

**CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**  
**Christianity and Sexuality**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

Tonight I begin a five-week series on the Christian and sexuality. Very little is said from the pulpit on this subject. And very little is often said among Christians on this. I suppose one of the concerns that anyone has in talking upon this issue is not to be misunderstood and say things in such a way that they mean the same thing to all the people who are listening and mean the same thing at the same time.

One of the problems we have in talking about sexuality is our fear of even talking about it, saying things specifically.

In preparation for this series one of the things that I did was I sent a two-page memo to a number of counselors that I know have a counseling ministry in our church and in the college. I gave them titles for my messages and I asked them to relate back to me things that they would say if they had the chance to be talking from behind the pulpit. Reminding them that the pulpit is the occasion where we speak to 6 year olds and 90 year olds. We take the whole of life. It's not a marriage seminar. It's not a premarital class. It is not a seminar on dating for young people. It takes the whole body of Christ. If they were speaking to the whole body of Christ about these themes what would you say?

The theme for tonight is Christian heresies on sexuality. I've chosen to start on a more negative title because I think I can set better the context for the positive view on Christian sexuality next week.

As I got all the responses back from the various counselors that I asked to give responses I came to a list of 18 different phrases that these counselors suggested that they felt were Christian heresies on sexuality. I'm not going to necessarily relate a lot to these eighteen. My outline doesn't have 18 points but two. But I'd like to give you some of their thinking, commenting rapidly on them. Maybe not even personally agreeing with them all. But they've helped me in looking at this series.

Let me share with you some of the things they think are Christian heresies.

Sex is of the devil.

Many people feel this way. The devil created sex and not God.

Sex is dirty.

Sex and religion don't mix. The two ought to be kept in separate compartments.

One counselor put the heresy that sex education is a communist plot. There are some who feel that way.

Another was the attitude you do not have to teach animals about sex. Why humans? Of course the response to that is we don't teach animals about God either. There's a difference between humanity and the sexuality within humanity and the sexuality within animals. Man has

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

the chance literally, theologically in terms of his concourse with God of being face to face relationship with God, which is the deepest intimacy. God as chosen to reduplicate that kind of a thing in man and woman relationships.

Another heresy one of the counselors felt is that sex is not a normal and natural response to life so we should feel guilty about our feeling sexually. Some things sexually one should feel guilt over. But this counselor is saying the heresy is the attitude that says that all sexual feelings one should feel guilt over.

Another counselor reflected on the view that many persons struggle with and felt that it was a heresy to say that masturbation was a sin rather than perhaps being an immature sexual activity. In coming weeks we're going to look at that specific point.

Another counselor said the heresy was the idea that some Christians have was it was a sin to be tempted. If you've been tempted you must feel guilty about it.

Another counselor said old people are not interested in sex nor do they participate in sex. They felt that was a heresy.

One counselor said that one heresy was that Christian men do not lust. We took a survey some Sunday nights ago in church of problems people were having. One of the high rates that came back from men in the audience was the temptation to lust.

Another heresy: Christians should not investigate technique.

Another heresy: the language of sexuality is unclean. Therefore sexual terms, even medical terms, are seen as forbidden or dirty or unspiritual.

Another heresy: original sin is a product of desire. Eve's transgression is confused with women's power to seduce men. Women are the culprit.

What the idea behind that, and we'll talk more about that is some people view sexuality as a result of the fall. This is the brokenness of man. We have sexuality because Adam and Eve sinned. Therefore Eve is the culprit. She is the initiator in this whole thing. Therefore to this day women must bear the blame for all things that happen that are wrong sexually. The original sin is the product of desire. Many, many Christians have held to this over 20 centuries.

Another heresy: sex is evil.

Another: piety equals abstinence. The more spiritual you are the less sexual you will be.

Another: sexual feelings were not created by God.

And the 18<sup>th</sup>: if you are married God does not want you to enjoy a sexual relationship. They would regard that as heresy as well.

We will be talking about these matters during the next five Sunday nights as we develop a Christian view on sexuality. But I'm going to try to take the 18 different things that were said

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

and boil them down into two things that I think if I were to assess the mood of the body of Christ today and the things that I as a Christian have experienced in the body of Christ, remembering that I've been in the body of Christ all my 40 years, so I think I speak as someone who knows that body fairly well. If I could take the heresies and list what I would say are the two top heresies they'd be something like this:

The first heresy is that sexuality is something we do not talk about. I think our failure to talk about sexuality either in the pulpit or the home or personal relationships reflects a good deal often of what we wrongly think about sexuality and about God and about scripture.

I grew up in an atmosphere where sexuality was something you never talked about from the pulpit. You didn't even say the word "sex." When I give this series I'm almost in a state of trembling. Because my whole background tells me this is not a subject that is talked about among godly people.

Another thing is our world is so sex crazy that the church is sometimes almost driven to the opposite extreme. Not to talk about sexuality at all because the world has preempted the field. I think this is the reason why we ought to talk about it. People's attitudes and morals are being formed almost in a total vacuum of a Christian voice. Christians historically have not talked about sexuality. They've been silent about it. About the only thing Christians would have to say over the years is "don't." And that's basically it.

As Christians we ought not to be out in extremes. I think some Christians today who in reaction to the silence have almost gone overboard in explicitness. There's always the extreme that we will go overboard on anything. I like to stay right in the center. I think when we talk about sexuality in a context such as this I'm not expected as a minister to give a detailed kind of a lecture on sex that you might give to a group that is planning on getting married or a group that's married.

On the other hand I don't think I could be expected to avoid talking about those things which are matters of importance to us all.

I think also there is a propriety in talking about sexuality. There are certain things within family and within marriage we can say in a dating relationship because of the concept and the teaching of the scripture on modesty that there are some things we need to leave unsaid.

We are most free to talk to one another or should be if we're not most free to talk about sexuality is in the home. And in the family unit.

Many times parents, older people, are inhibited in sharing the deep feelings of life. The feeling that maybe it's wrong to talk about things that maybe are of an affective nature or an intimate nature. That somehow will drive the children away. Because we don't feel confident enough to talk about something so personal and deep to us we create a false imagery in the life of a child that there is somehow something shameful or wrong with sexuality. If this is backed up by a withdrawal of affection the lack of embracing in the family, the lack of saying words of love, it can indeed produce a kind of neurosis.

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

There are three distinct ways we learn. The first way we learn is through direct and conscious instruction called education. The second way we learn is through deliberate observation and imitation. (Think of things we see on TV or in the movies.) The third way we learn is unconscious imitation and absorption.

When children see parents and see a church that is uncomfortable even talking about sexuality they may assume therefore there is something inherently wrong and devil with sexuality.

The question is not will you learn about sexuality? The real question is who will you learn it from? And how will you learn it?

And because we're concerned about who you will learn sexuality from and how you will learn it a case can be made for the fact that God wants us within the family context and within the body of Christ context to be the kind of open people that can share frankly according to one's level of understanding the good gift that God has given to us as human beings.

We must recognize that the Bible is not silent about sexuality. The Bible has great deal to say about sexuality.

If the scriptures speak frankly about sexuality then maybe there is encouragement for us within our marriages, within our families, within the body of Christ to speak forthrightly as well. And to treat as a heresy the viewpoint that says you cannot talk about this subject. This is off the list of things to discuss.

The Concordia Series on Sexuality is without a doubt the finest material that has been done by Christians on human sexuality. I would recommend you use a book like this with your children.

Another book by Rex Johnson, At Home with Sex. He talks to parents about being the teacher in regard to sexuality in the home.

A super little book on the Christian and Sex by Donald Tweedy, these are a series of lectures he gives to students at college. It's especially geared to a college audience. An unmarried college audience. He has three chapters that are absolutely fantastic. The physiology of sex, the psychology of sex, the theology of sex. It is great.

For married couples here is book on sexuality by Wheat – medical doctor Intended for Pleasure much better and much more discreet.

The second heresy that I think is in Christian circles is the view that sex is evil, or sex is of the devil. There are several reasons why this view has knocked around so long in the Christian church.

One reason is a misinterpretation of scripture. Often there is a vital misunderstanding at key moments in scripture. Three texts that are frequently misunderstood in regard to sexuality. Those who think sex is evil will point to these verses.

One is the fall of man and woman. The viewpoint that when Adam and Eve fell the reason for their fall was sexual seduction on the part of Eve. This is the curse that she was to bear now as a

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

woman. That after the fall the relationship between man and wife was to be forever tainted. And any relationship between man and wife when sin entered the world was inherently evil it was the product of the evil one who had led them into temptation.

The problem with this viewpoint is the scripture itself. The scripture does not call in the creation account sex evil. In fact creation says that God made them male and female in his own likeness after his own image and he said it was good. It says further that the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed.

So here is not a question of man and woman being created sexually evil. What God declares not good in Eden is man's loneliness. That was what was not good. Not sexuality. A verse often misunderstood.

Another verse often misunderstood is Paul's statement. "It is better to marry than to burn." To burn with passion. Paul was saying to the young man it is preferable for you to remain unmarried. But if you can't control yourself get a wife.

The problem with that passage is it doesn't deal first of all with the context of Corinthians and doesn't see the whole of Paul's teaching or the whole of scriptural teaching. Paul was dealing with Christians who were betrothed to one another and who believed in the nearness of the Lord's return. He was saying if you can give yourself to the work of the Lord and if you have a gift of remaining celibate or remaining non married then practice that gift and don't get married.

But Paul is not speaking against marriage. He's very clear in that same context of passage total to a man and his wife very frankly about sexuality and say to them that they are not to rob each other of sexual relationships. Further the man who wrote 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, is not a person who goes around saying that the reason for marrying, the sole reason, is because you can't control yourself sexually. Such demeans the overall teaching that Paul has given. He's dealing with the practical matter of some believers feeling that they're living at the close of time and because if they have the gift of being single then Paul says be single like I am.

A third verse that is often misunderstood is Jesus said in Matthew 19:12, that there are some who are eunuchs by birth, some eunuchs made so by men, and some by choice. That is there are persons who have given themselves to the single life. It has been their nature from birth to not be able to have sexual relations. Or there were some who have been castrated or made eunuchs by men and here are others who have by choice determined to live a single life. He says he who can receive this teaching receive it. He himself chose this way. He chose not to be married because of his task. But it was in no way a put down upon marriage. As can be seen as the Lord did his first miracle at a wedding and here honored a bride and groom with his presence.

The fact is the scriptures are saying you can have either world depending on what gift you feel God has given to you. If you feel that God has given you the gift of singleness, then do not strive to be married. Do not feel less a person if you are not married. There are some people who feel like they're a half a person if they're not married. Sometimes they've unfortunately been given that attitude by others.

Scripture says singleness is a whole state if it's God's gift to you. But on the other hand God also gives the gift of marriedness. If that is God's gift to you, celebrate it.

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

Misinterpretation is often the reason for the view that sex is evil.

Another reason why sex is thought of as evil is what is called the Gnostic heresy. A virulent 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century heresy that still knocks around in the church today. It was the view that matter is evil. That God doesn't have anything to do with matter. Real stuff. God is Spirit. He's removed from matter. The body is matter and God doesn't have a thing to do with the body either. He is Spirit. Therefore the Gnostics would either say of the body deny it or satiate it. But they were never in the middle on that. Many of the Gnostics said that the body is a trap. Marriage and sexuality only serve to entrap more souls in the prison house of the body. Therefore be an esthetic. Be alone. Do not get married. And the Gnostic heresy generally said the body is evil.

Yet the Lord in creating us made our bodies. He made every part of our bodies. He knew exactly what he was doing. And beyond that he has chosen to incorporate our bodies in the resurrection. Not only is our spirit going to eternally be with the Lord. But our body is going to be raised up and with him forever as well. God is very much for the body.

The third reason why the church historically has taught that sex is evil is the development of a celibate or unmarried priesthood coupled with the elevation of perpetual virginity created in the church historically a view that marriage was a lesser state. That the higher call was the celibate call. The call not to be married.

And Mary unfortunately was often used as a model for this. The Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary became a viewpoint in the church that a really good holy woman will never have a normal sexual relationship. She will be like Mary. Communicating the idea historically in the early centuries (not so much now in modern America at all) but in the early centuries that there was a less state that was involved if you became married. Mary was the example.

Scriptures don't say that Mary was a perpetual virgin. The scriptures very clearly say in Matthew 1 that Mary did not know her husband Joseph (and the word "know" is used in a sexual sense, just like Adam knew his wife Eve) until after Jesus as born. The very clear conclusion here was they had normal married relationship after the birth of Jesus. And indeed other children were born to their union. They were not just cousins or stepbrothers of Jesus or the children of Joseph by a first marriage. But they were the result of the union of Mary and Joseph. And the Lord sanctified their marriage and their relationship.

The legacy of the early church fathers that they bequeathed to the church for centuries was somehow the elevation of this celibate priesthood. They did not deny that procreation or the act of begetting children was good in itself. But there was a general disposition to the means that the creator had appointed for procreation. It was a good thing that children came into the world, but why did the creator have to use the method that he did.

Augustine, the 4<sup>th</sup> century great church father author of the book The City of God and a great formative influence in Christian theology was bothered by the fact that sexual feeling, although lawful in marriage required the awakening of sexual feelings or lust. On the one hand the Christian outside of marriage is told to resist the temptation to have sexual feelings. On the other

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

hand in marriage the Christian must submit to these feelings to have children. A true Christian therefore Augustine says is one who “would prefer to beget children without lust.” Augustine’s view of sexuality was much more healthy than some of the other church fathers.

The bishop of Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century thought celibacy was the way of higher merit. But commended marriage as best suited to the majority of men. However he taught that within marriage one should regularly practice abstinence of marital relationships. He argued that marriage offered better opportunity than virginity for attaining perfection because it involved greater temptation and therefore more occasion for the exercise of self-discipline.

Origin, one of the greatest minds in the history of the church, although somewhat heretical and was later dismissed as a heretic had a theory of the fall of man in which the serpent seduced Eve and physically infected her. A theory under Origin in which original sin is defined as an invitation to wantonness. Therefore Origin regarded all sexual activity as inherently evil because it was the result of Eve’s being affected by the serpent in the fall.

By the way Origin’s viewpoint may be understood by the martyr complex that many of these early church fathers had. They lived in a very dangerous time. Many of them lived on the edge of martyrdom. In fact Origin’s own father was martyred for the faith. When Origin saw this happen he was seventeen years of age and he wanted to go die with his father. His mother hid all of his clothes so he wouldn’t go out naked into the streets and thereby prevented his martyrdom at the age of 17. Origin was a person who was anxious to give his life for Christ and who thought of himself as not having the time in his life to go through normal human relationships

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who was instrumental in Augustine’s conversion considered marriage “a galling burden.”

Jerome a 4<sup>th</sup> century church father and translator of the Vulgate, the Catholic Bible, the Bible in Latin, looked down upon marriage in favor of the monastic life. He says, “I do not condemn wedlock. Indeed I should like everyone to take a wife who cannot manage to sleep alone because she gets frightened at night.” That was his view of marriage.

He also told husbands, “If we abstain from sexual relationship we honor our wives. If we do not abstain, what is the opposite of honor but insult? He who loves his wife to ardently is an adulterer.”

Augustine and Jerome both had very immoral pre Christian experiences. Some of their views on sexuality may have been shaped by their tremendous immorality before they became a Christian. In fact Jerome although he retired to a monastic cell describes himself as taunted with visions of sirens and he was a sexually troubled man although he did a great work in the church of translating the Bible into Latin.

Dwight Harvey Small noting this period of church history says By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the suppression of any sex life was considered by many Christians to be a positive good in itself. Better pleasing to God than the marriage state. Although marriage was not held to be contrary to God’s will it was felt to be inferior to celibacy.”

The Middle Ages simply intensified this trend that was set out by the early church fathers.

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

Peter Lombard, a 12<sup>th</sup> century theologian, warned couples that the Holy Spirit left the room when they had sexual relationships. He urged widowers not to remarry because the death of their first spouse was God's call to a second chance to the celibate life, which he highly prized.

Catholic writer Ernest Messenger admits that the Middle Ages went to extremes. Abstinence from marital relationships was to be practiced in the average day in the middle ages. Abstinence was to be practiced 5 days out of 7.

Luther came ultimately to be happily married but he said in one of his table talks to his students "Had God consulted me about it I should have advised him to continue the generation of the species by fashioning human beings out of clay as Adam was made."

The Moravian pietist and founder of the modern missionary movement felt that there should be no more enjoyment of sex in marriage than of wine in the sacrament.

These are just some illustrations that could be given. But throughout the history of the church there has been the feeling routinely communicated to God's people that sexuality is evil.

Given this kind of set of data how can we respond to that? What can we affirm positively about sexuality? Why do we treat this view that sexuality is evil as a heresy today?

Some reasons why that would be a heresy to view sexuality as evil. And I want to say, by the way, there are some manifestations of sexuality that are evil. The scripture talks about fornication, adultery, homosexuality. I'm not trying to say that all sex is good. But I am trying to make the case that God created sexuality and in its created form sexuality was not anything evil at all.

What can we affirm positively?

First, we can affirm that we are all here because of sexuality and we were created sexual beings. There's only one way each of us got here and that was through the way God appointed, through sexuality. No one has come into life another way. Your presence here is an indication. When God affirms you he affirms the way you were created, he affirms the love with which you were created. He affirms you as a person. He created you male or female. That was his idea, not yours. Therefore since it is his work it is good. It's a miracle in fact that we are here. As you know from the biological processes of life when you consider the statistical probability of you being you, all the combinations that could be present, the millions of possibilities, the fact that you are here is a statistical probability right from conception you were a winner. God made you unique. God had the process of sexuality down so that you could come into life.

Another thing that we must affirm against this heresy that sexuality is evil, sex is God's gift to the people that he created. It is his idea. It is not the devil's idea. We learn in scripture that at God's right hand are pleasures forever more. Therefore the maleness and femaleness, the union in marriage which God intended for us is his way of loving his people and caring for them.

A third thing we can say positively about sexuality is God designed sex to be a part of a relationship of mutual commitment. He designed the full expression of sexuality in the flesh

## **CHRISTIAN HERESIES ON SEXUALITY**

### **Christianity and Sexuality**

should occur only within the covenant of commitment of marriage. Marriage then adds strength to the union and a foundation to the union that is being joined.

A fourth thing we affirm is that sin distorts God's design for sex. The reason why people have an unwholesome view of sexuality, once we understand what God is saying about it if we go on with an unwholesome view we have somehow let sin distort God's design for sex and have let guilt into our lives which doesn't belong. Or if real guilt is there we need to seek God's forgiveness.

Another point, God forgives people their sin, even their sexual sin. God is a God full of compassion and mercy and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to change if we get started in the wrong way.

There was a statement on human sexuality that was adopted on the conference on the family, an evangelical conference in 1975. I think it puts well the rebuttal that sexuality is evil: "The human body and the capacity for sexual relationship enjoyment and reproduction are God's gifts to be received in an attitude of thanksgiving, wonder, an joyful worship. We rejoice that God created male and female as sexual beings. And we affirm that sexual intercourse within marriage is good, desirable, honorable and consistent with personal holiness. Parents are to convey such attitudes to children along with providing factual information. Parents and church have a God designed responsibility to provide moral guidance by word and by example so that God's gift of sex will be used in ways honoring Jesus Christ. We deplore destructive, unbiblical and sinful sexual attitudes and practices both within and outside marriage, which contribute to the breakdown of the family. We resolve to resist the moral decline in our society. We resolve to teach that sex is to be enjoyed with mutual respect and fulfillment within marriage. And to proclaim that ultimate control results from Christian maturity which is brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the faithful and through happy useful service to Christ."

An eloquent statement of what God intends for sexuality.

That's the start for tonight. Next week we're going to be looking at sexuality: made in the image of God. And look at some of the reasons why God created us as sexual persons.

[end of tape]