

# SEX GOD'S WAY, Part 1

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There is a connection between the beheadings of Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong and Nick Berg and Paul Johnson and perhaps Kenneth Bigley, and this conference on Sex and the Supremacy of Christ.

I look at them and I see their hands and their eyes. And I think of my hands and my eyes and my death and my faith. And then I hear the words of Jesus put it all in perspective, and in relation to sex.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.<sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” ([Matthew 5:27-30](#))

In other words, there is something far more important than to keep your eye or your hand—or your head—namely, to receive eternal life and not to perish in hell. And Jesus links it with the war that we are waging not in Iraq but in our hearts. And the issue is sexual desire and what we do with it.

Everywhere you look in the world, it seems, there are reminders that life is war. We are not playing games this weekend. Heaven and hell, Jesus says, are in the balance.

## Two Simple, Weighty Points

I have two simple and weighty points to make. I think everything in this conference will be the explanation and application of these two points. The first is that sexuality is designed by God as a way to know God in Christ more fully. And the second is that knowing God in Christ more fully is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality. I use the phrase “God in Christ” to signal at the outset that I am going to move back and forth because the biblical assumption of this conference is that Christ is God.

Now to state the two points again, this time negatively, in the first place all misuses of our sexuality distort the true knowledge of Christ. And, in the second place, all misuses of our sexuality derive from not having the true knowledge of Christ.

Or to put it one more way: 1) all sexual corruption serves to conceal the true knowledge of Christ, but 2) the true knowledge of Christ serves to prevent sexual corruption.

## 1. Sexuality Is Designed by God as a Way to Know God More Fully

God created human beings in his image—male and female he created them, with capacities for intense sexual pleasure, and with a calling to commitment in marriage and continence in singleness.<sup>1</sup>

And his goal in creating human beings with personhood and passion was to make sure that there would be sexual language and sexual images that would point to the promises and the pleasures of God's relationship to his people and our relationship to him. In other words, the *ultimate* reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable. The language and imagery of sexuality is the most graphic and most powerful that the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his people—both positively (when we are faithful) and negatively (when we are not).

Listen, for example, if you can without embarrassment, to both the positive and the negative in God's words spoken through the prophet Ezekiel. Keep in mind that God has chosen Israel from all the peoples on the earth to experience his special covenant love, until the day when the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come and live and die in the place of sinners, so that the gospel of Christ would overflow the banks of Israel and flood the nations of the world. So what we hear God say about his Love for his people Israel in the Old Testament is all the more true of his relationship to those who believe in his Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Here is how God describes that relationship with Israel according to the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 16. He speaks to Jerusalem as the embodiment of his people and rehearses over a thousand years of history. Starting at verse 4:

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.<sup>5</sup> No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.<sup>6</sup> And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" I said to you in your blood, "Live!"<sup>7</sup> I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare.<sup>8</sup> When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.<sup>9</sup> Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.<sup>10</sup> I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. .

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That's a picture of God's utterly free and undeserved mercy. That is how Israel was chosen. That's how you were brought from death to life and from darkness to light and from unbelief to faith, if you are a believer. "I said to you, 'Live!' and made you flourish. I married you. You are mine." That's how Israel began. That's how the Christian life begins. The Mighty mercy of God. Then he goes on with the image. [Ezekiel 16:13ff.](#):

Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.<sup>14</sup> And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.<sup>15</sup> But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whoring on any passerby; your beauty became his.<sup>16</sup> You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. . . .

<sup>32</sup> Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! <sup>33</sup> Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. . . .

There's the picture of the faithless Israel. Her idolatry—her turning from the Lord God to foreign gods—is pictured as the work of a whore. And I say again what I said at the beginning: God created us with sexual passion so that there would be language to describe what it means to cleave to him in love and what it means to turn away from him to others. Now comes the word of judgment. [Ezekiel 16:35ff.](#):

<sup>35</sup> Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord: <sup>36</sup> Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, <sup>37</sup> therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. . . .

It may look as though God was finally finished with Israel. Judgment has fallen. The wife was put away. But that is not the last word. God hates divorce. Therefore, though he judge and separate, he will not finally forsake his covenant people—his wife. He will make with her a new covenant, and bring her back to himself at the cost of his Son and by the power of his Spirit. [Ezekiel 16:59ff.](#):

<sup>59</sup> For thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, <sup>60</sup> yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. . . . <sup>62</sup> I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, <sup>63</sup> that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God.

The end of the story is that God, after giving up his faithless wife into the hands of her brutal lovers, will not only take her back, and not only make with her a new and everlasting covenant, but will himself pay for all her sins. Are there debts this prostitute owes? This husband will pay them. “When I atone for . . . all that you have done, declares the Lord.” Indeed he will pay with the life of his own Son.

And so in the New Testament, after Jesus Christ has died and risen and is gathering a people for himself and his heavenly Father, the apostle Paul calls all husbands to live with their wives like this ([Ephesians 5:25-27](#)). Model your love on this kind of love:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

This is the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision: “I will remember my covenant with you . . . and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. . . . and you shall know that I am the Lord . . . when I

atone . . . for all that you have done.” Jesus Christ creates and confirms and purchases with his blood the new covenant and the everlasting joy of our relationship with God. And the Bible calls it a marriage. And pictures the great day of our final union as “the marriage supper of the Lamb” ([Revelation 19:9](#)).

Therefore, I say again: God created us in his image, male and female, with personhood and sexual passions so that when he comes to us in this world there would be these powerful words and images to describe the promises and the pleasures of our covenant relationship with him through Christ.

God made us powerfully sexual so that he would be more deeply knowable. We were given the power to know each other sexually so that we might have some hint of what it will be like to know Christ supremely.

Therefore, all misuses of our sexuality (adultery, fornication, illicit fantasies, masturbation, pornography, homosexual behavior, rape, sexual child abuse, bestiality, exhibitionism, and so on) distort the true knowledge of God. God means for human sexual life to be a pointer and foretaste of our relationship with him.

## **2. Knowing God Is Designed by God as a Way of Guarding and Guiding Our Sexuality**

That’s the first of my two points. Now the second is this: Not only do all the misuses of our sexuality serve to conceal or distort the true knowledge of God in Christ, but it also works powerfully the other way around: the true knowledge of God in Christ serves to prevent the misuses of our sexuality. So, on the one hand, sexuality is designed by God as a way to know Christ more fully. And, on the other hand, knowing Christ more fully is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality.

Now on the face of it this will seem to many as patently false—that knowing Christ will guard and guide our sexuality. Because many will list off the pastors, priests, and theologians who have committed adultery or who have been found addicted to pornography or who have sexually used little boys or girls. Surely, then, if pastors, who hold the sacred office of tenderly shepherding Christ’s flock, can be so sexually corrupt, there can be no correlation between knowing God and being sexually upright, can there?

I think this question should be answered from Scripture, not experience, because if the Scripture teaches that truly knowing God guards and guides and governs our sexuality in purity and love, then we may be sure that a pastor, or priest, or theologian, or anyone else, whose sexuality is not governed and guarded and guided in Christ-exalting purity and love does not know God—at least not as he ought. So what does the Bible teach concerning the knowledge of God and the guarding of our sexuality?

In answering this question let’s remember that knowing someone in the fullest biblical sense is defined by sexual imagery. [Genesis 4:1](#), “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” “Knowing” here refers to sexual intercourse. Or again in [Matthew 1:24-25](#) we read, “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,<sup>25</sup> but

*knew* her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.” He “knew her not” means: he did not have sexual relations with her.

Now I don’t mean that every time the word “know” is used in the Bible there are sexual connotations. That’s not true. But what I do mean is that sexual language in the Bible for our covenant relationship to God does lead us to think of knowing God on the analogy of sexual intimacy and ecstasy. I don’t mean that we somehow have sexual relations with God or he with man. That’s a pagan thought. It’s not Christian. But I do mean that the intimacy and ecstasy of sexual relations points to what knowing God is meant to be.

One of the books of the Bible that makes this clear is the book of Hosea. Listen to the way God speaks through Hosea to describe the restoration of his marriage with faithless Israel. [Hosea 2:14-20](#):

Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.  
<sup>15</sup> And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achora door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. <sup>16</sup> “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’” <sup>17</sup> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. . . . <sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. *And you shall know the Lord.*

I think it is virtually impossible to read this and then honestly say that *knowing God*, as God intends to be known by his people in the new covenant, simply means mental awareness or understanding or acquaintance with God. Not in a million years is that what “knowing God” means here. This is the knowing of a lover, not a scholar. A scholar can be a lover. But a scholar—or a pastor—doesn’t know God until he is a lover. You can know *about* God by research; but until the researcher is ravished by what he sees, he doesn’t know God for who he really is. And that is one great reason why many pastors can become so impure. They don’t know God—the true, massive, glorious, gracious, biblical God. The humble intimacy and brokenhearted ecstasy—giving fire to the facts—is not there.

But I am getting ahead of myself. I haven’t shown this from Scripture yet. I only said, “*If* the Scripture teaches that truly knowing God—truly knowing Christ—guards and guides and governs our sexuality in purity and love, then we may be sure that a pastor, or anyone else, whose sexuality is not governed and guarded and guided in purity and love does not know God—at least not as he ought.

So is this what the Bible teaches: that knowing God—knowing Christ—is the path to purity? Is it indeed the case that the true knowledge of God promised in Hosea (and [Jeremiah 31:34](#)) brings the powerful passions of the body under the sway of truth and purity and love?

I think this entire conference will be an answer to that question. But let me simply point you to some of the texts that provide the answer.<sup>2</sup> Each of these texts teaches that knowing God revealed in Jesus Christ guards our sexuality from misuse, and that not knowing God leaves us prey to our passions. [Romans 1:28](#):

Since they did not see fit to have God in [their] knowledge God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (literal translation)

Suppressing the knowledge of God will make you a casualty of corruption. It is part of God's judgment. If you trade the treasure of God's glory for anything, you will pay the price for that idolatry in the disordering of your sexual life. That is what [Romans 1:23-24](#) teaches:

They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

This is the old way. When we come to Christ, we take it off like an old garment. Ignorance of God's wrath and glory does not fit us any more. The new way is sexual holiness, and Paul contrasts it with not knowing God. [1 Thessalonians 4:3-5](#):

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles *who do not know God*.

Not knowing God puts you at the mercy of your passions—and they have no mercy without God. Here's the way Peter says it in [1 Peter 1:14-15](#):

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of *your former ignorance*, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

The desires that governed you in those days got their power from deceit, not knowledge. [Ephesians 4:22](#):

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt *through deceitful* desires.

The desires of the body lie to us. They make deceitful promises—promises which are half true as in the garden of Eden. And we are powerless to expose and overcome unless we know God—really know God, his ways and works and words embraced with growing intimacy and ecstasy.

When Paul describes the new person in Christ, who is putting off the old practices and the old slaveries, he says in [Colossians 3:10](#) that “the new self . . . is being *renewed in knowledge* after the image of its creator.” In other words, “I will betroth you to me forever, and you will know me.” And in this knowledge you will be renewed—including your sexuality.

Peter's second letter has one of the clearest passages in the Bible on the relationship between knowing God and being liberated from corruption. In [2 Peter 1:3-4](#) he says,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, *through the knowledge of him who called us* to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, *so that through them* you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

The divine power that leads to godliness comes “through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.” And we become partakers of his divine nature—that is, we share in his righteous character—through his precious and very great promises. In other words, knowing the glorious treasure that God promises to be for us frees us from the corruption of lust and shapes us after the image of God.

Or as Jesus said, most simply in [John 8:31-32](#):

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and *you will know the truth, and the truth* will set you free.

Not all truth. The truth that you find in my word. The truth that you find in relation to me as my disciple. And what is that truth? “I am the way, and *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” ([John 14:6](#)). “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” ([Matthew 11:27](#)).

The Son knows the Father with infinite truth and intimacy and ecstasy. The joy that the Son has in the Father is unparalleled. His gladness in God the Father exceeds all gladness ([Hebrews 1:9](#)). And this he shares with us who trust him as Savior and Lord and Treasure of our lives. “These words I speak to you that my joy might be in you and you might be full” ([John 15:11](#)). “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” And if he chooses, we will know the Father. And if we know the Father the way Christ knows the Father, we will be free.

## Conclusion

Therefore I say again my two points that fly as a double banner over this conference: 1) sexuality is designed by Christ as a way to know God more fully. And 2) knowing Christ more fully in all his infinite supremacy is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality. All sexual corruption serves to conceal the true knowledge of Christ, and the true knowledge of Christ serves to prevent sexual corruption.

I will come back to this on Sunday morning in our final session, and all the speakers will unfold it. And as they do, let the double banner over this conference fly with the words of Hosea to the wayward wife of God and to you: “*Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.*” Amen.

<sup>1</sup> I would argue that when God wills singleness for any person he designs it as a way of knowing him more fully. There are unique ways of knowing God through sexual continence in singleness and unique ways of knowing God through sexual intimacy in marriage.

<sup>2</sup> See other texts not referred to in this message: [2 Timothy 2:24-26](#); [Romans 12:2](#); [Philippians 1:9](#); [Romans 10:3](#); [Hosea 4:1, 6](#); [5:4](#); [6:3](#).