

# Jesus and Courtship

## GOD'S WORD AND SEX:

Matthew 5:27-32

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**Bethany Church**

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Last week, we opened a discussion of God's word and sex by exploring Jesus' teaching about marriage. Jesus said:

*Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"?* (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV)

Jesus claimed we were created male and female to be united as one. "For this reason," he said. "What God has joined together," he declared. Marriage is God's accomplishment.

Sometimes pathologies interfere. People suffer problems from birth. Sexually, about 1 in 700 males have Klinefelter's Syndrome where an extra female chromosome creates special physiological and emotional struggles. About 1 in 5,000 females suffer Turner's Syndrome where a female chromosome is damaged or missing. Other rare pathologies may interfere with sexual identity; however, most sexual and relational pain involves human decisions.

We Americans suffer relational brokenness at a rate unprecedented for our nation. Much like the rest of the nation, the local divorce rate runs over 50 percent. Not measured in that index are the breakups of those who cohabit rather than marry.

In the year 2000 five and a half million Americans cohabited. About 60 to 75 percent of the couples getting married for the first time cohabit. Around 80 to 85 percent cohabit after a first marriage. Studies on cohabitation show that these couple exhibit increased risk of spousal

and child abuse. The women suffer higher rates of depression and experience lower levels of personal happiness. The rates of cohabitation increase with age and also with the experience of having parents divorce. About 40 percent of cohabiting couples do not get married. Those who get married suffer a 50 percent higher divorce rate than other couples. Consequently, cohabiting couples, who eventually get married, will likely divorce.

Cohabiting couples commonly struggle: with unequal commitment by the partners, dealing with their families of origin, differing values and expectations, differing views of the future and marriage, sexual relationship issues, personal and social stigmas, what to call their partners, willingness to merge their finances, sexual trustworthiness, sharing of housework and child rearing, less positive attitudes toward marriage and less negative attitudes toward divorce.

Obviously, cohabiting is poor preparation for marriage. There are good sociological and psychological reasons for this. The spiritual reasons, however, are more compelling to me. The Apostle Paul warned his readers in 1 Corinthians 6 to flee fornication or sexual immorality. He said that sexual union outside marriage is a sin against the body. This is particularly serious because the body is a host or temple. It is a host for the soul. Through faith in Jesus it hosts the Holy Spirit. However, a defiled body is an appropriate host for what is unclean and corrupts. We spoke of this last week. Impure hearts produce impure love that destroys rather than builds relationships. That is what we are witnessing.

However, our sexuality is a gift meant to bless and build rather than defile and destroy. God loves his children and has equipped us to enjoy healthy, fulfilling, life-building relationships. God has equipped his children so that husbands and wives can bond together in fulfilling relationships for life. That is God's will.

Courtship rather than cohabitation is the healthy process of relationship building. Courtship is an interesting and exciting experience for young and old, and there are plenty of coaches. I got interesting advice from my peers. Indeed, we are coached not just by our peers; but by parents, movies, music, television, advice columnists, and even societies. In some cultures marriages are arranged by the parents. Most courtship then takes place after the wedding. This was true for the Jewish culture of the Old and New Testaments. Special allowances were made so that newlyweds could court each other:

***A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or given any other special responsibilities. He must be free to be at home for one year, bringing happiness to the wife he has married.*** (Deuteronomy 24:5, NLT)

In that first year, the husband, a task-oriented creature by nature, was to focus primarily on his wife's happiness. In this way, couples were encouraged to establish habits of life and intimacy that would knit their lives together. In addition, these couples carried no baggage from courtship with others. They had not experienced rejection or betrayal in dating. In some cases, the man asked for a woman and the woman gave her consent. In other situations, young people didn't go on blind dates; they went into blind marriages. That appears to be true of Abraham's son Isaac and his wife Rebekah. With Rebekah's home in a distant country and her use of a veil Isaac probably never saw his bride until the wedding night. Whatever happened prior to marriage, the hearts of the people, rather than some mysterious chemistry or attraction, determined whether their marriages were fulfilling.

Love is a matter of the heart, and fulfillment flows from love. It does not flow from sexual union. The idea that you are more fulfilled if you are sexually active is false. Instead, sexual activity outside of marriage brings frustration rather than fulfillment. God's gift is not for sport. It does not offer fulfillment. It awakens a hunger or appetite that reinforces your

commitment to intimacy with your spouse. God reinforces with your body what is necessary for your soul. God draws you to be “one flesh” so that you hunger to be together, work together, live together, honor and cherish each other. This hunger reinforces fidelity. It is to keep you coming back again and again to your mate, so you work through issues and develop a love that sustains companionship. King Solomon wrote about sexual love in the Bible. Listen:

***Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.*** (Song 8:6-7, NIV)

This passionate, fiery love is a gift from God. God has put this very gift in your body, and it is to be activated and fanned only in the commitment of marriage. It is not to be activated through pornography. It is not to be activated through music, media, fantasizing, or seductive dancing. When this sexual gift is not used exclusively in marriage, impurity rules our hearts; and pain results in our relationships. That is why chaste single people lead a much more fulfilling life than many married couples. For too many married people, impurity has diverted or dimmed their passion for their mates and left them with a gnawing hunger.

Solomon warns three times:

***Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*** (Song 2:3, 3:5, 8:4, NIV)

This is not a nonsensical, repetitious refrain. When fiery passion is awakened prematurely and inappropriately, it turns selfish and loses its power to support healthy companionship. The warning is don't get physically involved until a life commitment makes it appropriate.

Courtesy kissing is a whole different thing than passionate kissing. Regardless of what movies, sitcoms, books, music, peers and even parents tell you, kissing is not recreation.

Although it may be exciting and fun, it isn't recreation. It is relationship. If it is inappropriate for

us who are married to passionately kiss someone other than our spouses, what makes you think it is healthy for singles who are not committed for life.

Today, artistic gifts of writing, acting, singing, and story telling, along with millions of dollars of advertising revenue are messing with your minds and contending the opposite of what I'm saying. There is one reason why I feel I can stand alone up here and beat them in the battle for you thoughts and your hearts. I've been sent to you by God with his Spirit, and you are being visited by the Holy Spirit right now. Listen to what that Spirit caused Jesus to say:

***You have heard that the law of Moses says, "Do not commit adultery." But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So if your eye — even if it is your good eye — causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*** (Matthew 5:27-29, NLT)

Can you tell from Jesus' language that he is serious? Look at the people around you. They are God's beloved children. Jesus gave his life for each. So he's telling you, don't you use them. Don't defile them, betray them or dishonor them for your pleasure. That's not love. That's the way of death. Instead of that, let the Spirit of God cleanse you of defilement. Let repentance drive you to Jesus; let his forgiveness release you and his Spirit fill you with love that honors and sacrifices and endures forever.

Courtship in our culture can be a great, exciting and building time. The **D** in DATE can mean *discovery* about yourself and another. The **A** can mean *appreciation* as you learn and experience affirmation. The **T** can be *testing* that is done as you apply God's words in a relationship and learn what blesses. **E** stands for *evaluation* as you seek God's will for your life and for the one you date. What a joy that can be. What a joy it has been for many! Dating need not be painful. It need not awaken prematurely the bonding gift of God.

God has given us this gift to bless, not hurt. His fulfilling love is offered to you now!