

IS SEXUAL PURITY POSSIBLE?

20th August 2017

Readings: Judges 13:1-5; 14:1-3; 16:1-3

Is sexual purity possible? Now there's a question! It's controversial, it's emotive and I certainly have your attention. But as I was preparing this message I kept thinking, so many people aren't even asking this question. Many people look at Christians as if we're a sandwich short of a picnic and ask, "Why bother? Why bother with sexual purity? Given sexual purity means sex only between a husband and wife or abstinence, why bother? With effective ways to stop pregnancies and sexual diseases then surely sex between consenting adults is a good thing, a healthy thing and lots of fun". So we're told.



To answer the question "Why bother with sexual purity?" I prepared an explanation showing sex is a gift from God and so wonderful. It's powerful so we need to handle it with care. And it impacts our core identity so we better get it right. However it was way way too long for an introduction. In fact, it became a second sermon - which is a bit much for any of us on a Sunday morning. So I've added this mini sermon as an appendix to the manuscript. There are typed copies in the foyer and online. Or you can email Rose and she'll stick one in the mail for you.

So back to the original question, "Is sexual purity possible?" And as Samson is our focus you may think, "He's hardly a good example?" From this morning's Bible readings you'll have picked up Samson's wasn't in the slightest bit interested in sexual purity. However, God works with flawed people. Sometimes we're so flawed we serve as an example of what not to do - as a warning. But God's also uses our flaws to help us come to our senses and glorify his name. Both of these we see in Samson's story. Yes, his flaws are a warning but also a means to glorify God.

So, turn with me to Judges 14:1-3. As you do so, a few words about chapter 13 and Samson's remarkable birth. Chapter 13 tells of his parents desperately wanting children but couldn't. "Sterile and childless" the Bible describes them. But an angel appears and announces to Samson's mother she'll conceive a boy who'll grow up and begin the rescue of Israel. The angel leaves instructions. The lad must be brought up special way, including not having his hair cut.

Now let's pause for a moment. No other judge had such a beginning. We have to go to Isaac and Samuel as the only other Old Testament examples of angels announcing their birth. So what do we expect from Samson? We expect big things -

great deeds and amazing feats. What then his first great deed? What amazing feat will he perform? How will he begin the rescue of Israel?

Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."... But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me. Judges 14:1-3

What on earth is Samson doing? He's called to defeat the enemy not sleep with the enemy. His parents see his folly and suggest he marry a good Jewish girl. But no, Samson won't have it. So, the wedding is arranged. However things quickly sour. Samson gets into a serious argument with the wedding guests - remember they're Philistines. Eventually his bride is given to another man. Samson is furious and single handedly kills over a thousand Philistines. In retaliation the Philistines burn his bride and father-in-law alive.

This then is the first story of Samson. Now before we try and make sense of this we'll let's turn to the very next story. We'll see if he's learnt anything

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. Judge 16:1.

No, hasn't learned a thing! So, let's pause and see what we are to make of these two stories? Well, through Samson's flaws we can learn two keys to help protect sexual purity

1. Guard your eyes

Firstly, guard your eyes. For Samson, and for men in general, crossing the line sexually starts with the eyes. In 14:1 "I have seen a Philistine woman". In 16:1 "there he saw a prostitute". What Samson saw, Samson wanted. He was impulsive and because of his strength - he got away with it for far too long. So the first point is guard the eyes of your heart.

Job put it like this,

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. Job 31:1

Whereas Samson was happy to look lustfully at the ladies, Job made it a matter of prayer and habit to guard his eyes. "Lord help me not to look at women with lust or desire".

In practice what does this look like? Someone once asked what the difference was between an admiring glance at a woman and a lustful one. The answer was, "About three seconds"

And for us in the 21st century guarding our eyes is all the harder because of the ease pornography can be accessed. Whereas in the past porn was a magazine

purchased across a counter or a DVD rented from the restricted section of a video store, now pornography just the click of a mouse away. And because it's so accessible, even popping up in unrelated searches, we have to be more on our guard. Praying Job's prayer of not looking lustfully after a girl is a practical prayer - one to make a habit of. It also brings us to the second learning from Samson's flaws...

2. Don't Cross boundaries

We need to respect boundaries, not cross them. Where was Samson when he spotted his bride to be? He'd crossed the boarder into the land of the Philistines. He chose to enter enemy territory. Later, when he saw the prostitute he'd not only just crossed boarder he'd entered into the middle of enemy territory. He was in one of their major cities - the city of Gath.

The question has to be asked, "What was he doing in enemy territory?" Well, with his wandering eyes he was looking for trouble. Now, what are the implications for us? How can we put this warning in practice?

Well, as mentioned there are websites, chat rooms and social media that encourages sexual impurity. Accessing these sites is like crossing the border into enemy territory. Notice how progressive it was for Samson. First he just crossed a little but then crossed further and further.

And there are other modern day examples. In the workplace we may work with someone of the opposite sex who's attractive. Working closely together means we need to know and stick to boundaries. Working late in the office with that person, traveling in the car alone with that person, business lunches with that person. If these become patterns then sexual impurity is just a matter of time. So unlike Samson, we need to know the boundaries and respect the boundaries. Samson put himself in temptations way and allowed his eyes to draw himself into sexual impurity

Well, that's the first two stories of Simon. Now for the third. Surely he's learned something by now.

Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. Judges 16:4

I feel like hitting my head against a brick wall! Third story and his third foray into sexual impurity. Now as we work through this story you may find yourself asking - especially if you're a woman - you may find yourself asking, "Could Samson really be that stupid? Could a man be so besotted he does what everyone else sees as just plain dumb? Could a man be so filled with desire for a woman that he would make the same mistake over and over again? Surely no man is that dumb!" Men, we know the answer - don't we. The answer is... yes. Men can be this dumb. In fact some men here are shaking their head on the inside, blushing and thinking, "Been there, done that. Man, how could I have been that stupid."

Now if men can be stupid in the area of sex what about women? Do they have a common flaw? Though on dangerous ground I'll answer - just for balance. Whereas men can be dumb, women can be gullible. You believe what men say! You take us at face value. So if a man says "I love you", then your sexual guard comes down. So the smooth talking "Let's move in together until we can afford to get married" works. No, No. No. If he can't afford to marry you he can't afford you full stop. Or, "Let's move in together to see if we're compatible, whether it'll work". No. No. No. You do that with a car. "I'd like to take it out for a spin before I buy" No, you try before you buy with a car not with your girlfriend. So ladies - don't be so gullible. And men - ah even though it's wasted on you - but don't be so dumb.

Let's see how this plays out with Samson and Delilah. Now Samson's plain dumb while Delilah may or may not be gullible but she's certainly shrewd and calculating.

Again Samson's in Philistine territory and Delilah's caught his eye. So, the Philistine leaders approach Delilah with money - lots of money. In today's terms, well over \$100,000. And all she has to do is tell them the secret to Samson's strength. Now, we who know its God's Spirit that gives him strength and this strength is symbolised by his long hair. So, let's see how Delilah extracts his secret from him. Judges 16:6-7

So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh thongs that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man." Judges 16:6-7

So the Philistines bring her seven fresh thongs and while asleep she ties his hands. And with men waiting to pounce she wakes Samson expecting him to be quickly overpowered. But no, he snaps the cords and his secret is secure. Now, this should have ended their relationship then and there. I mean, she asks how he can be subdued, that night he wakes bound in exactly that manner and Philistine soldiers happen to be there. It's like, Samson, how could you be so dumb?

Well he is, so Delilah has a second go. "By new ropes I can be bound" he responds. So that night while he slumbers, she ties Samson with new ropes. Again she wakes him, "Samson the Philistines are upon you". But he snaps the ropes as if they were threads and his secret is still secure.

Delilah turns up the charm and Samson's responds, "If you weave the seven braids of my hair I can be subdued". And low, a few hours latter he wakes to find his braids weaved as he described. Come on Samson - wake up! Delilah's stringing you along. Yet, his secret remains secure.

Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the

secret of your great strength.” With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death. Judges 16:15–16

Nagged and prodded, day after day - day in and day out - until worn down Samson tells her everything. So while he slumbers she cuts his hair.

“Samson, the Philistines are upon you!”

He awoke from his sleep and thought, “I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison. Judges 16:20-21

And so Samson’s fate is sealed. And as he turns the large millstone with a whip licking his back, what are we to make of Samson? What can we learn? Well, because he didn’t guard his eyes and crossed boundaries - because he ignored God’s plan for sexual purity - Samson’s life was ruined, destroyed, left without hope. Sobering for each of us. Yet, remember how earlier I said his flaws are both a warning and a means to glorify God. So, there’s hope for Samson. Well, let’s see how he glorifies God.

You see, after spending time doing time the Philistines put him on display in their great temple. You know how in the playing field a child will say, “Well, my Dad’s bigger than your Dad”? It’s very much the same here. While mocking Samson they’re boasting, “Our god, Dagon, is way stronger than the God of the Israel.” But whilst God’s being mocked no one noticed Samson’s hair had grown back. And so with arms outstretched, resting on two pillars, Samson prays...

O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more... Judges 16:28

In these brief words we see a different Samson. We see a humble Samson, a Samson looking to God, a Samson so appalled God is being mocked he wants to put things right the only way he knows how. So with arms outstretched he pushes the pillars and they, with the whole temple, collapse. And more Philistines are killed in Samson’s death than all his other his exploits.

You see, the most important moment of Samson’s life was his death. The most faithful event of his life, is how he dies. He prays, he humbles himself, he trusts God, in death. For at last, and at the very last, he begins the rescue of God’s people - just as the angel foretold so many years before. Not only this, but with arms outstretched in death Samson points to Christ. For like Samson, Christ stretched out his arms and gave his life to rescue God’s people. Yes, Jesus gave up his life to rescue you and I - not from the Philistines - but from sin and death. Yet, though similar Christ’s death was different, more wonderful, in least two ways.

Firstly, Samson was in the Philistine temple because of disobedience. Not so Jesus. He went to the cross because of obedience. Obedient to his Father, even though it cost him everything. Hebrews 12: 2 says, "For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame". Secondly, Samson's death led only to a partial victory. His death only began the rescue (Judge 13:5), whereas Jesus' death was a full and complete rescue. Jesus conquered sin and death for all time - forever. Indeed, when we believe in Jesus we're adopted as God's children and have the gift of eternal life. Death is defeated in our lives.

So, Samson - one of the most flawed leaders in the Bible - his death was his finest hour. Why? because he died humbly depending on God and because this death points to the saving work of Christ and the cross.

And as I close I want to return to the opening question. Is sexual purity possible? Given our natural desires and a culture encouraging sexual freedom is it possible for you and I to please God in the area of sex. Well, from Samson's flaws we've learnt to...

1. Guard our eye
2. Don't cross boundaries

And though there's much in the Bible on sexual purity - these two will keep you on the right track. Except there's a catch.

Guarding our eyes and not crossing boundaries only works if we're motivated. How many here have known these two truths yet in a weak moment, or even with intent, crossed the boundary in the area of sexual purity. We've let ourselves down. We've let God down. How many? (*don't put your hand up - rhetorical question*). You see, in the area of sex - knowing what's right and doing what's right are two very different things.

So, how do we please God in this area? Well, we can't in our own strength. So what's our way forward? The answer is not just knowing the right thing but knowing the right person. It's having a personal relationship with Jesus that makes the difference. It's only when we allow Christ to captivate the affections of our heart that we can live rightly in this area. You see it's getting knowing what he did for us on the cross from our head into our heart. You see it's Jesus we follow not a bunch of good advice and warnings. It's only as we look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, depending on the Holy Spirit that we can live a life pleasing to God. A life that includes sexual purity and joy that knows no bounds. Amen

Appendix

Sexual purity - is it possible? If you ask many New Zealander's they'll respond with, "Why bother?" So, in a response to, "Why bother with sexual purity?" let's see what God's Word tells us about sex

a. Sex is a gift from God

Firstly, sex is a gift from God. It's not as if God when Adam and Eve first made love was sitting in heaven and looking down thought, "Goodness me, what're they up too?" He didn't call the angels over and say, "Look, isn't that the strangest thing you've ever seen". No, sex is a gift of God given to man and woman, to a husband and wife.

Now, Genesis 2:4 is core to any discussion on sexuality.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

This becoming "one flesh" is through the act of sex. Now, there's a lot more than can be said here but for now we remember sex is gift from God, it was given before the fall -before sin entered the world - and it's a good and wonderful thing

b. Sex is powerful

Secondly sex is powerful - very powerful - and therefore potentially dangerous. Now, to help has gain perspective let me ask, "Why don't we give a 10 year old a chainsaw for a birthday present? A real chainsaw, with a really sharp chain. Why, when an adult get's a chainsaw do they carefully follow the start up procedures?" The answer to both questions is, "So they don't chop their leg off, or a hand!"

So, just like operating any powerful and potentially dangerous gift, sex needs to be respected. This gift comes with God's instructions, "Enjoy, but handle with care". And this same Genesis verse, 2:24, gives us the first and most important instruction. Sex is designed to be between husband and wife, male and female, and no other. So, when sex occurs outside marriage think of forester starting a chainsaw incorrectly, it swinging up and hitting them on the side of the head!

c. Sex influences our identity and self esteem

Thirdly, sex impacts our identity and self esteem. Now, who we are - at our core - is all about being created in God's image and how we relate to God. However, sex has a powerful influence at this level. I'm not sure why, but it is? So an unhealthy expression of sex hits us badly at the core of who we are and our self esteem. In contrast sex in its right place, within marriage, enhances our identity and builds up self esteem. I repeat sex is not at the core of who we are. We can live a fulfilled, single life, however whether expressed rightly or wrongly, sex effects our identity and self esteem in a deep and significant manner.

So back to the question many non-church folk ask, "Does sexual purity matter?" The answer is, "Yes, big time". Why? Firstly, its a gift of God, a wonderful, amazing

gift. And we respect and honour God when it is expressed as he designed. Secondly, though wonderful, this gift is powerful, and potentially dangerous - very much a "handle with care" gift. Thirdly though not core, sex impacts our identity and self esteem.

And these are same reasons Satan sees our sexuality as a key battlefield. Satan hates God and out of spite wants to despoil God's gift. Nothing pleases him more than twisting this gift to our pain and destruction. And because it's so powerful he can turn more people away from God than most any other vice. And he also takes great delight in see our self-esteem crushed and identity confused by the misuse of sex.

So I can now start the sermon. We're clear on the importance of sexual purity. We also have a working definition where sexual purity involves sex between husband and wife or abstinence. We're also reminded sexuality is a key battlefield for our souls....