

**~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:**

Turn on your TV, pick up your newspaper, open any magazine, and you can see at a glance what drives the economy and makes the world go round: money and sex.

You see it all the time out there in the real world---money and sex. But in our churches these two powerful human drivers are hardly ever dealt with in a practical way.

Churches talk about money, when they're running short. Or when they want to put up a new building. Or increase the staff. But how to deal with money in everyday life, how God figures into our personal finances is rarely talked about.

Jesus talks about money plenty. He says,

"If you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon (money), who will entrust to you the true riches?"

Churches rarely talk about sex except when there's a controversy over "sexual orientation" or "inclusivity." Jesus doesn't tiptoe around the issue. On the one hand Jesus is far more merciful than most church folks in dealing with people whose sexual lives are in shambles. The prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, and covered those feet with kisses---was treated by Jesus with awesome kindness. Jesus looked into that woman's heart and saw deep repentance. He loved her for it, and healed her life.

Jesus shared his most profound teachings with a woman who was married five times and was stumbling along with a guy who was not her husband. Jesus takes people where they are in their bumbling sexual life and gives them a new start.

But once a man or woman commits to him, then Jesus gives clear direction---and supernatural power to put their past under the blood, and now to either remain celibate or to stick with their mate in an exclusive commitment for the rest of life.

So here we are. Men and women scattered in many places and times reading these words---at different stages in our physical lives and different stages of our spiritual lives. But no matter where we are, how old or young, how spiritually mature or immature, whether we're single, married, widowed, divorced---the sexual aspect of our lives is part of us as long as we are in these bodies, as long as these minds think.

We live in a world that portrays sex as a form of recreation.  
"Go for it! Just don't forget your condoms."

Or it portrays sex as a delightful escape from everyday reality.  
You meet this exciting person when you're away on a business trip. Why not top it off with some fun in bed? That's what they do on TV, and folks enjoy it.

Or it portrays sex as the ultimate fulfillment in life.  
Here's a man who's beside himself because his wife can't meet his "expectations" sexually. She's a beautiful woman in every way. She's trying her best to "satisfy" the dummy. But she just can't seem to "get there," as they say. So Hubby feels he has no choice but to find "fulfillment" elsewhere. The fool will search forever for his Hollywood Dream and stumble into old-age a bitter man.  
That's how the world looks at sex. But how does Jesus look at it? Jesus tells us that there are some people who are called and gifted by God to live a celibate life. Jesus himself, the apostle Paul, and Barnabas were celibate. And for all the DaVinci fantasies about Mary Magdalene, she doubtless remained celibate after she came to faith.

But when it comes to the physical union of a man and a woman, Jesus keeps it quite simple. He says they've become one flesh. They have given themselves to each other. Now they belong to each other, held together by their sexual covenant---a covenant of love and faithfulness. Every time they come together physically, it's like taking Holy Communion; they're renewing this covenant. If children come, they are the product of the deep commitment, honor, love, and faithfulness of their mother and father.

Of course this holy gift of God has been twisted and warped in a thousand ways by human sin. And so the

union between a man and woman can become a world of heartache and pain. It can be ripped apart and destroyed by our hardness of heart. For example, the woman at the well who had had five husbands and was now with a man who was not her husband---how did Jesus deal with her?

Did he say, "Go back to Number One?" She couldn't go back. Jewish law forbade such a thing. But by the time Jesus was through talking with this woman her past was under the blood of his approaching cross. She was given a new start.

(If Jesus were unable to set us free from our past, where would any of us be?)

But from now on, by the power of the Spirit, this area of the woman's life---and our life---is going to be right.

---right in our thinking.

---right in the way we conduct ourselves as single persons.

---right in the way we treat the husband or wife God has given us.

Of course, God is not nearly as picky about the details as we are. Isaac and Rebekah were never married by a Rabbi. You'd have to say it was "common law." Yet if any marriage was under heaven's blessing, it was theirs.

The issue, as far as God is concerned, is that once we've committed our lives to his kingdom, we leave our past under the blood of the Lamb, and now the sexual aspect of our lives becomes holy ground. Our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Spirit we are going to practice kingdom chastity.

If we're single, we trust God to either provide us with a mate in his time, or empower us to live a celibate life. God knows our needs as single persons better than we do. We seek his kingdom first, and he provides---in his way, in his time.

In a culture where millions of people are stumbling along that rocky road of sexual fantasy, the Lord's single followers are given something far better: freedom, instead of bondage, as we walk by faith and trust God to provide for all our needs.

If we're married, we too practice kingdom chastity. This man belongs to nobody but this woman. His body belongs to her. And this woman belongs to nobody but this man. Her body belongs to him. They treat each other with high honor. A holy jealousy keeps them exclusively for each other. And each time they come together, their covenant with each other is renewed and refreshed.

And how is this holy chastity maintained? By God's power working in us.

In every case, Jesus meets us where we are. When Jesus spoke to the prostitute, who washed his feet with her tears, he said, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, knowing she had had five husbands and was now with someone new, he said, "Ask me, and I'll give you living water." What grace! What mercy!

But when Jesus talked to his disciples about sex, here's what he said:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Matthew 5:27-30

Jesus is saying to us, "No matter how messy and confused this part of your life was in the past, I can take care of that. Turn it over to me, and I will make you into a new person. I'll wash away the nagging guilt. I'll heal the scars. But you're going to have to work with me on this. As long as you are in this body, you're going to have to work with me."

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" In other words: Get off your high horse, step down, and deal with that lusting eye. You'll get help from above, but you've got to deal with it.

"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away." In other words: Get off your high horse, step

down and deal with that hand. You'll get help from above, but only if you deal with it.  
The eyeâ€¦the handâ€¦the heart.

Don't ever look at some sexually messed-up soul and say, "I could never do thatâ€¦I could never be like that!" Because you could. Every one of us is capable of any sordid thing that any human being has ever done, given the circumstances.

But God will give us all the power we need to live as sons and daughters of light, if we work with him---daily presenting our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, daily renewing our minds in his Spirit.

Maybe we're not as messed-up as the woman at the well. Maybe we're not as stained as the man in Jerusalem who ran away when he was caught with his lady-friend in the act of adultery (Of course, we never hear about this man, since they only brought the woman to Jesus). But there is not one of us who does not need a big helping of God's mercy and redemptive power, when it comes to this area of our lives. Help with our thoughts, our attitudes, our self-pity, our vanity, our impatience.

So let's join the woman at the well, step down, and humble ourselves as she did that day when she opened her heart to the Lord. Let's ask the Lord Jesus to show us what he sees when he looks into our hearts.

Let's ask him to touch us, make us whole, and lead us into his kind of chastity.

His kind of chastity is not bondage but freedom.

In a world awash in sexual fantasy, let's present our bodies to the Lord, that he may transform them afresh into true temples of his Spirit.