

“Sex Mystery” // First Love 6 (NEW: Season Finale) // Ephesians 5:21–32

Happy Mother’s Day, Summit Church. This day is kind of a **paradox**, because we really want to **honor some among us** who really deserve honor, but it also **ends up being a really difficult day** for a lot of others. There are some for whom this day brings up a lot of **guilt**; some get **overwhelmed with a sense of failure**; for some this day represents something **they really want to happen** but hasn’t; for some this day reminds them of the **broken relationships, or no relationship**. For still other ladies, this day is **frustrating and disappointing** because it reminds them of how little their family seems to appreciate what they do, so they can’t help but go through this day with a profound sense of disappointment.¹

Let me share this with you. (*Not all of this is original with me.*)

- To those who gave birth this year to their first child, we celebrate with you.
- To those who lost a child this year, we mourn with you.
- To those who are in the trenches with little ones every day and wear the badge of food stains and spend most of their day smelling like sour milk and poopy diapers, we appreciate you.
- To those who walk the hard path of infertility, fraught with pokes, prods, tears, and disappointment, we walk with you. (Forgive us when we say foolish things. We don't mean to make this harder than it is.)
- To those who have warm and close relationships with your children, we celebrate with you.
- To those who have been forsaken by their children, we hurt with you.
- To those who will have “emptier nests” in the upcoming year, we both grieve *and* rejoice with you.
- To those who lost their mothers this year, we grieve with you.
- To those who were encouraged to have an abortion, we weep with you, and we love you.
- To foster moms, mentor moms, and spiritual moms, we need you.
- We have in our midst perhaps the greatest warriors in our culture—**women made in God’s image who possess the spirit of motherhood.**
- To all of you, we honor you.

Perhaps on this day it’s good to remind ourselves that **the gospel is not about** your accomplishments as a mother; it’s about your **position as God’s beloved daughter**. You are **honored and received** not because of what you have done as a mother, but because of what **God has done** to make you his own. One drop of the blood of Jesus is **better than 1000 beautiful children** or **a million bouquets** of flowers.

YOU GOT ONE MORE IN YOU?

21 ...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or

¹ Elyse Fitzpatrick says, “Many women feel like this is the one day when they are forced to look at either their own shortcomings (which results in guilt) or the shortcomings of others who fail to appreciate them properly (which results in discontent). It’s the one day you’re told over and over that your identity as a woman (is measured by) your ability to be the source of life and goodness for all.”

any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The main point Paul makes in this passage is that **marriage is a divine mystery**, pointing us beyond itself to Christ and the church.

- Whenever you have a sign, you’re not supposed to get fixated on the sign...
 - Imagine you were on your way to hike and camp out in the **Grand Canyon** and right before you get there you see a sign that says, “*Grand Canyon, turn right*” and you said, “*Oh great, there it is.*” And you camped out underneath the sign!
 - You’ve got to look past the sign to the thing the sign points to.
- But that’s what most people do with marriage
 - They get **fixated on the sign**. So they start to see marriage as essential to ultimate happiness. It’s hard to think of a happy life without finding perfect love. And **so they get obsessed** with questions like, “Did I marry the **right person—can they give me eternal love?** Am I ever going to **get married** and find true love?”
 - And we end up putting a **weight on marriage** it was not designed to hold. We look to romance for fulfillment and identity and satisfaction.
 - But they were never designed to give us that. God is.
- The **mystery of marriage**, Paul says, is that it and biological family are **echoes, signs** of something greater; something more eternal—Christ and the eternal family, the church.
- **Marriage is gospel-re-enactment**. In it we get a taste of the love of God and we learn to love like God.

That’s Paul’s main point in Eph 5, and we’ve been considering it from 6 different angles.

- This week, our final week, we are going to bring all these things together and **talk about intimacy and sex**.

Now, the word ‘sex’ is not found in Ephesians 5, but Paul talks in vs. 31 about coming together in one flesh in marriage, the ultimate expression of that is sex.

I’m going to try to debunk a deeply held cultural myth that a lot of people believe, or are trying to believe. That is: “Sex is just physical.” Some of you have tried to believe it.

- “I didn’t know him or her that well, just had some fun for a while. No big deal. No strings attached.”
- “Sex is kind of like **food**. You get hungry? Eat. Not significant what restaurant you eat at.”
- Or, “It’s **like a sport**. You play it together; next time, pick another team. Like touch football. Or, better yet, tackle football... just you stay on the ground for as long as you can.”

But most of us, when we think about it, *know* that is not true. I heard one pastor expose that this way.... Think about these questions:²

- ***Why is it that when a child is sexually abused, when they are an adult and connect the dots, it is so difficult to shake off?***
 - It’s not just that “an authority figure betrayed them.” No, it’s deeper than that.
- ***Why is rape so much more harmful to a woman than simply being beat up?***

² Andy Stanley, “Designer Sex,” from “The New Rules of Love, Sex and Dating”

- Women will report physical abuse, but report rape *way* less often.
- **Why is it that men with the deepest sexual issues usually had uninvolved or missing fathers?**
- **Why is adultery so hard to shake?**
- **Why is it that most people's greatest regrets are usually sexual?**
 - When somebody comes to me with some **deep, dark, secret**, it's almost always sexual.
 - When I hear, "I've **never told anyone** this before," I know what it's going to be about. It's hardly ever, "*I cheated on this test.*"
 - "We assumed there was nothing to it. I just met him on spring break, no big deal... all my girl friends were doing it, too."
- **Sex is not just physical.** Otherwise none of those things I just gave to you would be the way they are.

I am going to give you 3 principles about sex gleaned from this passage. And I was in a particularly Southern Baptist mood this week, so they all start with "S"...

1. Sex is... Symbolic

- The relationship between husband and wife, Paul has said, is like the relationship between Christ and church.
- **A couple of ways:**
 - Genesis notes that man and woman were naked and not ashamed. To be naked in front of someone else usually brings with it a sense of shame, exposure.
 - The human quest is to be **known and loved...**
 - We experience that ultimately in the gospel.
 - But we also get a taste of that in marriage. Genesis 2 says that the man and woman in marriage see each other naked, and they are not ashamed...
 - "*The ecstasy and joy of sex was invented by God to give us a foretaste of the intimacy and closeness we will experience when we finally see God face to face and enter into full union with him, and into union with everyone else that loves him.*" **Tim Keller**
- Second, when a man and woman come together sexually, **"fruit" is brought into the world.** (The act of making a child is not supposed to be mechanical. Rather: "The woman puts herself in the arms of the husband and fruit (children) are born through her body; when you put yourself in arms of Christ, fruit is born into your body and into the world through you from that intimacy.)

Sex is symbolic. It is a mystery that points us beyond itself to the ultimate thing we really crave—the love of God.

Which is **why we put so much weight on it.** Good romance and sex, we think, is the essential key to a great life.

- **McDowell:** *Many people today seem to look at good sex as the answer for life. Sex is not the answer, if anything it's the question!*

That's also the reason it has such potential to go wrong.

- **CS Lewis** did a series of radio talks in the 1940's on sexuality. He said,
 - Imagine visiting a country where when the young men go off to college and get out of home for the first time, they **put up life size big colored posters**, full-color vivid pictures of... **food. Hamburgers, bacon, ice cream sundaes.** And all the guys go around to each other's room and say oh, wow!
 - **On the weekend to a club** with low lights and bumpin' and grindin' music and everyone is drooling over something on stage that is covered and slowly the cover is pulled off, bit by bit, in rhythm with the music, and as it is pulled off you see **a plate of cheese fries.** Everyone screams and starts to throw dollar bills at the plate.

- o Late at night, men **search the internet** for pictures of food and then they just stare at them and as soon as someone walks in they flip off the screen...
- o **What do you conclude?** Lewis said. "They **must be starving**, right?" Then you find out that that's **not true**. For last **40 years**, he said, people have been gluttoned with food. They have been eating like crazy. The only conclusion would be that there is **something deeply disordered** about this people's appetite for food.
- Lewis said, "That's how we are with sex." And the reason is that it points back to something deep in us that is messed up. We are missing the love of God.³

Which leads me to #2...

2. Sex is... Sacred

- (Now, don't hear that word "sacred" as an exclusively religious word. The word "sacred" means "set apart." So think here, "*Sacred to you. Your innermost being.*")
- Here is why. Paul in Ephesians 5:31 says that marriage—and the sexual act that epitomizes it—is a fusion of two souls into one being, they become one body.
 - o Sex is an actual demonstration of that. Sex is an act of physical oneness. Think about it; the bodies interlock and conjoin. They become one.
 - o Well, that physical oneness is to be matched in every other area, and when sex is separated from that context, it becomes harmful.
- ~~In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, the idea that sex was simply biological urge was common.~~
- ~~In 1 Cor 6, Paul quotes a little one-liner people used about sex: "**Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.**" You get hungry—eat. You have sexual urges? Satisfy them. Yet,~~

~~The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.~~ (The human body is much more than a **biological machine**; our human **body is the vehicle** for our soul; a **soul united to the God** of the universe!)

In vs. 19 Paul says that our bodies—if you are a believer—are literally the temple of God—God's presence dwells within you.⁴)

~~**16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."**~~ When you have sex, you become 'one body' with the person you have sex with. Notice that Paul uses the cheapest form of sex imaginable. Prostitution. Paul takes the cheapest form of sex available and says even in that there is a joining.

- **What he's saying is that sex is so much more than biology. It's a deep, soul-level unity.** Which I told you that you intuitively realize.

God had at least 3 purposes for sex. When God was creating the world, after he got done with the stars and continents and the plants, he says, "Oooh... I have an idea." And the angels said, "What is it?" God said, "You can't understand it, yet." And God created sex as a tool for animals to **procreate**. But when he got to mankind, whom he created in his image, he said, "Oh, I'm going to make it so much more!" **Unifying**: face to face. **And, he said, I'll make it a lot of fun.** That's not an afterthought. **Fun Proverbs 5:18** "A man should be ravished with his wife's breasts." Yes, that's in the Bible. Some of you college guys may have just found your first verse to memorize (notice the word 'wife'). **Sex somehow points to the eternal delight of soul we will have in heaven.** I don't know how. God didn't tell us.

³ This is found in *Mere Christianity*. Some of the details here come from Tim Keller's relating of this in a message, Tim Keller, "Sex Guidelines, part 1."

⁴ Vs. 14, and that's also going to be true for eternity. Our bodies will be resurrected and God will eternally live within them.

So Paul says...

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

When you have sex outside of marriage, you are literally damaging your own body. Other sins hurt others, Paul says. If I walk into a room and punch you in the face, you're hurt, but I'm not. When I have sex outside of marriage, I'm hurting myself. It's like taking a razor to my own soul.

- Last year I reviewed a book called *Hooked*—it's not a Christian book, but a scientific study written by a couple of neurologists showing **what having** multiple sexual partners, especially when you're young, does to your brain—it actually rewires your brain, they say, in a way that makes genuine, lasting, selfless relationships much more difficult. They say,

"The individual who goes from sex partner to sex partner is causing his or her brain to mold in such a way that eventually accepts that sexual pattern as normal... The pattern of changing sex partners therefore seems to damage their ability to bond in a committed relationship."

*"The kind of attachment damage that occurs after repeated sexual encounters is, in many respects, more pernicious than pregnancy or STD's, because it typically goes unperceived by affected individuals while causing ongoing difficulties in establishing a lifelong and satisfying relationship."*⁵

The authors use the metaphor of **"tape,"** which you have probably heard... Sex is sticky (ooh; that could be another "s." But probably a little too graphic.) **PORN** rewires the brain.

They say, *"You can no more 'try out' sex than you can 'try out' birth. The very act of sex produces a new reality that cannot be undone."*⁶

- Tim Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, p. 226 (after 1st paragraph: that's like the plotline of every episode of *Friends* I've ever seen)
- Now, to those of you **feeling overwhelmed because you have made those kinds of mistakes:** the **power of God's grace** is amazing. When **God saved us he raised Jesus** from the dead, showing that there is nothing destroyed in you that he cannot fix. Sin damages you, and can kill parts of you emotionally and spiritually, but the power of the gospel raises from the dead.
 - So if you are sitting there listening to me and your **sexual past is riddled** with mistakes—you're like, "Yes, I see, I have sinned against my own body," **run to the cross**. Healing from all sins are found there.
- But **for those of you** who have not yet made those mistakes, I'm trying to show you why you ought to obey God. It's more than just "God said so." That should be enough, but **God's instructions are good and they are for our life**. You're like, "Oh, what's it going to hurt anything?" It's going to hurt a lot!

⁵ McIlhaney and Bush, *Hooked: How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children*, 48. The non-italicized portion of this quote is from the a review in the *Journal of Human Sexuality* by Christopher Rosik: http://narth.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/JournalofHumanSexuality_Vol2.pdf HYPERLINK "http://narth.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/JournalofHumanSexuality_Vol2.pdf" Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*, 123.

- A lot of students won't want to wait to have sex because they are afraid they are going to "miss out on something." God tells you to wait to have sex precisely so you *won't miss out on something*.
- And a lot of young adults believe the **colossally stupid idea** that you need to practice up a few times on sex so on your wedding night you know what you're doing. You *don't want to look stupid*. Here's a **tip from Uncle J.D.: LOOK STUPID**. Even if you have to fake it.
 - It's not like a sport where you both get good at it; people admire how good you are at it; you go enter a contest and then win an award.⁷
- Look stupid, because **exclusivity fuels romance** in the marriage, not some sexual skill.

3. Sex is... Service

- In Ephesians 5 Paul tells us to **submit** to one another; to **lay down our lives** for each another; to **serve** each other. What does that look like sexually? Certainly that principle applies to sex.
- Questions to consider:
 - What does it mean to submit to each other sexually?
 - What does it mean to lay down your life sexually?
 - What does it mean to serve each other—to wash each other's feet—sexually? (Wash each other's feet sexually—that's a great image. Like "early Christian foreplay"?)

In another place Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 7:3 *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

- In a marriage, Paul says your body literally belongs, in a way, to the other person.
- **Girls:** You're in the grocery store—he pinches your rear end. You say, "*Stop that. Don't touch my rear end.*" He's got a verse! He says, "*That's not your rear end, that's my rear end, and I'll pinch it if I want to.*"
- **Girl says to a guy:** "I don't want to have sex yet. I want to fool around for a while. He says, "Why? My body is ready." She says, that's my body, and this is what I want to do with it."
 - She says, "I want to **snuggle**." Guy says, "No? Let's just have sex then watch Sportscenter. Better yet, let's have sex while we watch Sportscenter."
 - She says, "Nope, I have authority over that body. I want to snuggle with it. Submit."
- **In marriage I am to consider my body to be under the authority of my spouse's sexual desires.**
- **What does that look like?**
 - Well, that would mean sex is not a reward for my spouse when they've earned it, or a tool to manipulate my spouse.
 - A girl says, "*He doesn't deserve it.*" Exactly! Fulfilling your husband sexually when he doesn't deserve it means to love your husband like Jesus loves you. If God only responded to you prayer when you deserved it, would he ever answer them? God had you marry a disappointing jerk because he wanted to teach you to love like him.
 - **One of you says, "They just want to do it more than I do."** (*Traditionally, we think of men wanting to have sex more, but that's not always true. I know a lot of relationships where the woman is a lot more into it than the man.*)
 - **So if your spouse wants to have sex less than you**, one of the ways you serve them is by taking that into account.
 - **Sex as service means sex is a gift you give to one another. When we got married**, there was all the pressure to live up... We're both trying to perform. If she didn't have a good

⁷ From Andy Stanley, "New Rules."

experience, she felt like a failure. Plus, she was always judging me—he didn't do enough, and I was judging her.

- But when we started to see sex as an act of service...
- or, better yet, as covenant renewal (explain—literally, I'm giving all of me to you), that sex was about so much more than just erotic pleasure
- ...things got so much better.⁸

The point: You are to both have a servant attitude during sex.

[(5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.]

- **Don't deprive each other.** If you do, it should only be a short time, and there ought to be a lot of prayer involved. Doesn't mean when he comes into the bedroom, girl, you hop down on your knees and say, "I'm in the safe zone. Can't touch me."
- The simplest explanation of that verse if you're married, you should have sex often. How many times if "often"? I don't know; but enough to qualify as "often."
- Some of guys are like, **"This is the best Mother's Day sermon I've ever heard.** Maybe the best sermon period."
- *What if my spouse wants to have sex and for whatever reason I just can't handle it right now?*
 - I believe in the **24 hr rule:** if you say no, say yes in 24 hrs.
 - Beyond that I'd say you are depriving and probably in sin.

But what if they just won't do it? They've had a 'head-ache' that has lasted for 7.5 years?

- Be patient. Serve them by being patient with them. By forgiving them.
- Leave that between them and God and let God deal with it. If it makes you bitter and angry and raging, realize, realize that is your issue, not theirs. You have an idolatry problem. Listen to sermon #4 in this series and realize you can be a happy, fulfilled person even without having sex. And keep loving and serving them even when they don't deserve it, like Jesus did for you.
- If you are a couple like that, you may need to get some counseling. We provide some here at the Summit.

~~Bottom line: Sex is about service and covenant renewal. If you started to serve one another that way... you'd find things altogether different, I promise!~~

- **~~Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than receive." That is true even in the bedroom.~~**
- ~~There is a strange irony in it. When you begin to think about your happiness less and someone else's more, you end up finding happiness and fulfillment for yourself. Gospel irony is that happiness and fulfillment are found by thinking about it and pursuing it less.~~

SEX is SYMBOLIC, SACRED, AND SERVICE... If you're single—a word for you: Perhaps the biggest key to a happy marriage is marrying someone who loves God more than you and someone who will serve you, not themselves, first in the marriage. ~~Girls, if you are dating a guy who serves himself sexually in your relationship now, do you think he's going to magically change when you get married and start serving you in all these other areas? Be real. Don't be naïve. Character rarely changes. If you want this kind of marriage, you have to resolve to only date someone who understands this, too.~~

- I want to challenge you to a profound act of faith. It could be a life-defining act of faith. You'll trace a life-change back to this moment. Why don't you break off the relationship that is not established on the Bible, and resolve only to date someone who will serve and love God and do things his way?

⁸ See Tim and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 233–34

- I am telling you, God will always bless faith. He may not do it in exactly the way you think he will, but he will always bless faith, and I'm telling you, for the rest of your life you will trace the path of blessing back to this decision.

Because I know so many of you are single, and because this is such a big issue, I wanted to do something a little different. I want to give the pulpit to a girl I've known for a long time, and one whose walk with Christ I have admired for years. She's single, but I've watched her grow here and mature here for about 9 years. Her name is Alicia Miller, she is a 'single lady,' and I wanted you to hear from her:

Alicia Miller

Conclusion:

Here's what I've been trying to drive home today: Sex is NOT just physical. It is so much more. Sex symbolic; sacred; and service.

God gave it to us as a blessing in marriage. It's a curse everywhere else.

This is the area our idolatry and unbelief is most exposed...

This is the area our enemy does his most deceptive work!

- **Don't believe the false promises of illicit sex.**
 - Don't believe them if you're single... **no lie promises more and delivers less.** All **IDOLS** promise a lot and fail to deliver, but this one especially.
 - If you're married, don't believe the false promises that illicit affairs make.
 - Sometimes people in marriage feel like their sex life has gotten a little boring and how sweet it would be to go a little on the outside.
 - The Bible talks about this. It talks about a young man being tempted toward adultery, and he says, "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is delicious..." But (Solomon warns) the house of the adulteress leads to death, taking you down into the depths of the grave." **Proverbs 9:17; 7:27**
 - When your sex life is boring in your marriage, work at it. **LISTEN: The best sex is not the result of exotic thrill. The best sex happens when two people have labored to become one in every way in their marriage; to serve each other; to consider one another's needs as more important than their own; to wash each other's feet and lay down their lives for each other.**
 - Sex is a **renewal of the covenant**. "I am giving all of me to all of you."
 - Lifelong commitment creates great sex in marriage, not visa versa. Tim Keller says that an illicit affair may produce a few shallow shouts of ecstasy, but true, gospel-centered sex can produce tears of joy.

Sexual hurts are the deepest—sex is one of the most potentially joy-giving and potentially damaging realities in our lives **because sex is at the core** of who we are and points us beyond itself to heaven.

Jesus, your God and Creator, is the ultimate spouse.

- He is the **one who saw you** in all your shame, nakedness and loved you anyway.
- He is the **one who served** you. When you had rebelled against him and ran away, he came after you, and washed your feet by taking the sting and penalty of your sin into himself and dying for you.
- He is the **one who has the never-stopping**, never-giving-up love that you have craved all your life.

Your failure in marriage and romance points you to the fact that you're disconnected from the source of these things—Jesus. Your **unhappiness in your singleness** screams at you that something is missing—it's him.

- Jesus is the missing piece. What you've been looking for all of your life is him. You should come home to him today.