



Queer Sexual Ethics

January 11, 2024

Presented by:
Phoenix Community Church UCC

Introduction

- Opening Prayer
- Welcome & Introductions
- We are recording this session and will make it available on youtube. The slides will be available at <https://phoenixchurch.org>.
- Please keep comments and questions respectful. Speak only for your self.
- Reference: “An Ethic of Queer Sex: Principles and Improvisations” by Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. (2013).

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Definition: Queer
 - A person who identifies themselves as LGBTQIA+ (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, etc.) may identify themselves as queer.
 - Generally, a queer person is a person who does not fit the cisgender heterosexual societal expectation.
 - The term queer is sometimes used as an umbrella term instead of LGBTQIA+.
 - The term queer was originally an insult used against LGBTQIA+ people. It has been reclaimed as a term of pride. However, for many people it can still carry negative connotations.

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Definition: Queer
 - The term queer can also be used as a verb or adjective.
 - To queer something is to challenge and disrupt the status quo, especially regarding the boundaries and norms of sexuality and gender identity.
 - For example, queer theory is an academic field of study that challenges and disrupts traditional notions of sexuality and gender identity.
- Definition: ethics
 - A set of morals or principles that define what it means to be a decent, morally good human being.

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Queer sexual ethics can then be thought of as challenging traditionally taught morals regarding sexuality and gender (i.e. what we're taught is "right" and "wrong").
 - Considers many often marginalized topics / practices such as open relationships, polyamory, promiscuity, public sex, BDSM and kink, prostitution and sex work, etc.
 - We will assume the validity and worth of LGBTQIA+ people in general. For example, we will not spend time discussing whether being gay is right or wrong but will assume it is a God-given gift.
 - Not just for the LGBTQIA+ community. All of these topics affect people of all sexualities and gender identities.
 - Although these topics are often more openly discussed in the queer community, that is not to imply that all LGBTQIA+ people engage in these practices.

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Is talking about this really necessary?
 - These issues are not talked about much in church circles, but they are a reality in the lives of many congregants – and not just queer people. Silence is shaming.
 - “The hope is that by pursuing these issues a contribution will be made to a more just and wholesome sexual ethic that overcomes the erotophobia that is at the base of the homophobia that often governs discussions of sexuality in religion and politics.” – Jennings

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Methodology
 - The basic approach to these marginalized issues / practices will be to ask: why should this be a problem?
 - We want to ask not only what is taught in the church but ask why it is taught.
 - “Is it possible for us to free ourselves of a normative sexuality for which all else is, if not evil, at least “immature” or deficient or what have you? If we cannot do this do we not still stigmatize some sexualities unfairly?” – Jennings

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Why do we put limits on sexual expressions?
 - Humans seem to have a need to understand and control all facets of life.
 - We project our experiences and hangups on other people and expect them to conform. Projections often come from fear of difference and/or fear of what might arise out of our own shadow.
 - Can a specifically Christian ethic embrace sexual lifestyles and ways of life that transgress the boundaries of conventional sexual morality?

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Break-out discussion
 - We'll break into small groups for about 10 minutes.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - What does “queer” mean to you? What does it mean to talk about a “queer sexual ethic”?
 - What do you think is required to be a decent, morally good human being and lead a flourishing life? That is, what is required to lead an ethical life?
 - Can so-called marginalized sexual practices be part of an ethical (Christian) life?
 - When we come back, we'll spend another 10 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

An Introduction to Queer Sexual Ethics

- Sharing highlights of small group discussions...
 - Meaning of “queer” and “queer sexual ethics”
 - Requirements to lead an ethical life

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- What is monogamy and why is it the norm?
 - Monogamy is a relationship of two people exclusively dedicated to each other
 - We've long been taught that sex is only acceptable to God if it is between two people who are married.
 - The Bible is not particularly helpful. Arguments for both sides of the question can be supported by references to scripture. Moreover, the Bible is not a rule book. It's a collection of our ancestors' faith stories, which often contradict each other.
 - Possible reasons monogamy is normalized:
 - encourage supportive family
 - patriarchy, control, inheritance, jealousy

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- What is non-monogamy?
 - Promiscuous and non-marital sexual expression
 - Open relationships – two people are primarily committed to each other but mutually agree that sexual encounters with people outside of the relationship are allowed
 - Polyamory – more than two people are part of a committed relationship, which might be open or not.

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- What does it mean to be ethical?
 - Jesus taught that love is the basis of everything we should be doing.
 - Acting in love is not the same as “being in love”
 - People in a sexual relationship don’t necessarily have to be “in love” (sex can be an expression of romantic love and/or holy and sacramental – or it can also just be a lot of fun), but they should treat each other lovingly.

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- Is ethical non-monogamy possible?
 - What concerns us?
 - Vows
 - Jealousy

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- The most important aspect of relationship is not the number of people but that it is loving and ethical.
 - Requirements (these are what make monogamous relationships ethical, too)
 - Honesty
 - Compassion
 - Respect
 - Do no harm
 - Consensual

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- Theologically speaking...
 - Even if we know monogamy works best for us, it doesn't follow that it works best for everyone or that we can only love one person at a time.
 - We are made in the image of God and God is a promiscuous force. God does not love just one person at a time. God loves everyone, all the time and at the same time.
 - One might claim that God's love for us is un-related to an intimate, erotic love, but Christian mystics have commonly used erotic language in describing their experience of the Divine. (example on next slide)

Thinking about Non-monogamy

Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

- St. John of the Cross, writing about his personal
experience of Jesus

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- Break-out discussion
 - We'll break into small groups for about 10 minutes.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - Can non-monogamous relationships still be “Christian” and “ethical”? Why or why not?
 - If yes, should they be blessed in Christian ceremony?
 - When we come back, we'll spend another 10 minutes sharing highlights from our group reflections.

Thinking about Non-monogamy

- Sharing highlights of small group discussions...
 - Can non-monogamy be part of a Christian ethic?
 - Should Christianity bless untraditional relationships?



Thank you!

- We appreciate you joining us for today's discussion.
- For follow up questions or to offer feedback and other comments please email office@phoenixchurch.org.