

Premarital Sex

"While others partner-swap, 90210's teen sex conscience [Donna] has kept her vow of chastity until marriage. 'Can you even imagine?' Tori says, throwing her head back and laughing hard. 'Donna must be so frustrated. I'm surprised that she's not in a bad mood all the time.'"

This excerpt from a recent TV Guide interview with Tori Spelling all too clearly illustrates the dangerous problems with society's attitude today toward sex in general and premarital sex in particular. Premarital sex used to be taboo. Sure, it happened, but the prevailing societal attitude condemned such an action. Soon, however, typical quick-fix Americans were unable to bear having their sexual "freedom" restricted. We faced the "sexual revolution" and attitudes toward sex took a turn for the worse. Sex went from taboo to trendy, and the unfortunate soul clinging to old-fashioned notions of chastity-until-marriage was tremendously pressured to enter the sexual arena -- after all, it was fun, and most importantly, everyone was doing it. These pressures eventually triumphed, becoming inculcated in the general population. We as a society today are facing the results of this conditioning. Sex outside of marriage is now considered the norm; most individuals are not even aware any more that waiting until marriage is a viable option.

In a left-handed way, society has improved itself; there are significantly fewer pressures today to engage in premarital sex. Unfortunately, though, this improvement is predicated on a false premise -- that premarital sex should be occurring in the first place. No one is pressuring any more because there isn't a need to do so. Our social history has created a sexual society, but as members of that society, we don't understand why we think the way we do. Consequently, we are dealing with the problems inherent in premarital sex the wrong way.

First, it is necessary to understand why premarital sex was considered wrong in the first place. If you look at the activity of sex from an objective perspective, there are two defining characteristics: it is procreative, and it is unitive. These do not necessarily have to be understood from a religious perspective, as many contend. From a scientific standpoint, it would be hard to argue that sex is not meant to be procreative; it is by this activity and this activity alone that the species is able to continue. From a psychological standpoint, no matter how much denial takes place, it is obvious that by engaging in sexual activity, a man and a woman give part of themselves to each other, and the bond between them is strengthened in a way that no other activity could accomplish.

Consequently, engaging in sex outside of marriage all too easily disregards both aspects of the act. Premarital sex does not assume any responsibility for the potential child, for the partners do not have any contractual relationship in the form of marriage. Because of this, birth control becomes necessarily attached to the act of premarital sex, obviously denying any notion of procreation. This is not to say that birth control should be left out of marriage, but that in marriage it is not always necessary, while outside of marriage it is. In addition, again because there is no nuptial agreement between partners, premarital sex denies its own unitive aspect. While the act itself still carries with it an increased unity between man and woman, outside of marriage there is no reason to assume the relationship will exist tomorrow. Not only, then, is the unity established of a lesser quality, it is subject to the devastation of being meaningless -- giving a part of yourself to another and then watching that someone dispassionately walk away with it is emotionally destructive, whether you are a man or woman, no matter how much some with their machismo attitudes may try to deny it.

As I said before, though, these underlying truths have been expunged from the social arena. It is only the religious freak who still blindly refuses to engage in premarital sex. The rest of the modern world has advanced to much that not only are they able to argue why premarital sex should be acceptable, they

don't even have to do that any more -- there is no longer any "why" to sex outside of wedlock; there is only a "why not". Unfortunately, as the inheritors of such "advancements", we as a society today are stuck dealing with the ensuing problems, and there are many. Sexually transmitted diseases run rampant among all levels of American life. The number of abortions is staggering and continues to grow. Sexual violence, single-parent mothers, and child abuse are all at all-time highs. Truth be told, premarital sex cannot account entirely for these problems and their growing numbers, but the force of its impact cannot be denied.

Our attempts to solve these problems are ineffective. We solve the spread of sexually transmitted diseases with increased distribution of birth control. Sexual activity goes up and we wonder why the number of STDs doesn't go down. We solve abortion with single-parent mothers and single-parent mothers with abortion. Then we wonder why neither number decreases. We solve sexual violence and child abuse with "education", but an education that continues to deny the responsibility of the man for the woman and the responsibility of both for the child. For some reason, we don't take the step back necessary to understand what the real problem is. Instead we continue to try to solve problems with problems, and they just get worse.

It is obvious that society can't change itself. It's an overused cliché, but change has to start with the individual. We have to look at premarital sex and look at it closely. We have to think about the destructive problems it causes, and weigh those against a few moments of fleeting pleasure. There is a time and a place for sex -- no one is denying that fact. But perhaps we need to challenge ourselves to accept that the time and place is not always here and now. The change we need to make is an exercise in self-control, but even before that can take place, it is an exercise in critical thought -- concerning both ourselves and the entire society.