

**Dear Church**  
**Sexuality Series Week 1: Honor God with Your Bodies**

**Dan Hamel**  
**August 28, 2022**

A number of years ago I was speaking to a few hundred college students about a Christian view of sexuality. To get things started I asked the students to take a moment and remember how they first learned about sex. They talked amongst themselves and shared the stories. Most people had a story about an older sibling telling them, a classmate telling them at school, or learning about it through a conversation in the back of a bus. Some learned through exposure to pornography. Though no one said so, I'm sure some learned about it through abuse. Still others had a conversation with their parents about the birds and the bees. Before we moved on, I asked, by show of hands, how many people learned about sex in such a way that was so wholesome and so helpful that they hoped one day their children learned about it that way. In a room of 200 people, only three raised their hands. I don't know what the percentage would be if I asked the same question here, but I'm guessing it wouldn't be that different.

When it comes to the seemingly all-consuming topic of sexuality, we've learned things from all sorts of different places. It's not only when we were young and first discovered this topic that we had various, and sometimes less than desirable, influences; it's happened all throughout our lives. Our approach and belief about sexuality is formed and shaped by our group of friends growing up, by what we watched in our parents' marriages, by our dating relationships as teenagers, by our college experience, by the movies and shows we watch—the list could go on. If you think about your view of sexuality as a lake, there are a thousand different streams, some larger than others, some healthier than others, that flow into that lake that have influenced your thoughts, beliefs, and convictions. That's true for all of us. Some of those rivers have been pure, healthy, and clean. Others have been polluted and toxic. Every person's lake is unique to them; no two people have the same experiences and perspective. Our goal in this series is to spend the next nine weeks allowing God, through the Scriptures, to pour eternal truth into our lives.

Before we begin, I want you to know our source—we are going to be going to God's word—and I want you to know our heart—it is one that is filled with love. We love people. We love you. No matter who you are, what walk of life you are on, what stances you hold, we have a heart filled with love and kindness toward you. You are not going to hear hostility, anxiety, anger, or fear, but simply God's word, spoken from a posture of love as we talk about the sorts of things about which we need wisdom: how to be single in a God-honoring way, how to date in a God-honoring way, homosexuality, transgenderism, pornography—there's no hot bottom topic we are going to avoid.

I want to say upfront that both Emerson, who is preaching several sermons in this series, and I have been highly influenced by numerous sources in our preparation. We've read more books than I could count, listened to dozens of podcasts and sermons, and learned from people throughout history, from different traditions and perspectives, so a lot of what you hear today and in this series will not be unique to us. We have pulled great insights from many people and hope to present the best of what they have to offer to you. We have about ten books that cover a wide variety of subjects from a wide variety of perspectives available for purchase outside the worship center throughout this series. We are giving them to you at a discount—cheaper than Amazon, so if you want them, this is the place to get them. You can also see a list of books on our website. If you want to go a little deeper, be sure to check out those resources. I owe some of the content in this message to Sam Allberry. Sam is not only a pastor and author, but he is also a Canon Theologian for the Anglican Church. He is also celibate, as he says he has only experienced romantic attraction to other men.

With recognition of our dependence on others, let's pray and then dive into our passage in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

In this passage we see three elements to God’s vision for sexuality. The first thing we learn in this passage is that God’s vision for sexuality is uniquely challenging. Paul begins this section by quoting the philosophy of the day as it pertains to sexuality: “I have the right to do anything,” which, interestingly, is the philosophy of our day as well. The common approach to sexuality today is pretty clear: as long as it’s with another consenting adult, do whatever you want—you have the right to do anything! But Paul counters this statement two ways in this passage. First, he says, “Not everything is beneficial.” In other words, just because you can doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s best or that you should. He also says: “I will not be mastered by anything.” Every person has physical desires. We get to decide if we are going to be in control of them, or if they are going to be in control of us. If you know anything about deer hunting, you know that deer are incredibly smart animals, especially the old bucks. They know there are hunters in the woods, so all year long they lay low. They usually only move around at night. Their senses are always alert, checking for predators. You almost never see them. Except one time a year. It’s called the rut—it’s when their hormones tell them it’s time to mate. Even though they are so safe and so smart eleven months out of the year, when they have this urge to breed, they throw caution to the wind, running around in broad daylight chasing the does. Because they are mastered by their physical desires, often they end up shot and killed. That’s obviously an extreme example, but I would wager that a high percentage of the greatest pain and the deepest wounds and heartache in your life also came because either you or someone who was with you, rather than having control over your physical desires, was mastered by them.

That’s why Paul says in 6:18, “Flee from sexual immorality.” In the Greek this word is *porneia*. Emerson did a great job explaining this word a couple weeks ago, helping us realize it’s a word the Bible uses to describe all sexual activity that is not between a man and a woman who are married. Pornography, crossing physical lines with a boyfriend or girlfriend, hook-up culture, homosexuality—*porneia* encompasses it all. Some people give themselves license for certain activities because they say, “The Bible doesn’t explicitly mention that it’s wrong.” Well, it does. Anything outside of intimacy in marriage is included in this word. And Paul says flee from it! Don’t dabble with it. Don’t flirt around with it. Flee from it. An antelope in Africa doesn’t see a lion approaching and say, “There might be a little bit of danger there, but I’m in the middle of my lunch. It’s probably not that big a deal. I can probably outrun him anyway. His teeth probably aren’t that sharp. I’ll walk the other direction when I get around to it.” That’s not what the little antelope does. He runs! We need the same mentality and approach to the temptation and draw of sexual immorality as well.

So often we think we are clever enough, smart enough, in control enough to find out what the line is and sneak right on up to it. But Proverbs 6:27-28 warns us: “Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?” God’s vision for our sexuality is demanding. No one made it clearer than Jesus himself. In Matthew 5:27 he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” That’s what everyone in Jesus’ day

assumed the standard was: just don't have sex until marriage or with anyone else if you are married. Jesus changed the standard. We all know that Jesus was loving, gracious and compassionate, so how do you suppose he changed the standard? Did he say, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you, follow your heart." Did he say, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you, be true to yourself." Does he say, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." He doesn't lower the bar—he raises it: not more permissive, but more restrictive! He says it's not only about avoiding the most intense sexual act possible. It's not only about avoiding unhealthy sexual activity all together. It's about the condition of your heart. He goes on to say if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to lose one part of your body than for your entire body to be thrown into hell. He was speaking metaphorically and using hyperbole, but there is no way to mistake the intensity of Jesus' language. God's vision for sexuality is uniquely challenging.

We also see that God's vision for sexuality is uniquely dignifying. The bar is set very high, but it's for a specific purpose. God has a high view of humanity, a higher view than we have of ourselves. Paul quotes one of the Corinthians' idioms in 6:13: "You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.'" With this idiom they were expressing an approach to sexuality that again is nearly identical to the approach many in our culture have today. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" means that food exists to be eaten, and when your stomach is hungry, you should get some food to eat. There is no morality, meaning, or significance to the food you eat. You want steak, you want pizza, you want sushi, you want tacos—who cares? It's your choice. Eat whatever you want. After all, one day it'll all be burned up. That's a very carnal view of sexuality. If you have an urge, respond to the urge. If you are hungry, eat whatever you want. If you have a sexual appetite, do whatever it takes to satisfy it. I want to say this very clearly, but without any harshness or judgmentalism: that's how animals behave, not humans. God's vision for sexuality is higher because he dignifies us not as animals who can't help but respond to our urges, but as people made in his image and likeness, endowed with the ability to discern the difference between right and wrong and the autonomy to choose to do right. God raises the bar for sexuality because he has an elevated view of humanity.

God also knows that sex has a greater power and purpose than the world often recognizes. The world says that sex is merely about passion and pleasure. Sex is certainly about those things. It is a wonderful way to express your love and desire to the one you are with, and it feels absolutely incredible. The world stops there. If that's all that sex is about, one might reason that you ought to share it with anyone you want and get all the stimulation you can. But there is so much more to it than that!

God tells us sex is about permanency. Sex isn't simply about body parts and nerve endings. There's a movie with Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz in which their characters spend a night together. Cruise's character thinks nothing of it, but Diaz's character says, "When you sleep with someone, your body makes promises even if you don't." Biologically speaking, we know that when a person experiences climax, the body releases bonding chemicals like oxytocin and vasopressin, which cause us to connect to the person we are with. If it's only a hook-up, our body is setting us up just to let us down. Pastor Tim Keller says sex is a way of saying, "I am giving myself to you fully, exclusively and permanently!" Ronald Rolheiser says, "There is an unconditionality inherent in so intimate a sharing of one's soul. Thus, if real trust, commitment, permanency, and unconditionality are not present within the wider relationship, sex is partly a lie. It pretends to give a gift that it does not really give, and it asks for a gift that it cannot respectfully reciprocate." That's part of what makes sex on your wedding night so powerful—it's like covenant cement that seals together the promises made.

God tells us sex us also about procreation. Intimacy is intended to have a fruit-bearing, family-generating component. God looked at Adam and Eve and didn't simply say, "Enjoy one another through any sexual activity you want, as frequently as you want, without any consequences." He said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Most people these days are working hard to have sex without any consequences, but one God-ordained purpose for sex is to join God in his mission of bringing new life into the world.

One last word: sex is to be a picture. The Bible teaches that as strong and significant as our sexual desires are, and as wonderful as the gift of sex is, it's ultimately only a signpost—pointing to a grander reality about our connection with God. When Jesus walked among us, he was not only called Lord and Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man; he called himself a groom. We are not only his followers; we are his bride. The picture of God being with his people in heaven from Revelation is a wedding banquet. As great as intimacy is, it's just a picture of a far greater reality.

Some of you will remember the movie *Zoolander*. The premise of the movie is that the better looking you are, the dumber you are. Those who are really, really, really, ridiculously good-looking are also incredibly dumb. The main character is Derek Zoolander. Some people want to honor him by building a school in his name. They show him a model of the school, which they think he is going to love, but he's furious and outraged. He flips the model upside down and says, "It's supposed to be a school for children, not ants." In his ignorance, he mistook the model for the real thing. We do that, too. Sexuality has been given to point us to something deeper. Every time we think romantic and sexual fulfilment will make our lives complete, we've mistaken the model for the real thing. Verse 13 tells us, "The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." *This* is really about *that*.

Some people look at Christianity's teaching about sex and the guardrails God has placed around it and think it's because we have a low view of sex. They assume they have a higher view of sex because they approve sexuality in every form, fashion, and expression. I'd kindly push back: you think you have a high view of sex, but your view isn't nearly high enough. When I was a teenager, my first vehicle was an old, beat up pick-up truck that had a ton of miles and body damage to it. Because it was old and dinged up, I wasn't too worried about being extra careful with it. When I went to prom, my neighbor let me borrow his brand new Audi convertible to take my date to the dance. Because that car was so much more valuable than my truck, I drove it much more carefully. It's specifically because sex is so meaningful that God gives us parameters and wisdom on how to handle it.

God's vision for sexuality is uniquely challenging. God's vision for sexuality is uniquely dignifying. And God's vision for sexuality is uniquely satisfying. When you look at the way the Corinthian Christians were behaving as described in this passage, they were embracing sexual immorality. They were treating their sexual desires like any other craving in their body. They were even engaging with prostitutes, not dissimilar from many people in our culture. But what so many people have found, Christian and non-Christian alike, is that the culturally predominant approach to sexuality doesn't bring the lasting satisfaction it promises!

Louise Perry wrote a fascinating article just last week entitled: *I'm 30. The Sexual Revolution Shackled My Generation*. In her article she says clearly and explicitly, "I'm not a religious conservative. I'm a feminist." She further says, "I used to believe the liberal narrative on the sexual revolution. As a younger woman, I held the same opinions as most other millennial urban graduates in the West. I conformed to the beliefs of my class...(I thought) what women need is the freedom to behave as men have always behaved, enjoying all the pleasures of casual sex, porn, and...any other sexual delight that the human mind can dream up. As long as everyone is consenting, what's the problem? I no longer believe any of this. (Sexual liberalism) is an ideology premised on the false belief that...any restrictions placed on sexual behavior

must therefore have been motivated by malice, stupidity or ignorance.” She says what she and many others have come to discover is that “Sex must be taken seriously...Some (sexual) desires are bad...Loveless sex is not empowering. People are not products.” She suggests couples should wait to have intercourse, and says, “Monogamous marriage is by far the most stable and reliable foundation on which to build a family.” She clarifies that these are not conclusions derived from religious ideology, but “are informed by peer-reviewed research.” When I read her observations, I want to say, without an ounce of smugness but simply with humility: *it’s almost as though God may have been on to something!*

Hookup culture leaves people feeling empty, not fulfilled. Pornography makes people feel lonely, not connected. Nobody leaves a strip club a better version of themselves than when they walked in. Cohabitation before marriage significantly increases the likelihood of divorce after marriage. We know these things. When we reject God’s view of sexuality, we’re not just rejecting him, we’re debasing ourselves.

Though God’s standards are higher, saying yes to God is more satisfying than any other path we can take. Becket Cook had a highly successful career as a production designer in Hollywood. He lived fully engaged as a gay man and said, “I had many boyfriends over the years and attended gay pride parades and marched in innumerable rallies for gay marriage equality. My identity as a gay man was immutable. Or so I thought.” In 2009 he experienced something pretty extraordinary. He encountered Jesus for the first time when he attended a church in Hollywood. He said, “I walked into the church a gay atheist and walked out two hours later as a born-again Christian in love with Jesus.” He writes, “I was stunned by the reversal. Since then, I no longer identify as gay but rather choose to be celibate because I believe that God’s plan and purpose revealed in the Bible is authoritative, true, and good. Surrendering my sexuality has not been easy. I still struggle with same sex attraction but denying myself and taking up my cross and following Jesus is an honor. Any struggles I experience pale in comparison to the joy of a personal relationship with the one who created me and gives my life meaning. My identity is no longer in my sexuality, it is in Jesus.”

Instead of being celebrated for his authenticity, when he came out as a Christian, Cook faced hostility and criticism. He was fired from this job. He writes—and I love this—“I’m not complaining about that or claiming to be a victim, because what I gained in Christ is absolutely priceless. Like the apostle Paul, I’m wanting to count everything a loss compared to the passing worth of no increase Jesus my Lord. Yes, the loss of close friendships and a lucrative career were harsh but being in the kingdom of God more than compensates.” A friend of his recently criticized him because he was not leaning into desires that used to define him. He responded, “I’m the most authentic person you know, in fact, because I am now who God created me to be, I’m finally authentic. Becoming more and more like Jesus, the truest human who ever lived, is far more authentic transformation than becoming more and more like whatever self my fluid feelings suggest on any given day.”

His words and testimony are so inspiring. He didn’t say, “My feelings are true.” He said, “What God determined in the word is true, authentic, and good.” He said, “taking up his cross is an honor. He said following Jesus is what helps him to become his true and authentic self. In other words, what he is saying is that even though God’s vision for sexuality is uniquely challenging, it’s more dignifying and more satisfying than any other vision available.

This is just week one of our series. No matter where you are at in life or faith, I hope you come back. I want to invite you to stick with us through all of it. In a room with a thousand people in it, we may have a thousand different perspectives on sexuality. Our goal is to spend the next eight weeks doing all we can to glean from the wisdom of Scripture and grow in our understanding of God’s perspective. Let’s pray.