

Marital intimacy 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Chapters six and seven are difficult but essential matters to discuss. God has placed them in Scripture for a reason and we are benefited by knowing God's will concerning the use of our physical bodies.

We shouldn't avoid this text any more than we can avoid a physical world. We can't avoid this issue because it is an everyday issue, and the Bible is an everyday book.

The world has no answer for the questions about sex. The unbelieving world has made a mess of this gift. But God isn't squeamish about discussing sexuality. He invented it, and He offers the best experience of it.

We learned last week that there is no such thing as casual sex. We cannot share our bodies without sharing

First: Context: v 1

1. 1a - *Now concerning the matters about which you wrote:*

In this section of the letter Paul begins answering questions the Corinthians have posed.

1 Corinthians 7:1 –

1 Corinthians 7:25 – *Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.*

1 Corinthians 12:1 – *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*

1 Corinthians 16:1 – *Now concerning the collection for the saints*

There were five groups Paul needed to address:

- 1 - The unmarried
- 2 - The married (There were four types of marriage in Corinth)
 - a) *Contubernium* = The 'tent' marriage – Slaves together to create best slaves.
 - This is how and why Planned Parenthood began
 - b) *Usus* = 'Common Law' marriage accomplished by one year of living together and without any contract to get out as easy as you got in
 - c) *Coemptio en manum* – 'pleasurable service women' – A man bought a daughter to satisfy her father's debt and create a 'second mate'/mistress
 - d) *Confarrateio* – a marriage ceremony much like in the U.S.
- 3 - The divorced and alone
- 4 - The widowed and alone
- 5 - The divorced and remarried
 - The Jews thought marriage was required since it was not good for Adam to be alone.
 - Many Greek Corinthians were saying the only way to live purely was to live single.
 - There is also some sense of Gnosticism in this – that all matter is evil.

2. v b – *"It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."*

NIV = *"touch a woman"* which is a Jewish euphemism for marriage.

In light of Paul's concern about sexual immorality, the Gentile Corinthians assumed they should not be intimate at all.

This is just like us, isn't it? We swing from one extreme to another. In this case, from sexual promiscuity to chastity. But extremes are easy; moderation is difficult.

Second: Marriage. v 2

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to get married

- a) Celibacy is a gift to be celebrated

v 6 - *Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*

V 8 - *To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.*

b) But marriage does protect us from temptation

One of the biblical reasons for marriage is sexual intimacy. Paul is not saying that it is the most important reason to be married but it is a reason.

Four reasons for marriage:

- Procreation – Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127
- Pleasure – Proverbs 5; 1 Cor 7:4
- Companionship – Genesis 2:18-20
- Picture – Eph 5

ILL – Physical intimacy builds borders around your marriage diminishing temptation.

It is a dam against the flood of sexual temptations that exist outside of marriage.

But, in the Christian context, sexual intimacy is part of the larger picture of presenting a gospel about a servant king who, in the Garden, prayed,

“not my will but yours...” (Luke 22:42).

In other words, marriage reflects Christ’s kingdom principles of serving one another as first demonstrated by the king of the kingdom.

And, for those protections from lust to exist, a marriage couple must be intimate with one another -

Third: Service. v 3-4

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

As is true about Christianity when compared to a nonChristian worldview, Christians bear mutual responsibility toward one another in physical intimacy.

Many Corinthians who became Christians determined to practice celibacy in marriage. This is a distorted view of Christian marriage. There is no place for celibacy in the Christian marriage.

ILL – The problem in our culture is singles acting like married couples. The Corinthians were married acting like single people.

The Greek says, *“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife and likewise also the wife to her husband.”*

'fulfil' = to pay a debt = present, continuous

'duty' = that which is owed

Physical intimacy in marriage is a privilege and responsibility.

The emphasis is on giving, on mutuality, on *"I owe you"* instead of *"you owe me."* In Christianity, sex is much more meaningful than a husband's or wife's privilege and a husband or wife's duty. It is about serving one another.

Lust is about physicality.

Love is about people.

Lust is about self.

Love is about others.

In Christianity, God turns our duties into delight, but our delights are always duties as well, making every privilege a responsibility.

1 John 5:2-3 - *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

Marital sexual relations in marriage build a dam against the flood of sexual temptation and adultery.

This exhortation means that we should be sexually satisfying to our spouses, to protect one another from the temptation to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

Husbands and wives have a duty to be intimate with one another to protect their marriage, and demonstrate the gospel, Christ's love for the church sufficient to sacrifice himself for her.

Love for God and one another is the motive for sex in a Christian marriage.

Four: Exceptions. v 5

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

God expects physical intimacy to satisfy both partners. It is not an option. And it cannot be used as a weapon.

"Do not deprive" = reason as well as frequency

God creates sexual desire, not the devil. But the devil can abuse that desire. His whole plan is to ruin God's good creation.

Sin is not a thing. It cannot exist without good. Good existed without sin. It is a thing. But sin is not a thing. Sin is the misuse of good.

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

– C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*

If your desire for sexual intimacy is not directed toward marriage and celebrated only in marriage, then your desire is too weak. It is self-serving and self-serving desires are always self-destructive.

- a) There are occasions not to enjoy intimacy
- b) Those occasions are not the norm
- c) They are agreed on by a husband and wife
- d) They are for a limited time
- e) They are intended to increase your spirituality
- f) Otherwise, Satan will use what is good for evil

Fifth: Christ in Marriage

And this brings us to Jesus:

1 John 3:8 – *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

How does God do this?

- a) The Spirit of Jesus in us

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 – *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body^l in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

b) The love of/for Jesus in us

The best way to fight a sinful pleasure is with a greater pleasure. Of course, in this passage, marriage is the greater pleasure Paul presents.

But Jesus is also that greater pleasure.

Faith is not saving faith unless it contains the component of love for Jesus.

"Love is the main thing in saving faith"

– Jonathan Edwards

I think we ought to believe in Christianity because it is true. But that intellectual honesty must be balanced with the love of Jesus for who he is else intellectualism become a self-serving god.

Conclusion:

A Christian husband and wife must not settle for a poor sexual relationship. God wants every Christian marriage to enjoy a sexual relationship that is a genuine blessing, and not a burden or a curse. It is simply one more way in which we demonstrate the worth and power of the gospel.

Community Groups:

- 1 – What kind of ideas about unbiblical marriage encouraged the Corinthians to write Paul?
- 2 – What did the Jews think about marriage?
- 3 – Why did the Greeks think they should live celibately?
- 4 – Is celibacy (outside of marriage) to be celebrated?
- 5 – What are the biblical reasons for marriage?
- 6 – How does marriage protect us from temptation?
- 7 – How is physical intimacy a privilege?
- 8 – How is physical intimacy a responsibility?
- 9 – How is physical intimacy about serving one another?
- 10 – What is the difference between lust and love?
- 11 – What exception exists for physical intimacy in marriage?
- 12 – Read verse 5 and discuss the exception.
- 13 – How does Christ employ marriage to destroy lust and temptation?
- 14 – How does a love for Jesus empower us to love our spouses?