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2 Corinthians 6:14-16a “Before You Fall In Love”

Intro. The title of my message today is, “Before You Fall in Love.” The wording of that title is very important. From the Bible, and from my experience as a pastor and counselor, I believe that the decisions you make *before* you fall in love are very important. So my message today is especially for our youth, their parents, and all adults who may face the potential choice of picking a marriage partner. The point of my title is this: You need to make some commitments to the Lord on the issue of dating or courtship, before you become emotionally involved with a person of the opposite sex. When you are really in love, you’re mood gets very elevated. You feel great. You feel like you are walking on air. You’re self-confidence goes sky high. You feel nothing bad is going to happen to you. The love bug has bitten! At such times your judgment can become significantly impaired. You can become reckless in your behavior. You can become blinded to your own faults, or the faults of your partner. You can easily make wrong choices that can have lasting, negative consequences. So you really need to make some commitments to the Lord *before* you fall in love.

Now as most of you know, I am preaching a series of messages on the family. Now one of the best things you can do is make some wise choices regarding picking a mate. If you follow my advice today, and pick a good mate, you will probably have a lasting marriage, and a good family. But if you make a bad choice, you are more likely to have a difficult marriage, and your family life will be adversely affected.

Now don’t even think about picking a mate until you have achieved a good level of maturity. You should be fairly mature before you start dating, and you should certainly reach maturity before you get married. One test of maturity is that you can live right & fulfill your responsibilities without a lot of parental or external control. Spiritual maturity is an important factor in determining whether you are ready for a close relationship with the opposite sex. If you are self-centered, you are not ready for marriage. Furthermore, you also need to achieve a good level of financial independence. Until you have matured to that level, you should not get married. And until you get married, you should not have children. So I have some serious reservations about allowing yourself to become emotionally attached to someone of the opposite sex before you are truly mature in the way I have described. Many young people start dating too soon, and they “go steady” with someone too soon.

Now once you have become mature enough to date or “court” someone, and before you get serious with someone, you should set certain standards in advance that you should go by. If you do this, it will help you avoid many bad decisions, and many compromising situations. In this message I will give you two key standards that you should adopt as a Christian. Then I will give you some practical points to consider about the person you are thinking about getting serious with.

Now the first principle to adopt is this:

I. DO NOT MARRY A NON-CHRISTIAN

This principle is based upon my main text, 2 Cor. 6:14, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” The same principle is found in 1 Cor. 7:39. Concerning a

widow, Paul writes, "...she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." I want to encourage every single believer here today to make a firm commitment to marry no one but a believer.

Argumentation: God gave these commands because He knew of the many dangers and problems involved in a Christian marrying a non-Christian. Prov. 6:27-28 says, "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" Marrying a non-Christian is like playing with fire. So note two of the problems with marrying a non-Christian:

1. The Problem of Incompatibility - We all know that one of the principles of a successful marriage is compatibility. But this problem of incompatibility is brought out in my main text (read vv.14a-16a). Paul is using an agricultural illustration. In the old days they would plow by yoking together two oxen or two horses. But you have problems if you yoke an ox and a horse together. They are different in height, and they won't work well together. Even so, when a Christian & non-Christian marry, they are too different for the marriage to work well. You will have different lifestyles, different desires, & different loyalties. Where there is spiritual incompatibility, you will face a lot of problems down the line.

2. The Potential of Spiritual Decline - Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:33, "Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals." If you become intimately associated with someone who is not a believer, they are going to tend to cause you to decline spiritually. He or she will probably pressure you to come down to their spiritual level, and you will compromise step by step until you sin against God. Besides, Adrian Rogers said, "If you marry a child of the devil, you'll get the devil for a daddy-in-law."

Now if you are married to an unbeliever, 1 Peter 3 says you should seek to win them to Christ, not so much with your words, but with your prayers, and by living a consistent Christian life. Furthermore, 1 Cor. 7 says that if the unbeliever is content to stay with in the marriage, you should remain married to them.

Application: So it is clear from Scripture that you should not marry a non-Christian. Have you made such a commitment yet? Now the best way to *ensure* that you not marry a non-Christian is to never date a non-Christian. You see, dating a non-Christian on an ongoing basis may lead you to fall in love with that person. And once you fall in love with that person, you will probably not be strong enough to keep from violating many of your Christian principles. And then the emotional attachment will be so strong that you will be much more likely to marry that person, which also is contrary to God's will for your life. There have been some success stories where a Christian has dated a non-Christian. But for every success story, there are probably 10 cases where the relationship ended badly. Besides, the better approach is to limit your relationships with non-Christians on more of a friendship level, and make it clear that you will not become romantically involved with a person who is not a Christian. Tell them they can go to church with you, but that you will maintain an emotional distance until they give evidence that they have become a Christian.

Of course some will object and say that limiting dating and courtship to only Christians will limit their options too much. They say, "I want to fish from the whole ocean, not just from a small pond." Indeed, you may look around our church and not find anyone that appeals to you. But there are plenty of other Christians in other churches!

II. DO NOT BECOME SEXUALLY INVOLVED BEFORE MARRIAGE

I can give a number of Scriptures to back this up. Turn to 1 Cor. 6:13. There Paul says, “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord...” V.18 says, “Flee sexual immorality...” 1 Thess. 4:3 says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.” God created the sexual relationship exclusively for marriage. Why, then, should we wait until marriage?

A. The Reasons [Argumentation] - In his book, *Why Wait*, Josh McDowell gives over 25 good reasons why you such wait until marriage to become sexually intimate. I will mention a summary of some of those reasons. When God says that we should not engage in sex before marriage, He is not trying to make us miserable. He wants to protect us from harm, and He wants to provide us with something much better in the long run. When God gives prohibitions, it is because He loves us, and wants the best for us. And there are a number of reasons why He prohibits sex outside of marriage:

1. Spiritual Reasons - Since, as we have seen, premarital sex is outside the will of God, there is no way you can engage in it without affecting your fellowship with God. And once you start premarital sex, it is addictive and hard to stop. It is better not to start. Furthermore, you will face problems of guilt, and Heb. 13:4 indicates that you will be inviting the judgment or discipline of God. On the other hand, God blesses purity and commitment to Him. You will be much better off spiritually if you wait until marriage.

2. Physical Reasons – Look with me at 1 Cor. 6:18, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” Sexual immorality is unique from many other sins, for that is one sin that is against your own body. Note some of the physical harm that can come through premarital or extramarital sex:

a) Sexually transmitted diseases - A whole generation has rejected God’s Word about premarital sex, and the result has been a huge increase in sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, now at least 20% of all adults under the age of 50 have a STD. Some are deadly, and most all are more than just bothersome. Some can cause infertility, or cervical cancer.

b) Pelvic inflammatory disease - A 15-year-old girl has a 1-in-8 chance of developing pelvic inflammatory disease simply by having sex, whereas a 24-year-old woman has only a 1- in-80 chance in that situation.¹

c) Pregnancy - Those who engage in premarital sex run varying levels of risk of pregnancy. Abstinence is the only sure method of birth control. And there are several problems with pregnancy before marriage. First of all, you will probably be pressured into making some difficult and wrong decisions. Will you yield to the terrible temptation of getting an abortion? I hope not, but if you are not strong enough to resist the temptation of premarital sex, how do you know that you will not yield to that temptation? Another decision you will be forced to make is whether or not to marry the other parent of the child, if you reject abortion and adoption. What if that man or woman is not even a good choice for a marriage partner? And even if they are, your marriage will get off to a rough start. A newly married couple should have some time of adjustment before they deal with the pressures of parenthood.

3. Emotional Reasons - Many Christians rationalize sexual involvement by saying that they are going to marry that other person. But you don’t know that. Without marriage you have nothing more than words, hopes, and feelings that you will have a long-term relationship. The fact

¹ <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/epid-std.html>

is there is a good possibility that you will end up breaking up with that other person and that will be much more difficult, and much more painful, if you have been intimate with each other. 1 Cor. 6:16 teaches that the sexual union creates a bond. And when you glue something together, and then break the bond of the two pieces, then usually one or both pieces will become broken in the process. Don't put yourself in that position! Furthermore, premarital sex typically leads to a marked increase in psychological & emotional distress. You will probably face feelings of guilt, worry, and lower self-esteem. A 1996 Heritage Foundation study found a strong correlation between teenage sexual activity and depression. 25.3 percent of sexually active teenage girls said they were often depressed, compared to 7.7 percent of girls who had not had sexual intercourse.²

Application: Young people, have you made a commitment to delay sexual involvement until you are married. If not, I want to encourage you to make that commitment right now. 17 year-old Jordin Sparks was named 2007 American Idol. In an interview the next morning, she acknowledged that the ring on her finger was a "True Love Waits" ring. She is committed to waiting until marriage to enter into a sexual relationship, and I commend her for that.

Now that commitment is not going to be easy to keep, especially in today's society. So I want to give you some:

C. Guidelines That Will Help You Avoid Sexual Immorality [How]- The following guidelines are based on a simple principle. If you want to avoid sexual involvement, the easiest way to do so is to avoid igniting the flames of sexual passion.

Illustration: When I was a boy, I had a friend who wanted to have some fun by starting a fire. Well, I went along with him and disobeyed my parents. I was told, "Don't play with matches." Well, we only intended to start a small fire. But it was a dry summer day, and once we started the fire, it spread quickly to the surrounding pine needles. Soon it was beyond our control. We would have set the whole woods on fire had not an adult in the neighborhood intervened! If we would have not started the fire to begin with, we would not have caused so much damage and trouble for ourselves. Even so, when you ignite the flames of passion with something like heavy and prolonged kissing, that passion can soon get out of control. Living by God's standard will not be so difficult if you just avoid lighting the flame of passion to begin with! So let me strongly encourage you to follow the following guidelines:

1. Set strict limits on the amount and extent of physical contact. To be blunt, don't let hands wander where they're not supposed to go. Don't engage in prolonged, passionate kissing, especially if you are alone in a place where passion can get out of hand. Some Christian couples have agreed to limit themselves to holding hands, friendly hugs, and brief kisses.

² There are also relational reasons. Premarital sex goes against what should happen in a relationship. A relationship should build, and grow in love, and gradually move toward complete intimacy at the time of marriage. But when a couple takes a shortcut to intimacy by having sex, they don't bother taking time to become mentally, emotionally and spiritually intimate. That kind of intimacy should take place before physical intimacy. And when problems develop in the relationship, physical pleasure and closeness is often relied upon to become a quick fix to the problem. And physical intimacy will tend to dominate the relationship. What kind of relationship is that? And think of this, if your relationship is based primarily on the physical, then what's going to happen when your physical self is not so great? But if a couple exercises self-control, they will build their relationship on a more solid and mature basis, such as with communication, and really getting to know each other. Furthermore, getting involved sexually will minimize the role of true love in the relationship. What is real love anyway? The person who says, "If you love me you will let me" does not understand the real meaning of love. True love first of all, is concerned with the well-being of the person loved. As we have seen, premarital sex certainly does not promote the well-being of that other person!

2. Avoid sexually oriented media. A recent study by the RAND Corporation and the University of California found that, for youth ages 12 to 17, those who watched a lot of sexually provocative TV were twice as likely to start having sexual intercourse as those who watched very little. Furthermore, you have no business watching a sexually provocative movie on a date. Guys in particular need to stay away from pornography, which is too easily available on the Internet. Girls can have sexual passions aroused by reading the wrong kind of romance novels, and then you are tempted to act out what you are reading.

3. Don't spend time secluded and alone with the opposite sex – Our first strategy regarding temptation should be to avoid temptation. Don't assume that you will always be strong enough to resist temptation. A Christian young man wrote, "Remember, we men get turned on more easily than women, so avoid places where the 'switches' are more likely to get 'bumped'!"

4. Plan your dates to stay busy doing good and acceptable activities together. If you sit around with nothing to do, you will more likely face sexual temptation.

Parents should take an active role in suggesting or enforcing these guidelines. For example, don't allow your teenagers to be alone in anyone's home with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Make sure there is proper adult supervision.

I want to say that Cheryl & I followed these guidelines when we were dating, and they helped us stay sexually pure in our relationship. Beside, Cheryl would have knocked my lights out if I had tried anything!

III. PICK A MATE PRIMARILY BASED ON THEIR CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

When you are young, you tend to pick a date & potential mate largely based on their looks. On a scale of 1 to 10, you want someone who is at least a 7 or 8. This is especially true of guys. We tend to go for looks above most other criteria. But as you get older, you realize that externals are not as important as what they are like on the inside. That being the case:

A. Don't Judge Based on Externals - Let me give some advice about physical appearance. First of all, you can't judge physical appearance before a person reaches the age of 21 or so. It's amazing what can happen to the physical appearance of a person between the time they are in middle school, and the time they reach full maturity. Some guys do not fully mature in looks until they are 25 or even 30. Furthermore, if physical appearance is the main reason you like a person or marry a person, then what's going to happen when they lose much of that physical attractiveness through the process of time or injury or disease? You are rather foolish to make physical appearance your main concern.

And what about the outward appearances regarding a person's personality & behavior? Some people's outward behavior in public is hardly more than an act. It is not necessarily a good indication of what kind of a person they are in a relationship. As people date, they tend to show only their better self, and hide their true self. Many older people can testify to the fact that after they got married, their spouse turned out to be a different person. This is why it is good advice not to become engaged to someone you have known less than 2 years. It takes time to really get to know someone. Unfortunately, picking a mate may be too much like picking a cantaloupe. It may look good on the outside, but it may not be very sweet on the inside!

Another main external factor that is commonly considered is how well off a person is financially. You want to marry someone who will do their part to contribute to the economic well-being & security of the family, but you should not marry someone just because they have money,

nor should you reject someone if they don't. Money can buy temporary happiness, but not lasting happiness.

As you get older and more mature, you realize that a person's character is far more important than external considerations. So:

B. Do Consider a Person's Character as Your Main Consideration - In 1 Peter 3:2-4, Peter encouraged women to put more emphasis on their inner person, making themselves beautiful in character, and put less emphasis on their outward appearance. 1 Sam. 16:7 says "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." We would do well to look a potential mates & dates from God's perspective. Inner beauty is more important than your outer beauty. Now it is generally true that a man is first attracted to a woman by her physical appearance. So women should have some regard for their physical appearance, as long as you maintain modesty. But a sensible man will look beyond the outward appearance, and look to the heart of a person. Young man, go for the young lady that has inner beauty. Go for the glow of a joyful Christian woman who really knows the Lord.

How do you know if that potential mate has inner beauty and good character? One good test you can use is found in Galatians 5:19-23. There we read of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. [Read & briefly comment]. Do you see more of the works of the flesh than the fruit of the Spirit? You want the kind of person described in vv.22-23. Other tests include: does he or she pray, read the Bible, and actively attend church? Other character traits to consider would include the following: Are they lazy or hard working? Are they dependable, or undependable? Are they selfish, or mostly unselfish? You won't find any potential mate who is perfect, but you should wait on God until He brings someone into your life who has good Christian character.

IV. TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THE FAMILY OF YOUR POTENTIAL MARRIAGE PARTNER³

Now what I am about to say on this point is not a moral issue, but more of a practical issue to consider "before you fall in love." This is a matter of wisdom & discretion. There are two main things I want you to consider:

A. You are not only marrying a person, you are marrying into a family – Marriage brings you into your spouse's family. Does that sound good to you, or bad? If that is an unpleasant thought to you, then you had better think twice before getting too involved with that other person. However, Genesis 2:25 says "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife...." There really should be some distance between the couple, and their two families. If that is the case, then this point will not be much of an issue. But if you marry someone who maintain close ties to their family, or is even controlled by their family, you are in for problems, especially if there are significant differences between you and your spouse's family.

B. More than likely, your mate will, in time, manifest many of the traits that you already see in their parents. As teen-agers, we may deliberately try to be different from our parents. But once we become parents ourselves, we usually end up being very much like our parents. For example, if that young man's father is a tight wad, then that young man will probably be a tight wad as well. We also need to become more and more like one or both of our parents physically, especially as we

³ Omit if short on time.

get older. When I was young, I didn't think I looked anything like my father. But the older I get, the more I look like him. I also chew my food like my father. I tend to close my eyes when I talk like my father. If Cheryl had known how much I was going to look & act like my father, she might not would have married me! Over the years I have become increasingly convinced that genetics plays a big role, not only in our physical traits, but also in our personalities, and even the extent of our natural inclination toward sin. So as you get to know a potential marriage partner, take a good look at their family. If you like what you see, if you like their character, their traits, and their customs, you will have less problems down the road with him or her as a spouse, and less problems dealing with his or her family.

Now please hear me! Don't exclude a fine Christian just because their family is not a strong Christian family. The Christian is not necessarily destined to become like their parents. After all, we have a new Heavenly Father, for we have been born again. Therefore, we can become more like our Heavenly Father than our earthly father or mother! We can overcome the liabilities of a difficult home life and family background. Nevertheless, before you marry someone with anything less than a solid Christian family background, you better make sure their faith is genuine.

Conclusion: I want to encourage everyone in my audience who may marry sometime in the future to make the commitments that I have shared with you today. Will you make a commitment to God that you will only marry a believer? Will you make a commitment to God that you will wait until you are married to engage in sexual relations? True love waits. Will you focus primarily on their Christian character, rather than external consideration? If so, make those commitments to God today. I invite you to make those commitments publicly. It would be great if several of our young people would make these commitments publicly. If there are couples here today who are dating, perhaps you will want to come and kneel at the altar and make the commitment to God and to each other to wait until marriage, and follow His will for your lives.

Now listen. You cannot keep these commitments in your own strength. You need to trust God to enable you to keep these commitments. Will you look to Him today?

Sources: Barry St. Clair & Bill Jones, *Dating: Picking (and Being) a Winner* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1987); Josh McDowell & Dick Day, *Why Wait: What You Need to Know About the Teen Sexuality Crisis* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1987); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).