



## **The Cross & Christian Marriage – Part 1** **1 Corinthians 7:1-24**

First Corinthians 7 in your Bible. Let me ask you to open it in that place. As you do, grab the Worship Guide that is there; there are some sermon notes there. We encourage you to use those to follow along. As you're doing that, let me just say to you, you know, we've dealt with some pretty heavy subjects related to sexual immorality and sexuality in general the last couple of weeks in 1 Corinthians 6, as Pastor David has just led us in so insightfully. I hope that's been an encouragement, a challenge to you, that we try to prepare you for that.

There's no way for us to put a disclaimer every time we deal with a subject that's maybe a little bit awkward for families. I want you to know, even before I read the text this morning, that in some respects, we continue the line of thinking—the subject—we're going to be talking about sex and the marriage relationship as we come into 1 Corinthians 7, and even before I read the passage, I just want you to know that in the event you haven't read ahead or gathered that from the notes pages there—for parents or families—if that makes a difference for you. So just be aware of that.

Hear the Word of the Lord, 1 Corinthians 7. I want to read the first nine verses. We'll read this, and then we'll jump into it and get started. Hear the Word of the Lord:

*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 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. 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.*

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

*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:1-9)*

I realize I probably, in just my introductory statements before I read the text, probably burst some of your bubbles. You thought you were going to get to sigh a sigh of relief when you came in here today. I mean, we've dealt with some pretty heavy stuff the last several

weeks in dealing with this whole issue of the Christian in relation to the culture that is just so pervasive, and in many respects, so perverted with regard to sexuality.

And then, you know, to come in, if you didn't read ahead and didn't know where we're going, and to know that, "Hey, we're going to continue some of that thinking." That might be a frustration or a discouragement for you.

Let me just tell you we're not going to some of the places that we went to, not using some of the terminology. I don't want to scare you with that, okay? We needed to deal with some of those subjects. But even just realizing that the theme, the idea, is something we continue to think about, I trust in the last several weeks, you haven't been offended but you've been encouraged, challenged, strengthened, edified in your faith.

I'll be honest with you. I told Pastor David I was offended at one point in his message last week, being one of the older people in the congregation. And that's when he told that story about the older couple that came to him after one of his sermons on Song of Solomon and said, "We're going to hurry home and obey your teaching on sex in marriage." And it wasn't that he told that story. It was just kind of how much fun he had with it, in regard to an older person. I don't know. What was that about?

I mean, it is interesting sometimes, the confusion that, you know, goes on with regard to the sexual relationship in marriage. I mean, you know, when we're young and we're young marrieds, you kind of look at this deal—you've waited so long for it—and you think, "Man, we need to get all this in we can because this is just too good to be true. It can't last forever." And you're thinking also that, "I know nobody over 40 still has the energy to engage in this." And then you get to be an older person, and you realize that everything still works, and you're thinking, "Man, we've not only got time, we've got experience." And that's when it really becomes meaningful here.

And I hope that that's, you know, a little bit of what we can do in looking at this text, is just understand what God has given us and what He desires for us in sexual relationships within the context of marriage. Not everything, but a lot of what we talked about up to this point in its heaviness has been because of the perversion in our culture and the temptation that that brings and all of that type of stuff.

And I want you to understand that, coming into 1 Corinthians 7, Paul helps us to understand that, while culture has perverted sex—and there are so many temptations that pull us toward perversion—that God intended something incredibly good and incredibly beautiful in this. So just count it as ironic that one of the old guys gets to stand up here and tell you about sex in marriage today.

## **Good Questions about Sexual Temptation...**

There was a lot of confusion in the Corinthian church about sex—no doubt. This teaching, like Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 6, hit many of them hard. And it created a lot of questions. It created a lot of confusion, because they lived much like we do in a sin-sick, sex-soaked culture that was assaulting them with temptations to use this in a way that God never intended. And so, you had this clash of value systems that was coming together.

And the Corinthians, as it were, they had all kinds of questions in general about becoming Christians. And then that's evident by the way Paul begins here in 1 Corinthians 7:1, when he says, "*Now concerning the matters in which you wrote...*" They had written him a letter. The Corinthians had written him a letter, asking Paul all kinds of questions about different things related to the Christian life and the church. And if you just flip forward in your Bible there, you'll see some of those, because basically in 1 Corinthians 7-11, Paul is addressing these questions. In 1 Corinthians 8, he's going to talk about food offered to idols; and 1 Corinthians 9, the surrendering of Christian rights; and idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10; and 1 Corinthians 11, head coverings and women's roles in worship; and then communion, the Lord's Supper. I mean, they had questions about all those kinds of things and more. And so Paul begins, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 7, to address some of those issues.

But I don't think it's coincidental that he inserts a discussion about sexual activity as it relates to marriage, as it relates to divorce, as it relates to remarriage, and as it relates to singleness. Paul does this, almost in a way of pressing pause on his own agenda the things that he had on his heart to address. And we're going to talk about all those issues over the next several weeks.

But think about how much sense it makes for Paul to insert these questions at this particular point. Can you imagine some of the questions that the Corinthians had to have after hearing him talk about this stuff in 1 Corinthians 6? I mean, this was some pointed, direct, deep, heavy stuff—some theological stuff—that he was saying about sexual immorality.

I mean, just glance back at it there in your Bible, and think for a moment about 1 Corinthians 6:9: "*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*" And so, he lists people whose lives are characterized in such a way that they could not be Christians—they're not going to make it to heaven. And the first thing on the list is what? Sexual immorality, right?

And then he comes on down and, in verse 13, he says, "*The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*" Verse 15: "*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?*" I mean, you have to stop and think about that reality.

Come on down to verse 18:

*Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)*

That is some heavy, deep theological stuff that relates to a very practical issue in our culture in our lives, and that's the issue of sex. And you have to look at that and know that this is something that God takes very seriously, but you also have to know--and I know this is characteristic of many of us. We read that stuff—we hear that stuff—and it prompts questions. "What does that look like?" I mean, look at the last statement in 1 Corinthians 6—that last statement there in the last verse, verse 20: "*So [as a result of all this] glorify God in your body.*"

Don't you know that there were a whole lot of these Corinthians that were in this sex-crazed culture, that were used to all kinds of sexual perversion? I mean, they had about four different ways you could get married that included slave owners doing matchmaking, if you will, and just kind of assigning marriage, to what we know of as "common law marriage", to many of the roots of our present-day, traditional wedding ceremony. They came right out of this culture. So they were used to all of this, in addition to all of the idol worship that involved sexual activity—all of those kinds of things.

And all of a sudden, here you've got these Corinthian believers who've come to Christ, and then they're a part of that culture, and they're hearing stuff like this—like we heard in 1 Corinthians 6. And there's no doubt that it prompts some very legitimate questions about how we navigate this. And I'm certain that the Corinthians thought about some of the things like, "Should I get married and risk the temptation to adultery? I mean, you know, Paul, if you're saying—if Jesus said—that you only have sexual relationships with one who is your spouse, then maybe it's better to not even go there, and not even get married and stay away from that temptation."

Others were saying, "Should I remain single and risk the temptation of fornication—of sex outside of marriage? If, when you're single you're not supposed to have sex outside of marriage, then maybe the best way to guard against it is just to hurry—to rush—and get married. I have to find somebody to marry to avoid this temptation."

Others were saying, "Well, you know, in light of this high standard, should I continue to have sexual relationships with my spouse within the context of marriage? I mean, if the culture's perverted this and there's so much negative that is related to it, then maybe it's better for us to, at the very least, downplay it in our marriage." No doubt, some were thinking that kind of thing.

And then still others, "Should I even continue in a marriage relationship that's not ideal—that doesn't honor God specifically?" There were people who came to Christ and woke up one day and realized that they're now married to an unbeliever. You have to be thinking, "You know, well, this is something that God created—this sexual activity—and it is intended to exalt Him and glorify Him. Should I even be in a relationship with someone who is not a believer? Maybe the best thing to do is just to get out of this deal."

And you hear all of those things, and you know that they're very similar to the questions that arise in many believers' minds today about sexual relationships, especially as it relates to marriage. And so, Paul presses pause on continuing on with issues, and he says, "You know, you wrote me a letter and had some very good questions in it. Some of those questions relate to the issue we've been talking about in 1 Corinthians 6. So let me just insert that into the discussion."

And what he does is he begins with one issue—one question—that reflected a contention that many held in that day, and now, even more of the Corinthians who were Christians were beginning to entertain this as a viable route, maybe even a preferred route, to avoiding all of this stuff related to sexuality and its temptation. And that is the issue of celibacy, which is simply abstaining from sex and marriage altogether.

And you have to know that it certainly makes sense that it's easy to look at 1 Corinthians 6 and to think about the headlines in our country, just in recent days, and the plummeting downfall of morality in our country. It is easy to look at the divorce statistics in the church, being as high as they are outside of the church, and knowing how pervasive some of these

things we've talked about in the last couple of messages are. It's easy to see how somebody would arrive at that conclusion and think, "Maybe the best way for me to approach this whole deal is just to crawl in a hole somewhere, join a monastery, join a convent and reject the whole sex and marriage thing altogether."

And that's why, in verse 1, most translations have quotation marks around what Paul identifies as something they wrote to him in their letter. And that is this: "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" (1 Corinthians 7:1) This, apparently, was one of the things that some of the Corinthians had concluded. It wasn't uncommon outside the church in this spiritually perverted world--even in the secular culture, celibacy was widespread. It was oftentimes elevated to a place of spirituality over everything else, where people were saying, "If you're celibate, you're more spiritual than everybody else." And after this teaching in 1 Corinthians 6, some of the Corinthians were, no doubt, saying, "Maybe they were right. Maybe that's the route to take. Well, let's ask Paul about it." And they had included that in their letter.

Now, here's the deal. Paul puts it on the table at this point immediately after this question about sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6, and he doesn't necessarily refute it. Now watch it, now. He just quotes it. "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" (1 Corinthians 7:1) If you're looking at an older translation, it may say, "for a man not to touch a woman." In the language of the New Testament, the word indicates sexual intimacy. But the conclusion that many were drawing is, "Man, that's the only way! That is the only way for me to avoid giving into temptation outside of marriage or inside of marriage; for men and women to not even touch each other."

And you know what Paul says? "There's some merit to that." You know how we know that? Look down at verses 6 and following: "*Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am.*" Verse 8: "*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.*" The Apostle Paul is not going to ignore the benefit, the possibility, the nobility of that direction. And we're going to talk about that some in the coming weeks, but that's not what he deals with here.

## **Biblical Answers Regarding Marriage ...**

Look at the beginning of verse 2. Paul says, "But this is what you've heard. This is what some of you are now entertaining as might be the right thing to do, and it is certainly a viable option. But..." Paul says. And then he begins to talk about marriage, and he begins to talk about the sexual relationship in marriage.

And so what I want us to do is I want us to... You know, in knowing that we're going to talk about divorce and marriage and singleness in the coming days related to this subject, I want us to take that one issue, and I want us to see what Paul says by way of biblical answers, biblical responses, to conclusions that we might draw—questions that we might have—about this culture, this temptation to sexual perversion and sexual sin that we're faced with all the time. Let's see what the Apostle Paul says to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

### **Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality.**

I want to start at this point right here. Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality; monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality. You understand, many of the Corinthians wouldn't have been in the letter that they wrote. Paul wouldn't ask them about it. Many of the Corinthians were entertaining that, "Hey, the only way to stay sexually pure in this culture, with the temptations we face, the way our bodies are wired, is just to check out of this and stay away from it altogether."

And the Apostle Paul speaks into that, and the first thing he says is, "Marriage, as God ordained it and defined it, is a legitimate protection against—not foolproof—but a legitimate safeguard against sexual immorality." He doesn't say—now watch this—he doesn't say it is the only safeguard. He doesn't say that the marriage relationship and the sexual relationship that is a part of it is the only reason to get married. We know this.

Reading the Bible, we know that the Bible puts forth a number of reasons for people to get married. However, Paul doesn't even really indicate the other reasons one should get married. He just states that one should do it in order to avoid sexual immorality. He mentions that at the beginning of verse 2: "...because of the temptation of sexual immorality." You come all the way down to verse 9: "*But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*" This text is bookended by this truth, this principle. The Apostle Paul, however, does not say that this is the only reason to get married, nor does he say it's the best reason. He simply says it's a reason; it's a legitimate reason.

Think with me for a moment about the reasons the Bible puts forth for us to get married. First of all, Scripture would say to us, "Get married for proclamation." You say, "What in the world? Proclamation of what? I'm not a preacher. What are you talking about? How do these relate to one another?"

This is something we've talked about a lot here at Brook Hills that I think, personally, my opinion is the highest, most important reason for people to marry. And I think when they don't understand this going into marriage, it's something that, you know, that causes us to start at a disadvantage. And that is this: God created marriage to be a picture that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know this here at Brook Hills.

But sometimes we forget about how that works. It's easy to lose sight of that, especially once you get into marriage. Genesis 2:24, when God performed the first wedding ceremony, this was His commentary on it. He said, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" That was God's commentary on the first wedding ceremony.

You come over to Ephesians 5, and the Apostle Paul is teaching to the Christians in Ephesus. He quotes Genesis 2:24. He cites that verse, and immediately after it, you know what he says? He says, "But I am talking about Christ and the church." And you know what Paul does? He interprets Genesis 2:24 in light of God's intended meaning. He identifies Jesus Christ as the first One who left His Father, walked out of heaven, leaving the glory of heaven behind, came to earth in pursuit of His bride. And on this earth, He lived a life we could not live; He died a death we should have died, incurred the wrath of God that should have been ours—all in order to buy, to redeem, His bride, to bring about in her the washing of water by the Word.

And this is why, in Ephesians 5, Paul says, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*" Why? Because you're a doormat? Because he's got all the right answers--he knows everything? No! But because you are a picture of how the church aligns itself under the loving leadership of her Lord. "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*" Why? So that He could present it to God as a pure and chaste bride. This is what Jesus did, and so he says to a husband, "You are a picture in the way that you relate to your wife. You are a picture of the way that Christ relates to His church. You're a running video together that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ."

If I could press pause for a moment and just speak a word to those of you that are here that are not Christians. Maybe you're on a journey, and you're exploring this. Hear this. I want to call your attention to as many reminders, as you walk away from this place, of what God is inviting you to. And so I want you to know, if you're married, your marriage, or if you're not married, every marriage that you see was intended to be this—that which proclaims to you and proclaims to me the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for you. And my prayer is today that every time you think about marriage, every time you see a marriage, you think back to this moment when some preacher explained to you, "This was God's plan in instituting marriage." I pray that you would know that Jesus Christ left heaven one day, came to earth in pursuit of you to make you a part of His bride—to make you a part of His family, His church. He died for you on the cross. He took your sins, incurred the wrath of God on your behalf and He rose from the dead to give you back the life God created you to have. That is what marriage was intended to be.

And the Apostle Paul says, "This is one of the reasons we get married (in Ephesians 5)—for proclamation." And if you're here without Christ today, we proclaim this to you. These marriages, they're not perfect that are represented in this room. None of them are. And sometimes, they abuse the gospel and pervert the gospel, but in its intent in what God desired, He desired these marriages to be a proclamation to you of the good news of Jesus Christ. And our prayer is today, before you walk out of this place, you would repent of your sins and cry out to God to save you. And you would become a disciple of Jesus Christ because of this gospel. We get married for proclamation.

Secondly, we get married for procreation. God said to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...*" And so we have babies, and we raise sons and daughters to reflect the glory of God, to propagate and further the human race the way God intended for it to be. And so we get married for procreation. That one's probably a little bit more familiar to us.

There's a third reason we get married: Get married for partnership. The Bible says men and women in the marriage relationship complement one another. In Genesis 2:18, I think, you know, God said, "The woman is a helper fit for man." Men need help. Right, ladies? I mean, we can't do this. We can't live this life. We can't carry this out. We've got to have some help. And God created you to make us complete, to complement us, to help us in that. The tables are turned in a positive way.

Later in Scripture, in places like Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3, the Bible says that men become a strength and support to the woman as the weaker vessel, both physically and spiritually. And so it works both ways. We complement one another; we become partners with one another; we make one another complete; we get married for partnership.

There's a fourth reason: We get married for pleasure. Yep, it's the one we've been waiting for, isn't it? We are not going to talk a lot about it now. We'll come back to it in just a

minute, but suffice it to say, this one gets brushed under the table a lot, at least in our conversation. And that is that God created sexual relationship in the context of marriage to be fulfilling and satisfying and gratifying with regard to the way He created us, and the way He wired our bodies.

And I'm concerned. I'll just tell you that we've talked recently about conversations we don't have. Maybe some of these messages have prompted conversations for parents and children. But I'm concerned in Christian families that this is one that kind of gets pushed aside. Because you think about it: In our conversations where we're raising our kids, most of our conversations about sex are warnings. They're, you know, "Stay away from this until you get married." And we kind of leave it at that. So, it kind of becomes a "stay away from this" thing.

And then, you know, young couples come into marriage—Christian couples without a lot of conversation, healthy conversation about this; they have no Bible-driven, God-ordained conversation about this—just to figure it all out on their own. One of the conversations we need to have is the exaltation of the sexual relationship in marriage that God wired for gratification and for pleasure to be enjoyed. It ought to be fun! And it ought to be okay to want it for fun. It ought to even be one of the reasons we get married—not the only reason, maybe not the first reason—but it needs to be on the list. This is a package deal.

But then there's one more: We get married for purity. And that's what we find in this text right here. That's where we come in 1 Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul very clearly is saying that marriage is a legitimate means of curbing the temptation to sexual immorality. He says it in very graphic terms here when he talks about the temptation in verse 2, and then being aflame with passion down there in verse 9, and marriage being a way and a reason to go after this relationship in order to curb that—in order to manage that, in order to navigate the temptation to sexual immorality.

So the Apostle Paul says it is a legitimate reason, and that's exactly what God-honoring marriages do: They honor Him, they are sexually gratifying, and they are purity-protecting relationship in a sex-crazed culture in the onslaught with temptation against the way that our bodies are wired. And Paul wants us to know that.

Now, before we leave that, let's make sure we understand the reasons that I used; I used some big terms in making this point. Specifically, "monogamous" and "heterosexual." I want you to notice in the text that marriage as a safeguard to sexual immorality is only introduced as working and being legitimate according to God's definition of marriage, not culture's—not the world's. Do you see it there in verse 2? He says, "*...each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*" He says this in the same sentence of saying, "*But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*"

That is monogamous marriage; this is marriage to only one person. That is heterosexual marriage, which is marriage to a person with the opposite sex. You can argue all of the cultural ramifications, implications, sociological things with regard to polygamy or homosexuality you want to, but I want you to understand this: The world's redefinitions of marriage will never be a safeguard against sexual immorality; they will only foster it.

Maybe more importantly—no, not maybe, certainly more importantly—we need to understand that no redefinition of marriage will ever be a pure representation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, Christians, can I just say to you that that really ought to be our



greatest burden and grievance with regard to the cultural norms, and that is that the gospel is being perverted.

Now, polygamy is not as big a deal in the Western world as it was in that day. Not as big a deal in our day today. But think about it: What does polygamy imply? It implies that Jesus had many brides, not just the church, right?

Homosexuality, which was certainly pervasive in that day and our day especially, is an implication that Jesus was married to Himself or that His wife was married to herself. Both are mockeries and perversions of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we need to understand you could take that list of five reasons to get married that I gave you a moment ago--just take homosexual marriage--and go down the list, and you see as God defines each one of these and as He intended each one of these, homosexual relationships in the context of marriage—any context of marriage for that matter—but in the context of marriage will never fulfill any of those purposes. They always will pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to understand that.

But Paul says, “Monogamous (marriage to one person), heterosexual (marriage to a person of the opposite sex) marriage God has ordained as a means of guarding—not foolproof, but guarding—against sexual immorality.” Now, let’s add to that a second one.

**The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality.**

The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality. The delightful duty of sex—Paul builds on this thing. He adds to it. The marriage relationship in general is a safeguard, yes, so have your own wife; have your own husband. But Paul says there’s more to it than that. And what is more is that God has created this marriage thing—and the way it works and the kinds of things that go along with it—to be a safeguard against sexual immorality. And at the very heart of that is the sexual relationship within the context of marriage.

Here’s what Paul says. Look at it in verse 3: “*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.*” You know what “conjugal rights” means, translated in my English translation? You ready for this? It means a debt that is owed. And it’s obvious, as you go down in the text, that Paul is talking about the debt of sexual relationship with one’s spouse. Married people, you owe a debt to one another, and that debt has to do with the fulfillment of the sexual desires that we have in the context of our marriage relationship.

Now, let’s just be honest: Most debts are not any fun to pay. We celebrate when we get them paid off and they go away, right? But this one is different. Here is a debt that never goes away—the context of the marriage relationship. It’s kind of like making a payment on a debt where your interest rate is so high that you only make the minimum payment, and it just keeps hanging around and getting bigger and bigger. That’s what sexual activity in the context of the marriage relationship is defined as here, only in a positive, good way. This is a debt we never want to go away, a debt we want to be sure to pay.

So here it is. Men, understand this: You owe it to your wife to satisfy her sexual desires. Now, sometimes that means sex. Sometimes, it means cuddling, like Pastor David was talking about last week. Sometimes, it just means casual, mundane conversation. But you owe it to your wife to satisfy the desires of the way that they are wired. Ladies, same thing. You owe a debt to your husbands. You owe a debt to your husbands to satisfy our sexual

desires in the context of marriage. That always means sex. No cuddling, no talking. Just sex. Just kidding! No cards or emails, please.

But the Apostle Paul is talking here about this relationship. This is the terminology that he used. This is the idea: Because we know that paying our debts is important to do—it's serious business—there is a righteousness in that, a spiritual thing. And he uses some terminology here to help us to understand the gravity of this in the marriage relationship. And so, he says, "Pay your debt." And that's where I want to start by just giving us some, you know, thoughts on how we respond to this. Well, we respond by paying our debts. He says here in verse 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.*"

This is what we signed up for. We traded for this when we got married. Men traded hairy backs and weird body noises for soft skin and pretty cool body shapes. And women, when you signed up for this, you signed up for, well, I'm not sure what you were thinking when you traded. But you traded! You traded your body, and there are no take-backs here, okay? So we're in this, and we traded this for an indebtedness to the other one—to trade our bodies to become the possession of a marriage partner for the satisfaction and the gratification of the sexual desires.

I'm not talking about perversion. There are certainly ways that that's perverted in marriage. I'm not talking about all the worldly things here. But at the same time, I want us to understand that this is something God wired us for, and it's something that He intended to honor Him in the marriage relationship. So, husbands and wives, pay your debts.

Pay your debt gladly. The tone of this whole passage suggests that sexual relationship in marriage is something that we ought to pursue, be aggressive in and not apprehensive. We ought to do this proactively and not as something that is pushed to the side. It's something we do as part of the glad submission to one another in the context of the marriage relationship, not something we have regret about or we're reserved about. Pursue. Pay your debt gladly.

Pay your debt spiritually. Well, what about this one? Where is that? Well, it's in a number of places in this text. It's growing out of 1 Corinthians 6; it's directly implied at the very front. You remember what Paul said at the end of 1 Corinthians 6? Go back up there, and he talks about how we're joined to one another in a sexual relationship. And, of course, he's talking here as a guard against sex outside of marriage, and he says, "When we do this, we're joined." And we become one with them. And we even—and this is just a mind-boggling thought—we even bring Christ in us into this relationship. There is something spiritual about the sexual relationship that is different from other things that we pervert and commit sin, and there's something different about this.

So Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6, puts it on the table as a guard against sexual immorality outside of marriage. Certainly, in marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, he brings it in; he wants it to be a guard against perversion of that. But listen. He also wants it to be something that spurs us on to intimacy with the suggestion that, if this is true—if it is true—that there is something unique about the sexual relationship; there is something spiritual that's not necessarily on the same plane of other sins we might commit or activities we might engage in, but there is something spiritual in the way that God created us. When you bring that into the marriage relationship, it means this is something that is positive, it is good, and it ought to be

pursued, and we ought to be intentional about it. This is a spiritual thing, and I don't say that tritely. I don't say that lightly.

And I know some of you men are thinking, "Now, that's some spiritual leadership I can get into right there." Paul says this is the way that God created us. And then he takes it a step further. Do you notice on down there what he talks about in verse 5? He says there are some times that, by agreement for a limited time, you might devote yourself to prayer. So you disengage; you abstain from the sexual relationship. But then he says, "...but then come together again..." Why? "...so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Paul understood that, even in the marriage relationship, there was sexual temptation that's not just a reality there because it's sex, but that Satan is literally, intentionally on the prowl with wanting to draw us as marriage partners into relationships—into the carrying out of sexual activity in dishonoring ways outside of marriage, with someone who is not our marriage partner. Paul says Satan is right there at the door wanting to do this.

So, you carry out your sexual relationship in marriage with an awareness that this is spiritual warfare. It really is. I know that sounds weird. I know it's something that we don't necessarily put in the category of Ephesians 6 and the armor of God and all of that kind of thing, but the Apostle Paul wanted us to acknowledge the fact that Satan is standing at the very door, just waiting for there to be some open door—some way for him to get his foot in the door—to tempt you inside the marital relationship to draw you away from your spouse. And the Apostle Paul says one of the ways we battle that—one of the ways we defend against that—is through the sexual relationship in marriage. So pay your debt spiritually.

Pay your debt frequently. I have to show you this. You have to see it. Paul uses a present tense verb back up there in verse 3 when he says, "*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.*" The verb tense means, "On an ongoing basis, continue to pay your debt." He says, "Keep on paying your debt."

And then, he comes down in verse 5 and says, "Yes, there is a time where you might separate for these spiritual purposes of prayer and seeking God, but come back together quickly. Don't deprive one another." Why? Because this is the norm. This is the norm in the marriage relationship for the purposes that he's talking about right here. So pay your debt frequently.

And then pay your debt passionately. This may be one of the most misunderstood or neglected parts of discussion with regard to Christian marriage. And that's this idea that God intended this for pleasure in the marriage relationship. He intended for it to be satisfying; He intended it to be something that we enjoy and that we have fun with and that we pursue Him with. Do you see there at the end of verse 9? He even describes this flame of passion. But He's mentioning it there, and if you can't control that, get married so that you don't end up trying to, you know, to satisfy this outside of marriage.

But you know what Paul never says? He never says this is supposed to go away when you get in marriage. In fact, the implication is that it ought to grow hotter! It ought to grow into something that burns brighter. It ought to be something that we give ourselves to. We want to do this. We long for this. And we don't talk about that a lot. The Bible talks a lot about it, but we have a tendency to de-emphasize it. Why? Because of the negative things—the negative connotations—that have come along with it in the perversion of the sexual relationship in our world. And if we don't bring a corrective to that with right biblical

teaching—good biblical teaching—then we grow up, our kids grow up, and we enter into marriages at the very best with a partial understanding of what God intends for this—sometimes even thinking we need to downplay it.

Just as 1 Corinthians 6 describes the patriarch, Isaac, as sporting with his wife, those are sports that we as married couples ought to all be involved in. Proverbs 5:18 describes the young man—the young husband—with exhortation: *"Let your fountain be blessed, / and rejoice in the wife of your youth, / a lovely deer, a graceful doe. / Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; / be intoxicated always in her love."* (Proverbs 5:18-19) Be drunk," he says, "with her love." Be consumed with it.

Hebrews 13:5 says that the marriage bed is undefiled before the Lord. Then, you have the book of Song of Solomon that Pastor David referenced. He's done some teaching out of it. Most Bible scholars believe this is why we have the book of Song of Solomon: To describe in poetic terms the sexual relationship between two people in the context of marriage. And when you get into that book and you get behind some of the imagery that is there, this becomes very evident, very graphic and very detailed to spur us on to the pursuit of our passions of sexual desires within the context of marriage. Pay your debt passionately.

**The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality for those to whom it is given.**

Paul adds one more, and I want this to be the one that we conclude with and that brings us to the Lord's Table today—building on the same idea. The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality for those to whom it is given.

I want to be careful here. I want you to know that everything said up to this point is a package deal. I'm not saying some have been given the delightful duty of sex in marriage; other marriage partners haven't been given that. No, that's part of marriage. I'm not saying that some have been given the gift of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. If you're going to get married, that's the way God defines marriage. That is a package deal. But the text is very clear to indicate to us that God has not called everyone to this.

Those of you who are single, I want to bring you into this conversation. Certainly, everything we've said up to this point is for your benefit as well, but let's let the Word of God speak to you specifically. I'm not in any way suggesting God doesn't want you to get married or you may not be headed for that, but just with an understanding that what we're talking about here, whether it be a marriage relationship which sexual activity is carried out, or singleness in which there is a call and the grace of God to restrain and refrain from sexual activity outside of the marriage, these are a gift from God. Both of those.

Notice what Paul says. He says in verse 6 this is a concession, not a command. What's a concession, not a command? All this stuff about marriage and sex in marriage. He wants to be sure that we hear him say, at this point, "I'm not saying that you have to do this. I'm not saying that everyone is called to this." But look at what he says in verse 7: *"I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own..."* What? *"...gift from God, one of one kind and one of another."*

Now, we're going to talk about singleness in a couple weeks, as I said. But I want to make sure that—as singles or as married couples today—that we understand that whatever God has beckoned us to at this particular point, whether it's just for this season or whether it's for a lifetime—and I'm thinking specifically of singleness there—whatever God has called is a

precious gift from Him that He gives with the accompanying grace—with the accompanying grace.

The same word is used here that describes spiritual gifts over in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 that we'll study later. This is a work of the Spirit that is accompanied by the grace that God gives to carry out certain tasks—certain functions—and here Paul uses the word related to singleness and marriage.

And he says to married couples, "Don't ever let yourself settle into a routine, where your marriage relationship is just a relationship to be tolerated or an obligation to be carried out. Don't ever let it become that. See it as the grace of God and the gift of God. Even with its challenges—even with the chinks in your armor—see this as a grace gift from God, that He provides all of the resources to be carried out in a God-honoring way."

And if you're single, whether, again, if it's for a season or whether it's for the long-term, to see your relationship with God as accompanied with the grace to remain single and to refrain from sexual activity. These are grace gifts that God gives, so let me give you these two challenges—one specifically for singles, and then the second one for both of us.

Explore God's grace in your life seriously. Singles, do this. Don't be passive about this. Don't be random or haphazard about this. Let me encourage you: Take this issue of marriage and singleness, both being grace—some to one, the other to others—take that seriously and explore it, pursue it and be intentional about prayer, asking God, "God, what have you done in my life? What are you doing in my life? Which of these gifts are you giving to me?" Bring other godly people who know you into that. Seek their counsel. Take this seriously; don't just navigate life going through there not thinking about it, assuming you're supposed to be married or assuming you're supposed to be single all your life. Explore it.

And then, the second one for all of us: Express thanksgiving to God frequently. Express gratitude to God frequently for the grace gifts that He's given you, whether singleness or marriage. You see, here's the deal: If you and I avoid this issue of thanksgiving, we let down our guard. Some of you've studied thanksgiving in Scripture; you know how powerful it is. And if we leave this out in our worship of God related to our marital situation, whether single or married, I think we drop our guard; we let our guard down with regard to the attack of the enemy.

But if we, every day, will express in worship to our God thanksgiving and gratitude for His assigned grace gift for us—at least, in this season of our life—I believe we marshal one of the most potent defenses that the enemy levies against sexually-wired people that is out there. And God puts this defense there. Even with the bad parts of your marriage (the challenges, the weaknesses that are there), we should be grateful to God for the institution, for the marriage—for Him calling you into it or calling you to stay out of it at least, for this particular time—and that builds a barrier, a defense. Express thanksgiving to God frequently and don't always be wishing for a different lot in life.

You know, there has probably been nothing that has brought more confusion to some Christian's mind about how the sexual relationship represents the gospel than sex. "Okay, Pastor, if this is true and the sexual relationship or the marriage relationship is a picture of the gospel, and we proclaim it, and the Bible says that sexual activity is a good, God-ordained part of that marriage relationship, then how does that fit into the picture of the gospel?" Well, I think the Bible tells us that it speaks to the most intimate union that will ever exist, and that is the intimate union between us and our Lord. This is not in any kind of

perverted or fleshly way, but in a way that causes us to just stand in awe about what God has beckoned us into in Jesus Christ.

You remember when Jesus got Himself in trouble in John 6:53-54 when He said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* I mean, that really messed some people up. There in the chapter, it even says that many of His disciples turned and walked with Him no more because of this teaching.

You say, "What's up with that, Jesus? Is Christianity about cannibalism? How do we eat your flesh and drink your blood?" But the more we go on through Scripture, we understand that Jesus was talking about the union that we have together—the unity, the oneness that is portrayed in a relationship with Christ. That we become one with Him and He with us. He wasn't talking about cannibalism. He was saying, "You partake of me in a way that speaks to the end of the most intimate union that will ever be."

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By Jim Shaddix. © Jim Shaddix & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)