

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part eleven

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HOW MARRIAGES ARE MADE STRONG BY VIRGINITY DURING SINGLENESS

I want to look at several passages of Scripture to address a subject that has fallen into such disregard in the church today. I find that pastors all over the country are wrestling with the same kinds of problems in the church.

There are scores of professing Christian people who have been brainwashed by the spirit of the age. **Young person - and older person - the course of this world is designed by the spirit of the age to put you on the make.** The networks promote men who can score and women - even older women - who are "**cougars.**" And what are all those Desperate Housewives desperate **for** anyway? The world will tell you that success in life is measured by your ability to find as much instant gratification of every desire as you can - that sex is safe as long as you don't get AIDS - that nobody has the right to impose their prudish values on you.

I want you to know that the God who made you puts **high value on purity - on virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage.** And here's a key point that I want to make: **those two things (virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage) are more closely related than most people think.** You can't treat **virginity** before marriage and **faithfulness** after marriage like two unattached things. You bring your past sexual record **into** marriage.

I want to give you **six** reasons for committing to virginity before or outside of marriage, and why you should be **proud** to do so:

1) VIRGINITY MANIFESTS A COMMITMENT TO THE CREATOR'S DESIGN AND ORDER FOR SEXUAL EXPRESSION AND FULFILLMENT

I want to address a lot of people - especially youth and young adults. I want to show more than anything that **God is for great sex.** The devil didn't invent sex. He can only come up with poor substitutions and perversions. **I want to say very clearly and candidly that God wants sex to be as exhilarating and exciting and fulfilling as it can possibly be. But He knows that can only happen on his terms.**

God isn't as shy and backward about sex as many Christians. I can still remember the lady who came by my office expressing her shock at the contents of the Song of Solomon: "If the Song of Solomon isn't just a picture of the relationship between Jesus and His church then it's **pure pornography and has no business being in the Bible!**"

However sincere she may have been, she's totally wrong about **how open, frank and descriptive the Bible is about the beauty and thrill of sex between a husband and a wife.** God is for sex. He invented it. It's good and beautiful. The Bible isn't backward about it at all.

But the beauty and potential of all that sex was intended to be can **only be fulfilled and preserved on God's terms.** And God's terms have never changed. Sex is totally and exclusively for marriage - **Not before marriage and not outside of marriage.** Remember where we've been in this series. Sexual intercourse is **not** the covenant sign of **love.** Sexual intercourse is the covenant sign of **marriage.**

2) VIRGINITY PRESERVES AND PROTECTS THE BEAUTY AND DURABILITY OF MARRIAGE

Hebrews 13:4 - "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

These are some of the words the writer uses as he wraps up his final exhortation to these Jewish believers. It's important to note that among his final instructions are these words about the importance of marriage. And, very specifically, they are words about how people **enter** marriage and **prepare** for marriage.

The word "**undefiled**" is a very striking one. "Don't bring pollution into the very entry point of Christian marriage. Make sure you keep marriage the way God intended by entering it in an honorable way. And the honorable way is an "**undefiled**" way."

Apparently this has to be taught all over again in the Body of Christ. There's a tragic mistake people make about sin in general - **and about casual attitudes toward virginity before marriage in particular**. The problem lies with a faulty understanding about the way God's redeeming grace works in our lives. There are all sorts of alleged Christians who look at grace like you would look at a free pass to Disneyland - "Jesus paid the price and now I can go on all the rides I want for free!"

I've heard it many times as a pastor: "I can have sex with so and so. After all, I'm trusting Jesus - I'm not going to hell for this one sin!" For some reason Christians have made this their go-to response when they choose to persist in sin. We constantly say God won't send any of us to hell for that **one** sin. And it never enters our mind to ask exactly how people **do** end up in hell?

I want to say two things about that kind of attitude when it comes to sexual sins:

- a) ***I frankly doubt that you've been born again with that kind of attitude.*** God's grace doesn't just get you off the hook. Grace ***infuses a hatred and distaste for sin in all those who truly receive it - Titus 2:11-12*** - "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..." There it is. You may not be perfect - yet. But you must be ***striving*** for perfection. If you don't ***hate*** all sin, especially the ones you have the hardest time forsaking, you're not saved. The rule of thumb is justifying sin proves an unregenerate heart.
- b) ***The writer of Hebrews says that there's more than just the issue of forgiveness here.*** The loss of virginity brings ***"defilement"*** into the very heart of the marriage relationship when it's entered into. It has nothing to do with being forgiven. Forgiveness deals with the books before God. The ***results of our actions*** take place in this world in which we live. Results always stand unerasable.

You sow defilement into the relationship with the one you truly love by careless attitudes towards sexual encounters you had long ago - whether with the same person you eventually marry, or someone you will never meet again. Damage is done to your marriage down the road.

You will reap the dishonesty, pain and carelessness somewhere in your future. You give your ***integrity*** away. You fragment your personhood. You have ***less of yourself to give to your spouse***. Please hear me on this. ***The success of your marriage doesn't just depend on how you behave after you say "I do". It has much to do with how you build into the foundation of your life the will and wisdom of the Creator in your relationships with the opposite sex long before your marriage takes place.***

You don't change who you are when you get married. You create that person while you're still single. You bring the character you created ***before*** your marriage and offer what's left of it to your spouse. You don't switch identities at your wedding. You bring who you were ***before*** your marriage ***into*** your marriage. Spiritual strength isn't transmitted through wedding rings. You carry your old commitment to Christ into your marriage.

I wonder and fear just how many young women in this church will listen to some young man, who will try to convince her if she really loved him she would let him ***make*** love to her, even though they are not married. And, perhaps out of ***fear of losing him***, she will compromise everything about her commitment to Jesus as her Lord.

Listen to me, if he loves you because you let him have sex with you - if his ***sexual desire for you*** is what you're using to keep him - I have very bad news for you. Because much sooner than you can ever imagine you're going to be, not a twenty year old young woman, but a thirty-five year old, then a forty-five year old, then a fifty-five year old woman. And you're going to be living in a world full of desirable twenty year old women. ***What will you use to hold your mate's love then? Sexual activity is a very fleeting, shaky foundation on which to build any kind of permanent, loving relationship.***

Both Reni and I came into marriage with the blessing of never having been together sexually with anyone else in our whole lives. I appreciated that a great deal back then. But I appreciate it far more ***now*** than I did ***then***. We allowed God to do something special ***after*** our marriage because we brought something special ***into*** the marriage - ***virginity***.

The marriage relationship is deeper because it was never spread thinly and cheaply all over the place before we went on our honeymoon. Or, to put it bluntly, we didn't open all our Christmas presents in October.

3) VIRGINITY PRIZES KINGDOM VALUES OVER THE LURE OF SATAN AND THE WORLD

Ephesians 5:1-7 - "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.[3] But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. [4] Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. [5] For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [7] Therefore do not associate with them...."

"Let no one deceive you with empty words"(6). Dear one, there is probably no subject in the whole world where more **empty words** - more **mindless empty thinking** - is offered as the truth than in this whole area of sexual purity. Notice that phrase, "**...the sons of disobedience**"(6). There's a whole sea of this world's **offspring** - "**sons**" - whose very **nature** - their genetic make-up - is to **not take God seriously about sexual purity**. And the Bible says "**do not associate with them**"(7). Authentic spirituality will always **separate** itself from the counsel of the ungodly.

You can't be a contradiction at the very center of your being. We are all made sexual beings. We're made male and female. Virginity says "I'm committed to obedience right at the very center of what I'm all about as a person. I'm not playing games in my walk with Jesus. I am thorough in living with eternal values in mind."

A virgin walk before Jesus guards the life against **the emptiness of this age**. The world is wrong. Getting some girl pregnant isn't the greatest danger. Contracting AIDS isn't what you should be most afraid of. **There's the eternal damage you can do to your soul - there's the wrath of God - Ephesians 5:6** - "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

"**Empty words**" - those are all the words piled up to explain away the seriousness of sexual sin and God's absolutely certain wrath and judgment against it. Those arguments, says God's Word, are useless words. They're empty of any truth or help. Don't fill up your mind and heart with the empty talk of Sex and the City and Desperate Housewives. Those words don't count. They're **empty**.

The wrath of God "**comes**" on those who are disobedient. It **comes**. It always comes. There's no avoiding or hiding from it. But you will set your life apart for all of God's best - in marriage and in **every other area** - as you keep your life clean and committed in the area of sexual purity. **You allow for the greater blessing of obedience and fulfillment on God's terms by resisting the world's empty words.**

4) VIRGINITY THAT COMES FROM SELF- CONTROL GIVES TRUE BELIEVERS THEIR HIGHEST SENSE OF SELF-WORTH AND CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD.

Hide these words deeply in your heart today: **1 Samuel 15:22** - "And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.'"

In the Old Testament the sacrifice of an animal portrayed the pathway of divine forgiveness. The lesson from Samuel's words here is profound. Forgiveness is free and wonderful. But old Samuel says there is something even **more** wonderful than forgiveness. **Obedience** is **better** than forgiveness.

Nothing builds your assurance and confidence before God like obedience. Plain obedience to the Lord will give you more peace of mind and self-esteem and more **future** blessing and victory in all areas of life than all the books and DVDs and conferences in North America.

"But Pastor Don, can't God forgive me for sexual sin?"

Yes, He can. **But listen - obedience is still better than sacrifice.** Only obedience - slowly and steadily repeated - obedience that **costs** - only that kind of obedience **trains the heart** in righteousness and builds **godly character**. Obedience gives more strength than forgiveness. It strengthens the heart against temptation in a way forgiveness never can. It fuels faith in prayer because, says John, it gives confidence before God. We ask and receive because when we pray, our heart doesn't condemn us. And it brings **eternal reward**.

Lives are more fragmented by sexual sin than any other. Even in the sleazy talk of the world, there's an accurate picture of what sexual sin does. Please forgive me for being so blunt in the pulpit, but people in the world say more than they know when they blither about their sexual escapades and say, **"I got a piece last night."**

And that's exactly what happens. Little by little, their lives become little bits and pieces of what they used to be. Whole people become fractions - little broken bits of what they were meant to be before God.

"But what about forgiveness? Can't God forgive me of those sins?"

Listen, forgiveness isn't the issue here at all. The issue is what you want to become for Jesus; what you want of His Kingdom to be fulfilled through your life. You can never get back what you gave away in sexual sin. You always reap what you sow. Life is always hard for the transgressor - even the forgiven transgressor.

5) **THE VALUE OF VIRGINITY IS SEEN IN THE WAY IT PAVES THE WAY FOR VICTORY OVER SENSUALITY AND BONDAGE IN OTHER AREAS OF LIFE**

In any area of life, living for the moment - building mindless patterns of instant gratification and addiction to the flesh - **lessens my ability to truly appreciate what is best, richest and most exciting in any of God's good gifts to His children.**

Picture a buffet, full of good and delightful food. Around the buffet table are 500 people who are scrambling mad for food - dying for all they can get. Then somebody rings a bell and all at once, all 500 dash for the one buffet table. People are sure they're going to die if they don't get as much as they can so they all grab whatever they see first - while the slower or more cautious get trampled under foot. They gorge themselves on the food without even returning to their tables.

The sad fact of that crazy picture is that **nobody** is really enjoying and savoring the experience of eating that food in a fulfilling way. The whole experience of **fine dining** is destroyed for everyone.

Our world is in a mad scramble for sex. You can't miss it wherever you turn. Paul describes the constant hunger for the base and the perverse. It's played out every day right in front of our eyes. The **BBC news** this morning said that the new right of passage for stars and celebrities is rehab. The kind of lives they play out on the big screen don't play out in the real world. We can see almost every marriage crumble. Paul says they're spouting **"empty words."** He says it's **"the course of this world,"** with a **"constant craving for more"** of the base: **Ephesians 4:19** - **"They [the ungodly] have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."**

Notice, **"greedy to practice impurity."** There's a constant craving for more because **the base never truly fills you up**. It leaves you increasingly empty the more you scramble. Learn it early and remember it forever: ***Pleasures pursued outside the gracious will and plan of Father God will always leave you empty in the long run. They never fill you up. You become emptier the longer you indulge yourselves in them.***

You see, the real tragedy of the person addicted to pornography - or the sexual excitement and expression pursued before or outside of marriage - or the nagging drivel that so many people are lapping up in the mindless, eternity numbing, soul shrinking movies and music that increasingly floods Christian homes - the real tragedy is that those poor souls are gradually losing the ability to truly appreciate how rich and exciting and fulfilling the genuine article of God's plan for fulfillment and pleasure can be on His terms. It is the desire of the spirit of this fallen age to hide that truth from you.

Everyone please listen. It's not that sin gives you more. It's that it makes you habitually settle for so much less. That's the real tragedy. A commitment to virginity gives you **a properly ordered value system in other areas of life at the same time**. A caving in to the flesh sets your whole life on a course that will constantly be in bondage to littleness all your life.

6) **THE VALUE OF VIRGINITY IS MANIFESTED IN THE WAY IT FREES YOUR LIFE FROM THE STING OF ITS DEEPEST REGRETS**

Hebrews 12:14-17 - "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. [15] See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; [16] that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. [17] For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears."

Esau is specifically used to illustrate the opposite of people who know what is true and best in life. He's offered to our minds as a person who **sees too late how bad the deals he has made really are**. He's offered as a classic example of a person who **trades his birthright - that's his whole future - for a "mess of pottage."** He's offered for us to observe a man who **actually thought he was going to die because he went the better part of the day without food!**

And finally, he's offered as a classic example of a person **who realized too late that he wanted back what he gave away, but couldn't retrieve it**. But most of all he's described as someone who couldn't **find a repentant heart** when he needed one. He **trained himself to pursue the trivial**. He felt bad about missing his inheritance - his earthly birthright. But he couldn't bring **God** into the picture. He lost sight of eternal realities in his quest for physical food. Maybe he told himself God wouldn't send anyone to hell for just one sin.

Listen as I wrap up - perhaps more than anything else, **virginity focuses the whole life around the trust in a loving heavenly father, who says, "no good thing will I withhold from the one who walks uprightly"** Honoring the Lord with sexual purity will **build a resistance to the ways of the devil in grinding your walk with Jesus to a halt**. You will feel **genuine** inside and **authentic** before God. The road won't be easy. But you'll know it's **going somewhere that matters**.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 - "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. [3] But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

This text isn't primarily about physical virginity or faithfulness. It's about being faithful and pure before Jesus. But physical virginity plays a role in that process. Paul wisely takes us back to Eve and the Serpent. How did Satan deceive Eve? He came and said **"God's holding out on you. He's trying to shortchange you. There's no reason for you to live by the restrictions he's putting on you!"**

So Paul writes to this church he once pastored. And he says, "I'm so anxious that you stand like pure virgins before Jesus Christ one day. But I'm afraid there are going to be some among you who will fall for the very same lie that set things off in the garden!"

And the lie is that you can have what God offers you. You can have grace, eternal life, heaven, relationship with Him, **and you can have it all on your terms. There really won't be any serious consequences to your actions.**

And so I try to hold out **two message at the same time**.

- a) **To those who are young enough, or wise enough never to have entangled themselves in sexual sin:** Listen, obedience is still so much better than sacrifice and forgiveness.

I would like to speak right into the fabric of people and say, **the best news isn't just that God can forgive your sin. The best news - and what He'd far rather do - is He can keep you from falling!**

Commit yourself to a virgin walk of purity before the Lord. Either until you're married, or until He comes again. You will never regret it in this life or in the life to come.

- b) **To those who feel it's already too late - who have failed the Lord miserably in this most key area of personal responsibility:** I have something to say to you too:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?"

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral [Remember that idea that people don't go to hell just for this one sin?], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

There is such a precious reminder here of the power of God's renewing grace in messed up lives. It's never too late to return to the Lord. There is always hope for the repentant heart. But God's grace is never extended to people who just presume to continue in sin and get forgiveness after. There are verses in the NT that we had better start memorizing all over again:

Hebrews 10:26-31 - "For if we go on *sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth*, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27] but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. [28] Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. [29] How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? [30] For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." [31] It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

This text deals with the soul-assaulting effects of a particular *kind* of sin. It's called "***sinning deliberately***"(26). But isn't *all* sin deliberate in some sense. I mean, we don't do it in our sleep. The writer is talking about sinning that is sustained when we know better, but convince ourselves that we won't be held accountable for our actions because we're covered by grace. The writer is saying make sure you don't fall into the ***fatal habit of responding to God lightly and conveniently***. It will cost you your eternal soul.

I wonder how many young people will enter marriage 2, 3, maybe 5 years down the road. And it will surprise them that they just can't get anything to work out right. And no amount of counseling will solve the problem. And no amount of prayer and tears will make the hell on earth go away.

And no one ever will be able to figure out why. But years earlier there was the wilful, flagrant, trampling of the will of God underfoot. They ignored and pushed passed every check and tug of the Spirit of God. ***But they've sinned away their birthright - their future in God***. They've trained their hearts away from following the Lord and now they just can't get anything right again.

But the good news of the cross of Jesus is that there's no need for that to happen. While your heart is still soft, it can be washed clean. It can be ***brought back home to the cross. Your past can be forgiven, and your life cleansed from all unrighteousness***. And, best of all, He is able to keep you from falling.