

## **Ceremony of the Marriage of Gordon Armstrong and Emily Obenhaus**

**October 9, 2021 – Stacy R. Obenhaus**

We are blessed, for many reasons, to be here today.

But we are especially blessed to witness today the vows of marriage between the *fabulous* Emily Elizabeth Obenhaus and the talented and quite frankly *gorgeous* Gordon Weeks Armstrong.

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But . . . before they take their vows, the rest of us will take a vow – to each other, amongst ourselves. Our vow will be a mirror image of the vow that Gordon and Emily make to each other.

We will vow to model and practice the type of virtues that will enable us to maintain ourselves as a healthy, functional, and thriving community, within which the community forming here today can continue to grow, and thrive, and flourish.

Here's what we'll do. After my remarks, I will pronounce this vow with my hand raised and invite your assent with the words: "And the people said" and you will reply: "We will."

Let's try it. And the people said: ["We will."]

Now I know some of you may be reluctant to make a public vow before all these other people, who years from now could try to hold you to account for something you rashly promise today just so you can hurry up and go sip some margaritas and oysters at the reception.

But let me make this perfectly clear: that bar will not open until **everyone** here takes this vow.

Now the vows that Emily and Gordon will make to each other are the same vows that my wife Rebecca and I made to each other 30 years ago.

Except that Emily and Gordon have expressly incorporated in their vows ideas from a letter that the Apostle Paul – in the Bible – wrote to one of the churches to whom he ministered.

In that letter, in order to emphasize proper moral character, the Apostle Paul presented a list of *vices*, and he contrasted that with a list of nine *virtues*.

Just as a refresher: the vices are the bad stuff; the virtues are the good stuff. That's Wikipedia – check it out.

Now the Apostle Paul refers to this list of vices as “the works of the flesh.” He calls the list of nine virtues “the fruit of the Spirit.” Now I must confess something to you: The works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit—if I saw those two on a list of cocktails at Bramhall whiskey bar in Portland, I think I'd want to try “the Works of the Flesh.” That just sounds really good to me.

But let me list these nine virtues that are the fruit of the Spirit, because we are going to vow to model and practice them, in community, as best as we can, in all that we do, and when Emily and Gordon take their vows, you will hear that they have incorporated these nine virtues into their vows to each other.

So here we go: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Now it's tempting to think that the Apostle Paul is present this list of nine virtues as a key to *individual* moral character. But that's not what's going on here. Rather, the Apostle Paul presents these nine virtues not to focus on *individual* moral character but as the key to maintaining the moral character of the *community* to whom he speaks – to be modeled and practiced by the *community* as a *community*. Here's why we say that.

First, the Apostle Paul is writing to a church, and a church is a community. He thinks of the church as this organic *thing*: he calls it a body with many parts, he calls it a lump of dough where everything gets mixed in together.

Second – this list of vices – the works of the flesh – is heavily weighted with vices that are plainly vices of an unhealthy *community* – not just jealousy and envy, but also dissension, factions, quarrels, strife – characteristics of an unhealthy *community*, for which the list of virtues – the fruit of the Spirit – is presented as the apparent antidote, a prescription for a *healthy* community.

Third, the Apostle Paul gives an example of one of these nine virtues in action – the virtue of gentleness. He says this: if someone among you is caught in a transgression – they been doing wrong! – those of you with the Spirit should restore this sinner *in a spirit of gentleness* - taking care that you yourselves are not tempted.

Think about that. In Paul's view this virtue of gentleness is for the *community* to model and practice, not the sinner; and if the *community* does not take care in this matter, then the *community* – not the sinner – is at risk.

The sermon has ended – praise be to God.

I'm not telling you what you do not already know. Nor will we vow to do something we are not already doing. If we had not been doing it, pretty well, already, we might not be here today celebrating together the formation of this new community – Gordon and Emily.

So here we go. Here are the nine virtues, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Do you vow, to each other, amongst ourselves, to model and practice these virtues as best as we can, in all that we do as a community, to maintain ourselves as a thriving and healthy community, so that the community forming here today will have a healthy community in which to continue to grow, and thrive, and flourish.

And the people said: ["We will!"]