actors taking different parts in a play.

I know this all sounds weird! Jesus is one human, but he said he was the bridegroom for all God's people, and that means all God's people form one body together. These are metaphors, like the idea of God as our Father. But the Bible often packages the most important truths in metaphors. And the idea that if we trust in Jesus, we are united to him like a husband and a wife, or like a head and a body, is one of the most important truths in the Bible.³

Marriage is signpost. In the last book of the Bible, we see the marriage of Jesus and his church bringing heaven and earth back together (see Revelation 19:7; 21:1-5). A human marriage can't remake the world. But the wedding of Jesus to his church will literally begin a whole new, never-ending world, and we can be part of that new world, if we're trusting in him.⁴

Problem: "Same-sex union is ok if there's love."

Why can't a man marry a man or a woman marry a woman if they're in love?

Problem with the Problem

That's not marriage. Remember, God created marriage and so God gets to define what marriage is. The Bible says from beginning to end that marriage is the union of one man to one woman. The idea of "same-sex union" totally redefines marriage and we don't get to do that. People don't get to redefine

marriage. The government does not get to redefine marriage, even though our government has made same-sex union legal. God says what marriage is because he created the institution of marriage.

Gospel Answer

Same-sex attraction and homosexuality is not what God wants for anyone. Those desires, that lifestyle is exchanging God for ourselves, exchanging truth for a lie, the natural for the unnatural. It is an assault on the Creator. "You haven't made us." Or, "You shouldn't have made us this way." Or, and, "I'll make you pay for making us this way."

People who struggle with same-sex attraction may not have asked God for those desires but those desires come from within us - we are all born broken and sinful. It's not that we're sinners because we sin? We sin because we're sinners.

Can you be a Christian and struggle with same-sex attraction? Yes!!! Some Christians struggle with same-sex attraction all their lives. Some get married to people of the opposite sex and still struggle. Some never get married and still struggle. We all struggle with sin!!! In one of his last letters, in 1 Timothy 1, right after telling his friend Timothy that all sex outside marriage (including gay relationships) goes against God's plan (1 Timothy 1:8-11), Paul said that he himself was the worst sinner and that Jesus saved him to show that even someone as terrible as Paul could be made right with God (1 Timothy 1:15-16)! So we are called to love and encourage our brothers and sisters who struggle with same-sex attraction because they're sinners who may struggle all their life to repent just like you.

How do we treat unbelievers who are homosexual? Same-sex attraction and homosexuality have been around ever since

³ Rachel McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask about Christianity* (Crossway, Wheaton 2021), 115-117.

⁴ Ibid, 118.

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the Fall and have been widely accepted by many cultures throughout history. We should not think or act like it's a new problem. And, you are not the Creator and Judge and so it is NOT your role to condemn those outside the church as if they were beyond salvation. Your job as a Christian is to hold out the gospel of grace to all unbelievers. So from homosexuals, gay, lesbian, transgender, sexually promiscuous, adulterers, gossips, boastful know it all jerks, social climbers, criminals - whoever you think is the worst of the worst sinner - your job is to reach them with the gospel; to be loving and gracious toward them.

Problem: "What if I never get married?"

"What if I don't want to get married or what if I struggle with same-sex attraction and I'm never attracted to someone of the opposite sex, do I still have to get married to be a good Christian?"

Gospel Answer

No!!! The Bible also says singleness is a gift from God. In 1 Cor 7:7 Paul says, "I wish that all were as I myself am [SINGLE]. But each has his own **gift** from God, one of one kind and one of another." Singleness is not only NOT a bad thing, it's also NOT just this thing. Singleness is a GIFT from God. Each has his own one of one kind, one of another - marriage is a gift and singleness is a gift. Jesus was single all his life. And he was not alone in life. He had incredible friendships, deep relationships. His life was full of joy, connectedness, fulfillment, passion, and committed relationships. The gift of singleness allows you to live a maritally-distraction-free life with more freedom to give yourself to Jesus and others.

Problem: "I think I'm gay." "I think I might be a lesbian."

Gospel Answer

What that person, young or old, needs to hear: "First and foremost, you are so much more than your current sexual temptations. This world will try to diminish you down to your base hormones and attractions but you are so much more! God has wonderfully and gloriously created you to be so much more than a mere sex machine." And then they need to hear gospel of Jesus' love and that his grace is sufficient for them and will be all their lives (2 Cor 12:9).

SEX

Sex in itself is not a bad thing. Sex is not the problem. In 1 Thess 4 Paul does NOT say, "God's will for you is your sanctification so abstain from sex." No! He says, "abstain from sexuality immorality." Sex is a good gift from God. Sex is also God's invention for a husband and wife. There is plain and clear rejoicing and celebration of marital love expressed sexually. The sex that hurts you is sexual immorality. In the Greek it's the word *porneia*. In the NT, *porneia* is the word to denote any and every kind of sexual immorality: the misuse of sex, abuse of sex, twisting of sex, redefining of sex. Paul says, abstain from this sexual immorality.

What does it look like to abstain from sexual immorality? Paul says, 1 Thess 4:4, "4 That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness..." Ok but what does that look like? Paul goes on and he puts it in positive terms and negative terms: controlling your body in holiness is about honor, [that's the positive; and] 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God [that's the first negative; and] 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter [that's the second negative]." That first negative is a familiar one for most of us.

The context for sex according to the Bible is super clear; it could not be clearer. The Bible says, from beginning to end, that sex is for marriage between one man and one woman. Sex is not for before marriage. Sex is not for outside of marriage. Sex is only for marriage between husband and wife; that's it. No exceptions. None. No ifs, no ands, no buts.

How far is too far with another guy or girl, boyfriend, girlfriend? That is not the best question. The better question is, does this honor the other person? "What I'm doing right now, would my future spouse be ok with it?" How do you want the person who is with your

future spouse to be treating your future spouse - shouldn't you treat the person you're with right now?

The Bible does not make sex everything; it is not the way to freedom, it is not the way to self-authenticity; it is not your identity; it is not the way to wisdom; sex is not your salvation. But, neither does the Bible make sex this disgusting, debased thing; it is a gift from God; created by God to be this powerful, uniting, joyful, covenanting thing. No other religion, no other human philosophy comes close to the glory of the Biblical view of sex. Everyone else's understanding of sex is infinitely lacking; infinitely too small.

Purpose of Sex: 1) Procreation.

Procreation (Gen 1:26-28; Jn 3:1-15). To populate the world that God would save a people. "Sex is the number one cause of...people" -Demetri Martin. A big question people ask is, "How am I going to contribute to society and culture?" Well what is the most important cultural product of mankind today? Mankind is the main cultural product of mankind. People. God commands us to be fruitful and multiply to create a family for him to worship him, a people to save for himself.

Problem: "Is abortion wrong? Is abortion always wrong?"

What about pro-choice, a woman's right to do what she wants with her body?

What about when a pregnancy threatens a woman's health?

What if a girl is raped and becomes pregnant? What if she's a minor?

Problem with the Problem

Pregnancy involves two bodies, the mother's and the fetus (which is Latin for 'little one'). An ectopic pregnancy is not the same thing as an abortion.

Two wrongs do not make a right. What about the toil of encouraging a rape victim to take

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the life of an unwanted baby and her having to live with that the rest of her life? Having an abortion is a major decision with physical, emotional, psychological consequences, side effects, possible risks and complications. It's not her fault she was raped. It's not her fault or the baby's fault she got pregnant. How does a wrong right a wrong? It would be an incredible act of love and sacrifice to bear such a child into the world.

There are many options available to women who do not want or are not able to keep their newborn child such as adoption.

Gospel Answer

The real question facing abortion is when does life begin in the womb. The Bible is clear life begins at conception. The fetus is a human being, regardless of quality of life for that baby they are an image-bearer of God and are to be loved and protected.

The Bible establishes that God recognizes a person even before he or she is born. "Before I was born the Lord called me" (Isaiah 49:1). Exodus 21:22-23 describes a situation in which a man hits a pregnant woman and causes her to give birth prematurely. If there is "no serious injury," the man is required to pay a fine, but if there is "serious injury," either to the mother or the child, then the man is guilty of murder and subject to the penalty of death. This command, in itself, legitimizes the humanity of the unborn child, and places the child on a level equal that of the adult male who caused the miscarriage. Scriptural support abounds for the humanity of the unborn child. "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . . your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days

ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps 139: 13-16). The Bible, in fact, uses the same Greek word to describe the unborn John the Baptist (Luke 1:41,44), the newborn baby Jesus (Luke 2:12,16), and the young children who were brought to Jesus for his blessing (Luke 18:15).

Purpose of Sex: 2) Recreation.

Recreation (Prov 5:15-19; 11:16, 22; 30:18-20). To enjoy one another, YES! When Proverbs was written there were only two reasons a guy got married: 1) to secure financial and social status or 2) to have kids and carry on the family name. No one got married for love or friendship or great sex. You got married for money, status, kids and then you went somewhere else to get your lovin on. Proverbs comes along and says you're supposed to be madly, crazy in love with your spouse.

Problem: "Sex is just sex and people are free to have sex with whomever they want."

Problem with the Problem

That's just an assumption. That is the new unquestioned belief of our society but that doesn't mean people have always assumed that about sex and it doesn't make it right or good.

A campfire in the woods is a wonderful thing. But what would happen if you lit a campfire in your bedroom? "The Bible teaches that sex between a man and a woman is a wonderful gift from God and an important part of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Sex can bring joy and create life. But like a campfire in the living room, sex can also bring terrible hurt and heartbreak."⁵

⁵ Ibid, 118.

As we grow up, our bodies and our hearts can pull us toward others in powerful ways. The films and songs we enjoy often suggest that we should try out sex with different people to find out which person suits us best: like trying on different clothes until you find the perfect fit. But experts have interviewed thousands of people to find out whether having lots of sexual relationships has made them happy, and it turns out that, in general, it doesn't. A loving marriage tends to make both men and women happier. But having sexual relationships with lots of different people tends to make us less happy. Like eating too much candy, it might feel good in the moment, but the after-effects can be miserable. According to the research, this is especially true for women. God created sex to go with deep, lifelong commitment, and researchers have found that having sex with just one person consistently does correlate with happiness. But when we pull sex and commitment apart, it hurts. When I was in college, people thought it was really weird that I wasn't planning to have sex with anyone before I got married (if I did). But as I talked more with other women about this, they would often tell me privately they wished they had made the same decision. The different relationships they'd been in hadn't brought them the happiness they had expected and had often left them feeling empty. One friend I met later shared the same thing. After years of sleeping with different guys, she realized that lifestyle was making her truly unhappy. She felt like she had to suit up in emotional armor and pretend she didn't care. I told her about the

research showing that having sex with lots of different people generally makes people less happy. She felt frustrated and asked, "Why wasn't I told this in high school?"⁶

Gospel Answer

If you're having sex with someone and you're not married it means you've not actually given yourself over to the other person. You're still in sole control of your life. You're retaining the right to get out of there if your needs are not met. AND if you're having sex and you're not married you've also not received the other person. You've received the other person's sex but you haven't received all their needs, their problems, their junk. When you have sex outside of marriage you're literally looking at the other person and saying, "*I want your sex. I want your body. I want the pleasure but I don't want you.*" You are reducing the other person to this thing that helps you masturbate. They're not a person to you. They're a product to be consumed and discarded whenever you feel like it.

The Bible says you are supposed to soar when you have sex but you can only soar in marriage. And the exclusivity of marriage, of only ever being with one other person is not a bad thing, it's the best thing. I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine and no one else's!

Purpose of Sex: 3) Communication.

Communication (SoS 1:1-4; 2:8-17; 4:1-16). In sex you communicate to the other person that you cherish them, that you desire them, that you think they're beautiful. Intimacy does not always involve sex. But sex always involves intimacy. Sex itself is the pinnacle of intimate communication. Sex is a language. The English language doesn't cut it, no

⁶ Ibid, 119.

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spoken language does. Verbal expression cannot capture the depths of human intimacy. Sex can communicate the intimacy of that oneness. God is a genius - he gives us a way to be physically one as our hearts are one. But God designed this level of intimacy to be exclusive between husband and wife and so sex has to be exclusive between husband and wife. Only husband and wife can communicate through sex the way God intended.

Problem: "Sex is a private matter. What I do with my body is my business and just for me."

I'm not hurting anybody if it's consensual and just for fun with no strings attached. I'm really not hurting anybody if I just watch pornography or just imagine stuff.

Problem with the Problem:

What you do with sex always involves another person.

In a brutally honest, and really sad, infamous interview musician John Mayer opens up about his sex life. *"Internet pornography has absolutely changed my generation's expectations."* And he goes off on how porn gives him all this control over when and who he's going to have sex with in his head. And he says, *"As soon as I lose that control, once I have to deal with someone else's desires, I cut and run. I'm pretty culpable about being hard to live with....When I meet somebody, I'm in a situation in which I can't run it because another person is involved. That means letting someone else talk, not waiting for them to remind you of something interesting you had in mind."* Then the interviewer asks John Mayer if masturbation for him is as good as sex and Mayer responds, *"Absolutely, because during sex, I'm just going to run a filmstrip [that is, he's going to think about porn]. I'm still masturbating [when having sex with*

someone]. That's what you do when you're 30, 31, 32. This is my problem now: Rather than meet somebody new, I would rather go home and replay the amazing experiences I've already had....I'm more comfortable in my imagination than I am in actual human discovery...." Porn is just a cheap substitute for intimacy. All our addictions are cheap substitutes for intimacy.

For a guy and a girl to get to know each other is complicated. You have to move through the different levels of intimacy and it's take effort and commitment and awkward moments and time and conversations. Why do that when with a couple clicks you can have a world of sex and fulfill your sexual fantasies, be done with it and go about your day with no messy relationship stuff.

The problem is when you try to move on to a real relationship with a real person you don't know what to expect = real people are not like that; they don't act like that, they don't talk like that; they don't look like that. A NY Magazine writer Naomi Wolfe points out that porn is NOT just a private problem for guys. For those of you who are watching porn it's deadening your sex drive *"in relation to real people, and so you see fewer and fewer people as 'porn-worthy.'"* And this message is being communicated loud and clear not just by hard core internet porn but the pornographized society in which we live where every where you look is sex - and that message is being communicated to girls everywhere. *"And now, women especially are worrying that as mere flesh and blood, they can scarcely get, let alone hold, a guy's attention."*

Another problem with pornography is you are not a passive observer. Their bodies are being used in ways that undermine their value. Those people are made in the image of God. And pornography is a huge part of the

sex trafficking industry. Many of those women have been forced into pornography. They're like slaves. So when you engage in porn you are contributing to the problem and hurting those involved.

Gospel Answer

Paul says 1 Thess 4:4-6, to abstain from sexual immorality and "control your body in holiness and honor...to not transgress and wrong another person". Sex always involves another person whether you're physically committing a sexual act with another person or you're by yourself looking at an image of another person or you're watching pornography or you're just thinking of someone else in your mind - sex always involves someone else beside you. If that other person is not your spouse then you're cheating that person of what is rightly theirs.

You can either use sex where you objectify the other person, use them, abuse them, dehumanize them. Or, sex can be used in marriage to humanize, build up, honor, and respect the other person.

Purpose of Sex: 4) Invocation.

Invocation (Gen 2:18-25). Sex literally seals the deal between a bride and groom in the covenant of marriage. One of the special things about covenants is that they are initiated/validated/authorized by an oath where you call on God, you pray to God, you appeal to God to witness the commitment you're making and to hold both parties accountable. To have sex is to enter into and make a covenant of marriage with another person and swear love to them and in the sex act you are appealing to God to witness and hold you accountable to this marriage covenant. Sex depicts, it dramatizes, it acts out the commitment of marriage. When you have sex you are saying to God, "God hold me accountable to this standard to hold and love and be vulnerable with and be this close

to my spouse always - this is the standard we are to live up to - hold us to this standard." So when you get married and you say your I do's you still have to consummate your verbal vows with this physical vow of sex. God gives us sex as a means of **invocation** to make this covenant.

Problem: "People abuse sex and abuse others with sex all the time - what does that mean for them?"

Gospel Answer

Some have been forced to have sex when they didn't want to. Others have had their bodies touched in sexual ways by adults when they were kids. This can happen to boys as well as girls, and often it's done by someone the kid trusts: maybe even a family member. If you've experienced this, I'm so sorry. What has happened to you is not okay, and it is not your fault. People who abuse young people in this way usually tell the person they've abused to keep it secret, or make that person think it's their fault, so the victim will feel ashamed and not tell anyone. Sometimes the victims worry that if they did tell someone, they wouldn't be believed. If that's how you feel, you're not alone. Please tell a grown-up you trust and get help. You are not betraying the person who did this to you by telling. You are actually helping them too. Letting someone do something terribly wrong is very bad for them, as well as for the people they are hurting. Sexual touching between adults and kids is the opposite of God's design. God hates it.⁷

⁷ Ibid, 120.

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FRIENDSHIP

Jesus also calls us his friends (Jn 15:13-15). And to love others well we need his friendship and the friendship of others.

The Bible says that Christians are “one body” together (Romans 12:5), that we are brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:50), “knit together in love” (Colossians 2:2), and comrades in arms (Philippians 2:25). Paul calls his friend Onesimus his “very heart” (Philemon 12), and he says he was among the Christians in Thessalonica like “a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). This is very intimate language. But it is not sexual. In the Bible, friendship is a very important relationship. Unlike marriage, it’s a kind of relationship that we can enjoy with lots of different people all at once. In fact, God made us to have multiple friends!⁸

Christian author, CS Lewis, says romantic love is like two people standing facing each other looking at each other with great interest. While friendship love is two people standing shoulder to shoulder facing out looking at the same thing with great interest.

The beauty of the church is you’re not alone. We have fellowship love, that thing we all have in common, strong enough to unite us, if we didn’t have anything else in common but we still had this we would be united - and it’s Jesus. Jesus is our fellowship. And within that fellowship we can grow in our friendship as we serve one another.

“Greater love has no one than this,” said Jesus, “that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “By this we know love,”

said Jesus’s friend John, “that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). Jesus’s act of true love paid for our sin and won us eternal life with him in the closest relationship we could ever imagine—closer than marriage, closer than friendship, as close as a head with a body. Put your trust in Jesus and nothing—not even death itself—will be able to separate you from that love (Romans 8:35–39).

⁸ Ibid, 126.