

Sexual Sanity in a Sex Obsessed World The Post Modern Mating Dance

Introduction:

Today we conclude our four-week series on Sexual Sanity in a Sex-Obsessed World. I debated the topic for today, but in the end decided to address the Post Modern Mating Dance. I want to show what has led up to the Post-Modern Mating Dance, and offer my thoughts on this subject. I also want to call all of us, as a community to a paradigm shift around the Post Modern Mating Dance. But before I do that I want to discuss with you an aspect of the Modern Mating Dance among Christians and that is the increasing tendency to mixed faith marriages.

Equally or unequally yoked? The tendency for mixed faith marriages.

Historically one of the issues in the mating dance for the people of faith has been-- in what pool should the Mating Dance take place? Does one handicap their chances for a good marriage if they choose a partner who is “outside the faith” or become (in old language) “unequally” yoked? Isn’t it better for Christians to marry Christians as well as people of other faith persuasions to marry within the faith?

Pastorally, I find an increasing number of Christians choosing partners who do not express any active faith or come from other faith backgrounds. In the past year I’ve spoken with several couples planning to marry where one person is a practicing Christian and the other is ardent agnostic or atheist; or practicing Christian and practicing Jew, or practicing Christian and practicing Muslim. One very likeable couple who I think will do quite well—the man left the Catholic priesthood for the “idea of a covenant relationship”; entered training or the Anglican priesthood—full of faith and found quite a delightful partner who does not subscribe to faith and does not intend to participate at all in the community where her husband will be priest. So, these couples have many things in common, but not faith. Is there any biblical wisdom on this matter? Yes, but we have to translate it from the ancient world to our world.

In past weeks I’ve told you about the libertine side of the Corinthian church—how they lived more by their slogans than by Christ. The libertine slogans included: Food for the Stomach, Sex for the

Body; we are not designed for monogamy; do what feels good; their sexual identities and their sexual behaviours were followed after their slogans and not after Christ. They were as sexually immature as they were immature in the things of Christ.

There was another side to the Corinthians that reacted to the sexualised spirituality of their day by de-sexualising relationship. Their slogan was “it is more spiritual not to have any sexual experience”. In the new age of the Spirit and in heaven we are neither given nor taken in marriage, so isn't it better not to have any sexual experience here. Isn't this the life in the spirit? The consequence of this reaction and very bad theology was that a segment of the Corinthian church were not only saying that it is good not to have sex but that the way to do that was to deprive your partner of sexual relations; or by separating and divorcing;

Just as the Apostle Paul responded to the libertines who over sexualised their lives he speaks to those who de-sexualise their lives. Let's see what we can learn from the Bible and then we will discuss the Post Modern Mating Dance.

1 Corinthians 7

To Be Married, to Be Single . . .

1 Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? 2-6 Certainly—but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to "stand up for your rights." Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out. Abstaining from sex is permissible for a period of time if you both agree to it, and if it's for the purposes of prayer and fasting—but only for such times. Then come back together again. Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it. I'm not, understand, commanding these periods of abstinence—only providing my best counsel if you should choose them.

Notice:

- Sexual marriage and sexual mutuality are Paul's answers to sexual immorality, the sex trade, and to bad marriage theology. Mutuality here is a Christian concept—mutually submission to one another that places a higher value on marital sexuality than most cultures where sex

was considered a duty. The notion of mutuality is that neither “body” owns the other, but you mutually and voluntarily and freely possession one another in sexual communion.

- Sustained sexual abstinence is not normal martial practice; and it usually means other problems (outlets) will occur.
- To abstain from mutual sexual experience or to manipulate marriage for some “super spiritual” reason is an abuse of mutuality and love and respect. This obviously does not refer to issues of different libidos and such. That kind of thing is worked out in counseling not by quoting Bible verses to your spouse.

Text:

7 Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me—a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.

8-9 I do, though, tell the unmarried and widows that singleness might well be the best thing for them, as it has been for me. But if they can't manage their desires and emotions, they should by all means go ahead and get married. The difficulties of marriage are preferable by far to a sexually tortured life as a single.

Things to note

- Celibacy is a gift. It is not for married people. The Corinthians urged celibacy in married for the wrong reasons. Celibacy is not actually for single people either. They should find their sexual fulfilment in covenant. Celibacy is only for the celibate.
- This by the way in its original context was **not** a solution for youthful sexual desires (Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion). Marriage was seen as a real alternative to widowers who currently going to prostitutes. It unfortunately has been used in years past to push many people toward marriage who on other fronts not ready for marriage.

Text:

10-11 And if you are married, stay married. This is the Master's command, not mine. If a wife should leave her husband, she must either remain single or else come back and make things right with him. And a husband has no right to get rid of his wife.

Things to note

- Here you see Paul's main point in this chapter—do not seek a change in status—if single, or married or abandoned. **The Point—your martial status has no spiritual merit. In fact status is irrelevant to God. God's will is that you live out your Christian calling to honour God in your life and in your body in whatever situation you find yourself—single, married, widowed or abandoned. And, when something happens to you—don't rush to change your status—don't loose the learning of living by faith where you are at. After you figure that out, then you can change things up.**

Text

12-14 For the rest of you who are in mixed marriages—Christian married to non-Christian—we have no explicit command from the Master. So this is what you must do. If you are a man with a wife who is not a believer but who still wants to live with you, hold on to her. If you are a woman with a husband who is not a believer but he wants to live with you, hold on to him. The unbelieving husband shares to an extent in the holiness of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is likewise touched by the holiness of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be left out; as it is, they also are included in the spiritual purposes of God.

things to note

This is a crucial paragraph for our discussion.

- In mixed faith, unfaith marriages Paul says it is not the person without faith somehow weakens or in old language “contaminates” the marriage. It is just the opposite. It is the person without faith who is “sanctified”. Paul's argument here is a high view of grace of God as grounds to maintain mixed marriages. It is a high view of the potential for salvation in the grace experienced in this marriage. In fact the language Paul uses makes his conclusion clear. **Mixed marriages are essentially Christian marriages.** They are to be treated as Christian marriages, not non-Christian marriages. This is shocking to Christian traditionalist.
- So what's this about?
 - The text about equally and unequally yoked in not in this section of Corinthians. In fact it is not even in this Corinthian letter. It is in Paul's second letter to Corinth about half way through and says this: *Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's*

not partnership; that's war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? (2 Cor. 6:14-15).

- RSV interpreted this as marriage—(*do not be mismated with unbelievers*)
- The yoke language comes from Deuteronomy 22:10 which forbids mixing of animals in a plough yoke (Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together). In Leviticus there is a prohibition give to OT Hebrews to avoid interbreeding of animals, crops, material such as different qualities of cloth. The idea was that there is something about God that is pure and the way you farm and work materials should remind you of God's purity.
- In the NT we can say what Paul is NOT saying. Being unequally yoked does not mean
 - *Coming out of the world or withdrawing from culture as Christians*
- What Paul was likely referring to be unequally yoked included things like
 - To use non-Christian court to settle disputes among Christians
 - To be linked with persistently disobedient Christians
 - Claim to be a Christian while being persistently living by non-Christian values.

- **But there is no NT command for Christians not to marry non-Christians.** There may be wisdom in choosing a partner with similar faith values, but there is not a command. Closest thing is Paul's instruction to widows. *A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.* 1 Cor 7:39. What Paul is saying is that it makes good sense to marry in the Lord, but it is not a command. All of 1 Cor 7 is very specific to the Corinthian situation and as Fee points out the discussion takes place quite apart from our concerns about marriage, faith, etc.
- **So, where does that leave us for today?** I can tell you where I'm at. There are no guarantees that if a Christian marries a Christian they will have a growing and positive marriage. Immature Christians who marry tend to have the same martial problems that immature non-Christians have when they marry.
 - **On** the other hand there is wisdom in marrying someone who has similar values in one of the central areas of life. Similar values here allow for shared intimate experiences of trusting God and experiencing God.

- When couples with mixed faith want to marry I check to see if the basic building blocks of a good marriage are in place. If they are then I don't object to the marriage. I ask them if they are o.k. with not having spiritual intimacy in their marriage. I also ask them to visit with a mixed faith couple with a good marriage and to see what it is like and hear first hand the real losses entailed. Then to check in with each other one more time before proceeding. I think that is in keeping with the spirit of Paul's text. You may disagree.
- The focus in the text is on maintaining mixed marriages not breaking them up. Listen to the next three verses.

text

15-16 On the other hand, if the unbelieving spouse walks out, you've got to let him or her go. You don't have to hold on desperately. God has called us to make the best of it, as peacefully as we can. You never know, wife: The way you handle this might bring your husband not only back to you but to God. You never know, husband: The way you handle this might bring your wife not only back to you but to God.

17 And don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life. Don't think I'm being harder on you than on the others. I give this same counsel in all the churches.

Main point

- So there is the main point again in verse 17. Live out God's will in the place you are at, single seeking married life, or single with the gift of celibacy, or married [to the person you are with], widowed.
- [There is more material in the following particularly on singleness in Corinth. We need to carefully understand it in context before we try to apply it. Particularly Paul's realized eschatology (which you won't understand what I'm referring to and don't have time to explain).]
- Fee notes that people try and apply this text to divorce and remarriage, but it is not much help to us there –it is more about supporting mixed marriages.
- Fee also notes that this passage is not one we turn to, to find out about covenant or marital love. That not Paul's purpose here.

Now To The Post Modern Mating Dance

As a pastor I am interested in God-formed relationships across the entire life-cycle—how our CapKids experience life in this community; how friendships are formed for teens, how intergenerational friendships grow in community; how life partners are chosen; how relationships are reformed in loss—of a marriage, a partner, a long term friend. In all these relationships I want to see God’s grace and values lead the way. When it comes to choosing life partners, my value for God formed relationship is challenged by the Post-Modern Mating Dance. I will explain.

Marina Glogovac, the Chief Executive Officer at Lavalife, one of the most popular web based dating services, says of the approximately \$700-million dollar web dating industry, *Online dating is one of the very few things on the Web consumers are willing to pay for, beside the travel and entertainment That speaks to the value consumers place on the service. Another online dating trend that followed other communication industries is "nichifying" –we see niche sites aiming to aggregate people around common values, lifestyles, religion, race or interests. Consumers converging around what they have in common, and wanting to “belong” to communities of like-minded people.*

The Post Modern Mating Dance is of particular interest because so much of our joy and pain, our maturing hinges on this critical and “risky” decision of the person with whom we partner. I mentioned in our study of cohabitation a Gallup poll taken in 2001 shows that young people are deeply invested in hunger for sustained intimate relationships. 94 % want to be in a long-term relationship with soul mate or best friend. 88% believe that person is out there waiting for them. So expectations are being notched up but at the same time the mating dance is increasingly privatised, and globalized on web. This means that the mating dance is cut off from historic structures of family, school, community, and faith.

A call to community

I don’t believe that the Mating Dance is or should be a private issue. I believe it is a community issue—particularly here where one of primary outcomes our leadership desire to welcome and reflect the unmistakable presence of God As we form strong, godly, and nurturing Christ-centred relationships. The Bible was written to communities of people. The Bible teaches that the relational

healthy of the community is the responsibility of all. Each of you makes a contribution to the quality or lack of relationship health of the whole. Whatever stage of relationship formation or recovery we are at, we are all called to form a community where healing is taking place and God formed relationships are being formed. We do this not just for ourselves but also for the whole. Then when someone comes into our community with a history/experience of ill-formed relationships they can taste and see something different and hopefully discover God in the process.

As many you know we have a home based marriage mentoring program that is intended to assist couples once they have made their partner choice. (e.g. R.B. with the Loewens—"I have no model of a good marriage in my family history to draw on"—being linked up a couple with generations of good marriages). That is good, but only part of what we need. *(Ask those who have been trained to mentor to stand. Ask those who have been mentored to stand. Ask those you believe that this was a valuable component to establishing a good marriage to remain standing)*

One of the young singles from Cap in years past wrote this on a questionnaire, "**Looking at most marriages today, I don't know what I would be hoping for—so maybe I should trust God to keep me from loving**". My question is—who will mentor this person in the Mating Dance. I believe that this is a community responsibility—to mentor one another in relationship formation.

The Mating Dance

Let's look at the Mating Dance.

One of the truths we learn from Psychology is that people choose friends and partners within a narrow range of psychological; emotional; and relational health. If someone has lived in a structurally chaotic and emotionally reactive and generally need based relationships in family of origin, then they are likely to choose friends and partners from the same range. The word is—if you think your partner is the crazy one –think again! One of the brilliant things about community is that as God is forming our relationships we can learn new ways of relating and we can make better choices not only understanding where we've come from but where God wants to take us. That is why our Marriage Mentors start their relationship with the couple to be mentored with a 3-

generation familygram. It is the best predictor of the strengths and challenges two people will face in a long-term relationship.

Without mentoring I think the Postmodern Mating Dance is going have dicey success at best. Why? Because...

- Long term relationship are not for the squeamish (cartoon)
- **Marriage Satisfaction chart**

Marriage is rewarding and challenging; at times delightful and one of the hardest roads I've ever traveled. It continually confronts my strengths and weaknesses. People who go in just for satisfaction or personal happiness are likely to be bitterly disappointed. (Chart on marriage satisfaction across the life cycle) Marital satisfaction declines steadily from the beginning of marriage to the period when children exit the family unit—Journal of Sociology study on Calgarian couples 1981

(you are suppose to make me happy cartoon)

- If it is only happiness you seek, then better off to be contentedly single. (The challenges and satisfactions of singleness are different than those of marriage. One is not better than the other). But if want to face the how hard it is to accept another person and give up trying to change them; if you want to learn what it means to live by forgiveness over the long haul, then there is no place like marriage.

Like most of you growing up, I had no idea what made for good relationships or good mating. In my dating life I wandered though a couple dozen-relationship beginning in grade 2—yes grade 2. time is limited so I won't bore you with the details, but the shortest dating relationship was about 3 hours and the longest before my now 34 year marriage was 2 years. I was looking for something using the trial and error method of what might make a relationship work. God was gracious to me in that about four years before I met Nancy I became a Christian and found in God and Jesus a model for covenant love. I didn't know what "love" was. I think I knew what lust was. I think I could tell you whether I thought my not-yet-defined "needs" were being met, but I didn't have any knowledge or experience of love that was beyond myself. I found in Christ a model for love that was not subjective, or narcissistic, but life giving. So when I met Nancy and found myself saying Wo-Man—this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh my question was not "how much will you fill my needs and longings?" but, "Can I love you with covenant love"? I believed from the beginning that marriage was about more than "us" it was about God forming us. Beyond this basic commitment, we were ignorant and inexperienced as to what made for a mature marriage. The

people we knew in our faith communities over the years plus some professional help from Christian counsellors, saved our bacon on many occasions.

Now, I know what makes for good long-term marriages. I know the predictable challenges a couple will face. I can predict with the help of the familygram the personal challenges a couple will face. I know that if the couple face their own unfinished “FOO” business and take responsibility for it rather than expect their partner to rescue them they will do better. I know that a commitment to imitate God’s example of covenant love is the best orientation for personal and marital growth. I know that practicing a deep respect and affection for your partner along with not taking yourself too seriously that loose sense of humour keeps love alive.

But Houston, we have a problem.

The problem is not what makes marriages work. The problem, which requires a paradigm shift, is in the Mating Dance. The problem is that both our postmodern culture and to a large extent the church has relegated mate selection to an individualistic trial and error approach.

Romantic love

Let me show you how we got to this point. In order to do that I have to go back to the 11th century.

Prior to the 11th century the family arranged most marriages. In subsistence economies the bride price was compensation for the lost and valued contributions that the daughter made to her family. In an agrarian culture the dowry made the daughter a highly valued partner in a new union and venture. In the 11th century in Europe, the notion of courtly or romantic love began. Rather than love blossoming out of shared life lived over time, the notion became popular that true love was only true love if romance was apart of the mating dance and that the individual got to judge for him or herself. You see this popularized in classic movie tales like *The Princess Bride* or the fictional tale, *Ever After*—retelling the story of the Cinderella girl. Here are a few lines from *Ever After*.

King of France: I’ve arranged a marriage with the King of Spain and there will be hell to pay if Prince Henry does not fulfill the contract.

Queen of France: But he doesn’t love here

Prince Henry: Marriage to a complete stranger never made anyone in this room very happy.

Leonardo Da Vinci: a life without love is not a life worth living

Prince Henry: do you really believe there is only one perfect match?

Leonardo: Yes, but you have to pay attention—fate has a lot to do>

Queen: Choose wisely, Henry, divorce is only something they do in England.

So courtly love began. It developed as a romantic and sexualized affair between a knight and a married aristocratic lady. Then the notion of romantic sexualized love being the stuff of true love filtered down into the middle classes.

This soon became the accepted Mating Dance—you choose a life partner on the basis of your experience of romance and sexual attraction completely independent of family or community wisdom. As the 20th century dawned, arranged marriage essentially lost to the industrialized world. The choice of a partner became based on romanticized and sexualized experience apart from the modeling and mentoring of family or community. The decision rested almost entirely on the couple. And we know that people tend to choose what is familiar to them—they long to replicate their experience of “normal”—often replaying what was unhealthy.

So the result are pitiful expressions of the Mating Dance: Blind Date (and spin offs HELL DATE, 5th wheel, Change of Heart); the talk shows modeled after Jerry Springer, where you think, can these folk really be the majority—or are they really the eccentric?

The filter model. The latest incarnation of the Mating Dance is connecting on the web. Most web matching services still use a filtering model that first appeared in the mate selection theories in the late 50's and early 60's. The Filtering model of Kerckhoff and Davis defined compatibility as when couples had the greatest number of similar likes; interests and complimentary needs. Once you progress through several layers of filters you came up with the person—the best choice and your best chance for a successful relationship. The model is still based your perception of yourself, particularly your needs.

God, Community, Individual Together In The Mating Dance

I want to suggest a different model for the Mating Dance. Over the past 30 years I've sat with couples who have met in all kinds of contexts: everything from choosing their childhood sweetheart, to couples who have met in kayak clubs, adventure trips; in church or ministry outreach.

Some of the more unusual places of connection have been in internet chat rooms; web based dating services; in clubs, in grief groups, and one couple who met in a drug deal. The common thing was that all wanted something good—wanted companionship and love, and none of them knew how to marry well. So, I think that the place of meeting is really irrelevant. The process of allowing God to form your relationship and allowing the faith community to assist you in discerning and growing your relationship is everything.

I believe that the absolute best process of mentoring possible is that a couple who think that they might have a future together—

- Involve the community in the discernment process before the decision is made
 - E.g. your commitment to discern via FOO work—most I ever took someone through was 5 potential mates over several years.
 - E.g. commitment to learn the relational lesson and help to control the sexual expression so that love can arouse in its time—as we discussed last week.
 - A theology of Christian relationship on our website titled Sexuality and Relationship—covers everything from singleness to dating to marriage to divorce
 - A 23 page “serious relationship” questionnaire
 - Our commitment not to marry anyone if they don’t go through that process with us.
- Get involved in mentoring—before marriage and after marriage for at least 5 years—where you meet every 6 months and brag about your successes and discuss the challenges you are facing and how you are handling them for the best good of all.
- Build friendships with singles and couples in the community whose faith and integrity in god-forming relationships you can learn from. (If can’t find that here than find a community where you can)
- Give away to others what you have learned

Sum: I believe that God has called us to sexual sanity; I believe God has called to redemptive relationships; positive body images, healthy fantasies. I believe God has called us to do the Mating Dance different than our culture I believe that God has called us to be a mentoring community across all ages and stages of relationships. By God’s grace, let’s become what we are called to be. Amen.