

I Pledge Thee My Faith

Last Friday, a film version of the book, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, hit the theaters. It set a new record for ticket sales for movies released in February. If you do not know, it's a story about a very wealthy young man who is obsessed with violent sex. However, the lead actor's wife, Amelia, refuses to see the movie. Mr. Dornan, the actor, has admitted himself that, before many of the scenes with his co-star, he apologized for what he was about to do to her. He even told a reporter that, "he was raised in a family that respects women... and in real life he would never do such things to a woman." So, he made a movie that his wife refuses to see and in which he does things he would never do in real life. Would you take that job?

We come now this week to the grand finale of this great song. From beginning to end, this song has a message quite opposite of the message of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. As we study these final verses, a comparison of these two philosophies of life is unavoidable. First, we see in the Song of Songs that...

I. Passion Flows from Commitment, Not Commitment from Passion.

In chapter 7, verse 10, the bride says to her groom:

I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. (Song of Songs 7:10)

Do you see the order? Belonging precedes desiring. What does this mean, that you cannot allow yourself to be emotionally or physically attracted to anyone until you are engaged? No. It means that you will not act upon your physical or emotional attraction until there is a mutual commitment to one another. What we see here is the difference between *The Song of Songs* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which is the difference between love and lust. Do you know the difference? The Bible speaks of this often. It speaks of "love" as a pure passion and it speaks of "lust" as an impure passion. But they categorically move in opposite directions. Eph. 2 describes lust:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked... Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath... (Eph. 2:1-3 NASB)

Love, on the other hand, is defined quite differently: (I Cor. 13:4-8)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered... Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

And the Bible tells us where this love comes from:

...love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (I John 4:7, 8)

What the Bible makes clear about relationships between men and women is that the physical expression of passion to one another is not appropriate and, therefore, not allowed until there is first a deep and complete commitment ("until

death do us part” deep!). Books like *Fifty Shades of Grey* are actually promoting a completely separate reality, a reality that’s really a fantasy! Listen to what Dr. Juli Slattery writes in her critique of not only *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but all forms of erotica:

Erotica twists and distorts the results of making immoral and foolish choices. In the real world, our actions have consequences, sometimes very grave consequences. The authors of erotica simply ignore those consequences and create a magical “happy ending.” ...You cannot pursue the kinds of relationships you read about in erotica without an outcome very different from the ones in the books. ...you will not end up in a loving, caring, committed marriage.

Just as there are scientific laws in our universe – such as gravity – there are also principles that govern our emotions, relationships, and spiritual health. You have freedom to choose if you will abide by them, but you can never be free from the consequences of your actions. ⁱ

Many people think today that living together before marriage isn’t just okay but it’s wise, so that you can test your relationship and see if it’s worth giving your full commitment to it. But this is the opposite of what is wise! Passion never leads to commitment, because passion without commitment is infidelity. In fact, passion without commitment is the definition of infidelity. Study after study has proven this. A statistical analysis of cohabitation in America showed the following:

- One-sixth of cohabiting couples stay together for three years or less; only one in ten survives five or more years.
- Cohabiting is especially a bad idea for women because, on average, the woman ends up providing 70% of the couple’s income.
- Cohabiting couples have 78% less wealth than continuously married couples.
- Those who suffer most from cohabitation are children. The poverty rate of children is fivefold greater than children of married couples and they are six times more likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral problems. ⁱⁱ

When put in the proper order, commitment then passion, the result will be real love. That’s what this song is singing about.

I belong to my lover and his desire is for me. (Song of Songs 7:10) Next we must see that...

II. The Greatest Threat to Biblical Love Is Not from Without but from Within.

Throughout this song, we haven’t really seen many significant threats to this couple’s relationship, have we? There have been a few moments of separation, but they didn’t seem to do much damage. They only made their hearts grow fonder. But I think we all know that there are plenty of real threats to relationships in our world. But what most of us would list as “threats” to a healthy relationship aren’t the real threats. If you ask people what puts stress on their marriage, they’ll say things like:

- not enough time together
- work demands
- business travel
- financial problems
- poor communication
- a flirty co-worker

But these are all threats that originate outside of us and, although they can be a problem, they aren't the major problem. At least, not according to the Bible. Jesus says:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)

John Piper says, "We are sinful not because we're victims of darkness, but because we're lovers of darkness." Why did *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the book series, sell over 100 million copies worldwide being translated into 52 languages? Why are 12% of all sites on the Internet pornography websites? Why is it that 40% of those under the age of 35 who struggle with sexual addiction are women? Is it because these are new temptations that humanity has never had to deal with before?

No, King David didn't need the Internet or a movie theater to drink from the cup of lust. He did what he did for the same reason that 50% of Christian men today say they are "addicted" to pornography – because we love darkness. Boats don't sink because of the amount of water that surrounds them. They sink because somebody does something that lets the water in.

As we've been saying, while the characters in this song are historical and their story is real, they also represent a divine story which we are all invited to join. So, have you been experiencing any brokenness in your divine love story with Jesus? How do you explain that? Have you complained to Him about all the pressure of your job, your finances and the constant bombardment of your mind with bad images through the media?

Have you said, "I really want to have a closer friendship with you, Jesus, but I'm just getting beaten up down here by all these attacks and distractions and temptations. I mean, once things calm down, THEN I'll be able to spend more time with You." Is that what you think is the problem? Listen to the apostle Paul:

...When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:21-24)

Paul did not blame his circumstances or his situation or the temptations all around him. He said, "It's me, Lord! The brokenness is in me! I actually WANT to sin!! Oh, Lord! I need You!! I need you to rescue me!!!"

Friend, listen to me; just because you've become a follower of Jesus Christ doesn't mean that you will no longer be tempted by sin or even be drawn to sin. But what it does mean is that, when you are tempted, God will always, always, always provide a way out.

...And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (I Cor. 10:13)

But daily you must remember what you are: a sinner saved by grace!

John Newton, the writer of the hymn "Amazing Grace", led a very sin-filled life before becoming a Christian. He even captained a slave ship that brought slaves from Africa to England. After he confessed his sin to Jesus and became His servant,

he printed a verse from the Old Testament and placed it over his mantle, directly at the bottom of his stairs, so he would see it every morning as he came down to begin his day. It read in the Old King James translation:

And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee... (Deut. 15:15)

The greatest threat to us living in the love of God is not from without but from within. Lastly, we need to consider the bride's final request to...

III. Place Me Like a Seal Over Your Heart

In the ancient world of Solomon, seals were precious to the owner. It was the "guarantee of your identity." And the seal of the king was the ultimate mark of authority that could open any door and close any disagreement. To be sealed with the seal of the king was a huge commitment on the part of the king to whomever he gave his seal. And what is the reason for this huge commitment?

...For love is as strong as death... (Song of Songs 8:6)

This may seem like a strange way to describe your love for someone, but think about it for a moment. What's stronger than death? Not any person. Not any government. Not any philosophy. Not science. Science can delay death but it can't stop it. Not Satan or his evil ways. Once death has taken us out of this world, Satan no longer has any access to us. He cannot reach beyond the grave to torment us anymore. So love, like death, is a protector, a giver of hope, an armored vehicle that can take us through the worst battles. And best of all, as I John 4:8 says, "**God is love,**" and since God raised Jesus from the dead, if we have His love, we too will be raised even from death itself. That's how strong love is!

What's an example of that kind of love, God-love, that you know of? Have you ever seen it in real life? I've got an example.

Roger Zerbe. Have you ever heard of him? Probably not. Roger was suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease. His wife, Becky, found his journal one day where he would write during his brief periods of clear thinking. The last entry said:

Honey,

Today fear is taking over. The day is coming when all my memories of this life we share will be gone. In fact, you and the boys will be gone from me. I will lose you even as I am surrounded by you and your love. I don't want to leave you. I want to grow old in the warmth of memories. Forgive me for leaving so slowly and painfully.

Blinking back tears, Becky picked up her pen and wrote beneath his entry:

My sweet husband,

What will happen when we get to the point where you no longer know me? I will continue to go on loving you and caring for you – not because you know me or remember our life, but because I remember you. I will remember the man who proposed to me and told me he loved me, the look on his face when his children were born, the father he was, the way he loved our extended family. I'll recall his love for riding, hiking, and reading; his tears at sentimental movies; the unexpected witty remarks; and how he held my hand while he prayed. I cherish the pleasure, obligation, commitment, and opportunity to care for you because I REMEMBER YOU! ⁱⁱⁱ

Someone filled with lust will never write a letter like that to you, only someone who is filled with the pure, passionate, biblical love of God.

In Song of Songs 4, the groom "pledged his faith," his strong commitment, to his bride by saying, "*You have stolen by heart, my sister, my bride.*" Now in S of S 8: 6 and 7, it is the bride speaking her deep commitment to her groom. She says:

**...for love... burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot wash it away.
If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.** (Song of Songs 8:6, 7)

Is that how you feel toward your divine groom? Can you make a commitment to Jesus today as strong as His commitment to you? The apostle John said:

**Yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God - (John 1:12)**

And Jesus Himself said: (John 11:25-26)

**...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live,
even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never
die.**

And Jesus, speaking through the apostle Paul, made this incredible commitment to you. He said that God's grace can cover any sin, even sexual sin – no matter how selfish, dark or even violent it may have been. He wrote:

**...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified
freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...
Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We
died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? For we know that our old
self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away
with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin... (Rom. 3:23, 24; 6:1,2, 6)**

Before he died, John Newton wrote his own epitaph. Today his tombstone says this:

**"Once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich
mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned
and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy."**

Preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed... does that describe you? It can if today you will commit your life to Jesus Christ. Ask Him to forgive your past and send you to the future as a new man or woman, no longer a slave to dark desires but free to be an instrument through which His pure and perfect love can flow into the lives that need it in your world. Are you willing? What are you waiting for? Pledge your commitment to Him by faith today! Let's pray...

ⁱ FamilyLife.com, “Is ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ Dangerous?” adapted from *Pulling Back the Shades* by Dannah Gresh and Dr. Juli Slattery (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014)

ⁱⁱ A. Patrick Schneider II, “Cohabitation is bad for men, worse for women, and horrible for children,” www.lifestyle.net (10-4-07) New Oxford Review

ⁱⁱⁱ Becky Zerbe, “Penning a Marriage,” *Marriage Partnership* (Spring 2006), p. 22