

# LOVE THY BODY

## Scripture readings: Genesis 1:26-31

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” <sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” <sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

## 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Sexual Immorality

<sup>12</sup> “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

## John 2:18-21

<sup>18</sup> The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” <sup>20</sup> They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” <sup>21</sup> But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

## MESSAGE:

The title of today’s message is taken from a new book entitled *Love Thy Body*, by Nancy R. Pearcey. Her book deals with the difference between the values and morals of today’s culture and the values and morals taught in the Bible. Much of this difference, she believes, springs from two radically different views of the human body—the Biblical view

and the modern secular view. The Bible teaches that our bodies belong to God: “*You are not your own, you were bought at a price.*” (1 Cor. 16:19-20) Most people today, however regard their body as their own possession. The Bible teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, holy and precious to God. Many modern people however think of their body as merely flesh and blood with little if any spiritual value. The Bible teaches that our bodies and minds are one organic whole—a unity of flesh and spirit. People today think of the mind and body as two separate entities with the mind governing the body. In effect, the body is demoted to a lower status than the mind and people believe that they can do as they please with their bodies. The controversial feminist Camille Paglia has written: “*Fate, not God, has given us this flesh. We have absolute claim to our bodies and may do with them as we see fit.*” (Camille Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps.*)

The idea that the mind and body are separate entities and that the body is inferior to the mind has had a lot of influence on how people today treat their bodies—and the bodies of others. Two controversial issues of our day are good examples of this: homosexuality and abortion. These are real and pressing issues for Christians, and we need to deal with them **as Christians.**

Let’s talk about homosexuality first. The argument that homosexual relationships—including marriage—should enjoy the same moral and legal status as heterosexual relationships and marriage rests to a large extent upon the idea that a person has no choice in determining his sexual identity. He is what he is and can’t help it. But—and this is new—it is now said that it is his *mind* and not his *body* that determines what he is. He says, “*I am what I think I am and that fact trumps everything else.*” His sexual identity consists of the sexual urges he feels and he is entitled to honor them. Therefore he has the authority to do whatever he wants with his body. God may have biologically designed him in intricate detail to be and function as a man, but he says that he is a woman trapped in a man’s body, and his “*I am*” trumps God’s “*You are.*”

A thought has arisen in the Christian community that maybe God makes certain people gay. But that would mean that God creates and approves of that which he calls a sin. And if a homosexual relationship is not a sin, how about other sexual sins? Many people are inclined to lust, so can they justify adultery or fornication by saying that God made them that way? That would make God inconsistent, to say the least. It would mean that God deliberately sets up a conflict between body and mind rather than designing them to work together in harmony. It would also mean that many homosexuals who have abandoned homosexuality and returned to heterosexual lifestyles and marriages are liars and hypocrites—even though many of these conversions have resulted from coming to faith in Jesus Christ. From a biological point of view, homosexuality is in direct conflict with evolutionary theory since evolution is said to occur through the random occurrence of competitive advantage—often referred to as “the survival of the fittest.” But there can be no competitive advantage to homosexuality since homosexual activity cannot result in procreation. People thus attracted would have been eliminated long ago by the process of evolution.

The fact is, however, theological and biological arguments persuade no one except those who are already persuaded. The real question for homosexuals is the same question that confronts us all: do we define ourselves by our standards or by God's standards? Do we follow the herd instinct—or do we follow God? Most important of all, how do we find peace—peace with ourselves, peace with others and peace with God?

There is no question that the Church finds itself in an awkward and difficult position on this issue. The Bible clearly calls homosexual behavior a sin. We cannot equivocate on that. Yet the Bible also instructs us to model love and forgiveness to ALL sinners. Homosexual behavior is no greater a sin and no less a sin than any other sin. In God's eyes, to ignore the Sabbath is as great a sin as engaging in homosexual relations. That we must keep in mind. And ours is not to judge, but to love and serve. Therefore we should welcome with open arms any homosexual who wishes to worship with us. If he repents of his homosexual activities, I would assure him that he had God's forgiveness and love and urge him to welcome God's healing power into his life. If he did not want to repent and felt entitled to his sin, I would advise him against taking communion but urge him at all costs to continue worshiping with us. This is the same advice I give to heterosexual couples who I know are living together but not married. The point is that only God can change a human heart and only God can give us the power to abandon a sin. And I would pray constantly for God to do for this man or woman what only He can do.

The other issue—abortion—is at least as controversial for Christians as homosexuality. The Church is all over the map on this issue—from the Roman Catholic Church which calls it murder to the United Church of Christ which says it is a woman's right to exercise. And nowhere does the argument that *"My body is my possession and I can do whatever I want to do with it"* hold more sway than in the area of abortion rights. It all began with *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. Now it's important to understand that even at the time of *Roe v. Wade*, the life in a mother's womb was regarded as a human life. Upon conception, a fertilized egg or zygote possesses in embryonic form everything that a mature adult possesses and, barring interference, it will seamlessly develop into a fully grown human being. This was recognized by a majority of the scientific and medical community at the time and it's recognized in the text of *Roe v. Wade*. The court ruled, however, that while the life in the uterus is a human life, it is not yet a *person* under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. Personhood replaced human life as a legal category and the human life in the womb could be terminated at the will of the mother without legal consequences. This gave birth to the maxim that "a woman has a right to choose"—a rallying cry that has persisted up to the present day. The will or choice of the woman trumps the right of her conceived child to live as long as it is in her womb.

This, of course, raises an obvious question: When does a human life become a person? There is a bright red line between pre-conception and conception, but where is the bright red line between human life and personhood? The answer is that there is none—only a

dizzying array of opinions. The traditional opinion was that a baby became a person when he was born. But what makes a newborn infant more of a person than he was five minutes before being born? Is his personhood dependent on our ability to see him? He is just as dependent upon his mother for survival as he was five minutes before. Another opinion that holds great sway today is that a baby is entitled to become a person only if he is wanted by his mother. Every child is wanted by God, but it is said that the mother's judgment is more important than God's. There are even those who argue that childbirth itself does not bestow personhood. Bioethicist John Harris scoffs at the idea that being born qualifies a human life as a person. If a human being doesn't have a conscious will to live he is not a person and, "...death does not deprive him of anything he can value." (John Harris, "Wrongful Birth," *Philosophical Ethics in Reproductive Medicine*, 1990) Personhood, in other words, is defined in terms of cognitive development. James Watson, the co-discoverer of the DNA double helix advocates waiting three days after childbirth before deciding whether a child should be allowed to live. (*Pacific News Service, January 1978*) His colleague, Francis Crick, agrees. "No newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and if it fails these tests, it forfeits the right to life." (James Watson, "Children from the Laboratory," *Prism: The Socioeconomic Magazine of the American Medical Association*, 1972) Princeton philosophy professor Peter Singer says, "Even a three-year old is a gray case." (Mark Oppenheimer, "Who Lives? Who Dies?—The Unity of Peter Singer," 2002, pp. 24-29) After all, how much cognitive function can a toddler have?

So we have now reached the point where two Nobel Prize-winning scientists, a prominent bioethicist and an Ivy League professor of philosophy have no problem with infanticide. When the body is relegated to a possession and human intellect rejects the idea that there is a God in heaven who dispenses moral truth, the human intellect can take us into some pretty scary places. You can see the horrors that follow our refusal to call a human life a human life.

For many of its critics, though, when the Church opposes homosexuality and abortion, it is on the wrong side of history. That in resisting what is called "progress" we are condemning ourselves to irrelevance, stagnation and ultimately, demise. But who is really on the wrong side of history? And what exactly constitutes "progress?"

The Graeco-Roman world of Jesus' time was intellectually quite advanced. The Greeks gave us philosophy, drama, physics, biology and geometry—the rudiments of western culture. The Romans put this knowledge to use and built an empire that lasted a thousand years. There was much to be proud of. On the other hand, Graeco-Roman culture was morally abhorrent. Prostitution and venereal disease were rampant. Infanticide was common: Plato, Cicero and Tacitus all approved of disposing of unwanted babies by simply abandoning them and leaving them to die. Slavery was common and house slaves—especially young girls and boys—were routinely subjected to the sexual predations of their owners. Engaging in homosexual relationships was considered a normal part of a boy's education. And abortion, of course, was common.

Into this world arose a new religion called Christianity which insisted that sex should be confined to marriage and that all other forms of sexual activity were sinful. A religion which called children gifts of God—whatever their “cognitive development”—rather than inconveniences to be disposed of like trash. A religion which regarded women and men as equals in God’s sight. A religion that said that loving service to others was superior to power and authority. A religion that despite horrendous persecution drew thousands upon thousands of people—especially women. In the deepest meaning of the word, Christianity was progressive, bringing moral order to the world along with physical and spiritual benefits unparalleled in human history.

Now we are living in a culture where the influence of Christianity is shrinking and its voice is growing dimmer and dimmer. The result is that society is regressing—not progressing—as it returns to the moral values of the ancient Graeco-Roman world.

What do we do? We stand firm—as a church and as Christians—and witness with our minds and bodies and lives to the only Savior of mankind, and leave the rest with Him. For with Him, all things are possible.

Amen.