

Sunday, June 11, 2017

"Sex and Marriage" Part 1

THE MEANING
OF MARRIAGE

Introduction:

The first time I (Spence) read the Old Testament book Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs as it's called in some Bible translations.) I was eighteen years old. It wasn't that my parents prohibited it or anything like that; I had just never cared much about the Old Testament. During my freshman year of college I found myself in a Bible study where the leader challenged my general disregard for the first two-thirds of the Bible by telling me to read Song of Solomon. Based on the Bible's table of contents I had always assumed it was something like a Proverbs bonus track. Same author, extra material. Then I read it. At first it was weird because the metaphors were going right over my twenty-first century head. Then I read it again with a commentary that explained what was being said. Whoa! I kept thinking things like, *How did this get in the final edition of the Bible? And Does Jesus know this is back here?* I was reading erotic poetry... in the Bible.

Many people are as surprised as I was to find out how positively the Bible speaks about sex. Maybe because it is an old book or because it is considered a sacred religious text, "may her breasts satisfy you always" is just not something one expects to read in the Bible.

Not only does the Bible talk about sex, it offers a vision for sexual intimacy unlike anything else from its time—or really any other time, for that matter. God designed sex between married partners to be passionate and erotic, intimate and secure, selfless and unifying. God designated it to be so good it gives us an otherworldly glimpse of heaven itself.

Whether you have been long familiar with the Christian sex ethic or this is your first time encountering it, it is especially important in this session that every participant brings an open mind and a generous willingness to understand everyone's viewpoints and personal stories.

Small Group Discussion

When you were young, did an adult have the "sex talk" with you?

- How did "The Talk" go? On a scale of 1-10 ("1" = entirely comfortable; "10" = terribly awkward) how would you rate your experience of that conversation?
- If you want (**no obligation!**), feel free to share your story of "The Talk". (How did you learn about sex? Or if you've had "The Talk" with your children, how did *that* go?)

Sex is Just an Appetite; Not, It's Not

Four Attitudes about Sex:

1. Sex is a natural appetite.
2. Sex is part of our lower, physical nature, distinct from our higher, rational more "spiritual" nature.
3. Sex is a critical form of self-expression, a way to be yourself and find yourself.
4. Christian sex ethic: Sex is for use within marriage between a man and a woman.



Sex is Dirty; No, It's Not

"3The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

Sex is Strictly a Private Matter, No, It's Not

The Christian teaching is that sex is primarily a way to know God and build community, and, if you use it for those things rather than for your own personal satisfaction, it will lead to greater fulfillment than you can imagine.

Sex is a Uniting Act

"Do you not know that a person who is united in intimacy with a prostitute is one body with her? For as it is said, "The two shall become one flesh." ... Keep away from sexual immorality... for you do not belong to yourselves. You were bought with a price. Show forth God's glory, then, in how you live your bodily life."

1 Corinthians 6:17,18, 20

Sex as a Commitment Apparatus

The Bible does not counsel sexual abstinence before marriage because it has such a low view of sex but because it has such a lofty one. The Biblical view implies that sex outside marriage is not just morally wrong, but also personally harmful. If sex is designed to be part of making a covenant and experiencing that covenant's renewal, then we should think of sex as an emotional 'commitment apparatus.'

Even if you are not legally married, you may find yourself very quickly feeling marriage-like ties, feeling that the other person has obligations toward you.

Practical Chastity

[Chastity] will be difficult, especially in a culture that gives you not support for your conviction. But you can be successful if you rely on the following resources:

1. First you need the "spousal love" of Jesus in your life.
2. Speak the truth to your heart.
3. Christian Community
4. Strike a balance with regard to your sexual thoughts and desires.

The Inner Dialogue

"I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour."

"Jane Eyre"



Home Study: For individual reflection.

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Read the following excerpt from *The Meaning of Marriage* and then answer the questions provided. You may want to reflect on the questions mentally without writing down the answers.

Finally, strike a balance with regard to your sexual thoughts and desires. Some Christians feel deeply stained and defiled by any strong sexual thoughts or daydreams. Others indulge them. The gospel is neither legalism, nor antinomianism. Christians are not saved by obeying God, and yet true salvation will lead to obeying God, out of gratitude. This should lead to a very balanced approach to thoughts and temptations. Martin Luther, for example was reputed to say about sexual desires, "You can't stop birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from making nests in your hair." By that he meant that we can't stop sexual thoughts from occurring to us—they are natural and unavoidable. However, we are responsible for what we do with those thoughts. We must not entertain and dwell on them.

And if we do something that is sexually wrong, we should use the gospel for grace on our consciences. That gospel will neither take the sin lightly nor lead you to flagellate yourself and wallow in guilt indefinitely. It is important to get the gospel's pardon and cleansing for wrongdoing. Often it is unresolved shame for past offenses that stir up present, obsessive fantasies.

1. The temptation to sexual gratification outside of marriage attacks both the married and the single person. What kinds of sexual temptation are you facing right now?
2. The first step to freedom from any kind of sin is repentance. That is acknowledging to God what you've done as sin—and then turning away from it and toward him. He enables you to do this through the forgiveness he offers in the gospel. Repentance is not just feeling sorry but changing the direction of your heart's affections. In true repentance you begin to see Jesus as more desirable than the sin you thought you were finding satisfaction in. Only God's Spirit can provide lasting change, but such change begins as you choose the glory of God over the faux glory of sexual sin.

For what sexual sin do you need to begin the process of forgiveness and repentance?

3. In a society so immersed in sex, it is quite common for people to have sexual experiences that have left them feeling powerless and wounded—whether from trauma, such as rape, abuse, or betrayal; or more nuanced things, such as disappointment caused by a former sexual partner. One effect of sin is for its victims to feel shame and isolation, but the gospel offers healing in community, and that can often begin with talking to someone about it. It will be a step of courage to choose to talk with someone, but the result can be to move you closer to the freedom you've been hoping for.

For what pain from the past do you need healing? Do you have a trusted confidant you can share your experience and feelings with?



No marriage plan would be complete without getting into the topic of sexual intimacy. As acknowledged in the Group Time and in the reading, sex is a powerful force God has created and prescribed for marriage.

³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

There is no way to obey this command of Scripture and maintain a dormant sex life as a married couple. This session's Marriage Plan is designed to help you take a step toward having a regular, active marital sexual partnership. Because every couple is different, an one-size-fits-all approach cannot work here. The goal is to help you take a step. It is up to you to build from there.

As in previous sessions, this discussion works best in a setting away from the normal distractions of your everyday life. Use the following questions to help you come to agreement on your next step toward experiencing the regular, active sexual intimacy God wants for your marriage.

1. Do you believe our current sex life fully agrees with Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5?
2. What is one internal factor in our marriage we need to address to move closer to God's vision for our sexual and emotional unity? (For example: unresolved conflict, lack of relational connectedness, physical ailments, etc.) Limit your answer to one thing. Because people are flawed and marriage is dynamic, it would be impossible to wait until you are perfect to have sexual intimacy. But you can work toward a better marriage as you work toward sexual intimacy.
3. What is one external factor in our marriage we need to address to move closer to God's vision for our sexual and emotional unity? (For example; children, work hours, Uncle Bob still lives in the guest room, television and Internet distractions, etc.) As with the previous question, limit your answer to one thing.
4. Knowing we will both have to have a selfless perspective to achieve greater intimacy, what is one step we could take to move in that direction? (For examples: a weekend getaway, scheduled date nights, no TV or Internet after 8pm, have sex tonight, move out Uncle Bob, etc.)
5. Having open, clear dialogue is important in developing lasting sexual intimacy. How could we begin to talk more openly and candidly with one another about this area of our marriage?

