

Wesleyan Methodist Church Sunday 1st February 2015

Sexual Holiness

Passages: Proverbs 5:1-4, 8-12; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Ephesians 4:17-24

Why talk on sexual holiness? Isn't that a strange word to use when describing sex? This morning I want you to get a glimpse of how God feels about your sexuality and your use of it. God fashioned sex to be used in the most intimate of relationships. In fact God used sexual terms when describing his relationship to his people.

Here are two examples: When his people worship idols he said they had prostituted themselves to these idols and Jesus called the church the bride and he the bridegroom. The ultimate aim of the sexual act is to bring oneness and it is this oneness that God is jealous for in our relationship with him. God considers sex holy. May our response to this be a healthy respect for this unique gift from God. I don't want to embarrass or make you uncomfortable this morning but I simply want to bring this important subject into the open.

So why talk about sexual holiness?

Intro: Our sick world

Because our world is sick, sick to the core with perverted sexual activity and it is extremely difficult for us to immune ourselves from this sickness.

A couple of years ago when a small team of people from our church went to Thailand to help in a children's home we spent the last two days in Bangkok. One day we travelled across Bangkok to a popular tourist market. Well the market was fantastic especially if you love shopping for a bargain.

Behind the scenes was another side to the market. Down the narrow alleyways off the main routes were numerous sleazy places where you could satisfy your sexual fantasies. Strip shows, prostitution, viewing parlours etc. Now their prime cliental are middle aged western men so at one stage when I found myself walking alone through the market I could not believe the amount of times I was asked or had pictures shoved in front of me advertising what was on offer 20 meters away.

The sad reality was we had just come from northern Thailand where the children's home was involved in saving many young girls from being sold into child prostitution and possibly the very places we were passing.

Child trafficking is rife in many poorer countries mainly because there is money to be made and a market from western middle class and upper class sexually perverted people. The sexual industry is a powerful money making machine that is an absolute blight on our society.

This is not an easy topic to tackle but a necessary one as we find ourselves immersed in the quagmire the world throws at us while trying to understand how to stay true to what the bible says.

The first thing we notice the bible say is that...

1) Sex is beautiful

I love the candid approach the biblical writers have used when it comes to sex. They have shown the two extremes of sex; the beauty and blessing of it when used right and the emptiness and consequential pain when used wrongly.

Sex is beautiful...

a. Because it is God-given

Adam and Eve felt no shame or guilt with their nakedness in the Garden of Eden. God's intention was for humans who were made in his image to relate physically, emotionally and sexually in an ideal world where they were also connected spiritually with their creator.

The beauty of God's intention behind sex is revealed a number of times in scripture. When woman was created out of man God said, 'for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they shall become one flesh'. (Gen 2:24) 'One flesh' is an intimate term used in the New Testament to describe the relationship between the believer and Christ.

Song of Songs gives quite an erotic account of the love between the king and his wife expressing the joy and pleasure of the sexual relationship. The song also highlights the power of the love between a man and woman.

Sex is beautiful...

b. In the right context

It is the gift that God gives to a couple after they marry, it is therefore to be left alone until marriage. It has nothing to do with performance or prowess rather all to do with a man and woman deeply in love with a lifetime to discover and enjoy one another. A couple could receive no greater present on their wedding day than unpacking the gift they have longed for in the person they are deeply in love with and showed respect for throughout their courtship. Young people can I plead with you to do everything you can to preserve this gift and the experience of it till the proper time. You will be so glad you did.

We also need to do all we can to preserve the uniqueness of the marriage relationship as only and ever between a man and woman. The bible is very clear on this and so should we. We can respect the choice of people to engage in a homosexual relationship but to claim that as a legitimate marriage only discredits God's beautiful intention for marriage.

You see there is...

c. (However there is) a wrong context... for sexual activity.

When sin entered our world the relationship with God was broken. God wanted the sexual relationship to continue between man and woman and even though it had the potential to be beautiful in the right context it would always be flawed and open to horrific abuse.

In Gen 3:16 as God was pronouncing the curse he said to Eve, 'Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.' The extreme end of this curse represents a gross misuse of sexual activity where women particularly have been abused.

There are many more biblical references to the misuse of sex highlighting what a problem it has been for thousands of years and still is today. Our passages today reveal the trap of sexual immorality. We are to flee it at all costs. Remember what Joseph did when tempted by Potiphar's wife? He acted on his first instinct and fled before he became enticed by this nasty woman.

You see if we are not careful we can all be tempted to stumble in what I call...

2) A process of degradation

Our passage from Ephesians 4:17-19 reveals a series of events that can lead us down a vortex and before we know it we've landed in a pit where we should never be.

It is a subtle...

a. Rationalisation: A slippery slope

Let's read again from Ephesians... Follow along: So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Now Paul is speaking about the non-Jewish people who don't know Christ but he is also describing how the Ephesian Christians used to live and warning them not to fall back into their former way of living. He could be describing you and me.

Paul describes a subtle process of rationalisation beginning with,

- Their minds: producing wrong thinking and ignorance. We could also say making foolish choices and having hardened hearts by allowing Satan to remain in control of their hearts and minds.
- Now that their thinking has been corrupted they find themselves in a position where they are separated from God and their understanding is clouded or darkened.
- Now that their position has changed they begin to lose any sense of guilt or shame. They are losing all sensitivity and find themselves given over to sensuality. This is the result of their foolish choices and separation from God.

- Finally because they can never be satisfied or get enough of this indulgence they hunger for more and more like a full on addiction.

Can you see the subtle process beginning with our minds rationalising away the importance of staying true to our convictions? Let's do...

b. Some test cases...

Let's call the temptation quicksand:

- Rationalise: Go near the quick sand. Despite the warning sign. Justify.
- Position has changed: Step into the quicksand even though you know you shouldn't.
- Result: We lose all perspective because it feels so good wallowing in the quicksand.
- Never satisfied: You sink in the quicksand because you can't get enough.

What if we substitute quicksand for pornography?

What about adultery? What about sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend? There could be many scenarios that we could substitute for quicksand here.

Please listen: sexual activity outside of the marriage between a man and woman is sinful and will always be sinful. It is a scriptural law.

I want to say something about pornography. It is predominately a male problem and the reason the porn industry is so powerful is because we so easily get drawn into it. Let me remind you of some of the effects of pornography:

- Degrades women
- Perverts your view of women and sex
- De-sensitises you to sexual holiness
- Leaves destructive visual imprints on your mind
- Can destroy marriages

Boys and men don't go there! And if you are there do something about it! If you're married talk to your spouse about the temptation. Put boundaries in place around your internet use. Be accountable to others.

Sign up to do Valiant Man later in the year. I believe every man in this church should do it.

So with all that we have looked at so far how do we...

3) Establishing a healthy sexuality

If we are going to avoid being stuck in the quicksand where do you think we need to address this slippery slope issue? It is up the top of the slope before we get on; it is...

a. By beginning with your heart and mind

The bible talks about the need to guard your heart and mind because it is where all other actions spring from. Proverbs 4:23 says, 'Above all else, **guard your heart**, for everything you do flows from it.'

Phil 4:7 says, 'And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will **guard your hearts** and **your** minds in Christ Jesus.

There is something about our hearts and minds that needs protecting. But it is a deeper problem than this. Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23,

"What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

Our minds not only need protecting they need a makeover. Romans says, 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.'

Our passage from Ephesians tells us to put off the old self which is corrupt and put on the new self which is righteous and holy like God and in-between it says we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds.

- We get our hearts right
- We get our minds right
- And our behaviour will follow

We establish a healthy sexuality...

- b. **By being careful...** Be careful what you allow to settle in your hearts and minds.

So be careful:

- What you watch
- What you think
- Where you go
- What you do

This is more than advice for Sunday school kids this is wisdom for all people.

We are told to flee sexual immorality, in other words get right away from it and don't go near it. The bible elevates sexual sin above all other sin. Why is this? Because 'All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.' There is deep emotional and spiritual wounding when we sin sexually.

And since our bodies are sacred places where God's Spirit dwells we need to protect it against this wounding. If God dwells in us then we no longer own our bodies, they have been bought at a great price by our saviour Jesus. So we are instructed to honour God with our bodies.

We also need to establish a healthy sexuality...

- c. **In relationships**

The quality of our relationships can either make us or break us. How often do we see a fired up Christian derailed spiritually because a relationship has taken them off course? Way too often.

Even relationships between committed Christians can become unhealthy if the correct boundaries are not put in place. Young people...

- Keep your relationship honourable
- Resist the need to date just for dating's sake. Why not hang in groups?
- Talk about your 'no go zones' together so you can respect the boundaries of each other.
- Be accountable
- Not only do the right thing but be seen to be doing the right thing

Let's strive for healthy relationships. It is for this reason we are pushing the Search for Intimacy series. Why not make it a priority to do it?

I have spoken a lot about the pitfalls and the misuse of sex. I want to leave you with two very important facts. Firstly if you have been abused, damaged, degraded, disappointed by others or if you have perverted and warped your own sexual holiness then...

d. Healing is essential

We owe it to ourselves and to any future relationship to do all we can to receive healing from past trauma. For example there is a higher divorce rate in second marriages simply because people don't make the effort and take the time to heal.

Secondly not only is healing essential but most importantly healing is possible. We may not remove the physical reality or scars from past destructive sexual encounters but we can be restored and healed emotionally and spiritually.

God delights in restoring and healing us, it is what he does best.

In conclusion can I encourage you to...

Be proactive... 'Do something!'

If you find yourself challenged by this message and know there is a need to act on it then please make a commitment right now to do something about it.

- Tell someone and be accountable to them
- Set boundaries in place. Re-evaluate your relationship... is it right?
- Seek healing and restoring prayer
- Do the Search for Intimacy series or Valiant Man later in the year
- Come out the front for prayer this morning.

Message by Pastor David Lloyd