

## THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE - Part eight - Teaching #1362

Sunday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010, 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

### THE MEANING OF BEING “ONE FLESH” AND WHY IT MATTERS TO THE SINGLE MAN AND WOMAN JUST AS MUCH AS THE MARRIED

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (NASB)** - “Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. [2] For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. [3] For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. [8] So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”

A Biblical understanding of the *theology of marriage* isn't just important for those who are married. It is perhaps *more* important for those who are not. The Biblical theology of marriage doesn't just define *marriage*. It is *more* important in the way it defines *singleness*.

Let me try to tell you where we're going in this teaching *in advance* so you will, perhaps, find it easier to see the truths unfold when we get there:

**First**, we're going to define the *meaning* of sexual intercourse. I know we all probably think we don't need to come to church for a refresher course in sex, but I'm willing to bet *many* of us don't know the *Biblical* meaning and significance of becoming “*one flesh*” in the act of sexual intercourse.

**Second**, I am very anxious to *unmask* and *expose* the horrific danger of two *common misunderstandings* about sexual intimacy before marriage that are rampant in the body of Christ, especially among the youth and young adults. The challenge of following Jesus in purity in singleness is greater today than ever before. In fact, it may well be that the *litmus test* of faithful Christian living is how one conducts himself or herself sexually as a single adult. This is becoming the *chief* test of the depth of one's commitment to the Lordship of Jesus for *two reasons*:

- a) **People are entering into marriage later in life than ever before.** I'm sure there are both strengths and weaknesses to this, and that's not the point of this message at all. I'm simply citing the fact that in 1960 the average age for marriage in North America was twenty. In 2004 it was almost 28. Today it's around 30. That means people are living longer slices of their *adult* lives as singles. They date longer as singles. They have more time to develop more relationships with members of the opposite sex than ever before.
- b) **The whole tone of our society treats marriage as a non-essential.** Consider this. The people we collectively enjoy watching and hearing about, the people who are, especially by youth and young adults, more read about and examined, the people our society tends to copy and mimic more than anyone else - our television, music and movie stars - parade partners, children, and living arrangements, all with virtually *no consideration* of the necessity of marriage.

Restrictions on sexual pleasure may have made sense before the advent of birth control. Back then there were good *reasons* for abstinence. And the days are long gone when a single woman couldn't afford to care for a child outside of marriage if she chose. We have eliminated the necessity of marriage for sexual activity. A forty year old virgin is so funny we'll even make a movie about it.

So, because we are *marrying later* than ever before, and because of the *virtual extinction* of marriage among those most paraded in front of our society as cool and admirable, the commitment to sexual purity *before* marriage requires a greater willingness to prize the glory of Father God *more* than the glory that comes from the applause of the crowd. And the church doesn't have a great track record when it comes to *proud, joyful detachment* from the idols of this world for the sake of the smile of God. I say it again, for *millions of young Christians* the commitment to sexual purity before marriage may well be the *litmus test* of devotion to Christ in our age.

1) **THE CHURCH NEEDS AN ABSOLUTELY UNEMBARRASSED, DEEP UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE SPECIFIC MEANING OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE IF PURITY IS TO BE MAINTAINED AND MARRIAGE PROTECTED**

Let's get down to basics. **Why** does God care whether or not I'm married to my sexual partner? I mean, we know He **does** care. But that's not nearly enough. **Why** does He care? As long as no one is hurt, what possible difference can it make to God with whom I have sexual enjoyment? Is there something in the very **nature** of human sexuality that is **different** if my partner isn't my spouse?

Every Christian in the world needs to be able to answer those questions. Sex has a given - a **God-given** - theological meaning and purpose. And it goes well beyond the reproduction of the race.

**Genesis 2:21-25** - "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. [22] And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' [24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

It's important to look carefully at how this text is put together. The words of Adam are recorded in **verse 23**. That's where they end. **Verses 24-25** pick up the text in the words of Moses. And they should, if read carefully, strike us as strange because they apply the **meaning** of what just happened with the presentation of Eve to Adam. They talk about leaving a **father** and a **mother** and being joined to a wife. Only Adam didn't **have** a father or a mother. Nor did Eve. These words are obviously meant for a wider and different hearing than Adam and Eve. They're meant for all of us.

And what they teach is something very unusual and unnatural takes place in every marriage. People leave those to whom they are **related** to be with someone to whom they are **not**. You commit yourself to someone to whom you are absolutely **unrelated**. And, as you leave those who really **are** your family in this world, your **flesh and blood relatives**, you commit to care for another person, to whom you are totally unrelated. You make an unheard of, enormous promise, to love and treat that person as though he or she were, not just your **family**, but **you** - your own **self** - your own **person** - your own **body** - your own **being**:

**Ephesians 5:28-31** - "In the same way husbands should love their wives **as their own bodies**. He who loves his wife **loves himself**. [29] For no one ever hated **his own flesh**, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, [30] because we are members of his body. [31] "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Ponder this. A man and a woman turn from those who actually brought them in the world. They **leave** those with whom they share common DNA and **unite** with one to whom they bear no earthly relation whatever. And they make a **promise**. In marriage two people - two people who have no **natural** relationship to each other whatsoever - take on **voluntary obligations** to each other. They make a **voluntary covenant**. Once married, I relate to every other woman on earth differently. And the woman I marry will have a **different** relationship to me from anyone else on earth.

Now, **what will be the sign of that covenant?** This is the important question because God **always** gives signs to covenants in the Scripture. After the flood God **covenants** not to cover the earth with water ever again. And we **remember** that covenant because God puts the **rainbow** in the sky after the rain. God promises to make Israel His covenant people. And He makes **circumcision** the sign of that covenant. Then, in the fullness of time, a **new covenant** is made, not only with Israel, but with whoever will place faith in God the Son, Jesus Christ. And men and women both are **baptized in water** as the outward sign of participation in that covenant.

So what is the **sign** of the marriage covenant? The two become "**one flesh**." Physical sexual intercourse is the **God given covenant sign of the marriage covenant**. My wife is in distinct covenant relationship to me and the proof of that is **she is separated from all the other women on the planet in that she is the only one with whom I have sexual relations**.

That is why, in the truest sense, sex is **meaningless** outside of marriage. In fact, if you go back to our opening text, it's **worse** than meaningless. It's an act of **fraud**:

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-6** - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you"(NASB).

I especially like the way the NASB translates **verse 6** and included the word "**defraud.**" It is so sad that most of the modern translations have updated the thought carried in that word. Really this is the only word that will do. Think back to the headline stories of **Enron** and **WorldCom**. Executives were on trial for painting a picture of business health and wealth that wasn't true.

That's **exactly** the meaning of Paul's words regarding sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Sex is the sign of the covenant. Sexual intercourse is the sign of the promise to **permanently devote your life to your partner in exclusive, loyal, devoted attachment**. And when you have sexual relations **outside** of marriage you are **promising something you aren't delivering**. That's right. However you think you **feel** inside, it's **not** an act of **love**. It's an act of outright **fraud**.

Our world has it all wrong. Please pay attention to this because if you are wrong here you will go wrong everywhere else as well. This is the first point I wanted to underline in this teaching - the **God-given meaning of sexual intercourse**. Sexual intercourse is **not** the covenant sign of **love**. People make out with all sorts of people they will never even see again. Sexual intercourse is the covenant sign of **marriage**. And every act of sex outside of the commitment of marriage is **fraud**.

Here's the question you need to ask yourself. I'd like every young woman to picture your wedding day. Picture the ceremony in your mind. Do you really want to walk down the aisle and see your groom, and then picture behind him, lined up in a row, all the women he did **not** keep covenant with? Is that the kind of foundation you want underneath your marriage? Because if he **didn't** keep covenant with **them** what makes you think he will keep covenant with **you**?

Young man, do you want to stand at the front of the church and picture your lovely bride, and see behind her a line of men with whom she did **not** keep covenant. Like it or not, you bring your sexual past **into** your marriage. Don't rob your marriage of confidence and trust. Don't build it on a foundation of **fraud**.

## 2) TWO HORRENDOUS LIES ABOUT SEX AND WHY BELIEVING THEM WILL RUIN YOUR LIFE AND STAIN YOUR SOUL

### a) LIE #1 - THE FEWER RESTRICTIONS WE PUT ON OUR SEXUAL PASSIONS THE MORE OPEN AND TRUE TO OURSELVES WE WILL BE

The truth is we will only be true to our **fallen selves** - our very poorest, emptiest selves - when we don't place sexual restrictions on our desires.

Look at a fascinating passage of Scripture with me - **Genesis 3:6-13, 21** - "[6] When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. [8] They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. [9] Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" [10] He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself. [11] And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" [12] The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." [13] Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate....[21] The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them."

Immediately upon departing from the revealed instructions from God Adam and Eve become aware of their **nakedness**. But more than that, they become aware of their need for **privacy and found for**

**themselves coverings.** Before the rejection of God's instructions there was no need for **privacy** because, as long as they obeyed God, there was no **vulnerability**. Sexuality was **safe** on God's terms. It could be horribly **destructive** on theirs.

They immediately made **temporary** coverings for themselves after disobeying God - **Genesis 3:7** - "**Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.**"

Notice, they don't cover their **arms** or their **ears**. It's precisely at the point of their **sexuality** - "**loin cloths**" - that they sense their need for **privacy** and **protection**. Then God **replaces** their temporary coverings with **permanent** ones - **Genesis 3:21** - "**The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.**"

Why this sudden need for permanent clothing? They had the exact same bodies they had **before** they rejected God's instructions. And before they sinned God said everything He made was **good**. What's happening here? What changed was not their bodies but the way they, and others, would **use** their bodies.

After the Fall naked bodies needed protecting from those who would be inclined to **use** those bodies as nothing **more** than naked bodies - **sexual objects** used for personal pleasure and excitement. Sexual openness and experimentation isn't safe in a world of **covenant breakers**. Hiddenness is needed in an age of sexual **fraud**.

b) **LIE #2 - SEXUAL INTIMACY SHOULD INCREASE BEFORE MARRIAGE AS THE RELATIONAL INTIMACY INCREASES**

"**Not on a first date!**" is a phrase suggesting there are many sexual options that will open up later on, as the knowledge of the person increases and the relationship deepens. And there's a sense in which that is true. I didn't kiss my wife on our very first date. So there is a degree of deepening physical intimacy as the relationship deepens.

But only to a certain point. And the God given covering of Adam and Eve gives a good indication that **physical nakedness** and the exploring of the parts of our being **protected** by those coverings gives a good Scriptural picture of things our Creator has placed within the protection and covering of marriage.

I am afraid for the growing number of people who think as long as actual sexual intercourse doesn't take place, **any** forms of sexual expression and pleasure are open for couples before marriage. And I'm here to tell you that kind of thinking will set you at odds with God's blessing and purpose for life and marriage.

If you want to, you can **convince yourself** that anything other than actual, complete sexual intercourse is fair game before marriage. But here's the problem you're sowing for yourself. You are **training yourself and your partner**, who may well one day be your spouse, that sexual activity is about **excitement and pleasure**, rather than **covenant keeping**. And when you **create** and **build** your primary perception of sexual activity in that way you lay a foundation for **sexual disappointment**, or worse, **sexual comparison** later on in life. This is especially true if you marry someone **other** than the one you were intimate with before marriage.

Don't give yourself **naked bodies** to compare with your future spouse. Don't give yourself **others** with whom to compare sexual excitement or technique. Love won't last in that kind of environment. Don't train yourself **before** marriage to make a **wrong interpretation** of the **meaning** of sex.

Let me be more blunt than will be comfortable for your parents. Everything you do with your partner **before** marriage, married people do **after** marriage. We call it **foreplay**. And we call it that because, in the proper context of marriage, it's all **going somewhere**. It's **tied to the act of sexual intercourse**. If you are serious enough in your walk with Jesus to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage, **where is this other physical intimacy going?**

"Well, it's just for our pleasure, pastor Don." And that's precisely the problem. You are **teaching each other** and **training each other** to think of sexual relations, **not as promise keeping**, but as **self-**

**fulfilment.** And that's a terrible way to begin a marriage.

Here's why. When you are spending time with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or when you're with someone you **know** to be your future spouse, remember one day you will be old. Nothing will be young and firm and lovely anymore. Stomachs start to hang over the belt. I don't need to go into more details. Others will be able to give you **more sexual excitement** than your marriage partner. Is this really the understanding of sex you want to have to live by then? Live **now** so you won't be afraid of being left for someone more attractive **then**.

Let sex, and the way you **train your body to think of sex**, be formed under God's life-giving revelation. If you remain single, you will be demonstrating your ultimate commitment to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. If, perhaps more commonly, you marry, you will be pleased you don't have to build your marriage fearing the haunting consequences of a careless, unguarded sexual past.

Trust in the **future goodness** of a faithful God. Live now in the light of His eternal plan for happiness and fruitfulness. No one will ever be disappointed whose trust is in the Lord who created marriage and sexuality, and knows their best design.