



Gospel / life

Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

Study 24: The Burnt Offering & Life In God's World (2) - Sexuality

God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1Cor. 6:14-15a, 19-20)

One of the key ways in which we are to live in whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-bodied love for the Lord—which is the meaning of living our lives as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God—is in the matter of the God-given gift of our sexuality.

It is important to have clearly in mind that our sexuality¹ is part of the gift of being in the image and likeness of God. The Anglican prayer book says of marriage that one of its purposes is for “the proper expression of those natural instincts and inclinations with which He has endowed us.” It takes both the man and the woman together to give expression to the image of God (**Gen. 1:26-27**), and it takes both the man and the woman together to fulfil the mandate of God to be fruitful (**Gen. 1:27**). Their sexuality is commanded, as well as blessed by God. The man without the woman cannot fulfil all of God's intention for humanity in the earth, and the man, prior to sinning, gladly recognised this and celebrated with joy the provision of the woman (**Gen. 2:18-23**). In their innocence, as they came together as one flesh, their nakedness was not a cause of shame to them (**Gen. 2:24-25**).

Everything physical about our sexuality is part of that gift, and so should not be dishonoured in any way, either by mockery or distrust (see **Eph. 5:5**; **1Tim. 4:3**). Our sexuality is not an outcome of the rebellion of the first couple—the taking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not “code” for engaging in sexual intercourse. The perversion and degradation of our sexuality is certainly an outcome of our rebellion, but that is not true of the gift of sexuality in itself.

For these reasons, the gift of sexuality is one of the means by which we glorify and worship God wholeheartedly in this world. As Paul says in **1Cor. 6:20**, the gospel call means that believers are to glorify God in their bodies. Sexual activity glorifies God when it expresses loving obedience to Him and love and honour to our neighbour. More, God is glorified by the refusing of sexual activity that is disobedient to God, or selfish or dishonouring to our neighbour.

¹ By “sexuality” in this study I am meaning our differentiation as men and women, and the expression of this differentiation in sexual relationships.

Sexual Ethics in the Holiness Code – Discovering Some Key Principles

Leviticus 18 sets out certain regulations for sexual relationships within the life of God's sanctified people. There are some guiding principles that are also found in the New Testament passages that deal with sexual ethics.

(i) Belonging to the Lord

Lev. 18:1-5, as we saw last week, sets out the general principle of the distinctiveness of God's people from the nations among whom they dwell. All of the behaviour of God's people is to be governed by the holiness of the LORD Himself, who has rescued His people and made them His very own. The key phrase is "I am the LORD your God."

This is the keynote of the New Testament's teaching on sexual ethics also. The Corinthian congregation had many members who came from a sexually immoral background, but wonderfully they had been cleansed, made holy and set right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and by the work of the Spirit of God. God Himself had separated them from their past, and liberated them from it (**1Cor. 6:9-11**). In **1Cor. 6:12-20** Paul urges his readers to refrain from sexual immorality. He says,

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.

The teaching is very clear: our sexual ethics are shaped by the fact that through redemption (i.e. his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection), Jesus has *bought* us to belong to God our Father. We have been washed, sanctified and justified that we might share in His holiness. He says this also in **1Thess. 4:7-8**:

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

In fact, it is as we remember and live in the truth of God our Father's redeeming work in Christ, and so walk by the Spirit, that we are best equipped to resist the temptations to sexual immorality. "Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh (**Gal. 5:16**).

(ii) Separation

Not only do God's people belong to Him, but they no longer belong to the surrounding cultures with their idolatrous worship patterns. This general principle has very specific application in the following verses to sexual behaviour. In **18:24-30** it is clear that the prohibited defiling practices that are spelled out in the prior verses all were practised by the inhabitants of the land before Israel came, and in fact these practices were a large part of why these prior inhabitants were ejected from the land.

In the New Testament this idea of separation, in particular in regard to sexual ethics, is also present. In **1Corinthians 6:9-11** Paul is very clear that sexual immorality in its various forms, along with other sins, is completely outside the life of the kingdom of God. (The full list of those excluded from the kingdom is the sexually immoral, which probably means sex between an unmarried man and woman, idolaters, adulterers, homosexual men, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers—a list that parallels and expands **1Cor. 5:9-11**). When such sins happened brazenly within the body, then the congregation must act by refusing to associate with such sinning Christians. By this, they would give clear indication that such actions, if persisted in unrepentantly, would show that those involved were under the judgment

of God (**1Cor. 5:9-13**). **Eph. 4:17-24** and **1Thess. 4:4** also contrast Christian ethics with the surrounding culture.

(iii) Prohibited relationships

Lev. 18:6-18 then lists a number of prohibited relationships. These relationships are prohibited simply on the grounds of belonging to the LORD. Close familial relationships are not to be sexualised at all, including those relationships that are not by blood but by marriage—a man was not to “uncover the nakedness” of certain close relatives. In **1Cor. 5:1-2** Paul has to address the situation where a man in the congregation has become sexually involved with his stepmother. The worst aspect is that the church seems to rejoice in this as an expression of freedom in Christ. Paul’s shock is that the church is less sensitive to the impiety of this than even the surrounding culture (which, in Corinth, was by contemporary standards very permissive!)

18:19-30 spells out other sexual relationships that have more dire consequences for the cleanliness and holiness of God’s people. These are: sex with a menstruating woman, adultery, child prostitution (or sacrifice), homosexuality and bestiality². Through the passage there is an increasing level of profanity and uncleanness marked by the words used to describe the acts—they make unclean, profane the name of the LORD, and are abomination or perversion. In all though, all these acts are seen as abominations (**18:26**), which were practised by the previous inhabitants of the land where Israel will dwell, and which defiled the land, incurred the LORD’s judgment and induced the land itself to vomit out the people. All this is to be avoided because, “I am the LORD your God.” In **20:1-20** the ways in which these various sins were to be punished is set out.

(iv) “Uncovering nakedness”

This phrase, used throughout **Lev. 18:6-18**, probably is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, but it can also have a voyeuristic meaning (see **Genesis 9:20ff**). It even has a wider meaning of dishonour or disgrace.

In the Fall, the man and the woman became painfully aware of their nakedness, which had not been a problem or shame to them before (**Gen. 3:7**). The shame they felt was deeply connected to their loss of glory by their sinning (see **Rom. 3:23**). This loss of glory was also connected to a deep competitiveness and rivalry between the man and the woman, which issued in blaming, accusing and finding fault (**Gen. 3:12**). In this situation they cobbled together what they could do to cover their nakedness. Later, God in His kindness and mercy had clothed them with garments of skins (**Gen. 3:21**).

To “uncover nakedness”, then, exposes again this situation of rivalry and competition. It is essentially a way of dishonouring the person. The gift of human sexuality has deep connections to God’s covenant faithfulness, and sexual union between a man and woman is given to be an expression of covenant relationship between them. All the promises of marriage, i.e. pledged love, which is unilaterally and freely given, which promises to persist for life whatever circumstances may come in the future, and which is exclusive of all others is the only safe framework in which a man and a woman may securely be with one another, naked and unashamed. Apart from those pledges, and the securing help of God to keep them, either person is at risk that the other person will bring humiliation to them.

² In the New Testament this list of illicit sexual practices is repeated with the exception of the rule about menstruation. Probably the issue here is the matter of contact with blood, which would make a man ritually unclean. It is also possible that part of the fertility cult of the pagan religions of Canaan involved menstrual blood.

In **Ephesians 5:22-32**, Paul sets out the beautiful relationship of husbands and wives. Husbands especially are called to serve and honour their wives, loving them as Christ loved the church, giving themselves up for their wives. And in **1Peter 3:7** it is clear that husbands are to be gentle and to give honour to their wives. **Hebrews 13:4** says that marriage is to be held in honour by all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled. The introduction into the setting of marriage of illicit and dishonouring sexual practices is to defile something that God has given for holy joy.³

(v) Wider effects

What might surprise us in the Holiness Code is that not only does a man uncover the nakedness of the woman with whom he sleeps, but he also uncovers the nakedness of the man who has responsible care for the woman (e.g. **Lev. 18:7,14**), i.e. leaves him open to disgrace and shame. No sexual immorality, even consensually engaged, is a “victimless act”. In **1Thess. 4:1-8** Paul calls Christian men especially to live sexually continent lives, refraining from sexual immorality, and controlling themselves in holiness and honour. By this they will not transgress and wrong their brother in this matter (v. 6).

In some cases he uncovers his own nakedness (see **Lev. 18:10**). Sexual immorality disgraces and dishonours the perpetrators also. In **1Cor. 6:18** we are told that the person who commits an act of sexual immorality sins against his own body. And in **Rom. 1:26-27**, as Paul discuss the degeneration of sinful sexuality into homosexual acts, we learn that through these shameless acts people *receive in themselves* the due penalty for their error. This may involve a deepening loss of glory, and of sensitivity to what is truly honourable and holy, such that when faced with something that is pure the person reacts either angrily or in despair. Further, there is a deadening effect inherent in sin and guilt, and the sexually immoral person may have to pursue more and more illicit forms of sexuality to get the “kick” that is sought.

(vi) God’s judgment

The former inhabitants of the land of Canaan were ejected from the land (*vomited out*—**Lev. 18:25,28**) because of their sexual immorality. It is clear in the New Testament that persistently immoral people will not inherit the Kingdom of God (**1Cor. 6:9, Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5**). The Lord is an avenger in these matters (**1Thess. 4:7**). The Old Testament contains warnings that God’s judgment falls on His people when immorality becomes the norm among them (**1Cor. 10:8**). This all impresses upon us that we are to take these matters very seriously, and not simply to ignore or cover them over in the name of “grace”.

³ In a pornographic culture such as ours, the nakedness and sexuality of other people is used to entertain, titillate, and arouse. This happens in general entertainment, and in advertising, let alone in more explicit pornography. It has a deep affect in how people see themselves, and how people try to find their way in the world. Gail Dines is a Jewish feminist academic and anti-pornography campaigner. Her book *Pornland* explores just how the burgeoning pornography industry is impacting on every aspect of popular culture and so on the lives of men and women in their daily lives. Justine Toh, from the *Centre for Public Christianity*, interviewed her—the link for the interview is <https://publicchristianity.org/library/pornland-gail-dines> (This interview contains material that many will find disturbing.) Another fine book that tackles our cultural situation is *A Return To Modesty*, again by a feminist Jewish author, Wendy Shalit.]