

The Bible on Sex

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[0 : 00] Our subject this evening is the Bible on Sex. And it's the first of two studies that we're looking at some of the biblical teaching on the whole realm of sex and relationships and marriage.

And it's Genesis 1 and 2 where we find the seedbed of the Bible. It's where we find the bedrock of the theology of so many things to do with human life in relation to God.

And we're going to read some of these verses from Genesis 1 and 2 this evening. We're not going to be expounding them as such, but we will refer to them. So Genesis 1, of course, is the first tablet of the creation story.

And when we come to verse 26, we come to the climax of that creation, the creation of humankind. So Genesis 1 and 26.

Then God said, let us make man in our image. Or it could be read, let us make man as our image, after our likeness.

[1 : 15] And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his image. In the image of God, he created him, male and female. He created them. And God blessed them.

And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heaven and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps upon the earth, everything that has the breath of life.

And I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything he had made and behold, it was very good.

[2 : 23] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Then in Genesis chapter 2, we have another tablet of the creation story.

This time from a slightly different perspective. This time with man and mankind at the center and at the focus. It's not a subsequent story.

It's another tablet of the same things, but with man at the focus. And that's why it begins in chapter 2, verse 4, with the first of 10 accounts that we get in the book of Genesis.

It begins with these words, these are the generations. The NIV has, this is the account. You find that 10 times throughout the book of Genesis. The account of the heavens and the earth.

The account of Adam. And then so on, right down to the account of Jacob. That's how the book is ordered. And you'll see that if you read through it. So these are the generations, he says, of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

[3 : 20] That is, this is what the heavens and the earth gave rise to. Or begat. In the old biblical language. When they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

When no bush of the field was yet in the land. And no small plant of the field had yet sprung up. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land. And there was no man to work the ground.

You see, the center of things here is man. And a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground. Then, the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground.

And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living creature. And we have verses telling us about Eden. And let's pick it up again in verse 18.

Then the Lord God said, it's not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Or suitable for him.

[4 : 21] Or corresponding to him. So, out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens. And brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit or suitable or corresponding to him. So, the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.

And while he slept, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made or formed into a woman.

And brought her to the man. And then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

[5 : 25] Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife or cleave to his wife. And they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not, well, the word there, ashamed. Not really the best word in our translation.

It doesn't really mean embarrassed. It really means were not in any way disappointed. Were not in any way finding their expectations were unmet.

As previously Adam's expectation had been unmet. The man and his wife were both naked and were, we could perhaps paraphrase, not in any way dissatisfied at all with the way God had made things.

It's really a corresponding verse to chapter 1, verse 31. God saw everything he'd made and it was good. Here it's in the negative form. The man and his wife were naked and saw that nothing at all was not good about the situation.

[6 : 33] Well, amen. May God bless to us this, his word. I realize that to speak about the Bible's teaching on sex is not an easy subject to address, especially in public.

Not as it is an easy thing for some of us to hear about tonight for varying reasons. And yet it is a very important subject and it's one we can't dodge.

And so I'll try to deal with it tonight as sensitively as I can. And I hope that there will be also clarity. Let me say three things by way of introduction.

We live in a society today, in the Western world at least, which is obsessed with sex. There may be no more of it going on than there has been throughout history.

I'm sure that's the case. Yet I doubt if there's been a time in history, certainly in recent centuries, when the whole issue of sex has been so deified, when it has become such a God at the center of the culture.

[7 : 45] It was Malcolm Muggeridge writing some decades ago who said this, the orgasm has replaced the cross as the focus of longing and the image of fulfillment. And certainly sex and things to do with sex does indeed dominate our thinking today in so many ways in the world of entertainment, even in the news, in the arts, in advertising.

I took two Saturday newspapers yesterday. First of all, I picked up the Times, because it was the only one left in the paper shop when I went along. I'm going off it increasingly.

It now looks like a tabloid as well as reads like a tabloid. And when I picked it up, one of the sections had a large article on sexual health. In fact, there was two about that subject.

Later on, I was in time. On my way back, I looked in to see if I could get another paper. I still couldn't get the one I wanted. I'll leave you to guess what that is. So I picked up The Guardian, a paper which I forced myself to read at times with great difficulty.

On the back page was an article called Ethical Erotica, and I won't tell you any more about that. We live in a society that is dominated by whole thinking about sex.

[9 : 03] And most, if not all of it, is a huge distortion. On the one hand, we are told that the whole issue of sex is essential. It's essential to intimacy.

It's the key to success, to significance. It's the mark of being normal, to be in a sexual relationship. And yet on the other hand, in many ways, it is empty of almost all its meaning, other than simply as recreation or as amusement or as fun.

And the result is that we live amid a great confusion. Devoid of any real understanding of what sexual relationships mean, we live in a society full of huge and lasting hurts, where people's lives have been damaged in so many ways.

And yet still, despite that, despite that undeniable fact, the world outside, the culture, bombards us with the message that if we're not having sex, if we're not in an active sexual relationship, we're missing out.

Although, what exactly we're missing out on is less clear. But the message is this, it's far better to be in with the crowd than to be the odd person out. Don't be left behind in the great sexual revolution that swept our society.

[10:27] There's nothing worse than being left behind. That's an argument, isn't it, which is used greatly today in all sorts of spheres. We haven't got a very good argument for joining something, but the worst thing that could happen is we're left behind.

The train's leaving and we might not be on it. But nobody seems to ask the question, well, where's the train going? What about if the train is about to career off a cliff? Do you still want to be on it? But such is the pressure in the talk about sex in our society that you're made to feel completely abnormal, odd, strange if you're not conforming to the way society thinks about sex today.

Secondly, in this society in which we live, we experience an increasingly aggressive pluralism.

What I mean by that is an intolerance of being intolerant of any particular behavior.

Or really what it is, is this. Don't anybody dare to say that what I want to do could be wrong and try and stop me. It's increasingly politically incorrect, isn't it, to challenge the behavior or the beliefs of any one particular group as being intrinsically wrong?

How can you do that? Everybody has the right to do exactly as they please. And why should you tell me anything else? Anything I choose to do, by definition, is normal.

[11:57] And we've seen that, haven't we, in recent years in the intense lobbying from the homosexual lobby. It's becoming increasingly difficult to say anything about homosexuality other than it is a valid lifestyle choice.

We get outrage to even suggest anything else. I read an article spoken by a counselor on the issue of sex.

In fact, it was on television. And she said this, If you're 21, quote, and still a virgin, there's something terribly wrong with you. And almost certainly you need therapy.

And that's the world that we live in today. It's obsessed with sex. It's aggressively pluralist, so that anything that you say you want goes and is normal.

And thirdly, inevitably, the society that we live in, which is like that, is having an impact on the Christian church. The church, in many places, is saying, Well, we mustn't be left behind.

[13:10] We mustn't become irrelevant to the world. And therefore, we've got to change our views on issues to do with sexuality. Now, it's one sense, of course, it's true, that the church must not become irrelevant to the world.

But it's a far greater danger by far, I would say, much greater danger, that the church should lose its contact with the gospel and the scriptures.

Because then we become totally irrelevant to everybody. And so the kind of things that many theologians are saying, Well, we mustn't alienate gay and lesbian people.

We mustn't alienate people who are living in relationships, but are not married, just for the sake of a few texts. That's the kind of thinking that's increasingly being promulgated in the Christian church.

But we have to ask the question, Is that all that's at stake? Is it just a matter of a few texts? Is it just something that, well, we can ignore and sweep under the carpet just so as to be open and friendly to everybody?

[14:18] Or, does in fact the God of the Bible lay down very clearly patterns for human sexuality? Patterns which are the only way, and the right way, and the way that he has made us?

That's the question. And of course, the answer to that is that yes, he has. What I want to do this evening is just briefly cover some basic points about the biblical teaching on the place of sexual relationships, and then offer a few comments on how we're to live in the society that we inhabit today, in a way that is counter-cultural, showing our difference.

So what about then a biblical theology of sex? How do we go about it? Well, we don't start with various lifestyle choices on the table, various methods of sexual expression, and then say, well, can we find approval for this in the scriptures?

Now, how do we take a proof text approach and kind of piecemeal our way through the Bible, saying, well, is this acceptable, is that not? What is and what isn't? That's not the way to go about these things.

We've got to read the Bible as a whole, as in any way we're looking at theology. For all kinds of doctrine, we've got to see that the Bible has a whole message. It's got a whole storyline.

[15 : 33] It's got a plot. It gives us a whole world view. It teaches us the way that we're to view the world in every part. An outlook on life. It describes the whole of life and explains the whole of life from God's point of view.

So we don't come to the Bible saying, is my sexuality, the way I want to express it, legitimate?

That's not the question we ask. Or we come to the Bible and we say, well, what is sex?

What is it for? What does it mean? Where does it fit into life? In other words, taking that approach to scripture, we're not coming to scripture starting with me and my experience and saying, can the scripture validate it or contradict it?

We're coming to the Bible saying, what does it tell us about God and what he says and the way he patterns things? And then we ask, how do we as human beings fit into that?

So the first thing to say when we approach the scriptures like that is to notice that the Bible doesn't know anything at all about undifferentiated sexuality. You know the kind of thing that people will say, well, my sexuality surely is a gift from God and so how can it be wrong for me to express my sexuality?

[16 : 54] But the Bible doesn't know anything about that kind of abstruse sexuality. The Bible gives us very clearly the pattern of a man and woman made for each other, made for a relationship of lifelong union with one another.

And it's within that relationship alone that the purpose of sex is to be found. Not in any other form of sexual relationship outside marriage, either heterosexual or anything else.

And these passages we read in Genesis 1 and 2 are foundational for all of biblical theology and especially also for sexual theology because it relates everything to our relationship with God.

It's our relationship with God as human beings that dictates our relationships with one another in a sexual way. Just look at Genesis 1 verse 26 that we read.

The emphasis there, you see, is on God creating man and humankind side by side as equals. Did you notice the singular and the plural language going through that?

[17 : 58] The emphasis there is God creating male and female together like one another, side by side in partnership so that together as a unit they image God.

Now that's not to say that there's any sense of sexuality in God other than this sense of relationship but that is what is mirrored by the male-female relationship. The same emphasis is there in chapter 2 verse 21 when it speaks about the woman being made out of the rib or out of the side of man.

The word there, the Greek word there for side, the medics would understand it as pleura. It's the thin lining of the lung, of the side. It's the Greek word which is used for two sides of a page. And that's the point that's being made here.

They're side by side and together side by side in that relationship they mirror the creator. But it's not just that. In chapter 2 verse 18 as we read there's the emphasis too on the fact that humankind are made face to face as well as side by side.

They're made not just like one another but different. They're made to complement one another. Not from the animals was a suitable a complementary helper to be found.

[19 : 19] A corresponding one. No. God had to make the female to correspond to the male. So to image God there must just not be sameness between the man and the woman but difference.

And that difference is intended and real. It's part of the way God has made humankind to mirror their creator. The differences between men and women are not just caused by conditioning in society.

That's nonsense. We all know that. I mean for goodness sake we all know that there are differences between men and women that can't be accounted for by society. There's all kinds of things. You've probably read that book men are from Mars and women are from Venus and although not everything in it I'd want to agree with there's certainly some very helpful and very amusing things. But we all know that women can't back a car into a parking place for example. I mean it's just a fact. And we all know at least all the women know that men just cannot possibly manage children's tea time.

It just doesn't happen. And there are all sorts of other things like that that we just know. But God intended it to be like that. God has made them complementary. complementary. And so the male and female are essentially different.

[20 : 34] We complement one another. We correspond to one another. And these words that are used here about a helper suitable very difficult to translate these words. The old authorised version uses the word help meet which just puts the two together.

But the two words there the word suitable really means standing over against corresponding to the exact correspondence. God has made the male and the female in exact correspondence to one another.

And the word helper there is sometimes one that feminists get very hot under the collar about. But there's nothing derogatory about that term at all. Almost always in the Old Testament that term is used of God helping helpless man.

And when God says he makes woman as a helper for the man. What he's saying is that she has a divine function to help the man to be what he otherwise could never be.

To help him fulfil his spiritual destiny. To help him be all that he can be as a man. There's no higher compliment that the scriptures could pay to the woman to say that she is a helper corresponding to the man.

[21 : 48] Because to say that is to say that without her the man is incomplete. I don't know if any of you have ever seen that film as good as it gets. It's a hysterical film with Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt isn't it?

Where he plays the poor chap who's afflicted with obsessive compulsive neurosis. And this beautiful romance is played out between him and Helen Hunt who is the waitress in the place that he goes for his breakfast every morning.

And as the relationship progresses through all sorts of hysterical things it comes to a point where sitting at a table in a restaurant she's trying to get this stiff hopeless man to actually do something nice and says come on Melvin can't you give me a compliment?

And he looks terribly fidgety and gets uptight and eventually he says since I met you I've stopped taking my tablets. and she looks at him in disgust about to get up and go away as though it's the worst possible compliment you could ever get.

But then he says no, no, no, no, no what I mean is this you make me want to be a better man. You make me want to be a better man. And that's the essence you see of what the woman is to the man.

[23 : 10] She is a corresponding one who is the one who helps him to be a better man. That's the essence of this word. And these complementary differences between men and women are reflected in their emotions in the psyche in the physique in a very clear and obvious way in the sexual anatomy.

Don't need to say any more. It's face to face. And together side by side and yet at the same time face to face and different man and woman make together a one flesh relationship that mirrors and models the Lord himself.

And so when men and women leave their parents and their childhood behind they become united. The scripture says there's one flesh in a lifelong union. It's a uniting of the emotions of the psyche it's a spiritual union it's a biological union.

And the public act that marks these things is the act of marriage. One writer says this the physical union both expresses the other unions and also brings them about.

We express ourselves with our bodies and the act of intercourse expresses our unity. There's more than that it's very important to say this it's not simply a natural thing with no higher reference than that.

[24 : 39] The man-woman union expresses a higher beauty it expresses and preaches to us the union between God himself and his people.

The New Testament puts it the marriage union between Christ and his church. Marriage you see the human marriage the human relationships that we have is not the greatest reality it's the picture. The Bible doesn't use nuptial imagery for God just because it's a handy thing to use. No. God created marriage he created the male-female relationship to be a picture of the reality of God's relationship with his people.

It's a living word. And that's why it speaks to us whether in this human life we ever become married or we don't.

Some of us will and some won't. But ultimately every believer will be united to the Lord Jesus Christ. That union has begun with faith. Ultimately we'll all be part of the bride of the Lord Jesus

Christ.

[25 : 46] That's the reality. It's important I think for us to remember that as though sometimes you know we see the goal of marriage as the be all and end all in life.

It's only for this life it's only till death do us part then the reality will begin. Marriage is just the preview of the real thing.

And the picture of our relationship to God lies in this likeness to him and in this difference from him. God has made us as his image in his image and yet we are different from him.

We are creatures and he's the creator. And that difference must be reflected in our human relationships also. Both the likeness and the differences needed.

Both the side by sidedness and the face to faceness the complementarity. It's equal cooperative and complementary. Not rivalry. You see that's the mistake of feminism.

[26 : 55] It wants to say well men and women are rivals together. They're just side by side. It wouldn't have anything to do with the face to face. The same is true for homosexuality.

Saying no there is not that complementarity. We don't need that. We just need the side by sidedness. But no this is the Bible. Side by side and face to face.

Men and women are like one another imaging God and yet they are unlike one another. They're complementary. They correspond. And further sexual intercourse is the Bible teaches as a life uniting act.

It's part of and it's integral to the creation of that one flesh. Very important to realize that. That's why Jesus in Matthew 19 when the Pharisees are testing him goes right back to these words in Genesis. Haven't you read Jesus says that at the beginning the creator made them male and female. For this reason the man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. They're no longer two but one.

[27 : 59] He's affirming what Genesis teaches that men and women will leave their family and cleave to one another. They will become one flesh. It's a life uniting act.

Paul deals with it in 1 Corinthians 6 in a different way. Speaking about the fact that if you unite yourself to a prostitute you unite yourself with her in spirit.

Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

For it's said the two will become one flesh. But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. So flee sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

So you see it's absolutely clear in scripture it's not just sex and love that must go together it's sex and lifelong committed monogamous relationship.

[29 : 11] One writer puts it this way sex does three things first it recalls the commitment one to another it is a reenactment of the marriage vial and a picture of that wonderful bond for life.

Second it's an act of mutual submission the desire to please the other expressed physically. Third it declares the relationship to be open to another in procreation the fruitfulness of the union bringing forth children.

Interestingly that's the thing that's desperately wanting to be avoided in a relationship out with marriage isn't it? But the Bible is very clear this is where sex belongs this is where it functions this alone is its place in life sex is part of the beautiful tapestry of God's creation but it's part of a lifelong union it's part of and expressive of and creative of that one flesh and out with that in whatever expression it might be out with that it is without meaning meaning and purpose or at least it's certainly devoid of God's meaning and purpose so Genesis 1 and 2 and as the writers of the New Testament take it up sets the pattern for the way that we're meant to be for the way that men and women are meant to be it's wonderfully positive they're the crown of

God's creation they mirror him and the Lord Jesus picks it up and the apostles pick it up and Paul in Ephesians 5 picks it up as the wonderful imagery of Christ and his church fulfilling that great image wonderfully positive and yet of course the story of man is very different the story is one of sin and rebellion it's of disharmony between the sexes not harmony isn't that right and that's true in sexual relationships just as it is in every other aspect and that's why you see God's word gives us commands that's why God gives us laws they're commands of grace and mercy for our benefit and for our help to limit the damage that we want to do to ourselves to limit and constrain our sinful

tendencies to hurt ourselves to ruin ourselves and other people to spoil the thing that God has made beautiful here's something

William still says on this in the midst of the infinite variety of the problems of sexual immorality the canons of biblical guidance and restraint are such that where they're acknowledged and observed they limit the injury that can be inflicted on the human personality they limit the injury you see God's commands about sexuality place for our good the Bible you see is warning us against all the kinds of things and the distortions that now seem to be natural to us because we've fallen and rebelled against his perfect rule and all through the scriptures we get this teaching consistently in the history books we read of characters who fall into sexual sin and it's very clear that they're meant to be examples to us of what not to do always throughout the emphasis is on monogamy and we see the disasters that happen where that's not practice throughout the prophets we have again and again metaphors used for marriage and sex an adulterous generation a people who loves divorce people who have cast off their first love the laws in the

[33 : 06] Old Testament themselves we have very harsh penalties for sexual crimes just because that relationship is so sacred so special it's because sexual immorality damages people and hurts people it hurts individuals it wrecks families wrecks society it does great damage even in the Christian church because of that God gives us his commands to limit to limit that damage I guess if we're honest most people would probably admit that adultery is damaging it's hard to deny it isn't it the family pain and breakdown that it causes the major cause of divorce but you see the biblical pattern shows us it's not just adultery if the sexual relationship is only the expression of a lifelong marriage union then any sex outwith that bond is wrong before marriage or after marriage or within marriage or anything else it's very hard for Christian young people today because every syllable of what we read in society is telling us the opposite there's huge pressure but you see

God tells you that because it's for your very best God's planned it to be this way not any other way and you will be hurt if you disregard his plan don't need to tell you of all the problems that are associated with premarital sexual relationships all the unwanted pregnancies all the abortions the rampant sexually transmitted diseases in this country at the present time especially among young people and teenagers the great risk of later sexual affairs within marriage there's so much less to look forward to together there's so much less to make special together if that sexual purity is not being preserved God wants us you see as his people to enter a lifelong union as a pure as a whole person listen to something quoted in a book by my father from an

American writer he says God intends for all of us to enter into relationships as whole people that's why he says we shouldn't play with sex or live together outside marriage we inevitably tear away from the one flesh relationship and leave pieces of ourselves behind you'll never be able to retrieve that part of your affections carelessly squandered in the past sometimes you'll have to look at your partner in the eyes and say I'm sorry but there's a part of me you'll never be able to have he goes on to comment could it ever have been God's intention that a Christian should have to say there's a part of me that you'll never have someone else has got it most of all you see all of these things are a hindrance to spiritual life they're very opposite of the purpose of the marriage relationship which is to be help to complete you can't wholeheartedly follow Christ you see that's Paul's point if you've got to hold on sin my experience a wrong relationship like that is often one of the things that is the greatest hindrance to somebody coming to

Christ committing to him as a disciple and as a follower because you can't bear to give up the relationship that otherwise they would have to that's the biblical teaching in brief very straightforward it's very clear there's many many other things that could be said but if that's the case then how are we to live and witness in a sexually disordered world a world that's so different well first of all we've got to be clear and straightforward it's obvious that there is a clash of world views between what the Bible teaches and what the world believes we've got to recognize it we are at odds with the world outside we can't pretend it or ignore it as Christians it won't go away that would be disastrous but no less we let it just creep over us and engulf us as though we were overwhelmed by the way the world thinks no J.B.

Phillips translation of Romans 12 2 is excellent in this regard don't let the world squeeze you into its mold he says and like Paul in Athens we've got to recognize there is a clash of world view and we've actively got to challenge it at all levels personally and in our culture in every way that we can let me just make three points about this first and most important we must teach the biblical truth unashamedly in our churches we must do that we must clearly proclaim the biblical world view we

must tell the bible's storyline the bible's big picture we must teach people to think biblically and that entails reading the bible seriously you won't get that with five minutes a day in your little bible notes or five minutes on Sunday and nothing else we've all got to be biblical theologians that's what the bible wants us to be to develop christian minds where we can think biblically or else we will just become swallowed up by the world's ways we've got to recognize too that the good news of the gospel will allow it to be meaningless to people outwith that framework of the bible's world view unless we begin to see biblically it's hard to see why the gospel is needed it's hard to understand why forgiveness is needed until we understand what sin is it's hard to see why the gospel is a solution for alienation from god unless we can see why we're alienated and sexual disorder is a symptom just one of that alienation so we've got to teach the truth about the way god means the world to be and the way god made the world to be as part of our evangelism that's why we need the whole scripture not just john 3:16 we must let the bible not social trends decide our ethics decide our morality and we mustn't shirk it remember hearing somebody from the family planning association on the radio in a discussion saying it's not our business or anybody else's to set standards well it is our business as the christian church to set standards the standards of the scriptures and in any case not setting standards just means setting no standards you've got to have standards unless there's none all sexual immorality the bible says is foreign to the kingdom of god it's as simple as that it's foreign to the church and we must be clear about that at the same time we've got to recover our belief in the regenerating and transforming power of the christian gospel it's a gospel of forgiveness but it's a gospel of transformation people can change and people do change through the power of christ in their life you don't need to be afraid of course we've got to recognize the pastoral issues of people who are already enmeshed in problems of this kind but nevertheless we hold out a gospel of hope that transforms just read paul's letter to corinthians and read what some of them were he says you were washed you were justified you were sanctified through the lord jesus christ so we must preach the truth unashamedly in the churches and we must be clear and not ashamed of what the bible says about these things secondly we must speak the truth unashamedly to the world too because we've got something to say something that the world needs that's true for us as individuals as a church but also as regards society at large

[41 : 50] of course we can't expect a christian state the days of christendom has passed and nor should we seek to impose our views in a way that is oppressive upon people that's not what we're about but the other side of it is that we do have a responsibility don't we as christians the lord jesus tells us in no uncertain terms to love our neighbours and part of loving our neighbours is to persuade them in all ways we can to live in the way that will bring them most satisfaction most fruitful living most happiness so we should rejoice to promote and strengthen all the things that promote real justice real human dignity real peace and all of these things and it's interesting to me that the christian church does seem very often to have a great strong voice on issues of peace and justice or third world debt and all sorts of ways very specifically in realms which in many ways are very very complex but we seem often very reluctant to say something where it's not complex at all it's very very straightforward the realm of sexual morality and if we believe God's way to be the true way and the best way for people we're not loving our neighbour unless we try to persuade them that that's the way but as

John Salt says in a democracy you must persuade a lot of people on a lot of points or else lose it's important that we're not seen as knee-jerk conservatives but rather we've got to try and bring about changes in the whole of our nation the whole way that we think the primary problem is not political but it is cultural it's spiritual of course that's why the most important thing of all is that there should be a vibrant witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ but it is true also that we are to fulfill a prophetic role as the church challenging society challenging the moral bankruptcy that we see around about us pointing out the falsity of many of the liberal arguments that we hear titled on the television many of them are dangerous myths what was it John F.

Kennedy said great enemy of truth is very often not the lie deliberate contrived and dishonest but the myth persistent pervasive and unrealistic and our culture has swallowed so many myths about sexual freedom it's not freedom at all is it it leads to misery it leads to broken lives it leads to broken families to fractured society it's not the way to acceptance and intimacy it's the way to loneliness the way to alienation everybody thinks well it's the obvious thing to cohabit before you get married but the statistics tell a different story the statistics say that you're 60% more likely to divorce if you've lived together before you're married now you can't put too much into statistics of course it's rather

interesting we've got to articulate these things as Christians of course graciously but myths must be exposed

Paul says that we have weapons to break down the strongholds of the myths and the untruths that stand against the truth of the gospel of God we've got to challenge and hold accountable those people who purvey these myths the kind of TV morality that we get you know the way they say it well TV doesn't do anything other than reflect society therefore it's alright but the reality is that the TV shows and the things that we see are making it appear that things are normal which for a start aren't normal even in today's world and even if they were they're totally wrong and perverse we've got to expose these things it's a right to challenge and protest it's right I hope you do write to the BBC and write to your MPs about things can't complain about things if we don't take part we want to win arguments by articulating the truth that's what happened you know in the wake of the great 18th century revival this country was spared revolution this country was transformed beyond all recognition socially politically in every walk of life as a result of the truth of

God spreading through the nation as people were converted to Christ and as believers in every walk of life in politics in the arts in sciences everywhere let their light shine that's what we have to do we have to proclaim the truth to the world most of all we must pray for a revival of biblical influence biblical teaching third though as a church we must live out and demonstrate the truth in a crumbling culture no matter what the cost in some ways at least perhaps to begin with more important perhaps than all we say is what we do and what we are that's what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5 when he calls us salt the earth he calls us light of the world that's what you are he doesn't say you have to try and be that he says that's what you are he says the way that we live should evoke the response in people that they see our good deeds and they praise our father in heaven and as the culture increasingly shrugs off our

[47 : 36] Christian heritage it's going to be more and more important for Christians to live in styles that are seen to openly conflict with the culture that we live in as individuals and corporately as churches in all kinds of ways but especially in matters of sexual behavior people should see within the Christian church the lack of soiled and sad and tattered sexuality and look to God and say who is this God whose people are like this they should also see lives changed and lives made whole that once were soiled and tattered but now are vibrant and shine with the light of Christ the New Testament tells us they will seek the reason for the hope that's within us but we must believe ourselves and have confidence ourselves that God's way is best we mustn't be ashamed of it we must walk gladly in that light or else no one will ever look to us and look to our

Father in heaven we can't put our light under a bushel we've got to let it shine in fact our light does shine whether we like it or not the question is what is it shining there's many practical questions we could ask many things that we could look at in terms of how these apply in specific situations and that's for us perhaps to think about and incidentally next Sunday evening I'm going to be dealing more specifically with the issue of homosexuality and I thought after the service we'd have a time of question and answer and discussion with subjects coming from this week and next week but finally let me just say something very very important in all of this this evening in all of this we must have the balance of the Lord Jesus Christ we must teach the biblical truth unashamedly clearly without embarrassment and with confidence but at the same time we must also have the same sensitive gracious merciful pastoral approach of our

Lord Jesus Christ and that's something that doesn't always come across sadly in the media because the media is against us when somebody's interviewed you hear the truth but you rarely have time to hear the grace and the mercy but we must have that balance why?

well for one thing we're all sinners we've all fallen short every one of us tonight in this church is sexually immoral you know that and I know it if we're pure at least physically may very well be just because we've never had the opportunity we're all sinners and that ought to make it easier for us to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our example because his example was one of forgiving love and acceptance along with along with the command not to sin neither do I condemn you go and sin no more and so it must be with us we must love sinners and hate the sin that's not just enough on its own though we must be concerned with separating the sin from the sinner we believe in a gospel of forgiveness yes but also a gospel of transformation that changes and the Lord must be our example so with us we must refuse to be squeezed into the world's mold at all costs we must stand different yet we must always humbly acknowledge ourselves and in our words that it's only by God's grace that any of us can enter his presence only by his grace that any of us can live lives that are pleasing

to him and verse 3 of that hymn does express it very well doesn't it let holy charity my outward vesture be and lowliness become my inner clothing true lowliness of heart which takes the humbler part and over its own shortcomings weeps with loathing humble penitent witnesses to the truth of God that's what the

Lord Jesus calls us to be unashamed unembarrassed but the truth with the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the knowledge that every one of us is a sinner but that for every sinner there is a gospel of forgiving grace and transforming grace that's the Bible's message on sex for tonight well let's pray we thank you our heavenly father for the wonder of the relationships that you've given us in this world which speak to us of the more wonderful marvelous eternal relationship that is ours through the Lord Jesus Christ that we with all our tatters with all our rotten past all our soiling should be washed and made clean as the blood of the Lamb what a wonder of grace and we pray heavenly father that that beautiful picture and prophecy and proclamation of that relationship that we have received in the gift of marriage we pray that that too among us would shine brightly and point to the

[53 : 31] Savior to a world that is in confusion and sadness and despair help us we pray by the power of your spirit to witness this message with truth and humility for the glory of Christ and for the blessing of us your people we ask it in his name amen thank you I think thank you I think I think we say well I feel free the glory of you thank you thank you