

RUF Bible Study – Dating Sex and Marriage
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The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

I once went to a wedding where the minister forgot to have the bride and groom kiss at the end. He was chastised later and has never let it down.

When Mary Rachel walked down the aisle, Andrew turned as white as a ghost and I thought he was going to pass out. When Mary Rachel's dad finally pulled up beside Andrew, I looked at him and motioned to him to get close to Andrew so he could catch him if he went down. But he didn't. He recovered and did very well from that point on.

Bobby Griffith told me he was at a relative's wedding and the ring bearer started to get noticeably antsy during the homily. He started jumping up and down. Then he shouted, so he could be heard over everyone, "I need to poop!"

Wedding stories are awesome. I love weddings so much. There is so much joy, but yet also so much tension and history and family dynamics and dramatics.

We've been talking about dating, sex and marriage this semester and we've come to the end of our time. Really, there is so much more to say. I can think of at least a dozen or so more texts that bear on this issue, and then if I wanted to, we could keep going after that. We'll have to be content to make applications to relationships from the other texts of the Bible we read.

I think it's been fruitful to think about marriage, dating, sex and the gospel all wrapped up together. I'm sure I haven't answered all of your questions, but I hope that some of those questions have been raised, and that you've seen that the Bible and Jesus both do have something to say to you besides just "No!" The Bible is filled with things about sex. We're not trying to be either prudes or pagans, but to have a joy in sex that is rooted in the gospel and hope.

It's a confusing place to be – here in the 2000s in college and 18-22 years old. There are so many voices, so much freedom, so little restraint, so little guidance, so much temptation. But God is good. He has so much in store for you. He is using you and even using your brokenness in our world to bring about his plan for your good. I know it doesn't always seem like it, and you might have a different plan for yourself, but remember we serve a good, wise and sovereign God who loves his children.

Let's look at four points tonight in closing.

Created for Intimacy with God – Deut 6:4-6

The first point is pretty basic and foundational – we are created for intimacy for and with God. I could come up with a million points on this, but let's look at Deut. 6:4-6: "*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.*" God is saying that all of our lives are to love God. We are to have a total life commitment to God with everything we have.

This is how he created us. This is what we are created for – relationship with God. This is the ultimate longing in your soul, the thing that everything points to, the underlying need and motivation between all you do. Do you realize this? You tend to cover up and mask this with your energies to other things, your passions, your desires, your goals, even your sadness. All of these things are secondary issues to the primary one of: What are you serving? What are you living for?

Christianity says you were created to live for God. God created the world and everything in it. God created people to be in community and relationship with him, as he is in community and relationship. We are to bear *his* image. We read over and over in the Bible that God communicates to us in relational terms.

Do you have a relationship with God? Do you think we are just the result of some evolutionary length of time, resulting in a mass of protoplasm that thinks, constructs and therefore has a will? Why would this be sufficient reason for you to do anything really in your life?

If you have a relationship with God, is it still active and working? Does he talk to you? Do you relate to him? Some of you send several hundred text messages a day, but you do not talk to God for even a minute. You might talk on the phone for two hours a day to your boyfriend, but do you talk to God at all? You will watch youtube videos for hours, but will you listen to a sermon or read a few chapters or pages in a book? You were created for intimacy with God.

This is to be like a lover for your soul. God isn't saying he wants you to pound out a few minutes to make him happy. He wants you to delight in spending time with him, like lovers do. They love to talk. They love to write. They love to read. They love to do things that makes the other person happy. You don't have to force them to do it. Do you have a relationship with God like that?

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For this series, I used several books as background reading and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Les Newsom, Richard Vise, Jeff Ferguson, David Jones, Ray Cortese and Jean Larroux. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

Thrown away – spiritual adultery – James 4:4

Many of us simply don't. Maybe you used to feel that way. We live in a Christian-ized culture where so many people grow up in Christian home doing Christian things when they were young, but so often that just fades away over time. I rarely see a vital, growing faith at the University of Oklahoma. I rarely see students who want to read the Bible, go to church, sing hymns, go to missions, give money away, love people, repent of their sins, pray and meet with people to love them and serve them. Why is that?

The New Testament book of James has one answer for us. James was the brother of Jesus, but he didn't believe in Jesus during Jesus' life. It was only after Jesus had died and been raised that he came to believe his half brother was the actual Messiah!, the Savior of the world! How crazy would that have been?

James then is writing to the church in the midst of persecution. He is talking to a people who say they believe in God, but they simply don't act like they do. Their supposed faith doesn't translate into real life. Faith without works is dead. Can you not love people? Do you not know how to serve people? What about orphans, widows and the poor? Do you give deferential treatment to the rich among you? Do you pray? Can you hold your tongue? These things are wicked and are what the wicked do. But you call yourself a Christian?

This is where a lot of us find ourselves a lot of times. We have totally given over to the world. We say we're Christians. We have Christian marked on our facebook accounts. We have Christianity in our family background, in our church camp summers, and in our back pockets. But it doesn't seem to make much of a difference in our dating. In our academics. In our social status. In our judging of others. In our desire for achievements. In our bank accounts. In our summer plans. We look just like everyone else.

James says this in 4:4, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"

This is a very bold claim. This is provocative language. This is meant to shock you. This isn't the first time God uses this language. There are 76 times in the Bible where God uses some form or version of this word and phrase.

God uses the image of the whore as a symbol or statement of what his people are like. Which is just crazy. God says that unfaithfulness to him is like that of a prostitute.

I would think we could come up with something less mean, or less shocking. How about: You fickle people! God does say that one too. Or: You keep changing your minds! It's like you click on me to register for a class and then come check it out and decide it doesn't fit your schedule and so you drop me for something better. Or: You never say Yes or No. You only ever click Maybe for me. Or: I'm like your dad's credit card. You use me, but then I have to pay the bills. You think it's all benefit and no responsibility. Or: You date me and you date me, but you won't ever commit. How long do you think I'm going to date you?

Any of those might work, and I'm sure they would be good applications at points. God uses a lot of different images and stories for us to point out our brokenness. We are estranged. We are guilty. We are lost sheep. We are lepers, unwanted and unloved. We are thieves and robbers. We are murderers and killers.

But we are also whores. This one is purposely sexual in nature. It cuts at our ideas of love, sex, use, abuse, destitution and desperation. We give ourselves to others for pay. We give what is supposed to be only for our lover-spouse-husband and give that most special thing away in order to gain something for ourselves. We often do this on the side, thinking God won't find out.

Do you think of sin that way? Do you think of your idolatry that way? You idolatry of status? You love status. You love what other people think. You are willing to disobey God and his ways, his care for you, in order to be better thought of by other people. God loves you and cherishes you despite your sin. Despite your wickedness. Despite your callousness. Despite your forgetfulness. Yet you judge others for those very same things, and try to make yourself look good by putting them down and lifting yourself up. It's whoring after status. It's spiritual adultery.

God is not pleased with this, with us. Some of you keep thinking I'm talking about rules. Christianity is not about rules. Sure, it has some rules, but these are rules that come out of the heart. Some of you keep breaking the rules over and over again. I want you to ask yourself why? Why do you not want to live according to God's law? What is going on in your heart? Maybe, just maybe you don't have a relationship with him. Or maybe your relationship with him is on the rocks. Come back. Come back not to just obey the rules again, but because he loves you, and you love him.

Others of you love rules. You thrive on them. You want to know what they are so you can obey them, and you can't figure out why no one can obey them like you can. In fact, you look down on those who can't obey the rules. You hate them. But you don't love God either. You love his rules. You may be a fairly moral person and you just keep God away by trying to be good all the time.

This imagery that God is pushing us toward is to get you to stop thinking that Christianity is about following or breaking the rules. Think of it this way. Imagine a wife finds out after years of marriage that her husband has a woman with whom he spends hours with every day. They talk about the most intimate details in his life. They laugh together and cry together. They do hobbies together. They take trips together and spend money together.

She confronts him on this, as of course she should. His reply? What is the big deal? I provide for you. I go to work and make the money. I sleep here and we do stuff together. You have everything you want.

What will she say? *I want your heart.* It's not the duty that she wants. She wants his heart. Yes, God is our king and we are his servants. Yes God is the shepherd and we are the sheep. But God is saying something way beyond that. He wants to relate to us as a husband relates to his wife. No other religion says that about a relationship with God. It's the picture of marriage – permanent, comprehensive and intimate. That's what God wants – he wants your heart.

You see, Christianity isn't a religion for the religious or the irreligious. It's not either one of those things. Not for the liberal or the conservative. It's about the heart. This heart love will work itself out into a different sort of life with different convictions, actions, beliefs, worldviews and a way of living. But it's about the heart.

All of us - We are not doing a good job. We are not living the life of love we should for a God who loves us and gives to us. Instead we take and take and take.

Can you relate to this? Can you understand your sin this way? It's pretty jarring stuff. It makes us uneasy. God doesn't seem to shy away from painting this picture, from showing this movie, from writing this chapter when he talks about our sin. It's the most personal of ways to think of it. Your sin hurts God that way. Your putting other things first – even good things – hurts God because he loves you this way.

It's time to realize this, and wake up and repent and believe the gospel. It's time to stop sleeping with other things, other gods, other idols in your lives. It's time to put God first and foremost by admitting your other lovers. Don't see them anymore. Tell them goodbye, that you are only for God and his arms. That you will not be tempted or satisfied by them any longer. That you will not bear the children of sin any more. *Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.* Turn to Jesus.

Friends with God – James 2:23

The Bible has several other images for us to help correct us and point us in a new direction. Of course the Bible talks about what we call a forensic justification. This is a fancy term for becoming legally right before God. In the courtroom of justice, we stand guilty before God. We have broken his laws. We have done the wrong thing time and time again. We have not done the right thing.

I got my first ticket in about eight years this past Saturday night on the way back from a high school football game with my boys. I couldn't believe it. The police officer asked me, "Do you know why I pulled you over?" I said no, I had no idea (which I doubt endeared me to him). I had made an improper lane change. I hadn't put on my blinker. I'm thinking, "Are you kidding me?!" There is crime and crack and murders and you're pulling me over for not putting my blinker on? It's going to cost \$172 for that ticket. I could go to court and try to fight it.

But I'm guilty. I didn't put my blinker on. I may think that is a bad rule, but it really isn't. I broke it. So I will pay. Forensic justification is standing before the judge and seeing all the things we did wrong, all the little things, all the big things, all the secret things, all the things you thought and felt. And someone has to pay for them. They don't just get wiped out. They get paid for.

Christianity says all of things are paid for by Jesus. Jesus paid that penalty and took the guilt and punishment on himself so you don't have to. You can do it. Or he can do it. Someone has to pay the \$172. Someone has to pay the life sentence. Someone has to do the community service. Someone has to die. Jesus can do it because he never, ever sinned himself.

This is all legal language in the courtroom of God. It's so very important to understand this and believe this. Jesus isn't just our buddy or teacher or moral compass or guru or prophet. He is the savior of our souls, the justification of our sins, the author of our faith, the one who was reviled and rejected so we could be accepted and loved.

But – but it's tempting to stop there. If we do we miss out on something. We miss out that God restores us to relationship. He doesn't just say, Go on! Get out! Don't show your face in this courtroom any more. He doesn't just forgive us, but he also loves us.

One important picture in that regard is his adoption of us as his children. You can read about this in Galatians 4:1-7 and other places. I've talked about it many times before. We are the sons and daughters of the King of Kings. We are the adopted heirs of God. We are no longer orphans, but we are in the family of God. We have a Father. That is such good news.

The relational aspect I want to point out here though is another one God uses. We are also now called the friend of God. You see this in James 2:23: *And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God and he credited to him as righteousness" – and he was called a friend of God.* And also in Exodus 33:11, we read, *"The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."*

There is something relational about being a friend of God. There is something special about that.

I want to make two applications here. The first is the big picture – are you friends with God? Do you speak with God face to face like someone who speaks to his friend? It's an awesome thing to have good friends. People who know you and love you and care for you. People who know when your birthday is, your favorite color and what ice cream you like. Are you friends with God? Do you see how this helps paint another relational picture of who God is in your life? Is God just a casual friend or an acquaintance with you? Is he your facebook friend or a real friend? Does God think of you as his friend?

The second application is that you should care about your friends now. God redeems our friendships. We've been talking all semester first about marriage and then about dating. Marriage is the essential paradigm of our relationships. It is the ultimate picture of commitment and community for us. It is the sharing of all of our lives in every aspect, yet being different. Respecting each other and opening our lives to a new reality together in friendship, love, sex, pleasure and service. Dating is a cultural phenomenon that we're hoping to recapture and reclaim, but it builds off of the ideas and the covenant of marriage.

But – but not many of you are married. And not all of you are dating. But ALL of you can be friends. My intention isn't to make marriage something you have to have or else you're second rate. Not at all. I don't think that is true. I do think most of you will get married at some point in your life, and I'd like you to be thinking about that and praying about that. I don't want you to idolize it.

If you are not married, then God is calling you to contentment in singleness right now. Not resignation. Not fear. But contentment in his plan for this stage in your life, this time of your life.

As you walk in contentment, as you offer to God your sex life in fidelity and chastity, as you hold your future out and place it in God's hands, you have something else and that is friendships. I think God calls us to pour ourselves into friendships. Cultivating lasting ones. Beginning new ones. Restarting dying ones. Renewing and revitalizing poor ones. These friendships bring us into community. They help us to know ourselves more and more, to experience God more and more. To understand who he is and what he is doing in our lives and in the world.

These friendships are a part of who we are. I think it's important that we experience our gender in these relationships. That you are a person first, created in the image of God. But you are a person who is a woman. Or a man. And that is different. That is not the same. We look differently, think differently, act differently. We see the world differently and that's a good thing. I think we should experience our gender in our friendships. But that is difficult for us to do in our culture without sexualizing everything isn't it?

Care about your friends. Same gender and different gender. God cares about friendship too.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb – Rev 19

So we become friends with God, which is a pretty awesome thing. But that's not all. The Bible goes way past that. We've already mentioned it, but the Bible talks about our relationship to God as of that between two lovers, a man and a woman in marriage.

In Revelation 19, we are at the end of the whole Bible. God is wrapping up themes we've been reading about through the whole story of the Bible. There was a creation, and it was created good. People and the earth were in perfect relationship with God in all ways possible. But then there was a huge fall, and what was good was corrupted. This affected everything. Everything. We became enemies of God, hating him. We fought each other tooth and nail. We hurt each other and ourselves. But thankfully there is redemption through Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became a man so we could be reconciled to God and each other.

And – there is restoration. There is a going to be a day when everything will be set right, when all will be fulfilled and renewed in perfection, just the way it is supposed to be. That is what we call restoration. Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration.

One of the pictures of this restoration is a wedding between Jesus and his bride. It's called the marriage supper of the lamb.

It's the marriage supper of the *lamb* because it is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the lamb of God, he is the spotless lamb sacrificed in order to pay the sins and atone for his people. One of the first words in the song in Revelation 19 is "salvation." This song and this marriage and this lamb are all about salvation.

The lamb has been a theme throughout the Scriptures as well. You see the lamb theme cropping up now and again. Where is the lamb? Who will provide the lamb? Will there ever be a perfect lamb so all this sacrificing will be done? That's why it's so astounding when John says in the first chapter of his gospel – Behold the Lamb of God! He is talking about Jesus from Nazareth. This marriage is not just any marriage, but the marriage of the Messiah, the Savior, of the Son of God.

It's a *marriage* because he is uniting himself forever to his bride. The church, the people of God, has been likened to a bride all throughout the Bible. It's another theme. This bride has not been the prettiest fiancé. She has not been very faithful. She has not been very modest. She has not waited well. But the groom still loves her and is willing to give everything to her. He unites himself to her. He sacrifices everything for her – his comfort, his resources, his very life. This is what marriage is all about it. It's the picture, the paradigm, of permanence, of commitment and of intimacy. It's what we're headed for.

We're living in a tension then because we are not yet to that day. Theologians talk about the "already – not yet" tension of the Bible. We are already united to Christ. We are already his bride. But we are not yet fully united, not yet fully married and consummated. We await the consummation evermore.

This is like being engaged. You know you're going to get married, but you're not married yet. The date is set, the church is booked, the cake is supposed to be made, the dresses have been fitted – then you wait. I have to tell you I thought this was a terrible time. I hated it. I was so excited, but why wouldn't the day come faster! I wanted to have sex with Julie and was going to so why did I have to wait? Engagement is a strange time and I wish I would have settled in and enjoyed it more. It's hard to enjoy it when you just want to be married. But you're not married yet.

If you look to Revelation and see this wedding coming, you should feel somewhat like this. I am Jesus'. I am intended to him. I am engaged to him. He is mine and I am his. Yet I still sin! Yet I still fear and lose hope and wander off and do wrong and don't do right. I still lust. I still lie. I still... You aren't in perfect relationship with him yet. You don't have to do something to get better and all cleaned up so he will accept you on this wedding day. But you need to realize that there is a day coming when these things will be finished with and we will be in perfect union with Jesus. Hooray!

It's the marriage *supper* because it's a big huge party. There is a roar and peals of thunder and everyone screaming and yelling. Hallelujah! There is rejoicing and exulting. Wahoo! We're so, so very happy! This finally happened! Everything is ready, and she is clothed in linen, bright and pure. And the doors open and she is there, and we are there because we are her. It all gets a little confusing if you try to figure out the details. But don't do that. Revel in the picture. The party.

Some of the absolute best parties I've been to have been weddings and wedding receptions. I've been to swanky country clubs. I love mashed potatoes in martini glasses. We had a 10-gallon pot of gumbo in Baton Rouge. Some of the best bands, and the most fun dancing I've ever had. Great toasts. Great friends. Tears of joy because we knew the story.

Do you remember the youtube video of the wedding party going down the aisle dancing?² Of course you do. I just checked and it has over 32 million hits! At first I turned my nose at it. "This isn't Presbyterian. This isn't proper." But then I realized that this was fun in a good way. This was joy. This was a party and love. And that's why people loved it. It wasn't a professional operation, but people celebrating a wedding and a marriage and a party of love.

I think there is going to be dancing. You should be practicing so you'll know what to do when the good songs come out. There is going to be wine, good wine at this wedding. You should develop your palate so you can taste it in its fullness. There is going to be a feast like you've never seen before because Jesus knows how to throw a party. You should appreciate food so you can appreciate how spectacular it is. There will be a party like you've never been to. All parties will pale in comparison to this party. All weddings are a faint, slight picture of this one, the one where the bride will be finally and completely married to the Son of God, the groom, the lamb of God.

Keep that in mind when you go to weddings. Think of Jesus.

Keep that in mind as you wait for this wedding. That you are engaged to be the Lord's. He doesn't just want you to show up. "Oh! The wedding is today? Huh. I forgot about it. Okay, let me throw on some stuff and I'll be there." Anticipate it. Wait for it. Get ready. Prepare your heart. Give him your heart.

In My Father's House There Are Many Rooms – John 14

According to Ray Cortese³, back in first century Jewish culture, here is the way a betrothal or engagement ceremony would work. The families would work to pick out a match between a boy and girl, usually around 13 years old. The fathers would work it out.

When this was agreed upon by the families, there would be a ceremony. During this ceremony, the boy would offer the girl a goblet of wine.

She stood there. She didn't have to take the cup. She could refuse it and thus refuse the marriage. Imagine what would be going through her mind at that moment. That may have taken a lot of courage to do, but it was an option for her. Or she could accept the cup, and thus join herself forever to this person in a life together. You can imagine his mind would be racing too. Would she take it?

If she took the cup, he would go back to his father's home and start at work. They would begin to add on a room, an addition to the house where this son and his wife would come to live when it was finished. There may have been a lot of rooms on this house if there were a lot of brothers. And of course the father may have had other brothers so it could have sprawled into a compound of some sort.

All the while, the bride-to-be would be preparing as well. She would be making plans on what it would mean to be a new wife and set up a household herself.

This was an elaborate process that would take several years to complete. When it was finally done, he would return to his wife-to-be, and they would get married in a huge week-long feast. He would then take her to his house where they would live together.

When he gave her the cup, do you know what he would say? The intended groom would say to her, "I am going to go away for awhile. In my father's house, there are many rooms, and I am going to prepare a place for you. When it is ready I will come back for you someday."

Does that sound familiar? Doesn't that sound like John 14?

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going."

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-94JhLEiN0>

³ In his sermon Thou Shalt Have Great Sex on his website. This whole point is from that sermon.

There are other reasons Jesus gives the cup of course. But the next time you take the Lord's Supper – and I hope it is this very next Sunday at church – I want you to think about this verse and how Jesus is calling you, telling you and inviting you to be his intended bride.

Don't be a fake one. No one likes fakes. Do you remember the runaway bride? She bailed on her wedding day and pretended to be abducted, but really she didn't want to get married. I had a friend who broke it off on the Friday before his wedding. He really didn't have a good reason to marry her, and he didn't want to play it out fake.

Some of you are pretending to love Jesus. I don't want you to pretend any more. But I do want you to love him. Don't break it off. Realize that he loves you. He gave his very life for you. Take the cup in faith and love, awaiting the wedding feast to come. Someday soon the doors will open and you will walk forward into the arms of the groom. He is preparing a place for you, and it's going to be awesome, just think of how much time he's putting into it.⁴

Don't just know about Jesus. Know Jesus. Love him and give yourself fully to him.

⁴ A nod to some Keith Green song with that comment.