

***Simply Human***  
Revelation 2:18ff  
Joshua Graves

**We Can Be Animals**

It is a true and disturbing thought: humans possess the dangerous power to act as animals; bodies with no soul.

Kara recently saw something that caught her attention: A man walked into the bank where she works with a t-shirt reading “FBI: Female Body Inspector”. Now, it’s one thing to own a shirt with such a straight forward message, it’s another thing to wear the thing in public. This person had no problem publicly stating that he believes a woman’s worth to be equal to the sum of her parts. This is a tragedy for when women become objectified; something tragic happens to the person holding this distorted view. **Their humanity is compromised.**

Some psychologists believe that “objectification” (when a woman’s worth is found in her physical appearance) is the root cause of alcohol and drug abuse as well as eating disorders and various forms of self-mutilation.

I suppose the FBI t-shirt should not really surprise me however.

The film *Animal House* is a cult-classic. Beer and boobs are the two main topics of discussion.

Paris Hilton, regardless of whether she found religion in prison, has made a fortune off of her alleged sexual appeal. I read something the other day that stated she is the most “googled” person in the United States.

Jerry Springer makes millions of dollars each year exploiting the chaos and sexual destruction of many of this country’s poor.

I suppose that it’s easy to pick on famous people. As long as I do so, I don’t ever have to look in the mirror to the reflection of my own church and my own life. I wonder if that’s why we’ve created celebrities in the first place: as long as we can fixate on others, we can leave ourselves in the closet.

According to one Christian ministry that studies pornography, “Thirty million people are now logging on to some 300,000 porn Web sites daily.”<sup>2</sup> Pornography has become a

<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell’s *Sex God* has greatly influenced this first section. **Sermon Focus: Sexuality is core to our identity as humans created in God’s image. We have the choice to live as animals (bodies with no soul), angels (souls with no bodies) or humans (both body and soul). Moreover, God calls us to bring heaven to earth, not hell. By living as humans we bring heaven (God’s space). By living as angels and animals we bring hell (Satan’s space) to earth. “When we deny the spiritual dimension to our existence, we end up living like animals. And when we deny the physical, sexual dimension to our existence, we end up living like angels.” The greatest thing you can do this week in your marriage, home, and place of work—is to be a human who believes the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is now alive and active you your soul and your body.**

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cbn.com/CBNNews/News/040507a.aspx>

multi-billion a year business, reaching to every nook and cranny of culture. It cuts through rich and poor, urban and suburban, blue collar and white collar, religious and non-religious.

Sometimes I understand why other nations in the world despise the rampant ethical breakdown in these United States. It's because they see what so many Americans spend their time watching; what we're consumed with.

**Christians are not immune to acting like animals.** The same statistics that tell us about pornography in the world, also tells us that Christians are no better off. Some of you may have heard stories about hotel's reporting to local newspapers the rise in purchased adult films during Christian Conferences and Men's Conferences up to 80 times the normal subscription level.

Animals live to feed their physical cravings. Animals are bodies with no soul.

### **We Can Be Angels**

If humans can act as animals, it is also true, and just as dangerous, that some humans live as if we are angels. If animals are bodies with no spirits, angels are spirits with no bodies. "It's the denial of the physical and the failure to acknowledge that our sexuality is central to what makes us human."<sup>3</sup>

We learn this from the total witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. Job reminds us (38:7) when God made the world, "all the angels shouted for joy." The Hebrew letter reminds us that an angel is a spirit (1:14).

If animals give in to their physical cravings, angels do not experience such temptations. Animals only concern themselves with the physical. Angels are consumed with the spiritual.

Think about it. A good number of Christians grew up in a house that pretended as if sexuality did not exist:

Think about the woman who has just gotten married and she's trying to figure out what it means to be true to her new husband and yet she doesn't want to have sex with him. She's got a million confusing messages about sexuality and obligation and love and him and her and it, and so instead of talking about it and getting it out into the open and dealing with it and learning and being open and honest... she...just...stuffs...it.

Denying one's sexuality is like pulling the pin on the grenade while one holds it.

The worst thing is not just what happens to those around us, but what happens directly to *us*.

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<sup>3</sup>Rob Bell, *Sex God*, 54. I am indebted to Bell for his framework—animals, angels, and humans.

Animals are consumed with the physical world: hence, sex is about procreation, biology—a transaction between two entities. Sex lacks real spiritual power and depth. Angels are gender-less; they are neither male nor female. When humans act as angels they become repressed, a sliver of who God made us to be.

## REVELEATION 2:18-29

Our passage has much to say about the human proneness to animal and angel escapism.

First, I need to say a word about the format. You should note, by now, a curious form in the churches addressed. Not only do the various churches get to hear read other people's mail (don't we all like that!), the churches are first praised before they are charged and challenged. **Some scholars believe that the address to the churches follows closely the model of the way in which Domitian, a Roman Emperor, addressed the various regions of his empire.** During the Domitian games (clever title) each region of the empire would be addressed: "To this city: you are hard working, dedicated and loyal. But I have this against you. You do not pay all of your taxes, report all your earnings, etc." Churches would surely recognize this pattern as a reader unfolded the scroll and read the first few chapters of Revelation. "To Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum...and now, Thyatira."

**Thyatira was a rather small but commercialized city.** Lydia, a key person in the Phillipian church network, comes from Thyatira. It was a place of manufacture for earthenware and various dyes. Most citizens would've been required to join a guild in order to produce goods which provided a living for their family. More on that in a little bit. **It's important to see a patter emerging—whether large (Ephesus) or small (Thyatira), the word of God has something to say to all people in all places.**

When the passage was read, I'm sure most of you noticed the line, **"You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess."** Ok, we remember Jezebel from the Hebrew story. She's the woman married to King Ahab (that makes her Queen Jezebel) who caused Israel practice the worship of Baal and along with it, commit sexual indiscretion. Jezebel epitomizes everything you don't want when your daughter grows up. Deceit, malice, greed and murder are adjectives usually associated with Jezebel. This is why no one has the stomach to say in the delivery room, "I think you should name her Jezebel."

The writer is speaking in metaphor here. *You have someone among you who is playing the "the prostitute".* Like the Book of Hosea, God uses sexual imagery ("I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely...") to describe something bigger: betrayal of allegiance. Perhaps, in Thyatira, some of the Christians are giving all of their lip and coin to Caesar because, at the end of the day, they believe their well-being, freedom, dare I say right to worship, comes from Caesar instead of Almighty God. Remember the guilds I mentioned earlier. One had to pay taxes and confess allegiance to Caesar in order to join the guild and thus, provide for one's family. They have traded their confession that God rules the world in order that they might have a nice bed and comfortable house to come home to. I know it seems like such a foreign temptation.

Within the indictment, we get two very clear charges. First, **there is sexual immorality among some of the Christians**. Remember some believed the body to be inherently flawed (a Greek idea completely foreign to Hebraic thinking) and therefore believed one could do with their bodies whatever they pleased because it is the soul, after all that lives forever. Secondly, **the teachings of the mischievous one have created an attitude for some to think it acceptable to eat tainted meat; meat dedicated to powers and gods other than Yahweh**.

And the great shame in all if this is simple: the powerful counter-cultural, counter-intuitive witness of **the Gospel is neutered**. Stripped, emasculated, raped, pillaged, and left for dead. It's dead on the side of the road and the Gospel is reduced to something all together different. **When the Gospel isn't the Gospel, Christianity isn't Christianity**. It's a group of people getting together to appease their guilt instead of embracing God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is why, for instance, it is deadly when a minister of the gospel of Jesus compromises his allegiances. By giving himself or herself over to relational and sexual impulses he or she, in one moment, goes against the mysterious bond of God and spouse. **If the greatest demonstration plot for one's fidelity to God is marriage, it is then the most dangerous and likely place for Christianity to be discredited**.

*Julie is seventeen years old. She is active in the youth group at church. You'd never know it but she's sexually active with three boys at school. She is searching for acceptance, meaning, and purpose by physical means. And of course, there are plenty of interested young men. Men ready to devour her as if she is the game and they are the hunter.*

*Bruce is thirty seven. He's never been married. He's afraid of women. He does not know what to do with his passion and zest. He buries it, punishing himself for having thoughts about others.*

Today, we are not merely waxing philosophical—we're talking about the space and segment of our lives that most reflects what we think and feel about God.

Ultimately sexual dysfunction or any dysfunction (of the animal bent or the angel persuasion) is a symptom of the problem not the actual problem itself. To paraphrase one follower of Jesus from a long time ago, "We will never find true rest until we rest in God."

***A Third Way***

*Garrison Keillor, on A Prairie Home Companion, tells about Uncle Cal, a deacon at the church in fictitious Lake Wobegon. Uncle Cal evaluates his pastor's preaching this way: "It's a lot of, 'On the one hand this, on the other hand that.' He never comes out straight with it. Many a Sunday I've walked away with no idea what he said. He never puts the hay down where the goats can get it."*

Let me put this as plainly as possible.

If the some say, "Eat drink and get yours" (i.e. be an animal) and other say "ignore the spiritual dimensions of your life and sex" (i.e. pretend you are an angel) the story of God offers a different way.

You are not an animal.

You are not an angel.

You are a human being created in the image of God. Three times the writer of Genesis retells us that you and I, male and female, are special in the story. We are not a side note; we are part of the grand finale.

You are not a body lacking a soul.

You are not a soul lacking a body.

You are a body and soul made in the likeness of God.

Male and female is the stuff in which God reveals himself to us.

One of the better examples I know is to have you briefly consider the words of Jesus (Matthew 5:27-30).

**27" You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'<sup>[e]</sup> 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.**

For Jewish people, heaven was not a geographical location related to eternity. Heaven is the realm of God where all is well and things are as they should be. Hell then is its opposite. Hell is not the furthest south one can go; it's the space and realm where all is dark, evil—opposing love, mercy, and hope.

That's why Jesus says it is better to address the animal in you or the delusional angel you've created now or else you will find yourself completely consumed in the things of darkness.

**Fred Craddock tells the story of an awkward conversation between himself and a former greyhound race dog.**

**“Are you still racing?”**

**“No,” he replied.**

**“Well, what was the matter? Did you get too old to race?”**

**“No, I still had some race left in me.”**

**“Well, what then? Did you not win?” I asked.**

**“I won over a million dollars for my owner.”**

**“So, what was it? Bad treatment?”**

**“Oh no,” the dog said. “They treated us royally when we were racing.”**

**“Did you get crippled?”**

**“No.”**

**“Then why?” I pressed.**

**“I quit,” he said.**

**“You quit?”**

**“Yes. I just quit.**

**“Well, why did you quit?”**

**“I quit the day I discovered that what I was chasing was not really a rabbit.” Then he looked at me very seriously and said: “All that running, and running, and running, and running... and what I was chasing, it wasn’t even real.”**

You and I have a simple choice. In our relationships and sexuality, we can bring the things of God (heaven) to earth. Or, we can bring the things of darkness (hell). May we rely upon the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us, and instruct us in learning what it means to be the kind of human God created us to be.

As we come to the table this morning, may we remember our calling to be exactly who God made us. Not animals. Not even angels. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us!

***Oh, God: Help us to be humans. Help us to recognize when we revert to being animals and when we trick ourselves into thinking we are angels.***