

From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, August 12, 2014

NOTE: Whatever else you do while reading this *Laptop*, it is absolutely essential that you **DON'T THINK ABOUT RED MONKEYS.** You can think about virtually any other subject, but **DON'T THINK ABOUT RED MONKEYS!!!!!!**



Last Sunday we considered the sixth beatitude, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*" (Matthew 5:8). There's more to be said on this subject than I had time to do on Sunday morning; and one of the things we considered on Sunday was the fact that one essential dimension of the purity Jesus commended has to do with our sexuality.

Terry Mattingly is one of my favorite commentators on the religious scene in America. In a recent column, "Porn Again,"¹ Terry noted that when pastors are asked to discuss Internet pornography in their churches, the most common responses are "Pornography isn't a problem in my church," or "I could never talk about that at my church." Unfortunately, according to that article, American boys first experience video or Internet pornography at an average age of twelve, although I suspect that the real age is much younger for both boys and girls, given the fact that even early elementary kids have cell phones these days.

Unlike pre-Internet years, when access to pornography was largely limited to print media, the Internet provides essentially limitless access to continually new images, with little or no accountability or oversight. Consequently, pornography use has increased exponentially in recent years, touching a very high percentage of active churchgoers. I'll come back to pornography and purity after a while, but first I want to think with you about sexuality in more general terms.

I imagine that you remember that "*God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,*" and when all was said and done, "*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good*" (Genesis 1:27, 31). To state the obvious, this means that God created us as sexual beings, and God is pleased with our maleness and femaleness.

According to the Bible, being human is good, and being human *means* being sexual. Sexuality is neither demon nor deity. Sexuality is a central part of what it means to be human, and sexuality is an aspect of every human conversation or interaction we have. Christians are not "anti-bodies," and God is not the Great Anti-body. The guidance God has given for our sexuality is not intended to take the joy and fun out of our sexuality, but to take the pain, the destruction, and the death out.

According to the Bible, the primary purpose for our sexuality is **companionship**: "*It is not good for the man to be alone*" (Genesis 2:18; Matthew 19:5-6a). A second purpose for our sexuality is **procreation**: "*Be fruitful, and increase in number*" (Genesis 1:28a). And a third biblical purpose for our sexuality is clearly **pleasure**: "*May your fountain be blessed, and may*

¹ www.patheos.com/blogs/tmatt/2014/05/porn-again-facing-denial-in-conservative-pews/#ixzz39czyPe00

you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19; Song of Songs 7:1-9).

While some of the major religions denigrate our embodiment, biblical Christians celebrate it. After all, “**The Word became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).²

James Nelson has pointed out that God’s incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth was a deep affirmation of our sexuality: “Jesus was a sexual being. . . . If we deny the radicality of God’s incarnation in Jesus, we may well persist in a vain attempt to be more spiritual than God.”³ And so, whatever else it is, the Church is also very much a community composed of sexual human beings.

The Church is also very much a community composed of sinful human beings, and, whether sexuality is the locus of your own primary weaknesses or not, every one of us has to deal rather continually with a sense of our own sinfulness . . . or else choose to live in a state of denial that bears little resemblance at all to reality. And whatever the shape of our own particular vulnerability to Sin, Satan is quite adept at leveraging our sense of guilt in such a way that our effectiveness for God’s inbreaking Reign is severely compromised.

Satan’s very name means “Accuser” or “Adversary,” and he knows his business well. “See,” his voice whispers persistently, “*you’re a loser. You may as well not even worship. No way are you going to make any serious commitment of your life to Jesus Christ!*”⁴

John Piper has noted that our response to Satan’s accusations might well center on Colossians 2:13-14 and on Micah 7:8:

- “*When you were dead in your sins . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14).*
- “*Do not gloat over my, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light” (Micah 7:8).*

Once we realize that Satan has no authority to condemn us if we are in Christ, we understand what Paul meant in the next verse when he wrote that God “*disarmed the powers and authorities . . . triumphing over them by the cross*” (Colossians 2:15; Romans 8:33). **This is Good News! This is Good News indeed.**

(NOTE: How are you doing in NOT THINKING ABOUT RED MONKEYS?)



² See the hymn, “Good is the Flesh,” by Brian Wren, attached with this *Laptop* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1989).

³ James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1978), pp. 77, 74.

⁴ John Piper, “Gutsy Guilt,” *Christianity Today*, October 19, 2007.

One strategy that I find helpful in dealing with Sin in any shape is God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it."*

My good friend, Herb Peak, explains that verse in a way I find helpful. Herb says, "Whenever we become aware of temptation, almost in that very same moment we also become aware of how we can resist or avoid it. The first impulse comes from Satan; the second from God's Holy Spirit. It's as though God gives us the exit, the off-ramp, just as quickly as Satan springs the trap. If we take that exit, we receive the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13. If we don't reflexively choose God's way, then we usually find that it's a long way to the next off-ramp."



And now I'm going to tell you what's up with the RED MONKEYS. As you've no doubt discovered, it is quite futile to try not to think about something. The trying not to think about it ensures that the thing rejected will become the steady center of our awareness, and it is so with the temptations presented by our sexuality, whether in the flesh or on the Internet.

The only successful way to avoid thinking about something is to choose to think about something else. There are many ways to do this. Here's what John Piper suggests with respect to purity of thought life:

"We must not give a sexual image or impulse more than five seconds before we mount a violent counterattack with the mind. I mean that! Five seconds. In the first two seconds we shout, 'No! Get out of my head!' In the next two seconds we cry out: 'O God, in the name of Jesus, help me. Save me now. I am yours.'

"Good beginning. But then the real battle begins. This is a mind war. The absolute necessity is to get the image and the impulse out of our mind.

"How? Get a counter-image into the mind. Fight. Push. Strike. Don't ease up. It must be an image that is so powerful that the other image cannot survive. There are lust-destroying images and thoughts.

"For example, have you ever in the first five seconds of temptation, demanded of your mind that it look steadfastly at the crucified form of Jesus Christ? Picture this. You have just seen a peek-a-boo blouse inviting further fantasy. You have five seconds. 'No! Get out of my mind! God help me!'

"Now, immediately, demand of your mind—you can do this by the Spirit (Romans 8:13). Demand of your mind to fix its gaze on Christ on the cross. Use all your fantasizing power to see his lacerated back. Thirty-nine lashes left little flesh intact. He heaves with his breath up and down against the rough vertical beam of the cross. Each breath puts splinters into the lacerations.

"The Lord gasps. From time to time he screams out with intolerable pain. He tries to pull away from the wood and the massive spikes through his wrist rip into the nerve endings and he screams again with agony and pushes up with his feet to give some relief to his wrists.

But the bones and nerves in his pierced feet crush against each other with anguish and he screams again. . . . Now, I am not thinking about the blouse any more. I am at Calvary.”⁵

That’s pretty intense, but that works. Another strategy that helps me is what I call **“The Publicity Test.”** This test grows out of what Jesus said in Luke 12:2-3: *“The time is coming when everything will be revealed; all that is secret will be made public. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!”* So, whenever I’m faced with a temptation of any sort, I ask myself whether I would want my wife, or my children, or the Deacons, or any of the rest of you, to know I’ve done this. **Most things become pretty clear in that light.**

Hebrews warns us that *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:12-13). Pornography is about seeing and desiring, as is purity of heart. What do we really want to see? Those who really, really, really want to see God, and who guard the purity of their hearts, thoughts, and desires, will indeed see God’s glory at the end of the race.

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”
(1 Corinthians 15:57).

Dave

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week thirty-two: PRODUCTIVE PARENTING

*“Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it”* (Proverbs 22:6).

How many parents have stood upon this verse during the troublesome times of dealing with wayward sons or daughters? There is no promise here that the child will never sow some wild oats. The promise is the child will eventually return home to the truth upon which he or she was raised. Of course, the operative word in all of this is the very first words of the verse—*start children off*. This promise is not for all parents with prodigals. This promise is for those who train their children during their formative years in proper conduct, with positive correction, and with personal counsel *“on the way they should go.”*

There is no more powerful example of this truth than the old and often-told story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15. The irony of this parable’s title is that Jesus told the whole story not about the boy but about his dad. Here is a father who appears to leave center stage in the drama to his two sons, one in rebellion and the other in self-pity. But this familiar parable is really about the father. The story begins, *“A certain man had two sons”* (v. 11).

⁵ John Piper, from the sermon “A Passion for Purity versus Passive Prayers” (November 10, 1999). www.desiringGod.org

The father is the subject of the sentence. Jesus put the father on center stage here, not the son. So let's look at that father and learn from him.

SEE HIM WITH AN OPEN HAND SAYING, “I release you” (Luke 15:11–13)

Here was a father who was prepared to stand by the truths he had poured into that boy since childhood. In fact, here is the truth of Proverbs 22:6 unfolding before us. Some parents hold on to their children so tight they lose them. This dad was wise enough to know there came a time when he had to open his hand and let his son go. In every generation, there are always some prodigals who choose to learn life's lessons the hard way.

SEE HIM WITH OPEN ARMS SAYING, “I receive you” (Luke 15:20–24)

When the boy “came to himself” and headed home, the father saw him “*when he was still a great way off*” (Luke 15: 17, 20). The father ran to meet him with open arms of welcome. No pointed fingers, no “Where have you been?” and no “How could you have done this to your mother?” Just open arms. The boy came *walking* but the father went *running*. We are not talking here about a boy who came home with the same rebellious spirit he had had when he left home, now simply sorry he had gotten caught. Here was a boy truly repentant. And here is a faithful father receiving him with open arms.

SEE HIM WITH AN OPEN HEART SAYING, “I restore you” (Luke 15:25–32)

The most notable characteristics of this model father are his presence and his transparency. He was there for his sons no matter what their problems were. The most valuable gift he gave them was his presence. When the festivities and homecoming party were at their peak, where was Dad? We find him outside with the wounded older brother assuring him of his love and support.

We all need to be parents like this one, a father with an open hand and with wisdom enough to know that the way to lose our kids is to hold them too tightly and that the way to ultimately keep them is to let them go when the time comes. We need to be parents with open arms, always ready to make a way for our children's new beginnings. And we need to be parents with open hearts that are both transparent and encouraging.

The real message of Jesus' story is that our heavenly Father deals with us in the same way that this father dealt with his prodigal. God our Father has open *hands* toward us. We are not puppets; we are real people. And the love we voluntarily return to Him is indescribably valuable to Him. He too meets us with open *arms*. And never were those arms opened as wide as they were on the cross. Finally, God shows us His open *heart*. He opened it on Calvary for the whole world to see, and He invites us in to His arms today.



Good is the Flesh

words by Brian Wren ©

(See Genesis 1:31, John 1:14, and John 14:23)

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.*