

FACING THE TRUTH



6 We have committed wickedness, with our
 fathers, we have done evil, and our
 fathers have done wickedly, and we
 have not loved kindness.
 7 Our fathers have despised thy word,
 and they have despised thy counsel,
 and they have despised thy voice,
 and they have despised thy word,
 and they have despised thy counsel,
 and they have despised thy voice,
 and they have despised thy word.
 8 Nevertheless, thy wrath is not kindled
 against us, neither art thou angry
 with us, because we have despised
 thy word, and we have despised
 thy counsel, and we have despised
 thy voice, and we have despised
 thy word.
 9 He rebuked the Red Sea also,
 and it was dried up:
 and he made the deep naked,
 and he made the high land low.
 10 He hath made the sea dry,
 and he hath made the deep naked,
 and he hath made the high land low,
 and he hath made the sea dry,
 and he hath made the deep naked,
 and he hath made the high land low.
 11 He hath made the sea dry,
 and he hath made the deep naked,
 and he hath made the high land low,
 and he hath made the sea dry,
 and he hath made the deep naked,
 and he hath made the high land low.

BOOK V
 107 Oh, give thanks unto Jê-
 hô'vâh; for he is good;
 for his lovingkindness endureth
 for ever.
 2 Let the redeemed of Jê-hô'vâh
 say so.



FACING THE TRUTH

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Series Summary

Over the course of four weeks, we are going to be diving into some of the most hot-button issues in our culture today. Specifically, we're going to look at what the Bible has to say about each of these issues so that we can make sure we are aligning our minds and hearts with the truth of God's Word rather than just going along with what is popular in culture. As we all consistently face the temptation to fall in with the opinions of those around us, my prayer is that this series will help us gain confidence in what is true according to our Heavenly Father so that we can stand strong in our faith and in our beliefs when we're challenged with culture's distortion of the truth.

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Wed Before Bed

Facing The Truth | Week 1 | 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

INTRODUCTION

As much as it pains me to say it, in our culture today, there is no such thing as committed sex; it is casual sex. Since 1960, the rate of marriage has been declining steadily and here now in what is best described as a low-commitment culture of “sex without strings and relationship without rings.” To go a step further, by the age of 18, over 75 percent of those who never attend church and almost 53 percent of those who do attend church weekly are no longer virgins. So as we look at our text in I Thessalonians 4, keep one thing in mind. The sex drive is God-given and there is nothing wrong with sex. It is just that God-given sex should be God-guided sex. God has a plan, a place, and a purpose for sex. When that plan is followed and that purpose is fulfilled, that is when sex is best. You’ve got to remember – It is God’s will that you don’t say, “I will” until you say, “I do.” God not only wants what is best for you, but He wants it when it is best for you, and when you get it, He wants it to be the best it can be. This can be true for you if you align yourself with the following three statements.

KEY POINTS

1. Sexual Purity Is God’s Will For Us

Normally, I can’t always tell a person what God’s will is for his or her life, but I can on this topic without equivocation or hesitation when we look at Scripture: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality” (I Thessalonians 4:3).

Paul doesn’t mince words here. He says there is a difference between godly desires and ungodly desires when it comes to sex. Godly sexual desires will end up in biblical marriage. Ungodly, sinful desires will end up outside the context of biblical marriage. Put simply, it is God’s will that we avoid sexual immorality.

If you read this verse in its original language, the Greek word “porneia” is used, which gives us our English word “pornography.” It can refer to any type of sexual sin generally, but here Paul is specifically talking about “fornication.” Specifically, it is God’s will that you should be “sanctified.”

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The word “sanctified” literally means “to be set apart.” When you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior your body becomes His body. You can’t do just anything with your body that you want to do, because it is no longer your body. Rather, your body should be a living sacrifice to the Lord, and you should strive to keep it pure by fleeing from sexual immorality.

2. Sexual Purity Is God’s Work In Us

Sexual purity is not just something you live; it is something that you learn, and God will teach you how to do it. He says so if you keep reading today’s key passage, “...that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God” (I Thessalonians 4:4-5).

When it comes to your sexuality, you are going to give your body over to one or two things: passionate lust or perfect love. There is a big difference between those two things. Lust takes what it shouldn’t from someone else. Love gives what is best for someone else. Lust uses another person. Love blesses another person. Lust is desiring for yourself. Love is desiring what God wants for the other person. Lust is saying no to sexual purity. Love is saying no to sexual immorality. Therefore, in order for us to choose love over lust, we need to allow God to do a work in our hearts when it comes to our actions and thoughts around sexual purity.

3. Sexual Purity Is God’s Word To Us

If you listen to the culture around you, you will hear it loud and clear. You don’t need a piece of paper to fulfill your sexual desires whenever you want to, with whomever is willing, wherever you can, and it is nobody’s business. That is what culture will say, but this is what Scripture says, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit” (I Thessalonians 4:7-8).

So here is the question, “Who or what are you going to listen to?” The culture will call you toward sexual immorality. God will call you to sexual purity. If you reject this message I’m giving you, you are not rejecting me; you are rejecting the very God who you say has given you His Holy Spirit. This is why it’s so important that we are aware of what Scripture says is true when it comes to sexual purity so that we can pursue what God loves and flee from what God hates.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What surprised you about the statistics surrounding sex, marriage, and commitment that were shared in this message?
2. When was a time you suffered the negative consequences of sexual immorality, whether it was committed by you or someone close to you?
3. What is one practical way you can choose sexual purity today and flee from sexual immorality?

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Model Marriage

Facing The Truth | Week 2 | Genesis 1:27-28; 2:1-24

INTRODUCTION

There is a line that is clear when it comes to where you stand on marriage, and you will either be on one side or the other. You will either be on the side of celebration by accepting what culture says or condemnation by affirming what God says. So here is my simple message today. Model marriage is what God has designed and what God has defined. In order to get this right, we are going to go back to the first wedding that resulted in the first marriage in history. As you are going to see, I got this idea from Jesus, because the only time Jesus was asked specifically regarding divorce, He went back to the first book of the Bible and so will we. When we do this, we will see what a true model marriage is.

KEY POINTS

1. We Must Understand The Divine Pattern Of Marriage

The first marriage was intended to be a model marriage. It was God’s visual example of why marriage is important, what it ought to be like, and who should be married. With this in mind, I want to point you to what Jesus said about marriage, and I want you to notice what He did. Jesus quotes two verses from Genesis. He quoted Genesis 2:24, which really related to the question of divorce by saying, “What God has joined together let no one separate.” That is all He really needed to say, but before that, He quoted Genesis 1:27, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

This verse had nothing to do with divorce; rather, it was talking about the sexual difference between a male and a female. You might think that would be irrelevant to the question of divorce today if someone’s sex doesn’t make any difference in marriage, but Jesus does quote it. The clear point is that, according to Jesus, marriage is to be between a male and a female.

Jesus said going all the way back to creation that this was the model marriage. For a marriage to be marriage, it must have two qualities: it must be monogamous (not polygamous) and it must be exclusively heterosexual. God did not give Adam two, three, or four helpers. He only gave one. He didn’t give Adam another male. He gave Adam a female. This is the definition of a model marriage, one that is clearly described in Scripture.

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Model Marriage

Facing The Truth | Week 2 | Genesis 1:27-28; 2:1-24

2. We Must Understand The Divine Purpose Of Marriage

We are told that God created the male and then the female in His own image. They were alike in that they were human, but they were different in their sexuality, but that was for a reason. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:28).

The very first responsibility God gave to the very first couple was to be fruitful and increase in number. In other words, to procreate – to have children in His image to be multiplied through both men and women, and He wanted both men and women to rule over the earth. He also wanted to have future generations of people who would love him and follow Him and inherit the blessing that He promised them.

Now, this might seem obvious, but I think it’s worth stating that if God had created either two men or two women to be married, He certainly would have never given the command to be fruitful and multiply because two men and two women can’t multiply anything. By the very fact that this is the unique, physical relationship that can produce children, God was also saying that children should be raised by a father and a mother. There are only two kinds of people who have the ability to produce the physical love in a relationship that makes children possible and that is male and female. Therefore, with this divine purpose in mind, we can clearly see God’s ideal for a model marriage.

3. We Must Understand The Divine Picture Of Marriage

Our God loves pictures, and He loves using His creation to point back to Him and to make it easier for us to understand His will and His ideals. There is an incredible picture that marriage is to portray – a picture of Jesus and the church and his relationship to the church. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Keep in mind, the church and Jesus are not the same. They are different. The church and Jesus are united. It is that marriage between the male and the female that is to be a reflection of this heavenly marriage between Jesus and his people. The truth is a man and a man or a woman and a woman cannot reflect the union of Christ and the church. Otherwise, it would be Christ and Christ or church and church.”

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So we see how this first marriage was to be the model for every marriage. That is why it's important that we understand what marriage should be like and who should be married because marriage is God's ideal idea. So as we come to understand what marriage should look like by His divine picture, we can gain clarity on the truth about marriage even when culture is trying to feed us lies about it.

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Model Marriage

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did you learn anything new in today's message about how Scripture addresses marriage? If so, what did you learn?
2. What were your thoughts on how Jesus addressed marriage in the gospels by referring back to what was written in Genesis?
3. In your own words, how would you describe the divine picture of marriage that God intended for people to portray?

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

Pro-Life For Life

Facing The Truth | Week 3 | Jeremiah 1:1-5

INTRODUCTION

When you read the phrase, “pro-life” you think about two things – right? Abortion and politics. Well in this message, I am going to leave the politics out of it. I want to make the case today that the pro-life position is truly the only logical, biological, and theological position that you can take if you are willing to face the truth. The thing I want you to keep in mind today is this – the right to life is the right side for life.

KEY POINTS

1. Being Pro-Life Is Biologically Confirmed

There are so many different routes we could take when it comes to explaining the validity of life at the point of conception. But today, I’ll just share a couple. First, you often hear women use the phrase, “It’s my body, so it’s my decision.” And while it is true that women have their own bodies, the baby is not part of that body. The baby is a completely different living organism. It has its own blood type, its own sex, and its own distinct and separate DNA and genetic material. Therefore, when someone chooses to have an abortion, they are making a choice that impacts someone else’s body, not just their own.

Second, a baby develops so quickly in the womb that often many people are unaware of just how much babies are sensing, hearing, and feeling in the early stages of life. A study from Great Britain recently found that babies very early in the term can recognize and distinguish between tastes. Later in the term, they can recognize words, tunes, and languages. As early as six weeks after conception babies can feel it when doctors inflict pain. I won’t tell you all the gruesome ways that babies are aborted, but here is the truth. If abortion procedures happen anywhere except inside a mother’s womb, not only would the outrage be immediate and overwhelming, but people would be going to jail. Simply put, pro-life is biologically confirmed.

2. Being Pro-Life Is Logically Consistent

The heart of the question of abortion is this – either what is conceived is a human being or it is not. I am not questioning the humanity of a child in the womb, but that is what the Supreme Court said in Roe v. Wade in the 14th Amendment.

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The 14th Amendment says that the state shall not deprive any “person” of life without due process of law. When the amendment was written, the word for “person” was a synonym for the word “human,” and they could have used the word “human.” That is very important because when the Supreme Court decided this issue, it did this – if the suggestion of personhood of the unborn is established, the appellant’s pro-abortion-case, of course, collapses, for the fetus’s right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the 14th Amendment.

In other words, the court arbitrarily decided without any scientific or medical evidence whatsoever that there is a difference between a “person” and a human. As we have already seen, the problem now is that pro-choice people have been painted into a corner because again the scientific community recognizes that what is conceived in the womb of a woman is indeed a human being. Therefore, if we want to look at this issue logically, we must acknowledge that abortion is in violation of the 14th Amendment

3. Being Pro-Life Is Logically Commanded

In Jeremiah 1:5, the Lord makes a simple statement that packs a big punch when it comes to this topic we’re discussing today. He starts by saying, “Before I formed you in the womb...” (Jeremiah 1:5).

The word “formed” means “to weave” like you would weave a blanket or “put together” like you would put pieces of a puzzle together. This is referring to how conception in the birth process takes place. We know that what is first formed in the womb of a mother at conception is called an “embryo.” The Lord is saying, “It is my hands that are at the very beginning of taking that sperm and that egg and knitting them together to become a human being.”

Now listen to the next thing God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...” (Jeremiah 1:5). The word “knew” doesn’t mean to just recognize or be familiar with. It refers to the way a husband becomes to know his wife after they are married. It would be better translated as “love.” God says to Jeremiah, “I didn’t just love you at conception. I loved you before conception.” God loved you and loved me before our parents even met, and before we were even conceived. Every baby is not a human idea; every baby is God’s idea. Every life is precious to God – born, unborn, conceived, or even not yet conceived. As believers, we should have the same mindset as our Heavenly Father.

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Pro-Life For Life

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Where do you stand on the pro-life/pro-choice debate? Why do you believe the way you do regarding this issue?
2. Did you learn anything new about the creation of a new life from today's message? If so, what did you learn?
3. How does it feel to know the Lord loved you and knew you before you were ever born?

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Gender Reveal

Facing The Truth | Week 4 | Genesis 1:23; 2:23

INTRODUCTION

Today, we are dealing with the phenomenon of transgenderism. The percentage of people that identify as transgender in the United States varies somewhere between 0.3 and 0.6%. To deal with this issue, in my study, I've determined as a follower of Jesus that there are three things we have to consider as we talk about this issue: feelings, fact, and faith. Or to put it another way, you have to talk about transgender and psychology, transgender and biology, and transgender and theology. We're going to look at all three of these in today's message, so let's dive in.

KEY POINTS

1. Let's Consider The Psychological Feelings

When preparing this sermon I had just finished an extended email correspondence with a man who has transitioned to into a woman. We had a very respectful conversation and from what this person told me I believe this person truly does have a relationship with Jesus. This person let me know that if the transition had not taken place, suicide was the only other option because it was unbearable psychological torture.

The person attempted to make the point that many transgender Christians desire to be in the Will of God, but they believe that the biological sex the Creator created them with at conception doesn't correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth. This person even made the further point that it was the Spirit of God that led them to make this transition.

The point I made to this person that I also want to say to you is this. The question is not whether people like this and feelings like this are real. They are. The question is whether "The is of our emotional or mental state equals the ought of God's design?" To put it another way, "Should psychology trump both biology and theology?"

There is a big problem with this idea. After all, why should feeling like a man make someone a man? Why is this the one area where psychology trumps biology? Our feelings don't determine our age or our height. I may feel as good as I did when I was forty, but I'm not forty. I can act like I am seven feet tall, but I'm a foot short. Yes, we must acknowledge these feelings are real. We must not discount them, but as you are going to see we cannot allow the psychological tail to wag the biological and theological dog.

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Gender Reveal

Facing The Truth | Week 4 | Genesis 1:23; 2:23

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2. Let’s Confirm The Biological Facts

Whether you accept the biblical narrative or not, we know that common sense tells us at some point a man, (a male) had to unite with a woman (a female) to produce another male or another female. That is simply a biological fact. In other words, it took a binary-gendered pair to produce a human, male or female. This isn’t a matter of theology; this is a matter of simple biology.

From the very beginning, male and female organisms had different biological parts that functionally synchronize for reproduction through sexual union. The sex of a person whether male or female is identified by sexual organs that can perform sexually reproductive acts which primarily distinguishes a male from a female. This might seem too simple of a concept, but these are the biological facts of life.

3. Let’s Confess The Theological Faith

Now for followers of Jesus the truth of God’s word must trump everything because at the end of the day regardless of psychology or even biology, what does our theology say? What does God’s Word teach? It is as if God himself anticipated we would be in this moment. The first reference to sex and gender is found in the very first chapter of the Bible leading to the very first human being.

The Word says that our biological sex is directly related to our bearing the image of God. It is not just a matter of changing body parts; it is the way God wants you to reflect His image to the world.

The Scripture simply does not hint at any other gender categories except male and female. Now we may express our masculinity and our femininity in different ways, but gender is binary. It is not fluid. It is fixed, and it is fixed in the womb. You are born one or the other. This is what it means to be created in the image of God. Men and women are neither identical nor are they interchangeable. The human race has two genders – male and female – one or the other, not both. Plain and simply from beginning to end, the Bible teaches the organic unity of both biological sex and gender identity regardless of feelings.

Horizontal lines for taking notes.

Gender Reveal

Facing The Truth | Week 4 | Genesis 1:23; 2:23

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What were your thoughts on whether or not psychology should dictate biology and theology?
2. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who disagreed with you on the topic of gender identity? How did that conversation go? What did you learn?
3. Before today's message, were you familiar with what Scripture said about gender and sexuality? If not, what is one passage you'd like to study more in-depth to gain a greater knowledge of what God's Word has to say on this topic?
