

Human Sexuality - Part 5

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Sermon Series: Live Faithfully

Matthew 5:27-30

Let's not only ask ourselves what Jesus saves us from; let's also inquire what Jesus saves us for!

Today's sermon constitutes the fifth consecutive message on the topic of human sexuality. Why five sermons on sexuality? Why not? Everybody else in America is talking about sex. Should the church remain silent?

God intended faith and life to go together. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly." Let's not only ask ourselves what Jesus saves us from; let's also inquire what Jesus saves us for!

I cannot recall a time in this church when it has been so quiet during a sermon as it has been these last four weeks. Last Sunday, I felt as though I could hear myself breathe. I invited you to call, visit or email me your reactions to these sermons. I have never, in 27 years of preaching, received so much feedback to a sermon series. How do I explain such a dramatic reaction to these sermons? I could assume it has something to do with the profundity of the messages, but I know better. It has far more to do with the fact that human sexuality is a deeply personal issue and touches people at the core of their being.

This sermon series was originally intended to be 11 weeks in duration, but I cut it back to five weeks. For an initial foray into human sexuality, I determined 11

weeks was too long. This series is focused on what is central and foundational to the Bible about human sexuality.

That's why I began at the beginning, with a book about beginnings, Genesis itself. There are plenty of bizarre notions of human sexuality circulating in church and society. I established three core beliefs from Genesis. First, God created our bodies good. Second, God created us sexual beings. Sex, after all, is God's idea. Third, God created sex for the covenant of marriage.

We devoted two sermons to the Song of Solomon, one of the least known and most misunderstood books in the Bible. It still blows my mind that this anthology of love songs made the final cut of books included in the Biblical canon. I'm convinced God, in providential wisdom, inspired Biblical scholars to include this love song in our Bible to provide us with a positive, life-affirming sexual ethic. This love song also reminds us that our human longings for love can never be fully realized by another person. Imperfect people can never love us perfectly. God alone is the One for whom our souls yearn.

Last Sunday, we examined what Jesus said about love and lust. In short, lust is all about the self; love is all about the other. I talked about how pornography launches a

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spiritual assault on God's gift of sexuality.

A few moments from now, we will conclude this series with an exploration of Paul's view of the human body.

Admittedly, a five-week sermon series doesn't do justice to human sexuality. There are so many subjects yet to be dealt with: sex education, abortion, homosexuality, sexual addiction. I anticipate we will return to this subject sometime in the near future.

I invite you to turn to Paul's letter to the Corinthians as we conclude this series. Corinth was a city notorious for its sexual promiscuity. One of its temples was devoted to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. There was a time in Corinth when prostitution was practiced in the name of religion. One thousand sacred prostitutes served Aphrodite's temple. So widely known was their immorality that a Greek verb, "Corinthianize," was conceived to describe their debauchery.

Plato believed the immortal soul was imprisoned in the human body. He espoused the philosophy that the body was human and therefore temporal, while the soul was divine and therefore eternal. This Platonic ideal contributed to the Corinthian attitude that it doesn't really matter what people do with their bodies. Paul quotes the well-known maxim in verse 12: "All things are lawful for me." The Corinthians believed, when it came to matters of the body, that anything goes. Nothing done to the body ultimately matters, since

the only thing of eternal significance is the soul. We can eat what we want and have sex with whom-ever we like, since the only thing that matters is the soul.

Paul challenges this distorted attitude of the body by referencing Jesus' resurrection in verse 14. The fact that God the Father raised the Son in the resurrection of the body demonstrates the dignity God gives to the human body.

Paul writes, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial." Freedom doesn't guarantee us the right to indulge every sexual desire.

Paul quotes, in verse 13, a second catch phrase of the Corinthians: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." These Corinthians justified their sexual exploits with the rationale that sex is as natural as eating. Eating has no bearing on a person's spiritual life, just as sexual behavior is inconsequential to the Christian life. Paul challenges the common order standby of his day. Food is not merely meant for the stomach, nor is the stomach meant for food. Rather, the body is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Perhaps Paul has temple prostitution in his sights when he references union with a prostitute with verses 15-17. On the surface, having sex with a prostitute seems to be a temporary liaison—he to gain sexual release and she to make a living. Paul insists sex is much more entangled. Physical acts have psychological consequences. At its core, sex is a psychosomatic connection.

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Bodies and souls are much more connected than most people think. When we have a side ache, our body not only suffers, our whole self suffers.

This body-soul connection runs counter to the prevailing wisdom in our age, which suggests sex is nothing more than a biological urge. The longing for physical closeness to someone is in reality a longing in our souls. People who engage in sex outside of marriage don't do so because they deliberately set out to be promiscuous. They do it because they are lonely. There is a voice within us that says I was made for connection. I was made to love and to be loved. And that voice will not be stilled. That's why sex is such an explosively powerful experience. How else can we explain how powerful, influential people—politicians, university presidents, CEOs of major companies and pastors (the scandal in Colorado regarding Ted Haggard comes to mind) fall prey to its allure. Why would people trash their reputations, jeopardize their careers, damage their marriages and capsize their families? A few minutes of sexual gratification makes some of the smartest people act like idiots.

Don't be deceived. We're not just talking about body parts and nerve endings. Sex is linked to the soul, whether we like it or not. That's why people chase after sex with reckless abandon.

John Ortberg uses a vivid analogy to depict what it is like to separate the body from the soul. He invites you to imagine placing

your tongue on a cold metal pipe. Hold it there until your tongue freezes to the metal and then try to walk away. Ortberg says that's something of what happens when we are involved sexually with someone without the soul-permanent commitment in marriage.

People say it's just sex. I can hook up with someone and then walk away. No you can't. Not without leaving a part of your frozen self behind. Every time we have sex with someone we leave behind a little piece of our souls. Maybe that explains why people don't feel whole anymore, because they leave little pieces of themselves scattered around.

Paul advises us in verse 18 to flee immorality. Remember what I said last Sunday? Make like Joseph and run from temptation. Run as fast as you can.

Paul concludes in verses 19-20 that God created our body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Gods and goddesses were believed to have inhabited ancient Greek temples. In like fashion, God takes up residence in our bodies through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are the place where God dwells. An early church patriarch, Tertullian, must have had Plato in mind when he said, "Our bodies are a temple, not a prison."

Paul acknowledges in verse 19 that we don't own our bodies. We have been bought with a price. Our bodies have been bought and paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The language here implies a change of ownership. The Lord has full property rights over

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our bodies. If you doubt what I say, tell me who owns your body at the time of your death?

I spotted a curious refrigerator magnet this week: “My body’s not a temple. It’s an amusement park.” Hmmmm. This statement may be truer than we realize.

In Flannery O’Connor’s short story, *A Temple of the Holy Ghost*, a precocious 12-year-old girl is visiting her female cousins at the same time two country boys are courting her cousins. This 12-year-old girl overhears her cousins mock a nun, Sister Perpetua, who has suggested a simple formula to use in fending off fresh young men in the back seat of cars. “Stop sir, I am a temple of the Holy Ghost.” The cousins think such advice is positively hilarious. This 12-year-old girl, however, is moved. The news that she is the dwelling place of Almighty God makes her feel as though someone has given her a present.

I invite you, as we conclude this sermon series, to regard your bodies as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Let us heed Paul’s admonition in Romans: “I appeal to you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).

If your sexual life is in disarray, turn to the Lord. Ask Jesus to help you reorder your priorities. This same principle could be applied to any area of your physical self. It could apply to overeating, insufficient exercise, sleep deprivation or any other distortion of what God intends.

Maybe you think the Biblical witness of human sexuality exalts an impossible ideal. Our transcendent God has the power beyond all human imaginings to redeem, save and restore. I invite you to surrender your life to Him. Invite Him to dwell in your soul and body.

