Core Seminars – Marriage

Week 10

# Biblical Sexuality

# Biblical Purposes of Sex in Marriage

## Introduction

When it comes to teaching on and talking about sex at church, especially sex in the context of marriage, it’s hard to imagine a topic that is at the same time more awkward and more important.

*Awkward* because of the way our culture has sensationalized the sexual experience and saturated our minds with it’s unrealistic and yet tantalizing images; *awkward* because sex between married couples is personal but not exactly private—we all sort of politely pretend sex doesn’t happen, and at the same time happy to celebrate someone getting pregnant and the birth of each new baby!

But at the same time it’s *important*. In the age of AIDS, sex kills; and even without that scourge, it has the power, when perverted, to capture and destroy lives. *Important* because it stands at the center of our experience of what it means to be married; *important* because more than anything else in this life, it gives expression to a physical intimacy and pleasure and joy that ultimately points beyond itself, to the intimacy and pleasure and joy we will know for all eternity in union with Christ.

So this morning, we want to spend some time talking about sex in the context of marriage from a biblical perspective. Why did God created sexual intimacy? What is it for? And how do we protect and cultivate that intimacy in your marriage?

**God’s Purposes for Sex in Marriage**

So why did God create sex? Some have pointed to procreation, and that is certainly one of its purposes. We’re going to consider that more in a moment. But I think before we even get to children, God has a purpose for sexual intimacy in marriage. In Genesis 2:16, God said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Remember our broad definition of “one flesh”—the physical, relationship, emotional, and spiritual merging of the husband and wife’s life together.

Sex does provide a physical expression of the overall union that marriage creates. The marital union happens emotionally, relationally, spiritually, intellectually. In sex, it happens physically, and serves as a sign of all the rest.

Over the course of this morning, I want to give you three biblical purposes for sex in marriage.

**Biblical Purpose #1: A healthy expression of intimate union**

The first purpose is that God intends sex in marriage to be a healthy expression of intimate union, in which each spouse gives himself or herself to the other, for the other’s good.

* We see this principle positively stated in the Song of Solomon, where the beloved says of her husband in 2:16, “My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.”
* We see this principle negatively stated in 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-5: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.”

Taken together, these verses lay out the overarching biblical principle for our sexual behavior and attitude in marriage. God cares not only who we love, but *how* we love. It is not to be in a passionate lust, that uses another for our own selfish pleasure, but in passionate love, that does not so much seek its own pleasure, but gives itself for the pleasure of the other and finds its pleasure there.

Obviously, this runs counter to what our culture tells us sex is all about. Our culture has sent us on a wild goose chase after the perfect sex life—hot, heavy, pornographic; focused on simultaneous orgasms and every time better than the last. And if that’s not the way our sex is, there must be a problem. Consigned to what we think must be boring, ordinary sex, we grow frustrated with ourselves, our spouses, and are tempted to turn elsewhere. Either to the ease of pornography and masturbation, or to the unreality of romance fiction, or to other lovers, be they other people, or our jobs, or our responsibilities as parents.

But the good news is that our culture has sex wrong. Rather than a pornographic pursuit of ecstasy, the Bible presents sex as a picture of our intimate union. What that means is that there are as many different kinds of great sex as there are aspects to your relationship. Sex can be passionate and hot, but it can be tender and gentle. It can be cautious and careful, or it can be playful and adventurous; it can be serious and it can be light; it can be sleepy or vigorous or calm or frenzied. It can even be sad. In that sense, sex is a lot like a mirror, reflecting physically all the different aspects and moods and expressions of your union. And that’s good news, because it means that sex has a place in your union even when you’re not feeling like a stag on the hills, but you just want to be together.

If sex is a *picture* of the marriage union, then that has another important implication: sex isn’t so much a solution to problems in a marriage (other than the problem of sexual temptation), as it is **a display of the state of your union.** Sex is much more like a *thermometer* than a thermostat. Too often, couples want to use sex to overcome a lack of intimacy, or conflict in communication. But the fact is, your sex is only going to display what’s already there. If your union is characterized by gentleness and respect, by understanding and intimacy, then that is going to come out in your sex life. But if your union is marred by roughness, selfishness, miscommunication and distance, then it should be no surprise if your sex feels like that too.

How then do we cultivate a good sex life in marriage? Rather than give us a how-to manual that focuses on technique, which would miss the point entirely, in the Song of Solomon, the Bible points us to *the priority of self-giving love that celebrates, delights in and cherishes the beloved*. And what we notice when we read this amazing erotic love poem, is that before we ever get to physical intimacy, the lover and his beloved have spent quite a bit of time learning about and delighting in each other, and then lavishing on each other the fruit of their study in words and actions.

Listen: *“How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves. How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant.”* (Song of Solomon 1:15-16) As CJ Mahaney has said in his excellent little book, *Sex, Romance and the Glory of God*, “Communication and sex are inseparable.” Between a husband and wife, intercourse, communication, of one kind or another, should be happening all the time. If a husband is using his knowledge of his wife, a knowledge by the way that should be constantly growing, then from the moment he wakes up in the morning, and right throughout the day, he should be verbally making love to his wife—as CJ says, touching her mind and her heart before he ever touches her body. With his words and his actions, he should be creating intimacy, moving toward her with understanding, delighting in her, cherishing her.

The sad truth though, is that for most men, emotional and spiritual intimacy is not a necessary precursor to physical intimacy. Men, I think that’s a function of the Fall. Our goal in sex shouldn’t be mere sexual gratification. ***The goal of sex is to give expression to the love, the union, that sex represents.*** So study your wife. Learn how to seduce her, how to cause her to feel loved and cherished and desired by you. And then pursue that all day long—from the way you speak to her over the breakfast table, to your interaction in the middle of the day via phone or e-mail, to the way you serve and attend to her at your reunion that evening. Touch her mind and her heart before you ever touch her body. And even consider that touching her body isn’t always prelude to sex. Remember the goal is not sex but the expression of love.

By the same token, wives you’re a part of this communication process as well. It’s not a one-way street. How do you communicate to your husband that you desire him and are there for him? Do you make yourself attractive to him? Not just physically attractive, but emotionally and personally? Are you available, or are there always chores to do, always lists that must be completed, always needs of the children that must be met? Finally, do you anticipate and look forward to intimacy with your husband as the Beloved does in Song of Solomon? “*All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him*.” (SoS 3:1) That is the language of desire, of anticipation, of longing.

There’s so much more we could say about this topic of cultivating sexual intimacy—the importance of surprise and creativity; the need to avoid getting into ruts; the peculiar challenges that children pose. But I want to end this section with two comments, both coming from 1 Corinthians 7:5 “Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self control.”

First, if God created sexual intimacy in order to provide a picture of the marital union, then it should not surprise us that Satan hates that beautiful picture, that display of God’s glory, and will go to great lengths to deface it. The first, and perhaps the most common way he does that is tempt us to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. This includes everything from pre-marital sex to homosexuality, adultery, bestiality, serial monogamy, etc. In each of these cases, the sexual activity tells a lie about Christ and the church. And so as Christians, married or not, we want to protect the reputation of Christ and the truth that sexual intimacy inside the covenant of marriage proclaims. And we’ll do that any number of ways. We won’t trivialize sex through coarse joking or a cavalier attitude, nor stigmatize it by being prude. We won’t engage in a sort “virtual” infidelity through pornography via the Internet. Nor will we endanger the exclusive nature of the marriage union by cultivating intimate emotional relationships with members of the opposite sex. Instead, as married couples, we will primarily relate to people of the opposite sex as married couples, two who have become one.

But the second comment I want to make is that infidelity in its various forms isn’t the only, and perhaps not even the primary way, in which Satan seeks to deface this picture inside our marriages. I think that in today’s pressurized world, the primary way he attacks sex inside of marriage is through sheer neglect. Thus, I don’t need to know how often you married couples are having sex to still encourage you to have more. Because I know that between all the necessary things, like PTA meetings and the kids’ sports and school schedules, and late nights at work and grocery shopping and laundry, and doing the taxes, and all the good things, like church events and small groups, and having friends over for dinner, or even a date night that has you out late, and the bad things, like getting the flu, or your kids getting the flu, altogether, a million and one things can simply squeeze sex out of your life.

Which means, couples, that if we are to protect and guard this incredible gift from God, we need to be vigilant and deliberate. We need to say no to some otherwise good opportunities, so that we can be with each other. We need to plan and strategize. The idea that the only good sex is spontaneous sex is just not true. Husbands and wives need to talk to each other, so that their expectations and their plans meet up. We need to take time and effort to create the context that will make our wives feel cherished and desired; and wives you need to make sure that you haven’t given everything to the job or the children, so that when you’re with your husband, you actually have the energy to be his wife. If you’re married, have more sex, to the glory of God!

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]

**Biblical Purpose #2: Procreation**

Our second purpose for sex in marriage is procreation. How do know this from Scripture? Three thoughts:

First, God commands us in the very beginning of time, during the creation account, to have children. It is one of our primary directives. In Genesis 1:28, Scripture tells us, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Secondly, God continually speaks of children as a blessing and a good gift from Him. In Psalms 127, the psalmist writes, “Sons are a heritage form the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth”(Ps 127:3-4). Again and again, the gift of children is a clear sign of the Lord’s blessing and favor.

Finally, the Bible is full of examples of children as sought after and celebrated. When Esau questions Jacob about his family, “Jacob answered, ‘They are the children God has graciously given your servant.’” (Genesis 33:5b) Children are consistently celebrated in scripture. As such, marriage should include children.

One pastoral note: It is often common today for couples to have difficulty having children – I know right now a number of couples that are struggling with infertility. I am not speaking about that situation. A couples struggles with infertility is in God’s sovereign hands. If you desire children and are trying to have children then you are obeying God’s commands. Some struggling couples wonder if God has cursed them because they have tried, and tried, and been unable to conceive. God is not curing you. There can a zillion and one reasons why God has decided to close your womb, and we just won’t know why until we are all in glory. Let me encourage you trust God, even though it is hard in your circumstances.

**Biblical Purpose #3: Pleasure**

The reason why so many people are drawn to having sex is because it brings great pleasure to those who are partaking in it. Song of Solomon describes the delight comes in admiring the beauty of your spouse:

## *The Lover declares, “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!  Your eyes are doves.” And the Beloved responds, “How handsome you are, my lover!  Oh, how charming!” (Song of Solomon 1:15-16).*

It also describes that satisfaction that comes in being intimate with the other:

*The beloved declares: “My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts” (Song of Solomon 1:13) and again later, the beloved declares, “My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies” (Song of Solomon 2:16).*

And finally, we also see the delight that comes from partaking in physical love with your spouse:

*The beloved proclaims, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth— for your love is more delightful than wine” (S of Solomon 1:2).*

*The Lover comments, “How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!  How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue.  The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon” (4:11-12).*

People have sex because they enjoy it; they like the pleasure that comes from being intimate with your spouse. Sex in marriage is supposed to be guilt-free. God has given this to you as a gift for you to find great delight in within our marriage. This is sex for the glory of God. As awkward as it might be to fit these two ideas together—sex (because we find it to be so private) and glory of God (because it is such a theological idea)—God intends to bring these both together *within marriage*—enjoyable, pleasurable, guilt-free sex for the glory of God.

Most of us associate sex with this third reason. When we think about having sex, we think about the pleasure and satisfaction we will get from the experience. But if that is your **only** disposition toward sex (i.e., to get pleasure for ourselves) that is fundamentally *selfish*. If you are entering into the sexual experience for only what you can get out of it—your pleasure and satisfaction—then you need a re-orientation to godly sex. Sex should not be fundamentally selfish, but self-less; you should enter into the experience more interested in pleasing your spouse rather than pleasing yourself. While it is true you will get great pleasure and satisfaction from the experience, that shouldn’t be your primary goal.

[PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS]