

# *Making Love Bloom Again – Part 4*

## **The Goodness of Sex and the Glory of God**

### **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

**May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006**

In an episode of the hit sitcom *Friends*, Monica asks her new boyfriend, “So, we can still be friends and have sex?” “Sure,” he replies, “it’ll just be something we do together, like playing racquetball.” Author Lauren Winner quotes this line and then comments: “That could be a tagline for our age: *Sex: it’s just like racquetball*. It’s no big deal. It’s just a game.<sup>1</sup>”

According to the story found in the Bible sexuality is much more than racquetball. It is a big deal; it is much more than a game. This morning I will attempt to outline a biblical view of sex in about 25 minutes. And here’s one promise: I will fail in this attempt. I will fail to tell you the whole story; I will fail to convey the poetry, beauty, danger and redemption of sexuality; I will fail to cover every question – as a matter of fact, I may raise more questions. But I’m going to plunge ahead and try anyway.

According to the Bible portion you just heard, the negative side of what the Bible has to say about sex is pretty simple: Flee sexual immorality (see verse 18). The Greek word that Paul used is the word *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography, but it actually was a very broad word. It’s used fifty-times in the New Testament and it basically meant sex outside the marriage of one man and own woman. And notice that this isn’t just a mild command i.e. “I sure hope you guys sort of don’t have sex outside of marriage.” It says, “Flee sexual immorality.” So let me state the biblical view this way: sex was designed for a man and a woman in the context of marriage. Period. Of course it’s the “period” that really bugs people. So most people look at this negative statement and say, “You’re kidding, right? I mean, times have changed. So when will the Bible or the church wake up and revise their prudish, repressive, impractical, life-negating approach to sex?”

It’s a good, honest question and we need to do our best to give a good, honest answer. First of all, the simple, blunt “flee immorality” is consistent with nearly every major religion on the face of the earth. The “big” religions usually disagree on major issues – i.e. God, sin, salvation, the nature of reality, the afterlife, etc, - but they do pretty much line up with the Christian message here. Secondly, for a believer in Jesus, the blunt “flee immorality” always needs to be placed in a larger, life-giving story of the Bible. I’d like to outline this larger story with four chapters: the Beauty of sex, the Power of Sex, the Distortion of Sex and the Redemption of Sex.

**1. The Beauty of Sex** – When the Apostle Paul wrote this passage to a group of Christ-followers in the city of Corinth, their culture was just as confused about sexual issues as we are. In this passage there were two competing views of distorted sexuality. The first view could be called “sex is dirty.” People were saying things like (see 1 Corinthians 7:1) “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” My wife likes to summarize it this

way: “Sex is dirty, defiling and disgusting; save it for your spouse.” Sadly, this is the only view many of us have heard.

In New Testament times the “sex is dirty” view had a name: Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a complex, sprawling category but most strains of Gnostic thought include the idea that the body is bad and only the soul is good and pure and true. Can’t I just worship and love God with my mind? Do I really need to drag my body into this? Well, the Bible vigorously rejects Gnosticism before you even get out of the first chapter of Genesis. Notice Genesis 1:26 and 1:31. Part of this *very good* creation includes our bodies and our maleness or femaleness. See also Genesis 2:23-25. Notice that Adam did not say, “Wow, she’s going to make a swell prayer partner.” He cried out, “At last, this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” We’d call this a dopamine rush. Adam is saying, “Whew, she’s a babe.” And then in verse 25 it says that “they were naked and not ashamed.” It’s clear that the nakedness is a good thing.

It gets even better – or worse if you want to be a modern-day Gnostic. Tucked away in the middle of the Old Testament, there is a little book called the Song of Solomon. It doesn’t give us any laws or hymns or rituals or religious advice; it just celebrates the marital love between one man and one woman. It doesn’t begin with profound theological talk like “In the beginning, the Lord Almighty, blessed by He, created sexuality for the propagation of the species.” Instead, the woman proclaims, “Kiss me again and again (or literally translated, ‘smother me with kisses’), your love is sweeter than wine” (see 1:2). Throughout the book both spouses soar with a flurry of metaphors for sexual love. See, for instance, chapter 7:1-9. Did you hear that? Breasts like grape clusters? A navel like a goblet of wine? Thighs as finely shaped jewels? People are often shocked – and sometimes embarrassed – to find this in the Bible.

And then consider this: Jesus had a body. This is astounding: God comes to earth not as a Spirit, but in and with and through a body. Jesus was raised from the dead in a body. And one day we will be resurrected in a body.

All of this leads to a profound truth: you can like your body. More than that, you *should* like your body. Ephesians 5:29 addresses husbands and says, “So men ought to love their own wives as their own bodies ... For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it.” Paul assumes that most of us know how to care for their own bodies. And he assumes that body-care is a good thing. Body-worship is a bad thing, but body-respect and care is healthy and even God-honoring. Christianity honors the body. So when we meet our friends over a cup of coffee or when we share our lives in small groups, we should ask “How’s your prayer life?” but we should also ask “Are you getting enough sleep? Are you eating well? Are you getting exercise?”

So if you struggle with this first view of distorted sexuality – the “sex is dirty” viewpoint - go back and read the first two chapters of Genesis. Then read the Song of Songs. Then watch Jesus in the Gospels; watch God in a human body. Watch him sleep and eat and drink. Then go out and enjoy your body. Go for a walk. Take a nap. Break open a butternut squash and make some soup. Dig in the dirt. Give someone a hug. Light a

candle and make love with your husband or wife. Come to the Lord's Table to eat and drink. If you scoff at these suggestions, if you think this has nothing to do with being a mature Christian, I would suggest that you may be more influenced by Gnostic spirituality than biblical spirituality.

In the first chapter of the biblical story of sexuality, God wants us to recapture the beauty and wonder and delight and pleasure of sexuality. Someone has put it this way: "Sex is good because the God who created sex is good. And God is glorified greatly when we receive his gift with thanksgiving and enjoy it the way he meant for it to be enjoyed" (Ben Patterson).

**2. The Power of Sex** – When Paul wrote this letter to a fractured, muddled church family, there was another sub-Christian view of sexuality. We see it in verses 12 and 13 where Paul quotes a few slogans that were making the rounds: "All things are lawful for me" and "The body is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will destroy them both." In other words, *what's the big deal, it's just a body? I can do whatever I want with my body. Jesus doesn't care who I sleep with or who I fantasize about.* The Apostle Paul stands in the larger story of the Bible and with a look of shock and horror exclaims, "What do you mean, it's just a body? Never say, it's just a body. Your spiritual health can depend on what you do with your body."

Listen to the end of verse 13 – "Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." You see, what you do with your body matters to God – it matters profoundly. See verses 15 and 16. The key to understanding sex is found in that little phrase "one flesh." Certainly, it's referring to two bodies coming together. But sex means so much more than that. Here the New Testament gives us a profound psychological insight, an insight unique to the first century. The word "flesh" never just meant your skin and bones; it meant a total, embodied personhood. It's all of you. So God designed sex to work like this: when you unite yourself to someone sexually, you offer your whole self to someone else. Sex has power. It symbolizes a profound connection, intimacy and connection. It points to a total self-giving, a whole-life union of my self to you.

So for a follower of Christ, pre-marital sex or a marital affair is not only immoral; it's a lie. God designed sex to say, "I give my whole self to you in a total commitment." But pre-marital sex says, "I want your body but I will not go all the way – i.e. I will not promise to be with you tomorrow or next year; I can't promise to stay with you through sickness or health, for richer or poorer." In the biblical story it's weird and abnormal and it's even a monstrosity to say, "I want the physical union but I can't offer you the other kinds of union."

This is stated powerfully in the movie *Vanilla Sky*. Tom Cruise plays an arrogant man who casually ends a fling with a beautiful young woman. But she can't end it that easily. So after hunting him down, she confronts him with a biblical truth about sex, "Don't you know that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not?" In sex your body makes a promise.

Sex has power. See verse 16. I'll also never forget the young woman who slept with dozens of men. Now she had become a follower of Christ. She wanted to give herself to her husband but she could only weep and say, "I feel like I've given so many pieces of myself away that I have nothing left over."

Sex has power. It isn't like playing racquetball. It's a total giving of ourselves to another person. Sex profoundly symbolizes our desire for intimacy, relationship, connection, commitment and real community.

**3. The Distortion of Sex** – Because it's so beautiful and because it's so powerful and because it profoundly symbolizes our drive for connection and intimacy, sex, in a way unlike other drives, has the potential for distortion and pain and hurt. That's why sexual desires, sexual problems and sexual addictions can hook us so deeply – and why so many people can't just shake them off with a moralistic "just say no" approach. That's why sexual abuse can damage people so deeply and a trite "just get over it" doesn't help.

Let me put it another way: when our heart is disordered, when we're not living with Christ at the center of our heart, when we're bent away from God, when we live like spiritual orphans who can only rely on and trust in our own resources, when we're not drawing life from God, living in a vital and intimate connection with God as our Father, then our heart will grab a god-substitute. The Bible calls this idolatry, which just means the attempt to find satisfaction and security in something that is not God. Idols are bad because God promises joy, infinite, rich and eternal joy – and idols always give us a thrill for awhile but then they turn flat and eventually they enslave us.

Every human being on this planet has idols. And one of the god-substitutes that often floods into our hearts is the god-substitute of sexuality. If you don't believe me, look at the Old Testament. The religions surrounding God's people were based on a worship of sexual expression. Baal, a favorite god-substitute in the Old Testament, was basically the god of sexual orgy. Now there may be dozens of ways to manifest our distorted god-substitute of sexuality, but the root is always the same: disordered worship. We are trying to draw life from an idol.

Here's my point: when sex gets distorted, when sex goes out of bounds, it's more than just playing racquetball. It starts in our hearts. It starts with what and how we worship. That's why when people struggle with lust and they just can't get over it, a moralistic "just say no" approach usually doesn't work. For instance, do you remember the rage of Christian teenagers signing sexual abstinence commitment cards? Well, they did a well-researched study and found that 61% of those kids broke their commitment. Why? Here's my theory: we don't understand the deeper work of the Gospel. Jesus is always after our heart motivations (see Mark 7:\_\_\_). That's why every New Testament letter begins with the good news of how God has changed our heart in Christ. God wants to change our heart – what we worship, what we value, what we draw on for life, how we relate to God, how we trust God.

So when sex gets distorted, look at your heart. Look under the hood of your life. Let me give you an example:

**4. The Redemption of our Sexuality** - Paul writing distorted sexuality. Problems – big problems. Port city of Corinth naughty place, wild, promiscuous – heterosexuality and homosexuality. Paul doesn't nag and tell them what they are doing wrong. You perverts. Vv 19-20 – Reminds them who they are and what they have in Christ. See also 1:3ff. Points them back to the power of the cross – see 1:25 – nobodies who have become somebodies in Christ. Power. New creature. Made for love. Sleeping with someone, sexual fantasies, on the verge of an affair, can't get over the lust, homosexual desires, looking at pornography – the New Testament says, "Don't be bad, stop it." But "remember who you are and then live that way." "Remember what you have. Remember your role in this world." I have something better for you. Struggle – Martin Luther quote. Tiger story.

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Winner, **Real Sex**, page 78.