

ROMANCE: A PASSIONATE PURSUIT

The Wonder of Becoming One! (Part 1)

I. Love and Romance Defined

A. Genuine love originates with God and is defined by God.

- To understand love in marriage we must understand God's love for us.

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

- The foremost expression and definition of love is provided in the gospel. God gave his Son and the Son gave his life for sinners like you and me. Instead of receiving His wrath we have instead received forgiveness through our Savior. The starting point for understanding genuine love is experiencing God's love poured out on the cross of Jesus Christ.

B. Genuine love is gloriously displayed in marriage.

- Marriage is a living demonstration of divine love in a human relationship, and as men we have the privilege and responsibility of leading our wives by our example of God's love.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her... (Ephesians 5:25)

- The culture is unable to define or display genuine love because it doesn't start with God and the gospel. As a result, love becomes all about obtaining our selfish desires.

1. Getting, not giving.
2. Selfishness, not sacrifice.
3. Conquests, not commitment.
4. Lust, not love.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

- C. Romance is the outward expression of the desire to love, nourish and cherish our spouse, of which affection, intimacy, and delight should be a regular experience. True romance is only possible where there is biblical love within the covenant of marriage.
- D. Romance is not a natural state that is automatically maintained. Instead, romance is a gift and an art that every husband and wife have the privilege to cultivate and display through all the years of their marriage.

II. Romance Spoiled

God mercifully alerts us to temptations that compete for our love for one another. Sometimes the struggle relates to sin in our past, leading to fear, uncertainty or reluctance. But it can also include the regular activities of life that we pursue at the expense of our marriage relationship. By asking God to search our hearts we can begin to prioritize and serve one another now with patterns that will last a lifetime. Sowing the seeds of servanthood and love will reap a wonderful harvest in the years to come.

A. Spiritual Neglect

- To love and pursue God is the first and greatest commandment over our lives (Matt 22:36-38). The grace to love your spouse will not come from you. Your feelings will fluctuate. But an ever-deepening love for the Savior will lead to an ever-deepening love for others—especially your spouse! When you allow patterns of spiritual neglect you are making this statement to God and to your spouse, “I don’t need God. I don’t need His grace.”

B. Selfishness

- This is the lie that believes that what you want is more important and better for you than what God wants. This can include laziness, ingratitude, pursuing romance primarily to get rather than to give, or believing that other things are more important than your spouse.
- We are not advocating that to have a marriage marked by God-glorifying romance we must be in a constant embrace. Husbands are called to a task. It requires time and effort. Wives are called to serve their husbands by managing their home. Both are called to a variety of relationships. But never should these priorities or relationships hold the passion or priority that belongs solely to one’s spouse.

C. Bitterness

- This can be the result of disappointment, resentment, or unresolved conflict. We must walk in humility if we are to experience genuine grace and intimate fellowship. As you consider your relationship with your spouse, are you currently allowing for any unresolved conflict? Where necessary, are you bringing friends from your caregroup into your lives to help you resolve conflict?
- We don’t want to allow God-glorifying romance to be spoiled. Quite the opposite! We want romance to characterize our marriages... we want romance displayed.

Session 4: “Romance”

III. Romance Displayed

An entire book of the Bible, *The Song of Songs*, is devoted to proclaiming the unique joy and wonder of passionate marital love. The couple depicted in this poem has studied one another, they are fiercely devoted to one another, they are constantly aware of each other and passionately desire one another. As a result they fill their thoughts, words and actions with expressions of love for one another. Both the bride and bridegroom are active participants.

A. Romance is to occur in the context of commitment

- *“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”* (2:16, 6:3, 7:10)
- *“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”* (8:4)

B. Romance is passionate

- *“For love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.”* (8:6a-7)

C. Romance begins with constant thoughts of affection

- Thoughts of desire
“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.” (7:10)
- Thoughts unceasing
“I slept, but my heart was awake.” (5:2-8)
- Thoughts of anticipation
“My beloved speaks and says to me: Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come away.” (2:10)

D. Romance is spoken with carefully crafted words

- Secret and public admiration
- 1. The bridegroom says to his bride, *“Behold, you are beautiful my love, behold you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.”* (1:15)
- 2. She says to her bridegroom, *“Behold, you are beautiful my beloved, truly delightful.”* (1:16)

D. Romance is active... planned and spontaneous

- Be a “student for life” of your spouse.
- Learn to appreciate your spouse’s interests.
- Begin to pursue planned and spontaneous expressions of romance. What is one next step you can take to romance your spouse? Please write it here:

Don’t tell your spouse... do it!

The Possibilities Are Endless!

(These are just a few suggestions. Keep the list growing!)

1. Not just things but you—Big gifts given occasionally from your wallets and hands are not a substitute for little things expressed consistently from your hearts.

- Interest—constant care, concern and lots of questions!
- Communication—thoughts, feelings, laughter, tears, and everything in between
- Time— it won’t just happen, and it’s never an interruption!
- Responsiveness— RSVP ASAP

Session 4: “Romance”

2. Planning (Like they say, “Fail to plan...etc.)

- Birthday/Anniversary/Holidays/Day you met/Day you got engaged, etc.

3. Supplies (Be prepared!!)

- Cards; paper/markers
- Know where the florists are
- Newspaper/directories/mailling lists

4. Cards/Notes/Emails (Write it, sing it, say it!)

- Humorous/romantic
- Timing: special occasions, on your way out, when you're away
- Placement: refrigerator, suitcase, clothes dryer, lunch bag, have children deliver, in pillow case, medicine cabinet, dash board of car, purse, pocket, briefcase... anywhere!

5. Gifts (Who doesn't like surprises?)

- Practical, only if seriously needed or requested
- Flowers/"Toys"
- Perfume/Cologne
- Clothing (find out size, colors, etc.), jewelry
- Special interest items... books, hobbies

6. Outings—Effort and planning

- Walks/drives
- Look for ways to budget: coupons, “Entertainment” card, share!
- Day trips. Objective: not only destination, but time together.

7. Spiritual Intimacy

- Pray, read, worship together

8. Miscellaneous

- Telling/singing “I love you” Childlike/uninhibited; pet names/playfulness
- Dancing (Anywhere! Spontaneity! Break routine!)
- Candlelight dinner (at home or out)
- Have photos nearby: office/wallet
- Know his/her interests
- Start slowly/be consistent
- Make memories: photos, videotapes
- “Your song” , “Your place”

ROMANCE: A PASSIONATE PURSUIT

The Wonder of Becoming One! (Part 2)

I. Sex in marriage is a gift from God

God's disposition to us is to bless and be gracious. Sex is a gift from God, given for the purpose of pleasure, procreation and intimately becoming one.

- A. Naked and not ashamed...the blessing of openness (Gen. 2:25)
- B. Two shall become one...the blessing of union (Gen. 2:23-24)
- C. Be fruitful and multiply...the blessing of children (Gen 1:28)
- D. Do not withhold...the blessing of pleasure (1 Cor. 7:3-5)

NOTE: There may be some hindrances that aren't sinful...fatigue, monthly cycle, sickness, recent baby, etc.

II. The effect of sin

Sin corrupted man and every aspect of his being, but God through Christ has made provision for man's redemption in every detail of his existence (Gen. 3:6-24). God's grace addresses guilt from the past, power in the present, and faith for the future. Redemption takes us from:

- A. Guilt, fear and hiding from God to forgiveness and cleansing (Eph. 1:7, 2 Cor. 5:17)
- B. Blame shifting and hiding from one another to restoration and fellowship (1 John 1:7, 9)

III. Before you touch her body

Men, before you touch her body, touch her heart and mind. Genuine, pleasurable and mutually satisfying physical intimacy begins with genuine relational intimacy. The Song of Solomon beautifully displays both.

- A. Communicate and share deeply. Observe, listen, study and learn constantly and thoroughly.
- B. Find creative ways to serve her, please her and delight her.

IV. The Season of Anticipation

In this season of anticipation we must be committed to protection and preservation (Eph. 5:3). Men, in the fear of God deepen your conviction to:

- A. Love and lead (anticipation and preparation in every context)
- B. Serve and sacrifice (What brings her the greatest good?)
- C. Protect...your sister (Guard and preserve against sin and regret)

Constantly ask these questions: "Is my leadership helping to keep us passionate in our relationship with the Savior and each other?"

Men, what a privilege to provide biblical leadership and sacrificial servanthood that will be a means of God's grace in every aspect of your marriage.

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The Wonder of Becoming One!

Discussion Questions

1. What effect should your experience of God's love for you, as displayed in the gospel, have on your love for your spouse?
2. Share with your spouse those qualities in him/her that inspire your gratitude, admiration, and respect.
3. What "Romance Spoilers" of attitudes, practices, or patterns in your heart are hindering your desires for expressions of romance? Explain.
4. From Romance Displayed, which category would you like your spouse to pursue more consistently? Explain.

BECOMING ONE

HOW TO TALK ABOUT YOUR PAST

The benefits of marital union are enormous. We become “one” in body and soul. We thrill at the delights of married sex. We experience the satisfaction of understanding each other’s thoughts and feelings. We do life together, and together is so much richer than alone.

But we bring more than goodness to our marriage. We bring our current tendencies to sin, and we bring a history of past sins. Not since the marriage of Adam and Eve has a sinless couple had a wedding. If we are to be complete in becoming one as a couple, we will have to become one in knowing and understanding each other’s past—the good, the bad and the ugly. This requires wisdom. How do we reveal our past sins without hurting our spouse? How do we inform him or her of things we are ashamed of, things that might be unknown but significant to our life experience, things others have known about us but are not known by our spouse?

Before even considering talking with your spouse about these things, how do *you* think about your past? Is there any hidden sin in your life? Are there any sins that you have failed to confess both to God and to anyone you’ve sinned against? Have you believed the lie that you can stop sinning without taking responsibility for it before God and those you’ve offended? Are you walking in the light before God and before your brothers and sisters in Christ? Hidden sin will hinder your experience of oneness in marriage. It also promises to create future offense if your sin becomes known apart from your self-disclosure.

Assuming that you have taken responsibility for past sins, how do you think about them today? Do you see them forgiven by God because of the death of Christ who pays your penalty for these specific sins? Is your conscience clear, not because of your works, but because of Jesus’ work for you? It does not please God—nor will it please your spouse—if you live under a burden of condemnation for past sins.

If, by God's grace, you have forsaken all known sin and live in the goodness of God's mercy and forgiveness, you will still want your spouse to know you by knowing about your past. Your confession might include lying or cheating on tests or tax reports or stealing or embezzlement. It might relate to broken relationships and offenses you brought on others. It might be a confession of gross foolishness leading, for example, to bankruptcy. It might mean acknowledging illicit drug use or drunkenness. You want to be self-disclosing but you also want to avoid bringing unnecessary pain by confessing more than your spouse needs to hear. Your goal should be awareness without unnecessary detail. If someone were to approach your spouse with the question, "Did you know that your husband...?" "Were you aware that your wife used to...?" you should be able to say, "Yes, I am aware of that. We talked about it." Oneness requires that there be no surprises about our past.

This can be especially challenging when we must acknowledge past sexual sin because such sins touch on the most intimate part of our marriage. If you were engrossed in lust through pornography, your spouse should know about it, but probably not what you viewed. If you were involved in a long term relationship that included sex, your spouse should know, but not about where or with whom—unless you or your spouse will likely have interaction with that person. This applies not just to sins you've committed but sins committed against you. If you were a victim of rape or of a child sexual predator, your spouse should be aware, not only for the sake of oneness, but so he or she can be a channel of God's grace and mercy to you.

While our sins are bad, confessing them with a right motive is a good thing. It may feel painful or embarrassing to confess a shameful thing to your spouse, but you must do it in faith that God will even use your past to bring union and oneness of heart and purpose to your marriage. Consider the warning and promise of Scripture, "*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy,*" (Proverbs 28:13).

There is another side to this issue. How should you respond to hearing your spouse confess his or her sins to you? First, prepare your heart not to respond in pride. If you think you are above any sin, if you are offended that someone you love could have done this thing, you are self-righteous.

Becoming One: How to Talk About Your Past

All of us stand on the same ground when we stand at the foot of Jesus' cross. We are all sinners and each of us committed sin that merited the death of the Savior to purchase our forgiveness. So while it may be painful to hear your spouse admit to a past sin, it should not be offensive to you. You should begin processing your thoughts by considering how much God has forgiven you.

Second, you should listen carefully to see and to help your spouse see if he or she is making a biblical confession. Does he see his sin as primarily against God? Is there appropriate sorrow for it? Does she take full responsibility for it or shift responsibility on to others? Has he taken all the steps necessary to repent as well as to make restitution if that is necessary? Has there been a history of change in keeping with her repentance? Has he experienced full forgiveness for this sin through faith in the finished work of Christ? You can be an enormous means of grace to your spouse by listening carefully and asking these kinds of questions.

The circumstances of our sin can leave us confused and tangled in their consequences. Confessing past sin to your spouse may present you with questions you cannot answer. If this is the case, involve a godly parent, a pastor or other wise counselor who can help you apply the principles of Scripture to your situation.

Marital oneness includes not just the experience of joy together but the sharing of our sorrows, including the sorrow of past sin—both our own and those sins of a spouse. Marriage is not just about receiving mercy but extending it. As shameful as our past may be, God can cause it to work for good, by using our marriage as a means of experiencing mercy and receiving help for change. Rather than seeing confessing as a necessary, evil, see it as a means of grace and a doorway to unity and oneness that can only be known in the bonds of married love.

BIRTH CONTROL

WHAT DO COUPLES NEED TO KNOW?

Marriage involves making lots of decisions. One decision that can appear simple but can have significant ramifications is birth control. For couples who choose to use birth control, the questions tend to be about effectiveness, convenience, and safety. *Will the method work*—will it prevent pregnancy? *Will it be simple to use* so that the sexual experience is not significantly hindered? *Will it have side effects* that could damage the health of a wife, or in the case of an unplanned pregnancy, the health of a child? Typically a couple's concerns are medical and practical, which is not the focus of this paper. More importantly, a Christian couple needs to consider the relationship of birth control to the character and will of God as he works in every aspect of our lives.

Birth control choices should fit into larger considerations for a Christian couple.

- What is the relationship of bearing children to a marriage?
- Does the Bible have anything to say about preventing pregnancy in a marriage?
- What principles should guide a couple as they decide on the use of birth control?
- If birth control is legitimate, is it always legitimate and are all techniques acceptable? Do some in fact, abort an already conceived child?

A Christian marriage is a companionship that allows for sexual joy, *as well as* bearing and raising of children. There are exceptions, for example, when a couple is found to be unable to conceive or serious illness makes a pregnancy a serious threat to a mother's health or a husband, because of some physical inability, is unable to fulfill a fatherly role. These are real life challenges that some couples face, and they require careful thought and the awareness that a caring heavenly father will provide wisdom to walk through them. The focus of this paper, however, is preparing couples for marriage, so we will not attempt to cover them here.

Birth Control: What Do Couples Need to Know?

Children and Marriage

The Bible is decidedly pro-child. In the context of recognizing men and women as being made in the image of God, they are—as male and female joined in marriage—to bear and raise children to further the representation of God and his character from one generation to another in increasing numbers (Gen. 1:26-28; Mal. 2:15). Children are viewed as a gift from God, with offspring seen as a great blessing to a married couple (Ps. 127:3-5; 128:3-6).

With this in mind, a Christian couple should see that bearing children should be a primary intent of their union. Marriage companionship extends far beyond children, but in a normal life span, children will dominate the attention of a married couple for 20-30 years. For this reason, couples must think carefully about all the choices they make regarding their family. Of course, not all the choices are ours: because of the fallen nature of the world, children may fail to come as expected or come only with great difficulty. But this should not deter a couple from cultivating a heart for children. Child bearing should be the desire of everyone who marries during years of fertility. They should see this not as a burden, but a joy and blessing from God.

The Bible and Birth Control

Strictly speaking, birth control is not a biblical category.¹ In the mind of the Bible, marriage affords the gift of sex which, as a wonderful consequence, brings about the gift of children. *The assumption of the biblical mind is that sex is a privilege of marriage resulting in the privilege of children.* Birth control is not encouraged, neither is it condemned.

With the wide acceptance of the birth control pill in the 1960s and the “sexual liberation” movement promoting the separation of sex from child bearing and even from marriage, birth control became a challenging issue for Christians.² To this day the Roman Catholic Church condemns all forms of contraception save that of “natural family planning.”³ But for most Bible-believing pastors and theologians, the use of birth control is viewed as an acceptable means of wisely growing a family.

So choices create the need to ask questions and make decisions which in the past were not a consideration for a married couple. In the past, one received babies as they came. Now their arrival can be—to some degree—controlled. So we must ask: How many children are enough? Is there a godly number? Some Christians in our day reject all birth control methods as a sinful limitation on the will of God revealed through pregnancy. Others say that birth control allows us to have children as they best fit our needs and desires.

Daniel Doriani tackles this question in an article that explains three basic approaches that Bible-believing Christians take. Some, he says, adopt a worldly view: having children is optional. A couple thinks of children as a life style choice and plans their arrival—or non-arrival—as a matter of personal convenience. Other take the opposite approach: any limitation on a wife’s ability to conceive reflects a lack of submission to the will of God as revealed in pregnancy. Doriani advocates another view. He encourages us to see children as a “blessing and trust from God” and therefore to seek a “large but limited family,” as God provides. Within this desire for numerous children, a couple may seek to postpone a next pregnancy due to circumstances that would limit their ability to fulfill their calling as faithful parents to all of their children.⁴

As with all of life, God uses Scripture to examine our motives and direct our choices. In light of the creation mandate (“be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth”), a couple should not use birth control to avoid having children altogether. Instead, birth control should be a means of seeking to be most effective in preparing for children and caring for the ones already in the family. A Christian couple must develop a conscience that seeks to maximize God’s glory in their family and to be aware of the sinful tendency to see children as an impediment to personal fulfillment. Often the main issue is money: babies are expensive; they require food and clothes, furniture and a bedroom; they take mom away from earning a pay check. A couple may have desires for housing that take years of double income savings, and therefore they postpone child bearing during the parents’ most fruitful years. The use of birth control can be rooted in selfishness, and every fertile couple should take this into consideration when they consider their use of contraceptives.

So, is there a godly number? That is a question for each couple to answer as they seek God’s wisdom for their individual family and shape their

Birth Control: What Do Couples Need to Know?

attitudes toward child bearing and child rearing. Some times physical limitations prevent conception or child bearing, and birth control becomes a non-issue. But the heart of the matter must be a view of children as a blessing from God to be desired as a gift and a trust to be stewarded for his glory.

Not All Methods Are the Same

Not contraceptives are the same. Some methods work to prevent the union of a sperm and egg; some work to kill a living a growing human being. The difference is crucial. The Bible recognizes that God is intimately involved in human life while it exists in the womb (Pss. 51:5, 139:13-14,; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:44). The ancients, with only crude methods of observation, were unable to located conception at a point in time. But modern science has allowed for such observation. Once a sperm unites with an egg—with the proper protection and nourishment—that living being will grow to adulthood with his or her own ability to reproduce. Any attempt to define life as beginning after this point of union is arbitrary and non-scientific. And the Bible is very clear: the intentional taking of an innocent human life runs against the character and command of God (Ex. 20:13).

Some birth control methods work to abort a fertilized egg by preventing it from implanting in the wall of the mother's uterus. This is the intention of the IUD, or intrauterine device. It is also a possible effect of the birth control pill or so-called "mini pill" which is comprised of progesterone only (not the typical combination of estrogen and progesterone). This "mini"-pill's first effect is to prevent fertilization, but in the event that fertilization does occur (and it can with this method), the pill is designed to prevent the uterus from accepting the fertilized egg, thus causing the newly conceived child to be aborted.⁵

Beyond these issues, if a couples decides to use birth control at the start of their marriage, they should consult their doctor or accurate literature on how contraceptives work, their physical benefits, dangers, and side effects. Since some methods require preparation before use, they should probably have this discussion and make any necessary doctor's appointments a few months prior to the wedding date.

But as important as practical preparation may be, it is secondary. A wise couple will give the biblical principles in this paper careful thought and much discussion. They will think through all the factors surrounding the bearing

and raising of children and pursue a family that avoids selfishness and raises another generation of image bearers who glorify God.

“Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was he seeking? Godly offspring.” (Malachi 2:15)

Key Thoughts to Consider

- What is your attitude toward children? What do you look forward to? What do you fear?
- Read Psalms 127 & 128. What specific attitudes toward children do they promote?
- Why do you want to have children? Do you have desires for the number of children you should have? If so, what is your reason for these desires?
- If you plan to begin married life using birth control...
 - a. Since no birth control method is completely effective, do you both believe you are prepared to have children within the first year of your marriage? If not, why not?
 - b. What will be the factors that determine when you should seek to conceive a child? Are any of these factors rooted in selfishness or fear?
 - c. Are you convinced that the birth control method you have chosen will work to *prevent* contraception and will in no way kill an already conceived child?
 - d. Have you discussed the various methods of birth control and decided together which will serve you best? If necessary, have you consulted a doctor so that you are prepared for your wedding night?

Birth Control: What Do Couples Need to Know?

Notes

1. Some may argue that the sin of Onan, in which he interrupts intercourse to avoid producing offspring for his deceased brother through his brother's widow, is a form of birth control. While this may be so, the Bible's condemnation of the act is his refusal to care for his widowed sister-in-law and to honor and extend his dead brother's name through children. See Genesis 38:6ff.
2. This is not to say that birth control did not exist in the larger world of the Bible. There is evidence of its use by the Egyptians as early as 1100 B.C. While methods used prior to the modern era proved to be crude and ineffective, birth control has been a human concern since ancient times. Prior to the Twentieth Century, Christians tended to take a dim view of birth control, associating it with moral laxity whenever married sex was separated from procreation. Even in Nineteenth Century America, the Comstock Act of 1873 made mailing or importing contraceptives illegal. For a brief discussion of the history of birth control methods and attitudes toward birth control see John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethnics: Issues Facing the Church Today, 2nd Edition*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1993) pp. 16ff.
3. "Natural Family Planning" is a birth control method which avoids any chemical or mechanical method to avoid pregnancy by timing intercourse to avoid ovulation and the chance of contraception.
4. Daniel Doriani, "Birth Dearth or Bring on the Babies? Biblical Perspectives on Family Planning," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Fall 1993. (www.ccef.org)
5. For a detailed treatment of this subject see Randy Alcorn's *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* (Gresham, OR: Eternal Perspectives Ministries, 2000) www.epm.org. See also Davis in *Evangelical Ethics* p. 20, op. cit.