

SERMONS  
ON  
SEXUAL INTIMACY



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FALL 2006



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COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, DANVILLE, CALIFORNIA  
FALL 2006

Audio and video sermons available online at [www.cpcdanville.org](http://www.cpcdanville.org).  
CPC In-House Publishing, Second Print September 2008

## PREFACE

I was in Atlanta in March 2006 and had anticipated this sex sermon series. I asked my friends (about 50 pastors or so), “Have any of you done a series on sex, a whole series?” Fifty pastoral pastors of large Presbyterian churches all said, “No.” Later, when I was with my brothers from Moraga, Menlo Park, and Walnut Creek, I asked, “Have you ever done a whole series on sex?” They, too, said, “No.” I then asked, “Well, are you going to in light of the sexual turmoil in our culture?” They responded, “No.” I replied, “I’m going to try it.” They said, “Well, we’ll pray for you.”

I believe this is an important series. As a culture, we are in the midst of sexual reorientation, re-labeling and rethinking. We no longer have a moral consensus on how we should express ourselves sexually. In fact, there is great confusion inside and outside the Christian church on this issue. About 40 years ago, our denomination spoke about this in the Confession of 1967. *Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man’s alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man’s perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation and into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ.* That is what we are going to do: Walk in the responsible freedom of the people of God, out of the anarchy of sexual relations that mark a people who are alienated from God, our neighbor and ourselves. I love the way the quote closes, *The church comes under the judgment of God and invites the rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds compassion of Christ from those in the moral confusion of our time.*

In the pages that follow, we will address four very important and challenging issues, beginning with **Marriage and Sex**. Then in **Extra Sex**, we will look at intimacy and isolation outside the marriage relationship. In the third area, **Divorce and Remarriage**, we will explore sex after a broken marriage and remarriage. In the fourth segment, we will look at **Homosex** and whether it is still important that there be male and female roles. Our culture has a whole emphasis on the equality of the sexes and their non-differentiation. With that is an increasing toleration of sexual attraction towards one’s own sex in homosexuality. I am going to call the acting out of this attraction homosex. What do the Scriptures have to say about that?

*Prayer...God, thank you that you do speak into this deep part of our souls. You who have made us male and female and made us for each other, to complement each other, to care for each other, to live fully the life you dream for humanity. We come to you and we ask you to guide us away from any alienation, but rather to You, and towards one another, in healthy and wholesome lives. Lord, we pray compassion would mark these days for those caught in sexual confusion in their own souls. Have free reign, Holy Spirit. We come to you in the One who saved us. Amen.*

## CHAPTER

### 1

## **MARRIAGE AND SEX**

**I CORINTHIANS 7:1-7; MALACHI 2:13-15**

SCOTT FARMER

We enjoy a special tradition at our church with the Rose Wreath. A faux flower rose is taken by church members to represent a prayer only God can answer. When prayers are answered, the rose is returned with the story of how God responded to the prayer request. The rose is then placed on our Rose Wreath to join many other roses representing years of answered prayers from our congregation. Sometimes the roses and their stories are returned after a few months, and often after years. Recently this rose story was received from our church member, Gary Ryness, and we share this story with Gary's permission:

*Scott, I'm returning this rose because my prayer has been answered. I started praying five years ago that God would find a godly man for our daughter, Natalie. Four years ago, she told us that she would be married in our backyard so don't sell the house, even though all the kids were gone and we didn't need six bedrooms anymore. At the time she didn't have a boyfriend and never really dated anyone. Well, God delivered. Natalie was just married in our backyard to a wonderful Christian man that God gave to her two years ago. What seems impossible to people is never impossible to God. Here is my delightful answer to prayer, my prayer rose.*

It was also recently that I had the joy of watching Melody Thompson wed at Bridges golf course, right on the putting green. The week before it was Casey Sweeney, loved by many of us here at CPC, daughter of Jim and Barb. The youthful exuberance and giddiness of that couple was wonderful.

We also know that part of marriage is rightfully tabooed and very private. I remember when my son, Todd, was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Stone Valley Middle School. He invited me to participate at Career Day, where parents share their occupation, giving students the opportunity to be exposed to many different career choices. The students participate by asking questions. I shared about my Presbyterian pastoral ministry and someone asked, "I didn't know that priests could marry?" I answered, "I'm a Protestant. I could never be a Catholic priest because I like sex too much." To which Todd exclaimed, "DAD!" Todd just turned 24 and I think he's forgiven me. But just the utter embarrassment of saying that you like sex...what a crazy thing to do! But to me it felt so natural and normal to talk about this most important part of our life, this gift that God has given us. He made us as human beings to enjoy this intimacy. We are male and female made for one another: *flesh of my flesh* says Adam. Yay God! I hope to share about sex in a tasteful and helpful way as we come to share the first topic, **Marriage and Sex**.

**First Corinthians Chapter 7:1-3.** A young church has a list of questions they have written to the apostle Paul for discussion. One of their issues was, of course, "Let's talk about sex, Paul." We join him in his divinely inspired response. *Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.*

The city of Corinth was the lusty seaport town of that area, and Paul said that it's good for a man not to marry, to stop being so horny, to stop being so consumed with sex. But he added, that given all the sexual desires, it is good for a man and a woman to marry. Here are seven truths inspired from Paul's teaching:



The first truth is that **sexual desire is expected as part of a human experience**. God made us male

and female. Our sexuality has always been a part of us. It is, of course, important for the procreation, the furtherance of our race. It is wired into us deeply, and it's a good thing. God made it long before the Fall affected our lives. We are made with this attraction.

The second truth is that **marriage is the channel for the moral expression of sexual intimacy**. Paul says *each should have his own wife, her own husband*. Why? Because there was so much immorality or sexual desire expressed outside the bond of covenant of love. Paul talks about it as their *marital duty*. It is the responsibility of living out the covenant of lifelong love between one man and one woman. It is a duty. As a matter of fact, from Genesis on we understand that sexual intercourse is actually the act of marriage. It is the consummation of marriage. Our culture has unlinked sexual intimacy and marriage and says that they are unrelated. This cultural view is that sex is merely a physical thing, and marriage is a covenantal lifelong, caring thing. We as a culture have absolutely unlinked these two. But here Paul is saying that a husband should fulfill his conjugal duty to his wife, and likewise, the wife to the husband. Why? Because the two becoming one, as Genesis 2 talks about, is more than physical. It is the whole person coming together.

The third truth is that **marriage intimacy values self-giving; that which is mine I give to the other**. *The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. (v.4)*

This means, I belong not only to myself, but also to my spouse, body, soul, and spirit. My body serves not just to meet my needs, but also to meet my spouse's intimate needs and desires. Marital intimacy is never to be coerced. It is mine to give in self-giving love and care. Intimacy is never to be taken by violence, force, or by coercion, to be grabbed. It is to be given and received, to be cherished as a freely and lovingly given gift.

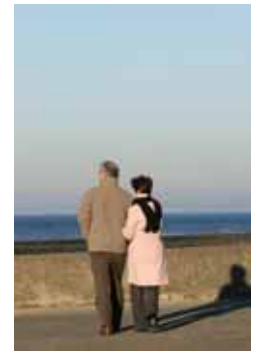


The fourth truth is that **marriage intimacy values mutual care**. We are to meet each others needs and desires. Right here I want to put a caveat and say that I have no professional expertise to elaborate on this. I'm an amateur. I don't have professional psychological training and refer you to professionals who can counsel you, preferably with biblical insights. Here at Community Presbyterian Church we offer seminars given by our Director of Marriage and Family Ministry, Laura Taggart, and our Associate Pastor, Mark Wollan. These seminars offer workshops on intimacy in the marriage relationship; how a couple can build oneness in this special way. For those of you who want to explore these themes, I strongly urge a marriage tune-up.

As men and women we have different ways of expressing intimacy and receiving it; different meanings and different desires. But we are talking about mutual care and the meeting of each other's needs. That it is mutual, I believe was and is a new concept. Historically, we have had a male-dominated view of sexual pleasure and involvement. Think back on the women's suffrage movement. Women's vote only came to the United States in 1920... doesn't that seem crazy? The idea of women's equality in all areas of life now even includes the bedroom. Women's rights in the voting booth, and in the bedroom, have only come most recently. Sex is more than procreation. Three P's apply to sex: Procreation, Partnership, and Pleasure for both in mutual care.

The fifth truth is that **healthy marriages require sexual and/or prayerful intimacy**. *Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer* What a connection. *Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession; not as a command.*” (1 Corinthians 7:5-6) There are two strong ways of being intimate in the human relationship, supremely in marriage: one is sexual union and the other is spiritual union. For true sexual intimacy to occur, we have to put away our resentments and our slighting of one another. We have to forgive one another, holding no grudges. If you want genuine intimacy, to be able to delight in each other, there must be no love withheld. Likewise, try praying with your spouse, when he or she knows that you are just faking it or when you’re being selfish! That kind of sex and prayer are both hollow experiences. Unfortunately, I share this truth from experience; you drift apart. If you are neither wanting sex nor praying together, then you are in danger that Satan will use that lack to drive a wedge into the oneness of your marriage. You withdraw from the marriage relationship, and you don’t care since you are not seeking to express that oneness. If our marriages are not having sexual intimacy and/or prayerful intimacy, one or the other, these are warning lights on the dashboard. There are many times and many reasons why we can’t have sexual intimacy in marriage: busyness, distance, sickness. Scripture would warn us, urge us, at these times to be prayerfully intimate, to be praying for one another, to be caring for one another, lifting praise to God together. If we are not doing either, let that be the dashboard warning light which says, you need to stop right now and fix something in this most important relationship. Satan will tempt you because of your lack of self control. By the way, Paul says of this lack of self control, don’t think you are so spiritual that you don’t need physical intimacy. That was part of the reason you got married.

I was asked by one of our Elders, “What are you going to say to those who have been married for 50 years and the whole sexual relationship changes?” My answer is very simple...start putting on seminars. If you have been married for 50 years, and you have it figured out, then you tell the rest of us what to do at that point. You tell us what works. I know a wonderful couple deeply in love for decades and decades, Allen and Ruth Finley. They are very good friends of mine from San Jose. I met them in 1976. Allen was a former president of Partners International. Allen was dying and has since passed away in December 2006. He was on morphine, chemotherapy, had surgeries, and life was tough. Ruth asked those of us around the country to just pray for Allen. She was sharing with us their relationship. I guarantee there was no physical intimacy. But I also guarantee there was a sweetness, a oneness, a cherishing that was going on, living a vow she vowed years ago when she said, “I, Ruth, take you, Allen, as my husband, and I promise to be your loving and faithful wife in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want, as long as we both shall live.” That’s good stuff.



Some believe they can’t express their sexuality because they are not married. There are many who are married who can’t express their sexual intimacy, either. May God help us have a whole vocabulary of cherishing and affection. Even within our marriage we need a very broad vocabulary that says I LOVE YOU. The New Testament records a kind of asceticism that came into the church. It proclaimed that if you are really going to follow Jesus, you would pull back and not become consumed with lust, greed, and gluttony. These are things that shouldn’t matter that much to you. This thinking got out of hand as Paul says in the New Testament. It

really became exaggerated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Listen to 1 Timothy 4:1, 3 where Paul nips this kind of asceticism in the bud: *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. They forbid people to marry* [these people were saying it is too worldly to be married] *and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* This is false asceticism, and some of us have been caught in the idea that even sex in marriage is kind of a dirty thing: “You shouldn’t have that much pleasure. You shouldn’t have that much fun. There’s something even unclean about it. You should do it but you shouldn’t feel that good about it.” Paul says that is a false teaching by a deceiving spirit.

We believe in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. We believe in the full person and the whole of life under the reign of God. If you want to understand how much God enjoys our sexuality and sensuality under his Lordship, read the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. It’s a praise of marital sensuality saying, Yay God! In Hebrews 13:4 again the apostle says *the marriage bed is pure. Delight in each other. God created you this way. My word to those of us who are married is to save time and guard your energy for prayer and for passion, in the physical sense. Delight in it! If you are too busy for it...you are too busy!*

Paul does have a very important caveat in verse 7: *I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his one gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.* Paul was not married at the time he wrote this. Paul apparently was a widower we can only surmise because of his role under the school of Gamaliel and his role as a Jewish leader. One had to be married to be a high ranking rabbi in his day. The assumption by most scholars is that he was a widower and that he did not feel the need to remarry. He could live with his passion under control and give himself fully to the ministry in spite of the intrinsic loneliness of singleness.

What he is also saying brings us to the sixth truth that **singleness is not incompleteness.** God does not call us all to marriage. There are some of you who are unmarried and say, “Thank God,” and there are some who are unmarried and who say, “Where is God?” Those who think that incompleteness and singleness go together should remember that we follow the one named Jesus, who was crucified at the age of 33 and never married. How dare our culture say you have to be complete through marriage?



Maybe you have read the statistics that appeared in the San Ramon Valley Times and other media reporting the most recent census that over 50% of the households in America are not led by a married couple, with or without children. So we are a culture of single people, not married. This has never happened in U.S. history. We are thinking through some new things, but remember singleness is not incompleteness.

The seventh truth is that **there is no spiritually neutral marriage.** Those of us who are married need to realize that how we live out our faith and our faithfulness in relationship profoundly affects our experience, or lack of experience, of God. In Malachi 2, the prophet said, *Another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?”* (2:13, 14) What he is saying is that your worship life is going through the motions, but there is like a lead ceiling between you and God.

You are not making a connection. You grieve saying, "I can't find God. Where is God in all of this? I am empty, alone, depressed. Why is this happening?" *It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, and the wife of your marriage covenant ...So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.* (Malachi 2:13-15) Wow! Here it is... the unity of spirit and flesh. How we live and the choices we make profoundly affect our relationship with God. If we are not living in genuine love, if we are not turning from selfishness to intimate relationship, if we are using our spouse without self-giving, without caring, then forget intimacy with God.

So what do we do? I want to refer many of us to at least a marriage tune-up through the workshops we offer at CPC or through professional Christian counseling or seminars offered throughout the United States. It would be a fantastic investment in your marriage relationship. Remember, apart from experiencing God's love for us in Jesus Christ, and apart from us experiencing the life of God, we will constantly flail in our sexual desires. We will crave things that are unhealthy and destructive. We will give ourselves over to sexual desires when we are really searching for God and His love. I urge you, first of all, let God love you. If you feel distant from God, alienated, if you feel like God has let you down, depressed because of your lack of intimate life, let God love you! Don't first of all address and submit to your sexual desires. Rather if you first let God love you, life will begin to align. Your thinking will become clearer, your longing will become clearer, and your choices will become clearer.

Let's pray together. *I particularly pray now for those of us for whom this strikes deep and who feel this area is not under control, certainly not God's control. I pray for those who don't like the results that are happening in their lives, souls, and relationships. May they receive your love for them in Jesus Christ? God, you say that you so loved the world that you sent your one and only Son, so that we might have life abundant and eternal. We now receive that. We thank you that you have made us male and female as sexual beings, and that you long for us to live the full life that you have planned for us. Thank you that you created sex for us. You like intimacy, love, and self giving. You want us to care, nurture and cherish each other in faithfulness. Lord, will you now fill us with your Holy Spirit so that the words of our mouths and the deeds of our lives will please you, and express your love. Amen.*

## CHAPTER

# 2

## **Extra Sex**

1 Corinthians 6:9-20, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

Scott Farmer

We are looking at an intimacy issue that has profoundly experienced a cultural revolution in Western Society, and especially here in the United States. In the previous chapter we reviewed God's creation of us as male and female. Only in union with one another does our very race survive. Therefore, God made us beings who are powerfully attracted to one another sexually. Sex is a wonderful thing and a gift from God for parenting and partnership. But he also made it for our unadulterated pleasure! Sex is good, and is something that God made for us as human beings. But God has set boundaries. He has bounded the expression of sexual intimacy in the covenant relationship of a man and woman in marriage. In **Marriage and Sex** we looked at Song of Solomon and 1 Corinthians 7 and how God delights in our sensuality under his Lordship. Not enthroning those desires, but rather in those desires enthroning God himself. We are now looking at part two, (**Extra Sex**) sex outside of marriage.

While traveling through Europe, my son, Todd, watched last week's sermon **Marriage and Sex** online. He wrote me this response, and I have his permission to share it. By the way, Todd just turned 24.

*Dad, I had the luxury of listening to some of your sermons while I have been staying at Roberto's (our friend in Rome). They are wonderful. You did a great job in presenting Sex and Marriage, and I'm very excited to hear what you say in the others, particularly as it pertains to me. I don't mean to add pressure, but, trust me, as a young man who is single and abstaining from sex until marriage, the pressures are HUGE. It is very comforting and strengthening to hear what the Bible has to say about this issue. Culture shouts what we are to believe in this area, and the church has either been silent or teaches that sex is bad, and that we should be abstaining from it. I'm a man and that's not possible. Denying my sexuality is denying part of me. I'm not saying that I need to have sex right now. What I'm saying is that for the church to say that sex is bad and evil is wrong. I'm greatly encouraged to hear CPC and you speak truth into these falsehoods. I thank you, as a young, unwed man and as a Christian. I want you to feel free to use any stories of my life as illustrations. I will hold nothing back for the sake of shame or embarrassment, if it will help reveal the truth of the WORD.*

Now that is a young man's perspective. Another letter received this week came from a friend who is in his 70's: *Good job Scott. Almost impossible subject. Gutsy to the core. Wow! Go for it.! There are so many of us guys, including some of us with maturity on our bones, that are way over the top, in our hearts, minds, and actions regarding this FIERCE DESIRE. There is a lot of alienation from one's self, God and loved ones over this issue. And there are massive struggles to get us back to health. I pray insight, strength, and blessing for you, as you go forward.*

Recently I read a statistic about our life together. The United States now leads the entire world when it comes to unwanted teenage pregnancies. In fact, American teenagers are more likely to become pregnant



and have multiple partners than any other teenagers on earth. According to recent research, 61% of all high school seniors have had sexual intercourse, half are currently sexually active, and over 20% have had four or more partners. Early sexual activity among American teens has become a major public health problem.

Let me share about a TV show I recently came upon during family prime time. Minding my own business, planning to watch Monday night football on ESPN one evening, I tuned into channel 2, FOX, for the Monday night, National Championship League (NLCS). At 6:30 pm instead of getting the NLCS, I found myself watching an episode of the popular TV series FRIENDS. This is what I heard...

*(Monica) You had sex in his chair! I said that a little too loudly, didn't I?*

*(Ross) You had what?*

*(Rachel) Sex in his chair.*

*(Ross) What were you thinking?*

*(Rachel) I don't know. We still care about each other. There is a history there. It's like you and Carol.*

*(Ross) No. No. No. It's nothing like me and Carol.*

*(Rachel) Please, if she said to you Ross, "I want you on this couch right now," what would you say?*

*(Chandler) If it helps, I could slide over...*

*Laughing from the TV audience.*

Dinner time, family hour, pop TV... isn't it hilarious? For those of us who are of a different generation, we think, "What! Where did that come from?" I thought I was going to get a football game, and during family hour I'm hearing about free sex and "Gee, we had feelings for each other and should I move over so you can live it out right here?" Our culture has radically changed from an ethic that once had an agreed-upon standard; now it is radically different.

Let's turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, beginning in verse 9 to hear what the inspired Apostle Paul says about this whole issue of sexual drive under the Lordship of Christ: *Do not be deceived* (and I would add don't be deceived either by what the culture is teaching or what our internal drives are shouting) *neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* Let's face the truth. Let's have the hope of living the life that God dreams for us to have and to express. Some of us have experienced what it's like to live through the tragedy of extra-marital affairs. We're trying to recover, trying to find God in the midst of it all, and move on. I know that some of us have patterns of behavior that have us hooked and we don't know where it will end, but we are deeply into it. Some of us try to believe what our culture says - to be lighthearted about various sexual practices - and buy into it, discover it's just not working, not the way the advertising says it should.



I want to call us as a church to God - glorifying and humanly fulfilling freedom - responsible freedom - in this new life of Christ, particularly in the area of how we live as male and female. Hear the truth, with the compassion of Christ, and the hope of living the quality of life that God dreams for us.

Let's reflect on six principles that Paul draws in this passage:

First, **what we do with our body shapes our spiritual life.** 1 Corinthians 6:13. *Food for the stomach and the stomach for food – but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.* The idea here is that you feed the body because it needs food. It's not a spiritual event; it's just what you do. In the same way, sexual appetite is just like eating. Isn't it? Shouldn't sexual appetites just be met? What is spiritual about sex? It is just a normal human function. In our valley here, among the popular youth culture, sexual favors are given just as readily as a back rub: "Just meet the need and move on." No, Paul is saying that sex is never just a physical event; it's a total person event that expresses our spiritual life. In this passage Paul is battling two philosophical extremes: first, Materialism. It says since there is no spiritual reality, the appetite for sex should be fulfilled. There is no higher guide or Lord or God who tells us how we should live. Don't worry about an ethic. Just express your bodily urges. The second philosophical extreme is Gnosticism. Hyper spiritualists see a big disconnect between spirituality and the physical realities of life. The hyper spirituality of Gnosticism goes in one of two directions: one is the ascetic ethic that advocates withdrawal from things of earth. The ascetic ethic brings us into fasting, denial of sexual pleasure, denying ourselves education, and involvement in politics. This ethic says, "Let's not get involved in that. Let's just focus on a spiritual relationship with God."



The other extreme of this philosophy is the libertine extreme. It says, "Since it doesn't matter, since body and spirit are not really connected, let's give ourselves fully to sensuality; it can't affect our spiritual life." This is the sexual ethic that values feeling good, "Do it, and do it whenever you want. Eat, drink, and be merry. By the way, whatever you do in church in no way affects what you do in the workplace, because the two are not connected." If you are following this philosophy, you end up with a dual ethic. There is the Christian ethic for Sunday, but then how I run my business the rest of the week is another thing. What I do with my money, the way I vote, the way I live in the political arena, they are all very different and are not connected to my church life. Paul was combating all these extremes of thinking, when in verse 14 he says, *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.* Here there is an integration of the whole person, body, soul and spirit in Jesus Christ. Christ was incarnating God's love in real life and perfectly living out the spiritual connectedness between the spirit and the flesh. The God, who resurrected not only Christ will resurrect us too, is saying what we do with our body really matters for our spiritual life. We cannot disconnect the two.

The second principle Paul states is **what we do with our bodies shapes Jesus' reputation.** In verse 15 we read, *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!* Prostituted sex is a commercial transaction. It is not an act of love, but rather an act of getting needs met for pleasure or power or to show off affluence. "I'm going to do this because, for whatever reason, I want it". It's not an act of love toward the person. It's meeting self-

ish needs and making a transaction. Paul says in effect, *Can you imagine Christ relating to a person that way?* If we are in Christ, our actions should reflect our relationship with God. We are the hands, the feet, the arms, the care of Christ extended to a needy world. We represent Christ to the world. Since we are Christ's representatives to the world, it is self-deceiving logic to reason that what we do sexually doesn't matter.

Thirdly, Paul says, **sexual intimacy is the act of marriage.** Our culture does not buy this. In verse 16: *Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, (here is a quote from Genesis Chapter 2:24) The two will become one flesh.* Wow! Did you see what Paul just did and what Jesus does in the gospels, using the same passage? (Matthew 19:5). Do you think this is just a physical thing? Let me remind you that this is not just physical union, but it's uniting of our persons, our souls, and our spirits in becoming one. When Adam and Eve were united, Genesis says, *A man shall leave his father and mother and become united with his wife and the two shall become one flesh.* The sex act is the act of consummating a marriage.

Let's reassess several Q & A that I hear with some frequency.

1. *Why can't we live together before we are married?* This is a common question of about half of the couples who come to be married by our church staff. In America, across the board, people live together and have sex together before marriage. When this happens, you are undermining your marriage vows, even with each other. You are demonstrating that marriage vows are not that important by violating the vows you make. Many studies repeatedly show that those who live together, and/or have sex together before marriage, have a much lower success rate in sustaining healthy marriage and a much higher break-up/divorce rate. The reason is very simply that in living together before marriage, you undermine the covenant of marriage.
2. *We love each other.* The foundation of love, the definition of love is expressing the heart of God. Although you may say that you love each other, if you're disobeying Christ by living together, you are not really loving each other. You are only bringing yourselves to a point of self-deception.
3. *We can't wait.* Oh, don't say that. Are you saying that if travel or disease or sickness comes into your marriage, that you then have no choice but to go out and have an affair because you can't wait? Don't let that be your foundation. Learn a broad vocabulary of care, intimacy, sharing, and cherishing. Use this future as a reason to now broaden the way you express love to each other. "I care deeply about you and I'm a covenant keeper. I vow to you the covenant of our marriage." Don't let desire dominate you. Popular culture, however, encourages instant gratification. This longing intensifies when a longer time gap exists between puberty - when we are physically mature and wired and fired in every way to merge - and the marriage dates. The age of marriage is rising in our culture due to education, travel, the economy, and all sorts of things. We parents are putting youth in a real challenge when we do this. I think we need to marry younger as a culture. I want to speak to my generation. Given the extent that we are pushing education and the postponement of a career - our generation needs to help finance earlier marriages in order to create a different model than the one that says, "You are legally of age. You are on your own." We are putting our youth in a tough spot. That doesn't justify premarital sex, but it is something that as a culture we need to address.
4. *Pastor, I can't get married. I don't have any likely candidates and I'm still burning with passion.* Paul is

still very sensitive to those, by the way, who are older singles, the widowed and those divorced in the right way. Paul speaks to this in 1 Timothy chapter 5. He particularly addresses those who have been married and now face the loneliness of life in singleness. He urges them to get remarried, if they are young and are able to have life together.

We need to develop a broad vocabulary for delight, cherishing, intimacy that is non-sexual in its expression. The legacy Bill Clinton cultivated during his presidential term forces us to define what sex is and what sex is not. What counts? When is sex not sex? Our youth have this down to the bodily locations and to pieces of clothing. Oral and anal sex are all over the place because, “That’s not really sex. Bill Clinton taught us that.” We now have a new definition of the word. I asked our expert on such matters, CPC Student Ministries Pastor, Bill Haslim, “What are you teaching?” His answer was, *Anything that is sexual stimulation to a climax, and anything that is sexually gratifying, and anything that has the word sex in it, that is sex.* I think that’s very wise.



The fourth principle is **What we do in our body shapes our body for good or ill.** Paul says in verse 18: *Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.* What about solo sex using pornography and masturbation? People justify it by saying, “Well, no one gets hurt, it’s just me.” Paul says to this, your body is entrusted to you from God. How we relate to our own sexuality by ourselves does matter. I was listening to a presentation by **Avenue**, a sexual recovery ministry hosted in our valley by East Bay Fellowship. We were being reminded that physical orgasm is a powerful chemical high. It is a wonderful, pleasurable human experience. Paul says, in effect, we are bonded to whatever is in front of our minds or imagination at the time of that wonderful, pleasurable experience. To the extent that it is not our spouse, we are actually hurting both the inside and outside of our marriage, putting up walls of inattention and apathy, because our real life is now being compared to this fantasy life we have built and are building. It destroys our intimacy partnership. Sexual desire was intended by God to motivate tender care in the marriage relationship. Its purpose was to inspire attention, cherishing, and forgiveness. It was meant to release grudges, to get over anger, and to deal with it. To the extent that we isolate ourselves mentally, while engaging in the wonderful, motivating human experience of physical intimacy, we place distance, and we build walls instead.

CPC has a ministry called **Every Man’s Battle**. My experience is that men wrestle with this more than women. **Every Man’s Battle** is a support group for those of us where this fantasy has gotten out of control. We invite you to join such a support group, if sexual urges are overwhelming and they have control over you. Our Counseling Center at CPC and other Christian-based counseling centers around the country have the professional expertise for recovery in this area. Notice Paul’s first word in verse 18 is *flee* from sexual immorality. Don’t just disapprove of it...*flee*; take active, energetic effort to avoid sexual immorality. And if caught up in it, to *flee* means to speak to someone who is a safe, a prayerful partner, and confess your sexual addiction. Break the secrecy of your fantasy life. Break it and bring it out to a brother to hold you before the grace of Christ and the transforming power of our Lord.

The fifth principle offers this hope...**you have the Holy Spirit to help reshape you.** Paul says in verse 19: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?* We have the Spirit of God to reshape our hungers, reprioritize our joys, thoughts, passions, hopes, and our fears. We can know spiritual reorientation, when we know the ultimate pleasure of desiring and finding God, which helps properly locate all the desires we have for wealth, power, pleasure, intimacy. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: *This is the will of God, your sanctification...that each of you should learn how to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable; not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.* This transforming power of knowing God and being indwelt by his Spirit means we are no longer controlled by other gods like our belly or our sexual appetite. He says, and notice the words, *abstain from it, control your body*, which means choosing between desires. It does not mean ignoring or denying our sexual desires, but locating them and choosing them in the right place under the Lordship of Christ. This speaks to the argument that natural desire must mean divine endorsement. “Just because I have this orientation or this desire, then this is the way God made me. Shouldn’t I be able to give in to it?” Here is Paul saying, *No!* You have a choice to live under the controlling power and the knowledge and pleasure of God. In our cultural ethic nowadays, the issue is **consensual** sex. As long as two people agree, then it’s fine, as opposed to **coercive** sex, which our culture rightly frowns on. I would say you need three to really consent; the two people involved, and then God himself.



Finally, Paul says if you don’t like those arguments, then simply **obey your new owner**, the sixth principle. Here is his summary statement, in verse 20. *You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.* He has gone through all the arguments of what is logical; what is good for you, what is good for a witness, what is good in relationships. Bottom line is, do it because God says so. You are under new ownership, Christ, who laid down his life, cancelled the power and the penalty of your sin, to bring you back to intimacy with God. This is what the Divine One says, so live under his Word. I pray that this is good news for you as it is for me.

All this should be our response for knowing God’s delicious, fulfilling love for you and for me, with all of our desires, all of our cravings, all of our longings, all of our hopes, all of our fears, all of our hang-ups and all of our hurts. God loves you and me just as we are. He loves us enough to send his Son to die for us. He raised him from the dead to demonstrate his power over all that would separate us from God. He wants to lead us into the abundant life. God is after your good, my brothers and sisters, and he is after my good, too. Jesus was brought a woman who was caught in sex outside of marriage. Her accusers were all over her lifestyle, and everyone was ready to condemn her. Jesus said, *He who is without sin throw the first stone.* They backed off. He then said, (John 8:1-11) *I don’t condemn you either. Now go and sin no more.*

Let’s pray...*Lord, would you lead us out of alienation from you and one another, out of this chaos in sexual relations that has gripped our culture, out of this moral confusion of our time, and out of our own conflicted internal desires. Deliver us into the abundant life, the responsible freedom that comes from the new life in Christ. May we not be consumed with lustful passion like those who don’t know you. May we live God-honoring and humanly fulfilling lives. Lord, I pray for those of us who do not know you, to whom you are*

*distant or unknowable. I pray that they may trust you enough, even today, to receive your love for them in Jesus Christ. Help them acknowledge that they need a Savior and help them receive the gift of your Holy Spirit and the ultimate pleasure you bring. Align all these human longings under your Lordship. Lord, I pray for those of us who are caught in patterns of behaviors that seem to be our masters and shout at us that we cannot change or be fulfilled in any other way. Lord, I pray for those of us who are relating in what we try to call love and we know is not. Would you help us under the Lordship and the Spirit of Christ to genuinely love one another? We pray this in the gracious, compassionate, and truth-telling name of Jesus.*

## CHAPTER

### 3

#### **Divorce and Remarriage**

**Deuteronomy 24:1, Malachi 2:13-16a,**

**Matthew 5:31-32, 19:2-12, 1**

**Corinthians 7:1-5, 10-11, 7-15**

Laura Taggart

Many Christian men and women have suffered the tragedy of a divorce. They know the pain of rejection, when their partner leaves them. Then come the fear of loneliness, of financial ruin, and fear for their children, who will bear the scars of the breakup, perhaps for life. For some there is the pain of realizing they will not see their children's faces every morning or kiss them goodnight every night. Many feel abandoned by their church and their friends, and a little bitter at those who did nothing to intercept their departing mate.

There are others who feel trapped in a loveless marriage that offers them little happiness; no sense of companionship - a marriage that has fallen far short of what they had dreamed of. They just desperately want out of their disillusionment and pain.

I've counseled several situations where the husband has left his wife of many years for a younger woman. Blaming his wife for his own emptiness, fueled by fear of getting older, he became convinced that the younger woman would make him feel younger and more alive. This thinking is a product of our culture's consumer mentality which says, "We are all entitled to an exciting marriage and great sex life. If we don't have it, we don't have to settle for a second-class marriage, we can always trade it in for something better."

Consumer marriage thinking goes something like this:

- This marriage isn't meeting my needs.
- I'm not getting enough back for what I'm putting in.
- We have nothing in common; we're just incompatible.
- I fell out of love.
- Children are resilient. It's more important for them if their parents are happy.
- We just grew apart.
- We are not the same people we were when we got married.

This attitude has infiltrated the church. The divorce rate for Christians is no different than the secular culture. The projected failure rate for first marriages in the U.S. this year is forty three percent, inside and outside the church. This is tragic!

Let's look at what the scriptures say about marriage.

Genesis 2:24 – *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.* God designed marriage. It was his original plan.

Ephesians 5:32, 33 – *This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* What Paul calls a *profound mystery* is really the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. It is called mysterious because it reflects the relationship between Christ and his church. It is a sacred relationship, far richer and bigger than just the union of two people.

Malachi 2 talks about marriage as a covenant relationship. God invented the concept of covenant, but today this concept is insufficiently understood. If we really did understand it, it would make an incredible difference in how we see commitment within the marriage covenant. We learn a lot about the nature of covenant relationship, as we see God entering into covenant relationship with Noah, Abraham, and Moses - and even more in the new covenant that Christ makes with us.

1. A covenant spells out the basis for and nature of a long-term relationship between persons; for better or worse, rich or poor, in sickness and health.
2. Covenants are promises of how one party will always treat the other. Covenant declares: “This is how things will always stand between us.” It assures life time relationship.
3. Covenants are one-sided offers of promise – our vows: “I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses . . .” The vow is made unilaterally. Although it is reciprocated, it says, “No matter what, I am committed to you.”
4. Covenants are not based on conditions, but on a heart commitment. It is a promise to enter into a growing relationship, for better or worse.<sup>1</sup>

There will always be surprises in marriage. Aspects of your mate, once hidden through the infatuation of courtship, now surface in full bloom. Traits, once endearing, may become downright annoying. Differences rise up; conflict ensues. Covenant relationship ensures that you will work through the worst in order to enjoy the better. But it will take guarding your hearts and minds from the consumer mentality of our culture. That mentality is definitely anti-covenant.

Let’s review what the Scripture says about divorce. If we look at creation and the beginnings of marriage we see that there is no divorce. There is no divorce in creation because there is no sin. It is not until the Fall that we begin to see divorce. The relationship between husband and wife is severely disrupted because male/female relationships are severely disrupted. The Scriptural record shows that sexual perversion, prostitution, rape, polygamy, all became rampant after the Fall.

We read in Deuteronomy verse 24:1, that divorce was really very easy. Moses writes, *If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her from his house.*

It was that easy. Divorce happened all the time and it was always the man divorcing his wife. The woman couldn’t, and did not initiate. The Mosaic requirement of a certificate of divorce was a civilized act at that.

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<sup>1</sup> *Unlocking the Power of the Family* by Daniel Brown

time. From that time forward, a man had to provide the woman he divorced with at least the dignity of a document, indicating the divorce was his decision and not hers. This declared in a formal way that the woman could be married again. It gave women legal rights and a sense of self-respect. Women were no longer thrown out on the street without any means to survive. It was not a sanctioning of divorce, but a concession to protect women in a very patriarchal society. This is the earliest form of no-fault divorce.

The next time we hear of divorce is in Malachi 2:13-16a. Malachi was God's prophet in Jerusalem and he warns the Jews of the willful disobedience regarding their faithfulness in marriage; *You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his . . . So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel.*

If we want to know God's heart about divorce, there it is. It hasn't changed. I can think of many reasons why God would hate divorce, but one stands out: because He loves us so completely and knows the devastation divorce wrecks.

Let's look at what happens in the New Testament, with Jesus and the issue of divorce. We have already noted that in creation there was no divorce. Then we have the Fall where divorce is easy, particularly men divorcing their wives. And now we have in Matthew verse 5:31, 32 where Jesus says, *It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery.* This was shocking language to the culture of the time and it was shocking to those to whom he was speaking!

Jesus is not calling us to a new legalism in this hard teaching in Matthew 5. On the contrary, he is calling us to a righteousness of heart. Jesus equalizes the issue of unfaithfulness. Jesus returns us to God's heart regarding divorce. Jesus clarifies the fact, that divorce was a concession in Old Testament times, but never God's original intention. The equal dignity and permanent union of one man and one woman in marriage was his original intention.

In a similar verse in Matthew 19:3-10, we find Jesus drawing large crowds and healing in Judea. *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.'* 'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' *Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.'* The disciples said to him, 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry?'

Jesus was addressing the Pharisees' habit of missing God's heart, in their interpretation of the Law. They were focused on external behavior, but he was focused on the heart.



In my counseling setting, believers will sometimes want to know if they have a sanctioned reason to leave their relationship. Sometimes this question comes out of a genuine desire to be obedient to the will of God. Sometimes it comes out of want to be free from guilt, if they should leave their mate. In either case, I would imagine Jesus (rather than providing an answer that would allow them to “check the box”) would ask two questions: “Where is your heart?” and “Do you trust me with your marriage?”

Does this word of Jesus seem harsh to you? It seemed harsh to the disciples. Divorce was easy in those times, too. Jesus brings them back (and he brings us back too) to the heart of God, and to the fact that there is equal responsibility, of both husband and wife, for fidelity in the marriage.

Why is “unfaithfulness” the exception here? The thought here is that a broken trust means a broken covenant. Sometimes it is just too hard to repair. Jesus is not saying here that divorce is inevitable in those situations, but that unfaithfulness is a grave breach of the marital covenant, and repair may be beyond the capacity of the couple to achieve.

This is what Paul had to say about divorce in I Corinthians verse 7:10-15, starting with verse 10... *To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*

In the Corinthian church there was a question about whether becoming a Christian necessitated leaving your unbelieving mate. Paul says, *remain as you are*. Paul is cautioning here against the believing spouse appealing to religious incompatibility as a reason to end the relationship. But Paul does bring up the issue of what should happen if the unbeliever leaves. *An unbeliever who leaves is a reason for divorce. Let him go.*

Recently at one of our Saturday evening services, a woman shared her experience. She had married a man who was a choir director. They were married for about five years when he decided to walk away from the Lord. For the next thirty years, he stayed away from his faith. He was diagnosed with cancer two years before his death, and he returned to the Lord, regretting his wasted years. His wife chose to remain faithful

throughout those years. I would imagine she went through seasons of self-pity where she said, “Hey Lord, this isn’t what I signed up for. This is not what I wanted for my life.” But she hung in there. Scripture tells us that we may win our mate, if we remain faithful.

Is there a violation of the covenant relationship when a man abuses his wife physically or beats her down emotionally so she has lost the ability to stand up for herself? Is that an abandonment of her as a married covenant partner? I believe so.



I have counseled people who have experienced infidelity in their marriage. In cases where there has been unfaithfulness, abandonment, or abuse, and the offender is truly repentant and seeking to repair the violations with his or her spouse, and he or she is truly seeking to obey God, there is the possibility of restoration. In these cases, the mate is able to see where the affair was a symptom of something deeply wrong in their relationship. The infidelity indicated something in their marriage which needed to be addressed, causing the couple to focus on it and learn from it. Often marriages become even stronger than they were before. The couple learns how to protect their marriages from this in the future. But where the offender is unrepentant and demonstrates an unwillingness to come under the rule of Christ in their marriage, separation and perhaps divorce may be the only way to become safe and to experience healing. The offender has broken his/her covenant. Just as with unfaithfulness, there is a severe violation of trust in abandonment or abuse.

Our Westminster Confession, which is the Presbyterian book that we refer to, says, *It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, this allowing for no dissolution save that caused by the death of either husband or wife. However, the weaknesses of one or both partners may lead to gross and persistent denial of the marriage vows so that the marriage dies at the heart and the union becomes intolerable; yet only in cases of extreme, unrepented-of, and irremediable unfaithfulness (physical or spiritual) should separation or divorce be considered. Such separation or divorce is accepted as permissible only because of the failure of one or both of the partners, and does not lessen in any way the divine intention for indissoluble union.*

Divorce, because it is a violation of God’s plan, carries with it painful consequences and complications. Perhaps one of the most severe consequences is what it does to the children. For decades some have purported that children are resilient and that it is better to divorce than expose children to the parents’ conflict. Current studies have shown this is not true. Judith Wallerstein wrote [The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce](#), which is a twenty five year longitudinal study of children who were two to six years old (the most vulnerable age) at the time the parents divorced. She found these children were severely affected by their parents’ separation and at each developmental stage it was expressed differently. Children showed a clear pattern of drug and alcohol abuse (fifty percent) and were less educated and of lower economic status than their parents. They were two to three times more likely than peers from intact families to be victims of serious social and emotional problems. Children do suffer.



Divorce is always the result of sin. We, as humans, are capable of enormous self-deception. It is not uncommon to minimize one's own responsibility for the breakdown of a marriage and to blame the other, in whole or in good part, for what has occurred. Perhaps that is the reason sixty percent of remarriages fail. A deep, soul-searching assessment as to what went wrong in the first marriage, and one's own responsibility, in its demise is necessary. Without this, one is likely to enter a second marriage without sufficient self-awareness or penitence to make it successful.

One of the dangers of easy remarriage is that believers are tempted to exit their first marriage prematurely, whether to escape pain or to pursue a fantasy. Some have such a light view of marriage that they can deceive themselves into believing that God wants them to be happy and he must have another mate for them. God isn't as interested in our happiness as he is in our holiness. We have ways of orchestrating our own lives now and asking for God's approval later. Remarriage must not be entered into lightly. That said, remarriage can be a wonderful gift - a means whereby we can experience the gracious love of God in our lives. God has made perfect provisions for the complete forgiveness of all our sins through the death of Christ, even the sins of sexual infidelity and unjustified divorce.



As we look at the Scriptures regarding remarriage, they are really the same ones that we have already reviewed. In 1 Corinthians verse 7:39, it indicates that remarriage is possible if a spouse dies. It also states in Matthew verse 19: 9, that remarriage is acceptable if a spouse has been unfaithful and in 1 Corinthians verse 7:15 if the spouse abandons or leaves. We believe this includes the emotional and spiritual abandonment caused by abuse. But we should note that in 1 Corinthians Paul advocates for the consideration of remaining single. He says that singleness can allow a person to have an undivided devotion to the Lord.

In all these matters, we must seek guidance from Scripture; yet avoid legalism. We don't want to slip into what the Pharisees were doing and miss God's intention for our heart. We must cling to the gospel of reconciliation, peace, and hope. Westminster Confession says this about remarriage: *The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the church, in keeping with the redemptive gospel of Christ, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifested.*

If you are divorced, you have suffered greatly. When you said, "I do," you did not expect your marriage to end as it did. Many of you did not choose it. Some of you are still suffering from enormous guilt. Jesus would bid you to come . . . *Come unto me all you who are weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.* (Matthew 11:28). For some of you, the burden is due to self-justifications that have kept you from confessing your responsibility and receiving forgiveness. For others, your burden is a guilt that you have carried far too long. For you, the invitation is to come to the one who longs to forgive you, to heal you, and to restore you to himself.

If you are divorced, and neither you nor your ex-spouse has remarried, commit yourself to a ruthless inventory of the failure of your marriage and your own part in it. Pray for your ex-spouse. Seek reconciliation, if

at all possible. If restoration of the marriage is not possible, due to remarriages by one or both of you, take an inventory, and seek peace with your ex-spouse. Romans verse 12:17-18 says, *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

When I see couples in my counseling office, I am deeply respectful of the fact that they are fighting for their marriage. Differences can become painful. Our personal sin can take its toll on our mate. Our mate's sin can take its toll on us. If consumer thinking has infiltrated our relationship, we may believe we have made a mistake, and purchased the wrong product. Or we may feel we are missing out on the better product and are entitled to more. If we have failed to guard our spirit, we may be fooled into believing that someone else is going to make us feel younger and more alive. Satan tempted Jesus with such bait. Why wouldn't he tempt us? Whatever the problem, we want relief from pain. God knows our tendency is to exit situations that are painful. He knows about our tendency to take situations into our own hands. He knows our pain *and* he wants to bless us. I believe often this is the reason he wants us to stay in our marriage. He knows what he wants to do in and through us - and he often uses pain to do it. But we must be willing to trust him with the outcome.



I have often observed that couples come to this impasse: the one thing she needs from him is the most difficult thing for him to give –and the one thing he needs from her is the most difficult thing for her to give. But often as these couples learn to give these very difficult things, the marriage is transformed, and each of them becomes more Christ-like in the process. Maybe this is the *mystery* – how our marriage reflects Christ and the church – in sacrificial love. Marriage is a creative thing; it is God at work. He made you one, and he is at work in you and in your marriage.

Dear brothers and sisters, those of you who have experienced the pain of divorce, know that the Lord is merciful and gracious and abounding in love. Know too, that we desire to be a healing community for you. Come before the Lord and let him speak to you about your past decisions and your relationships. Know that *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and earth.* (Romans 8:1).

Pray with me...*Father, we thank you so much for your redemptive love, that even in the most painful and difficult situations you are present in it. Father, we know that our marriages are not just about two of us. You have made us and you have granted us marriage. You desire our marriages to be a reflection of you. Father, we invite you, we ask you, to heal our marriages. For those of us who have experienced divorce, Lord, we ask that you help us to heal. Help us to renew our commitment and love to you. Lord, help us to live here as a church, as a true healing community. Help us as we love our brothers and sisters, who have suffered in this area, by supporting them and encouraging them. We thank you Father for your love for us. Renew us as we pray, in Jesus name.*

## CHAPTER

# 4

## **Homosex**

**Romans: 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

Scott Farmer

*(Fall 2006, Sermons on Sexual Intimacy)*

*Lord, thank you that you have invited us here to meet with you - to celebrate your love, your grace, and your truth into our lives. We thank you that we're here by your divine invitation, that you have pursued us with your love. May our hearts be filled with You, and may we be so responsive to You that it's obvious to all who would see, that You have been alive in our midst. With great expectation, we come in the name of the One we call Savior, Jesus. Amen.*

This concluding chapter on Homosex looks at a very tender topic that's dividing our culture and even the church. More prayer, research, and study have gone into its preparation than perhaps any other message throughout this entire year. A great deal of pain, fear, shame, and anger is connected with homosexuality.

Let's review the framework for this series from our denomination's Confession of 1967, as it confesses our faith into our culture: *Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of our alienation from God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Our perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, and the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication. The church, as the household of God is called to lead men and women out of this alienation and into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ...The church comes under the judgment of God, and invites rejection by people when we fail to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or when we withhold the compassion of Christ from those who are caught in the moral confusion of our time.*

Much fear in the "homosexual community" comes with this topic. There is fear of losing a job, rejection by one's family, being ostracized by the church, and even fear for one's own physical safety. At the same time, fear in the "pro-homosexual Christian community" sees acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle as a justice issue, emanating from the outcast-welcoming, inclusive gospel, modeled by Jesus Christ, Himself. On the other hand, fear in the "heterosexual Christian community" sees endorsement of the homosexual lifestyle as betrayal of scriptural teaching and its authority. They see Homosex perceived as disobedience to God and His revealed plan for humanity, as we express ourselves sexually.

Such a divide splits our church and our culture in America that we don't even have a common vocabulary to talk to one another. Our own Presbyterian denomination struggles with this. In our families, we join in the larger confusion, chaos, and pain of seeking to embrace our own gay and lesbian family members, while at the same time, upholding biblical teaching and a Christian world view. In addition, some of us here, struggle with our own sexual desires, while seeking to follow Christ. Powerful feelings compel us. Still again, the church has highly offended and devalued some people for whom God deeply cares. And so, I am going to try to hold out some biblical truths while speaking into this confused, chaotic, pain-filled, shame-

filled, anger-filled area of our church and culture. Let's pray.

*Lord, may the words of my mouth, the meditations and responses of our hearts, and the capturing of our affections bring a smile to your face. May your Spirit have free reign in us, as we hear and as we respond. In Jesus' name we pray.*

The previous three chapters on human sexuality have led to this discussion on **Homosex**. The first chapter, **Sex and Marriage**, established that God created us as sexual beings, male and female, who need sex for the very continuance of our race. Sexual intimacy is good, wonderful, and of God. Scripture considers sexual intimacy as the act of marriage and it has bounded this act in the covenant of marriage. In the second chapter, **Extra-Sex**, we addressed the issue of sex outside of the marriage covenant of a man and a woman. In the third chapter, Laura, addressed the issue of **Divorce and Remarriage**. This chapter will now seek to explain and understand, from a biblical point of view, the issues surrounding "homosexual marriage."

I have been receiving e-mails in anticipation of this series, literally for months. One that I received reads, "Pastor, I was born this way. I did not want to be gay. I love my companion. Why must you condemn me?" This question will be addressed in the paragraphs that follow.

Let's come to the text of Paul in Romans 1. Romans was written as a Christian manifesto, the Christian revelation of Jesus Christ and of God's love, and its implications for all of human life. Paul writes to the church in the capital of the Roman Empire, to the center of Greco-Roman culture. Paul builds a foundation in Chapter 1, where he says we are shaped, first of all, by our relationship to the one true God, the God who has revealed himself to all of humanity. The reason people don't know God is because they have avoided God; it's not because God has not revealed himself in all of his wonderful creation.

First, **Avoiding God darkens our minds and our affections**. It impacts the way we think and what we're attracted to.

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile (that's our minds), their foolish hearts were darkened (that's our affections). Although they claim to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1: 21-23)*

He's saying there are no actual atheists. We may say we don't believe in God, but when we prioritize something as our ultimate concern, our ultimate allegiance, our ultimate affection—that is our God. If we do not acknowledge the one true God and give thanks to him with humility and gratitude and obedience, we're going to enthrone something else! We're going to worship and give ourselves to something! When we don't worship the true God, it makes our minds eccentric, and we get our affections all mucked up.

Second, **Avoiding God can cause sexual indulgence**. Because they decided to avoid God...

*Therefore God gave them over in sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (Romans 1:24)*

I think it's fascinating, the sexual drive in us as human beings is so profound, so large, that Paul mentions it as the first thing that goes haywire when we don't put God in God's place. Sex becomes center stage. Sex becomes too important. We can give ourselves over to it. He's not just referring to homosexuality; he is speaking of all sexual passions. When God is left out of our lives, sex can become central.

### Third, **Avoiding God can cause misplaced allegiance.**

*They exchange the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. (Romans 1:25)*

When we don't let God be God, we put something else at the place of our worship. Then "god" becomes what we ultimately serve, and what we give ourselves to. In today's culture, our god can be our careers or achievement, or the approval of certain human beings. Our god can be food or pleasure. It can be whatever we define as success, that which we dedicate ourselves to. When we say, "this thing is of most importance," the things of the world



become too important. Our highs become too high, and our lows become too low. Things matter too much, because we try to put them in God's place. We seek satisfaction out of these other things – created things and relationships that can come from God alone.

### Forth, **Avoiding God can cause destructive sexual actions.**

*Because of this (avoiding in God exchanging the truth for a lie), God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, receiving in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:26-27)*

Our attractions are out of whack, and then we reinforce them by acting on them, says Paul. We discussed in **Extra Sex** how acting on our sexual desires reinforces them. It ingrains them. Sexual orgasm is a huge chemical rush. It is wired by God to be so. We also learned that we attach ourselves to whatever is before our mind or our imagination when we are experiencing this wonderful human experience. Paul says here that we have an internal not an external, penalty. As a natural consequence, we attach to that person whom we have with us or before our imagination, when this wonderful chemical high, this orgasm, is taking place. The more we act out our sexual desires in a not-honoring-God way, the more we're attracted to that desire, and the more it takes hold in us. The same is true of any addiction. Paul wrote into the Roman culture, where homosexual practice was rampant at many levels of society, very famously among their politicians and the literati. Many studies have recorded, that in ancient Greece and Rome, men were having sex with men and men with boys as an accepted practice. Paul is speaking into this when he says that it's debilitating.

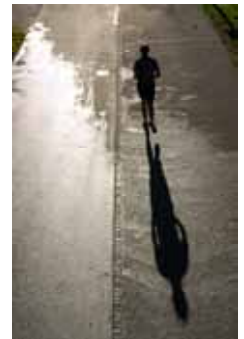
The Jewish and the Christian ethic of honoring the marriage bond is unanimously affirmed in extra-biblical historic settings against this background. The Scriptures in the Old and New Testament disapprove of homosexual practice every time it is mentioned. You especially see this in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. It's also apparent in the book of Romans and in 1 Corinthians 6. In every mention, the acting out of homosexual desires is disapproved in Scripture. Some would say, in kind of a new biblical interpretation, that Paul is referring to "unnatural homosexuality." They say, "What about those for whom it is natural?" Recent studies indicate that about 2% of the male and about .5% of our female population identify



themselves, by orientation, as homosexual. Is Paul saying for them, “Well, that is their natural orientation lived out, and it’s not wrong for them”? Some will say, “Well, I was born gay. It’s not a learned behavior or learned desire.” And being born that way suggests that, “God made me this way; therefore, I should express my sexuality naturally, as God made me.” Is this becoming an ethic of desire? Because I desire something, I should do it? Some would say that Christians seeking to be faithful to Christ, who have a huge desire for sexual pleasure, should be able to say, “It’s natural for me to express it with someone of the same sex.”

I would respond that Scripture says that we are filled with unsanctified desires, passions, cravings, that only the knowledge of God can rightly shape into their fulfilling place. Having these desires wired into our body chemistry or our DNA does not make them of God or God-honoring. Otherwise, those of us with a genetic propensity toward alcohol, toward violence, toward greed, or toward overeating would surely say, “Well, it’s of God. God made me this way. Can’t I be encouraged to hurt myself and those around me?”

We know from natural experiences of a musician trying to master an instrument that we need to shape and train our desires for that which is fulfilling and productive. As students mastering a subject, or athletes mastering a skill—we train our desires. That is what discipline is all about: shaping our lives and soul. We, as Christians, know that we are a mixture of a saint and a sinner, and we need to be shaped. For instance, the fact that I am heterosexually attracted does not give me license to express that attraction anywhere beyond the covenant of marriage with my wife, Barby.



I would like to say that homosexual attraction may be a dislocation or a twisting of a love that is of God. I think we have to distinguish between behavior and attraction. Just because I desire something doesn’t mean I do it. Let me draw our attention again to the segment on **Extra Sex**, 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5 where Paul writes, *You should learn to control your own body in a way that’s holy and honorable; not in passionate love like the heathen, who do not know God.* Learn to put those passions, those desires, under the control of holiness and the honoring of God’s name. In Ephesians 2:3 Paul says, *All of us also lived among them (unbelievers) at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.*

When we avoid God, when we just live purely by our God-avoiding life, our thoughts and our desires are darkened and miscued. We used to give ourselves to those desires, but when we know the love of God in Jesus Christ, a higher desire addresses us. Dick Halverson, former chaplain of the U.S. Senate, is quoted as saying when he saw the love between several gays, “there must be something right there.” We are a mixture of saint and sinner, and as forgiven sinners, we relate to one another with a mixture of motives. We still hurt those we want to love. For many in homosexual relationships, love is expressed, but not in the sex act. Sexual intimacy outside the covenant bond of marriage of one man and one woman is just not expressing Christian love.

I’d like to speak directly to those here who are involved in acting out a gay lifestyle. I believe you really have one of three choices. The first choice is to continue to be active, in giving yourself to this very strong

desire, making it of dominant importance in your life. The second choice is to live celibate in the midst of the desire, while the desire still exists. This would be like your heterosexual brothers and sisters who are not able to have sex and live life in a celibate way. The third choice explores the possibility of inner transformation, leading to the possibility of marriage in a heterosexual covenant of one man and one woman. We'll read later a story that shows how that can happen for some in a very fulfilling way.



#### **Fifth, Avoiding God not only deals with us personally, but it causes destructive approvals**

*Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, (here he's quoting from the Old Testament law in Leviticus 18 and 22), they not only continue to do these very things, but they approve those who practice them. (Romans 1:32)*

Our culture is militating for full acceptance of practices that Scripture calls wrong. This biblical view is now under attack by both secular and even religious groups. But Paul warns that such deviant endorsement is not new, nor is it to carry the day for the church. According to Paul and Jesus, homosex is not just an alternative lifestyle, but one that is destructive to our soul and our relationships

How do we respond and love those who choose to say, "Thanks, Pastor, I'm not going to go that way? Thanks, Christian friend, I'm not going to go that way?" How do we love those who choose other values?



#### **Sixth, Jesus modeled for us welcoming people, but not affirming misbehavior.**

We are to reveal the love of Jesus Christ without fear, without separating or withdrawing, but reaching out in Christian love. Remember in John 8, the Pharisees, self-righteous people, brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus and they shouted, "Here, she deserves death." Jesus responds, *Those without sin, you throw the first stone.* They all melted away. He says, *Neither do I condemn you. Now, go and sin no more.* You have hope for change. Jesus ate and welcomed those whom the Pharisees rejected, condemned, and ostracized. Jesus showed compassion for those filled with greed in their tax-collecting profession, prostitutes who saw sex as merely a commercial transaction and lepers who might contaminate with a touch. Jesus reached out to, cared for, and divinely healed those who were judged by society as outcasts. That's what we're to do.

Let me read to you from my pastoral mailbag. "Pastor, what should I do when my five-year-old is invited to the birthday party of a classmate, whose parents are gay?" "Pastor, I've been invited to the union or wedding of my lesbian friend and her lover. Should I go in support of her or stay away and distance myself from endorsing what I hold to be destructive?" Let me put those questions in perspective. We live in a world where many people we love do not share our values. If you were to substitute the phrase, "not Christian", for "gay or lesbian" in those sentences, how would that shape your response? Someone who rejects God's Son has made a far more drastic decision than their sexual choice! This decision is of eternal conse-

quence. That's gigantic! Sexual issues, though painful, are smaller. Welcome and receive people, but do not endorse the behavior as we do in so many other lifestyle choices.

When homosexuality enters our most intimate family relationships, a lot of hurt can accompany it. Such a conversation may begin like this: "Dad, I'm gay. I love my companion. Why must you condemn me?" Many of the people we love will never accept that we welcome them, unless we affirm their lifestyle choice and say, "Yes, I endorse it, and I agree with it." We'll have to live with that tension, my brothers and sisters. It's tough when Jesus says that we will have to choose loyalties, even within our own family members. Welcoming, but not affirming, is the way that Jesus tenderly spoke to that adulterous woman.



Our Presbyterian denomination, as well as other denominations throughout America, wrestles with accepting practicing, non-repentant homosexual candidates into leadership. There is a huge difference between those who are weak and longing for full freedom in Christ and those who advocate disobedience from God's loving law. We here at CPC pass out Bibles to those of you who are exploring the Christian faith and are just coming into membership, that's one thing. But for those who are taking positions of leadership as deacons, elders, and pastors, we hold to a higher standard of maturity and discipleship. We affirm our Presbyterian Church USA standard for leadership in elders, deacons, and pastoral staff, noted from our Constitution: *Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to scripture and conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice, which the Confessions call sin, shall not be ordained or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament (Book of Order G-6.01066).*

Ted Haggard, the well known Christian pastor of a 14,000-member Evangelical church in Colorado Springs and president of the 30-million-member National Association of Evangelicals, recently made national headlines. The media unveiled and publicized his drug purchases of methamphetamines and his ongoing sexual relationships with a male prostitute. The news story appeared in Time and Newsweek magazines, and made the headlines of national and local television and newspapers. Our local paper quotes Ted Haggard as saying this, "I've been battling my dark side for years, and it got the best of me. I am being rightly and lovingly removed from leadership responsibilities. I am under discipline and support, and, hopefully, restoration." That's tough love. That's welcoming, but not affirming. Ted Haggard has not lost his salvation. He has given in to powerful desires that he has tried to put under control by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. He has given in to those desires that have plagued him his whole adult life, and it's right for him to step aside from leadership while this area of his life gets under the control of Christ's Spirit.



Many of us have sung a song, called "You are my all in all, Jesus, Lamb of God. You are my strength when I am weak, You are the treasure that I seek, You are my all in all." Re-

cently I discovered the story behind those words. The song was written by Dennis Jernigan, who has had a lifelong struggle with his own homosexual desires. I would like to share with you journalist Carol Heffernan's account of Dennis Jernigan's testimony. I think it's an account of painful honesty and yet hope.

*There was time when Dennis Jernigan was battling issues in his soul he didn't understand. From an early age, he was musically gifted. Preferring the piano, he became the church's pianist in elementary school. His whole childhood revolved around the church. His family was there every time the door was open. He can still remember his Sunday school teachers discussing the topic of homosexuality. He writes, "That word was not used, but I knew they were talking about me." He knew, but he kept it to himself.*

*Throughout his teen years, Jernigan masked his sexual confusion and relied on performance to earn his dad's respect and his Heavenly Father's favor. "I thought God could love me, but the only chance for me to get to Him was if I performed well." In high school, Jernigan played basketball and was named class valedictorian. And yet, as his list of academic and athletic achievements grew, so did the intensity of his homosexual feelings. He studied music at Oklahoma Baptist University, where he tried to suppress his feelings by burying himself in studies. And in the midst of his college years, Jernigan asked God to bring someone into his life, just so he could talk about his homosexual feelings. Eventually, he met a respected Christian leader, who began to encourage, check on, and pray for him. And after a time, Jernigan felt finally comfortable enough to divulge his struggle, but the freedom he felt after sharing that secret lasted only a few seconds. Jernigan soon realized his so-called confidante wasn't so trustworthy after all. The man responded to Jernigan's secret by making a sexual advance. The hopelessness that consumed him that night was more than he could handle. Arriving home, he turned on the gas and waited to die. But even as he inhaled the toxic fumes, Jernigan began to question if he really was ready to die. He writes, "It scared me so much, I turned off the gas, and I made this statement: It must be the way I was born, so I'll just embrace it rather than fight it."*

*He hoped that accepting his same-sex attractions would bring him the peace that he craved. It didn't work. Acting on his feelings only resulted in more confusion. "The gay community," he writes, "seemed to me like everyone was out for number one, so I never felt really accepted there like I wanted to be. I felt I had to perform for them! I had to look good, sound good, had to make myself attractive, so to speak. I still had to perform for acceptance." His college years left him more miserable than ever. Still struggling with his sexuality, he wanted to know more about God. He figured the best place to do that was seminary! He says, "It was suicide or seminary at that point." In the end, it was neither. Three days before Jernigan was to leave for seminary, he got a call from a Christian friend, who said, "Would you consider moving to Oklahoma City, living with us, and just giving God a chance?" So he accepted the offer, moved to Oklahoma City, and got a job as a school bus driver.*

*And he would report that the time following graduation was when he fell off the deep end, and gave himself to it fully. But then, in November of 1981, he attended a concert by a Christian group, called Second Chapter of Acts. He writes, "I went to be entertained. I came away with my heart changed." Inspired by the words of the group's leader, Jernigan realized he could surrender his homosexuality to Christ and be freed at last from its powerful grip. He walked away from the gay lifestyle that night, convinced that if God said he could be free, it must be the truth. When people asked if his deliverance from homosexuality was instan-*

*taneous or a prolonged process, Jernigan said, "Both." Did the temptations end immediately? No. But as Jernigan soon learned, "Just because I am tempted in a certain matter, doesn't mean that's who I am." And now, more than 20 years later, he's never looked back.*

*Jernigan may have forsaken the homosexual lifestyle, but he would not give up his secret. He decided not to share his past with anyone, including the woman he eventually married, Melinda. He worried that if he told her, he could lose her and their children, as well. Still, his past continued to haunt him. What if Melinda found out from some other source? What if the kids started hearing rumors? What if his church learned of his former lifestyle? So, he realized it was time to get honest. But at what price? He writes, "I took my wife out, and I told her that I struggled with homosexuality, and she just began to weep and thanked me for telling her." What he feared most never happened. On the contrary, Jernigan said he and Melinda grew even closer, and they made it a point to remain as open as possible with their kids about everything, including the past.*

*Today, Jernigan leads worship services throughout the country and world. He has released more than 20 albums, and seven of his songs are the most listened to and sung in Christian worship in America, including "You are My All in All." He was asked, "Has your past hindered your career or your ministry?" And he says, "Well, I can tell you examples where I've been mocked by different people in the Christian music industry, because of my past, and that hurts. But I've also seen this story offer encouragement to others battling similar issues. Whether the music goes there first or the story goes it doesn't matter to me, as long as people hear that there's hope." <sup>2</sup>*

I pray that Dennis's story and his journey bring hope to those among us who struggle with sexual desire and the confusion as to what to do with those feelings. I'm referring to homosexual desires; adulterous desires, pornographic desires, premarital discipline, or whatever. And for those loved by us, who find themselves longing to know God so well that we live his perfect plan for expressing this great gift of our human sexuality and the abundance life offers, may we find hope. God has made us male and female with huge sexual attraction. It's a gift unto the Lordship of Christ, and that is rightly expressed when he is our all in all.

Let's pray...

*Lord, lead us into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. May all here who are caught in the moral confusion and chaos of our time and of our own hearts know the compassion of Christ, who said, "Neither do I condemn you." You who died for us, who intercedes for us - you are our all in all. May we experience the abundant life that you offer, as we enthrone you as our God in the center of our mind's attention, our heart's affections, and our will's allegiance. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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<sup>2</sup> Carol Heffernan, "Giving God a Chance: An Interview with Dennis Jernigan"

# **You Are My All In All**

*Dennis Jernigan*

You are my strength when I am weak.  
You are the treasure that I seek.  
You are my all in all.

Seeking You as a precious jewel,  
Lord, to give up I'd be a fool.  
You are my all in all.

Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name.  
Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name.

Taking my sin, my cross, my shame,  
Rising again, I bless your name.  
You are my all in all.

When I fall down, You pick me up.  
When I am dry, You fill my cup.  
You are my all in all.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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