

The Crossings, Matt Powell  
Engage Your Marriage (Week 6)

I want you to think for a minute about the most beautiful place you have been in your life. Maybe you have been to Australia or the Swiss Alps. Maybe you have been to Hawaii or the mountains of Montana. Wherever it is, just think about it for a moment. Think about how you felt there—the joy, the peacefulness of a place where everything felt different; all of life's stresses were gone when you were in that place.

Now I want you to put that thought aside and try to picture this: what would it be like if you were born at Memorial Hermann Hospital, and all your life you never went anywhere beyond a 10-mile radius from that hospital? Imagine being born there, growing up there, maybe going to Stratford High School and the HTC campus, working at the hospital, and never stepping beyond that geography—never knowing anything else. Can you imagine doing life that way? Can you imagine never seeing or experiencing the beauty of all of those places we imagined a moment ago?

When God looks down at us and thinks about His creation of sex and the beauty He intended it to be, and He sees where we are at and what we have done with it, He must think . . . *Man, are they missing out! If only they could apprehend the beauty I desired it to be. Instead they are in a cement jungle looking around at something they perceive as beautiful without any idea of the truth.*

Today we are going down a path that applies to everybody in this room, married or not. And as we go down this path of looking at what God created sex to be, and what our world, our culture, has created it to be, we will be building a foundation for next week. Then we can understand why we have the issues we have. We will see that the reason we are sexually confused in our marriages is because we have allowed our culture to define for us what sex really is.

Today we are going to begin in Romans, chapter one. But first, I am going to pray before we dive in: *Father, thank you for the opportunity we have today to approach a subject that is so avoided, so not talked about and so misdealt with, yet it seems to be our true religion of the day.*

*Father, this topic that we don't like to discuss is really the object of our worship today. I pray that through this passage of scriptures you would begin to touch our hearts and minds and redefine for us what sexual intimacy is—what You desire sex to be. Show us the beauty that began in Genesis chapter two. Redefine our hearts and let us see the counter cultural path it will set us on. Help us not to be calloused or feel awkward about this subject, but free us to see that sex is Your creation, created for Your glory, and created to be beautiful in Your Kingdom. Father, it is in Your name we pray, Amen.*

If you are new with us, we have been traveling through the book Song of Songs—the only book in the Bible given entirely to marriage—and we have identified four distinct themes on what biblical love looks like. So far we have seen that biblical love is specific, it is steadfast and it is spoken. Today and next week we are going to see that biblical love is sexual.

As with many of these themes, we must go through a process before we can begin to understand the needlepoint idea for our marriages, because even though we don't realize it, we have brought a lot of baggage into the discussion. We see symptoms inside our marriages, problems and issues, but we don't understand why they are there. The reason they exist is because we have brought into the marriage a wrong definition or mindset. So this is our goal today.

We are going to take a look at Romans, chapter one, beginning in verse 18: "[For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.](#)" The wrath of God is revealed . . . sometimes we forget the reality that Paul wrote about in Romans, chapter three: "[For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation—this is a substitute—by His blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.](#)"

"The wrath of God is revealed" means that God didn't think . . . *okay, everybody is going to sin so I will decide that that is okay with me.* That would not be a just or righteous God. For Him to be just or righteous, a punishment had to be paid. What Paul is saying is that the wrath of God

was poured out on Jesus on the cross for sins committed in the past, as well as the future. Grace does not mean that no penalty for sin will ever be experienced; grace means that the penalty for sin was felt by Jesus on the cross.

Look at Romans, chapter one: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Let's be honest for a minute here. In the quietness of your minds—no hands raised, no talking out loud—join with me and think about the fact that you and I live in this state of unrighteousness. If left to our quiet, selfish, isolated selves, we would choose sin. That's who we are. And if any of you don't agree, spend a few minutes with me and I will point out a few things.

We are all there. That is our natural tendency—to choose pride, to choose selfishness. That is who we are. And Paul is saying that in this reality we suppress the truth; sinfulness exists in us. "For all have sinned and fallen short." All of us suppress truth in life; our flesh is constantly pushing out the truth of God.

Now in verse 19: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." Now we could spend an entire two days on those two verses, but what I want you to focus on is the last two words: "without excuse."

So we have the cross and we have God's wrath revealed on the cross, yet we still have this sin nature and are suppressing the truth of this book and what God wants us to do . . . to live a truly righteous, sanctified life, which will be completed when we meet Christ in heaven. I know we are throwing out some big words, but we will break it down a bit here. The point is all of us are without excuse. Verse 21 says, "For although they knew God, they did not honor . . . and the root of this word *honor* is *glory*; although they knew God, were aware of God and what He had done, they did not glorify him . . . "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they

became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."

Do you see the logical result of the situation Paul is describing here? Although they knew who God was, they did not glorify Him. Although they knew who God was and they knew the truth, they continued to suppress the truth rather than being transformed by it, so they became lost in an unsatisfying pursuit of futility.

Now let's back up a minute. Here we are—you and me. We know the reality of God, we know who He is. Whether you have put your faith in Jesus or not, if you believe the basic reality of the cross, that Jesus died to appease an Almighty God and to take upon Himself the sins of all of those who would come to know Him and follow Him, it is the same thing. We live like this today, in a wrestling match between the Holy Spirit who lives in us, and the flesh or the sin nature.

Paul talks about this in Romans, chapter eight, verse five through eight: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Again we see that opposition, those two choices, those two realities of living and pursuing.

So Paul has constructed this picture of reality: we are living, failing to glorify God, and losing ourselves in unsatisfying pursuits. From there our hearts become weak, thirsty and dark. What is dark? It is the absence of light. "Claiming to be wise—" We think we have got it all figured out, don't we? We think we have all the answers. We think we know how it is supposed to be done. "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged—hear that arrogance—and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." Exchanged, substituted. We have taken the glory of God and substituted it for something else. We have taken the Creator Himself and His glory, and we have said, "That's not good enough. We are going put creation in His place. Substitute it. Exchange it."

In verse 24: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged—again hear this repetition in this word—exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

What is the truth? In this context and in the context Paul was writing about, it is sexuality. What is the truth? Sex was created by God, for His glory, to be incredibly beautiful and beyond imagination. That is the truth. We have taken that truth created by Him and for Him, and claiming to be wise we have said, "That's not good enough. I don't feel good enough. I know what is best for me and I am going to exchange it for the created. Everything is for my glory. Everything is for my pleasure." That is what we have put in place. We are no different now than the people Paul wrote to.

I want to set the stage for you. We are reading something here that was written in the first century AD, but if you are thinking . . . *these people were really bad*, listen to some statistics I found this week. These came through another pastor who commissioned this study through a sociologist at the University of Virginia, and they are mind boggling.

The average age today for a first sexual experience is 16. Pornography is a \$60 billion dollar industry annually; \$3,000 dollars are spent on this industry every second; \$12 billion of that comes from our red, white and blue here in America. More than 200 films of pornography are released every week—more than 200! Twenty-five percent of all internet searches are pornographic terms. That means *one out of every four* terms searched on Google are pornographic terms. The average child today views internet pornography for the first time at age 11. And just to bust some of the stereotypes, of all those involved in pornography addiction, 28% are women—this isn't just a man's issue; that is getting close to half.

So when we look at Paul's words and we think . . . *Man, these people were messed up*, we forget that today we look just as bad, if not worse. It is my hypothesis that with every day we separate from the cross of Jesus Christ, we get farther and farther away from the truth. Every day we

move away from the day that He died we get farther away and exchange more of the creation for the glory of God. That is selfish pursuit, selfish desires.

Now in a room this size the reality is that a large percentage of people here have some type of sexual addiction or are participating in pornography. But the rest of you may be thinking . . . *I don't struggle with that. It doesn't have anything to do with me.* Here is what I want you to think about. Our culture, the creation, has defined sex for us. That doesn't have to mean pornography; it can simply mean we are dressing according to how the entertainment industry coming out of Los Angeles and New York says to dress. They determine what is sexy, and then five years later it trickles down to suburbia and we begin dressing in a way that was set in motion five years ago. So it's not just about pornography; it is about how the definition of sex has been hijacked from the biblical truth and exchanged for self-serving, all-about-me, my-glory-alone kind of pleasure.

In a world that defines sex as pleasure, recreation and manipulation, we wonder why married couples get so confused and messed up inside the confines of marriage. We don't even know what is right and what is wrong anymore. And every time we turn on the TV, our minds are filled with how our culture defines sex. All that is coming into our heads and here we are trying to figure out what reality looks like.

As you read and hear these scriptures, my challenge for you is to think about how big sex is. It isn't just about pornography or what happens in a bedroom; it is a mindset, a definition that infiltrates every area of your life. Think about what you watch on TV. Think about what you wear. Think about how you pursue health. Now don't get me wrong, we should pursue health; that is a biblical pursuit and we should strive to be healthy people. But I wonder how many people pursue health to be sexy because Hollywood has defined it as such. How many of us want to look good because the culture says that is sexy, so we try to look good for other people. There is a difference between that and taking care of the "temple of God."

In all of these different areas our culture has hijacked the definition of sex and infiltrated our lives, and we have got all this baggage. My question for you is this: what is that area for you? As you begin to think about that enormous definition of sex in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world, what are

those spots for you? What are those areas where you have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of creation? For some it is going to be internet pornography. For others, it is going to be the fact that you view other people as sexy, outside of your spouse, and you are involved in that. Are you giving a part of your heart away to somebody else when the very definition of sex is within the confines of marriage?

Sex was created for God's glory. Think about that for a minute. God gets glory from sex. Now when He looks down at the definition for sex we have today in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world, how much glory do you think He gets? That is what He created it for—all things: "Oh the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" We cannot fathom all the mysteries of the Creator's mind, but listen to the next words: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever." Genesis, chapter one says it is no accident that God created us the way we are and intended that we exalt, worship and glorify Him through the real definition of what sexuality is, and not through our culture-adopted, distracted, perverted definition of sex.

This is not just for a few of us. There are not just a handful of people in here addicted to internet pornography. We all have a struggle with exchanging the biblical definition of sex for the culture's definition. Where has that exchange taken place for you? You have got to figure that out and begin healing so that next week you can see how that definition begins to thrive, to blossom. As it says in Song of Songs, the vineyard begins to bear grapes. Last week we talked about those little foxes. Right now we have got a raging mountain lion that is tearing away at our marriages because we no longer know or understand what sex was created for. Why? Because we have brought in all this cultural baggage.

As Chris comes and plays, here is what I would like you to do. I want you to take out those gray pieces of paper in your worship guides. All of us in this room, beginning with me, have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of creation, pursuing an idea and a definition of sex that couldn't be farther from God's definition. My challenge for you today is to write down some

of those areas for you. Whether obvious, blatant sexual addiction that runs rampant in our culture, or whether just the things that define what sexy is, ask yourselves what you are really pursuing. For those of you who are married, are you pursuing the desires of your spouse, or is there a part of your heart you have given away to another image in your mind? What area of your life needs healing when it comes to the true meaning of sex? This may feel a little awkward, but that's okay because living a life transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ gets a little awkward sometimes.

While you are thinking about that, I am going to read you a definition of sex I put together based on a list of scriptures. *Sex is a gift created by God to experience pleasure, intimacy, procreation and unity inside of marriage in order to glorify the Creator Himself.* That is what it is really about—a gift created by God in order to experience pleasure. That is good, and there is nothing to be ashamed of here. Intimacy. Procreation. Be fruitful and multiply, Genesis chapter one. Unity. There is no greater way to experience the unity between you and your spouse outside of sexual intimacy done in a biblical fashion. That glorifies the Creator. He wants us to participate in this to bring glory to Him, not ourselves.

Once you have written your thoughts down, my next challenge to you is to exchange it back. We have exchanged the glory of God for the pursuit of creation, and what I want you to do today is exchange it back. I want you to take whatever you wrote down on that piece of paper, wad it up, and bring it over here to either one of these tables and set it down. Or you can throw it straight in that trash can if you feel better about doing that. But I want you to set it down and exchange it back for God's definition of sex.

And when you walk up, put it down, and exchange the pursuit, I challenge you to take back the definition of what sex really means according to the scripture. Married folks, next week as we begin to talk about what sex really looks like in marriage, you are not going to get past go if you don't get this today. If you don't begin to let the Holy Spirit heal your scars and the baggage that our sinfulness in this culture has created in our lives...