

Titus 2:11-15

Relationship Series (Introduction)

Introduction: The culture all around is shifting. More than ever, in our short history as the USA, young people are not getting married like they did in the past, divorces are at an all time high, and the family unit is rapidly disappearing. (sadly, the statistics aren't much different when it comes to the church)

Not to mention along with all this is the sexual revolution of the hook up age, the increasing demand for pornography, the legalization of same sex marriage, the pushing for transgender rights, and this is most likely just the tip of the iceberg -

The point is that there is indeed a sexual revolution taking place in this country and the pervasive view is that whoever you are and whatever you've believed in the past you better get on board because this is the future, and you don't want to be on "the wrong side of history."

Russell Moore, in his book *Onward*, describes a recent experience that he had, on a talk show in San Francisco, sharing the Bible's view about sexuality and marriage: "You know, I don't think you understand just how odd the things that you are saying sound to me." She said, "I don't know anybody who believes that sexuality can only be expressed within marriage and that marriage is defined only as this permanent union between a man and a woman." She said, "As a matter of fact, if anyone in my peer group that they'd been on more than 2 or 3 dates without sexual activity, I would not assume that there was some sort of moral conviction. I would assume that there's some sort of psychological problem. So I don't think you know how odd this sounds to me. And strange."

And my response was to say, "Well, I think I do, because a Christian sexual ethic has never been easy and it has never been well-received. It is always contrary to what we as sinners want to do, and I also need to tell you, however strange you think our Christian sexual ethic might be, we believe even stranger things than that." We believe that a previously dead man is going to show up in the sky on a horse. Every time that that message is proclaimed in the first century, the response is not,

“Well, of course, that’s Christian.” The response is, “That sounds insane to me.” And when the response is NOT a seeing of the strangeness of this, Jesus and the apostles always press the question until that IS the reaction from those who are standing around. And so as we move forward into the future, religious conservatism should not attempt to hide the strangeness or distinctiveness of the Gospel. We should lean into that and be strange, but not crazy.”

1. All or Nothing

1. This is something that we need to understand as Christians -our message, whether the Gospel itself, or the lifestyle that follows it has never been accepted by any culture carte blanc but has always been a challenge to both conservative and liberal people throughout the ages. Remember when the Gospel was first preached it wasn’t religion or irreligion but something else entirely - it was a message declaring God’s kingdom, the forgiveness of sin, a removal of judgment and condemnation, a promise of a new creation, a new way to be human. As the church we need to hold on to this differentiation no matter what the shifting tide; be it conservatism or liberalism.
2. But even as I wrote this study out I know that in my thinking and often in my practice I can tend to think more like the world, or the culture. I can swing the pendulum just like anyone else. I can tend to focus on those proof text that support what I already think about singleness, marriage, relationships, and family. You see, the truth is that everyone of us is tempted to affirm our own rightness; to only hear what we want to hear. Usually the filter through which we put things through is the filter of self. What is best for me? What will satisfy me? What will make me happy?
3. When Paul was celebrating the goodness of being single or the goodness of marriage - he was not celebrating personal freedom or personal fulfillment but glory to God and good to others. The goodness is to be found in putting the gospel and the coming kingdom of Christ on display on display. Church, we need to be a

culture, a community that celebrate singleness, marriage, and family in a Kingdom of Christ focused way.

4. The Christian ethic only makes sense because of the Christian worldview -Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. If you don't subscribe to the whole thing there is no reason you would or should live your life according to Christian ethics.

2. Creation

1. The Bible teaches, and we believe, that God created us. That he created us in his image and for his glory, that he created us male and female to reflect his image. That God is the creator and architect for all human relationships - singleness, friendship, marriage, and family.
2. The Bible pictures the beginning of all human relationships in a garden, in a paradise. Mankind has harmony with God; mankind has harmony with itself; mankind has harmony with nature.

3. The Fall

1. The Bible tells us what brought disruption and disharmony into the world was a self determination to decide for ourselves what is good and what is evil, what would truly make us happy. And this is the continual story of the human race -we are looking for fulfillment, identity and place, in a world where we feel so lost and out of place no matter how we try to shape it. Why do we have suicidal attempts because of loneliness, why do we have broken hearted people that feel used after a one night stand, or a series of hook ups, why do we have so many broken marriages and families, why do we have divorce courts, and laws about no fault divorce that leave women and children stranded, why do we have rape, and all sorts of sexual perversion rampant in our culture - Because we like all other peoples and nations have cast off any restraint, or understanding of God as creator and designer and we want to choose for ourselves what is best- and this is where it leaves us - Broken.

4. Redemption

1. But thanks be to God - **“the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” - Titus 2:11-14**
2. The picture that Paul the Apostle paints for us is one of illumination - all people, at all times have had, and do have wrong ideas about life, about its purpose, about how to be truly satisfied, about how to live life to the fullest about singleness, marriage, sex, family, money, power, etc.- But now, this light of God’s grace has shown on the world, to bring us back into what God had originally intended for his creation. That we would be brought back into line with our original purpose to glorify God and to enjoy him forever and to bring everything in our lives into that single focus.
3. Guaranteed, you have wrong ideas about your life and so do I and that’s why we need revelation from our creator, redeemer God. So we would know how we are to live in a way that is truly fulfilling and in a way that honors are creator.

5. Restoration - The Kingdom

1. The Bible teaches not only that Christ died and rose again to redeem us from all lawlessness and sin - but that he is coming again with power and glory to set up his eternal kingdom - filled with righteousness, peace, and joy for all.
2. You might be surprised at how much the doctrine of the restoration of all things has to do with our personal relationships -

3. Christians are to choose between marriage and singleness not for the basic contemporary motive of personal fulfillment, nor for the traditional motive of propagating family legacy. Rather, we are to marry or to remain single on the basis of which state best makes us a sign of the kingdom.
4. Stanley Hauerwas says that single Christian adults were a startling witness to the coming kingdom in that ancient world by showing that their hope and significance was not in family or heirs but in the kingdom. It follows, then, that being married is also a way to be a sign of the kingdom. Because one of the main purposes of marriage is to build kingdom-exhibiting community—to show the world how Christ transforms everything, including marriage—God forbids Christians from marrying nonbelievers. A Christian who knowingly marries a nonbeliever shows that his or her motive is not mission or kingdom exhibition.
5. One of the main ways—and perhaps the main way—that married Christians witness to Christ is to show the difference Christ makes in a marriage. This explains why many single Christian adults do not marry even though they desire to do so. If one non-negotiable reason for marriage is kingdom exhibition, then that removes a lot of otherwise good prospects! When a single Christian remains single largely because he or she will not compromise on this point, then he or she is paying a price for the kingdom and will be blessed for that (1 Peter 4:13–14, 19). Furthermore, God will use the Christian’s singleness to minister to others in ways that married people cannot (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32–34).
6. In summary, then, the purpose of both singleness and marriage is to create communities that reflect the glory of the coming kingdom of God. Every church, then, needs a combination of Christian married couples and Christian singles. Couples and singles can minister to each other; there are advantages and disadvantages in ministry for both singles and married members. The world needs to see both.

6. A Community Practicing a New Sex Ethic

1. It is typical for Christians to think of sexual ethics in purely individualistic terms, but that is not the right way to read the Scripture. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 reads, **“Do not be deceived: neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor homosexuals nor greedy nor slanderers . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. But you were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”**
2. Richard Hays, in his First Corinthians commentary, responds: First Corinthians 6:9–11 has provided the launching pad for countless moralistic sermons that decry the types of sinners listed here. In fact . . . the concern of the passage as a whole is . . . to call the Corinthians to act as a community . . . and to assert the transformed identity of the baptized. . . . The Corinthians are to stop seeing themselves as participants in the “normal” social and economic structures of their city and to imagine themselves instead as members of the eschatological people of God, acting corporately in a way that will prefigure and proclaim the kingdom of God. . . . [Paul] is seeking to re-socialize them into a new way of doing business, a new community consciousness. (15)
3. Hays notices that Paul is calling the church not just to individual moral behavior but to be a kingdom community in which the world’s values do not hold. Notice that Paul lumps broken sexuality and greed together. Moderns view sex as a medium of exchange for fun and convenience and view money as something sacred, special, worth sacrificing for, not something easily shared. But biblical Christianity espouses just the opposite view. Money is merely an exchange, a way to procure goods and services. It is not special or sacred; it is something to be shared, to be given away to those who need it. Sex, on the other hand, is sacred and special and to be enjoyed only in the right context of pointing us toward the eternal. Paul, then, is calling Christians not just to individual moral behavior but to form a community in which consumerism—both sexual and material — is rejected.

4. Christians will fall prey to the world's views of sex unless we create a community, an alternative city. In this alternative city, singles enjoy their kingdom mission and practice sexual abstinence joyfully. They live in community with Christian families, who do not make an idol out of family or make singles feel abnormal. One of the reasons it is hard to practice the discipline of sex-free romantic involvement is that we don't have a sufficiently large community of people creating this alternative city.

Conclusion: Reasons/Vision for this series:

That each of us might find contentment in Christ in whatever state we are in. (Philippians 4:11-13)

That we might use our status whether single, married, married with children, married without children, single parent, divorced, or widowed to glorify God and to serve others. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31)

That we might consider other's struggles, loneliness, frustrations, as legitimate and seek to support one other in these different callings and seasons rather than criticize or ostracize. (Philippians 2:3-11)

That we would not be a segregated congregation. That we would have a balanced, biblical view of singleness, marriage and family - that we would see each and every one as equals, brothers and sisters that have gifts, callings perspective and a legitimate role to play in the advancement and displaying of the kingdom of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-16)