

Jan 25: Gender & Sexuality (pt 1)

Before we begin, I want to remind you that the notes for this class and the audio recordings are available on the church app in case you miss a week or want to review. We have also included a follow-up feature on the app specific to this class where you can submit questions and comments online. If you go to sermons, select the particular equipping hour that prompted the question or comment, look for “The After Hours” menu and you can ask questions or add comments along with options for how you would like your response to come. Those all go directly to me. I would also encourage you to join us here at the church at 7pm Wednesday evenings for our follow-up Q&A where we have the opportunity to ask questions in more of a discussion format.

I want to remind everyone what you can expect in these three-week worldview topic series. Last week we finished our discussion on what it means to make decisions guided by a biblical worldview. Today we begin our three week examination on gender and sexuality. Parents and teens, full disclosure, today we will be talking about sex. Our first week in a series is not about what the Bible says, but as you have probably recognized by now, we will absolutely look at God’s Word in the next two weeks. This week is about understanding the dominant story our culture tells about sexuality and gender. That matters because we all live in this culture. We all absorb its assumptions—often without realizing it, and this means clinging to beliefs, values, and behaviors that are misaligned with God’s Word. This conversation is radically important and belongs in the church.

Discipleship is not just learning new behaviors; it’s learning to see the world differently, to challenge those assumptions according to the biblical standard we profess with our lips but often miss with our thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, desires, and motivations. If we belong to Jesus Christ, then we must make every effort to contend for this faith through regularly examining why we do what we do, why we value what we value, why we believe what we believe, in order to see whether or not we are living in a manner consistent with God’s design for us because that’s where true freedom, peace, joy, and fulfillment are found.

Everyone has a worldview. It’s the core assumptions, the formative messages we adopt in order to make sense of our surroundings, our reality, and our hearts are filled with thousands of such messages. Every worldview answers a few basic questions, such as:

- Who am I?
- Is there more to life than right now?
- What is my body for?
- Who has the authority to define meaning and identity?

A secular worldview answers those questions without reference to God or divine design, and instead places authority in the individual self, personal experience, psychological well-being, and human wisdom. Today, our goal is simply this: to understand how our society

came to think about sexuality and gender the way it does. In other words, we are trying to answer the question:

“How Did We Get Here?”

Since time is limited, I want to begin with a book recommendation. If you want to know more, connect more of the dots for why we are the way we are as a culture, from a Christian perspective, check out Carl Trueman’s book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.

Let’s start with an important principle. People do not begin with sexual ethics; they begin with assumptions about reality. Sexual ethics are values, and values come from beliefs. Beliefs, including what we believe about sexuality and gender, flow downstream from deeper convictions about human nature, freedom, authority, identity, and meaning. So when we see dramatic changes in sexual norms, they are not random. They reflect a deeper shift in how people understand what it means to be human.

For much of Western history, sexuality was not primarily about personal identity or fulfillment. Sexuality was understood as: socially regulated, morally accountable, oriented toward family, continuity, and community stability. This wasn’t just a Christian view—it was a broadly shared cultural consensus. Beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment introduced a profound change. Authority moved away from God, Scripture, and tradition and shifted toward human reason and individual autonomy. We’ve covered this shift in several of our other topics, and Trueman expands on this in his book. Religion increasingly became a private preference not a public authority. As a result, moral claims—including sexual morality—were reframed as matters of personal freedom rather than objective truth. Which means sexuality was no longer socially regulated, morally accountable, and now oriented towards personal fulfillment.

In our last series, we explored several philosophical streams of thought that have led us to this point in our cultural river. One of those streams, Expressive Individualism, was coined by the philosopher Charles Taylor to describe modern Western thoughts on identity. The basic idea is that “I am most truly myself when I express what I feel inside.”

In this framework:

- Identity is discovered internally, not received externally
- External limits are seen as threats to authenticity
- Restraint is suspicious
- Fulfillment comes through expression

Expressions of gender and sexuality, then, becomes especially important because it feels deeply personal and emotionally powerful. Existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir argued that there is no inherent meaning in nature, that the body has no built-in purpose, and meaning is created through choice.

Since meaning is created:

- There is no “ought” built into the human body
- The only moral failure is failing to choose freely
- Constraints are seen as imposed and therefore oppressive

These philosophies deeply shape modern thinking about sexuality and gender.

From a clinical perspective, Sigmund Freud changed the conversation in lasting ways.

Freud taught that:

- Sexual desire is the primary driver of human behavior
- Repressing desire leads to psychological harm
- Mental health depends on sexual expression

It’s hard to overstate just how revolutionary Freud’s teachings actually were, and because his views were framed within a post-Enlightenment, pseudoscientific rationale, his views, which were initially rejected, eventually became mainstream as they invaded academia. Freud was a pervert and addicted to cocaine. Just putting that out there.

Before Freud, sexuality was something you did. After Freud, sexuality became something you are. Sexual desire was no longer merely a behavior—it became a window into the true self. This change in how society viewed sexuality led to changes in beliefs, values, and behaviors, directly contributing to the sexual revolution of the mid-20th century.

In his book *Remember Death*, Matthew McCullough observes the following:

“In the 1870s, when death was everywhere, it would have been embarrassing to bring up sex at a dinner party. It would have been shameful to admit you think much about sex. It would have been irresponsible to talk to your kids about sex. But by the 1950s, ... the taboo had shifted. Death had already become in the 20th century what sex had been in the 19th century. In the 19th century adults told children that babies came when storks dropped them at the front door. Those same children stood bedside as their loved ones died. Now kids learn that grandpa’s death means he’s gone to a place where he can play golf or go fishing all day. Meanwhile, kids have 24/7 access to sexual content in their Instagram feeds.”

The spark of sexual freedom became a raging inferno with the advent of the pill. Suddenly birth control separated sex from procreation. Cultural authority structures weakened and personal freedom became a supreme value. Moral boundaries were recast as sources of harm. The result? This is important: Sexual fulfillment was reframed as essential to human flourishing. Essential. A need. Not a gift. A need, like food, air, water, shelter. And when my needs aren’t met...

Consider with me for a moment how this thought has permeated even Christian thinking, in marital conversation about “sexual needs,” in well-intentioned “Christian” marriage books and workshops about meeting your spouses “needs,” be they emotional or physical. If I had

a dollar for every Christian husband who has lamented to me that his wife is not fulfilling his sexual needs, I would have about 100 bucks. That's 100 bucks too many. Folks, I was one of them. I don't want to just pick on men, here, because the same can be said of women lamenting about their "emotional needs." It's the same thing. When a good gift becomes a need, a desire becomes a demand, and suddenly we are worshiping ourselves on the thrones of our hearts rather than Creator God. We'll get to that next week. Those belief, the belief that we need something from someone else, or we need autonomous self-expression in order to be happy, healthy, and whole can be directly linked to secular thinking, secular philosophy about what it means to be human, what it means to create right and wrong rather than receive it. That's just one example of how pervasive Satan's lies have become within our culture.

Another huge lie is Gender Theory, bringing us to one of the most significant and destructive development in modern thought: the separation of biological sex from gender identity. If we have been taught to challenge norms, challenge authority, and express our true self, this is a logical conclusion. What began as real social observations became the line in the sand, so to speak, for how our society functions. Men and women were viewed as often confined to rigid roles. Well, that's got to go. Cultural expectations regarding sexuality and gender were "liberated" from biological design. The initial claim was modest on the surface. Social psychologists redefined sex as biological traits and gender as social roles and expectations. But over time, this distinction expanded dramatically.

To quote Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Her argument was that society shapes identity, biology does not determine destiny, and gender is formed through social conditioning. This idea resonated deeply in a culture increasingly suspicious of nature-based and traditional morality-based limits. Psychologist John Money advanced this idea by teaching that gender identity is learned, can be shaped independent of biological sex, and can be determined by early socialization. I remember learning this during my psychology undergrad, which was at a Christian liberal arts university, I might add. Boys actually become boys from playing with traditional boy toys, and likewise with girls, so if your "boy" plays with dolls, he's forming a female gender identity.

Though many of John Money's theories later faced serious ethical and empirical challenges, the core idea remained influential and spread. There are several famous cases where parents refused to "gender-identify" their child when introducing them to public school in an effort to provide the child with self-empowerment in identifying gender for himself or herself.

Postmodern philosophy added another layer, bringing in key assumptions like: There is no objective truth—only narratives. Social norms reflect power structures, and fighting against power imbalances is a moral cause. Social justice and standing up for the actual oppressed, which are Christian ethics, morphed into overthrowing norms, championing the marginalized, and intersectionality and critical race theory. And language shapes reality. We changed the meaning of words. As applied to gender, the beliefs became:

Equipping Hour: Jan 25

- Biological categories are seen as social constructs
- Binary distinctions are viewed as tools of oppression
- Self-identification becomes the highest authority

Thus, gender is no longer something observed—it is something asserted.

In this secular framework:

- Gender is an internal sense of self
- The body is raw material
- Authenticity requires alignment between inner identity and outward expression

But what happens when there is conflict?

When the body and inner sense conflict:

- The body is seen as the problem
- Medical or social transition is framed as resolution
- Affirmation is considered morally necessary

The inner self is considered trustworthy. That means feelings. Trust your feelings. The body is morally neutral, so whatever I choose to do with it has no objective standards beyond my feelings. And my personal inner peace is the measure of truth, the measure of right and wrong. In a very real sense, all of this is designed to empower you to be your own god. I am the god of my body. Where else do we hear this in our society?

These radical ideas spread like a virus, growing and spreading over time, resulting in the decline of shared moral authority. Without a shared moral framework, moral disagreement becomes personal offense. Tolerance becomes the highest social virtue, and affirmation replaces moral reasoning. We live in what many call a therapeutic society.

In our culture:

- Mental health is the highest good
- Moral questions are reframed as psychological ones
- Harm is defined primarily as emotional distress

As a result, over time:

- Moral categories have been removed from clinical language
- Distress (how it makes me feel) defines disorder, not behavior itself
- Psychological frameworks increasingly shape ethical conclusions

So if I hear something that goes against my inner self, my inner peace, I interpret it as harmful. Right and wrong give way to healthy and unhealthy, affirming and harmful.

Identity today is:

- Publicly performed

- Socially validated
- Constantly reinforced through affirmation

Our culture celebrates people for rejecting norms, living their authentic self, embracing personal freedom and autonomy. Personal narratives have become morally protected, not questioned. By this point, we can summarize the dominant secular worldview of sexuality and gender:

- The self is sovereign
- Desire reveals identity
- The body has no inherent meaning
- Authenticity is the highest moral good
- Freedom means the absence of constraint
- Psychological well-being defines human flourishing

“Nature abhors a vacuum.” This famous quote is attributed to the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Let’s modify this by adding one word: human. Human nature abhors a vacuum. What do I mean by that? I mean we are not blank slates. In the absence of one worldview, another will form. Always. If God is removed, something dark and chaotic will take His place. Every single one of us has a worldview, answering the numerous fundamental questions about reality, meaning, and identity. Sometimes we take this for granted. Sometimes our answers are biblically aligned. Often they are not.

In the absence of a biblical worldview, we will always, always, always adopt a secular worldview because we exist in the middle of a sin-soaked sponge. None of us are formed in a morally neutral vacuum. Folks, we need to stop taking for granted that our minds are still in need of renewing. If we are going to have any chance of being a church of disciples who make disciples, we have to stop taking for granted that just because we believe Jesus is Lord doesn’t mean we have stopped being renewed. Jesus is Lord is the beginning of our journey towards Christlikeness.

This secular worldview on sexuality and gender did not appear overnight. It is the result of centuries of philosophical, cultural, and clinical influence. Let me end with a few questions:

- What happens when two authentic selves collide?
Conflict. Isolation. Tribalism.
- How and why do desires become disordered?
In our modern clinical context, the patient decides if something is disordered, not the doctor. Meaning, if this behavior causes me distress and harm, or if your behavior causes me distress or harm, I get to decide. Therapists are banned from telling a patient that what he or she is doing is morally wrong.
- Who gets to define what human flourishing actually is?

Equipping Hour: Jan 25

Next week, we will ask a different question:

What does Scripture reveal about the body, sexuality, identity, and desire?

And then, in Week Three, we'll ask the hardest question of all:

Where has my thinking—often unintentionally—been shaped more by culture than by God's Word?