

Genesis 1:26–28 (NIV)

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 2:24–25 (Common English Bible)

²⁴This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they weren’t embarrassed.

Matthew 5:27–28 (NIV)

²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

1 Corinthians 6:12–20 (NIV)

¹²“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do 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! ¹⁶Do 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.” ¹⁷But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Philippians 4:8–9 (NIV)

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Rebecca DeYoung puts it well:

Lust is the place of smoke, fire, and ashes.

We are nearing the end of our series on the capital vices. Throughout, it has been a challenge to remember that what we have been talking about are habits, patterns of behavior that diminish us and threaten to wreck our relationship with God and others. Further, each of these vices is a disordering of something good, a warping or perversion of God’s good creation. This week, we turn to lust, the fiery roar of sexual passions that, when stoked, often overwhelms people, destroying everything in its path.

We’ve talked before about the indisputable observation that we live a culture awash in sexual images and obsessed with all things sexual. One might think that human sexuality then would be elevated and cherished, but instead it has been cheapened and trivialized, having lost any sense of the sacred in this most personal of human activities.

The Greco-Roman world of Paul's day was sexualized to an extent that you would have trouble believing. Thus, it isn't surprising that Paul writes to the small community of believers in Corinth, Greece, about the disordering of human sexuality in their small band of Jesus followers. The Christians in Corinth were an over-spiritualized bunch. As they experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, regrettably, they soon came to see our physical bodies as no more than an external casing for what really matters, our souls. After all, our bodies are often weak and diseased. They age. Some of our bodily functions are not spoken of in polite company. And, they believed, someday our bodies will stop working, freeing our souls to go to the heavenly places. So, they concluded, what we do with our bodies in this life doesn't really matter. What counts is our "spiritual quest." Right?

The Corinthian Christians could not have been more wrong. Paul's lengthy letter, 1 Corinthians, is largely devoted to helping the Corinthians see that their elevation of all things spiritual and their diminishing of all things physical was deeply un-Christian.

God's Good Creation

In the Genesis creation accounts, God creates all that there is and pronounces it good. The earth, the stars, the plants, the animals, the humans. It is all good. How could it be otherwise? The tragedies of illness and pain and death creep in only after the humans distrust God and do the one thing God had told them not to do. In the biblical view, God's physical creation is in need of redemption, but it is still inherently good.

And in God's creation, the humans are created as whole persons, integrated totalities. We are not simply a "soul" encased by flesh and bones. We are a wholeness. The Corinthians believed that the only part of themselves that mattered was their spiritual part – as if one can neatly pull apart the physical and the spiritual. But we can't.

"Members of Christ" (6:15)

Not only is each Corinthian an integrated whole of flesh and spirit, each is also part of the body of Christ. A foot, a leg, an eye, an ear as Paul describes it later in the letter. Thus, they are all bound together in deep union with Jesus and with one another. Everything that the Corinthians do has to be considered within that context. As we'll see shortly, this leads to some surprising perspectives.

Bought with a price (6:20)

Further, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the bodies they see as being fleeting and trivial do not even belong to them. They have been bought by God. "You are not your own," Paul writes. How different this is from the popular culture of today, consumed as it is with "rights," "autonomy," "self-determination," and so on. I don't own me, God owns me. And the price God paid was higher than I could imagine paying for anyone or anything – the willing death of God's own son.

Resurrected bodies

Not only are we integrated wholes of body and spirit bound to Christ and to one another, but our bodies are not as fleeting as they seem. The climax of Paul's letter is his great chapter on the resurrection. The Corinthians are wrong to deny the resurrection of the body, Christ's or our own. As Christ was raised, Paul writes, so shall we be raised. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection (15:23), not the only fruit. It isn't that our resurrected bodies will be the same as our present bodies, but they will be physical as Jesus' resurrected body was physical. Jesus could walk, talk, eat, and be touched. As with Jesus, there is continuity between our "now" bodies" and our "then" bodies. God's redemptive work is about the restoration of God's physical creation, not its abandonment.

The mystery of sex

All this and more must be brought to bear on Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. When we strive to read Scripture well, context always matter. Often it is essential. The immediate context of today's passage is that a member of the Corinthian church has been visiting a prostitute.

Doesn't the man realize, Paul writes, that sexual union with the prostitute creates "one flesh" (6:16). Again, in keeping with the Genesis creation accounts, sex is, as Eugene Peterson puts it, "as much spiritual mystery as physical union." There is nothing casual or trivial about sex. It creates more than babies.

Further, Paul writes, doesn't the man realize that because he is bound to the body of Christ, each person in the body is then bound to the prostitute, by virtue of the man's sexual union with the prostitute (6:17).

If all this makes your head swim a bit, you are not alone. Confronting the Christian worldview and all its implications requires the transformation of our minds, an enormous conversion of our moral imagination.

Lust

Paul challenges the Corinthians' moral imagination. He wants them to see that they are to honor God in all things, even in and with their bodies. Paul wants them to grasp that sex is intensely *interpersonal*; it should create an intense bonding that comes uniquely from the joining of a man and a woman into one.

Lust, by contrast, pretends sex and sexual pleasure are a party for one. Lust makes sexual pleasure all about me. It is a self-gratification project. This feature of lust more than any other puts it in opposition to well-ordered sexual enjoyment. In lust, sexual pleasure is divorced from love and mutual self-giving. And when we lust we certainly want nothing to do with giving life and the future commitments that might bring— if we even register the thought that the organs involved are reproductive by design. I want my pleasure, says the lustful one, and I want it now.

This is why it is characteristic of lust to degrade the fullness of sex into a merely physical act. Ricoeur says, "Everything that makes the sexual encounter easy simultaneously speeds its collapse into insignificance." Perhaps the hardest thing to appreciate about sex until one has experienced it is the way sex is more than a physical act. The emotional bond of intimacy and the union of persons is all part of the "one-flesh-ness" of the thing. If we strip off its personal and social meaning, which lust demands that we do, we are left with the version of sex found in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which offers tips and techniques on how to achieve the greatest orgasm of one's life and make things "hotter" in bed. *Cosmo*, *Maxim*, and the like have nothing to say about what sexual desire and intercourse look like in the context of love. To anyone who has experienced the beauty and warmth of married intercourse, the *Cosmo* sex experience looks cold, clinical, and downright abhorrent. Lustful sex makes the other person instrumental to getting what I want, or a necessary audience for my successful performance. As Pieper puts it, lust wants "it," while proper *eros* desires a beloved person. Lust aims for the antithesis of real intimacy. No wonder it leaves one feeling used and empty.¹

"I want it and I want it now"

This was David on that tragic afternoon when he sent his guard to take Bathsheba and bring him to the king for the satisfaction of his lust. "I want it and I want it now" underlies the attraction of pornography to so many men. It is the dynamic driving the objectification of women.

I came of age in the '60's. That is when I began to notice women, if you catch my meaning. It was also the time that the early feminists began to talk about the objectification of women. I will admit I didn't get it then, but I do now. When a woman is reduced to an object, sexual or otherwise, in a man's eye, she is no longer a person. The interpersonal nature of human sexuality has been lost. As DeYoung writes, "proper *eros* desires a beloved person." The love of others that God urges us toward is a love of persons, not objects.

Christians are often accused of making a big thing out of sexual sin when it is really just harmless fun. However, when sex is divorced from self-giving, sacrificial love it becomes

¹ DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk (2009-06-01). *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (pp. 164-165). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

focused on our own gratification, rather than the union of two loving souls. With the collapse and disappearance of important social institutions, we live at a time when people feel more isolated than ever. The last thing we need is for lust to shove us deeper into that isolation, leading us ever-downward into our more animalistic urges, when we should be looking upward to the higher and truer things of life and love (Philippians 4:8-9).

As Philip Yancey writes, “Two independent beings open their inmost selves and experience not a loss, but a gain. In some way – a ‘profound mystery’ not even Paul dared explore – this most human act reveals something of the nature of reality, God’s reality, in his relations with creation and perhaps within the Trinity itself.” Understanding sexual intimacy in this way helps us to embrace the becoming of “one flesh” as something that we need to protect. Perhaps we can understand better why God insists that sexual intimacy, this physical union, be confined only to an exclusive, covenantal relationship – to marriage.

Fidelity

Love is a choice. It is about what we do. True love is self-giving rather than self-seeking. Marriage is the loving union of one man and one woman. Through God’s gift of sexual intimacy, husband and wife bond as “one flesh,” a bond so profound that it is a sign to their union with Christ, a bond so intimate that it is to be shared with no other person. God values marriage so highly that God is willing to use marriage as a metaphor for his own relationship with us. In a striking image, so far as God is concerned when we chase after false idols we are committing adultery.

The biblical perspective on love, marriage, and sex is that these gifts are all far more valuable than many of us want to acknowledge. These gifts from God are to be guarded and cherished, hence the teachings on sexual fidelity. As husbands and wives, our sexual energies – body, mind, and spirit – are to be poured into our marriage, toward our spouse.² Jesus taught that adultery is more than the physical act (Matthew 5:27); when our sexual energies are directed outside the marriage, our marriage is diminished. Further, if we habitually turn our spouse into an object for the gratification of our own desire, we have embraced the vice of lust. God calls us to lives of faithfulness in all things, including utter faithfulness to our beloved.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In his book, *Sinning Like a Christian*, Will Willimon gives us a few questions to consider when we contemplate the vice of lust.
 - a. What makes our passion a good thing or a bad thing?
 - b. In what ways does our culture make it difficult for us to think about our sexual desire— which so often leads us into Lust— in a Christian way?
 - c. Is Jesus being prudish to make such a big deal out of our all-too-human propensity to Lust?
 - d. In what ways does the church enable us to critique that which the world regards as “all-too-human”?
2. Adultery, having sexual relations with anyone other than one’s spouse, is one of the oldest taboos in the Bible. It even made the top ten list, alongside murder and theft. Why do you think this is so? What does the absolute prohibition against adultery teach us about marriage? Even if both spouses wanted to have some sort of “open” marriage (I think that is still the term!), the biblical answer would still be no. Why? Jesus goes further than Paul. If we think that we have avoided adultery by not engaging in the physical act, Jesus reminds us that it is our hearts that really matter. Energies, attention, and fantasies directed to someone other than our spouse diminishes our marriage. Do you agree? How might we go about ensuring that all our sexual energies are directed to our spouse?

²This is why pornography poses such danger to marriages – it diverts our sexual energies outside our marriage and away from our spouse.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Leviticus 18 Holiness in sexual behavior. This is a long list of sexual taboos. God's people are to be different from the people around them. ("Uncovering nakedness" in the NRSV is a euphemism for sexual relations).</p>	<p>Tuesday, 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:23 The story of David's adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband, and the death of their child.</p>
<p>Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 5 Paul is presented with a shocking case of sexual immorality. Paul's primary focus is on protecting of the Christian community, even if that means asking someone to leave the community.</p>	<p>Thursday, 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 Paul's advice to couples about sex in marriage. It seems that some are trying to embrace abstinence.</p>
<p>Friday, Colossians 3:1-17 For Paul, this new life in Christ underlies all of his instruction and advice.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class - now studying 2 Samuel

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class - now studying Daniel

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our Current Series:

*Ten Things You Don't Have to Believe to be a
Jesus-lovin', Bible-totin' Christian*

Dr. Eben Alexander, author of *Proof of Heaven*

October 15

7pm

Smith Worship Center

Dr. Alexander will be speaking about his new book, *Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People are Proving the After-life*. It has been awhile since we hosted an author, but this should be an entertaining and provocative event. At 6pm, there will be an author reception in Festival Hall. The cost is \$25/person and will include a signed copy of the book.

You can buy tickets online at www.standrewumc.org.

On Sunday, Oct. 19, Scott Engle will teach a special class at 11:00 in Festival Hall. Scott will respond to Dr. Alexander's presentation and review the Christian teachings about the after-life.

Sermon Notes
