



Part 5: Dying to Lust for Love

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

The Way of Jesus includes denying our lust for genuine, sacrificial love of the other.

I. We Need Lent to Wake Us Up

“And so he was raised on a cross, and a title was fixed, indicating who it was being executed. Painful it is to say, but more terrible not to say. ... He who suspended the earth is suspended, he who fixed the heavens is fixed, he who fastened all things is fastened to the wood; the Master is outraged; God is murdered.” – Melito of Sardis (A.D. 180) (quoted in *The Crucifixion* by Fleming Rutledge)

II. Formed by Two Different Stories

“So we can still be friends and have sex? Sure, it’ll just be something we do together, like racquetball.” – Monica to a new acquaintance in “Friends”, as quoted in *Real Sex* by Lauren Winner

In Monica’s world, sex is just thrills and fun – disconnected from marriage, cohabitation, and even a long-term dating relationship.

“The sexual revolution was the de- stigmatization of non-marital sex and the reduction of sexual relations in general to a kind of hygienic recreation in which anything goes as long as those involved are consenting adults.” – Mary Eberstadt, *Adam & Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution*

Contrast this view of the body and sex with Jesus and the writers of Scripture like Paul and you see quite a different view.

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ...Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

The Bible celebrates sex as God’s good gift to be enjoyed in the covenant of heterosexual marriage. Our modern culture worships sex as simply play for consenting adults.

Paul addressed the subject of our sexuality in 8 of his letters, because he was writing to Christians in a highly sexualized culture like our modern culture. Many of the Gentile Christians had routinely engaged in the practice of sex with temple prostitutes, and it was generally accepted that men could freely engage in sex with other women besides their wives.

Clearly Jesus, Paul and the writers of Scripture express the truth about morality (right and wrong), but their greater motivation is love. The truth is we are all being formed into a certain kind of person, and we are significantly formed by the stories we believe.

The larger question about our sexuality is this: “Am I becoming a person of genuine, sacrificial love of another or am I becoming a person of selfish lust?”

Physical desire for another must always be mastered by a greater desire to bless and build up another in holy love.

III. **Embodying Our Sexuality in the Way of Jesus**

- A. There is a way to embody our sexuality that pleases God and is distinct from our culture.

“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you **how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living...**It is God’s will that you should be sanctified (made holy)**... For God did not call us to be impure, but **to live a holy life.**” 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 3, 7

We are called to live lives set apart, holy, distinct from our culture so that we reflect the glory of God and the Way of Jesus. We largely live according to the stories we believe.

<u>The Story of Culture</u>	<u>The Story of Jesus</u>
Humans are only animals with base instincts	Humans are made in God's image to reflect God's glory
Gender is a social construct	Gender is the male/female expression of God's image
Marriage is a social construct; monogamy is not natural	Marriage is God's design & a life-long covenant
Sex is only a biological release; play for adults	Sex is God's good gift with many purposes expressed in heterosexual marriage covenant

- B. Sexual immorality (*porneia*) is any expression of sexual expression outside the heterosexual covenant of marriage.

"...that you should avoid **sexual immorality**; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is **holy and honorable**; not in passionate **lust**..." 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5

God's commands around our sexuality are expressions of His love and wisdom for our protection and His honor.

- C. Jesus' way of embodying our sexuality is one way we love and honor the other person.

"... and that in this matter **no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.**" 1 Thessalonians 4:6

Lust is incompatible with love, because lust wants only to consume another's body rather than love the person. It objectifies a person made in God's image.

"Chastity is one of the many Christian practices that are at odds with the dictates of our surrounding, secular culture.... It strikes most secular folk as curious (at best), strange, backwards, repressed. Chastity is also something that many of us Christians have to learn." – Lauren Winner, *Real Sex*

IV. Offering Our Sexuality to Jesus

"Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus **to do this more and more.**" 1 Thessalonians 4:1b

Example: Japanese custom of Kintsugi ("golden joinery") ...the ancient Japanese art of fixing broken pottery using a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold or silver. As a philosophy treats the broken pieces as something to be restored rather than discarded; it sees the flaws and imperfections as part of the story of the

pottery rather than something to be hidden (like what Jesus does with our sin and brokenness).

“And that is what some of you were [sexually immoral]. But you were **washed, you were sanctified; you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:11

Recommended Resources:

1. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity* by Lauren Winner
2. *Sex and the Soul of a Woman: How God Restores the Beauty of Relationship from the Pain of Regret* by Paula Rinehart
3. *Surfing for God: Discovering the Devine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle* by Michael Cusick
4. *Love Thy Body* by Nancy Pearcey (explores cultural ideas & their impact)
5. “Why is Sexual Abstinence Before Marriage is Important: A pastoral response in light of the Gospel” by Doug Brown (See GreenwoodCC.com/resources/articles).

Discussion Questions:

1. Let’s be honest, how comfortable are you with sermons on sex? Do you see the need/value of Biblical teaching on sexuality? Why?
2. What has been your experience with Biblical teaching on sexuality? Was it shame-based or Gospel-centered? Did it celebrate sex as one of God’s good gifts or did it present sex in a more negative light? Were there any boundaries expressed for our sexuality? If so, what were they?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Do you see how Paul connects our self-control to love of the other person? How do you think this teaching compares to our present cultural moment?
4. If we assume God’s commands and boundaries regarding our sexuality express His love and wisdom, why do you think they are given to us? How do you think our embodiment of our sexuality express God’s glory? (see Doug’s paper listed above and available on our website).