

Sex

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Okay, so we're going to turn back to Matthew chapter 5 and that section entitled in the ESV Lust 27 to 30 and there are questions connected with this for the identity which we'll meet in our house after the service.

So word craft is always important, I mentioned this morning about the importance of knowing the facts about a situation.

Well also I think the way we use words is important and our understanding of words is important particularly as God communicates to us in the Bible, our understanding of His words is important.

Because we look at a word like law and we all go boo, don't like law. We look at a word like love and we all go yeh, because we all like love. And so we look at words very differently but it's interesting isn't it in the New Testament what we have in the Bible is that God's laws are laws of love actually.

So the two go very closely together, these two words and it's very important to understand that when we're speaking about God's law that is taken by Jesus Christ here and accentuated and explained and deepened and given kind of three dimensions is it where?

[1 : 33] These are laws of love that were given to us in response to His grace, in response even in the Old Testament to what He'd already done. These are the laws of, I am the Lord your God who's already taken you out of the land of Egypt, the God who's already redeemed and rescued His people and so for us we recognise and understand that God's law have that aspect of obedience out of gratitude as well.

You love me, if you love me you'll obey my commands, that's what He says. So we recognise the laws of love. So it's important therefore when we speak about God's law and we speak about law here in this passage or we speak about what He's saying that we're aware of not externalising them okay, just because the laws of God is always looking into the heart isn't it and that's one of the things about these laws, they're laws of love.

So the danger is sometimes that we just externalise the laws and say as long as we're obeying what God says outwardly so that everyone else can see in a comparative way then we're okay.

That's exactly what the Pharisees were doing. They said as long as you don't commit adultery physically and in a, well maybe not in a public way but in a way that could be found out then you're not breaking the law and Jesus internalises it far more and says it's not just the external outworking of these commands that's important.

It is our attitude and it's our heart and it's our soul. So there's that danger of externalising love but also therefore we need to recognise that these laws of God have dual purpose.

[3 : 18] One of them is because they expose our heart failure. They expose that we fall short.

You read, did you read these? Did you read these verses? We fall short of that. Every one of us falls short of God's perfect standard for us.

None of us are free from anger. None of us are free from lust. None of us are free from coveting. None of us are free from these internal falling short of God's standards so that the law, part of it is exposing our need and it exposes our need of heart surgery.

Spiritually speaking, that we need grace to transform our hearts, to change us from the inside out, to enable us to begin to fulfil and to follow God's laws with the right motives and with the right intentions and with the right desire so that it's not just about outwardly doing what's right so that we can compare ourselves with others but rather out of love for Jesus Christ and what He's done and having been given a heart of stone being removed to have a heart of flesh so that we can love Him and desire Him and serve Him because of who He is and the law of God does all of these things.

So we come to this section and I'm going to speak this evening about sexuality. And the Bible is a lot to say about sex and sexuality and I'm going to say a few things but that's actually far too much for us to deal with in 20 minutes but we'll try and set the scene for some further discussions on these things.

[5 : 12] I think by way of general introduction we recognise and know that sexuality and sexual act is in its right context God's good gift.

We know and recognise that right from the beginning of time. Like all of the good things of life that have been given to us, they are given to us by God and just as eating is a pleasure so sex is a pleasure but He gives us parameters both for eating and for sex and for a lot of other things as well, parameters for our wellbeing so that we use His good gifts in the right way and it's important that we consider them and that we recognise them and that we recognise them because primarily, particularly, probably more than anything they are going absolutely counter to what everyone else in the world is saying.

And so we will find ourselves swimming upstream the wrong way if we follow God's teaching and Jesus Christ and His parameters for our sexual lives.

One thing we need to remember, okay the human race might die if we don't have sex but you personally won't and it's not an appetite at that level.

Now if we don't eat we will die, if we don't drink we'll die but if you don't have sex we'll not die, okay. So it's not an appetite at that level for the individual but we know for the furtherance of the human race it's a good thing and we need it and He makes it fun and enjoyable as well.

[6 : 56] But it's set in a precious package, that's what God has done. He set sex in a precious package.

It's set within the context of the family unit, that core relational union for society which is marriage between a man and a woman.

That from the very beginning has been God's parameters from which sexual activity is to be engaged within. That primary community of love, that is where the outworking of that gift is to be enjoyed and participated in.

And that community reflects, of course right from the very beginning that community itself reflects the nature and the character of God who is a Trinitarian God so he says let us make man in our image, let us make them male and female, let us make them.

So there's that sense in which, can I say not just married couples reflect the image of God but men and women in community reflect the image of God because God is a social being and God has made humanity social at that level.

[8 : 06] But we recognise that within that union God has set sexual activity for very significant and important reasons because the activity is to reflect the union, it's to reflect the relationship that there is between a man and a woman in a loving marriage.

It's that physical expression in other words of what the relationship is fundamentally so that there's to be in the outworking of sexual activity within marriage, there's to be respect, there's to be commitment, there's to be honesty, there's to be joy, there's to be satisfaction, there's to be compromise, there's to be security, there's to be vulnerability, there's to be self-control.

All of these things are to be reflected in the sexual activity that reflects the marriage itself, that reflects the ongoing characteristics of that marriage and that is where it is fulfilled and that is where it is freest and fullest and most enjoyable.

And because sexual activity isn't simply for procreation but is also for procreation and for families and for children, then we see that children then are the children who are to be brought up in the same environment as the environment that allows sexual behaviour to be safe and to be enjoyable.

So that the family unit is to be a place of respect and commitment and honesty and joy and satisfaction and compromise and security and vulnerability and self-control and all these other things as well and that is the model and the pattern that God gives us for the parameters that he gives us for the enjoyment of and the activity in sex.

[10 : 11] Now only hearts that are touched by grace will ever accept that. That's the gospel message is that we struggle to consider and to accept that unless we have been touched by the grace and gentleness of Jesus Christ and recognise that to love him is to obey his commandments and his commandments are burdensome and weirsome for us because of that.

But you see the world in which we live, if I were to write this in a newspaper or in a media outlet of some kind or speak about this model of sexual activity in the world today, I would be utterly and completely lampooned and I would be told that I was engaged in religious bampottery of the highest order that nobody could ever possibly understand or would want to work out and follow in their lives because the world in which we live is certainly in the western culture in which we live almost seems to be all about sex.

It's regarded as a completely normal, natural function that is essential for everybody. That is debatable and that there should be no boundaries to that.

That also is questionable really. Does even the world think that there are no boundaries to sexual activity? I doubt that's the case.

It's not so much the boundaries that are the problem, it's who makes them is the problem because people are quite happy in the world in which we live in a secular world to make boundaries that they have decided to make as long as it's not God who makes them.

[12 : 02] So the problem is not really boundaries, the problem is God. And again it returns back to a heart issue that the only way that we will recognise and follow willingly and enjoy God's model for us is when we've been touched by His grace because the problems in our lives are primarily spiritual and the issues and the difficulties and the struggles we have are because we're rebels and rebels against God and that's what sin always does.

We're looking at that in job is that anything that causes us to doubt or distance ourselves from God often comes from the evil one who will want us to curse God and die.

That's what he wants us to do. He wants us to abandon God. Say God is an unfair and harsh and oppressive ruler and you can't possibly fall.

Don't be ridiculous in this day and age. What a ridiculous way to live to think about sexuality in this day and age. But as believers and if you're a believer here this evening you need to be someone who allows the lordship of Christ not just to challenge and to be over things that are easy for you to consider but over all of life and over all that he teaches about because he's Lord of all of life.

He's Lord of all that we are. He's Lord of our relationship. He's Lord of our ambition. He's Lord of our pleasure. He's Lord of our eating and drinking and sleeping and rising and sexuality.

[13 : 31] Everything comes under his lordship and there's much teaching in God's word about sexual and so there should be because he invented it. He made it. He gave us it. This is not, let's not be prudish about this and kind of look at our feet and tie our shoelaces because it's important stuff and he gives us this stuff because it's important because he wants us to have a good foundation and he wants us to enjoy his good gifts as he intended them to be enjoyed.

So sex and the lordship of Christ is a very real issue. Our obedience to Christ is the core of our discipleship. It's absolutely core to who we are with a new heart.

The laws of God become laws of love, laws of gratitude and laws that we recognize even sometimes as being tough but good for us and as he defines the priorities for us we follow him since separates.

It divides, it deceives, it dehumanizes, it damages and it destroys. You're getting all the D's today. You got three this morning, you're getting five tonight.

Okay, that's what sin does for us and we need to remember that. It divides and it deceives and it dehumanizes and it damages and it destroys.

[14 : 53] And as we recognize that within this context then it will also challenge our thinking. Because Jesus makes clear here and when speaking about adultery, sex and sin he says you've heard it said you shall not commit adultery but I see unto you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So he's basically what he's saying and he's broadening just to the simplistic act of adultery. The whole New Testament speaks about sexual sin in broader terms but in reality Jesus is saying if you rip sex from its precious package you are stealing it from where it is and taking it to where it ought to be.

So it should be within that package of loving, committed, faithful, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman. It matters that if you take it from that you're ripping it from its rightful place.

And what adultery does and what sexual impurity and immorality does in our lives it destroys trust for that unity and that union and it destroys honesty and it destroys all these characteristics that we were speaking about which should be the atmosphere in which sexual activity is enjoyed.

And all sexual sin ultimately does the same thing. It dehumanizes, it deceives, it damages and it destroys.

[16 : 31] You only need to look at the world in which we live and see some of that destructiveness in the context of sex. How pornography, how it objectifies women and makes them no more than forms to look at.

Two dimensional sex on the screen whether it be in the computer or in the cinema or in the television is doing the same kind of thing. The privacy of it, the vicarious nature of it.

I'm going to give you five of these, I'm giving you three of these now. Don't often do this but just have them to work out this way. Virtual, vicarious and voyeuristic.

That's what two dimensional sex does for us when we're engaging in that and in our own, when we're feeding our fantasy minds and imaginations.

Something that's isolating, something that's ultimately selfish and lonely and it's inducing loneliness within us and it's doing exactly the opposite of what it was intended to do in God's good model and pattern for us.

[17 : 42] Sex is taken as a substitute for love, engaged in fear of rejection. When it's a bargaining tool, when it's used to manipulate people's emotions or feelings, when it's used to abuse power or even indeed abuse beauty, all of these things reveal sex taken out of its context and used to divide and to separate and to deceive and to destroy and to dehumanise.

We're constantly bombarded with the misery of rape and of prostitution and of sexual slavery and of violence. This is a broken world we live in and sexual brokenness is some of the most avert and painful and destructive brokenness that there is and it's a heart problem.

It's a spiritual problem at that level because it is our attempts to enjoy God's good gifts without the God who gives them and without the parameters in which he gives them to us.

Jesus is saying clearly that this is a heart problem, it's not just an outward act, it's what we do internally, it's the covetousness that even the Old Testament commands deal with also in the 10th commandment and it's a recognition that that is breaking God's precious model and pattern for us.

So he talks about sex and sin there, he also then goes on to talk about the eye and sin which is very interesting, if you're right eye causes you to sin, tear it out, throw it away if it's better that you lose one of your members than that whole body be thrown into hell and of course he's making that great link between what we do and what we look at and the eye of our bodies being the eye of our imagination and the eye of our ongoing activity and behaviour, this great link between body and soul and between body and imagination and mind.

[19 : 53] So he's saying our sexual sin is fed primarily in the first place by our eyes, by what we allow ourselves to imagine and watch and feed on, that then becomes what governs our thinking in this amazing area, the eye and sin.

Of course he's using really powerful language here, he's not talking about something we should literally do, some misguided people in the past have tried that, it doesn't work.

It's an illustration, powerful illustration to remind us of what we should do. So therefore what we look at is important, what you choose to do, what I choose to look at, anybody else chooses it, it's our own choice, we're utterly responsible for that in our lives.

Even I guess here with looking lustfully at a woman, I think there's a distinction and a difference between looking at a woman and looking lustfully at a woman in what Jesus is saying here, the lustful look is that lingering, covetous, longing, undressing look that is used which is covetous and which once what isn't yours and which is jealous and lustful and selfish and that's really what he's speaking about here, and how we look at the opposite sex, what we imagine, the eye of our mind, what we do, and what Jesus is very much saying in this area is the unseen area, isn't it?

Not just the outward fidelity but the inward fidelity, what we choose to do without imagination and if we allow it to fantasise into areas of impurity and of lust for our lives, what is private?

[21 : 53] But it's interesting, isn't it, that what is private and what we think nobody sees, nobody knows about, actually very often comes out in our behaviour, in our attitudes, the way we speak about the opposite sex and sometimes in adultery.

Because adultery very rarely just happens at the front door, it usually happens in our minds and it usually happens over a long period of time and it usually happens because that is what we've fed ourselves to do.

So it's a hugely significant area and Jesus, I'm not just in this area but in every area, jealousy, lust, impurity, anger, Jesus, Corey preached about that last week, it takes drastic measure using this powerful illustration, this powerful figure of speech, you know, rip your eye out, cut your hand off, get rid of, in other words, get rid of what is offensive and deal with it in your own life and in your own heart.

Because he says it strikes at the heart of our faith. He says if we don't deal with these things, if we don't deal with sin in our hearts in a powerful and drastic way then we have to ask the question if we're saved at all.

Because there's such a dangerous thing. It strikes at the very heart. He says Christianity, personal faith is about getting tough. It's about getting on others, it's about getting tough on ourselves.

[23 : 26] It seems sin is a cancer, not as a candy. See the difference is that it's something that is destructive, divisive, deceptive, dehumanising and damaging.

He wants us to stop us spending our time comparing ourselves with other Christians and think well actually I'm doing pretty well, I'm as good as the next, I'm better than him and definitely better than them.

And thinking that we're okay when he says just stop looking at everybody else and comparing yourself and rather look into your own heart and deal with that honestly and deal with a sense of accountability to God not just privately with God but also with other people who are strong and mature Christians that you can be accountable with.

Personal faith is a great thing but it's about getting serious about our faith. It's about dealing with things in our own hearts that we would be ashamed to mention in public that we would be ashamed to confess to and it's about taking away any double standards in our lives.

Everything else about faith can be faked apart from this, apart from dealing with our own hearts you can't fake that.

[24 : 50] You know everything else coming to church looking great, great theology, great doctrine, great worship, great outward obedience, outward morality, all of it can be faked.

But this eyeball to eyeball, internally eyeballing God in Christ and asking Him to examine your soul and root out what separates you from Him. Nothing, it can't be faked and that is the core of our spiritual reality.

Christ knows, Christ sees and knows what the great thing is, Christ forgives. He doesn't hold it against us as we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

He doesn't leave us crippled, spiritual cripples. He redeems us, He buys us back and He is willing to do that but He needs us to be honest and to face Him honestly in our Christian lives and one to one with Him.

So this passage speaks very powerfully into an area of our lives that is I guess very significant, very important. Can I just conclude with one or two thoughts?

[26 : 04] It's a huge area and obviously we've just skimmed the surface this evening. There's a lot of teaching in the scripture about sexuality and our morality and our lust and our behaviour with one another and we're all sexual sinners and we all need His forgiveness.

But primarily as Christians what we need to remember is that in this area as in other areas it's about our identity.

It's about our identity and our identity as Christians is in Christ. We are His children, we're His family, we're His brothers and sisters, God is our Father.

Our identity is in being Christ and in being Christ-like. That's where our belonging is, that's where our self-value is, that's where our self-worth is.

All of these things revolve around knowing and appreciating that we are loved, that we are far more wicked than we could ever imagine but we are far more loved than we can ever dream of because of what Jesus Christ has done as we come to Him.

[27 : 15] That's where our identity lies, that's what stops us from being cowards in this area. So it stops us from trying to find our identity in our sexuality but rather it's in Christ Himself.

So can I say one or two things in the least of this? First I think you need to be aware and we need to be aware of the power of beauty. Maybe particularly women need to be aware of that.

We need to be aware of the jealousy, the envy and the lust that it can provoke in others.

Can I say to you your identity is not in your looks or in your beauty, however beautiful you may be but in Christ. And so it's important not to play on that and not to abuse that.

But also we need to be aware of I think, I believe, I hope I'm not wrong here, in Christ's emphasis in this passage because it's male-shaped isn't it?

[28 : 19] This passage is male-shaped. Jesus says you know, you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So that doesn't mean that adulteries male-only sin, not exclusively male but I think it's definitely male-shaped this passage and I think that's not insignificant.

God knows the heart of men as well as the heart of women and He knows that we are tempted in different areas by different things and by different temptations.

You know the summer brought out the exposure of the Ashley Madison website which was the adultery website which promised that you could have free adultery and release it when you signed up and no one would know and all that kind of nonsense.

But interestingly and I'm sure there's lots of debatable figures in this but 31 million men signed up. They reckon probably because there was a lot of false accounts of women.

[29 : 34] They reckon 12,000 women actually signed up with active accounts as opposed to 31 million men. I think God knows our hearts and God knows that adultery for a man and sexual activity for a man is different and they look for different things and they throw aside things easier than women do.

But I think we also need to understand the significance of marriage. Don't joke about marriage. Don't talk about marriage as if it's outdated or kind of to be avoided at all costs.

Protect marriage. Pray for marriage. Pray for marriages in this church. Help people who are married. It's tough sometimes.

Encourage people. Young people. Get married. It's good. Better to marry than to burn. It's a good thing. Marriage is a good thing.

It's not enslavement. It's not stopping your living. It's not something that is to be mocked just because society mocks it but interestingly enough doesn't anymore because of all the issues that we've looked at recently.

[30 : 49] But understand the significance of marriage. And remember again and go back to this point. Remember again your identity in Christ. As a wife or a husband or someone who's single, remember as a single person that you belong, that you're unique, that you're part of the family of God, that you're not alone, that you're valued and if you long to be married that you would take these longings to the Lord Jesus Christ, that you would trust Him, that you would tell Him what you want but that you would not make an idol of it and don't choose a partner carelessly or without grace or without prayer because marriage can be a lonely place.

And very lastly we're not really time to talk about same self-attraction, same sex attraction. But it's obviously a huge area and the defining issue of the day in which we live undoubtedly, clearly it is.

But again that temptation is one that is real in the lives of people and for those with that temptation again all we can say is that we value them, that we value their uniqueness and that they belong to this family, that they're not to make an idol of the attractions they feel but they're to take them to Christ and understand what He is asking and demanding of them and what they're asked to do in bending to His Lordship is something that we should support and help and encourage them through.

So remember significantly these laws of love. Our heart needs to be right with God and we seek to be Christ-like, not just as individuals but as a community, I can't overestimate the importance of community in working out these laws of love and in making up for some of the things we think we are missing out on when we follow Him and when we follow His ways.

And remember the safety from the community of Christ. The more you're alone, the more likely you are to fall into sexual sin.

[33 : 33] Remember the safety of God's community and remember the grace that He enables us to live His way with. Amen, let's bow our heads.

Father God, we ask that you help us in this area. We confess our sins and thought and word and indeed we pray for those who maybe have a colourful history sexually and who feel enslaved by failure and sin.

We pray that they would know forgiveness and redemption and freedom in Christ and that Satan would not be able to paralyse them in the way he so loves to do.

We pray that you would forgive us for the selfishness that so often reigns in our hearts in this area, pride, the manipulation, the different ways in which we take your gift and we abuse it and we take it away from the precious package in which it should be found and expressed.

Lord, we struggle in these areas and we ask for forgiveness and grace. We pray for our young people, for all of us indeed but maybe especially our young people growing up in their young lives with so much sexual pressure where pornography is so readily available so easily accessible in the flick of a switch, the privacy of our homes and our rooms.

[35 : 12] We would simply work in all of our hearts to find that sin is not something that we do when other people aren't around but sin is something that destroys and dehumanizes and divides and keeps us from Jesus Christ and that we would remember the cost that he paid on the cross to set us free and to rid us of that cancer and to give us life.

So help us in this and in every area of our lives we pray to deal with our own hearts and to keep short accounts with you, to deal with the large beam that often is protruding from our own eyes rather than focusing on the speck of dust that we proudly point out in the eyes of others.

We ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.