



TIME OF GRACE®

Sexpectations: Sex Is Fiery

Study Notes

Summary

Like fire, sex must be treated with a healthy fear. Mess around with one flame and you might get hurt. Mess around with one night and you might get hurt worse. This message explores the Bible's loving warnings about sex, showing God's loving and fatherly heart when he restricts sexual pleasure to the commitment of marriage.

- Sex is _____.
- **Proverbs 6:27-29:** ²⁷ Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? ²⁸ Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? ²⁹ So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.
- Sex can hurt _____.
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3-6:** ³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.
- Sex can hurt _____.
- **Romans 1:24,25:** ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.
- Sex can hurt _____.
- Sex is _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Study 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. List at least three reasons why Paul is so cautious about sexual immorality.
2. Evaluate: The Bible sets people up for guilt and shame by having such a high standard for sexual purity.
3. Read John 8:1-11. Describe how Jesus perfectly balances unconditional love with uncompromising truth.

Homework for Next Week

Read Philippians 4:4-13.

*“By trying to grab fulfillment everywhere, we find it nowhere.”
—Elisabeth Elliot*

Time of Grace Ministry
Sexpectations: Sex Is Fiery
Proverbs 6:27-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6; Romans 1:24,25
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Today, I want to wrestle with a really important question. And the question is this. Why are Christians so different? When it comes to sex, why is the teaching of Christianity so different than the teaching of our culture? Because you know, by this point, it's really different, right? But, perhaps that there's no topic where culture and the Christian church differs as much as sex.

So my question today is, why? Why would our Heavenly Father, if He loves us, set the standard so high? Why would He call us to be so different than the culture around us, so that faithful followers would have to wrestle and fight -- for some of us, this would be the biggest war and battle that would not end soon, but it would last years, if not decades, to honor God with our bodies, and to flee from sexual immorality. Why would He do that to us? Why would He challenge us and call us to deny what so often feels natural and desirable and pleasurable? Why would God do that?

Well, the other day, I opened the Bible and searched for the answer to that question. And I found one. I did kind of a search for every time the Bible uses the word sex or sexual, and I learned that there are 77 passages in the Bible where words like that appear. They're about evenly divided between the Old and the New Testament. And if I could summarize what the Bible essentially teaches about sex and sexuality, it would be not with 1,000 words, but with one picture. And the picture would look a little bit like this. A fireplace.

Just a quick show of hands here today, how many of you had fireplaces in your homes growing up, or have a fireplace in your home now? Yeah, oh, wow. A whole bunch of us. Yeah, I have a fireplace in my house right now, and I love making fires. Like, I don't know if it's the long Wisconsin winters, and I'm just, like, preparing myself, but, not just the, like, flip-the-switch fire, but getting the wood out of the garage, the look of the flames, the smell of the fire, like, there are few things better on a cold night than making a good fire, getting out a Bible or some board games, and being with the people I love the most. I love fires so much that I choose it, I want to have it inside of my home, and yet, I'm a little bit afraid of the fire. I have pretty strict rules when it comes to the fireplace in my living room. Once it's started, and the door swings open with the hot glass, my head is on a swivel, and I'm very cautious and very strict with my kids about where they can be in the living room. I don't want anyone in our home to just make a fire. There are some pretty strict boundaries, and I don't have to tell you why, right? Because you don't get ten tries with a fire before it can burn or scar you. Sometimes, it just takes once. And I hope that doesn't make me a bad father, or a strict father, or a legalistic father, I'm just very, very cautious with fire, not because it's bad in and of itself, but because it can hurt you.

And essentially, that's how our Heavenly Father feels about sex. Like, is sex in and of itself bad? No. No, I've spent two entire messages opening the Bible to try to prove, no, God invented sex. It's good for married people, like, He gives it into our lives to provide warmth and connection and intimacy. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love showing up at every wedding and leaving a little box on the gift table that says, "You're welcome," because this is their gift to every single married couple, and yet, if you'd read those 77 passages, do you know what you'd find? Every single one of them is a warning. Like, there are positive ways to talk about sex in the Bible, but all 77 times the word sex or sexual is used, it's a warning. Not because God's bad, or sex is bad, but because God's a good Father who loves His kids.

So here's the idea I want to explore with you today, it's kind of my big idea for today, that sex is fiery. That Christians are called to be very different, to embrace a different sexual ethic than the world, because sex is fiery, it's very good, but if we use it outside of God's boundaries, it can go very badly. Now, obviously, I don't have time with you today to walk through all 77 passages, so I'm going to focus on just three of them tonight, and I hope what you embrace at the end of this message is that even though this is difficult, and even though it's always going to be hard to be this different than our culture, I hope you see the wisdom of our Heavenly Father's heart.

So, we're going to kick it off with the first passage, which comes from the Book of Proverbs. Give me a nod if you've ever read the Book of Proverbs before, in the Old Testament. Yeah, a bunch of you. It's essentially a book about how wise people live. Like, if you want to be wise with your money, or your words, or your relationships, or people who want to start drama at work, you should read the Book of Proverbs, but do you know the topic that the Book of Proverbs talks about almost more than anything else? Sex. And yet, most of the passages in that section are not about the goodness of sex, but the danger of it.

Let me give you one example from Proverbs 6. It says: "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished." You kind of see the Father's heart. He says, "Son, I don't want you to get punished. I don't want you to get burned. I don't want you to get hurt." You're going to dump burning coals into your lap, so don't go chasing off into an adulterous relationship, because it's not going to turn out as well as you think. You're going to get hurt. You're going to get burned.

The Father's really making the first big point I want to share with you today, that sex can hurt you. Which is a pretty interesting thing to say. I mean, think about that. Why would this Father have to say that to His son? Can a man pour burning coals into his lap, I mean, who'd ever do -- have you ever been at, like, a barbecue, and you say to your buddy, "Hey, Bill. After you finish those burgers, make sure you don't put the charcoals on your pants." You'd be like, "Well, yeah. Why would I do that?" And yet, this Father says, with sex, sometimes, people do that. And the reason why is known by some of you who have been long-time members of our church family.

You know, it's been about six years, I think, since the founding pastor of our church preached here, but Pastor Ski used to say something that's kind of stuck around our church culture, even

though he's been gone for many years. He used to have this beautiful acronym, it would go like this. STP = LTP, which stood for Short-term Pleasure equals Long-term Pain.

See, Pastor Ski used to remind us what the Father in Proverbs is saying. The reason people will do with sex what they wouldn't do with burning coals is because there's pleasure involved. I mean, it's sex, after all. And in the heat of passion, you can forget about the short-term part of that pleasure. It's like it's blown up into a 96-point, caps-lock font, and you're so excited about the pleasure, you forget it's short-term, and it might leave you with long-term pain. That you might actually get hurt, and burnt. It might be exciting and dangerous and thrilling and intimate, but then, the night's going to be over, and the consequences won't.

And some of you know that's true, right? Because you look back on your sexual history and it hasn't always worked out as well as you thought in the passion of the moment. Maybe, you were young, middle school, high school. And he said he loved you, and you believed him, and it didn't turn out like the fairy tale, and you look back, and you can't believe, you know, like, ten years later, that you would give something so precious to someone who loved you so little, who knew you so little. Maybe, it just felt right, like, you were star-crossed lovers, and so, you started flirting with someone else's boyfriend, or you got interested in someone else's wife, and it didn't turn out without drama. You got punished. There was a jealous ex, and there were kids who were confused, and your life did not get easier, it got much, much more complicated. Maybe, it ripped your family apart, and you suffer the consequences. Maybe, someone got hurt because you crossed a sexual boundary, and the person was you. Or maybe not.

You know, the interesting thing about the Proverbs, that they're not promises. See, people get confused when they read the Proverbs, because they expect them to be, like, 100% guarantees, but that's not the point of wisdom literature. Like that passage that says, "If you train up a child in the way he should go, when he's old, he will not turn from it." Some of you parents know, well, there are exceptions, because that's not a guarantee, it's just a probability, not a for-sure prediction.

And that's the dangerous thing about some of you who are crossing the line sexually right now, you think it's going to be okay, because you're doing okay. You're like a kid who's been chasing the basketball into the street without looking both ways, and a car hasn't hit you yet, so it must be all right. You're like a person who lets your children mess with fire, and no one's gotten burned just yet, so you figure, that's the way it will always be. And I would beg you, God, the Father, has been patient with you because He doesn't want you to get hurt, but He does not guarantee the future. Don't assume that because something hasn't happened yet, it won't. Because God might not give you a tenth chance, or even a second, the first time, you might get burned.

Brothers, sisters, trust the wisdom of your Heavenly Father. Sex outside the bonds of marriage can hurt you. Our Heavenly Father doesn't want you to get hurt. And He doesn't want you to hurt them, either. A few years ago, I got to teach a class full of teenagers about the Bible and sex, and of course, that was the lesson when one of the students brought his friend to class. I'll call his friend, Keandre. And I didn't know a lot about Keandre's family, or his faith, but I could get the impression really early that he didn't really know much about the Bible. I don't know if he had

ever heard it before. And so, when I was teaching this lesson on Christianity and sexuality, I was thinking in the back of my head the whole time, I wonder what in the world this kid is thinking. Like, compared to what he's experienced out in the world, this must be so, like, conservative and restrictive and crazy. I wonder what he's thinking. And then, he told me what he was thinking. I paused in my teaching, and I asked if there were any questions, and whose hand went up? Keandre's. Yeah? I dared to ask. And this is what Keandre said. "Pastor Mike, if everyone did what you just taught, the world would be a better place. There wouldn't be dads who don't spend the night with their kids." This kid didn't know much about Christianity, but he had experienced that the fire can burn people.

And that's what our second Bible passage teaches today. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4. The apostle Paul said: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or a sister."

Do you know, right now, in our culture, how many people are victims of sexual violence in America? One in three women, and one in six men. Can you imagine if every seat in church was full today? Do you know how many people that would represent right here in our church? Imagine if every person in the side section had been a victim of sexual violence. If every chair was filled, there would be 50 women and 30 men, just here, who had been hurt because of this, someone wronged or took advantage of a brother or a sister, and that's just sexual violence.

Pornography. Do you know how many people get hurt? When the search history is discovered, when the door wasn't locked, when you can't hide -- do you know what that does to relationships? Do you know how many people we've had to work with as a church family to rebuild the trust and the closeness, because she says, "Why am I not good enough for him? What's wrong with us? What's wrong with me? Am I not beautiful enough, do I need to change, do I need to lose weight?" And, like, the comfort that leads to good sex is just torpedoed, because people get hurt. And kids get hurt, and it was fun in the moment, but now, here's a kid who doesn't get to grow up with mom and with dad in the same house, because sexual immorality doesn't just hurt you, it wrongs and it takes advantage of other people. You might be consenting adults, but what happens when that consenting adult grows up and marries another person, and now, that future spouse has to compete with that sexual experience?

You see, in a moment, it is pleasure, but it leaves us with long-term pain. And God doesn't want His kids to get hurt. Write this down, it's the second reason that God wants us to be cautious with sex, because sex can hurt them. God's sons and His daughters. I'm a dad, I would never want someone to hurt my kids, and God, the Father, feels the same way. You know, before I started this conversation with you, I was kind of nervous. Not because talking about sex makes me blush, or I thought this would be bad for our church. I was nervous about a certain demographic of people who would hear me preach. Older women. And maybe, it was just my stereotype, but I could picture a lot of, you know, 20-something guys being interested in what the Bible has to say about sex, but like, the grandmas who are among us, or watching on TV, I thought, oh, man, like,

I'm going to have to apologize and just let them know in a couple weeks, there's going to be something that maybe resonates with their life.

But then, I found out I was wrong. I'd written a blog post a couple of months ago, and I asked the supporters of Time of Grace, our media ministry partner, if they had any questions or things they'd want me to talk about, and do you know the number-one demographic of people who emailed me? Older women. And do you know what they told me? That they had gotten hurt because of sex. And I was so naive, because I forgot to just do the math - that a 70-something-year-old woman was in her roaring 20's right in the middle of our country's sexual revolution. When our culture decided to stoke the fire of sex, but dismantle the fireplace, when anything goes, and you know what they told me, as grandmothers, what they would probably never tell their children? That they got burned. That they had been hurt.

This morning, at our other campus, I ran into an 82-year-old woman, and she said to me, "I wish someone would've told me this when I was 20." That God was right. That He sees the big picture. That in the moment, there are exceptions, and you can violate His boundaries, and it seems like no one gets hurt, but from His 30,000 foot perspective, people do. And so, our Father says, "I know it's hard, but I don't want my kids to get hurt one more time. So don't, just wait. Wait. Be patient."

But the last thing is the hardest. Sex might hurt you, and it might hurt them, but the worst part is that it might hurt God. Look what the apostle Paul says in Romans 1. He wrote: "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator -- who is forever praised. Amen." What was Paul's biggest fear? That people would exchange something created for the Creator, God. That instead of liking sex, or experiencing sex, or enjoying sex, what does Paul say? That we would worship and serve some created thing like sex, instead of worshiping and serving God, which is the worst thing that can happen to the human heart.

I'll write down our final warning for today, that God is most worried that sex can hurt Him. It can hurt your connection, your eternal relationship, with God. I mean, listen to me right now. The worst thing that could happen to you sexually is not a disease. And it's not an unplanned pregnancy. And God forbid, it's not even sexual abuse or regret or shame. The worst thing that could ever happen to you is that you would walk into your bedroom, and you close your Bible. That you would exchange what God wants for you sexually, for what you want sexually. That you would decide that you were the exception to God's commandments, and you turn them into suggestions. That your desires are more important than God's desires, that what you want to do with your body matters more than what God wants you to do with your body.

And brothers and sisters, if you stop struggling against that, if you embrace that, you are in grave spiritual danger. It proves that you do not just like sex or enjoy sex, you worship it, you are a sex slave. And unless you repent, you cannot be saved. If someone wants to talk to you about your sexuality, your sexual identity, your dating habits, your relationship, and you run away, you are running away from God. And He doesn't want to lose you. This is what I fear most of all, that the

difference in this culture would cause people who grew up in the church to choose sex, rather than God. Because 80 years of sexual happiness, compared to eternity, is short-term pleasure. And it can leave you with everlasting pain.

And that's what the Bible says about sex. So why would you do it? This is the most serious sermon I've preached in months. If it's your first time here in church, I just, I can't imagine what this sounds like. Why would you do this? Why would you choose this Christian sexual ethic? It's heavy and it's hard, and it's challenging and it confronts us in so many ways, why would we do it? I'll give you one answer. Jesus. That because of Jesus, we are willing to follow God. And because of Jesus, this truth, it warms our hearts once more.

Write this down, and let me tell you about it. We follow Jesus and His sexual ethic because sex is forgivable. Because Jesus, who is the Son of God, 2,000 years ago, when He came to this earth, and He was face-to-face with people who had hurt people themselves, God's children, God Himself, do you know what Jesus did? He didn't hurt people. He was willing to be hurt for people.

And that's what I want to tell that anonymous 20-year-old. Now, when I asked, what questions do you have about sex? I got a lot of messages from older women, but there was a younger woman, and she wrote me this. "My boyfriend and I are continuously going to church, setting boundaries, seeking help, reading the Word together, and praying. And yet, we keep engaging in sex, which leaves us both frustrated and convicted. I feel dirty, guilty, unworthy of what God has for me. I just don't know how God sees us right now, and I feel so ashamed, like God is upset. Does He forgive people like us?" You know what I want to say to her? And to every one of us in this room who wishes we could rewind and do things differently? Yes. Yes. Thank God, and hallelujah, yes. Because of Jesus. Because Christianity is not just about a different ethic of sexuality, it's about a different message of being saved. It's not about good people and worthy people and clean people and perfect people making it to heaven, it's about people reaching out to Jesus being forgiven.

If they say a picture is worth 1,000 words, and if I could send this 20-year-old and maybe all of your hearts a picture, it would look like this picture. Artist Chris Powers tried to make this picture to depict what Jesus thinks about His people. And He wasn't naive that all of us have struggles and sins, it's almost like this dark serpent that coils around our bodies, but do you notice what Jesus did? That by His Cross, He put our sin to death, and that by His resurrection, do you see the tomb in the background? He reconnected us to a perfect God, and just look at the expression on that face. Does He look disgusted with His church? Fed up, embarrassed, ashamed? No. Artist Chris Powers put a Bible verse next to this picture, Song of Songs 4:7. "There is no flaw in you." God says to His people. And He would say that to you today. You might have a decade's long struggle with pornography. There might be an affair in your past that you can't undo. You might have done things with your body that make you feel embarrassed or ashamed, but if you reach out to Jesus, if you confess that sin, He will not make you earn His love. He'll treat you like this. He will forgive you. He has forgiven you. That because of this never-ending, crazy, reckless love of God, He would give up His body, be hurt by Roman

soldiers on a Cross, so that for you, there would not be long-term pain, but eternal pleasure in the presence of God.

So know this, sex is fiery. It's a good gift. But it can be dangerous. And so, your loving Father in heaven says, "Be careful." He helps to heal us when we get burnt, and He doesn't want His kids to get hurt again.

So let's pray.

God, I have the feeling I'm not the only one here who wishes there was a do-over button. And I have a feeling I'm not the only one who is so grateful in this moment for Your grace. That Your love for us is undeserved, that we can cry out to You and say, "Forgive us," and You do.

God, thank You so much for the passage that says, "You are the Savior of the worst of sinners." Thank You, God, that there was a prodigal son who ran into the arms of prostitutes, and when he came back, Your heart was filled with compassion. Thank You, that in the Scriptures, there was a woman caught in the act of adultery, and You looked her in the eye, Jesus, and said, "I don't condemn you."

Thank You, that there were Corinthians and Ephesians and Thessalonians who messed things up in the culture of Greek sexuality, and yet, You called them holy and blameless and pure, because of what Jesus did, and You still do. Thank You, God, for this warning. I pray that we heed it.

Help us to be wise. And more than anything, help us to know who we are because of what Jesus did. We're Your bride, the people that You loved. You're not ashamed of us, and for that, we praise You. We ask this all only because of Jesus. Amen.