

## Is Pleasure the Primary Purpose of Sex?

Turn to Eph 5. The short answer is “no.” You already expected that. God is no enemy of sexual pleasure. It was his idea at the start. He created men and women to enjoy sexual intimacy. God created many different things for all people to richly enjoy. Our sexuality is one of those things.

In Genesis 1 and 2, the purpose of sex is babies, children, people multiplying and filling the earth. And the line in Genesis 2, about the two becoming one flesh again, since they began as one flesh, gets used in the NT. That is, sexual intimacy is the sign and the seal of marriage.

In the NT, having children is not the priority that it was in the OT. The NT does not go against that, but does not emphasize that as part of marriage the way it’s emphasized in the OT. Since birth control is so common now, the connection between sex and babies is not what it was, but before God it is still a big factor. But I want to come at this a different way . . .

Which Marriage is the Real Marriage? Eph 5:22-33 gives basic instructions to wives and to husbands. That’s what we call that section. But three fifths of those 12 verses is not about wives or husbands at all. 3/5 is about Christ and the church. All the instructions to wives and to husbands put together total 2/5 of those 12 verses, 40%. (I’m going by word count here.)

Here’s an example: Eph 5:29f *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—<sup>30</sup>for we are members of his body.<sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”<sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Christ feeds and cares for the church. We are members of Christ’s body. Then Paul quotes the marriage line from Genesis 2, but not about husbands and wives. Paul applies this to Christ and the church: “... *just as Christ does the church – for we are members of Christ’s body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”<sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

Christ left his father, and is being united to us, his wife, and he took on human flesh so he could be one flesh with us. *This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

So I ask: what is the real marriage? The real marriage is between Christ and the church. What happens between wives and husbands is a model of marriage. Wives and husbands are called by the Lord to live out the basic roles that that the Lord has with his bride.

This did not start with Christ. In the OT, the prophets regularly described Israel’s idolatry as Israel, the wife of God, wanting sexual pleasure with other men. When Israel turned to other gods, God experienced their wandering as a faithful loving husband would experience his wife lusting after other men, and inviting other men to her bed.

The whole book of Hosea is built around this image of Israel's idolatry, and there is quite a bit in Jeremiah, and in other prophets. But Ezekiel 23 is the most graphic. Ever since you were young back in Egypt, God said to Israel, you lusted after men with big genitals.

You would lift your skirts and spread your legs for anyone. You were mine back there in Egypt, but even then you lived like prostitute, you invited men to caress you and fondle your young breasts. Ezekiel 23. I have said no more than Holy Scripture says. I have said less than Ezekiel.

This is God speaking to his people about their unfaithfulness to him. Once we get past the explicit language, imagine this from God's side, from the husband's side. Imagine a loving and faithful husband whose wife does things like this. Painful and infuriating. That's how God experienced Israel, and that's the kind of language God used to describe what they were doing.

So I ask again: what is the real marriage? The real marriage is between God and his people, the real marriage is between Christ and the bride. Human marriage is a model of this real marriage, it is a replica of the start after the real marriage.

When God made Adam and Eve, God already knows this. He made Adam and made Eve so that what they do shows how God and his people treat each other.

This is why Jesus said, no adultery and no divorce. God is faithful to his people, and expects his people to return the same. He's not leaving us, and he expects the same from his people back to him. No adultery and no divorce shows among humans how God and his people treat each other.

If the real marriage is between Christ and his bride the church, what is real sexual pleasure?

Sexual pleasure on earth is a model, a replica, of what will happen after the wedding of the Lamb. Jesus told several parables about a great wedding feast, about a father inviting guests so a wedding feast. People asked why the disciples of Jesus did not fast. Jesus said, the bridegroom is with them, how can they fast? When he's taken away they will fast.

The parable of the ten young women with the lamps, five wise and five foolish, is a parable about people being ready for a long wait until the groom arrives and the wedding can start. In Rev 19 there is a great song in heaven: "rejoice and be glad and give God glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." The beginning of Rev 21 also describes God's people as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

Human sexuality is a model, a replica, of finally being with Christ forever. Whatever joy, pleasure, ecstasy, delight, and satisfaction are available in human sexuality, at its best, is God's intentional foretaste of the joy, pleasure, ecstasy, delight, and satisfaction that will be a part of being wedded to the Lamb and being one flesh with our Lord.

This is for the celibates among us, and the sexually active among us, for the sexually frustrated and the sexually content. At its best, sexual pleasure is an overrated appetizer of the real thing. This is why there is no male or female in heaven, I think. Human sexuality will be redundant. We will all together be the bride, and we will live with the groom and enjoy him forever.

This sermon series. I think this is the last of these marriage sermons. Next week is Advent! All of these messages have been doing the same thing, and this one is included.

Our society has a sentimental view of marriage, by which I mean society views marriage as a happy romantic high point of closeness and emotional fulfillment. That is, we go into marriage based on what it will give us, the happiness and fulfillment we assume will happen.

This view is a problem on its own, and what makes it worse in the church is that quite a few Christian marriage teachers and teachings assume this to be true, and they work with all their might to help us experience the romantic high point of closeness and emotional fulfillment.

And when our marriage is not like this, which either most of the time or all of the time it is not, then we think we've failed. There are many difficult Christian marriages that are also strong and pleasing to God. The couple is devoted to each other and loyal to each other in the big picture, they get past the conflict and injury and carry on, and don't plan to do anything else.

It is a difficult marriage, but it is also strong and pleasing to the Lord.

Sexual pleasure gets viewed the same way. Our society is disastrously pleasure-seeking in many ways, and sexual pleasure is certainly prominent. Our society does not think anyone should be denied sexual pleasure for any reason.

There are as few boundaries as necessary. People have lost their way about life, it is sad, and self-satisfaction is their only plan. There is so little meaning left, so little purpose beyond enjoying ourselves.

#### Marriage as a Calling, sexuality included

Our basic call is to submit to the Lord Jesus in every part of our life. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life, up to and including death. The most important thing we do is kneel before the Lord Jesus with that understanding: "You are Lord of heaven and earth, and you have full rights to my life, up to and including death."

Within that, at a wedding, a believing man says to the Lord: "Lord Jesus, I now enter your calling to be a husband to this woman whom I'm taking to be my wife. The goal of my marriage is to be faithful to you, Lord, in this calling."

At a wedding, a believing woman says to the Lord: “Lord Jesus, I now enter your calling to be a wife to this man I now take to be husband. The goal of my marriage is to be faithful to you, Lord in that calling.”

And this is not separate from sexual intimacy. This is exactly the setting in which sexual intimacy belongs. In Scripture it is always a part of relationship, committed permanent relationship.

So the husband says to the Lord: “Lord, I will live out my sexuality as a part of your calling to be a loving faithful husband to my wife.” The wife says, “Lord I will live out my sexuality as a part of your calling to be a loving faithful wife to my husband.”

This is not going to solve all the problems. Of course not. But it has to be the starting point. Even in marriage, just seeking more pleasure is a sour foundation. The goal of sexual intimacy must change from pleasure to something deeper.

### Marriage love is Christian Love, sexuality included

The specific instructions to wives about living with husbands, and to husbands about living with wives, are always already a part of Christ’s call to all his followers. To submit to each other and to love each other are solidly established by Christ and the apostles as part of how all followers of Christ will treat each other.

We have gone over this in detail in the two previous sermons, I will not do that again today.

The fruit of the Spirit, in Galatians 5:22-23, is a handy summary of how believers live with each other: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Let’s put marital sexuality under this umbrella. The Holy Spirit would like everything in our marriages to show this. This fruit is at the center of how a man lives out the call to be a husband, and how a woman lives out the call to be a wife.

Let’s include our roles as sexual partners in this. Our goal will not be to have more pleasure, rather our goal is that our sexual relationship will show these things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Even the ordinary role fulfillment of unremarkable sex, at its lowest level, is good for the marriage relationship. The pleasure might be minimal, but there is real relational benefit and meaning. It would help a lot if we stopped making physical pleasure the priority.

Sexuality is not just for bodies. In the Scripture overall, sexuality is for the whole person. It affects mind and soul and spirit and heart. It is not good to divide people into parts. Everything we do, mind or body or soul or spirit, affects all the other parts. Our sexuality is like this.

Our society has reduced sexuality to my pleasure for my body. But in Scripture, sexual intimacy is *relational*, it is not about *me*, it is about a *relationship*, it is a sign and a seal of two becoming one for life. And it is not just about *bodies*, it is about the *whole person*.

Sexual intimacy is the sign and seal of a relationship between two persons. It can be pursued just for individual bodily pleasure, and we can ignore the other, but that's all we're doing, we're just ignoring the rest.

Remember that the real marriage is between Christ and his bride.

Remember that the real wedding night is still ahead for all of us, including our Lord.

Human marriage was designed by God to model the real marriage.

Sexual pleasure was designed by God as a model and a foretaste of being with the Lord forever.

Every believer is part of the real marriage, and every believer will know the joys of being one flesh with our Lord.

Do not insult God by doubting his ability to give us far greater delight and satisfaction than the best of human sexuality.

We all bow before the Lord: "you are Lord of heaven and earth, you have full rights to my life, up to and including death." We all live out our sexuality as his slaves.

Marriage is a calling from the Lord, to live out the role of husband or wife as one faithful to the Lord of all. Our sexual relationship will be included in this.

Marriage love is Christian love, as summarized in the fruit of the Spirit. Each married person will be a sexual partner who lives out the fruit of the Spirit.

Physical pleasure in sexual intimacy is good, it is from God. But it is only one of many sides to sexual intimacy, and not the most important. Don't make physical pleasure the measurement of sexual intimacy. Don't assume lack of pleasure means nothing good is happening.

In the Scripture, sexual intimacy is always about relationship, more than pleasure, and more than just me. And it is about the whole person, soul and spirit included, not just bodies. It is the sign and seal of marriage.

In 2 Tim 3, Paul says that in the last days people will become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. He's clear in the next sentences that this is already happening at that time. So we will not be surprised that the world does something different with pleasure and with sexuality. It has been like that since Moses. For our part, we will live in the Lord's ways. Amen.