

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Biblical View of Sexuality 2004 Family Enrichment Series

Chapel Elders

*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

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Revision # 69 as of January 28, 2004
Doc: Biblical View Of Sexuality.Doc

Introduction

Theme - Biblical Sexuality

This important topic needs to be clearly and biblically addressed here at the Chapel.

Aims

To call our people to Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness

To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality

To counter the world's influence in this area.

Cautions

- To explain to people the need and use of the series.
- To excuse younger children on Sunday Evenings to Scripture Sowers
- To assure people that we will speak plainly yet hopefully, not offensively, using metaphors and euphemisms as the Scriptures do.
- To be sure that teens and singles are present for the whole series.
- To be sure that all flocks are interacting with the series on Wednesday Evening.

Schedule

Pastor Russ developed the initial outlines on the subject. They ensure that there is a coherent and consistent teaching on the subject with a minimum of overlap.

		Title	Text	Speaker
January 4	AM	Dedicated by God	Heb 13:4; 1 Thess. 4:1-8	Russ Kennedy
	PM	Context for Sex	Roles, relationship, response	Greg Cook
January 11	AM	Designed by God	Genesis 1:27;2:18	Dale Evans
	PM	Consecration of Sex Waiting	Song of Solomon	Russ Kennedy
January 18	AM	Directed by God	1 Cor 7; Prov 5:15-20	
	PM	Consecration of Sex Wonder	Song of Solomon	Russ Kennedy
January 25	AM	Distortion of Sex	Lust, Fornication, Adultery, Masturbation	Greg Cook
	PM	Open Forum		Greg Cook Russ Kennedy

God's Dedication of Sex - Purity

Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Russ Kennedy

Introduction

Each January, we set aside a significant time to think together about the Bible and family. This is a very important season for us as a church as we wrestle with issues we face and bring the Bible to bear on them. We often are addressing what people perceive to be felt needs, but then turning the light of the Word on those issues so that we interpret them Biblically and live in such a way as to please God.

Theme – *Biblical Theology of Sexuality*

There is no subject that so dominates our culture as the subject of sexuality. Like many pagan cultures, we are surrounded and immersed in sensuality. This important topic needs to be clearly and biblically addressed here at the Chapel. That is what we intend to do this Family Enrichment Conference.

Aims – *Biblical Purity and Passion*

Let me establish three aims for our series together.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness. This means we must understand God's purposes, precepts and practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality. This means that we will range over the whole of the Bible, using Christ and the cross as the lens through which we affirm and apply truth in the context of being a New Covenant community of believers.
- To counter the world's influence in this area. We must affirm and deny. We must say not only what we are for but what we are against. And what we are against must be defined solely by the Scriptures lest we either become legalists or licentious.

Cautions – *Biblical Clarity and Discretion*

Now, we need to be clear and cautious, plain, but not offensive. We have thought carefully about this as we have prayed over and prepared for this series. I know that for many Christian people, this is never a subject to be addressed in public. Yet, the Bible speaks of it much, even dedicating one whole book of intimate poetry to the commendation and consecration of the joys of married intimacy. So here are some guidelines that we hope will encourage all of you to be here for every sermon in the series, will alleviate any concerns over your little ones, will help us to be pleasing to God as we pursue our joy in Him through our joy in one another.

- To explain to people the need and use of the series. We will, each sermon, remind you of our purposes and principles so as to hold our focus on the Word.
- To excuse younger children on Sunday Evenings to Scripture Sowers. We will be sure that little ones will not be in the auditorium so that parents with concerns over the subject matter will be addressed.
- To assure people that we will speak plainly yet hopefully, not offensively, using metaphors and euphemisms as the Scriptures do. Here is sometimes a difficult thing, given our different backgrounds and sensibilities. We will strive for the Biblical third-way – not treating sex as though it were dirty and impure and not speaking of it in dirty or impure ways.
- To be sure that teens and singles are present for the whole series. Now this might be worrisome to some. But hear me. You teens and you singles know well that you are exposed to constant bombardment of the world's view of sex and enticement to sensuality. While innocence is desirable, ignorance or worse, involvement is not. So you need to be here to hear the Scripture on this important subject lest you be more shaped by the world than the Word.
- To be sure that all flocks are interacting with the series on Wednesday Evening. It will be very important for every family to be at flock and to interact with your elders in that setting. Every flock will be helping you think through and make application of the Sunday sermons.

Now this has been a long introduction. But now, let's begin. As we begin, let's go to the Lord and ask His blessing as we open His Word together.

Prayer

We will begin by seeing how God has honored the marriage state and called for holiness in our sexual intimacy.

Let it be Honored

Hebrews 13:4

First, marriage is to be honored as pleasing to the Lord for sexual oneness. The author of Hebrews has just exhorted the believers to offer God acceptable worship or service with transforming reverence and awe in view of what God is like (12:27). He then turns this theological exhortation into practical applications right where people live.

The Lord's Instructions

WE ARE TO HONOR MARRIAGE.

God has ordained marriage. It provides the context for companionship. Its covenant union, sacrificial love and loving submission all model the relationship between Christ and the church. Even those to whom God has given the gift of singleness, marriage is not to be demeaned as though it were only a necessary, but Biblical concession. Marriage is to be honored. Whatever tends to erode it is to be avoided. Whatever openly attacks it is to be opposed. Christians must clearly and publicly affirm that marriage, that is, the covenant and physical union of one man and one woman is the Biblical standard. All else is evil.

WE ARE TO KEEP MARRIAGE INTIMACY PURE.

The phrase here “the marriage bed be undefiled” is a euphemism. It means that sexual relations are only within marriage. Immorality and adultery pollute and defile marriage. Sex is God-honoring only within marriage and certainly within marriage. As we will see, the Bible consistently frames immorality and adultery as profaning marriage. But, further, there is the possibility of defiling marriage intimacy by bringing into it patterns of thought and behavior that are sinful. Marriage intimacy may be polluted by the thought and lust life of spouses. Pornography, visual or verbal, can so control ones mind that intimacy with a spouse is filled with thoughts of lust directed *at some other individual*. This clearly is wicked and defiles our intimacy.

We must constantly be on the guard against the subtle pressures to think wrongly about marriage and sex. And some of the temptations are not subtle at all. When we as Christians are together, we ought to be talking in such a way that honors marriage. We must constantly place before our children a Biblical and wholesome approach to the sex.

The Lord's Judgment

Why is marriage to be honored and intimacy to be holy? Because we are confronted by the certainty of God, who will judge. Notice the connections – honor and keep holy because God will judge those characterized by thought and deed as immoral. There are no secret places nor hidden practices from the all searching eye of God. He knows what thoughts and lusts slither around in your heart. He knows about those sinful trysts. He not only knows about you, but He will certainly hold you accountable.

I want to make a connection here that is vital for a Biblical view of marital intimacy. It is an act of worship. It is an act of giving, of treasuring, of marriage joy.

When shared within marriage as an expression of love in a sweet relationship, it pleases God. What a glorious thing that what we can delight in as a gracious gift from His design can also please and glorify Him. This is why when we profane and pollute our marriages and intimacy, God responds with judging wrath and severe consequence.

Brothers and sisters, honor marriage and keep your intimacy undefiled.

Let us be Holy

1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:8

While we will be focusing on chapter 4:1-8, I want you to see how Paul frames his exhortation. In this short prayer for them he establishes God's purpose for holiness in every area of life including our sexuality. He prays that they will grow in their love for each other and for others (v.12). He wants it abound (*pleonasai*) and to overflow (*perisseusai*). Authentic, abounding and overflowing love will look like holiness. True godliness is an expression or outworking of true love. Loving God and loving one another is seen in godly attitudes and actions toward one another. This growing love means that we will have an authenticated holiness and be blameless before God when the Lord returns (v.13).

So here is our prayer and purpose for you as well: we aim to see each you growing ever more in love for each other so that you will be blameless before our great God when He returns.

Now, an large and high aim like this must have real and practical directions lest loving holiness becomes mostly about theory and not practice. So, in verses 1-8 of chapter 4, we are shown how to be constantly growing in our knowing how to be pleasing to the Lord in our sexuality.

The Progress Expected

(v.1)

Progress is expected in what they received. They were grounded in truth and practice. Paul instructions to them come with life context and teaching as a foundation. They had received from his ministry how they ought to live and how to be pleasing to God. They were following that direction in their lives now.

Progress is expected in how they respond. They were to be growing in truth and practice. Present levels of practical application in wisdom are expected to develop. They are to live and please God more and more. Thus, the words and warnings that follow.

The Precepts Taught

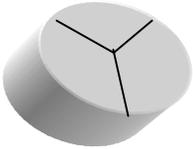
(v.2-6)

The instruction for practical holiness in sex comes in the Word of God to us (v.2) and as the will of God for us (v.3). The instructions Paul gave were through Christ and an expression of God's directive will. These instructions are coming with all the authority of the Word of God. These are not options which we can adopt or reject as it suits us. This is the will of God where we must carefully obey. Why is this so? These are the *instructions* they had received before (v.1). These are the *commandments of the Lord* he had given before (v.2). These are the *will of God* in sanctification (v.3). So they had been instructed by the command-

ments of the Lord so that they knew what the will of God is. This was not simply Paul writing, but is God directing.

The will of God for us is in the work of self-control by us. (v.4) God's will is not primarily about what career you are in, where you go to college or where you live. The will of God is in your sanctification, in obeying His precepts in such a grounded and growing way that He is pleased with you. So here is God's will – your sanctification.

Sexual purity is a part of your sanctification. Paul approaches it here as three pieces of a pie.



ABSTAIN FROM IMMORALITY.

The Scripture is clear. The word here not only means not to do it, but to distance yourself from it. Teens and singles - you are particularly open to temptation to immorality. All immorality is simply sin. You must not do it. Even in Christian schools we are prone to give all the worldly reasons for avoiding sexual sins: the potential for STD's and AIDS, the emotional effects, long-term affects on marriage. I want to give you the only reason that really matters: *GOD SAID DON'T.*

Husbands and wives - do all you can to protect your spouse from temptation and to provide for their needs in this area. A husband or wife who is withholding themselves may be sinning against God and making their spouse more susceptible to temptation. Husbands and wives—be totally satisfied with each other.

CONTROL YOUR OWN BODY.

Now there is some discussion over the original language here. Without going into all the argument, I would agree with the ESV and the NASB in their rendering here. Every believer must *know how* to control their body (literally, *vessel*) in holiness and honor. We must know how and when we are tempted. We must know how to respond to the particulars of our temptations. Further we must learn to control ourselves, to be grounded and growing in self-discipline. The unmarried must wait in self-disciplined holiness. The married must exercise self-discipline to focus on your spouse and not to wander in eye or thought. Brothers and sisters, without self-control and self-discipline, there can be no holiness, no sanctification.

The command is reinforced with a contrast. Live in self-control not in self-indulgence. Those in the world simply are controlled and dominated by their passions, both heart and physical. Make no mistake, Paul is not just pointing to physical self-indulgence but lust as uncontrolled passion. And the reason the Gentiles live like this is because they do not know God; but you do, so live like it.

You can overcome because you know God; this makes all the difference! Paul did not say that the heathen do not know *about* God. The reason they behave as they do is because they do not know God in a believing way, even though they may know about Him. When you come to know God, to believe in Him and to bow to Him, not only do your attitudes toward sex change, but

you also discover that God gives you the ability to act toward sexual temptation as you could not before. Knowing God is basic to living a holy life. This is why maintaining a vital relationship with God is essential to maintaining a clean walk before God.¹

DO NOT WRONG ONE ANOTHER.

Here is a concept that we have little understood. An expanded translation would sound like this: “Do not disregard and cross over the bounds and thus defraud your brother in this matter of immorality by sinning with his wife or daughter.” Now why would he say this? Why would he couch this in terms that sound like a contract or an agreement?

Because we are a community covenanted together, to have sex outside of marriage with anyone who is not your spouse and whose family is in church is to transgress the covenant and to steal by fraud and deceit what is not your own. This is why the church must rise up and discipline all such sin. God has forbidden it. It is a violation of our covenant community. We are first, brothers and sisters, then we are husbands and wives.

Those of you who are not married are not exempt from this warning. Current immorality also robs you and your future spouse of the fullness of marital joy. You will bring to your marriage thoughts and memories and expectations that are intended to be developed with your spouse alone. I am speaking here not only of physical sex, but of fantasy sex through pornography and erotic literature. All present sin, though it can be forgiven, has consequences. Lots of little marriage destroying foxes are bred through impurity.

God will not allow sins in this area to go unnoticed and uncorrected (v.6b). Be assured that those around you may not know and may never know. But God will prosecute in the court of His providence. He will move as a stern father to chasten and correct.

The Purpose Explained

(v.7-8)

Paul stresses the importance of these commands through two important warnings.

In its Aim

(v.7)

The purpose of grace in sanctification is not license. God has summoned and separated us to Himself and away from sin. Salvation has sanctification as its immediate project and glorification as its chief end. Therefore, we are called to become holy. Salvation is a calling out of God's people to God from sin. While we tend to think of it as deliverance from hell, we need to focus, as the Bible does, on our salvation and sanctification as deliverances from sin to our Sovereign and Savior.

¹ Adapted from Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

In its Authority

(v.8)

To carry on and say that this is just man's perspective and man's word is to reject God who gives us the Spirit to sanctify us. When we reject the commands and warnings of the Word of God, we are rejecting the God of the Word. What Paul says in this text and, under God, what we will say in this series will give shape to that holiness in our world, in our culture. While we may give practical advice at some points, our primary aim is to define the boundaries of holiness and illuminate wisdom in the areas of freedom.

Finally, the Holy Spirit has been given to us in order to bring about our sanctification. He is to teach us, to convict us and to correct us through the Scripture. He is the power of God's grace energizing our consciences, our minds and our wills to excel in pleasing God.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by highlighting some important lessons.

LET US FIND THE HIGH ROAD, THE THIRD WAY, IN OUR VIEW OF BIBLICAL SEXUALITY. Let us not be down slope and view it as secret, dirty, necessary animal function not to be discussed from Scripture except with thundering denunciations. And let us not go so down slope the other way that we shame and sully and stain what was given as a pure and passionate and pleasurable expression of the great joys of marital love.

BE MOTIVATED TO GODLINESS BY BIBLICAL MOTIVATIONS. The Bible exhorts and encourages our sexual purity by both vertical and horizontal means. Abstinence is not primarily to avoid disease but to please God.

CONSTANTLY UPHOLD MARRIAGE AS HONORABLE AND DESIRABLE. We must resist the world's way of treating it with casual and corrupting disregard. We have come to the point that living together, sleeping together, having sex together is not much different than choosing a restaurant you prefer. Prize it and treasure it.

AVOID ALL THAT CORRUPTS YOUR PRESENT AND FUTURE INTIMACY. We will talk more about this in future messages. But I want now to wave the banner over self-control and not self-indulgence in how you feed your eyes and your ears. Let us do so, not because we are some sort of holy prudes, but because we will pursue our holy pleasure in God and what He consecrates and commends.

MAINTAIN YOUR PURITY BY KNOWING GOD INTIMATELY AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER PASSIONATELY. This is at the heart of Biblical holiness – to so believe, love and know God and to so love one another that we think and want, act and feel in ways that are pleasing to God.

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. [ESV]

God's Context for Sex - Relationship

Pastor Greg Cook

Review

One of the items that Joni McNeese does as the counseling secretary is to make sure that I get things done in enough time so that there isn't a last minute rush to get things done. And one of my duties is the Family Enrichment Conference and Retreat. Joni starts sending me weekly "tasks" to my Microsoft Outlook to remind me (I would call it "bugging") about the theme for the conference, etc.

Russ and I have been talking about doing a series on Biblical sexuality for a couple of years. We have seen the need for this type of series in our counseling, but actually putting it together has not been a priority. As we talked about the theme, we decided that the Family Enrichment Conference was the setting for the series on Biblical sexuality.

The next time Joni enquired about the theme for the Conference, I told her it was Biblical sexuality. Now, most of the time when she hears the theme she will make a remark like, "That sounds really good", or "I think we need that", or something like that. This time she said, "Oh". Just the sound, "Oh". Amy must have been looking at Joni while she made this comment because the look on Joni's face caused her to ask what was going on. When Joni told Amy the theme of this year's Conference, guess what she said. That's right; you guessed it – "Oh".

Maybe that has been some of your reactions – "Oh". Maybe some of you even went so far as to say, "Oh no". Or perhaps, "You've got to be kidding". But we aren't kidding. I am really looking forward to this series. Not because I'm one of the presenters, although there is a degree of satisfaction and delight in bringing the Scriptures to bear upon the lives of God's people so that they are instructed, warned, and challenged to change into what God desires. My anticipation has been based on what I see in the lives of those I counsel on Mondays. And I know that there are some of you here at the Chapel who are struggling in this area. I have yet to teach the class on Biblical sexuality in the Biblical Counseling Training Course without having at least one person come to me with questions, and in many instances serious issues, in this area of sexuality.

So let's review the aims that we have for this Conference:

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness. We are shooting for understanding God's purposes, His precepts, and the practice of marriage oneness as He has outlined in His Word.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality. We want to use the entire Bible looking through the lens of Christ and His Cross as we understand the truth and apply it in the context of being a community of New Covenant believers here at the Chapel.

- To counter the world's influence in the areas of sexuality and sensuality. We are going to both affirm what we believe to be the truth of God in these areas as well as deny what we believe to be the lies of this world in these areas.

So having begun with that short review, let's pray and ask God to give us understanding and wisdom as we look at this area of the Biblical Context for Sex.

Introduction

I would like to start tonight by making a statement that might surprise or even shock you. Here is the statement. In the majority of marriages, I can ask one question and tell you what kind of marriage relationship you have. I would go so far as to say that it is the barometer of your marriage. (Pause) I hope that many of you are evaluating that statement. Hopefully, some of you are trying to figure out what that question would be. Some of you may be trying to decide whether you believe that to be true or not. Some of you may not be sure you want to know what that question is. And probably, some of you may not really care if it's true or not, or even what the question is. I hope that the number in that last category are few. However, here is the question:

“Evaluate the sexual relationship of your marriage?”

Now I'm not asking you to tell me about your sexual techniques or any of the details of your love-making encounters. I am asking you to describe what you **think** (your evaluation) about the physical relationship in your marriage. I am asking you to say **verbally** what you **think** silently about your physical relationship with your spouse.

Are you surprised that this is the question? Do you think that it is possible to tell about a marriage by asking about the sexual relationship? Maybe you think that I'm some twisted sexual pervert who gets his jollies by digging into everyone's sex lives? Let me assure you that I am not that kind of person and that is not what I do in counseling. However, if you don't think that question can tell much about a marriage, it is probably due to the fact that you don't think that a couple's physical relationship and their non-physical relationship are vitally connected. In fact, it is the non-physical relationship that is the context for the physical relationship.

Let's start with a hypothetical couple. I'm going to call them Ben and Rosie. I don't know of any couples by the name of Ben and Rosie here at the Chapel, nor have I counseled any couples by those names. So if you are here tonight and you happen to be Ben and Rosie, it is purely coincidental.

Ben is the type of guy who is hard working, serious about issues, and wants to be thought of as the guy who has it all together. He brags about his job, his car, his home, and his prowess as a softball player and golfer. In fact, if you asked his softball teammates, they would tell you that he is one of the reasons they have finished as the division champions the last 5 years. And his golf team depend on him to bring them through every week. When Ben comes home, it is usually to catch a quick bite to eat. , He will give his wife a dutiful greeting and kiss, pat the kids on the head asking how they are doing, and gather up his ball uniform or golf clubs and run out the door. For Ben, he is a good husband. He works hard, supplies the needs of his family, is faithful to be at all the church services available.

Rosie and Ben have been married for 10 years. Rosie quit work when the first baby came 3 years after they were married. The second child came two years later. Rosie and Ben didn't do a lot together before the kids were born. They each had their own interests – Ben his athletics and Rosie her girlfriends and all the activities they did together. But with the kids came a change in lifestyle for Rosie. Ben's lifestyle didn't change. He is going at the same speed he has gone for their entire married life. It seems that the only time that Rosie has to themselves is when they both collapse into bed at the end of the day.

Let's follow Ben and Rosie as well look at the context for Biblical sexuality which is our relationships.

Understanding our Personal Responses

In the Level One Biblical Counseling Training Course we spend several weeks going over the theology of the heart. In Level Two, it is the main theme of that entire course. We can't do that tonight, but I want to briefly develop a theology of the heart that will help us to understand why and how we respond to one another the way we do. Please turn your Scriptures to Matthew 15:10-20.

Its Root in the Heart

Matthew 15:10-20

What the religious leaders of the day were teaching was the same lie that we are being taught today – our behavior is the result of external influences. We behave the way we do because of our past, our family influence, the way we were reared, our education, our economic condition, our surrounding culture, blah blah blah.

But Jesus cuts through all of those lies and teaches what is the source of our actions and desires. He says it is our hearts. All the other reasons that we give for our behavior are just excuses. We behave from what is in our hearts. Who we really are is betrayed by our behavior. You are not an angry person because that is the way it was in the family in which you were reared. You are an angry person because you have chosen to have a heart that is believing lies and a heart that is wanting what is contrary to what God wants for you. And when you don't get what you believe is rightfully yours and you don't get what you want, you choose to respond by getting angry. I will grant you that the influence you had while growing up has made it easy for you to respond in anger, but it is not caused by your family – it is your choice and yours alone.

So what is our heart? The heart is who we are on the inside. There are only two people who know what is in hearts – the person themselves and God. From Hebrews 4:12-13 we learn that the heart has two functions. One function is to determine what we believe to be true. The other function is what the old Puritans referred to as our affections. It is what we want or desire. The heart is where the process of thinking in words is used to convey what we believe and what we want. At the risk of sounding like psychobabble, it is that talking that happens in the quiet of our minds as we relate to one another. We silently express what we think to be true and what we want to happen in our lives.

Its Responsibility in Choices 2 Corinthians 5:9, 14-15

So when Jesus exposes the reason for our sinful behavior is our hearts, then that puts the burden of our behavior on us. Turn your Scriptures to 2 Corinthians 5: 9, 14-15. We must examine our hearts to see and evaluate our thinking. Is what we are thinking really true or is a lie from the god of this world? Is what we are wanting God-honoring or self-centered and selfish?

We must choose what is pleasing to God, regardless of our background, family situation, education, culture, boss, circumstances, spouse, and the list continues. We must make it our aim to please Him Who died for us. We are to live for Him and not for ourselves as we have in the past.

Its Requirement in Repentance Joel 2:12-13

What that means is that there must be true repentance as God puts His finger on our hearts and their ungodly thinking. Please turn now to Joel 2:12-13.

What we see here is that true repentance means we renew our thinking – we change our hearts. We evaluate and change what we have as our false beliefs and false wants. We put-off the old way of thinking and put-on the new way of thinking. We put on the mind of Christ.

True repentance also means real change will show itself by putting-off sinful behavior and putting-on God-honoring behavior in very practical, everyday life.

Let's return to Ben and Rosie. Let's ask him THE question. "Ben, how would you evaluate the sexual relationship in your marriage?" What do you think he's going to say?

Well, here's how he responds. "Greg, I'm glad you asked that question. I have been wanting to tell someone about this for a long time. Our sex life stinks! On a scale of 1 to 10 I would rate it a minus 5. After all I do for her, this is the thanks I get. I work my tail off to provide a great place to live, food for the family, including eating out as often as she wants to, a new car to drive, new furniture; in fact, I give her anything and everything she asks for. You would think that she could at least show a little gratitude when it comes to the area of our physical relationship. You would think that I was asking her to sacrifice her first born child when I ask her for some physical attention. I am so tired of having to beg and manipulate in order to have the very infrequent times that we do have. And is it too much to ask for her to at least act like she enjoys it!?"

Do you think that I'm making this up? I assure you this is a frequent song that is sung on Mondays here at the Chapel Counseling Center. I would go so far as to say that there are those of you men listening to me now who would answer the same way, and maybe even more strongly and cuttingly.

Let's ask Rosie the same question. "Rosie, how would you evaluate the sexual relationship in your marriage?" What do you think is going to be her response?

"Greg, I'm so glad you asked. It is absolutely awful. My husband is the most self-centered person on this earth. All he wants me for is maid service and sex. If his softball uniform is not clean for the next game, or his league golf shirt is dirty, he acts like I have cut off his right hand. I'm sorry that our kids have to hear some of

the things that he says to me. And then he comes home from the game or round of golf and plops down in front of the TV with the remote control and sits and snoozes for the rest of the evening. He doesn't talk to me; he doesn't help me with the kids; he doesn't do anything around the house unless I nag him like my mother used to do to my dad. It's awful living with such a man. And then to top it all off, after he's had the evening to relax in front of the TV and take a nap, he expects me to be some kind of sexual tigress in bed. It's like he expects me to be able to throw some switch in my head and have great desire for this guy that just 5 minutes before I absolutely couldn't stand to be in the same room with. What does he expect? He can forget about sex until he starts thinking about me for a change!"

What lies are Ben and Rosie believing to be true? What is Ben and Rosie wanting? Do you see how the talk that we do in our hearts comes out in our actions? All of the things that these two have now said verbally have been rehearsed in their thinking for years. And each time it is said gives it more weight that it is the truth.

Are you starting to get the picture that the context for our sexual lives is in our non-sexual relationships?

Practicing our Biblical Roles

Let's begin to chip away at some of the lies that we believe to be true and some of the desires that are God-honoring. The Bible places a real emphasis on the dynamics of our roles in marriage.

In a Wife's Loving Submission

Ephesians 5:22-24

Let's turn to Ephesians 5:22-24. As it pleases God, Biblical submission pictures the relationship between Christ and the church and draws out a husband's heart to lovingly lead her. The wife voluntarily submits to her husband. The picture is not a submission the wife grudgingly grants. She willingly and lovingly gives herself to his leadership. Her submission draws out his heart in such a way that he lovingly leads her.

In a Husband's Sacrificial Leadership Ephesians 5:25-31

In verses 25-31, we see sacrificial leadership as it pleases God. It pictures the relationship between Christ and the church and draws out a wife's heart to lovingly follow him. He does not demand submission. He does not coerce and beat into submission. His sacrificial leadership causes his wife to lovingly give herself to his leadership.

What is going on in the lives of Ben and Rosie? Are the Biblical pictures of sacrificial leadership and loving submission clearly seen in their marriage? Do they believe in what the Scriptures say about the roles of husbands and wives, or are they believing lies about what their roles are? What is it that they want? Let me be clear here. I think that we can honestly say that both Ben and Rosie would say that they wanted a God-honoring husband and wife. They would not deny that the picture that we have seen in Ephesians is something they want for their home. They would say that they believed that the Scriptures were true and that is what they truly believe. Some people might describe their situation as Ben and Rosie have head knowledge but not

heart knowledge. There is no such thing as head knowledge vs heart knowledge. The problem is they do not have a believing faith. They do not have an obedient faith. They truly are believing lies. They want the other person to change before they make any effort to change. We have not seen that in any of the Scriptures that we have looked at so far. In fact, we have seen the opposite. God calls us to change and to please Him no matter what the other person does or does not do. Our behavior and obedience are not contingent on the behavior and obedience of someone else. When we believe something in an obedient way, there will be change. What would be different in Ben and Rosie's roles if they truly believed what was taught in this passage of Scripture? What would they be thinking in their hearts if they truly responded in faithful obedience to this teaching?

I want to insert here a word of exhortation to our teens and singles. You may be tempted to put their minds in neutral at this point. I have been talking about a married couple and you think that you can tune out since you don't fit into that category. No so. Even though you aren't married, you must be very aware of the habits that you are developing in this area of relationships. You must learn to evaluate your hearts and to develop the ways of thinking that are part of God-honoring relationships, no matter if you ever get married or not.

As you teens are involved in the dating process, take this time of life to develop Godly relationships based on His Word. Don't work hard on learning the techniques of manipulation and playing games in order to get your way. Learn to have a heart that seeks God's ways in all of your relationships.

I have counseled with singles who are concerned that they aren't married yet. They think that time is slipping by too quickly and they are never going to get married. I have had to tell some of them that they are not marriageable material. They have developed self-centered and sinful ways of thinking that make them undesirable, not only to the opposite sex, but to everyone. We all know the "Bitter Bettys" and the "Loser Larrys" of the world who can't see any farther than themselves. Please pay close attention as we continue in learning to develop Godly relationships.

Cultivating an Authentic Relationship

Modern Christian culture often defines marriage relationships in worldly ways that setup expectations that the Holy Spirit and God's grace are not enabling. The effect is to frustrate everyone. What is needed is a Biblically authentic relationship.

By our Connection

1 Peter 3:7

One of the principles that is foundational, and yet so easily overlooked is found in 1 Peter 3:7. What we forget is that we are connected at a level that is basic. Christian spouses generally are to treat one another as brother and sister in Christ, first. Paul says "since they are heirs with you of the grace of life". The footnote renders another reading as "since you are joint heirs". How would Ben and Rosie's hearts be changed if they obeyed this teaching in a believing way? How would their behavior and language toward each other change? What would be the words that would be going through their minds?

By our Concern**Philippians 2:1-5**

Please turn to Philippians 2:1-5. What we have is a passage that has huge theological emphasis. It is referred to as the *kenosis* passage – Christ emptying Himself in order to procure redemption. But the passage is not there just for some lofty theological concept. Paul uses this high and lifted up teaching about Christ to command us in how we are to live in our relationships. In the context of this Conference, we learn that Christlikeness is exhibited when we put our spouses' interests first.

Do you think there would be any impact on Ben and Rosie's relationship if one or both of them obeyed in a believing way this teaching of being concerned about the other more than about themselves?

By our Communication**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

And then turn back a couple of pages to Ephesians 4:25. We could spend an entire month on this passage alone. But the summary of the passage concerns the way we communicate with each other. Nothing can destroy marital relationships like ungodly talk and nothing can build it like grace-imparting words.

These are not only the words that we verbally say, but also the words that we say in our minds. Remember, whatever is in the heart will come out in our actions. You can't fill a pitcher full of water and pour even one drop of milk out of it. What is on the inside will come out. The children's rhyme about "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me" is a lie. Proverbs tells us that words have the power to kill.

What would Ben and Rosie's relationship sound like if they obeyed this teaching in a believing way?

By our Companionship**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

The last principle we are going to look at tonight is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. How does love actually conduct itself? If these rebukes were needed in the midst of relationship problems in the church, how much more do we need to hear them in our homes?

One of the biggest problems that we face with our spouses is believing that we can tell what is in the other person's heart. Even though the Scriptures tell us that there is only One Who can see into a heart, God Himself, we assign motives to our spouse's speech and actions. We believe that they are trying to do us harm and cast things in the worst possible light. But one of the areas that this passage speaks to is "believing all things". This means that we give the other person the benefit of the doubt in the most positive light possible.

We could spend enormous amounts of time in each of these areas, as well as many others. But I think that you get the message.

Let's return to Ben and Rosie. Let's assume that Ben and Rosie have been convicted about their non-physical relationship and have been working on the areas that we have mentioned tonight. Granted, they will not be experts in all areas, but there is progress in most. One of the areas that they are working hard on is the thinking that

is going on in their hearts. They have been working on being keenly aware of the talk that they do in their minds. They are capturing the lies that they are believing and they are getting a handle on what they are wanting. They have been focused on truly repenting at the heart level and the behavior level. What do you think their responses would be like now to our question “how would you evaluate the sexual relationship in your marriage”? Let me assure you that it would be totally different.

Jay Adams describes it this way: All through the day we have been collecting the garbage. We have been putting into our garbage bag our thoughts, our words, and our actions along with the words and actions of our spouse. And our spouse has been doing their own garbage collection. When we climb into bed, the first thing that we do is dump our garbage bags all over the bed. Is it any wonder that we have difficulty in intimacy when we have to climb around and over such stinking piles of garbage?

Conclusion

Do you understand why I made the opening statement that I can ask one question and tell you about your marriage? God has given us the gift of sexual intimacy in the context of our relationship with each other. Our sexual relationship is generally a barometer of our marital relationship.

May I ask you this question, my brother and sister?

How would you evaluate the sexual relationship in your marriage?

And then the closing question – what are you going to do about it?

God’s Design for Sex - Marriage

Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-24

Pastor Greg Cook

Introduction

We may have some people who were not here last Sunday to hear what the theme is for our annual Family Enrichment Conference. The theme is a Biblical View of Sexuality. We have chosen this theme with three aims in view:

- To call for Biblical purity and the holy practice of marriage oneness. We are shooting for understanding God's purposes, His precepts, and the practice of marriage oneness as He has outlined in His Word.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality. We want to use the entire Bible looking through the lens of Christ and His Cross as we understand the truth and apply it in the context of being a community of New Covenant believers here at the Chapel.
- To counter the world's influence in the areas of sexuality and sensuality. We are going to both affirm what we believe to be the truth of God in these areas as well as deny what we believe to be the lies of this world in these areas.

I would also like to put before you the messages for this Conference.

		Title	Text
January 4	AM	God’s Dedication of Sex – Purity	Heb 13:4; 1 Thess. 4:1-8
	PM	Biblical Context for Sex – Relationship	Various
January 11	AM	God’s Design for Sex – Marriage	Genesis 1:27;2:18
	PM	Biblical Consecration of Sex – Waiting	Song of Solomon
January 18	AM	God’s Direction for Sex – Joy	1 Cor 7; Prov 5:15-20
	PM	Biblical Commendation of Sex – Wonder	Song of Solomon
January 25	AM	God’s Correction of Sex -- Immorality	Various
	PM	Open Forum	Greg and Russ

I don't know how your flock discussions went last Wednesday, but I think that I would like to propose a different approach for the Open Forum this time. There is normally a reticence to talk about this subject in public. It is bad enough to ask questions publicly on any topic, much less this one. So I would like to encourage you to send your questions by e-mail to Russ or me here at the Chapel. The addresses are on the back of your bulletin. Or you can write out your questions on cards if that is more convenient and place them in our mailboxes. Please don't hesitate to ask your questions. The only dumb question is the one that wasn't asked.

Those who have been in the Sunday morning Adult Bible Study hour at 9:15 have been studying what is called Biblical Theology. Last quarter, the book that was used was *According to Plan, The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* by Graeme Goldsworthy. The main teaching of that series was that God has had a plan for everything from the very beginning that finds its ultimate completion in Christ. God has been working out that plan and will continue to do so until it is ultimately completed. We also learned that there are themes that run throughout the Scriptures that are major parts of His plan. One of those themes is salvation by faith alone. Today we are going to look at another of those major themes – marriage.

After this morning, I hope that you will look at marriage differently than you ever have before. As I have prepared for this message, it has been both an awe-inspiring study as well as a delight to see the Great Creator bring about His purposes and what that ultimately means for his us, His bride.

Let's ask Him to give us discernment, insight, and understanding as we gaze into His marvelous plan. <Pray>.

Everything that has been made is designed for a purpose. Many of you ladies are Pampered Chef enthusiasts. My wife is one of you. However, I want you to know that the fancy ice cream scoop, (you know, the one that has the secret inside chamber that makes dipping rock hard ice cream child's play) can also double as a small hammer. Let me tell you how I know that to be true.

The kids had given us, as an anniversary gift, an 11X14 picture frame for each of them that contained one of their baby pictures, one of their first baby outfits, and a current picture. There were four of these framed memories. In addition, there was an 11X14 portrait of all four of them.

Bec had been asking me for several weeks to help her get them hung on the wall. Well, you know how it goes – it just wasn't a priority at the time. So on that fateful evening, I came home to all 5 pictures hung on the living room wall. It looked pretty good. I asked Bec how she had hung the pictures. She said with little nails. And I asked her where she found the hammer, knowing that it was in my toolbox. She pointed to the Pampered Chef ice cream scoop still lying on the coffee table. She said that it didn't work too badly as a hammer.

The point of this story is that everything is designed for a purpose. You can use an ice cream scoop as a hammer, but only if the nails are very small and the wall is very soft. And I am very sure that the engineers who designed that ice cream scoop did not have a substitute hammer as one of its purposes. If we, as mere humans, have as our goal to design things according to a purpose, what must it be like for the Creator

of the universe in His designing of every atom in the universe. Each atom has been designed and created for His purpose.

God has designed men and women not only to bring Him glory, but also for their union and communion together as husband and wife. We must be clear about God's design for marriage or we will misuse intimacy in our marriages.

So let's begin by going back to the very beginning – Genesis 1.

God's Design of Man

Genesis 1:26-28

As we learned last quarter in the Adult class and are continuing to learn in this quarter, Moses had a purpose in writing the book of Genesis. This first book of the Bible begins with revealing God's plan and place for man. The account here is a creation week summary that is unpacked in more detail in Genesis 2.

In His Purpose

(v.26)

As part of God's design, His purpose for creating mankind was for man to establish governance over all of God's creation. Man was created in God's image in order to rule and care for all that God had created.

In His Pattern

(v.27)

As part of God's design, His pattern was that both male and female were created as equal image bearers while their gender affected the whole person. In God's sight, both genders are equal. But each gender has its own unique role whereby that person fulfills God's purpose for them.

God's Creation of Man

Genesis 2:1-17

When we turn to the second chapter of Genesis, we now get more of the details of God's design. I don't want to take the time to read this entire chapter, but I want you to see the detail to which God went in His creation of mankind.

The Forming of Adam's Person

(v.1-14)

In verses 1 – 14, God designs and plants a garden. This garden gives Adam the pattern for his exercising dominion over the "wilds" of creation. God puts Adam into a situation that has been designed especially for him with amazing detail. This is the place where God will teach Adam what it means to have dominion over God's creation.

Then God makes Adam out of dust and breathes into him the breath of life. Adam became a living creature made in the image of God. Then God places him in the garden.

The Framework of Adam's Life

(v.15-17)

Can you imagine what Adam must have thought. You know what it's like to be in a new and unfamiliar place. You don't know what to do or which way to turn. Our loving and merciful God spoke to Adam and interpreted the world for him. God counseled Adam. And Adam learned that he must live by God's counsel as part of God's design for him.

Adam also learned what he must do in governing God's world. God gave him instructions on what tasks he must perform and how he was to relate to the world in which he found himself.

God also made it very clear that Adam must obey God's commands. God was very specific about a certain tree in the garden. And God was very specific about what was acceptable and what would be the consequences for disobedience. All of these things defined the framework of Adam's life.

What I want you to take away from these passages is that God had a very specific design and plan for mankind from the very beginning. All of this was not some after thought or a flexible plan that was adapted as things went along. This was God's very specific plan and detailed design from the beginning.

God's Design of Marriage

Genesis 2:18-24

As we continue in this passage, we note that Moses establishes God's plan and purpose for marriage. I want you to take notice again of how specific God is in His design of marriage. God did not arbitrarily decide to make mankind male and female. He had a grand design and purpose for marriage from the very beginning that is probably bigger and more glorious than you have ever imagined before

Companionship – Not be alone...

Moses records that it is not good that the man should be alone in verse 18. God helps Adam recognize his aloneness through a visual aid as recorded in verse 20. I believe that there were two ways that God helped Adam recognize his need for companionship. I think that God brought every living creature, with its mate, to Adam so that Adam realized that he didn't have a mate. And I think that Adam also recognized that none of the creatures that he named were suitable for companionship, either. Adam names all of the creatures as part of God's purpose for him in subduing the creation, but Adam also notices that there isn't a mate for him to satisfy his lack of companionship. I want you to see and remember that God specifically designed a female as his companion for a very specific purpose.

Complement – Suitable helper...

Moses also tells us that there wasn't another creature in all of creation that was a helper suitable for Adam. The ESV translates it as "fit for him". Adam was not complete without his complement. The person that God created was the perfect complement for Adam. Again, I want you to see and remember that God specially designed a female to complete Adam for a very specific purpose.

Covenant – Established by God...

Again, I don't want you to lose sight of the fact that God instituted marriage as part of a very specific design with a very specific purpose from the very beginning. Creating humankind as male and female was not some afterthought. And neither is the establishing of marriage. He tells us that marriage is a covenant. Please turn to Malachi 2:13-14. <read text> The prophet makes it very clear that marriage is established by God through a covenantal relationship. Now turn to Proverbs 2:17 <read text> Again we see that an adulteress has forsaken her cove-

nantal relationship with her husband. This institution that is established by God is done through a covenant. Again, I want you to see and remember that God specifically designed a male and female to be in a covenantal relationship that is only broken by death.

Cleave – Be one flesh...

Now, come back with me to Genesis 2:24. This verse used to be very puzzling to me. Moses is giving the account of the first man and woman. Then all of a sudden he brings in this verse. <read verse> What in the world is Moses talking about? Adam and Eve didn't have a father and mother. What is Moses doing putting this verse right here?

And then someone explained to me that Moses is making an editorial comment. He is stating how this marriage relationship has been designed by God. Moses, through God's superintending, is pointing to a future explanation of the purpose for God specifically designing marriage as He has. He is describing the marriage relationship to be a leaving, a weaving, and a cleaving of two lives into one flesh. There are those who teach that this one flesh is established by the physical union of a man and a woman. This one flesh relationship includes the physical union, but it is so much more as we will see later! And again, I want you to see and remember that God specifically designed a male and female to have a one flesh relationship.

It's time to examine what God's specific design and purpose for marriage has been from the beginning and why it is such an important theme throughout the Scriptures. As we look at this glorious truth, I am hoping that we will gain a profound and glorious appreciation for this gift that God has given to us called marriage. And as we understand, it will give us guidance for what our marriages should be like.

God's Development of Marriage

Because Genesis 2:24 is quoted so often through the rest of the Bible, we must establish a Biblical theology that reads this text through the rest of the Scriptures in a Christ-centered way. What is the Biblical theology of marriage? Why was God so specific in His design and purpose of marriage from the very beginning? Let's look at the New Testament passages first and then draw the conclusions that they teach.

Its Intended Permanency

Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7

We know that the Biblical authors have a purpose for their writing and a goal to be achieved in what they have written. Both Matthew and Mark record for us Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in which he quotes a couple of verses from Genesis. <read Matthew 19:3-10> Jesus quotes this teaching of male and female and being one flesh. He then takes one item of this relationship and expounds on its importance. God's original design in marriage was for one man and one woman to be married for life. Marriage is intended to be a permanent relationship. Jesus takes this aspect of marriage, its permanency, and expounds on its importance.

Its Unifying Purity**1 Corinthians 6:16**

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6. Let's read verses 12-20. <read text> In verse 16 he goes back to Genesis 2:24 and quotes the one flesh phrase. Paul takes another look at marriage that was different from Jesus'. Paul applies it in the context of sexual immorality. Paul condemns immorality and commends marriage intimacy as a very real union at both the physical and spiritual levels appealing to this concept of being one flesh found in Genesis 2:24. Paul takes this aspect of marriage, sexual purity, and expounds on its importance.

Its Christological Pattern**Ephesians 5:31**

Now, please turn to another familiar passage that I used in last Sunday evening's message – Ephesians chapter 5. I don't want to take a lot of time going over what I said last Sunday evening about this passage. The aspect of marriage that he expounds is the loving, sacrificial leadership of the husband, and the loving voluntary submission of a wife. But Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 in verse 31 here in Ephesians 5. I have always been confused by the references in most of the verses in this passage. Paul refers to Christ and His church in verses 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30. And then there is verse 32. This reference to Christ and the church has been so out of focus for me in the past. It just didn't make any sense, just like Moses' editorial comment in Genesis 2:24 didn't make any sense to me.

But when someone suggested that I look at the Scriptures through the lens of Biblical theology, it all began to make sense. Greg, just read the text. Verse 32, "This mystery is profound". What mystery? Read on. "I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church". Is that the mystery? Of course it is! This is the key that I have been looking for. Marriage is about Christ and His church! Christ is the husband, and the church is His bride. All of a sudden the great design and purpose of our great Creator began to make glorious sense and the wisdom and purposes of God began to overwhelm my soul! It was like the flood lights had been turned on!

Here is the heavenly substance of which marriage is an earthly shadow. Paul is showing us why God was so specific in His design of marriage. Paul is giving us the purpose for marriage – marriage is an earthly shadow of what our heavenly relationship is going to be like. Hallelujah!!

Its Ultimate Pleasures**Revelation 21:1-4**

But there is more. Please turn to Revelation 21. <read verse 1-4> Here, at the end of time, we have the ultimate expression of what marriage pictures. The ultimate relationship that believers have to Christ is that we are His bride. He is our husband. We have the Bible beginning with marriage in Genesis 1 and ending in Revelation 21 with this marriage theme. The deliberate design of God that we find in Genesis is that marriage is to continually picture and be a reminder of the pleasures of eternity that we will experience with Him. Earthly marriage has been a continual testimony to each generation of the ultimate glory of our eternal marriage to our eternal husband.

Now, those of you who have been sleeping, wake up. And those of you whose minds have been wondering, it's time to return and focus. If you haven't heard anything

that I have said thus far, you must pay close attention now. This is the purpose of this message.

God deliberately and specifically created a male, Adam, as the husband, to be a picture of Christ. God deliberately and specifically created a female, Eve, as the wife, to be a picture of all believers throughout history. The marriage relationship is a picture and a shadow of the ultimate marriage between Christ and His bride. That is the Biblical theology of marriage as God designed it.

God created male and female as equal image bearers of His divine image. We are joint heirs with Christ and His righteousness has been credited to us so that as God looks at us He sees Christ. And just as Adam and Eve each had their own roles we each have our own roles. Christ is the head of the church and we are the submissive wife to the Head. He is the loving servant leader. We are the loving voluntarily submissive wife. There is never a time when roles will be reversed.

God did not create marriage and then later say, “Oh, how cool. This pictures what the relationship is going to be between Christ and the church”. NO! He deliberately designed marriage in order to picture and shadow this relationship between Christ and the church from the very beginning. That is why he designed marriage the way He did.

Paul said in verse 32 in Ephesians 5, that this mystery is profound. The word that he uses is *megas*, the word from which we get mega. What Paul is saying is that we can't even imagine all of the mega aspects that are involved in this teaching that we are the bride of Christ for all eternity. What we **can** do is look at the different aspects of marriage that God has left in the Scriptures and realize that they are a taste of what it is going to be like married to our husband for all eternity.

So when God tells us that marriage is companionship, that it is not good that we are alone, the joy and pleasure that we have in the companionship we have with our spouses is just a small taste of the companionship that we are beginning to enjoy now and will ultimately enjoy in eternity.

We see that marriage involves a helper that is our complement. We are completed by our spouses. Our marriages are to picture the completeness that we have in Christ. He gives us generously all that we need.

And He has made a covenant with us. He will be our God and we will be His people. He covenants with us that Christ is our husband and that we are his bride forever. This covenant will never be broken. He will never divorce us. We will never divorce Him. Our marriage relationship with Him is secure. There is never a doubt about His love. There is never a hint of divided affection. He is our covenant husband.

And the most mysterious aspect of the marriage relationship is our oneness – our being one flesh. We are in Christ. He is in us. We are one flesh with Christ. That is why the one flesh of Genesis 2:24 means so much more than just our physical union. The one flesh between husband and wife pictures the one flesh between Christ and His church. This truly is a mega mystery.

And as part of that one flesh relationship is our physical relationship. Teens, singles, husbands, wives, listen closely. This is the most compelling reason for us to keep ourselves morally pure. We are married to Christ. Our physical relationship should

be a reflection of our one flesh with Christ. The fidelity that spouses keep pictures the fidelity that we, the bride of Christ, keep to Him, our husband. The purity that unmarried people keep pictures the fidelity between Christ and His church. This is why the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, always make such a big deal out of adultery and immorality. It is profaning our marriage to Christ.

Marriage has been designed so that we, in the here and now, can have a foretaste of the joys and pleasures that await us in glory. And in keeping with our theme for this month, we must place our physical relationship in the context of God's design for marriage. God designed us as sexual beings. In our physical relationship as husband and wife, we experience the exhilaration, the satisfaction, and the joy of mutual oneness. God has given us this glorious gift as a foretaste of the exhilaration, satisfaction, and joy we will ultimately experience for all eternity with Him.

Conclusion

Let me summarize our time together.

First, God designed marriage as a picture and shadow of the ultimate marriage of Christ and His church.

Our marriages should be reflections of the marriage that we have with Christ. We have a one flesh relationship with Him and our relationship to Him should be our guide to how our marriages should be functioning here on earth.

The gift of marriage and the joys of sexual intimacy are given in order to give us a foretaste of the joys that we have in His presence, both now and forever.

Let us strive to make our marriages ever increasingly accurate pictures of our eternal marriage.

God's Consecration of Sex - Waiting

Song of Solomon 1:1-3:14

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Adapted from *Lessons in Love from the Lost Book*, Pastor Tom Nelson, Denton Bible Church, 1910 E. University Dr., Denton, TX 76201

Introduction

This is Canticles – the Song of Songs. Just as the holy of holies is the innermost, the superlative place of God's dwelling, this is the song of songs. It is the superlative of songs, the highest, best and innermost song. It is superlative in its eloquence and movement. It is superlative in its passion and purity. It is superlative in its ultimate object of affection and adoration, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this Song of Songs is most difficult for us. Fallenness and sinfulness and impurity picks up the intimacies of consecrated, consummated and commended marital oneness and takes its beauty and make it base, its wonder and make it wanton; its glories and make it gross; its purity and makes it perverse. Many, with hearts unable to comprehend that God has designed the purity of marital oneness and sexuality, turn away from the plain meaning of this text and create fanciful allegories.

Yet, as we have seen from our last chapter, this design of God for marriage is not an end in itself. Now that Christ has come, now that He is portrayed to our eyes as our groom, now that we have this grand mystery of the union between Christ and His church, this Song of Songs now has a greater object than Solomon and the shepherd maiden, but the great King and his Bride. James Dennison writes, "Solomon's Song contains a retrospective, introspective and prospective dimension. It returns us to the garden where we realize how God created our sexuality ("good"). It reminds us that in our marriages, we are invited to experience a union that surges to rise above a fallen creation. It testifies of an eschatological arena where love is perfected in blessed, mystical union with our Heavenly Lover, Jesus Christ."

As with how we handle the graphic language of this wonderful poetry, we must also find the third way in our approach to this book. We must not go down slope and arrive at the conclusion that Canticles is *merely* a sex manual (or, as some, a guide for married love) thus ignoring both the context of godly communion and the centrality of Christ. And, we must not go down slope the other side and so allegorize and spiritualize the book that we lose the use of the Song to illuminate both our human marriage oneness and our union with Christ. No, just as marriage is a lesser reality portraying a greater one, so marital oneness portrays a greater union.

This is because we find that Jesus Christ Himself could take three disciples from Moses through the Prophets and show how all the Scriptures are fulfilled in Him. So Jesus is in the Song of Songs. He is its first reality and its final fulfillment. Marriage portrays Christ and the church and we are to read the Old Testament through that lens. Christ fulfills the law, the wisdom, the songs, the narratives of the Old. He is

the grand end and aim and object of all. At the end of days, He is our Groom and we are His Bride and the marriage feast is laid and consummation is coming.

This Song of Songs is about companionship, communion and consummation. It is about how the soul moves toward the object of its love. It is about the importance of words and wants as giving direction to affections and actions. It is about how the husband courts his spouse and how the wife charms her husband. It is about how we guard ourselves and preserve our purity until the day of union and consummation. It is about how self interest and self focus can mar oneness at all levels and how the responsibility for reconciliation is placed on both. It is about how the providence of God is to be seen in the weaving of life stories as a shadow of the weaving of redemptive history.

And it is all this at both the human and divine levels. It is about our companionship with Christ. It is about our growing communion with Him. It is about that longing for day of glorious consummation. When we are to worship our King, there is to be fealty; when we are to walk with our Father, there is to be fear; and when we are to love our Groom-Husband, there is to be fire.

The divine Author, the Holy Spirit of God, filled each section of this book with the ebb and flow of relationship. There is separation, longing and union. There is mutual initiation and marvelous imagery. There are expectations, expressions and experiences of whole-souled devotion, of vibrant delight, of vital desire.

So as we hover over this Song of Songs may its truth at all dimensions sing in our souls.

Companionship – Growing Admiration (1:2-7)

The book opens with its title and author. It is the Song of Songs by Solomon. This is dramatic poetry written to be read and recited. It is about the love between Christ and His Bride as is seen in the love between Solomon and the Shulammitte maiden.

His Attractions (v. 2-4)

She begins by expressing her attraction to him. There is attraction to him in the physical contact of kisses and in his character and reputation. His kisses and his name are sweet and tasty. While many may admire his character, his chambers are for her alone.

She is not alone in extolling his virtue. This “chorus” that appears several times provides a sense of responsive song – she sings the solo of her admiration and they respond with the chorus of theirs. They will exult and rejoice in him and his love. Thus they commend him to her.

Her Anxieties (v. 5-7)

But she is concerned as she contrasts herself with the women in the court who surround him. She is tanned and they are alabaster. She has worked out in the sun in the family vineyard, being forced to do so by her step-brothers. She is concerned that he will not prefer her duskiness. Yet, she is aware of her own beauty and charms.

She describes him in the simplest of terms: the one whom I love. She wants to be near him and have his love for her publicly declared. She wants to be recognized and acknowledged, not hidden away among the ladies who move through his life.

What emerges here is what we would think of as admiration, of holding our loved one high in our regard. There is a call for exclusive and focused attention and affection. This is at the heart of Biblical sexuality. Each spouse must have eyes and heart only for their spouse, even in the competing attractions of others in our lives. This is where we begin. Do you have a single-minded focus on your spouse? Do you acknowledge and declare your sole devotion to them privately and when needed, publicly? Does your spouse sense that they are competing for your attention and affection?

O how we ought to reflect this kind of admiration and affection for our heavenly Groom. He is utterly perfect – His character is without flaw and His reputation, spotless. While we know that we are not perfect in His eyes, yet He has set His heart on us.

Courtship – Guarding Purity

(1:8 - 3:5)

The lovers move from the longing of separation to expressions of delight and desire for each other.

Their Description of One Another

(1:8-2:7)

They begin with wonderful descriptions of one another. There are words of praise (1:8-2:6) to one and about one another.

This is how they think of one another. Our affections and attractions to one another flow from the way we think. If we cultivate words in our souls that describe our spouses to ourselves like this, we will fan the flame of one another's love.

This is also how they speak of one another. We can either build or destroy our relationship and the joy of our marital oneness through the way we speak to one another. All through this Song, we find tender and loving words framing and filling their relationship. I am deeply concerned that we learn to speak to our spouses with words that are full of love and grace. Further, we must learn to become skillful in the language of our love. I know many men who would say that they are not able to talk like this about their wives and especially to their wives. Yet, you wax eloquent over sports, computers, cars, whatever.

You see, you can talk well and a lot about what you treasure. In fact, you just do. What you value and esteem, your affections go out to and your words will describe with praise and proficiency. I would encourage you to begin with cards or a simple note expressing your love for your spouse. Men, shame on you if you are embarrassed or you think this is for sissies. God declares and affirms His love for us through words all through the Scriptures. He is not embarrassed to express His love for us. Most of you are unskilled because you are unpracticed. You may not be a Solomon or a Shakespeare, but you can learn to express yourself.

Notice too how she describes him to herself in verses 3-4. Her words describe a deep sense of satisfaction and security. These ways of thinking about him and

words in her soul are very important to sustain her attraction to him. Thus, her desire for him grows (v.5-6). His affirmations of love and desire for her and her thoughts about him fuel her desire for him. Like much of this poetry and what it describes, this exotic culture seems overwrought and overdone to us. She is feeling faint from desire for him. She is beginning to imagine them in bed together.

But, their restraint protects them (2:7). This is most important. As a couple are courting or dating one another, as there is a growing awareness and admiration and even desire for one another, there must be godly commitments to purity. This phrase, "Do not stir up love until it is appropriate," is a very important principle in sexuality. It should guide us in when and how we introduce the subject to our children. It must guard us when we are dating, to know how to possess our bodies in sanctification – to know what entices and enflames and tempts. The more you give away and get in dating and engagement, the less you have to give away and gain in marriage.

One other observation – notice the power of thinking, of imagination, of fantasy. Most often we think of it as being a power to evil, to lust, to sin. But here, it is being used, as it will all through the Song, to awaken, elevate and sustain passion for our spouse. Brothers and sisters, it is right and I believe, important, that you delight and desire your spouse in your thoughts, in your imagination. That leads to two exhortations: you must not have these thoughts and imaginations over any one other than your spouse and you must have them about your spouse. Failing either way will seriously harm the frequency and joy and pleasure of your sexual oneness.

Are you faltering in your affections and your desire for God? This is the power of our praise and worship – it is songs and expressions of description and delight and adoration of God that stir up our hearts to want Him and to wait for Him and to serve him. And when you have little desire to so worship God, is that not because you do not really prize Him and treasure Him?

Their Desire for One Another

(2:8-3:5)

In the language and analogy of the "hind" and stag", love deepens and their passion awakens.

HER AWAKENING PASSION (2:8-15) is a response to his loving invitation. Here is here reflection on and recall of his call to her. The language here is rich in imagination as they are described as a stag and deer. She is in her home and he is calling to her and inviting her to join him out to walk with him in the country. The description of spring portrays the beauty of their awakening love and passion in the language shared in almost every culture. His invitation and affirmation delights her and draws her out to him. Here is the power of his words to affect her as a whole person.

He is aware of all the little things that can enter their lives and ruin the sweetness of their love. The little foxes were destructive pests in gardens and vineyards. He does not merely want them fenced out, but caught and dealt with and destroyed. There are all sorts of little things that need to be addressed and dealt with during courtship and during marriage. Often, the slow build up of small hurts, minor

disagreements eats away at a relationship until there is massive decay and destruction. In my counseling over the years, I have found over and over again that marital oneness and sexual vitality are ruined by all the small foxes running through the vineyard of marriages.

HER ASSURED LOVE (2: 16-17) is spoken of in terms of mutual ownership and lasting commitment. This is somewhat hard for us today – but this language of mutual ownership in marriage runs all through the Bible and reflects that mutual commitment in our relationship with Christ. Esther and I just as gladly say this to one another as we can say, “I am the Lord’s and He is mine.” In this is a sense of safety, security and well-being.

HER ADAMANT SEEKING (3:1-4) pursues him from her country home to his city dwelling. She leaves her comfort zone and goes after him in response to his invitation. This is the Bible way. This is God’s way. The man initiates with heart drawing out invitations. And the woman responds with active efforts and initiatives. This also reflects that Jesus seeks us first and all our pursuing of Christ is upon His gracious invitation to be sought and pursued. We love Him because He first loved us.

HER APPEAL FOR RESTRAINT (3:5) comes when she has brought into her home, and into her mother’s bedroom. Here we have moved from the temptation in thoughts (2:7) to the temptation of a place. Before, it was love moving toward lust in the heart. Now it is love moving toward passions of the body. And once again, restraint and caution are appealed for. There is a constant need for care and caution that we be pure before marriage. God has a time and place for marital oneness and it is reserved for marriage. When courting, be careful about the places and times that would open you to temptation so that your growing love is not stained by sin and shame.

If only our long years of waiting for Christ could be filled with such yearnings of the soul and movements of the heart. We are now engaged to Him, His betrothed. We are waiting with joy and anticipation until He comes and we are married to Him. We respond to His invitations to be sought and pursued even as He affirms to us that we are His and He is ours. And our longing for that final union with Him is savored in our anticipation of and participation in earthly marriage.

Covenant – Glorious Union

(3:6-11)

Ah, what a day this is. This is the day of the wedding. The culture is very different from ours. The groom comes in a procession and takes her from her parent’s home to their new home. There, they begin what was often a week long wedding feast. During the first night of the feast, the couple would consummate the marriage.

Its Sanctity

(v. 6)

From the perspective of the narrator, the groom approaches – but what a groom. Here is the power and majesty of Solomon in all his rich array. Today, all the attention is on the arrival of the bride – in that day, on the arrival of the groom. The language here is intentionally evocative of pillar of cloud in the wilderness. Here is Solomon arriving to claim His bride. Here is Yahweh leading the procession

through the wilderness to arrive at Canaan. Here is Christ in triumphal procession arriving to claim His bride. What glorious smoke and incense. What fragrance of beauty. What awesome majesty. But these terms also indicate the holiness and sanctity of marriage and marital union. It comes through the way and at the time and in the context God has ordained.

Its Security

(v. 7-8)

When her groom comes with such an awesome train of soldiers and servants, she has no fear. Here is the great safety and security her husband brings to their marriage. While this is opulent and extravagant, many a wife would take heart from a husband's providing safety and security under the gracious hand of God.

Its Splendor

(v. 9-10)

Her groom also comes to escort her in the best chariot of the day. It is custom made and meant to show how much he cares for her and that all his wealth is brought to their marriage. Notice that it is what he himself made and fashioned. He arrives in it and it seems that it is his gift to her. She who has come from lowly means will arrive at her new home in grand ceremony and procession.

Its Satisfaction

(v. 11)

When the king arrives, his mother comes out to place the wedding crown on his head, signifying the seal of his marriage. All the maidens are summoned to look upon him and to be reminded that he is now married. This is his wedding. This marriage to this woman is a great and glad day. They must honor that union. They must not compete with her for his attention. They must rejoice with the King in the day of his covenant union with his wife.

What is there to say? I cannot even begin to describe the sanctity, security, splendor and everlasting satisfaction on the day our King arrives from the far country of heaven's home. On that day He will be admired and adored. On that day, all will acclaim His fame and worth. On that day, all that we have waited for and longed for will come true.

And we must do all we can to flesh that out with our spouses. Most cannot bring the wealth and magnificence of Solomon to our marriages. But we can be extravagant in our demonstrations of love, care, provision and protection of one another. Men, treat your wives with royal regard. Honor her. Uphold her. Be a living demonstration of the lavish care and loving provision of God for His Bride.

Conclusion

Learn the importance of your thoughts – the words in your heart carry your beliefs and wants. This is so important in your relationship with your spouse. The words of your heart will give rise to holy and loving affections. Or the words of your heart will destroy them and generate responses and emotions that are not pleasing to God and do not sustain your marriage.

To the unmarried, guard your purity, even in courtship. Impurity in thought and want will wage war on the soul, harming your walk with God and hurting your present and future relationships.

Grow in your ability to express your love to one another. Learn to say, “I love you” in all kinds of ways. Learn to share yourself in words and actions. Be extravagant in your commitment to both give yourself and draw out your spouse.

Each of you, be poised to respond to the other. We see this all through the Song of Songs. Sometimes, he takes the initiative and leads in their loving. Sometimes, she takes the initiative. But there is that dance of invitation and response. Don’t make the other feel foolish for their initial attempts – always warm to them and respond to them.

Is there a connection between a man who has little romantic skill with his wife and his having little passionate communion with his God? It may well be that cultivating one will bear fruit in the other.

Aim your marriage at all levels and in all ways to reflect our union with Christ. The joys of marital oneness with our spouses are but a small foretaste of the consummation of our great, spiritual union with Christ.

May these words ever be true, “I am His and He is mine.”

God's Direction for Sex - Joy

1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Proverbs 5:15-20

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Introduction

As people of the Book, we must come to grips with the subjects the Bible deals with. While some subjects might appear to awkward to deal with, sometimes they are critical to our Christian life. This has been our concern over this subject of sexuality. It is easy at one level to simply declare the ethics of the Bible on this subject – its clear commands, consequences and condemnations. The church has largely done this in the last 50 years. We basically had an ethics of sexuality, but no Canonical-Biblical Theology of sexuality.

In this Family Enrichment Conference, we have been wrestling through and unpacking a Canonical theology of Sexuality. Here are our aims in doing so.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality.
- To counter the world's influence in this area.

As we have studied and preached, we have come to discover an unexpected treasure. We have found that the ethics, the do's and don'ts of sex are grounded in a Theology. Our marriages and our marital oneness are shadows of a greater spiritual reality. From the beginning, God designed to use our gender, our physical and spiritual oneness in marriage to reflect the image of God and His oneness with His Bride, the church. Marriage and physical union were designed by the wisdom of God to exhibit in the physical world that greater reality. Further, it allows us to experience now what is to come when we will be with the Lord Jesus, albeit in a smaller, dimmer and lesser way.

And we have discovered that this is why God is so full of wrath against sin in this area. Sin in the sexual sphere is first, vertical. It is not only against God, but it is about God. Immorality, sex before marriage, denies the great value of this period when we, the Lord's betrothed are awaiting Him in purity. Adultery, sex with someone not our spouse in marriage, mars, stains and sullies the witness we are to give as well as denying the Lord as having exclusive claim to our love. Homosexuality and lesbianism, sex with someone of the same gender, corrupts the good and perfect design of God to portray His image, His union with His people, through male and female. Pastor Greg will be taking us through God's Word next week, illuminating these terrible sins from this perspective.

When we pick up our Bibles, we hear a very important two themed symphony over sexuality. There is the theme of delight – motivations directed at our wants and desires holding up as desirable and delectable the pleasures of God in all the good gifts that He has given us. Lest we turn these into idols and sin, there is the theme of di-

rection – commands, instructions, expectations with accompanying warnings, counsel, consequences and condemnations.

The story is told of a young Christian couple getting ready to be married. They had waited with Godly purity for the day they would be one. They had planned a simple, but God-honoring and beautiful wedding. The family was all there. The groom and pastor were at the front of the church. The bridesmaids had gone down with the groomsmen. The music was just changing to the wedding march. As the father and the bride waited by the back pew, an elderly aunt reached up, grabbed the bride's hand and pulled her down to whisper in her ear. What words wisdom and joy would she share in this moment of wedding joy? The aunt grated, "Be ready for what is going to happen tonight. Sex is awful and for his sake, pretend like you enjoy it."

Well this aunt needs to hear the Word of God – as probably at this point, so does the bride. What direction does God give for our marital intimacy?

The Directives for our Intimacy

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

As we open to 1 Corinthians 7, we are confronted with a church that had gone seriously awry in many areas. They were immersed in carnality while making public claims to high spirituality. Many things Paul had taught them were being denied, misused, over applied and questioned. This is the case in this chapter as well.

As a result of Paul's teaching on marriage and celibacy, several problems and confusions had emerged. They wrote Paul a letter raising questions and making assertions about a number of these issues. Paul keys in on one quote from that letter and gives us straightforward direction for our sexual intimacy.

Sexual Intimacy is Required

(v.1-2)

Their assertion, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman", is in regards to either asceticism or platonic love (v.1). This is properly in quotes in the ESV – it is something they wrote and it is wrong, as Paul will show. To quote this as though God is saying to us, "Don't touch a woman (v.1) unless you are married to her" is to miss the point entirely. All Paul had taught them was that celibacy was a good thing and not to be despised. This teaching from Paul was probably a response to accusations made against him as an unmarried Apostle. So, he had explained that singleness in the church was to be accepted and honored as long it was used for the sake of the church.

Now, I want to pause here and speak to something. Consider Paul's words to singles and widows (7:8, 32-35; 1 Timothy 5). Singleness whether a lifelong gift from God or a temporary station of life, is not to be used to serve self. It is a time in your life when God expects you to dedicate your singleness for service to God and to His kingdom. Too many young people stay single in order to enjoy life, make money, advance a career and other self-serving agendas. If you are single, you should dedicate the time you have to the Lord and the service of His church.

But the church had evidently misunderstood and misused Paul's teaching. It is also possible that they were trying to respond to the situation around them of persecution, a rising food shortage in the city and increasing difficulty in raising families in the cultural milieu, what Paul calls "the present distress" (v.26). They

also seem to be asserting that a higher level of spirituality was to be gained by abstaining from sex, even in marriage. Not that they were asserting that sex was wrong. Just, as they did over many other things, they had a second level of spirituality that was measured by misusing Paul's teaching. Now, Paul's response to their assertion is that sexual intimacy is required in marriage (v.2). The word "have" here is a euphemism for marital oneness, for sex. In contrast to asceticism or Platonism where a woman is not to be "touched" rather spouses are to be sexually active.

Just to be sure that he is understood, he uses a reflexive possessive indicating that each man is to have sex only with his own wife and each wife with her own husband. You can almost hear him thinking and writing very carefully. He has just spent chapter 6 warning them of the dangers and deadliness of sex outside of marriage. He does not now want to be heard to be contradicting himself. His instruction is emphatic: there must be marital oneness in marriage and only within marriage.

Sexual Intimacy Reduces Temptation (v.2,7)

While grace enables us to resist temptation, grace has also provided for intimacy in marriage as a way to decrease our vulnerability to temptation. This is the great blessing of marriage and it is why life-long singleness with purity is a gift from God. The more sensual the culture in which we live then the more we must pay attention to this principle. God has ordained that spouses help reduce sexual temptation through all the directives given in this paragraph.

This is why we believe and counsel that a spouse who withholds sexual intimacy in marriage may be contributing to their spouse being vulnerable to temptation. When we are dealing with adultery, this is always a question to be raised and, when true, repentance is called for and forgiveness is to be sought.

Sexual Intimacy is a Responsibility (v.3)

Each spouse has a responsibility to meet the needs of the other. We are to regard it as a right. It is not a right to be privately asserted, but one to be personally granted. We must be careful as Christians when we hear this that we do not become aggressive in demanding our right but rather we become assertive in meeting our responsibility.

This means that there will be times when you will give to yourself to your spouse simply for their good, but not as a duty to be endured, but a joyous sacrifice. Remember that we have seen in the Song of Songs, a poise to respond through having thoughts in our hearts that are pleasing to God.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Reciprocal

The man is not given rights superior to the woman. It is clear, then, that mutual initiation and mutual stimulation are to be encouraged. This means that shared, active participation is to be expected. This requires a real surrender of ourselves to our spouses. Thus, there is to be a kind of engagement with one another that is like the Song of Songs.

Now understand this. These kinds of instructions are placed within a loving, caring marriage where one spouse is not going to be taken advantage of by the other. That is the expectation. But, it does make us more vulnerable to being sinned against in marriages where sin and lust rule the hearts of spouses. Thus a man may take advantage, not to make love to his spouse, but merely to satisfy his physical desires without regard for her. Or, a woman may trade her favors for attention and advantage from him. She may use them as a lever to gain what she wants. She may punish or reward “good” behavior from him. These are sins of unloving attitudes and actions in your marriage.

Beloved, if those are the kinds of concerns you have in your marriage when you hear these instructions, and those concerns are well grounded in the actual realities of day-to-day living in your home, then you need to speak to your elder. You need one anothering and you need Biblical counsel from God’s Word. And if this sounds dangerous to you, then please call us so that we can get involved to give you help and hope from His Word.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Rewarding (v.4)

Now, bear with me as verse 4 and 5a speaks to a very personal aspect of our marital union. *Our aim in sex is to bring our spouse pleasure.* It is not to be primarily self-focused. It is to be mostly about what pleasure you can give, not what you can get. The greatest joy in sexual intimacy is when both spouses are focused on giving pleasure and on helping their mate to know best what gives that pleasure.

This is where we are most vulnerable to our own sin and to the shaping influence of the world. Sinful sex is primarily about your pleasure and satisfaction. It is seeking your pleasure through the use of another, usually seen as an object. It is about what you can get, you can achieve, all about *you*. The Bible takes Philippians 2: 4 sets it as the watch guard over almost every area of life. You are to pursue your joy in the joy of another – to experience the greatest pleasure in bring pleasure to your spouse.

So, many of you need to repent of the sin of self-interest in your marital intimacy. You need, today, to confess your sin to God and to ask forgiveness from your spouse. You need to replace your self-focused thoughts and wants with words and thoughts for your spouse. You must talk and share and become skillful in the way that brings your spouse pleasure while not demanding what your spouse does not enjoy giving nor what is sinful itself.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Regular (v.5)

Finally, Paul becomes very plain and pointed about frequency. While some in Corinth may have begun to abstain from sex in marriage without the consent of their spouse, Paul says this is not right. He expects that marital union will be a regular part of marriage.

He gives several guidelines for abstaining in marriage. Refraining from sex is to be:

- By mutual agreement – both the husband and the wife are to agree to it. There is to be no unilateral abstinence, particularly, when it leads to greater vulnerability to temptation.
- For spiritual exercises – interestingly, Paul sees fasting for prayer as either the only legitimate reason or is an example of legitimate reasons. Now, I know that there may be physical incapacity or illness. But the proverbial “headache” or “hard day at work” may simple be a symptom, not a reason. And it is possible to agree to abstain based on principle – for example, many Christian couples agree to abstain during monthly periods.
- Over a short period of time – Paul says that mutually agreed upon, for spiritual exercise abstinence is to be for a short period or for a set period. In other words, it is for a short and a defined period of time. No open ended agreements are allowed here even if it is mutually agreed upon. I am of the considered and hopefully, Biblical view, that Christians should not have platonic marriages where there is no physical attraction or attention. Long-term abstinence is here forbidden.
- With alertness to temptation – during this time, both spouses are to be alert to the temptations Satan may troll across our abstinence. It is vital that we not be naïve and foolish during these times, but guard our hearts and lives.
- And ended with planned and mutually pleasurable consummation. Paul sort of states the obvious – a Biblical time of abstinence is ended with a Biblical “coming together.”

So, clearly, the Bible is concerned with the problems of sensuality that leads to immorality and adultery. But it is also very concerned with worldly and cultural views that make sexual intimacy in marriage less than what God intended.

Here is the core of God’s direction for marital union; *MAKE YOUR SPOUSE’S JOY AND PLEASURE THE FOCUS OF YOUR LOVING.*

The Delight in our Intimacy

Proverbs 5:15-23

This is an important time to talk about the use of metaphor and euphemisms. This is the way the Bible speaks. It uses metaphors both to hide and heighten what is being discussed. To children, the words of the metaphor appropriately clothe what is being described. But to spiritually minded adults, the words serve to help us see it in our imaginations without grossly, direct description. The Bible’s way in Proverbs and in Canticles (Song of Solomon) gives us direction: we strive for Biblically used metaphors that hide when necessary, and heighten and help at all other times.

And just one more word as we come to this text and to Song of Songs later. We cannot have a standard of words and ways between married couples that would effectively ban this text and Canticles. My exposition of Canticles is not reading all the

text publicly, but will explain it well enough for you who are married to take it home and obey Proverbs, to delight in your spouse.

In the context here, Solomon is warning his son against immorality, fornication and adultery. Since he is writing to a son, it is couched in language that warns against the process of belief and want in a man's heart and the seductive temptations presented by a woman. Thus, it is truth in particulars. We must be able to take the particulars and transfer them. Therefore, young ladies and wives, you must also guard your own hearts and be alert to the forms in which you are tempted and your heart is seduced as well.

And we must also see that in this text we hear the wanderings and warnings of our own sinful adulteries against our great heavenly Betrothed. We must guard against allurements and seductions presented as wise, beautiful, desirable pleasures that steal our hearts and affections from God. Adultery in either realm will take us down a long and destructive path to damnation. Beware, my beloved.

But from verses 1-14 with all its warnings, we pick up with Solomon as he places before us a vision of godly delight in our intimacy.

An Intentional Faithfulness

(v.15-17)

First, we must have a single minded focus on our spouse that excludes all others. Solomon uses the analogy of wells and cisterns which is largely unfamiliar to us. We go to a tap, turn it and get (we hope) clean water. I grew up in Africa where we had a cistern that was filled with water during the rainy season and became a carefully tended and monitored resource during the dry. Solomon was very familiar with this. Taking water from someone else's cistern was a crime. It would be like hooking up your electric and water to your neighbor's meters without their knowledge.

The analogy of water, springs, wells and cisterns as a way of speaking of sex was quite common and familiar to people of Solomon's day and still so in many parts of the world. So Solomon's counsel here is for each of us to have a careful, intentional and focused faithfulness. This kind of godly faithfulness must be committed to and cultivated. It will not happen passively – it is intentional and active on our part. The seductions to turn the gaze of your eyes, your ears, your hearts and even your body to some other source of delight usually come through unguarded means and ways.

This intentional faithfulness also recognizes our exclusive relationship with our spouse and their absolute claim on our heart, mind and body (v.16-17). The very important sense of "I am hers and she is mine" is not just about titled ownership, but is real and practical. It establishes an overarching call for exclusive purity – my body is not my own, it is the Lord's and it is Esther's for her alone.

And this is true in the spiritual realm as well. God owns us, yes as a servant, but also in this same exclusive, for-Him-alone sense. We are God's and God's alone. Give yourself whole and totally to Him in surrender. Resist all other claims on your attention and affection that will woo and win your soul, and then destroy it. And it is the great glory of all this – I am God's and He is mine. I am Esther's

and she is mine – this is a great and glad affirmation in my heart that works its way out in my affections and actions.

An Intoxicating Fullness

(v.18-19)

This exclusive commitment arises from having a single minded desire for our spouse that intoxicates us. This counsel comes to us, not only in the fresh flush of newly married love, but also in the long steady pace of persevering delight through old age. The exhortation here is to sustain in your maturity what filled you in your youth. Take joy in your spouse. Be exhilarated with their love and loving.

Notice how these have the force of commands. Rejoice, be filled with delight, be intoxicated. This means you have a responsibility to love in this way. Is this how you would describe your feelings about your spouse? Is this kind of delight and desire for her how you think? Do you think of your husband in the parallels of these for a lady?

And we also must consider the problem that a false modesty raises in this. Husbands and wives, there must at all times be modest and appropriate behavior in public and among each other as is fitting for the saints. And there should be a shameless and pure openness with our spouses in private. We will see this more clearly in the Song of Songs, but many ladies would be embarrassed by this kind of language and attentiveness from their husbands. If the husband has an imperative to focus on his wife like this, then the wife has an imperative to relish and revel in this attention.

Why, because we are to so love and focus on all the wonderful attributes of our Beloved Redeemer and Ruler who is perfect and beautiful in all His grand holiness and winsome love. Should we not rejoice in God? Should we not be intoxicated by His love? Should we not delight in all the extravagant care and delights He has stored up for us, holy pleasures beyond our imagination at His right hand? And do we struggle with this in our communion with God because we struggle with it in our relationship with our spouses? Are you getting the connections?

One final thing on this note: if you do not have this kind of earthly relationship, either because of your singleness or because of your spouse, that does not prevent you from so glorying in your God. God has shown Himself merciful, gracious and wholly satisfying to hundreds and thousands of singles or lonely spouses who have little experience of this at the human level but who experience it in the grand mystery of their union with Christ.

An Iniquitous Foolishness

(v.20-23)

Solomon moves seamlessly between two opposites. We may be intoxicated with our spouses or we may become intoxicated with someone else. Briefly, we must guard against the intrusion of another in our thoughts, in the object of our desires, lest we become bound in the cords of sin and folly. Sending our hearts down that path to another ensnares us, binds us, destroys us and then leads us astray in many other areas of folly.

But here is the centerpiece of it all. We are loving our spouses before the face of God (v.21). His eyes are on our hearts, listening, weighing, evaluating and responding to words of belief and want that flow through them and then surge outwards in actions and affections.

So MAKE YOUR SPOUSE THE DELIGHT OF YOUR EYES, YOUR BODY, YOUR WHOLE PERSON.

Conclusion

Reflection and Examination

To the unmarried, examine your own heart for wrong beliefs and wants even though you are unmarried. Where do you need to change? Teenagers, you must prize your purity and protect your heart so that when you marry, you will be ready to be pleasing to God.

To the married, there is so much here that lands, maybe somewhat uncomfortably, on our lives. It strikes that we are sucked either into a sort of Christ prudery that makes our marital oneness almost a necessary concession or duty or else into a sort of worldly defined, carnally driven licentiousness where our minds are dominated by a gaze of lust and occasionally our spouses wander into our field of vision. It is our prayer that the plainness of these texts and the pointedness of these messages will pop the shallow facades we hide behind.

Repentance and Change

So, renew your mind to believe what God says and discard unbiblical lies. Many of you need to go through your whole view (I believe that... I do not believe that...) and examine it in the light of Scriptures and then change it.

Turn your desires towards your spouse so that they are the delight of your eyes. Make their joy and pleasure your primary aim. Surrender yourself and give yourself completely. Purpose to give them exclusive place in your heart, in its thoughts, desires and affections. For many of you, this will involve a conscious choice to repent, a distinct decision to turn away from or to turn lovingly toward.

Ask forgiveness for your sinful attitudes and actions that have been exposed to your heart today. Many of you need to go home and over lunch or over the afternoon ask forgiveness for the mess you have made, not just generally, but with the specific bits the Holy Spirit will tenderly and powerfully illuminate.

Response and Commitment

And I call on you (as I do myself) to be a doer of the Word you have heard this morning and not a hearer only, lest you deceive yourself. Cry out to God for His mercy and grace to help in this your time of need. Ask Him for that wisdom He promises to give to those who will humble themselves.

May God help us to glorify him in the grand mystery of our marriages and oneness.

God's Commendation of Sex - Wonder

Song of Solomon 4:1-8:14

Pastor Russ Kennedy

Adapted from *Lessons in Love from the Lost Book*, Pastor Tom Nelson, Denton Bible Church, 1910 E. University Dr., Denton, TX 76201

Introduction

<< Crassly Literal Slide – *Wittenberg Door* >>

In this Family Enrichment Conference, we have been wrestling through and unpacking a Canonical theology of Sexuality. Here are our aims in doing so.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality.
- To counter the world's influence in this area.

The Song of Songs illuminates the wonder of marital oneness. We are dazzled by their desire and delight in one another. By God's grace, we are to be drawn out to seek this kind of relationship with our own spouses. God Himself commends to us the wonder of our marital union, its privileges and its pleasures. He does so for our good and His great glory. He does so as we see through this earthly lens the wonder of our coming union with Jesus Christ, our Groom.

Consummation – Loving Oneness

4:1 - 5:1

Chapter three ends with the marriage. Chapter four is the honeymoon, their first night together. Many commentators suggest that the way this is written does portray the initial consummation, but not in a way that makes it utterly unique in their experience. The sweetness and thrill of that first evening together may become characteristic of our times of marital oneness.

He Admires Her

(4:1-8)

In verses 1-5 we have such an eloquent expression of love and desire. Some of it sounds very strange to us, but it was sweet music to her heart. He is speaking in a way that declares his admiration of her beauty. He does so indirectly with comparisons and imagery. It is both intense and playful. It shows that he has thought a lot about her and what he loves about her body.

We need a third way here as well. We must not despise the body as though it itself were corrupt or contemptible. And we must not worship the body as though its present state is perfection. We can love our spouse's body, the way they look and move and how it thrills us. In fact, it seems that this is an imperative in the Scripture. So, husbands and wives, love your spouse in such a way that you admire and expression your appreciation for them.

Further we see how Scripture is true to life. Everyone knows in their heart of hearts the importance of admiration, affection and affirmation in initiating and

cultivating a heart and body stirring marital oneness. These two wonderful paragraphs are filled with expressed anticipation. Beloved, how often does our Groom describe His love for us and the joy of what is to come in heart thrilling, hope filling words that stir up anticipation.

Verses 6-8 are intention and invitation. It is easy to see how along the soft touches of his words are accompanied by the caresses of his hands. As he speaks, he assures her and raises her own anticipation. Then, reaching back to their courtship, he invites her to join with him knowing that where there had to be restraint before, there can be a surrender and fulfillment now.

He Arouses Her

(4:9-15)

As they move closer to consummation, he gives assurances of his total surrender and dedication to her. His words flow over the contours of her character, as well as her form. He tastes and enjoys her lips. He wonderfully speaks of her purity while tenderly and sweetly preparing her for their union. He rejoices in her response to him. Even in the imagery here, there is an amazing delicacy and gladness, urgency and patience braided together in loving words and ways.

She Admits Him

(4:16-5:1a)

These verses, with glorious charm, bring the consummation and they are one. She is a locked, watered and fragrant garden which is now open for him. She invites him in and is delighted with joy in their union.

God Approves

(5:1 b)

And then these words, marvelous and mysterious. Is this the chorus? Is this the wedding party rejoicing in this their night together? Along with a number of commentators, I believe this is God. God is hovering over their courtship and now their consummation, approving it. And it is not just the stern gavel of a rendered decision. It is the happy approval of a glad God. This is what the Proverbs mentioned and the Bible is full of. You are living your life before the face of God. His holiness guarantees that this is not just divine voyeurism, but rather divine joy that illuminates the day of consummation of His Son and His bride.

This removes any shame in loving, joyous, holy sex. Now, if this is strange or possibly even distasteful, if this sounds sinful or erotic to you, then my beloved, there is something amiss, something wrong. I know it is possible to react to the fact that this is coming from the pulpit on a Sunday Evening, but I am being even more discreet than the Bible in deference to your sensibilities. So even taking that into account, I would encourage you to see a negative reaction to all of this as a symptom of a deep heart issue. I would call on you to seek the counsel of elders or mature godly women.

The consummation in their marital oneness is approached with loving and tender anticipation, marvelous imagination, delighted participation, deep satisfaction and joyous Divine approval. The beauty and delicacy of the Scriptures anticipates our loving martial union here and our mysterious heavenly union then. "Eat, drink, be drunk with love!"

Conflict – Losing Joy

5:2 - 6:13

How quickly life can move from the good to the bad, from loving, passionate responses to casual indifference. In this next movement of the Song of Songs, we have just that. As we will see, they did not allow the wonder and intimacy of their marriage to wane, but rather had nourished and cherished it so that it grew and matured.

Yet, even in the midst of a good marriage, there can arise problems to deal with – conflict that must be addressed and dealt with. We find here a pattern, a model for solving marital conflict that is fleshed out in other Scriptures as well.

The Root of their Conflict

(5:2-3)

First, we need to see more clearly what is being alluded to here. The husband is approaching her for intimacy either very late at night or very early in the morning (v.2). As was common in their day, they had separate bedrooms. It is not clear whether he is coming in late from work or has come over to her suite early in the morning. “Honey...”

She responds with words in her heart that appear at first to be a legitimate excuse (v.3). After all, it is either very late or very early – it is very inconvenient for her. She hasn’t offered the proverbial “headache” or “too tired” excuse, but it is clearly being offered out of self-focus and indifference. So she delays. She does not respond to him. She tosses around these words in her mind. She lingers with excuses either in her own heart or possibly, even spoken out.

The Results of their Conflict

(5:4-8)

He rattles the doorknob (v.4) and she repents. Notice the change in words in her heart from “How could I?” to “my beloved, my heart thrilled...” So she gets up and in perfumed anticipation, goes to the door and opens. And he is gone. He has turned away. Ah, her soul had failed her. Her heart sank.

Now listen to me beloved. There are all kinds of reasons that we do not respond to our spouses. Many of them are “justified” – our spouses may be insensitive, ignorant or even just demanding. We may not be feeling well or tired. It may well be either 12:30 at night or 4:30 in the morning. The problem is when we are poised to respond like this regardless. The conflict comes when we lie – we say we... when we well know that is not really true, we just want something else than what is being offered or requested at the moment.

This is precisely where the Scripture is placing it. Right or wrong, at this moment of request and response, there are competing wants – here, desire for intimacy clashing with desire for comfort (notice carefully that it is comfort, not sleep and not sickness.) This is where both spouses need to consider, “look after the interests of others.” Is this a good time? Am I simply gratifying myself? Am I responding to invitation out of self-_____? Can I appeal with a promise? What would please God right now?

So she pursues him. In verse one, she is sleeping awake, in other words, she is dreaming. Now her dream becomes a nightmare. She runs out to pursue her beloved and is accosted and assaulted by the night watchmen. It is hard to tell from the text if she is actually having this experience, or if she is dreaming or if the

Holy Spirit is helping us to connect to what our conflict can feel like. It could be all three.

Isn't it true that sometimes our little "innocent" demands and responses suddenly turn in surreal nightmares. Do you ever listen to you and your spouse and think, "How in the world did we get here? What are we doing? What are we saying?" Little foxes destroying vineyards. Little acts of self-indulgence leading to large areas of difficulty and conflict.

The Response to their Conflict

(5:9-6:1)

The first response is to seek the counsel and help of friends. Now, this given in this text in its poetic drama. She appeals to the chorus now acting as friends to intercede for her. It seems to me that their response to her is calculated to cause her to overcome her indifference. "Tell us," they say, "What is your man like?"

In verses 10-16a she responds to their prompting with a beautiful description of her man. This is important. She is filling her mind and mouth, not with self-justifying words but with praise and love. Here is true repentance. Now, ladies, your man may not be this hunk (sort-of what we have described here), but he is your man. Men, your wife may not be the most beautiful woman in the world, but she is your wife. If your instinctual response to, "Tell me what your spouse is like" is a negative, critical picture, then you will simply have continual conflict. The words in your heart by which you describe your spouse to yourself and others, are the source of your emotions and actions, of your response to them.

See how she ends this? "He is altogether desirable. This is my beloved; this is my friend." I love the response, "Wow, where is he. Let's go find him together." Now beloved, how often, in the midst of conflict, would your friends admire your spouse after you described them? This isn't how we tend to respond. But this is how reconciliation is launched.

The Reconciliation after their Conflict

(6:2-13)

Now we have that reconciliation. They are together. There is mutual care and affirmation. They assure each of their love, admiration, praise and outright hunger for each other. Reconciliation is taking place in the very area in which there has been conflict. This is not just disengagement. This is not a truce. This is not resignation because the alternative is worse. This is an active pursuit of peace and reunion. The closing words of the chorus are a bit difficult. But it is a joyful, playful call for them to come back as they are reunited and riding off together.

Communion – Longing Delight

7:1 - 8:14

What follows in the book and in our lives after true reconciliation is communion. The last two chapters turn up the flame of their appreciation and acclamation of one another. There is now a sense of communion, of longing delight that is richer and deeper. I will not do as extensive an exposition over these last two chapters. But, here is what a true love looks like.

His Deepening Passion

(7:1-10)

While we return to the language of passion, his words are far more intense, personal, knowledgeable, sensuous, appreciative, and loving (v. 1:9a). He pursues and praises her with his words. He intends to use them to draw her out to him.

Her Heightened Longing

(7:11 - 8:4)

She responds to his passion and praise with a satisfied sense of belonging. I mark this as being so important. There is a belonging of surrender that responds to his love for her and his longing for her. This is something that we as men need to hear. We must observe that our heavenly husband affirms his love for us in a way meant to draw out our sense of belonging to Him, our security and satisfaction with Him. How helpful it is for us to learn this from Him for the sake of our wives. Would your wife be able to say verse 10, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me?” And if not, what will you do to begin to give her such a sense of belonging, security and satisfaction?

Their Enduring Commitment

(8:5-7)

Their maturing love deepens their enduring commitment. Much of what is going on in this chapter is remembering, reflection and response. They look back to precious times and share them again through memories. I know to describe this sounds stilted and prosaic; but, with eloquence they not only commit to one another, but revel in what that commitment means to them.

The New Bible Commentary is so helpful here. “*Seal* is a sign of ownership that can be seen by anyone. She wants it to be obvious to all that she is totally owned by him and in no way belongs to any other. The seal was to be in two places: on his heart (the seat of his affections) and on his arm (the symbol of his physical strength). He would totally own her, love her and protect her. Moreover, true love is *as strong as death* in that both are irresistible. So too, the love of Christ is all-conquering. Paul found that the love of Christ compelled him irresistibly (2 Cor. 5:14). True love has a *jealousy* about it which is a reflection of the jealousy of God (see Ex. 20:5; 2 Cor 11:2). A wife has every right to jealousy if her husband starts getting involved with another woman. Jealousy hurts and hurts badly and that is why it can be as *unyielding as the grave*. Further, true love is as unquenchable as *a blazing fire* (cf. Ex. 3:2). *Like a mighty flame* can read ‘like the very flame of the LORD’”²

² Carson, D. A. New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. 4th ed., Is 1:1. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.

Her Declared Purity

(8:8-12)

This looks back to her own upbringing, commending her purity as a model for the readers of the Song of Songs. The text here tells of a loyal, caring family who protected their young sister from misuse of sex. From her early years, before she was physically developed, her older brothers, in particular, disciplined her and encouraged her to keep her body only for the one she was to marry. Until the time of marriageable age she can either be *a wall*, resisting all the approaches of false love, or *a door* allowing any man to pass through her defenses and so losing her virginity before God's time. This is why she has often spoken the phrase 'do not arouse ... love until it so desires'. If she keeps herself, her brothers will reward her. If she fails or falls, they will build even stronger protections around her. And she has responded enthusiastically to their training (v.12). She has now reached physical and mental maturity and she has remained *a wall*. What peace and contentment she experiences when she has please God and maintained her purity. What great joy her husband takes in this. What a great example she has been to the maidens around her.

Her Responding Invitation

(8:13-14)

The Song of Songs ends with a mutual invitations and responses that have characterized the whole book. He longs to hear her voice and she longs to see his grace and strength. In the words he asks her to invite him and she does.

We are pointed once again to our betrothed Redeemer. He seeks us and extends to us appeals to invite him. And we should. We should respond as the Shulamite does. But we often do not. Should we not be ready to respond to Him who has laid down His life for us and given us the privilege of being His bride?

Conclusion

God is interested in every area of life. He directs our lives for His glory. He does so, if we bend to Him, for our holy happiness. And it is not a cheesy, passing, frivolous giddiness; rather, it is a deep and satisfying joy.

Our hearts must be filled with praise and joy over our spouses. If there is anything that I can awaken in every marriage in this congregation it is this. Love your spouse with deeds, yes. But love your spouse with words in your heart, words of praise, pursuit and pleasure.

Indifference and self-focus will slowly erode our relationships. It will affect every part of our marriages and our relationships. How many couples drift in occasional, resigned, unjoyful, unsatisfying marital intimacy. Sadly, we often drift like this in our relationship with God – unjoyful, resigned, unsatisfying, dead.

We must work hard at reconciliation and restoration. Every marriage will have conflict. But as we work out the issues and solve them Biblically, we must not only sustain our marriages, but elevate them. I am so concerned that each instance of conflict and resolution does small damages that add up to severe difficulty. Don't just declare truces. Beloved, work hard at restoration, as well as reconciliation.

Let us joy in God in our joy in one another.

Sinful Distortion of Sex - Immorality

Greg Cook

Introduction

We have come to the last message in our 2004 Family Enrichment Conference. Our theme has been the Biblical Theology of Sexuality. For those of you who are visiting with us for the first time, you may be shocked that we would be teaching on this theme from the pulpit, especially on Sunday morning. In order to put this in the proper perspective, let me review our aims one last time:

- To call for Biblical purity and the holy practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality.
- To counter the world's influence in this area.

I don't think that anyone would argue that these aims are not worthy of consideration in light of what we face daily in the culture in which we live. We began our conference by stating that we would be affirming the truth of both what we are for and what we are against. And what we are for and against must be defined solely by the Scriptures or else we may become either legalistic or licentious in our thinking and practice. Today we are going to consider what we are against – what is immoral. I will warn you that the Scriptures are not *politically correct* in this area. But the God Who created sexuality has given us His directives on what is *spiritually correct*. So let's ask Him to help us as we consider this area of immorality. <Pray>

The Principles of Intimacy

I think that it is necessary to begin this topic by laying a foundation for our thinking. This foundation is what we have discovered thus far in the area of biblical sexuality. By defining the parameters of what God has said regarding intimacy, we have the proper context for looking at what He defines as immoral.

Russ began our series with God's call to purity from Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Sexual relations are God-honoring only within marriage. The will of God for us is holiness. Growing in holiness is our sanctification. And sexual purity is part of our sanctification. We are to abstain from immorality which means that not only are we not to do it, but that we are to distance ourselves from it. We are to exercise self-discipline over our bodies. The unmarried must wait in self-disciplined holiness. The married must exercise self-discipline to focus on their spouse and not to wonder in eye or thought.

Next I looked at the context for our physical intimacy which is our relationship with our spouse. I made the claim that I could tell a lot about your marriage and relationship with and to each other by asking one question – “Evaluate the sexual relationship of your marriage.” Our responses to our spouses come from our hearts – what we think is true about our spouses and what we want from them. We learned that

both of those heart functions were based on our choices, not on what our spouses did or did not do. Our roles involve a wife that exercises loving submission to her husband and a husband who exercises sacrificial leadership to his wife. Many believe that our sexual relationship is separate from and not related to our marital relationship. But nothing could be further from the truth. Our physical relationship happens in the context of our marital relationship. It is impossible to have a God-honoring sexual relationship when one or both spouses bring their sacks full of hurts and unforgiven sins to the bedroom. With hearts that are believing lies and that are full of selfish desires, they dump their sacks full of all that garbage all over the bed. Is it any wonder that physical intimacy, as God designed it, is impossible with all that stinky yuck piled everywhere?

Then I explored how and why God designed marriage. From Ephesians 5:32, we found the key that opened our understanding. God's design of marriage was intentional from the very beginning. God deliberately created a male and a female to picture and foreshadow Christ and His church. God designed marriage as a continual testimony to each generation of the ultimate glory of our eternal marriage to our eternal husband. Our earthly marriages are to reflect what our ultimate marriage will be like. This understanding of marriage is the reason that we keep ourselves sexually pure. We are in the waiting period before our marriage union to Christ. The purity that unmarried people keep pictures the fidelity between Christ and His waiting bride. The fidelity that married people keep pictures the fidelity between Christ and His bride. God purposefully designed marriage as a one flesh relationship to foreshadow the one flesh relationship that believers have in Christ. That is why sexual purity is commanded and demanded by God.

Lastly, Russ took several messages to display the joy of God's gift of sexuality. Contrary to the beliefs that physical intimacy is dirty or just a duty, we learned that intimacy is another expression of our worship to God and of joyfully serving our spouse. We saw the importance of words and wants as they give direction to our affections and our actions. We observed how the husband courts his wife and how the wife charms her husband. 1 Corinthians 7 and Proverbs 5 taught us that our sexuality is for the exclusive purpose of bringing pleasure to our spouse. Our bodies are not our own. They belong only to the one with whom we have entered into the covenant relationship of marriage. God has designed our physical intimacy to be mutually satisfying, mutually initiated, and actively and frequently pursued. God's design of joy and delight in our earthly physical intimacy is a small foretaste of the joy and delight that we, His bride, will experience when we are eternally united to our Husband, the One Who gave Himself for us.

The Practices of the Immoral

Hopefully, you have seen our physical intimacy as the good and glorious gift from God that it is. But every good and perfect gift from our Father's Hand can be perverted and used for sinful, evil purposes. Physical intimacy is no exception. And it is understandably a target of Satan since it is such a grand demonstration of the oneness that believers have in Christ.

Fornication

By the 6th chapter of Genesis, every imagination of man's heart was evil continually and God was sorry that He had ever created man. It is safe to assume that those imaginations included sexual immorality. The first practice of immorality that I would like to consider is fornication. The word fornication is used in some translations of the Scriptures like the KJV. The NASB, NIV, NLT, and ESV use the words sexual immorality or immorality.

It is common for us to believe that fornication and adultery are the same thing. We would define adultery as having sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse when you are married, and fornication is having sexual relations when you are not married. It is unfortunate that these are the common understandings of these terms. We misread those definitions back into the Scriptures. I'm going to cover adultery next. But for now, fornication or sexual immorality, as used in the Scriptures, is any sexual activity not involving your spouse. The Greek word used is *porneia*. Does that suggest any word that we use today? That's right, pornography. The Scriptures are clear and specific in their use of this term. It is always used of any and all kinds of sexual sin. It includes incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism. It does not have any reference to whether or not the person is married.

Adultery

On the other hand, adultery is always used in reference to the covenantal relationship of marriage. It is violating that covenant by introducing a third person into that relationship. And once again, the Scriptures are very specific in their use of this term. Please come with me to Matthew 5.

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of **sexual immorality**, makes her commit **adultery**. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits **adultery**.

Sexual sin in marriage is always adultery, but adultery is not limited to sexual sin. It is possible to commit adultery without ever being involved in sexual sin with someone who is not your spouse. Anytime that we have a relationship that takes the place of the companionship that is due your spouse, it is adultery. This has drastic implications when we consider the use of internet chat rooms. How many men and women begin chatting innocently, only to find that they are being sucked in by their increasing desires. It is a serious issue when a husband or wife has a friendship with a person of the opposite sex who becomes their confidant and with whom they feel more comfortable and relaxed than with their spouse. That person at the office that is such a good listener and is so intensely interested and interesting is feeding desires that should only be for your spouse.

I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying. It is a very serious issue when sexual activity is involved. But don't be fooled into thinking that the inti-

mate conversations you enjoy with someone else is innocent. It is a very fine line between friendship and adultery.

The Perversions of the Immoral

If you believe the literature and the experts of our day, the next three items that we are going to cover are not perversions of sexuality. They are extolled as being part of the freeing of ourselves sexually and the means to mental health. What used to be diagnosed as abnormal behavior in previous editions of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is now diagnosed as being legitimate alternate lifestyles and methods of self-understanding, self-discovery, and mental health.

Pornography

Pornography used to be relegated to the dirty, sleazy streets of larger cities. One of the best deterrents was the fear of being seen going into those shops by someone you respected or having to ask the clerk at a convenience store to retrieve a magazine from behind the counter. But not anymore. It is as close as your computer screen and TV.

Statistics for Cybersex, the term used for pornography on the internet, change very quickly. But the research that I found from what are described as reliable sources indicates that Cybersex generated about \$2.5 billion in revenue in 2003. 12% of the total websites are classified as Cybersex. That number is up from about 5% 3 years ago. It is estimated that 72 million people worldwide visit Cybersex sites annually with about 40 million of them being from the United States. 20% of men and 13% of women responded that they view porn at work during working hours. And 10% admitted that they had a sexual addiction.

Now before you slough this off as the low-life of society, listen to these numbers for those who said they were Christians. 47% of Christians confessed that Cybersex was a serious problem in their homes. 53% of the men who had attended Promise Keepers in the past 12 months admitted that internet porn was a weekly activity. And before you ladies think that it is only men who are involved, 1/3 of the participants in Cybersex are women.

With those kinds of numbers, I believe that it is a fairly sure assumption that some of you sitting before me this morning are struggling with this perversion. The easy access to and the secrecy of this activity make it very alluring and appearing to be safe. With the more than 372 million pages available 24/7, is it any wonder that we struggle with this sin. But it is a fantasy life based on lies. There are a number of intricate lies that are believed by those caught in this sin. And I would refer you to an excellent article in the Fall 2003 issue of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* for a discussion of these lies.

My brothers and sisters, this secret sin is not without consequence. Your relationship to God, your spouse, your family, your employer, your friends, and your brothers and sisters in Christ is greatly impacted. Please don't delay another day without dealing with your sinful heart!

Masturbation

This next area is just as cloaked in secrecy as the previous one. Those who consider themselves to be moral and upright would not even consider it a topic of conversation. The attitude is that it is discussed only by those who are perverts and of low status. And consequently, it is fraught with much misunderstanding, guilt, and worldly thinking.

First, let me define what I mean by the term masturbation. I am not talking about the mutual activity that goes on between husband and wife. That is legitimate. I am talking about the self-gratification that is done apart from your spouse.

Just the very definition of this solo activity being separate from your spouse makes it sinful. In the beginning of this message, we looked at the reason that God had made us sexual beings – for the exclusive purpose of bringing pleasure to our spouse. This purpose excludes self-gratification. Honoring God with our bodies excludes this from the activity of someone wanting to please God with their life.

Homosexuality

And finally, the most politically incorrect teaching of Scripture, according our society, is homosexuality. I am using this term for the sexual relationship between two people of the same sex.

God created Adam and Eve. God did not create Adam and Steve. God created Adam and Eve. He did not create Adie and Eve. Remember, God deliberately and purposefully created male and female. This creation of marriage and physical oneness between one male and one female was designed to picture and foreshadow Christ and His church.

This is not an alternative lifestyle. It is sin. There may be attempts to explain this perversion of what God created as being a genetic predisposition, but God pronounces it sin. It is a perversion of the picture of His relation to His people. There may be struggles and a desire for this activity, but it is never God-honoring or endorsed by God.

The Punishments of the Immoral

I do not want to spend a lot of time in this area of God's punishments of the immoral. I only want to make you aware that God does not look lightly at this area of sin in our lives.

Disease – Folly and Futility

In Romans 1:24-27, God describes His action toward those who exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. He gave them up to impurity, which was the lust of their hearts. He gave them up to dishonoring their bodies among themselves. He gave them up to dishonorable passions all of which resulted in receiving the due penalty for their sin. In Proverbs 5 verses 7-14, the Teacher gives a warning to his son about the immoral woman. He says that you will groan at the end of your life and your flesh

and body are consumed. The NLT translates this verse as groaning in anguish when disease consumes your body.

Who has not seen the effects of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS. We are moved with compassion for those who are reaping the harvest of sin, but the answer is not **just** finding a cure for these diseases, as the Hollywood celebrities claim. Yes, we would like to be able to medically help those in need, but the ultimate answer is found only in Christ and His sacrificial death for the sins of the immoral.

Destruction – Failure and Frustration

Pornography provides a very distorted view of the physical union of a husband and wife. It is a fantasy world produced for profit. How many woman are pressured into performing according to the fantasies of husbands who are so duped that the fantasy is reality. How many husbands are frustrated by wives who do not have the fortune of bodies that are air-brushed into perfection. How many marriages endure a sex act as opposed to glorious worship of the loving God for His gift of physical oneness and the giving of sacrificial service to the mates with whom we have become one flesh. The glorious and gracious gift of mutually giving pleasure and meetings the needs of your spouse has been replaced with anxiety about performance and frustration over failure.

There is also the wasting of resources that have been given by God. The \$2.5 billion includes the money of Christians. How much credit card debt can be attributed to immoral activity? How many people have secured individual credit cards with statements sent to addresses other than home in order to conceal their sin? How many Christian homes are struggling financially from sexual sin? How many ministries could be doing more for the glory of God if those resources had not been consumed by immorality?

Many of the people who seek help for sexual immorality, especially Cybersex, give testimony to the increasing amount of time that is given to these activities. They stay up later and later at night. They rise early in the morning. They steal time from their employers. Most men haven't read one entire book in a year. What would it be like if they devoted the wasted hours to productive reading? What would their Christian lives be like if they spent time in the Word instead of on the Web? What effect would their lives have for the Kingdom if they spent their time with Christ instead of with Cybersex?

Most corporations have strict rules about internet use. Many have policies that warn of dismissal for offensive activity on the web. How many employers are wasting their resources on employees who spend company time on Cybersex? How much productivity is lost from employees abusing their access to the internet? How many families suffer because of the loss of the job of the family breadwinner?

Damnation – Judgment and Wrath

And then there is the most chilling of punishments. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, as well as other passages, gives this somber warning: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the

sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

My Christian brother or sister, if you are participating in any of these immoral activities without guilt, without chastening, and uncorrected by God, then you need to give serious consideration to your relationship to Christ. You may not be a believer. You may not have believing faith, and you are on your way to an eternity without Christ and without hope.

For believers, Christ has paid for all of your sins – past, present, and future. But consider how the sexual sins in which you are participating have added to Christ’s burden that He bore on the cross. Your heart should be breaking as you realize that your lifestyle has added to the penalty that the sinless Son of God suffered for you.

The Paths to Implement

This has not been a happy time this morning. We have looked at the yuck of hearts that lust after something other than God. We have looked at the person who is living according to their desires – living according to a selfish, self-centered view of life. We have looked at **our** hearts – I have looked at mine, and hopefully, you have looked at yours. We have been appalled at what we have seen. It is hard to look at things that affect all of us. This entire series has been good for me. I have been reminded again of the preciousness of my marriage and of my dear wife. I have discovered that my marriage has been designed by God to be a reflection of Christ and his church. And I have been reminded of the great sacrifice and love of my heavenly Lover Who gave Himself for me. I would be very surprised if there is anyone who has listened to all of these messages and has not be convicted of sins in his own life.

I would like to bring our series to a close by giving some practical suggestions on how you can change for the glory of God. Each situation is different, but I’m going to give a survey from 30,000 feet of the paths that you need to consider in your goal of growing in sanctification in the area of Biblical sexuality.

Change what you think

First, turn your Scriptures to Matthew 7:1-5. "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

If you will recall the message on relationships, I reviewed the heart and how it is the source of our behavior. The heart has two functions – what we think and what we want. The first path that you need to examine is your thoughts. And you need to begin with where the problem really lies – you! Repent of your haughty attitude and prideful spirit and humbly and meekly seek the forgiveness of your Savior and your spouse.

Jesus told us that we begin with examining the log that is in our eye. Picture the exaggeration of this illustration. Can't you see this person with a telephone pole sticking out of his eye and trying to use the tweezers to get the floater that is in his spouse's eye. It is laughable. And yet, that is exactly the opposite of what we think. The problem is not me, it is my spouse. If she would only do this or that. If he would only say this or that. Jesus says, you look at you. You are the problem!

So when you are tempted to say in your mind, "My wife is as cold as a dead fish", you should be saying instead, "How can I show love and affection to my wife in the way that Christ gave Himself for me?" Instead of thinking, "My husband is only concerned about himself", you should be thinking, "How can I be a wife that honors God by honoring my husband?"

The tape recordings that you constantly play and rewind to play again and again become your reality. You have begun to believe the lies that you have been saying. May I suggest that you begin to write out those thoughts that you play over and over in your mind. Look at them. What is God's evaluation of your thoughts? Is He glorified in your thoughts? Are you a better spouse because of what you are thinking about your spouse? Be honest! Evaluate critically. And then write out the God-honoring thoughts that you should be thinking instead. Write them on a card and carry them with you so that you can pull them out when the recorder begins to play the old tape.

Change what you want

Next, you need to examine what you want. Husband, are you wanting a wife who is understanding like that attractive gal who happens to meet you during breaks, or sits close when you are at lunch? She understands you so well. She is so sympathetic. She sends you those encouraging e-mails during the day just when you need them. Why isn't your wife more like she is? You scream, "I want my wife to be like she!"

Wife, are you wanting a husband who is as concerned about your problems as the guy who is working on the same project as you are? He is so supportive! He understands your needs like no one else. He always has time to listen. Why isn't my husband more like he is? You scream, "I want my husband to be like he!"

What is it that you want, husband? You should be looking at the telephone pole in your eye – not the floater that is in your wife's eye. Husband, what you should be wanting is to be the kind of husband that reflects the servant leadership of Christ to His church. You should be wanting to be a husband that gives his life for his wife. You should be wanting to be a husband who knows what his wife needs and supplies it to the best of your ability.

And wife, you should be looking at the telephone pole in your eye. You should be wanting to be the kind of wife that reflects the willing, voluntary submission to your husband that the church is to Christ. You should be wanting to be a wife who pleases her husband and meets his needs. You should be wanting to be a God-honoring wife who loves her husband.

May I suggest that you write out what you want. It will probably be worded, "I want blank." The blank is something that you want for yourself. What you should

be wanting will be worded as, “I want to be or do or think blank” with the blank being what you want for someone else.

Change what you do

When our thinking has changed to be God-honoring and our wants are directed toward wanting what God wants, then this will be reflected in what we do. We will change our behavior.

There needs to be a concrete plan for change. Are you struggling with the internet. Place the computer in a public area. Take it out of that private room. Put it where other people are. No secret use. Purchase some software that will keep a record of your websites and send it to someone who has agreed to keep you accountable.

Husband, begin showing your wife how special she is. Tell her over and over how much she means to you; how grateful you are for God’s gift of her to you. Begin calling her during the day. Send her love notes. Work on your relationship so that it is God-honoring.

Wives, don’t you dare criticize the initial efforts of your husband in being romantic. Encourage him. Praise his efforts, no matter how feeble. Tell him how attracted you are to him. Tell him how much you appreciate him. Shower him with your love and affection.

And for both of you, if you are struggling in this area of physical oneness, begin by honestly talking about the issues. Agree on the vocabulary that you will use as you discuss issues. Wife, don’t be embarrassed to help your husband by telling him what you enjoy. Husband, be considerate and patient as you prefer your wife and her pleasure to your own.

And may I make a couple more suggestions. Make a list of 30 things for which you are thankful about your spouse. Make another list of 30 things that are attractive to you about your spouse. Pray these lists to God each day, thanking Him for the spouse He gave you and what it is about that person that is attractive to you. Each day make it a goal to tell your spouse one item on each list. Use the lists as guides to your thinking about that person each day. And then, add one item to each list every day until you have at least 50 on the each list.

I can hear you now. “You’ve got to be kidding! 30 things I’m thankful for. I can’t even think of 5!” That’s OK. I know that you can do it. Work hard at it. Make it a priority. Pray asking God to help you change your hard heart and give you a tender heart toward the mate He has given you. This is not impossible. Just be glad that I didn’t start out with 50! As the slogan for Nike says, “Just do it!”

There are so many issues that can be involved in your marital relationship. Please do not continue living as if there is no problem. God has designed sexuality for mutual enjoyment. Go to your elder. Seek help from those you know can be of help. And brothers and sisters, let us not be so prideful that we would look down upon someone who needs and asks for our help, or be so proud that we don’t seek help from those who can provide it.

Conclusion

What would be appropriate for concluding this series?

- Let us honor God with our bodies. They belong to Him and to our spouse.
- Let us honor marriage and keep the marriage bed undefiled.
- Let us look forward with great anticipation to that time when we will consummate our marriage to our eternal Husband and enjoy the ultimate one-flesh relationship prepared for us from eternity past.
- Let us encourage one another to live lives that bring honor to God in the area of our sexuality through the power of the Holy Spirit using His Word and His people.

To Him be all glory and praise both now and forever, AMEN and AMEN!!