

Sex

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Date: 13 June 1990

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[0 : 00] I assume it's from, yeah I want to say it must be from Romans looking at it. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, people lie close in hand.

For I delight in the law of God and my inmost self. I see in my members another law at war, for the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I have myself served the law of God with my mind.

With my flesh, I serve the law of sin. Want this? Yeah, thanks. A seven-year-old lady of my acquaintance went to her mother last week and said, what is sex?

And her mother pulled her hat down over her ears and said, I guess it's time. And so she started with, why do you want to know? And she said, well, I want to join the library.

[1 : 15] And what does that have to do with joining the library?

There's a question on this application which says, sex, M or F. And that pretty well summarizes what I know about it, too.

It was not. However, there is a lovely statement that I read somewhere.

And I mean, mostly when a preacher gets up to talk about the subject, it's to give people hell. It really is a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, amazing gift that God has given to the whole of humanity and should be dealt with in the most positive terms imaginable, but has suffered so much abuse that it's hard to do.

The Bible is very helpful. If you want to know all about it, you just have to read about Samson and Delilah or David and Bathsheba or Isaac and Rebekah or Ahab and Jezebel or Hosea and Gomer, the two very seductive ladies in Proverbs 7 and 8.

[2 : 46] There's a beautiful but sexually promiscuous lady in Ezekiel 16.

There's the story of Ruth and Boaz, of Esther and Ahasuerus, the most powerful, one of the three great pictures of the church in the New Testament is the picture of the bride of Christ.

And there is the richly sensuous, tender, and beautiful Song of Solomon, which is an amazing sort of statement which deals with it.

It's not, for that reason, a subject on which people haven't been looking at for a long time.

Just to put in a little plug here, it would seem in terms of sex education in the school, it would be a far better thing to tell kids all those stories than to give them stories on the care and management of condominiums, which seems to be what they do most of the time.

[4 : 06] So you get, you know, that would give a, I mean, a better basis for understanding would come out of the dynamics of those stories, I would think.

Now, when you, when you, there's, there's a book by Walker Percy, bit, bit striking, but he, he makes this statement, and this is the problem of temptation, sexual temptation in the city.

And he tries to identify the root core problem when he says this. He poses this question at the beginning of a short story, which is entitled, Our Promiscuous Self.

Why is it, why is it that oneself often not only does not prefer sex with one's chosen mate, chosen for his or her attractiveness and suitability, even when the mate is a person well known to one, knowing of one, loved by one, with a lifetime and family in common, but rather prefers sex with a new person, even a total stranger, or even vicariously through pornography?

And that sort of sets the question, why, why is this true of our society, that this is one of the facts of life? And he gives a lot of, he gives a lot of statistics in this short story to, to answer that.

[5 : 52] The answers, I mean, he suggests a whole number of answers to that question, like, three, three examples are, humans are biologically as promiscuous as chimpanzees.

It is only the cultural constraints of society, probably imposed by the economic necessities of an agricultural society, which required a monogamous union and children as a reliable labor source. And a lot of thinking like that, I mean, that our behavior isn't, you know, that if you want to know how we should behave, pick something in a natural state like a chimpanzee and watch how they behave, and then you'll know how we should behave.

There's a logic to that which has escaped me, but it's very funny. Then another suggestion, he says, Western man is promiscuous because promiscuous sexuality is the obverse or flip side of Christianity and is, in fact, specified by Christianity as its opposite.

And a lot of people tend to think that, you must admit. Thus, pornography is something new in the world, having no parallel in ancient so-called pagan cultures.

[7 : 13] Accordingly, there is little, if any, difference between present-day promiscuity than that of, say, the Victorian era, the so-called sexual revolution, is nothing but the legitimizing of the secret behavior of the Victorians and its extension to women.

People have always behaved this way, it's just that we do it on the street now, so to speak. It's public. Third possibility, he says, as to why we behave this way, why go further than the orthodox Judeo-Christian belief that monogamous marriage was ordained by God for man's happiness, that the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and that as a consequence, modern man has lost his way, has not the faintest notion who he is or where he's going, and nothing short of a catastrophe will bring him to his senses.

Well, the idea then of a sort of sexual freedom is one that totally dominates our society, that all the ancient inhibitions imposed by our Judeo-Christian background, by our Victorian background, by our Puritan background, by standards of morality which have been imposed on us, all those have to be ruthlessly abandoned in order that we can find our true fulfillment, and our true fulfillment is in overt sexual involvement.

So that tends to be a fairly pervasive view in the city in which we live, in the culture in which we live. There's strange things about it, but that tends to be predominant. Now, in the series of talks that I'm doing, this is talking about temptations in the city, and so we are to deal with sex as a temptation, and a very real one.

[9 : 37] So, James, in the passage that's noted there, James 1, 13 to 15, says, Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, which is the usual rationale we have, is that God gave me this urge, so God must mean me to fulfill it, so I'm going to find fulfillment for this sexual urge with which I am richly endowed.

James says, God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. And then he gives, in a sense, the pathology of temptation by saying that, he says that each person is tempted when lured and enticed by his own desire, and then desire when it is conceived brings birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown brings forth death.

And so, what James is saying here is that the temptation doesn't come from outside of you, it comes from inside of you. And therefore, what you need is you need some help.

if that's the area of, you know, the area of the problem, if you get too close to it, it's going to get you. So, you need to sort of put a fence around it to keep you away from it, from getting into the place where you no longer are able to cope with it.

[11 : 16] And, so, he says that what happens is that there is desire, desire brings, gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown brings forth death.

And, so, you get a, you get a strange, I mean, our sexuality is, is very closely related to, to our, our spiritual life, to our Christian life.

I mean, there's, you know, people talk about their relationship to God and it's a deeply personal thing. And, they talk about their sexuality and it's a deeply personal thing.

And, so that, that one tends to affect the other most of the time. now, what, what, what, the picture that, that, Paul gives, and it's, it's a picture of, of Abraham.

And Abraham had been left a great promise, you see. And, that great promise that Abraham had been left was that he was to be the father of a great nation.

[12 : 34] A nation that would be more in number than the stars in the sky and more in number than the sands by the seashore. So he had to figure out how he was going to become a great nation.

And, he looked at his wife and his wife didn't look very promising. Yeah. she was well on in years.

And, he had, as he saw it, the promise of God that he would be the father of a great nation. And, he had a wife who was well past the age of childbearing.

And, he says, well, we're not going to get there. But, then there happened to be another lady who was Hagar, who was a slave to his wife.

And, he said, there it is. This is what God has promised and this is the way we're going to get there.

And, so, he got, I think you'd have to say on the whole, the grudging permission of this lady.

[13 : 40] And, and, he and this lady got together and gave birth to a child. and, that is one of the, you know, classical pictures in, in the whole of the Old Testament.

But, what happens to this, to this relationship as, as, Paul describes it is that this was using the flesh to achieve the promise of God and this was using faith to achieve the promise of God.

And, which way was God's blessing going to be conferred upon Abraham? By his taking it upon himself to achieve fulfillment or, by him depending upon God, utterly dependent upon God to achieve fulfillment?

And, you know how the story goes that in due course Sarah conceived and bore a child in her whole old age. That child was Isaac and that child was the father, one of the patriarchs of the line of Israel and the people of God came from not the flesh but from the promise.

And, you see, that creates in a sense the basic tension that you have to deal with and that is that is our life to be lived in order to fulfill the longings and desires of the flesh as the means of finding God's purpose in our life or do we live with the promise?

[15 : 20] And that's very hard to explain to people that there's a difference between those two things. There's a difference between the flesh, the thing that we can do in order to accomplish what we believe to be God's purpose for us as Abraham was led to believe in this instance by fathering a child through Hagar or are we to wait on God's promise?

And this waiting on God's promise may not involve marriage at all. It's the promise of God is the thing that you want fulfilled in your life and that promise of God is there whether or not you are involved in a marriage relationship even.

The purpose of your life is to see the fulfillment of the promise of God. Now you know that this has always been a major problem in the church and one of the things that in this century we're trying to cope with is that first class Christians have always been regarded as celibate.

They're nuns or priests or something like that. They are the people who are really spiritual as opposed to the second class Christians who can't handle their life situation and so get married.

And to give it the problem to somebody else to handle. Well, you see that kind of thing has been one way of trying to deal with the problem and you know how tragically it has broken down in our society that it hasn't worked.

[17 : 13] And somehow you see that when Saint Bernard of Clairvaux started enlisting men into his monastery he knew that they had to have a passion for Christ which would surpass them and consume all the energies which they otherwise might find could only be met and satisfied by a heterosexual relationship.

So it's not an easy issue to face because it looks as though by the flesh we achieve as close as we're ever going to achieve to the fulfillment of the promises of God.

And yet the promise of God is to be fulfilled by faith and we have to live with that promise. And it's a very powerful story that appears in Galatians and I commend it to you.

It's in the fourth chapter. Well that's one picture and it's a powerful picture and yet it's I think a very significant picture.

The other picture that I want to give you is taken from Romans chapter 7 and verse 1 following. You know I think it has I guess this is my own understanding but I think that you may agree with me.

[18 : 52] but that the sexual stimulus in a person's life is going to lead them either to faith or to death.

You know it's a very powerful force and what you do with it. And to think that you can handle it casually and just let it you know just use it for whatever purposes suits you is not very helpful.

And the heart of the problem I think is expressed by Paul in Romans chapter 7 in the passage that you have in front of you beginning at verse 1.

He says when I want to do right evil lies close at hand. It's very difficult to do. right. And so you have this person here who has every intention of doing right but the reality is that evil is much more readily available than the right which he longs to do over a period of time.

And so he compromises with the moment and it says I want to do right. Evil lies close at hand. And he says about himself I delight in the law of God.

[20 : 17] You know I mean people thunder on the subject of thou shalt not commit adultery and yet are involved in that kind of relationship themselves. But they recognize that for the community as a whole it's a very bad thing and does a lot of damage.

But for them as an individual the rules are always different. And that's why Paul says to us here from his own experience I delight in the law of God in my inmost self.

And you know that's one of the problems of going to church is you go to church to delight in the law of God without any intention that it should go any further. So Paul says I see in my members that is the members of my body another law at war with the law of my mind.

You know what I say and this is this is the problem of our Christian faith being so desperately intellectual. You know that we can intellectualize Christian faith but we have to realize it in some way in the circumstances of our life because he says I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.

this is going to kill me. And you know that time and time again you run into people who say if you realize that what you're doing you will probably lose your job you will destroy your wife you will completely disinherit your children you will do all those things.

[21 : 59] Well it doesn't change the pattern. You go ahead and do them anyway. And that's because there is this law at work. A law in my members making me captive to the law of sin and death.

I cannot help myself. I behave this way because there's nothing else I can do. And that's what Paul says. That is the existential dilemma of human society when faced by the kind of temptations which are sexual as well as other kinds.

so that where he goes from there he says my predicament is that I have myself served the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

And that's the thing that generates all the guilt and all the sense of failure and all the sense of inadequacy and all the sense of private failure in our life is that recognition that we know better than we do.

And if the New Testament is going to mean anything then it's got to have a very powerful answer to a very profound problem.

[23 : 15] I mean that existential personal problem that Paul lays out in front of us in Romans chapter 7. I have myself served the law of God with my mind but then there's something else happening.

And Paul goes on and says now if you look at your passage there you'll see that I read verse 25 after verse 23 and left out verse 24.

And that's because I'm led to believe that that's probably the order in which it originally appeared. And then you go to verse 24 where Paul gives his kind of cry of dereliction and says wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death.

That he's caught, he's trapped, he's condemned and that condemnation he sees in himself. It's not somebody else, he sees it in himself. And you know this is, this I guess is why alcoholics speak to one another and share the fact that they're alcoholics.

that's why Christians should meet together and share the fact that they recognize the reality of what it's talking about here in their personal lives. Who will deliver me from this body of death? And he says thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[24 : 40] Now, you see, all the promises of God come into focus in the person of Jesus Christ. And no matter what the conflict is between your mind and your members, the determination of your heart is in faith to believe the promises of God which he has made known to you in Jesus Christ.

You see, there is no law that can make you behave in a sexually moral way. It's just not strong enough. unlimited sexual promiscuity is totally destructive to our person and to our society.

So where are you? That's what Paul says. Where are you? Wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me? And he says thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And that's the heart of the problem. And that's the heart that I think that our sexuality and the sexual temptations of the city drive us to.

Where is the replace of deliverance? Well, for lots of people there is no deliverance. So they abandon themselves to the law of sin and death. It's going to happen, let's go down singing.

[26 : 09] And that's that's not good enough. What he says here is that there is another option. And that option is through Jesus Christ.

Because the promises of God are revealed in Jesus Christ. You, by putting your faith in Jesus Christ, are laying hold of those promises and asking God to forgive you and to strengthen you and to enable you.

And you're not going to let go of that thing as being the central reality of your life. and that is your personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ. You see, the law can't forgive you.

And unbridled promiscuity teaches you that you don't need to be forgiven. But it's only in Jesus Christ that we can fail and be forgiven.

And that seems to me to be the central need that is required in all of our lives in order that we can go on. a relationship to one who can accept us and can forgive us and can restore us to all the promises of God, which God intends for us as our inheritance to be received by faith in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 30] Well, I'm through. I can't go any further. But I, it's let me just pray to end with. I guess that's the best thing.

Father, we thank you that you have put us in this situation, but that you haven't left us in it.

And that you, you will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able, but have with the temptation also made a way of escape that we may be able to bear it.

And our God, open through all our hearts in all the various conditions of sense of failure and guilt and uncleanness sometimes, from all of that, open to us that way of escape, which you have provided for us through Jesus Christ.

Father, if we don't understand this, help us to, to understand it. And make us restless till we do. We ask in his name.

[28 : 36] Amen.