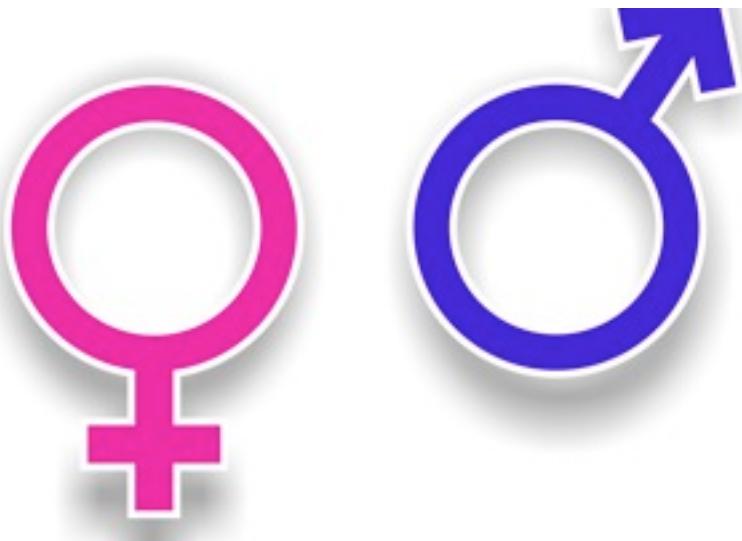


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# A Biblical Guide to Safe (and Great!) Sex



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Message by **Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor**  
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**Scripture Passage Exodus 20:14, Matthew 5:27-28**  
**Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada**



Some of us are married and I am sensitive to the fact some are single for a variety of reasons. Trust this will have something to say to all of us as we live in our culture.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, they were commanded when they to cut down the Asherah. These were sacred objects, crudely sexual in style and purpose. Behind this command to cut them down was the expectation and the demand that this covenant nation was to have a different ethic regarding sexuality and marriage.

More than ever I am convinced that in the Ten Commandments we find the practical word from God about how his people are to live in a foreign culture. In some ways just as morally confusing and sexually tempting as Canaan was going to be for the Israelites. Our society as its own Asherah, sexual symbols that have to be cut down.

In the context of marriage and family.

At least 40% of Canadian marriages end in divorce.

Fewer than half the present generation will reach 18 with both parents still living together

Between 1981 and 1991, number of people living together jumped 50%. Latest census confirms this growing trend of people living together. By the way, not only young people live together, but older people do that too.

In the spring of 2005 the Canadian Government passed Bill C-38 which allows same sex marriages.

For those who are confused between morality and legality and do not understand the difference, what is now legal becomes understood and accepted to be moral.

These negative statistics can easily create a lens that puts marriage and family out of focus from a biblical norm. We easily end up living closer to the cultural norm than to the Biblical standard. This is the seduction of our hearts and the breakdown of the Christian mind. The reality is, the more persistently and steadily we look at things that are out of focus, the more we may assume that they are normal and so we end up living in this distorted view of reality.

It is against these social distortions and this sexual deformation. What we might call the modern day Asherah, the

sexual totem poles of our day. It is against these cultural abnormalities that become a mirage of normality, that God calls his people to stand as a holy nation and as a royal priesthood. It is another way of saying the well known challenge in Romans 12. Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed...

His word is: do not commit adultery.

There is a word that we need to rediscover today. A word we need to revive especially in our biblical vocabulary and Christian thinking. That word is **Covenant**. It is a word we need to start to use again, to speak again, to believe in again, to weave into our lives again. It needs to be a key word as we try to forge a biblical worldview.

It is a word that is close to the heart of God. The Hebrew word to describe the heart of God is **HESED**. It means faithfulness, loyalty, lovingkindness, mercy, steadfastness, unfailing love.

Hesed describes the heart of God towards us as his people. It describes the nature of his covenant love for us. It is to become a key word in our worldview. It is to be at the very centre of the lens through which we view all of life and our

understanding of marriage and sexuality.

This morning we are going to explore this word covenant as it relates to marriage.

### **COVENANT FIDELITY GIVES US THE FREEDOM IN COMMITMENT.**

We start in God's garden, where everything began and where it still begins.

#### **Genesis 2**

**18. The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**

**19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.**

**20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.**

**21. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.**

**22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

**23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."**

**24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

**25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.**

Up until now in creation everything had been declared good. Now for the first time something is not good. It is the solitude or the loneliness of the man. Someone is needed who will complement him, be his helper. That is not a demeaning word. The same word is used in the Psalms to describe God.

Whenever I have asked people who just lived together why they chose that. The answer is often, we did not want to make a commitment. Perhaps parents were divorced. Look at the statistics today, so they say. We just live together. We are going to see if it works out first. So they tentatively tiptoe onto the sacred ground of marriage. They want to keep an escape door open in case it does not work. Given the data in today's

world, that sounds almost logical. They do not want to be another statistic, but they will be anyway if they break up.

Yet if there is freedom **FROM** commitment, we also need to see that there is also freedom **IN** commitment. Of course there is a freedom that we surrender when we enter into a covenant commitment with someone else. There are things that we give up, but as we walk through that narrow door of commitment where we have to bend down as it were to go through it. When we lay aside everything we are carrying and see what lies on the other side. We enter into a deeper world of a different kind of freedom. There is a new freedom **IN** commitment.

This means that some of the questions and alternatives we had to think about have been answered. We no longer have to think about them. Some of the options we used to consider are now closed. The commitment we accept sets us free.

There is an old wedding service vow that says:

I bind myself to you for life. I have chosen you and from now on my aim will be not to search for someone that will please me, but to please the one whom I have chosen.

That is covenant loyalty and we learn that from God, who has a single-minded jealousy, a determined passion towards us. He says I am committed to you no matter what and under that canopy of that promise we can say to another human being, I am committed to you.

### COVENANT LOYALTY GIVES US THE FREEDOM TO GROW.

I hear this from time to time. I don't want to be stifled by marriage. Well actually neither do I. I don't think anyone does.

But a covenant marriage that is rooted in loyalty is not one that stifles us. Rather it encourages us to grow as people. In our creativity, in our individuality. It is where we mutually assist each other to become the person that God fully intends us to become.

At marriage services couples often want to light a unity candle. They take the two single candles and they use them to light a unity candle. We understand the symbolism of this act. People love to use candles at wedding services, [at one wedding someone with a candle set a bridesmaid's hair on fire, that was exciting! ]

I remember at one wedding rehearsal we had worked all this unity candle bit out, what they were going to do. Then when it came to the actual ceremony,

they took the two candles, very nicely lit the unity candle and then in a way that was not rehearsed, they blew out the two candles representing their own individual lives. I almost wanted to scream, no! Don't do that. You are not being extinguished. A healthy marriage does not suffocate or smother our own individuality, rather it gives us a place to grow. It involves three people: you, me and us!

Paul Stevens (well known here in Vancouver) describes 6 kinds of loyalty in his book *Married For Good*.

### ATTITUDINAL LOYALTY

We cherish and value our spouses, thinking the best of them and for them. When we cherish people, it is not hard to do thoughtful things for them.

### VERBAL LOYALTY

It means the way we talk to them and about them.

### SPIRITUAL LOYALTY

We are brothers and sisters together in the grace of God. We are people mutually gifted. How can we encourage the gifts in our spouse, How can we help them to grow.

### DECISIONAL LOYALTY

It means that we will make decisions together and we will stand together in what we have decided. Nothing divides a couple faster than when one

says, look what **YOU** have done! The times I have messed up the most in decisions are the times I have not taken Harriet's advice. She has better intuition than I do.

**HEART LOYALTY.** Old wedding vow says, I pledge thee my troth.

Troth is an old word. More than truth, it means truthfulness. It is when we bring our heart.

Last but not least, **PHYSICAL LOYALTY.**

We understand that there is one thing that is to make our marriage relationship different and unique from every other friendship and relationship we have. It is the dimension of sexual intimacy. The word, do not commit adultery, was a word to protect and guard marriage in a sexually promiscuous culture. At one level it obviously means physical adultery, because that act by its very doing breaks the exclusive nature of marriage.

Jesus speaks into almost all the commandments and in his usual style, Jesus does not let us off with what the commandment means on the surface. He exposes its heart.

### Matthew 5

**27. "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'**

**28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

The Pharisees were the experts at legalisms. They could define adultery. They knew exactly what it was. It was sexual intercourse. It was ending up in bed with someone who was not your spouse. They could declare that they did not cross that line. But Jesus knows as we all do, that there is a lot that can happen that does not cross that line. Adultery does not start in the bedroom, it starts in the heart.

Let me give you a definition of adultery.

Adultery is anything which we nurture in our heart which interferes with the growing intimacy with your spouse.

I have a sense that there are many men who out of moral integrity would never think of ending up in bed with someone else but who are in fact adulterers. They have another lover and their mistress is their work. We respond to her seductive invitation. This adulteress has summoned our time and energy and has satisfied our heart.

Pornography is adultery. It visualizes and invites another lover in the relationship. It stimulates what 1st John calls

the lust of the eyes. The internet has opened up the whole world of pornography.

Who might be the lover in the heart of a woman?

It can also be a job.

It could also be children, whose demands of time and energy seduce a woman into being a mother before being a wife.

It might be her house, which becomes a seductive lover rather than a place of love.

The point is, countless marriages maintain a strict sexual fidelity and yet the bedroom is occupied by other lovers.

Healthy marriages are not free from stress and challenges rather they are forged by hammer and by heat as two people commit day after day to covenant loyalty, where they give each other the freedom to grow and to change.

Sometimes people say, you are not the person I married. The answer is of course not. All of us change and grow.

O how we change, and covenant loyalty allows us. It encourages us to change and grow.

## **COVENANT INTIMACY GIVES US THE FREEDOM TO LOVE.**

One expression of the shallowness of our society is our movement towards self-gratification and its twin, instant gratification. We want it now. We do not want to wait.

You cannot turn a relationship back once you have been to bed with someone. Sex is not a recreational event. There is no such thing as casual sex. It is an intimate process with someone. Sex is not something we do. It is who we are.

The Bible has 3 different words and pictures for sexual intercourse.

### **1. Procreational Sex**

Genesis 16:23, to go into (NASB)

When Sarah seems unable to conceive a baby with Abraham, she comes up with a culturally acceptable alternative. She says Abraham should sleep with Hagar her maid, *to go into her*. It is procreational sex.

### **2. Recreational Sex**

Genesis 39:7. Joseph is in Potiphar's house, a warm day. Everyone is out except his wife and so she says to this handsome young man, come lie with me, lets go to bed. It is recreational sex. Sex without commitment.

### 3. To Know

That is why the Bible uses a simple but profound word to describe our sexual intimacy in marriage. It is to know.

One flesh is not the first act of sexual intercourse on a wedding night. It is all the ways in which we become one.

The truth of being one flesh with someone is a deep and intense way to describe this covenant intimacy. It means being with someone and being naked and not ashamed, which has very little to do with taking off our clothes. It is being with someone with whom we can share our dreams, our hopes, our fears, where in the intimacy of each others arms we can laugh and we can cry together.

The only safe sex today is to retain our virginity before marriage, until perhaps one day we will bring ourselves as an intimate gift to someone in celebration. The only safe sex is to be faithful within marriage and to guard relationships outside the covenant fence of marriage.

The Song of Songs is a whole book written to celebrate this kind of covenant sexuality. It is the delicate portrayal of sexual intimacy on a wedding night. I call it, love without lust, passion

without pornography. Has some great lines.

*3 Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle.*

*Your waist is a mound of wheat – not sure how romantic that is Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon*

*Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon – not sure I would use that.*

In the intimacy of covenant marriage, we do not just meet as body to body, we meet as soul to soul and spirit to spirit.

Covenant sexuality invites us to experience what it means to serve each other in this intimate way, to lose ourselves for the sake of the other person.

**Proverbs 5:15-20** gives us a picture of covenant faithfulness in marriage. We are to find in our own spouses all the physical, mental, emotional satisfaction that we desire.

**15 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.**

**16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?**

**17 Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.**

**18 May your fountain be blessed,  
and may you rejoice in the wife**

**of your youth.**

**19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.**

We are created as sexual people and in marriage God calls us to enjoy and to celebrate sexuality. To our young adults, can I encourage you to pray for and wait for a person with whom you can celebrate covenant love. Do not settle for less. Do not give yourself away for less than that.

So 44 years ago I waited at the front of a small church in Scotland for a lovely young lady to come and stand beside me. I watched her as she came down the aisle. She has loved me through the darkness of depression. I would not have made it without her. She has sat at my bedside through a long night when she was told I would not live. We have laughed together and we have cried together.

A poem by Mary Carolyn Davies describes how many of us feel in the intimacy of covenant marriage.

**I LOVE YOU**

**NOT ONLY FOR WHAT YOU ARE**

**BUT FOR WHO I AM WHEN I AM WITH YOU.**

I LOVE YOU NOT ONLY FOR  
WHAT YOU HAVE MADE OF  
YOURSELF

BUT FOR WHAT YOU ARE  
MAKING OF ME

I LOVE YOU FOR THE PART  
OF ME THAT YOU BRING OUT

I LOVE YOU FOR PUTTING  
YOUR HAND IN MY HEART

AND PASSING OVER ALL THE  
FOOLISH WEAK THINGS

THAT YOU CAN'T HELP DIMLY  
SEEING THERE

AND FOR DRAWING OUT  
INTO THE LIGHT

ALL THE BEAUTIFUL  
BELONGINGS THAT

NO ONE ELSE HAD LOOKED  
QUITE

FAR ENOUGH TO FIND

I LOVE YOU BECAUSE

YOU ARE HELPING ME TO  
MAKE

OF THE LUMBER OF MY LIFE

NOT A TAVERN BUT A  
TEMPLE

OUT OF THE WORKS OF MY  
EVERY DAY

NOT A REPROACH BUT A  
SONG

So we live in changing moral times, the flickering candle of a biblical morality seems to be getting snuffed out. We cannot go back to the good old days. I am not sure they were always that good.

But this moral eclipse can also be the stage for biblical witness. We will never have perfect marriages or perfect families or perfect kids. Scripture does not offer us this kind of utopia, but if we will do the hard work of building covenant marriages that have credibility and authenticity in these darkening times. As the moral sun fades, people will be drawn to look for answers.

This is a great place for the church to minister to its community, premarital classes, workshops on communication, raising kids in todays sensuous world.

Our society has had to face the reality that the free love of the 60's was not free. It had a price. The materialism of the 70's has left us bankrupt. The humanism of the 80's was a striptease and the spirituality of the 90's was the road to nowhere. The real crisis of the 20's is not the environment and changing temperatures, but the spiritual atmosphere we are in. We are lost and we have been seduced.

But somewhere in this moral wasteland, in this spiritual wilderness, there must be a people who are not sexually disoriented or morally confused or relationally perplexed. They are the people who have heard the voice of God from the fire on the mountain and who will echo with Israel. All that the Lord has commanded we will do.

So whether we are single or married this morning, the word we need to hold to is this word **Covenant**. This is word Jesus used to describe the way in which God related to us, covenant. This cup is the cup of the new covenant. It is not some casual relationship. It describes a deep and lasting commitment, a relationship that will stretch out into eternity.