

Unmasking Idols: Five things the early church was known for. Sex within marriage.

In first-century Corinth, the attitudes toward sex were deeply rooted in a pagan culture that celebrated idolatry. Tim Keller notes that many Greek men juggled different relationships: they had a legitimate wife (*gynē*) for running the household and raising children, a mistress (*paidiskos*) for companionship and pleasure, and concubines (*pallakai*) to boost their social standing. This setup showed how women were often seen as tools for men's satisfaction rather than as equals. Religious beliefs played a big role, too. Worship of gods like Aphrodite involved rituals that included temple prostitution, making sex a casual, transactional experience. In this environment, sex was often disconnected from any deeper emotional bonds, seen instead as a source of personal pleasure. Glen Scrivener highlights that this idolatrous culture not only accepted but even celebrated sexual promiscuity. The idea of personal gratification overshadowed any sense of commitment or responsibility. Men's identities were often tied to their sexual conquests, reinforcing the notion that their worth came from the number of partners they had. This chaotic approach to sex left many people feeling unfulfilled and craving something deeper. It created a perfect backdrop for early Christianity, which offered a transformative message that challenged these norms and introduced a more meaningful understanding of love and relationships.

Passage. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:6.

In complete contrast to the Corinthian attitude towards sex, Paul emphasises the sacredness of our sexuality. Whether someone was single or married, Paul says our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Identity and Ownership. How does the truth that "your body is not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19-20) impact how you view your personal identity, especially in a culture that prioritises self-expression and autonomy?

For Singles.

1. Singleness is often undervalued or seen as merely a season to pass through before marriage. How can we actively affirm that singleness, like marriage, is a gift and a calling with its own opportunities for serving God and others (1 Cor. 7:7-8)?
2. How can we as a community affirm the value and purpose of singleness in the Christian life, making singles feel fully included in the life of the church?

Widows and divorces.

1. How could we provide healing, grace, and ongoing support for those who have been widowed or divorced? Or how can we help them while also reaffirming their identity in Christ?
2. Divorce often carries deep emotional and spiritual wounds. In what ways can we create an environment of grace that allows divorcees to heal, grow, and find their value in Christ, while also upholding biblical truths about marriage and sexuality?

Marrieds.

1. Marriage is often celebrated as the pinnacle of life's achievements, but how can we ensure that we are affirming the unique value of marriage without making it the ultimate standard for fulfilment?
2. How can we support married couples in navigating the challenges they face, offering grace, encouragement, and biblical wisdom, while promoting the health and holiness of their relationship?

Prayer.

Take some time to pray for each other. Praying that regardless of what circumstances you find yourself in, you can see yourself and live as temples of the Holy Spirit.

PS- this has been a very sensitive topic. If you need to speak to one of the pastors or elders at CBTB, we can help support you by looking at counselling, prayer ministry or other support.

Sources.

Ben Witherington. Conflict and Community in Corinth A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. 1995

Timothy Keller · The Meaning of Marriage 2011

Timothy Keller. Podcast Wednesday Apr 12, 2023. Sexuality and Christian Hope

Glen Scrivener. The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality (2022)