

The Sex Problem (Evening Service)

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, we ask now that you'd give us focus and humility so that we would take what you say much more seriously than we take ourselves.

We pray this in your name. Amen. This is the last in a series of talks on the problem with Christianity. You know, when someone finds out you're a Christian, they say, the problem with Christianity is, and they insert something there.

And this last talk is on the question of sex. And it's not easy to know what the question of sex actually is, but it's probably best expressed in this sort of summary idea.

You Christians, you're far too regressive about sex, and you're too nosy. It's my life. It's my body. It's my bedroom. Stay out of my bedroom.

You get the idea. And I want to say as we start this that when we talk about sex, we're not talking about an issue out there. We're talking about precious people who are made in the image of God.

[1 : 08] And we also need to say to each other that we are all sexual failures. None of us have kept the law of God, the word of God with purity. And we need humility.

And we need to avoid self-righteousness. And we need to think about these things deeply, carefully, biblically, instead of just reacting from the gut.

But here's a little test for you. A couple of years ago, Facebook allowed users to customise their gender. And they listed 71 choices of gender that you could choose.

And Facebook said, we want to help users be their authentic selves. They soon after dropped the 71 options and put a blank box called custom because they were allowing users to make their own gender identification.

Now, how do you respond to that? Most of us, I think, have a gut reaction to that that is probably neither thoughtful nor biblically faithful.

[2 : 09] I think Christians tend to react to what is going on around us, the rapid move of the sexual revolution, with one of three kinds of gut reactions.

Either yuck, yikes, or yes. A yuck, I don't want to talk about this. Yikes, where is it going to end up? Or yes, who am I to judge?

But none of those are the way Jesus reacts. And none of those demonstrate the hope that we have in him. If you have an unquestioning yuck, it's just prejudice.

If you have an unquestioning yikes, it's just cowardice. And if you have an unquestioning yes, it's lies. I want to say the problem is with these unthinking reactions is they're lazy thinking.

And it undermines true care and true compassion. So what I want to do tonight is to do two things. I want to give two different moral visions of our sexuality and of the body.

[3 : 14] One moral vision is deeply held and preached in our culture. And the other is deeply held and preached in the scriptures. And I want to try and do some analysis and try and get a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of the dominant moral vision of our culture on this issue.

How it works, what the assumptions are. And then I want to look at the good news, and it is good news, of the moral vision of the New Testament just through this little one passage here. And I think we should take about an hour, an hour and a half on it.

I'm serious. It's not that long, but this is a longer sermon than usual. I said this morning an hour and a quarter, and someone came out and said, you weren't anywhere close to an hour and a quarter. That's very kind of you.

So, is that okay? I'm not going to take a vote. I'm just telling you where we're going. So firstly, let's have a look at the moral vision of our culture on this issue.

And people would resent the idea that there's one moral vision, of course, but there are features that we can track on this. And I've been reading a bunch of terrific resources. Two of them are a

regent prof called Sarah Williams, who's been working on this for a long time, and her stuff is just brilliant.

[4 : 30] Another is a guy called Glyn Harrison, who's a British psychiatrist, who's written a book called A Better Story. And he's trying to understand the narrative of the sexual revolution and what we can say.

So there are two things. I want to look at the moral vision of our culture, how it works, and then what the ideology is underneath it. So how does it work? Sarah Williams says that our contemporary culture has a big folder called sex and sexualities.

And inside that folder, big folder, there are a number of other folders. Homosexuality, reproductive sexuality, therapeutic sexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality.

And she says heterosexual marriage is one folder amongst all the others, and it's a rapidly shrinking file. And the whole idea that there's a separate folder for sex illustrates, she says, how sex has been severed and separated, disembedded, disintegrated from traditional family norms and social institutions.

And this change has historically seen sex separated from six things. She articulates a number of these. Firstly, sex is separated from procreation now.

[5 : 54] Of course, with the introduction of contraception and artificial insemination, you can have sex without children and children without sex. Sex has been separated from procreation.

Secondly, sex has been separated from marriage. Now, this has always been a human issue, but contraception has made this possible. It's made possible seeing sexual activity as recreational. So in Canada, in the last 40 years, cohabitation, that is without any marriage, has increased from 4% of couples to 31% of couples. And Sarah tracks this change in the language we use for the person who we live with.

Instead of spouse, we now refer to them as partner. And partner is not a covenant term, a lifelong commitment term. Partner is an economic word.

You know, it's about a partnership as an exchange where my choice and my autonomy is key. I contract as a partner so long as it meets my needs.

[6 : 56] It's an essentially self-serving view of a relationship. Whereas Christian covenant is different. It's fundamentally other persons serving, no matter the cost, for the totality of life.

Let me quote Sarah. She says this. We all marry the wrong person. I discover that it just shows, see, the mourning congregation is a lot older than this congregation.

And I said that this morning and everyone laughed. Because the majority of them are married. She said, we all marry the wrong person. You know the myth, you've got to find Mr. Right and Miss Right, Mrs. Right, everything will be happy.

I discover that Mr. and Miss Right is painfully difficult to love a whole lifetime through. What matters in Christian marriage is how we learn to love the people to whom we are committed and by the grace of God live up to the promises we made when we had no idea what they involved.

That's why I love doing marriages. Because you've got a young couple, they've got no idea what's involved. And then she says, the ideology of partnership cannot peacefully coexist with a covenantal understanding of marriage.

[8 : 04] I think that's brilliant. Thirdly, sex is not just separated from procreation and marriage. It's now separated from partnership. Sex has become the ethically harmless way I get to know another person.

It's a private recreational activity. It's one path along which I might pursue a possible future relationship. It's a very low view of sex. Sex itself does not establish intimacy.

It doesn't make me one flesh with another person. What I do with my body, what I do with sex has got nothing to do with anybody else. It's been separated from partnership. Fourthly, it's been separated from partner.

If it's a private recreational activity to satisfy a physical need like food or water, I can have... Why bother with a relationship? And have sex with myself? So we now have a porn industry that's worth over \$100 billion a year.

Think about that. That's enough to feed 4.8 billion people. Sex addiction is such an issue in our culture, there are now TED talks about the problem of sexual addiction.

[9 : 13] Not just pornography, but the use of prostitutes, multiple affairs, compulsive behaviours. Fifthly, sex has been separated from the sexes.

So in this big fold, heterosexuality is just one sexual option amongst an array of others, and all of them are morally acceptable and even desirable. So more and more public companies and jurisdictions, political jurisdictions, are making policies that benefit non-heterosexual sexualities. And sixthly and finally, sex is separated from our bodies. We remove our gender from our biology and locate it in our feelings. Our sexuality is now what we choose, like clothing. And my duty is to be true to my own inner feelings. If I experience gender dysphoria, feeling like I'm trapped in the wrong body, what's the choice? I have to be true to the identity I feel inside. So this is what's going... This is the culture in which we swim, and all of which I think you probably know. Sex has been steadily separated from procreation, from marriage, from partnership, from partners, from sex to bodies.

[10:26] Here is my question. What is underneath? What's the moral vision underneath this massive change? And although there are a cluster of things that make up...

A cluster of convictions that make up the moral vision, they're all fed by one ruling assumption, and it's radical individualism. That is the highest good.

My highest good is my own individual choice and expression. That my identity comes through self-expression, through discovering who I truly am, what my most authentic desires are, and being free to express them.

And I look at you and I think, this is an absolutely dreadful pressure on you if you're under 30 today. It's a terrible pressure. You are obligated to follow your heart, to believe in yourself, and to chase your dreams.

And you're being preached a narrative that goes like this. Our spirits have been suffocated by restrictive traditions and morality. We must have the courage to follow our own light.

[11:33] We've got to resist anyone that stands in our way. We have to discover the hero inside ourselves and enter the freedom that comes when we become who we really are. My question is always, what if you discover you're not a hero?

Radical individualism shows itself in three A's. Autonomy, authenticity, and affirmation. Autonomy is that sex is my own sovereign personal choice.

That to be truly free, I need to be free from any external authority, free from marriage, free from partnership and biology. And the only moral consideration left to do with sexuality is the consideration of consent.

That's why rape and pedophilia are the only two sexual crimes left in our culture. Not because they're intrinsically wrong, but because they sin against and they transgress my personal and my physical consent.

And in just a couple of days, we're going to have the 40th annual Gay Pride Parade under the slogan, Be True to Yourself. And the thinking in the homosexual lobby has shifted in the last seven years.

[12:47] It used to be 10 years ago that I am a homosexual because I was born that way. That's a thing of the past. Matthew Paris, who writes in the London Times, he says, that reduces my personal choice.

No, no, no. I'm a homosexual just when my desires take me that way. It has to be self-chosen. That is my autonomy. Autonomy, authenticity. I have to be true to myself sexually.

So in marriage, this is how it works. Authenticity is more important than my commitment to you. My highest commitment is to be myself, which means I'm obligated to come out and declare to you one day, I no longer love you and dissolve that partnership.

And if you're single, inauthentic sexuality is regarded as evil. I have to live in a line with my true self. I have to express myself sexually in a way that resonates with my feelings.

And the third A is affirmation. It is your job to affirm and validate my feelings. And if you don't, you are at least not caring and compassionate and likely bigoted, intolerant, and even phobic.

[14:01] We are determined to show that we are sex positive, and that means the unquestioned right for me to create my own sexual identity. Now, as Christians, what do we say to all this?

If I had time, and I don't, if I had time, I would like to track something of the cruelty of radical individualism or the tremendous human cost, particularly to women and children, the feminization of poverty, the pornification of children, the modern slavery of sexual addiction, the increasing number of voices who are warning us about transitioning in gender, including a growing number of detransitioners.

These are adults who've gone through the surgery and the medical treatments and believe later that they were told a lie and they're detransitioning. But I think what we need to do is we need to turn to the Bible.

And I just want to turn to 1 Corinthians 6 for a few minutes to see how very different the moral vision of the New Testament is. And it's really important for us as we go to 1 Corinthians 6 because it's written to Christians that are living in a culture that was more sexually promiscuous than ours. I know you might find that hard to believe. The Greco-Roman culture in Corinth was, it was a depraved culture. You could do whatever you wanted with your slave girl or slave boy at any age. [15:35] You had the right to. Prostitution, it was part of civic life. It was part of civic religion. The Corinthian church is turning the Lord's Supper, which we're having tonight, into a sex orgy.

And you can see something of this Greco-Roman view, the Corinthian view, as Paul quotes their slogans. Look down at chapter 6, verse 12.

See the quote marks there? He's quoting the Corinthians. All things are lawful for me. And then he says, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I won't be enslaved to anything. Here's another quote. Food is meant for the stomach and stomach for the food, and God will destroy both one and the other. Their view was that sex was just an appetite like food. I feel hungry, I eat.

I feel sexy, I sex. In the Greek view, it's my soul that's free and important. Who I am inside, my logos, my feelings.

[16:34] The Greek view of the body is that the real view, the real me is inside. I'm trapped in this body. The body is not my true self. And so what I do with my sexuality does not affect the real me.

And there was a Christian version of this in chapter 7. You see chapter 7, verse 1, concerning the matters about which he wrote, quote, it's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Because they had this low view of sex, the Corinthian Christian married couples were thinking it was more spiritual to have sexless marriages. And that's what chapter 7 is about, which we don't have time for today.

We'll do that another week. Ask Erin. The Christian moral vision is completely different. It is to seek the good of the other person.

Sexually it means, my freedom is not to serve my own desires, but to serve the good of Jesus Christ, particularly the body of believers to whom I belong.

[17:36] So look down at verse 12 again. All things are lawful for me. This is very important. Lawful is my right to decide. And Paul says not all things are helpful. That word literally means not all things are the common good.

He doesn't mean not helpful for you or for me, but helpful for the community. It's the complete opposite of radical private sexuality and individualism. And the reason for this is because the Bible has an astonishingly high view of the human body.

Look at verse 18 for a moment. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body. But the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

This word sexual immorality comes three times in the passage. It is the Greek word pornea from which we get pornography. And it covers all forms of sexual stimulation outside of lifelong heterosexual committed marriage.

Verbal stimulation. Flirting. Visual stimulation. Visual stimulation. Now today virtual stimulation. Physical stimulation. And why is this?

[18:47] Well, if you're new to Christianity, it's really terrific that you're here. And you might be expecting right now a long list of rules. A long list of do's and don'ts.

Or a scolding. And it comes as a great surprise, I think, that God has such a high view of sex and such a high view of the body. When you think about how he made human bodies and sex was his idea in the first place.

And since we are creatures, we're not machines that define ourselves, he knows what's best for our flourishing. And the New Testament view is that you're not defined by your feelings or your failings, but by Jesus Christ.

And what the apostle does here is he gives us a moral vision for our bodies. Our bodies are the place of God's glory for the sake of others. Because they have been joined to Jesus in an eternal union.

So I want to make three points. The apostle makes basically three points about our bodies here. And I think they all begin with R. And the first is this, your body has been redeemed.

[19 : 54] Verse 15, do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Verse 19, second half, you are not your own.

You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. A body is made by a loving God designed by him. They're not value neutral. They are a good thing in their own rights.

Your real self is not trapped inside your body. You are your body. You're an embodied creature.

And God has made us sexual creatures. Each person with a biologically determined sex, apart from a tiny sliver, which is a gift, a good gift of our creator.

Sam Albury, who's a writer, says, our culture says, your psychology is your sexual identity. Let your body be confirmed to it. The Bible says, your body is your sexual identity.

Let your mind be conformed to it. And you know, we hear this, you hear this every week. We've said it already in our songs tonight.

[21 : 01] We've all turned away from God. And so we all have disordered desires and disordered minds and disordered bodies. The thing is that we don't just belong to God because he made us.

We belong to him because of redemption. Our bodies, he says in verse 15, have been joined to Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection, not for selfish expression, but for the glory of God. You are not your own. You've been bought with a price. Glorify God in your body, he says. The Bible picture is that we are somehow imprisoned in a kind of a dungeon of our own desires, slaves there.

And Jesus, the son of God, the perfect son of God, became a human, taking a human body, affirming our human, human flesh, living a perfect life, giving himself for the needs of others.

And on the cross, he dies in our place, carries my judgment. And he says in verse 12, I'm sorry, verse 11, on the cross, he washed me from my sin completely.

[22 : 09] He set me apart as holy and he justified me. He gave me the verdict of the last day, perfect, perfect, perfect.

And I think this is just, it's astonishing news for every sexual failure. It doesn't matter if you're married or single. It's so easy to feel like you're different from other people and you failed him so badly.

How could God ever use me? But the death of Jesus, says the apostle Paul, has an effect on your body. It's more powerful than your failure.

All of us have done things we're ashamed of, but you're washed. You're set apart for him. You're justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And that means he has given to you a new identity by his grace. You're not defined by your desires. You're defined by Jesus Christ.

[23 : 06] Your body is not your own. It doesn't belong to you. Okay, what does that mean? It means authenticity is not following my feelings.

Authenticity is becoming more like Jesus Christ. It is freedom for the sake of others. My sexuality particularly is to bring glory to God. You cannot believe that you have sexual autonomy and belong to Christ at the same time.

That's the first point. Our bodies are redeemed. Point two. Our bodies will be raised. Verse 13. Halfway through.

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.

You see, God has an eternal purpose for your body. This is the opposite of the cultural view. Most of us hate our bodies. We're taught to hate our bodies.

[24 : 11] We compare ourselves to others. We're ugly or we're too tall or we're too wide or too short or too slow or too fast. We obsess about how to look good. And I warn you, after 26, it's all downhill.

It's wrinkles and gray hair and weakness. Sorry to tell you that. And Jesus entered our world as fully human and he glorified God in his body through the life of being a single person, giving himself to the needs of others and ultimately dying in our place.

And God raised him from the dead and his resurrection body was his old body but transformed, perfect, deathless, eternal.

But it was still a body, material, physical, if you will. It was his body but renewed without weakness, without decay, without disease, without the possibility of death.

So tonight, as we sit here fanning ourselves, and I have to tell you, this fan behind me, it's very nice. And it's lovely to have at least one fan in the congregation.

[25 : 20] Tonight, as we are here and for the rest of eternity, Jesus Christ is a human body and he continues to serve us through his human body. And if you are joined to Jesus, you're not just redeemed but God has a future use for your body in eternity.

When we're raised from the dead, we don't just float around on clouds like spirits and, you know, the bug's bunny view. But you'll be raised to life in your body but it will be transformed to be perfect, deathless, eternal, without weakness, decay, disease, or the possibility of sin or death.

It matters to God what we do with our body. That means the idea of sexual autonomy is a lie. It fractures us from the Lord Jesus Christ.

It fractures us from our community and it fractures us from our true selves. And I thought I'd just add this. Marriage, of course, marriage is temporary. It's for this life only.

But your body is meant for this life and for the next life. It's just a completely different view of the body. So, our bodies are redeemed. Our bodies will be raised.

[26 : 35] How's it going? You all with me? Thirdly, our bodies, I'm stretching this one, have a new resident. Let's look at verse 16.

Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. This is a brilliant word, this word joined. And the choice is either being joined to the Lord or joined to a prostitute here. The word is a word, glue.

This is what happens through sexual intercourse. And multiple sexual partners ends up shredding personalities. If you take two pieces of paper, you glue them together and they dry, then you start. They won't be whole. If you keep doing that and glue them to many and tear them apart from many, in the end, you have a shredded person and it is humanly impossible to restore that person humanly.

[27 : 41] The only one who has the power to restore us is God, the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in our bodies so that we're joined to Jesus. Look down at verse 19.

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.

The Holy Spirit enters our body. If you've trusted in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has entered your body and made them a temple where God dwells. And what he then does is he begins a big art restoration process.

See, in God's view, we are flawed masterpieces. And if you find a masterpiece that's flawed, it's got problems with it, you don't do what Mr. Bean did.

Remember the Mr. Bean movie where he found Whistler's mother and he sneezed on it and he wiped it off and got some cleaning fluid and smudged the picture and then drew a cartoon on it.

[28 : 40] That's not what you do. The Holy Spirit is a master art restorer. It's he alone who can make us our true selves. And when we become Christians, our disordered desires, they do not magically go away.

They will one day. So some desires we affirm, some desires we deny. And both the desires we affirm as well as the desires we deny become the path along which God the Holy Spirit draws us out of ourselves towards serving other people and toward Christ and repaints us in the colors of the glory of God.

the ultimate purpose then of sexual union is to act as a picture of the intimacy that we have from being joined to Jesus Christ.

That means you don't have to have sex to be fully human. In singleness, just as in marriage, we testify to what it means to be joined to Jesus Christ by our purity.

So, what do we say to those who say stay out of my bedroom? What do we say to each other in a culture that is deeply in love with radical individualism?

[30 : 01] I think we want to encourage each other to brace this Christ-centered moral vision. What does that mean? Well, I think it means at least three things. Firstly, at least it means we need to put our own bedrooms in order.

Not just for our own sake, but because we're members of Christ and members of each other. Remember Jesus said, if you even look on someone lustfully, you've committed adultery with them. He means by that at the very least that what I do with my thought life sexually affects you as my Christian community. Very different, isn't it? Secondly, I think it means we should be very hopeful. If our bodies have been redeemed, raised, and we have a new resident, we have a completely different basis for compassion and for affirmation and denial.

We have a different sort of spiritual power going on in us. I know as humans we are such dangerous conformists. But our focus is not don't conform.

[31 : 05] Our focus is to be to join more closely with Jesus Christ, to serve each other, to glorify God in our bodies. And we need each other for that. And we need each other to give each other hope on this.

And thirdly and finally, there's a little command at the beginning of this section and it says, do not be deceived. And every time in the New Testament, or every time in the epistles, when it comes to a passage on sexuality, the writer will say, do not be deceived.

It's because we so easily deceive ourselves this. It doesn't matter what the messages are that you're hearing from the media or from your friends. As far as Christ is concerned, your body matters to him.

He created you in that body with all its unique difficulties and great things and he has joined you to himself and has become the work of restoration in you.

Don't be deceived. The ideology of radical individualism is a great cruelty. I think here is a Christian marriage where one partner is thinking, oh, I no longer love this partner.

[32 : 20] That person needs to repent and turn back to Christ and ask Christ for the power to seek the needs of the other person to glorify Christ in their body. If you're caught in a cycle of addiction, there is no transforming power in being true to yourself.

Radical individualism will only just increase your shame and your secrecy and your fear of rejection and your helplessness. Your body belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You've been washed, set apart, justified and God has eternal plans for your body and rather than making lots of vows to him that you're going to be different in the future, come to Christ and speak to someone you trust who the person would say you're not your own.

There is forgiveness in Christ. And I say to all of us here tonight, if someone comes to you and confides to you, it doesn't matter what they confide to you, they might be in a cycle of addiction, they might be thinking of leaving their marriage, they might be having an affair, they might be struggling with gender dysphoria, they might be struggling in their singleness, they might have some sort of secret life that they have.

I say to all of us, take them to Jesus Christ. Read with them Matthew 11, 28. Come to me, says Jesus, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

[33 : 44] Take them there. Take my yoke upon you, says Jesus, and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And if someone has confessed this to you, love that person and find a way to be with that person.

There are lots of helpful resources. There are groups. you know about Seeds of Hope and Journey Canada and walk with them.

And after church tonight, ask the people who are your friends, how do we glorify God in our bodies? That would be a great place to start a conversation.

Let's pray. We pray again, Heavenly Lord, that you would give us the humility we need to take your word more seriously than ourselves.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.