

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

December 12, 2017

Well, okay. Do I have your attention?

The news is a-buzz nearly every day with new accusations and revelations about the sexual misbehavior of powerful men in our society, and we are beginning to have some long-overdue conversations about sexuality and power and sexual ethics in general.



In the days when I was teaching beginning pastoral counseling students, I spent an entire week talking about sexual ethics in ministry, and this *Laptop* will be a “Cliff Notes” version of some of that material. For starters, I invite you to read the following poems and give attention to your emotional reaction to them:

Good is the Flesh

words by Brian Wren ©

(See Genesis 1:31[“it was very good”], John 1:14 [“the Word became flesh”], and John 14:23 [“we will make our home with him”].)

1. Good is the flesh that the Word has become,
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,
good is the feeding, caressing and rest,
good is the body for knowing the world,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.
2. Good is the body for knowing the world,
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,
feeling, perceiving, within and around,
good is the body, from cradle to grave,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.
3. Good is the body, from cradle to grave,
growing and ageing, arousing, impaired,
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.
4. Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,
longing in all, as in Jesus, to dwell,
glad of embracing, and tasting, and smell,
good is the body, for good and for God,
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

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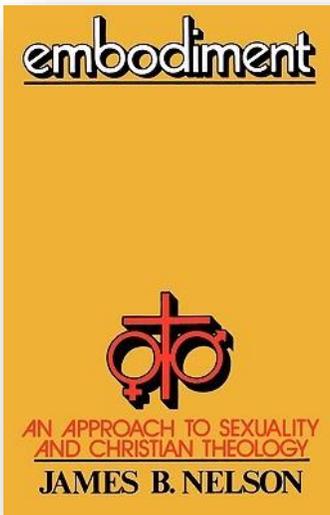
And how about this . . .

“How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince’s daughter!
 Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman’s hand.
 Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine.
 Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies.
 Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.
 Your neck is like an ivory tower.
 Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim.
 Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus.
 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.
 Your hair is like a royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses.
 How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights!
 Your stature is like that of the palm tree;
 and your breasts like clusters of fruit.
 I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.’
 May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine,
 the fragrance of your breath like apples,
 and your mouth like the best wine.”

Song of Songs 7: 1-9

Both of these poems emphasize the fact that human sexuality is God’s idea and is God’s good (and complicated) gift to us. The fact of the matter is that we are psychosexual wholes, and our sexuality can never be separated from our spirituality.

To say this is to affirm that our sexuality is a much larger experience than simply genital sexuality, or intercourse. Our sexuality is also not to be confused with culturally-conditioned gender roles.



James Nelson pointed out that “sexuality is not a separate compartment of human life. It is a *radiance* pervading every human relationship, but assuming a particular intensity at certain points.”¹ Sigmund Freud, though he was mistaken about a great many things, was right about this: **human sexuality does not lie on the periphery of human experience, but at its center.** And Christian faith, of all faiths, ought to take embodiment seriously, because we affirm that “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14).

Jesus was a sexual being. Being celibate does not mean being non-sexual in the sense in which I am using the word. And the Bible tells us that *Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin* (Hebrews 4:15).

As the quote above from the *Song of Songs* illustrates—and there are many other illustrations—God is not the least bit squeamish about sexuality. And that radical bond which we know to be possible in sexual love is often used in the Bible for the kind of relationship God desires to have with us (cp. Hosea 2:19; Ephesians 5).

¹ James Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Augsburg, 1978).

Nor is the idea of “embodiment” simply a theological construct about the Incarnation. Embodiment affects everything we do, every day.² I submit to you that, while we really have no idea how the mind-body-spirit connections work, **we have no communication with God whatsoever except through the physical cells of our bodies. Our bodies are the only antennae we have with which to experience the transcendent**, and we do well to keep them “tuned.”

Whatever else it is, the Church is very much a human community composed of sexual human beings. So are our schools; so is our government; so is everything in our lives as humans.

This is precisely the point at which our current news scandals come into focus. Powerful persons—mostly men—who are both ignorant of and deceived about their own sexuality and its place in human experience, are reaping the harvest of abusive behavior that should never, ever have been allowed in the first place. These conversations are LONG overdue.

And it is in this context that I offer to you the three handouts that are attached to this *Laptop*:

- The first, *Scripture and Sexuality*, provides further insight into biblical principles about human sexuality.
- The second, *Biblical Principles related to Sexuality and Counseling*, makes various applications of those first principles to interpersonal relationships.
- And the third, *Sexuality Issues in Ministry*, while focused on congregational leadership, identifies specific best practices that relate to us all.

Each of these would come with a lot of commentary in a classroom setting, but I think they are adequately self-explanatory as they are. Let us live as embodied saints with the *joie de vivre* of the redeemed!

Dave



² C. S. Lewis noted that we should pay attention to the fact that we humans make sexual jokes and that we tend to be uncomfortable around corpses. On the one hand, two things (body and spirit) are joined together in a way that we experience as somewhat odd; on the other, two things are separated that ought not be so. Animals don't seem to find anything amusing about their sexuality or frightening about dead bodies (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, p. 132).



Scripture & Sexuality



1. Sexuality is a Good Gift

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:27, 31).

2. Our Bodies Are the Temple of God’s Spirit

“Do you not know that your body is a temple 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 body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

3. We Are Called to be Pure

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

“The body 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” (1 Corinthians 6: 13b-15).

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

4. Do Everything As Unto the Lord

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

5. Intercourse Establishes a “One-Flesh” Union

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:24-25).

“Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19: 4-6; also Mark 10:6-9).

“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” (1 Corinthians 6:16).

6. Marriage is the Place for Intercourse

“But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Cor. 7: 2-4).

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4).

7. The Misuse of Sexuality Is One Form of Sin

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

“For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave” (Proverbs 5: 3-5).

“You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5: 27-28).

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . . God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Romans 1: 24, 26-27).

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place” (Psalm 139: 13, 15a).

8. God Gives Strength for Temptation

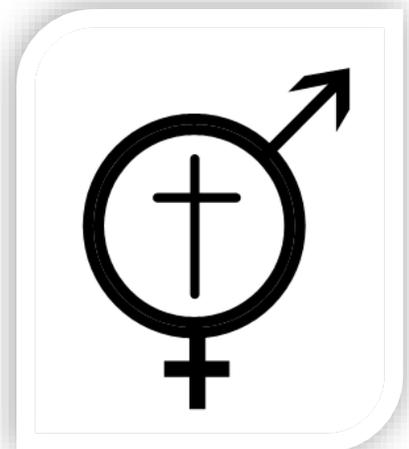
“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4-7).

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Biblical Principles related to Sexuality & Counseling

1. The Good Shepherd protects His flock from harm and expects His undershepherds to do likewise (1 Peter 5:1-4). Christian counselors must be beyond reproach if we are to bring honor to our Lord.
2. Biblically, sexual contact is restricted to that of husband and wife in marriage. Sexual relationships within marriage are encouraged and considered a beautiful gift of intimacy and love from God (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Songs; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5).
3. On the other hand, any sexual contact outside of marriage is forbidden as sexual sin (Leviticus 18:6-20, 19:29; Deuteronomy 22:5, 23:18, 27:21; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:24-32, 13:13-14). Even sexual thoughts about other people than one's spouse are forbidden in order that we live holy lives (Matthew 5:27-28).
4. Adding a sexual dimension to the relationship between counselor and client—or former client—in intention, thought, word, or conduct is NEVER acceptable in God's eyes.
5. God's warning about sexual fantasy is clear: "*After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*" (James 1:15).
6. God instructs us to flee immorality (Genesis 39:12; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 5:22).
7. The consequences of leading spiritual charges astray are clear in scripture: "*But if anyone causes one of these . . . who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea*" (Matthew 18:6).
8. God's Spirit will enable us to respond with faithfulness in the face of challenges to our spiritual integrity: 1 Corinthians 10:13; Luke 4: 1-13; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8; John 15:1-11; 1 John 1:5-7; Hebrews 5:14; John 16:7-15.



Sexuality Issues in Ministry

A. Touching/Hugging

Jesus did.

1. Are you comfortable with touching/hugging?
2. Is the other person comfortable with touching/hugging? If not, to impose such is a form of invasive touching or “soft bullying.” It is a power play.
3. Is the touching/hugging helpful in the ministry context? What does the touching/hugging communicate?
4. Be aware of the progression of touching/hugging.

B. Why Clergy are Uniquely Susceptible to Sexual Violations ^s

1. The private office
2. Close working relationships
3. Intimate access
4. Stimulating conversation (vulnerability)
5. The sexual desirability of leadership
6. Eagerness to please
7. The myth of invulnerability
8. Weakened primary relationships
9. Inadequate training
10. Inadequate accountability

C. Warning Signs of “Falling in Lust”

1. Looking forward to seeing a certain person
2. Wondering what to wear when seeing a certain person
3. Rearranging your schedule in order to see a certain person
4. Meeting a certain person in non-standard locations
5. Nurturing sexual fantasies about a certain person
6. Being secretive with your mate about your relationship with a certain person
7. Physical arousal of either person
8. Sexual gestures or body language
9. “Intuition,” “instinct,” or “not feeling right”
10. Desire to talk about sexual intimacies that are not clearly pertinent

D. When the Alarms go off . . .

1. Be aware of your own sexual feelings for the client.
2. Check yourself with the “publicity test.”
3. Set clear boundaries:
 - a. Don’t give ambiguous messages;
 - b. Provide structure: time, place, etc.
4. Seek immediate supervision or consultation.
5. Refer if necessary.

Discuss with your mate your parameters and intent in ministry situations.

INTEND “NOT TO”

^s Modified from Robert J. Carlson, “Battling Sexual Indiscretion,” *Ministry* (January 1987), 4-6.