

Give credit to conference lady!

This series focuses on the Gospels, Jesus transformative words. But we are going to slip in something from Ephesians today since it is an important topic for our revolutionary transformation. This is a PG-13 sermon. We are going to talk about everyone's favorite subject today, sex/sexuality. We're going to be candid, because we need to speak clearly and maturely on this subject in church. I'll try to do it in a respectful manner. I'm not here to heap guilt or pass judgment. Our sexuality is like a 90 pound jockey controlling a 1200 pound race horse. How do you control yourself when you're constantly bombarded by imagery and ideas contrary to the biblical message.

Some of you have a personality that will tend to take my words as judgment. You'll naturally negate the words of mercy and grace feeling despair – that's not my intention. Listen carefully to the message of grace imbedded in these words, merely taking stock of how you're living; repent maturely, if need be, and don't needlessly throw away a relationship that may have a lot of potential. Please don't over over compensate.

Some of you are skeptical however, and don't fully buy into this whole Christian sexuality thing. I want you to feel the weightiness of the issue, because you may be more inclined to walk away and not feel that you have to think or live differently. So, listen, allow the Holy Spirit to speak, and respond in a mature manner, whatever that may be.

Ephesians 5:3-12

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹

Why is this passage so strongly worded? Isn't it a little too much for us to bear in such a sexually charged world? I think we have to understand the context of which God is speaking to us.

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Eph 5:3–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

A secret: You're all players in a story, whether you know it or not. It all started with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eden was a beautiful place and they lived in perfect harmony with God and each other. They were naked, husband & wife, and were to unite sexually, remaining faithful to each other and God. Fidelity and faithfulness was at the heart of their relationship which mirrored their relationship with God. Adam and Eve had the perfect marriage relationship. Now, I want you to think about something, just take a moment, what if Satan never turned up? What if the fall never happened? What would we be living like now? (pause) Okay, that's enough, because that's about how long it lasted in history.

What happened? It certainly wasn't that God was so upset just because of the fruit. The real problem lies in that they were duped into thinking that they could decide for themselves how they should live. They knew the difference between good and evil; they just had to go to God for it. So we need to ask ourselves, who is Satan? Scholars tell us that he was an Arch Angel; a beautiful one at that. Satan, in his stupidity, tried to usurp the throne of God, and was casted down. Now, he knew that he could not beat God, but at the least he could try to destroy Gods special garden, and these vulnerable little people living in it. Maybe in his initial attempt to usurp the throne he sensed that God had a weak side? Maybe he sensed the vulnerability of God in relationship? Maybe he saw that God had a tenderness, and gentility about him? How God is willing to give of himself with risk of being hurt. Maybe he misread vulnerability as weakness, and now all he wants to do is to make a mess of Gods creation. He desires to divert the worship of Gods creation to himself.

Now we know that God desires worship, but his worship is never coerced. God does not force it upon us; it is an act of free will to worship God. Contrary to this, Satan's worship is coerced, and he doesn't care that coerced worship is not really true worship at all. He doesn't care if you even know that you worship him, all he cares about is that you are not worshipping God. So, Satan convinced Adam & Eve that maybe God was holding out on them, maybe they could be better than God, and decide for themselves how they should live; that they didn't need to be dependent on God for their knowledge of good and evil.

He was the first used car salesman, manipulating them into doing what he wanted them to do. Just listen to it, decide for yourself how you should live, decide for yourself who you will marry, decide for yourself what you will do. It all sounds familiar. Satan craved Gods Glory, and he'll take worship by default, even though it's not real worship, coming from free will in healthy relationship. Satan's deception of them opened up all out war on Gods wonderful plan. When they were no longer faithful to God, why stay faithful to one another; why bothering imaging a God you are not going to follow? Remember, it was not their mouths they covered, it was their genitals; their nakedness. This fall struck right at their sexuality, and now, by default they placed themselves under Satan's rule.

From Adam and Eve it went downhill, they hid their differences, exchanged harmony for hostility, and came under the dominion of a being that sought to destroy them. God

allowed them to stray because it's what they wanted; remember God does not desire coerced worship. Then we go to Cain & Abel, the first murder, from there to Noah and the starting over by God because, "every intention of the thoughts of his (humankind's) heart was only evil continually."² God was saddened that he'd made man, and decided to start over with one faithful family. God makes a covenant, asking them to live on the earth and spread his love from the inside out. Then we come to God choosing one man, Abraham as his reference point to build his special people. But, He also chose to pick up these special people and move them to a special place, Canaan, the Promised Land.

You have to realize that I just summarized a good deal of the Old Testament in a few sentences, remember there is a large history there of the Israelites following God and not following God. Their devotion to him waxed and waned over that history, following God out of Egypt and into the desert; on to Mount Sinai and making a golden calf, through the judges and on and on. Scripture tells us very clearly of what they did. Remember, we are still players in this story. We are spiritually connected to all of Scripture; you're connected to Adam & Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and all others throughout history. You can't read the Bible as a book of old stories; you're a part of the story.

Let's go back to the Israelites in Canaan. God chose, as I said earlier, to pick these people up and plopped them down in Canaan. However, before he did so, he made a covenant with them and said that he would cause them to be fruitful. Their ability to procreate/sexuality was a part of his plan, and came under his lordship. He also said kings & nations would come from Abraham, Canaan will be yours and so forth; sounds promising (Gen 17). However, God chose to command them as their part of the bargain to do something strange. He asked them to circumcise all the males; what? You want me to do what to my what? You want to mess with my manhood? You want me to chop off the skin at the end of my penis? What for? What could this mean? Have you ever asked yourself, why did God put this circumcision thing into effect? Why would he ask us to excise a piece of flesh from a sexual organ? It is a little strange. How could this be a symbol of their commitment to God? What was he saying, and why in such a graphic painful way?

Well, let's look at Canaan. Canaan was a spiritual place, a very religious place, but a dark place. They were involved in idol worship; they didn't know God, or his worship practices, obviously. The Israelites were just bringing those new ideas to them. Now, what you were taught in Sunday school about idol worship was something to extent that people had temples, and little statues, of either wood or stone. They might place these idols in their home, on a mantle, or in a corner, and bow to them; seems fairly harmless. Why was God so upset, other than the obvious, that it was not him they were worshipping. We're all enlightened people now, we know that little pieces of stone, or wood, have no real effect on your life, they have no power, in and of themselves, to hurt,

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ge 6:5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

or harm, correct? So, from Sunday school we always viewed these people as really only bowing to some small idol, then going on about their day farming, and we saw no power or effect in that.

What you were not taught was the actual extent, or form, the worship took. They were worshipping a number of gods. Baal, the supreme deity of many gods for one, was the male deity of the land or fertility; his title actually meant landowner. Then there's Ashtoreth, who was also known by Venus in Rome, or Aphrodite in Greece (Greek Olympics), Ishtar in Babylonia; and some others. She was the Goddess of fertility and war. She was imaged by Asherah poles, which were phallic symbols (explain phallic) that decorated the high places. What they believed was if the deities would see them in lascivious acts of orgies, incest, adultery, and the like, these deities would be aroused and bring forth rain making their land fruitful. Within this religious structure there was a temple priesthood, most likely good looking young folks, and as your act of worship, you were to go to the temple, and perform sexual acts like orgies, incest, possibly homosexual acts, and adultery as your spiritual form of worship. An obvious byproduct of these practices was offspring, and you'd naturally have a problem with paternity, or the taking care of unwanted pregnancies. You'd have all these babies, and not know who exactly the father was. So, there was a third god by the name of Molech, the god of fire, and he demanded child sacrifice. Molech was the obvious solution to the unwanted byproduct of the worship of the other two deities; an ancient abortion solution. So, now we see why Gods disgust and anger was so strong.

So, God chose his people, made a covenant with them, asked them to circumcise themselves, and then chose a special place for them, Canaan, this place of sexual idol worship. A dark place and he plopped them down right in the middle of it. Now there is a lot of history that's taking place and not enough time to talk about it all. But I'll give you a little, Abraham pulls up his tent stakes, goes on to the land of Canaan, Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, gains power, calls on his family, they grow like crazy, a new Pharaoh comes along, enslaves them, they're called out of Egypt, under Moses, and finally Joshua leads them to the Promised Land.

God immersed the Israelites in this sexual immorality; this darkness; the sin. And, what was the Israelite supposed to live as, 'children of light'. And now, we need to go back to the issue of circumcision. As I see it, God was doing 4 things when he asked the Israelites to do this strange thing.

1. Your sexuality and your worship of me are inextricably linked.
 - a. The male genital is a vulnerable spot, but a symbol of great power/procreation, and God is saying I want it to belong to me.
2. The power of your life has to be marked by vulnerability to God in this area.
3. You need a daily graphic reminder of that belonging and vulnerability
 - a. So now when you guys go to the bathroom you will look down and think about God.
4. I want you to be a visual reminder to others of your connectedness to me.

So, isn't it interesting that God chose such a sexually immoral place and asked the Israelites to mark themselves in such a sexual way? If they went to a public bath, they were marked. If they involved themselves in the sexual worship of other deities, they were marked. When he instituted circumcision he was inviting the Israelites to be a part of the redemptive story; to be a light, or an image of God's covenant relationship to the people around them. Through Circumcision God was asking Abraham to submit himself fully, body and soul; the whole man. Through this right, God was taking ownership of Abraham's sexuality and virility. He was going to build this nation through him, and that had to be marked by fidelity and faithfulness - God was starting over with his original plan. I think if you look at Duet. 30:6 which says - ⁶ The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.³, there is a direct correlation between human sexuality and spirituality; the terminology's the same. Abrahams' sexuality was linked to his spiritual life with God, and God's ultimate purposes of bringing life to this planet. God wanted to be in control of his whole being, including his ability to procreate. Abrahams offspring were God's people (Isaac & the three barren matriarchs). Remember, sexuality within a covenant relationship was in direct contrast to the Pagan beliefs and practice of their sexuality. (SEE ALSO COL. 2:9-12 CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART & ROM 2:28-29)

Now they are a marked people physically & spiritually, and after 40 years they come to the point of going into the Promised Land, and Joshua leads them. And there were the Canaanites, and God asks them to go in there and do what? Ephesians 5:8 - be light. They served the Lord under Joshua, but then they did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. So, they had conquered the Canaanites militarily, but were conquered spiritually by Canaanite worship practices. They prostituted themselves to other gods, they would not listen to the judges; they waxed and waned and returned to ways that were even worse than their forefathers. God says I will no longer drive out the nations due to this & uses these enemies to test them. We find that in Numbers 25, the Israelites didn't even wait to enter the land before they started to serve other gods; 24,000 were killed for their disobedience (Paul mentions this in 1 Cor. 10:8-22).

The lesson is: Sexual impurity is not spiritually neutral.

One commentator writes: "This worship (Canaanite deities), appealing to every sensual passion, joined with the attractions of wealth, fashion and luxury, naturally was a great temptation to a simple, restrained agricultural people, whose worship and laws demanded the greatest of purity of heart and life." Peloubet's Bible Dictionary, Zondervan (1972) p.272.

Just listen to this commentary from Judges 2:10-19 about the first generation in Canaan. ¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the

³ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Dt 30:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

¹⁶ Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands.¹⁸ Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them.¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.⁴

Judges 17:6 says...⁶ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.⁵ They just hammered through this history of Judges and Kings and doing well sometimes then doing even worse than their forefathers. It's a sad story. In Judges 6:25-30 the Israelites wanted to kill a fellow Israelite because he had torn down an altar to Baal. They built more and more altars; involved themselves in this sexual worship of other deities, burned incense in the place of Yahweh's (God's) altar, so on and so forth. In Jeremiah 11:13 it says, ¹³ You, Judah, have as many gods as you have towns; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.'⁶ They built temples for Baal worship and swore on his name. They set up idols and pagan symbols on threshing floors, in their wine vats, and behind their doors and doorposts of their homes (Isaiah 57:9/Hos 9:1). Every time they looked at one of these symbols or idols they probably felt sexually aroused recalling the last orgy, or sex act, they had involved themselves in worship of these gods. They brought Asherah poles into God's temple, housed temple prostitutes, and practiced these things in his Temple. They had become polytheistic and polygamous; interesting how these go together. Leviticus 18 describes these practices, and in verse 21 outlaws the sacrifice of children. God had commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and cover the earth, and he was intending to continue this plan through Abraham. Satan was still seeking to destroy God's creation by diverting worship and taking the power of procreation of Abraham's descendants to himself (Abraham's offspring being killed off by Satan – life bearing is a part of our sexuality).

⁴ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Jdg 2:10–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Jdg 17:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Je 11:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Wow, what a story... I am glad that happened to those ancient people and not us. None of you have an idol hanging on your keychain. They were a screwed up bunch! I am glad we have it altogether. We're enlightened now, we know that our sexuality has nothing to do with our spirituality; God is here, sex is there. No mixing, no problem. We know that there are no spiritual powers controlling our thoughts, actions, or tempting us into doing what we should not. We're smarter than that; we can choose how we should live! We don't have Asherah poles and don't know anyone who worships such deities. So, what does all this have to do with us?

Remember, sexual immorality is not spiritually neutral; it's an act of worship either to Satan, or to God in the confines of a heterosexual marriage covenant. We give glory to Satan by default (remember coerced worship) with every illicit orgasm, encounter, immoral fantasy, porn image viewed, and so on.

The enemy pays special attention to your vulnerability in this place. He knows that sexuality is supposed to be a spiritual act of worship to God, mirroring his love relationship with us in fidelity and faithfulness in the confines of the heterosexual marriage relationship. And we are weak and vulnerable; we fall just like the Israelites. We're not perfect. And now, when we understand the context of where God is speaking to us, we understand those passages in the NT which speak to sexual purity, that's what he was speaking of. When we use our sexuality outside of what God created it to be we offer something good & holy to something (Satan) other than God.

Years ago an artist by the name of Andre Serrano created an image called the *Piss Christ*. It may offend, especially when I tell you what the medium was, but please reserve judgment, if you are patient you will understand why I am showing you this. The artist sought to offend Christians; he succeeded. He was attacking the church due to the judgment he personally felt about being homosexual. What he did was to take a crucifix and place it in a beaker. He then filled the beaker with cows' blood and his own urine. Offensive, yes, I would agree; I felt the same way when I first saw it, as did many others. Senator Al Damato proceeded to tear up a copy on the senate floor that year. Newt Gingrich was quoted by Time magazine as saying, "This is prototypical of the cancer that is eating up our society". The National Gallery of Australia had to close its doors due to two attempts to destroy it, most likely by Christians.

But, we have to remember, what man intends for evil, God uses for good. In creating this image, the artist unwittingly created something which, more than most, illustrates the Gospel of Christ.

I said earlier, you're a player in this continuing story. Ephesians 5:8 is a charge to you. God has chosen you, like the Israelites, to be immersed in your host culture; in the darkness. You're swimming in it, surrounded by it. You're to live as children of light in it. There is no greater calling than to be a part of the redemptive story in history; to live as children of light in the darkness. You're immersed in it. However, we're fooling no one. Every single one of us is a dirty rotten scoundrel. We're not only the crucifix immersed in a dying world as light, we're also the beaker containing the blood and urine of our

lives. God in all his wisdom chose to immerse himself in us, to revolutionarily transform us from the inside out. Now, He wants to use you to do the same for others, so you're all revolutionary transformative agents in the blood and urine of your culture.

We can remain committed to God by submitting our sexuality to him – we as 90 pound jockeys may not be able to handle a 1200 pound horse, but God can. His Spirit and Word are like the bit in the mouth of our sexuality. Sex is not dirty or wrong, and it's not outside of God's intentions, but it's a reflection of what our relationship is to Him, and others need to see that. Sex within the heterosexual marriage relationship, and in the patient waiting of the Single person, is glorifying to God, and a witness to the world; did you ever think of your sexuality as a witness. In Indonesia, I would venture to guess my marriage, the faithfulness and fidelity thereof, was profoundly useful to God in my witness to Muslims; just as much as my single teammate was in their submission to God in this area. At times it seems that everyone is involved in some sort of wrong relationship, pornography, or just in an abusive relationship with the opposite sex. Yet, just like a jockey we have what we need to be Triple Crown winners. It's possible. Just don't be duped.

Let's look at Hosea 2:14-23 and God's words of Grace to his people...

¹⁴ "Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her.

¹⁵ There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will respond as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

¹⁶ "In that day," declares the Lord,
"you will call me 'my husband';
you will no longer call me 'my master.'"

¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;
no longer will their names be invoked.

¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them
with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky
and the creatures that move along the ground.

Bow and sword and battle
I will abolish from the land,
so that all may lie down in safety.

¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.

²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will acknowledge the Lord.

²¹ "In that day I will respond,"
declares the Lord—
"I will respond to the skies,
and they will respond to the earth;

²² and the earth will respond to the grain,
the new wine and the olive oil,
and they will respond to Jezreel.

²³ I will plant her for myself in the land;
I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.'
I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people';
and they will say, 'You are my God.' ” ⁷

God wants reconciliation with his people. God's in a love relationship with you, he's head over heels enamored and wants you all to himself, but he wants you to want that. Although, He may need to lead you into the desert for a while to ween you off your idols, and woo you back to himself. Do you hear the grace and mercy in that passage to a people who had gone astray? His discipline is hardest on those who've totally given themselves over to sin, those who are flint-headed & defiant. But there's grace extended even to them, and especially those with everyday honest struggles; God's not here to destroy, but to bring life. If we listen to Song of Songs 7, the allegorical wording describing God and his love relationship with his bride, the Church, it's romantic sexually charged language! There's nothing wrong with sex, God's not a prude! It was created by God for his purposes, and that drive is there for a reason. Yet, it needs to be in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman, marked by fidelity and faithfulness, in order to fulfill God's plan to mirror his love for His people. How should we respond to God? Let's listen to chapter 1:1-4 of Song of Songs.

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.

3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the maidens love you!

4 Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers.

In conclusion remember a few things:

1. Our sexuality was created as a witness to the faithfulness and fidelity of God to his people.
 - a. Sexual immorality is not spiritually neutral - circumcision
 - b. Your sexuality is not bad and dirty - God's not uptight
2. That relationship has to be within the confines of a heterosexual marriage.
 - a. When you offer your body in erotic pleasure in any form outside of that, you offer it by default in worship to Satan
3. God loves you and wants you to be wholly fulfilled and reconciled to him
 - a. If we repent, he welcomes with open arms; do you need to?
 - b. Don't over compensate

⁷ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ho 2:14–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- i. In these hard passages concerning sexuality, God is speaking to those who've become wholly syncretic in their worship of other deities
 - c. Take this seriously
- 4. The Holy Spirit gives you power to live well - submission
 - a. 1 Corinthians 10:13 ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. ⁸
 - b. God wants worship of your whole life.
- 5. The sexuality portrayed by your culture is unreal
 - a. Everyone argues about it, gets fat and ages, and men, young large breasted women will not always want you
 - b. It won't fulfill all your emotional and physical needs.
- 6. You are that crucifix and the beaker, how are you going to live out your life as a child of light among a lost and dying world?

⁸ *The New International Version*. 2011 (1 Co 10:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.