

Ephesians: *The Sex Talk*
Ephesians 5:3-5

One of the joys of parenting four children is having “the sex talk” when your kids come of age. I don’t know how that works in your family, but in our family I was responsible for having “the talk” with the boys, and Momma was responsible for having the talk with the girl. Now, I was very strategic about how I went about having the talk with my boys. When they were entering into the sixth or seventh grade, I found an excuse to get them in the truck for a long drive. I would start off with some light chitchat, get them the prerequisite McDonalds chicken nuggets meal, and then I would lay it on ‘em! I told them about the changes that were coming in terms of their body and how they would begin to feel things they never felt before. I covered everything from body hair to how babies were made to nocturnal emissions to masturbation to sex before marriage. As you might imagine, they were seconds away from flinging themselves out of the truck and taking their chances on the interstate. The look on their faces was similar to the look many of you have right now...kind of a queasy, greenish, panicked look of dread...and you don’t even have any McNuggets.

Now, listen-it’s going to be O.K. We are going to be talking about sex and sexuality today, and if you would feel more comfortable removing your child from the service, you are most welcome to go, and I totally understand. However, before you go, you might ask yourself if you would like your child to learn a biblical understanding of sexuality from your Pastor or if you would prefer they learn about sex from YouTube and Snap Chat. Your kids are learning all the time about this subject at just about every age, so a little input from the Bible and your pastor may not be a terrible idea. That said, I know most parents want to control the situation when their kids are educated about sexuality issues...I get that...and might I suggest a long road trip with some McNuggets?

For the rest of us, let us look to Ephesians 5, where Paul is in fact addressing sexual immorality--which was a big problem in the early church even as it is today. Let’s stand and together read aloud Ephesians 5:3-5:

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

My message will fall under three subheadings: 1) The Antithesis of Love; 2) A Positive View of Sexual Intercourse, Christian Marriage and Christian Singleness; and 3) Living Water.

I. The Antithesis of Love

Whenever we read the scriptures, we must always consider the historical and textual context of any given passage in order to grasp the meaning of the text. Paul’s strong condemnation of sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthy talk, and crude joking immediately follows this sentence in 5:2, “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Do you see why that’s important?

To walk in love...to love one another as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...means the believing community must abstain from “anti-love” behavior. According to Paul, sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are the antithesis of what it means to walk in love.

To emphasize his point, Paul makes a very serious statement in vs. 5, “Everyone who is sexually immoral, impure, or covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Church, take this teaching to heart. To walk in anti-loving behavior...to indulge regularly in sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, foul-talk, and filthiness is completely incompatible for those who have been forgiven in Christ. To *walk* in that way is to live an unrepentant life. Those who will not repent have no inheritance in the kingdom.

Now, to be clear, Paul is not suggesting that a believer who falls into sexual temptation has lost his salvation...heaven forbid. Every Christian I know, including myself, falls into temptation and sin...and sometimes in the ways listed here in vs. 3. However, you will know authentic believers immediately by their hatred of their sin, their sincere repentance, and their renewed effort to resist that anti-loving behavior in the future. Here in Ephesians 5, however, Paul is referring to those within the fellowship who have given themselves over to an “anti-loving” lifestyle of sexual immorality, impurity, and idolatry. Paul is absolutely clear: this kind of anti-love behavior has to go...it is completely incompatible with “walking in love as Jesus loved us.”

Now, I suspect you’re wondering: what exactly does Paul mean by “sexual immorality”? You always ask very good questions.

The Greek word here is *porneia*, which of course is where we get our word “pornography.” In the ancient Greek culture *porneia* meant “unlawful intercourse.” For Paul, sexual immorality refers to any intercourse outside the bonds of marriage. How do we know this?

When we look to 1 Corinthians 7, Paul writes in vs. 2: “Because of the temptation to sexual immorality (*porneia*), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.”

Again, Paul writes in vs. 8: “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

For Paul, there is only one God-ordained, God-sanctioned context for sexual intercourse—and that is marriage between a man and a woman. All intercourse outside of marriage is unlawful intercourse for the Christian...it is considered sexual immorality...and such behavior is contrary to “walking in love as Jesus loved us.”

The word “impurity” here comes from the Greek word *akatharsia*. You can hear the Greek word “catharsis” in that term—which meant for the Greeks exactly what it means to us: purging or cleansing. The Greek letter “alpha” in front of the Greek word “catharsis” denotes “the opposite of.” So *akatharsia* is the opposite of cleansing...it is defiling behavior. This kind of impurity could include anything from bestiality to steamy romance novels to pornography. Again, sexual impurity is also an act of “anti-love.”

Covetousness, *pleonexia* in the Greek, is a deep longing for that which belongs to another. The 10th commandment reads: “Thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Given the context of sexual immorality and impurity, we get the sense that Paul is condemning the longing stare of a man who secretly fantasizes about having another man’s wife. Jesus viewed coveting another man’s wife as committing adultery. In Matthew 5:27-28 He taught: You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Needless to say, sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness is not limited to the behavior of men...women are also very susceptible to all of these behaviors as well.

The bottom line of our text here in Ephesians 5 is that these anti-loving behaviors should not even be named amongst the fellowship of believers. Why? Because those behaviors--along with filthy and crude words-- are “out of place,” according to Paul. Those who have been redeemed...those who are called to be “imitators of God”...those who have been set apart to walk in love as Jesus first loved us...should have no involvement with anti-loving sexual behaviors, patterns of thinking, and speech. Whoever engages regularly in such behavior has no inheritance in Christ; they are those who remain unredeemed.

Now, before we move on, we must acknowledge that this is a hard teaching for many of us. In his classic work entitled *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes:

Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it; the Christian rule is, ‘Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.’ Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think it is the instinct which has gone wrong.¹

He goes on to make his point: One man may eat enough for two, but he does not eat enough for ten. The appetite [for food] goes a little beyond its biological purpose, but not enormously. But if a healthy young man indulged his sexual appetite whenever he felt inclined, and if each act produced a baby, then in ten years he might easily populate a small village. This appetite is in ludicrous and preposterous excess of its function.²

¹ C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*; 95.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

Do you hear what Lewis is saying? He's saying that the only reason the Christian sexual ethic of chastity is so offensive and hard for us to manage is because our sexual appetite is excessive and corrupted. By the way, this is not a new problem.

Consider the ancient Greek culture that Paul is writing to in Asia Minor. A first century writer known as Pseudo-Demosthenes describes the excessive sexual appetite of Greek and Roman men, "We have mistresses for our enjoyment, concubines to serve our needs, and wives to bear legitimate children."³ It was a man's world to be sure, and marriage was not what we think of it today.

In the ancient Greek culture, marriage was arranged by the parents as a means of furthering the family name and transferring property. In fact, "laws about women were largely laws about property."⁴ Because of the complexity that accompanied the property and asset transfer, a Greek male would often be required to wait until his late 20's or 30's before getting married. In almost every instance, however, he would then be married to a virgin who was barely over the age of 12. Prior to getting married, the young Greek men would seek their pleasure with their male and female servants, high-class prostitutes if they could afford them, and even younger boys in the gymnasium. Once married, it was assumed that husbands would indulge their appetites for sex with courtesans as well as with their male and female slaves, while women were expected to remain faithful to their husbands, raising their children and working like slaves in the home.⁵

Imagine if you will, then, that you are a Greek man who has recently become a follower of Jesus, and you are hearing Paul's instructions regarding sexual immorality. No more courtesans; no more sex with the servants; no more casual sex with anyone at all...from now on it's just you and your wife. If you are a Greek or Roman man, that is a staggering thought. However, how does that sexual ethic strike you if you are a Greek wife...a woman who was expected to remain faithful to your husband while he went off and enjoyed his sexual escapades?

In his book entitled, *Who Is This Man?*, John Ortberg traces the impact of the Christian sexual ethic as it affected the value of girls and women in the ancient world. The conclusion is clear: a great contributor to the spread of Christianity throughout the ancient world were women who felt valued first by Jesus and second by their believing husbands—husbands who were now held to a high standard of sexual fidelity in marriage by their Christian community. Even though women were called to submit to their husbands (nothing new there) in Ephesians 5:22, the husbands were commanded to love their wives and to lay down their lives for their wives as Christ laid down his life for the Church! It was this teaching from Paul, based upon the teaching, example, and influence of Jesus, that literally transformed the world's view regarding the value of girls and women. One could make an argument that the further we stray from the Christian ethic of chastity and the Christian view of sexuality and marriage, the more likely that girls and women

³ John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man?* 137.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 51

⁵ https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~rauhn/greek_gender.htm

will be de-valued. One could argue that is already happening at an alarming rate in our current culture.

O.K., we have spent quite a bit of time looking at what those in the church should NOT be doing. Let's take a few minutes to investigate the positive Christian view of sexual intercourse, marriage, and singleness.

II. A Positive View of Sexual Intercourse, Christian Marriage, and Christian Singleness

There are at least two lies that we must resist when it comes to sex. The first lie is that sex is dirty and sinful. Many people from conservative cultures and religions use fear to impose a strict sexual ethic upon their children. Sex is presented as necessary for childbearing, but generally condemnable and shameful all the same. In the ancient world, this would have been the view of the Gnostics who considered all matter to be sinful and corrupt.

The other lie is that sex is strictly a physical appetite that needs to be fed, and that whatever we do sexually in the body remains unrelated to our soul. This view is now the prevailing view held by our culture, particularly amongst college students and young adults. The practice of casual sex is premised upon this assumption that I can feed my body's desire for sexual pleasure while withholding my "self" from being personally committed at the soul level. You might be surprised to know that this idea is nothing new as well. John Ortberg writes, "In the ancient world, sexuality was celebrated as a means of procreation and as an appetite to be gratified [for men], much like appetites for food."⁶

Both of these views betray a low and inadequate understanding of the body, the soul, and sexuality.

Biblical Christianity has a very high view of sexual intercourse and the body as well.

C.S. Lewis observes: Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of a body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion: and nearly all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anyone says that sex, in itself, is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once.⁷

The Bible tells us in Genesis 1-2 that every person bears the image of God in both body and spirit. Both the body and the spirit are GOOD, and both are inseparable while we have breath. It is precisely because the Christian view of the body/soul and sex is so HIGH that the ethic of chastity is so important.

⁶ Ortberg, 138.

⁷ Lewis, 98.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members with a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.”⁸

According to Paul and a Christian worldview, the body is not evil, nor is sex evil. Our redeemed bodies are “members of Christ”...they serve as a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells (6:19). Our bodies are good, they are beautiful, but they are also sacred and to be treated as such. Male and female, spirit-filled bodies, were designed to be united for the sake of producing children, but love-making is more than a physical act for the sake of pleasure or reproduction. When we make love to another person, we are uniting ourselves to that person in body *and* soul. Paul is not limiting the sexual experience to our “physical bodies” when he says that “the two become one flesh.” The Greek word *sarkos* is really a much deeper word that means “person.” The person, in a biblical understanding, is both body and soul, and both body and soul are inseparable. The physical might be thought of as the outer part of the person, the soul is the inner part of the person, but both body and soul are necessary for personhood in this age. In other words: whatever our bodies are doing, we are doing as souls.

Paul, therefore, understands sexual intercourse as a life-uniting act...a whole-life union of two persons into “oneness.” It is a whole body, whole soul, whole person experience. It is an act of mutual submission, trust, and self-giving designed for permanent oneness and life-commitment. Dr. Lewis Smedes, in his highly regarded book entitled *Sex for Christians*, describes what happens when a man sleeps with a prostitute as an act of casual sex:

The reality of the act, unfelt and unnoticed by them, is this: [sex] unites them—body and soul—to each other. It unites them in that strange, impossible to pinpoint sense of ‘one flesh.’ There is no such thing as casual sex, no matter how casual people are about it. The Christian assaults reality in his night out at the brothel. He uses a woman and puts her back in a closet where she can be forgotten; but the reality is that he has put away a person with whom he has done something that was meant to inseparably join them. This is what is at stake for Paul in the question of sexual intercourse between unmarried people.⁹

Christianity’s high view of the body and sexual intercourse points to the biblical view of marriage. Again, Smedes states it well and succinctly:

Christianity’s positive view of marriage and fidelity rests on the insight that God created men and women to live out their closest personal relationship in a permanent, exclusive union...and now we can see clearly why Paul thought sexual intercourse by unmarried people was wrong. It is wrong because it violates the inner reality of the act. It is wrong because unmarried people thereby engage in a life-uniting act without a life-uniting intent. Whenever two people copulate without a commitment to life-union, they commit fornication [sexual immorality].¹⁰

We must also remember the words of Jesus on this matter of marriage. In Mark 10:9 “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” According to Jesus, God is involved in

⁸ There were no single young people (particularly women) in the ancient world. Everyone was married at a very early age. If you were having “unmarried sex,” it was most likely with a prostitute, or another man’s wife, or possibly a homosexual encounter, but the rule of chastity here in 1 Corinthians 6 applies for all sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

⁹ Lewis Smedes, *Sex for Christians*; 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128-130, selected passages.

bringing a man and woman together as husband and wife. Sexual intercourse and marriage is not merely a physical, social, financial, arrangement...both sex and marriage are profoundly spiritual.

So, Christianity has a high view of sexual intercourse because it has a high view of the body, the soul, and marriage; thus making the sexual ethic for Christians quite clear: sexual intercourse is to be reserved for a man and a woman in the permanent, exclusive union of Christian marriage. Sex is something created by God for our enjoyment in marriage as the two become one flesh, but it not to be perverted, corrupted, or spoken of crassly with crude joking. These kinds of behaviors are inconsistent with those who have been redeemed. Again, this is the core teaching that we find here in Ephesians 5.

Now, what about those who are single? We must remember that Christianity has a VERY high view of singleness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:

I wish that all were as I myself am [single!]. To the unmarried and widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Again in 1 Corinthians 7:28ff Paul writes:

Those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife and his interests are divided. The unmarried woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this to...secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. So then, he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

Christianity celebrates singleness! In fact, the two most respected heroes of Christianity, Jesus and Paul, were single men. We get the sense that Mary Magdalene was likely single, and perhaps many other disciples as well. Even Mary the mother of Jesus was single when she was chosen by God to conceive the Savior of the world.

Church, Christianity's high view of singleness was, and remains, unprecedented and unmatched! Previous to Christianity, people thought you to be cursed if you remained unmarried. This was so much the case even in Judaism that a woman who lost her husband was to be immediately wed by the dead man's brother. I hope you can appreciate that Christianity, above all the world's religions, celebrates singleness not only as equal to the status of married, but actually celebrates singleness as superior to those who are married!

Why? Pauls says, "Because those who are single have less distractions and are able to be singularly devoted to the Lord." OK...but what about our desires for sex and intimacy? Can we really expect single people to live a life of sexual abstinence? Can we really expect our teenagers, college students, and young adults to refrain from sex prior to marriage? And for that matter, can we truly expect married people to remain faithful and chaste in marriage for an entire lifetime?

The answer is YES...but only if...only if we have a hope that is so intimate, so satisfying, so liberating, so complete that it frees us from placing our hope and our identity in sexual behavior and sexual relationships. And that leads us to our final subheading:

III. Living Water

Let's go back to a very familiar story...back to John 4 when Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. This woman was a pariah in her community. She was unmarried with a checkered past. If you recall, Jesus asks her to draw some water and they get into a religious conversation. Finally, Jesus looks deep into her soul as only Jesus can do and states, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The lady is shocked that a Jewish man would even speak to her, and she responds with a mildly snarky comment, and then Jesus restates His offer: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. That water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." At this point, Jesus has her undivided attention. Something shifts in her spirit...a deep thirst wells up for peace, rest, and redemption. So she whispers, "Sir, give me this water..." To which Jesus responds, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

The woman blushes and admits, "I have no husband." Jesus replies, "You are right in saying 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband."

Why, when this woman expresses a desire for the living water of Jesus, does the Lord bring up her sex life? Do you see it?

This woman has placed her hope and identity in husbands. Her hope has been in attracting men who will supply for her needs, and time after time that has ended tragically. Even now she is an outcast because she remains unmarried and yet lives with a man who is not her husband. But here's what Jesus is saying: you must no longer place your hope and identity in your husbands, in your sexual appeal and your sexual relationships. I am your hope. I am your satisfaction. I am the One your heart has been longing for. Find your identity, your satisfaction, your provision, and your home in ME. Place your HOPE in me, and you will never "thirst" again for those things that cannot ultimately satisfy you.

The Christian view of sexual intercourse, marriage, and singleness all rest upon this HOPE: Jesus satisfies the deepest desires of our body, mind and soul. A relationship with Jesus liberates us from the slavery of our sexual desires. He liberates us from having to forge out our identity based upon our sexual orientation, desires, conquests, or relationships. This is why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealing with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? Some just write this off to Paul thinking Christ was going to return in his lifetime. I don't think that's it at all. Paul recognizes that as Christians, we are now

living in the already but not yet. We still marry; we're still single; we're still buying and selling; we're still grieving and rejoicing; but we do all these things with one foot in the old world and one foot in the new world of life in Christ! We already have access to the Living Water that satisfies our souls, so we do not NEED our wives and husbands and sexual desires and property and successes or even our pain to define our identity and give us a place to stand in the world. We don't need these things in the way that we needed those things before our relationship with Jesus. As those in Christ, we have a hope that satisfies the soul already...but that satisfaction points forward to a union that will once and for all satisfy our deepest needs...body, mind, and soul...and that is our future union with Christ...a union of the Bride and the Bridegroom.

Church, you will never embrace and appreciate the sexual ethic of Christianity until and unless you actually know the HOPE you have in Christ! Jesus satisfies our parched souls and empowers us to have victory over our appetites so that we are not slaves to our bodies, slaves to our marriages, slaves to our past, slaves to our shame, or slaves to what the world tells us we must do to be found acceptable. Jesus satisfies our soul, which is why Paul states here in the middle of his teaching on sexual immorality "...but instead, let there be thanksgiving."

Sexual immorality, impurity, and covetousness (which is idolatry)...along with all the filthiness and crude joking that accompany these behaviors...all of these things reveal an ungrateful heart. In other words, we fall into sexual sin when we believe that we don't have enough in Jesus.

Listen: if you are wrapped up in sexual sin this morning, you have not yet truly believed the Gospel. You don't yet believe in the sufficiency of Christ. You are still looking for pleasure or conquest or a person or a group of people to validate you. You have placed your hope in a false god...a god that does not love you and a god that will not forgive you.

Friends, place your faith and your hope in the Living Water of Jesus Christ. He is the only One who died for you, the only One who loves you and forgives you when you stumble. Place your faith and your hope in Jesus...discover the satisfaction that He provides, and we will no longer look to the things of this world to satisfy our thirst. And above all...be thankful, amen?

Will you pray with me?