

Why the Church Needs to Change the Way We Talk About Sex

How are you talking about sex at your church (or with your kids ... or with your friends) these days? Or are you talking about it?

Sometimes when we don't know what to say, we say nothing. Or we say the wrong thing.

Yet our culture is talking about sex every ... single ... day. And increasingly, they're talking about how the church is talking about it.

The way we talk about sex, marriage and family is coming under greater and greater scrutiny. This is true whether Christians are addressing same-sex attraction, sex outside of marriage or marriage itself.

For the record, I believe that the context God designed for sex is between a man and woman, married to each other for life.

I also realize that fewer and fewer people share that conviction with each passing year. Increasingly, the view I hold is the view of a small minority. I understand that.

But the fact that some church leaders hold a minority view means the way we talk about it becomes more important every year.

Consequently, I'm convinced that *how* we talk about sex needs to change.

Given the tone of some of the current dialogue, the damage done by the way we talk about sex may actually rival the

damage done by sex outside of marriage itself (or inside marriage ... married sex isn't always harmless sex).

I don't say that lightly. So what needs to change?

I'm not sure anyone's cracked the code on this, but here are a few things I think could help us create a dialogue that helps more and hurts less in the church:

1. Don't just talk about sexual sin, talk about church sin too. Everyone has sins they focus on and sins they ignore. The tendency, of course, is to focus on the sins of others and ignore your own. The church is no different.

So here's a proposal: Deal with the church sin everyone in the church seems to tolerate.

Let me explain.

When you explore a passage like Galatians 5:16-26, you notice that, included in the *same* list that speaks of *sexual* sins, is a long list of what I call *church* sins. Church sins are sins Christians engage in all the time that, frankly, no one talks about or addresses.

Right alongside sexual immorality, impurity and 'wild parties,' Paul lists:

- hostility
- quarrelling
- jealousy
- outbursts of anger
- selfish ambition
- dissension
- division
- envy
- jealousy
- arrogance

If you add gossip and gluttony to the list, you've pretty much

got a complete list of church sins we too often tolerate.

This list of sins actually describes the lives of too many churches and too many people who would declare themselves to be 'mature' Christians. (I wrote about why we need a new definition of Christian maturity, and shared some thoughts on what's wrong with Christian discipleship.)

We are so blind to our own sins that we not only tolerate them, we sometimes celebrate them. What do I mean?

Too many prayer meetings are thinly disguised gossip marathons.

Many churches could easily call their next potluck *Gluttonfests*. It wouldn't be inaccurate.

More than a few Christians justify division, dissension, hostility, quarrelling and jealousy in the name of being 'right.'

This is terrible. It really is.

And before you think I'm pointing fingers, I'm not.

I have gossiped. I have eaten too much too often. I have caused division and hurt. I struggle with envy. I can be arrogant.

Don't get me wrong ... sexual sin has some heartbreaking consequences.

But so does church sin. Seriously, just look at the state of the church today as church sin gets continually neglected, and you will see droves of people staying away and walking away.

So ... what if church leaders never talked about sexual sin unless they also addressed church sin?

It would reframe the conversation.

It might even change some hearts. Including ours.

2. Deal with church sin ... seriously. So do you *never* deal with someone else's sin?

Well, you do. But we're not nearly there yet.

Before dealing with someone else's sexual sin, deal with the church sin that lives inside you and your community. If we keep reading Galatians 5, we can see that Paul had an astounding picture of the church in mind. Here's what he said:

"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives:

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

There is no law against these things.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there" (Gal. 5:22-24, NLT).

So, think about it. Why would someone struggling with their sexuality want to come into a place of judgment, anger, division, gossip and arrogance?

That's right. They wouldn't. But they might want to find a place of love, kindness, faithfulness and maybe even a place characterized by self-control.

Ironically, the very thing most people look for when they express themselves sexually is acceptance and love. And it's

the very thing they are rarely able to find among many Christians.

Could you imagine if the church got serious about *our* sins? What if we repented? What if we became a community of truth *and* grace? What if?

3. Put your arm around people as though you were one of them ... because you are. Paul called himself the chief of sinners.

People outside the church today have no doubt that people inside the church are sinners. They just don't think that we *think* we're sinners.

Too often when we open our mouths, we accuse. We condemn. We confront. What if we changed that?

What if we came alongside people and said, "I know what it's like ... it's hard isn't it?"

I always try to start a conversation by saying something like, "We all have issues. Some of mine may be different than yours, and some may be the same, but I know what it's like to mess up. Let me know if you want to have a conversation about it."

It's amazing what happens when you change your stance, put your arm around someone and say, "Let's figure this out together." I don't always get it right, but I try.

Church leaders, put your arm around people as though you were one of them. It's because you are.

What Do You Think?

I realize this is a complex and difficult subject. I'd love to know what you're doing that has helped advance the dialogue about sex and sin in the church.

I'll be monitoring the comments on this post carefully (be polite, be respectful), but please scroll down and leave a

comment.

I'd love for us to learn together on this.

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