

SEX: GOD'S GOOD GIFT

Part 1

January 6-7, 2007

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Pure Sex, Pt. 1
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Why would we dedicate sermons to the topic of sexuality? Bob Russell has one answer. He says there are three topics which are sure to draw a crowd to church: sex, the end times and will there be sex in the end times?

While we aren't addressing the issue simply to attract a crowd, we are praying that many will take seriously God's plan for sexuality. This is a delicate topic. And, while we will do our best to be tasteful and appropriate, the discussion might cause some discomfort. Our older members might feel uneasy at the topic. Parents might be concerned that the message is age inappropriate for their kids. You who bring children into the Worship Center might prefer that your children hear these words from your lips. For that reason we are posting the message on our web page as well as providing manuscript versions of the lessons a week in advance. Please know that Brad, Fareed, Keith, and I will do our best to be, at once, honest and respectful.

Many of you, like I, have never heard sexuality addressed in church. Or, if you have, the message could be summarized in one word: "No." We are unaccustomed to honest discussions of sexuality from the pulpit.

Which is regretful. Television addresses the topic, explicitly, and unapologetically. The affluence of multi-channel cable TV morals guarantees daily home deliveries of a godless sexual philosophy. Popular shows like *Desperate Housewives*, *The Tonight Show*, *Two and One-half Men* come land-mined with intentional messages about morality, or the lack thereof. Documentaries about Swingers, and Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies have a singular agenda of mocking God's plan. Movies, the internet, magazines, billboards...sex saturates this society. The vast majority of messages we see and hear portray moral purity as prudish and the Bible's instructions as relevant as an oxcart. The result? Skyrocketing out-of-wedlock pregnancies, venereal diseases, the AIDS epidemic, broken homes, fatherless families.

Hence, the justification for this series. Sex is God's idea. Rather than relegate and abandon the topic, let's reclaim and elevate it as God's good gift. There is no better place to begin than in the beginning.

"A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:24-25)

Observe the plan. Two people leave their childhood support systems, come together in public covenant and then, only then, they become one flesh. The result? Unembarrassed intimacy. No guilt. No shame. Just the opposite- confidence and security. Healthy intimacy strengthens a marriage.

In "The Holy Longing" Ronald Rolheiser writes: "Sex is the energy inside of us that works incessantly against our being alone. If that energy is harnessed, it moves you to unselfishness, generosity, love and sacrifice. It moves you to becoming more like God.

But out of control, that energy can lead to self interest, immorality, indulgence and the wounding of other people.”

Rolheiser imagines a 14 year old in the natural process of development. Instinctively he wants sex- the love and relationship means little or nothing. But, as the years go on, he falls in love. He still desires sex, but love matures his desires. He seeks, not just connection of the body, but the soul...the intimacy of life. This requires a commitment; he doesn't want to share his girlfriend with other men. So they marry. And, as they mature, they desire and want children. He is surprised at his devotion to his children. He finds himself putting their needs above his own. Eventually his house is filled, not just with his children, but their friends. He and his wife spend much of their time thinking about the needs of their children, planning for their futures. PTA, tournaments, concerts...through parenthood into grandparenthood, over the years becoming more and more mature. More and more like God.

In this context, sex works. Sex cements the relationship; permitting husband and wife to do physically what they do emotionally. They share deepest, for your eyes only secrets. The marriage bed helps husband and wife stitch their souls together, reinforcing with the body what the calendar and checkbook declare daily. Sexuality, in God's plan, fosters, not just pleasure, but unselfishness, sensitivity, patience, Godliness. Pure sex develops pure hearts and pure people.

Contrast this outlook with the *Seinfeld* or *Howard Stern* one-night-stand-philosophy that is only flesh to flesh: soul, disregarded; security ignored; and shame and separateness created. Contrast this philosophy with that of the Penthouse man who hunts women like safari trophies, with the soap opera woman who uses her curves to get her way, with the couple who wake up in the same bed hardly knowing last names. This is sex a la jack rabbit, not God's plan.

One can have a lot of sex and no real love, just as one can be celibate and enjoy community and security. Rolheiser goes on to write: “When you see a young mother so beaming with delight at her own child that for that moment all selfishness in her is given way to the sheer joy of seeing that her child is happy, you are seeing sexuality in it's most mature form. Or when you see an elderly nun who, never having slept with a man, never having been married, never having given birth to a child, has through years of selfless service become a person whose very compassion gives her an obvious comfort with her femininity and she smiles a mischievous grin, you are seeing sexuality in maturity. When you see an elderly husband and wife who, after a half century of marriage, have made such peace with each other's humanity that now they can be content to share a bowl of soup, content to know just that the other is there, you are seeing sexuality in maturity.”

The problem with the Hugh Hefner or the *Grey's Anatomy* view of sex is not that they tell so much, but that they tell too little. They limit sex to a moment of pleasure with no commitment. In contrast, God's view of sex sees the physical act of just one part of a greater intertwining of the lives of two people. He gives you, not one pine cone, but a forest; not one inning but a baseball game; not one painting but a gallery.

God gifts his children with sex for, at least, four divine reasons.

1. Marital sex celebrates the marriage covenant.

“So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.” (Gen. 2:24 NCV) The “leaving” is the announcement that a man and woman make to the community. Whether this announcement occurs in a cathedral ceremony or a backyard wedding, it serves the same purpose: it declares a covenant between two people. It removes two individuals from the dating market and enrolls them in the university of matrimony.

“...The two will become one body” or as other translations state, “one flesh.”

Leaving, uniting, then sex. First comes love, then comes marriage then comes the fruit of love...the baby carriage. This teaching stands in bold defiance to today’s idea of “sampling the fruit before you buy the tree.” Many people see premarital sex as healthy pre-marital preparation. How can you know if you can live a lifetime together if you don’t sleep with each other first?

Consider with me the folly of that statement. What does extra-marital sex tell you about a person? Do you learn anything about their character? About their patience? Does a night of passion answer these questions? “Will he love my kids?” “Will she tell the truth?” “Will we love God better together than apart”?

Hardly. Premarital sex reveals only one thing. He or she will sleep with a person who is not their spouse. This person doesn’t have to be married to someone to sleep with them. And, it tells your partner the same thing about you.

Don’t be fooled by the lure of extra-marital sex. Sex without commitment becomes boring, then perverted. It fails to deliver. What’s more, it hurts both parties. One writer describes its consequences this way. “Step outside into ten below temperature and stick your tongue on a flagpole for about five seconds. When you pull away, some of you is left behind. You can dismiss it by saying “It thidhn’t thurt a thall.” But it does.

Would you let an eight year old drive a car? No. We place restrictions on a driver’s license because a car, improperly directed, becomes a weapon. Does God permit people to experience sex outside of marriage? No. For the same reason. The world says, “Try intimacy so you will know if you can make a commitment.” God says, “Make a commitment so you can know true intimacy.”

God provides many meaningful relationships: parent to child, teacher to student, friend to friend, but God gives to only one relationship, husband and wife, the good gift of sex.

2. Marital sex facilitates mutual trust.

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” (Gen. 2:24-25 NKJV). This verse describes, not just the physical, but the emotional nature of Adam and Eve’s relationship. They hid nothing from each other. They bared themselves to one another. No cover-ups, no secrets, total honesty and safety. The act of sex says, “I entrust to you my naked self.”

For that reason, adultery can devastate a marriage. When you promise your body to one person, then give it to another, trust is ruptured...sometimes beyond repair.

3. Marital sex stimulates healthy pleasure.

God gives enjoyment. Every good and perfect gift comes from him (James 1:17). Marital sex is not to be endured, but enjoyed. The honesty of Scripture on this topic might surprise you. In Genesis 26:8 we read of Isaac "...showing endearment to Rebekah his wife." (Gen. 26:8 NKJV) The King James version says he was "sporting with her." The wise man urges husbands to "rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Pro. 5:18 NLT). The Song of Solomon explicitly describes the healthy romance between a husband and wife.

Pleasurable sex motivates marriage...in fact, were it not for sex, most men would not get married. Pleasurable sex supports marriage. It is a challenge to maintain a marriage. Women discover that men can be sloppy and insensitive. Men discover that women can be moody and irritable. It is difficult for men to understand women. Comedian Brad Stein sneered: "Men marrying men? Cowards." The enjoyment of sex is God's motivation and compensation in the challenges of marriage.

Phillip Yancey has good words here: "Marriage strips away the illusions about sex pounded into us daily by the entertainment media. Few of us live with oversexed super models. We live instead with ordinary people, men and women who get bad breath, body odors and unruly hair; who menstruate and experience occasional impotence and have bad moods and embarrass us in public and who pay more attention to our children's needs than our own. We live with people who require compassion, tolerance, understanding and an endless supply of forgiveness. So do our partners. Such is the ironical power of sex. It lures us into a relationship which offers to teach what we need far more--sacrificial love."

4. Marital sex populates the earth.

"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth..." (Gen 1:28 NKJV)

God loves children and he wants children to grow up in a healthy environment. A one-man, one-woman home is God's plan for well-balanced children. A permanent marriage between father and mother is a prerequisite for children. David Blankenhorn's book, "Fatherless America" calls the absence of dads from the home America's most urgent social problem; the root of crime, sexual abuse and so on. For that reason, we must take a stand for bi-gender homes and healthy marriages. Some see marriage as a political issue. It's more correctly seen as a divine issue; 3,500 years of Judeo-Christian time-tested teaching.

Sex is God's good gift. It celebrates the marital covenant, facilitates trust, stimulates enjoyment and populates the earth.

Over the next few weeks we hope to address some of your questions. What about pornography? How about sex and the single adult? How can I keep adultery out of my home? We'll ponder these, and other questions.

For some of you, today's topic raises guilt. You've messed up. You've wondered if God can forgive you. Of course he can. King David, the great saint, committed adultery with Bathsheba and asked for forgiveness. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." (Ps. 51:2 NKJV)

And God did. David lived with harsh consequences, but sufficient mercy. He offers the same mercy to all who seek it today. Just as a teacher gives the student a fresh sheet; God gives all who seek it a new leaf. As the poet wrote:

Beginning Anew

(Also titled in some poetry books "A New Leaf")

He came to my desk with quivering lip;

The lesson was done...

"Have you a new leaf for me, dear Teacher?

I have spoiled this one!"

I took his leaf, all soiled and blotted,

And gave him a new one, all unspotted;

Then into his tired heart I smiled:

"Do better now, my child!"

I went to the throne with trembling heart;

The day was done.

"Have you a new day for me, dear Master?

I have spoiled this one!"

He took my day, all soiled and blotted,

And gave me a new one, all unspotted;

Then into my tired heart He smiled:

"Do better now, my child!"^[2]

^[2] Kathleen Wheeler, quoted in John R. Rice, *Poems that Preach*. Excerpted from "The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart," ©Charles R. Swindoll, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, Inc., 1998.

NOTE: Bob Russell's message, "Sex by the Book," was a key resource for this message. All quotes (Yancy, Stein, Rolheiser, etc.) were derived from Bob's message. Used with permission.

