

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
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SERMON: SEX: THE TOPIC WE AVOID

TEXT: SONG OF SOLOMON 2: 1-7

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.

As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love. O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!

Oh my, we are stirring things up today!

After 31 years of avoiding or dancing around the subject which they told us in seminary was the equivalent of a politician voting to cut Social Security payments, here we are.

I'm not sure you can call it temporary insanity because I decided to preach on human sexuality about a month ago - so whatever this is, it's premeditated. My seminary preaching professor told us "sex" is a great topic for your last sermon at any congregation. I believed him. And in a more immediate note, my dear wife's last words to me as I left the house today was, "Don't get yourself fired!" (Note: I didn't pack up my office this past week so I'm not hoping or expecting to get fired for having a frank discussion.)

Well, I want you to know that this is your last chance to take a long bathroom break. No one will blame you if you didn't come to church to hear about sex. After all, we hear about sex everywhere these days: newspapers, magazines, TV, movies, radio, and internet. Only place I'm safe is when I'm playing golf all by myself - and only then because I'm very occupied by how bad my golf game is!

In fact, church is one of the very few places that we don't talk about or hear about sex. It's like we have some big banners all around the church ~~SEX!~~ There is a strange and deafening silence here about a subject on which the Bible has a lot to say.

Before I go too far I want to tell you that I preach on this subject, as Dr. Fred Craddock said, "as one without authority." I am no Hugh Hefner. I am no sex guru. Please don't ask me for sex tips – I'm fresh out! (Take a quick personal inventory: Did that statement disappoint you or relieve you? And what might that say about you?)

OK, take a deep breath and hold it. It won't take me long to say everything I know about sex and human sexuality. O but the Bible, on the other hand, says a lot so keep breathing. We might as well begin with the Old Testament because it is so full of sex that I'm not sure why we allow children under 18 to have a copy – they might read it and start asking lots of difficult questions!!

Well, The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible begins its chapter on Sex and Sexuality with this statement: "The overarching factor characterizing the biblical treatment of sex is the impetus to regulate its practice. It is this factor that reveals that for the biblical authors sex was a very dangerous aspect of human existence. It was dangerous because biblical religion is based on common identity passed on through the family of Abraham. To ensure this genealogy was not compromised, the correct paternity was vital. Sexual desire was a force that had to be contained for, as it says in Song of Solomon 8:6, 'love is strong as death, passion as fierce as the grave.'"

Love and sex, together or separately, wield incredible power in our culture. The desire for sex can motivate a young man to walk head first into a brick wall and keep doing so until he gets what he wants. It can also be the end of otherwise good marriages when a mate catches the scent of someone else desirable. And think of the billions of dollars sex brings in for the movie industry, not to mention what people spend on porn and prostitution. Sex sells. Sex motivates. And sex can either bring great pleasure or immense suffering.

Who were the first people who had sex? Adam and Eve. Why did God create sex? Wait. Just to be clear – the Devil didn't do it and we sure didn't come up with the idea during dinner! God is responsible. It was a gift – not a curse. God gave it primarily for procreation. For all us common folks that means "making babies." God wanted future generations. We know how that happens.

In fact, God told them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” It was an obligation, a responsibility, a duty and apparently, for some folks, a calling.

Question: Did you ever sit your children down, before they left home to go out into the big wide world and say, “darling child, it is your duty to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with babies that have our last name”? I didn’t. No sir. None of them. Closest I ever came was on Mother’s Day about 6-7 years ago when the “Mother with the most grandchildren” had 18. I made some smart comment about that would be six from each of our children and my adolescent daughter said, “Guess I’ll have to start now.” Man, I threw that car into reverse fast as I could! Never said anything like that again – because I don’t live in an Old Testament world! Multiplication happens fast enough without encouragement!

Remember, in the Old Testament the People of God did not grow through evangelism. Fact is: they didn’t want outsiders to join. They grew...by procreation! Makes me wonder – if the Israelites had celebrated it – what would their Mother’s Day have looked like?

Just one thought to add here. In Genesis, after that first sin, Eve’s punishment is the pain that comes with childbirth. If my sermon gets boring ask someone around you of the opposite gender if an epidural shot during childbirth is a sin because it gets in the way of God’s plan? I’m not taking a position on that one!

Another part of the Old Testament’s views on sex has to do with ritual purity. This may be all new to you but they had this big commitment to keeping the sacred separated from the profane. One example: menstrual blood. Impure! Anyone who comes in contact with it: also impure. I read the book “The Year of Living Biblically” and there was a section in which the man was trying to live literally by the Old Testament laws regarding sexual impurities. He was not allowed to touch his wife for a week or more at a time and he could not even sit on any chair that she had sat on during that time. This annoyed his wife. That’s the gentlest word for it. Enough so that she made a point to sit on every seat in the house so he would have nowhere to sit except on the floor. When mama isn’t happy nobody is happy!

Aha moment! Could this be why lots of old churches had separate pews for men and women – to protect the men from impure women?

Now, there are big parts of the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy that have to deal with prohibited sex. I don’t have all day to belabor this point but basically almost any

sex that didn't potentially lead to children was prohibited. There were laws dealing with who you couldn't have sex with, where you couldn't have sex, when you couldn't have sex, what sorts of sex you couldn't have, and that you couldn't pay for it – unless the transaction was with a registered cultic prostitute. Please, please, please don't ask me about them – they've been out of business for 2,500 years – and I don't want the “men's clubs” in Dallas figuring out a way to register all their staff as cultic prostitutes. It may not be in the constitution but I believe in the separation of Church and Sex Clubs!

Let me end our time in the Old Testament with a more positive note, sort of: The Song of Solomon affirms that sex is good. We don't want our teenagers to know this so I won't repeat it. But the Old Testament tells us that “unbridled passion” is dangerous. Unbridled means out of control lust. The Old Testament offers us three examples of unbridled passion:

1. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife
2. Sampson and Delilah
3. David and Bathsheba

In each of those stories people get swept up in a passionate, sexual relationship and somebody ends up crushed. Joseph goes to prison. Sampson gets his eyes gouged out. And David and Bathsheba's love child dies.

Basically the Old Testament says, “Get married, have lots of sex, and have lots of children.”

When it comes to the New Testament and sex it comes down to the opinions of two people: Jesus and Paul.

Paul first. Paul was raised a Pharisee which means he grew up trying to live up to all 600+ Old Testament laws, including all those regarding sex. When he accepted Jesus he believed that most of the Old Testament laws no longer applied. BBQ pork ribs are now on the menu. Circumcision – optional.

But Paul's views on sex were dominated by the anticipation of the second coming of Jesus, which was anticipated ASAP. So he told his followers to embrace celibacy and ignore the distraction that sex can bring to your life – because Christians needed to be out saving the lost full time. Anything that took you away from evangelism was a bad thing.

Stop and think how far we have come from the Old Testament idea that evangelism was prohibited and procreation was the only way the people of God increased!!

Paul said, "to the unmarried and the widows I say it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." (I Cor. 7: 8-9)

Wait, does that mean Paul thought that getting married killed sexual passions? Another discussion to have over lunch - but maybe not with the kids.

Anyway, we are well aware of people who are aflame with passion and will do anything with anyone to satisfy that passion. I don't know how to refer to women who have this condition but with men we call them "testosterone poisoned." And any woman who has a clear head runs in the opposite direction because they virtually always bring drama, angst, suffering, and lasting regret.

If that is not enough, in the second chapter of the Book of Timothy Paul wrote about how women were to be saved. You thought you knew? Well apparently it is tied to sex: "Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam, was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet the woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

There are a sizable number of Biblical Scholars who think that Paul did not write the book of Timothy but that someone else wrote it and published it under Paul's name. So you have to decide if you think women are saved by having children...and being faithful, loving, holy, and modest. Or all we all save by faith alone - as Paul says in the Book of Romans.

OK, what does Jesus say about sex?

Well, if you are a traditional Christian then you believe he had no firsthand knowledge of the subject. If you are a Mormon or a Moonie you believe that he not only was married but that he had children. And if you are a conspiracy theorist then maybe you believe that he had a relationship with Mary Magdalene and fathered children who are still with us today, either hidden from or sought after by the Catholic Church.

I'll hold the traditional view until I see some solid evidence to say otherwise.

So, why was Jesus celibate? First, because he was following the Old Testament Laws. If the Son of God doesn't follow the rules then who else will? Second, because any "affairs" could have been used against him by the religious leaders, or politicians, or the Devil. And third, because it would have thrown the community of people following Jesus, the Disciples and others, into chaos trying to deal with who Jesus was sleeping with. Three good reasons to believe Jesus was celibate but ultimately we won't know until we get to heaven.

Jesus didn't have a lot to say, directly, about sexuality. He met the woman at the well and noticed she had had 5 husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband – but he did not condemn her, he led her to salvation. And he was called to judge a woman caught in the act of adultery but he said "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone," and when no one did he told her "Go and sin no more," which was a recognition of her sin but not a condemnation. He didn't go all "Old Testamental" on them when he had the chance!

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did talk about adultery, a sin the Old Testament said merited death, but only to increase its scope – that even thinking about adultery was just as sinful as committing adultery. Some people say he did that because it made that law almost impossible to obey – therefore the only path to salvation lay not in one's action but in faith in Jesus who forgives sins.

So, what do I think that God want us to know about sex?

First, sex is a good thing, created by God for human delight and procreation. Don't be ashamed to enjoy it.

Second, sex is like plutonium, if handled casually or improperly it can cause immense pain, scaring, and even death.

Third, with sex it's not "anything goes." God places limits. Those limits are there for our protection. Fail to obey them at your own risk. Rape, incest, and bestiality, to name but a few, are on God' list of sins.

Fourth, sex is best within marriage, within a committed relationship that has the love and power to sustain it, channel it, and make it grow. Yes, sex outside of marriage has its pleasures but nothing like that which comes in a long term relationship.

Now not everyone is going to believe just this. And not everyone is going to act just this. So what do we do when people use sex badly or thoughtlessly, getting hurt or hurting others? Well, we follow Jesus' lead, we don't look down our noses and speak condescendingly. We acknowledge the truth without venom and invite the other to come live a life more to God's liking. Remembering that such invitations are more effective when served with honey instead of vinegar.

Now in conclusion, should I start looking for another job? After all, I did say the S-E-X word in church.