

PART TWO

The Beauty of Intimacy in Marriage • By Dr. David O. Dykes

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

INTRODUCTION

I think our society has done an injustice to our young people and to our entire culture, because they have portrayed sex as being something that is dirty. Something that you don't talk about. Whereas the Bible teaches a healthy view of sex and marriage.

Things change the longer you're married. When you first get married, you know how anxious you are to help your spouse and just how close you are. Somebody gave me a little, uh, funny writing here about how a husband reacts to his wife's cold over seven years of marriage. The first year when she gets a cold, he says, "Sugar dumpling, I'm really worried about my baby girl. You've got a bad sniffle and there's no telling about these things with all the stress going around. I'm putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food's lousy at the hospital, but I'll be bringing your meal in from a restaurant every night. I've already got it arranged with the floor superintendent." That's the first year. The second year of marriage, she gets a cold and he says, "Listen, darling, I don't like the sound of that cough. I've called Dr. Miller. He's going to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl for me." Third year, she gets a cold. He says, "Maybe you better lie down, honey. Nothing like a little rest when you feel lousy. I'll bring you something. Have you got any canned soup? I'll warm it up." The fourth year, she gets a cold. "Now look, dear. Be sensible. After you've fed the kids and you've got the dishes done and the floor finished, why don't you lie down and take it easy?" She gets a cold the fifth year. He says, "Why don't you just take a couple of aspirin?" The sixth year, she gets a cold. He says, "I wish you'd just gargle some salt water or something, instead of sitting around barking like a seal all evening." The seventh year, she gets a cold. He says, "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing. Are you trying to give me pneumonia from all your germs?"

First Corinthians 7:1-9 says:

Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have

authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷ I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

It's apparent from verse one that Paul had received a letter from the church at Corinth, and they had asked him about several important topics. Paul says it is good for a man not to marry, or literally, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. It should be in quotation marks because that is what the church at Corinth wrote to him. And if you don't understand that, you could read verse one and you could say the Bible says it's good for a man not to marry. Or that the Bible says it's good for a man not to touch a woman. But you missed the point. That's what they wrote to Paul. And Paul is just addressing the subject. He says, now “the matter you wrote to me”...let me explain. That’s why verse two doesn't contradict verse one. He says, “You're asking me is it wrong for a man to marry? Is it wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations?” He says, no, because of so much immorality, a man should have a wife. And a wife should have a husband.

I. A CONTROVERSY CONCERNING IMMORALITY (7:1-2)

In Corinth there was a great deal of immorality for a very simple reason—the temple of Aphrodite. One of the ancient wonders of the world was this temple to Aphrodite, who was the goddess of fertility. A meteorite had fallen, and it had somewhat the form of a woman who had many breasts. And they thought it was some goddess that had fallen from the sky. And they built a huge temple over this strange meteorite. And they worshiped it as the goddess Aphrodite. Now the temple was huge and ordinate and beautiful. And part of the worship of Aphrodite involved men having relations with the temple prostitutes. That was how they worshipped because they didn't understand. Pagan ancient man tended to worship that which they couldn't understand. And they couldn't understand how a man and woman could come together and she could become pregnant. And then she could give birth to a child. So because they didn't understand it, they worshiped it. They worshiped the process rather than the God in heaven who instituted the process. And so there was very much immorality.

Now in the church at current, there were two different ideas. Both of them were mistakes. And today in our society, these two thoughts are prevalent, and both of them are wrong.

1. What we do physically doesn't affect us spiritually

Some people in the church who came out of this pagan background said, “Hey, all my adult life I've been going down there to the temple of Aphrodite, participating in sexual relations with these temple prostitutes. But I'm a Christian now, but that's no problem because you see what I do with them is physical. And what I do with God is spiritual.”

And they tried to divide the two and say, “I can do anything I want to physically, as long as spiritually I'm with God.” Paul says that is absolutely wrong. That's why in chapter six, he says that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he's sinning against his body. You cannot separate your body from your spirit and your soul. It's a sin against your body.

Many people have this mindset today. They say, “I can do anything I want to during the week, as long as I go to church on Sunday and I ask God to forgive me. And as long as I love Jesus, I can do anything I want to.” That is a lie from the pit of hell. That'll get you in trouble.

2. Sexual intimacy is wrong, even in marriage

Here's the second mistake that they made. And it's on the other end of the spectrum. This may be hard to believe, but there were some of them who thought that sexual intimacy is wrong, even in marriage. Some of them went to the opposite extreme and believed that it was wrong to have sexual relationships, even with your spouse. That's why they asked that question. Is it good for a man not to touch a woman? They thought, “Hey, we're Christians. And now we're saved. And we're into things of God. And so sexual relations, even with my spouse, that's dirty, that's wrong. I won't do that anymore.” But they were wrong too. I like what Ray Stedman said about the Corinthians. He said you had one group that you can put into the category of the drunks. They were the ones who said you could do anything with your body you want to. They were the drunks.

He said then there was another group who thought that they needed to withdraw from anything physical. He called them the monks because they were aesthetic. They tried to get away from the world. He said, you had the drunks and the monks, and both of them were wrong. And there's an attitude among some people today who think, “Don't talk about sex from the pulpit because that's dirty.” Well, no, you're wrong. The Bible says in Hebrews that the marriage bed, that's a euphemism for the sexual relationship in marriage, is undefiled before God and holy.

Now the Bible teaches one man for one woman. And the Bible has erected this wonderful, beautiful wall of protection around sex within the relationship of marriage. There was a time when sexual immorality was more rampant than it is today. Statistics have shown that monogamy is “in”—but it may be because of fear of AIDS than anything else. I read a book about “how to make love with the same person for the rest of your life.” The author said that many people tried many

things in the seventies and eighties and found that many sexual relationships did not satisfy. They are realizing that finding a new partner is not the solution. She says that people are security oriented. “We all need someone who will always be there to hold our hand. Contrary to widespread beliefs, extra marital affairs do not enhance sexual enjoyment. People are finding that lifelong commitment is more important than short-term affairs.” Now that's what the world is saying. But the Bible has taught all along that sex and the relationship of marriage is God's plan.

II. A CHALLENGE CONCERNING HUSBANDS AND WIVES (7:3-6)

He has a direct challenge to husbands and wives, the way they ought to relate to one another intimately. He says the husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and the wife to her husband. “The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband...the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Paul says this is not the best plan. “I say it as a concession, not as a command,” he says. It's important to understand the true purpose of marriage. What is the background of marriage in the Bible? Corinth was basically a Gentile city, a Greek city, and they had different kinds of marriages that we can't relate to. First of all, there were slave marriages. Did you know that about 50% of the people living in the Roman empire were slaves? But don't picture in your mind some antebellum plantation with slave shacks in the back. No, it was a totally different kind of relationship. These were professional people, technical people, educated people, but because they were citizens in a land that was conquered by Rome, they moved in to serve in the households of some of the people. And they were slaves. They had to have the permission of their master before they could marry. That was one kind of marriage. We can't relate to that today.

Another kind of marriage that they had back in the time of Paul were marriages for business. It was a marriage for convenience when two men would get together and make a business deal. They would arrange the marriage of a son and a daughter for mutual advantage to each other. And we really don't have anything like that.

The third kind of marriage that they had in the time of the Roman empire was a common law marriage. A man and woman would live together exclusively for a certain period of time, and they would be considered married in the eyes of the state.

The fourth kind of marriage was the marriage of the nobility, the marriage of the patrician class. And did you know we get many of our American wedding traditions from these patrician marriages of the Roman empire? The idea of the father escorting the bride comes from the Roman patrician marriage. The idea of the woman wearing a veil over her face comes from the Roman marriages. The

idea of exchanging rings, the reciting of vows and even the concept of a wedding cake all came from these patrician marriages.

So Paul says it's very important for a husband and a wife to relate to each other correctly. It's very important today that we have the right kind of marriages in America, because our nation will fall apart when our families fall apart. The devil is doing everything he can to drive a wedge between husbands and wives. Because when the devil can drive a wedge between husbands and wives, he'll drive a wedge between children and parents, and then he'll drive a wedge between families and then drive a wedge to divide our very nation. The devil is a divider, and God is a uniter.

There are three purposes for intimacy in marriage:

1. For emotional partnership

Remember, you are body, soul, and spirit. In marriage, your soul ought to reach out to your spouse, and you ought to be friends. You ought to love each other. As friends, you ought to be best friends with your mate. That's emotional partnership. The Bible says that God had told Adam that he was to name all the animals. So Adam names Mr. Hippopotamus and notices Mrs. Hippopotamus walks by him next. He names Mr. Crocodile, and he notices there's Mrs. Crocodile coming by. He names Mr. Lizard, and Lady Liz is right behind him. Adam thinks something's wrong with this picture. The Bible says there was not "help meet" for him, according to the King James Version. It literally means there was no helper suitable.

So God said, "I'll do something about that." He put Adam to sleep. He had a spare rib and God turned it into a prime rib when he woke up and there was this beautiful woman. When he woke up and saw her, he was excited. You can't really get the true meaning of it in English. He says, "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." And he's saying, "This is one just like me. Where I am weak, she is strong. Where I am low, she's high. We just fit together well emotionally."

And that's the purpose of intimacy in marriage. You got to have that intimate, emotional relationship. Now guys, have you learned that? I hope you've learned, husbands, that to your wife sexual fulfillment as it is at least as much emotional as it is physical. And if you don't believe it, sometime you just get in knock down, drag out fight with your wife and just make her real mad. And then about 30 minutes later try going in the bedroom, wink at her and give her a big hug. She'll say, "You're crazy, kiddo." You spoiled it because you have injured her emotionally and for her, it's an emotional experience. Intimacy has an emotional value.

2. Physical pleasure

Is that biblical? Well, yes it is because Paul says every man should have his own wife and every wife should have her own husband. Ladies, there ought to be one key and one key only to your body. And you give it to your husband. Husbands, there ought to be one key and one key only to your body. And you give it to your wife. What you're saying is, "You have access to me."

And the Bible says that God has created us that way so that we could find fulfillment and pleasure from our spouse. And so don't withhold sex from your spouse, because the Bible says that's not biblical. Paul Harvey tells the story of the man who goes home one afternoon and looked at his wife. And he gets a couple of aspirin, a glass of water, and walks in there to his wife and says, "Here, honey." She says, "Well, I don't have a headache." He says, "That's all I wanted to hear."

That's exactly what the Bible is saying. Don't deprive each other. The Bible says that that God made man and he made woman, he wanted them to be joined together as one. I like what Mike Mason has written in a wonderful book called *The Mystery of Marriage*. It's about marriage from a Christian perspective. And he says, "What can equal the surprise of finding out that the one thing above all others, which mankind has been most enterprising and sufficient and dragging through the dirt, turns out to be the most innocent thing in the world? Is there any activity in all the world, which an adult man and an adult woman, they engage in together, perhaps apart from worship that is actually more childlike, more clean and pure, more natural and wholesome and unequivocally right than the act of making love? For if worship is the deepest available form of communion with God, then surely sex in marriage is the deepest communion that is possible between human beings and as such is something absolutely essential to our survival."

God intended the man as a husband to have his wife, and the wife to have her husband. And so there must be emotional partnership. There must be physical pleasure, but there's a third purpose for intimacy in marriage. And you may be surprised.

3. Spiritual progress

An intimate relationship can lead to spiritual growth. Look at verse five; this is an interesting verse. And a lot of times people miss it. He names the only time that a husband and a wife should refrain from having sexual relations. Now you understand the value of fasting. That is when you voluntarily deprive yourself of food for a certain period of time. And the whole purpose of fasting is so that you can concentrate on the spiritual purpose. Paul says here that it is sometimes profitable for a husband and a wife to withhold sex for a certain period of time for a spiritual reason. But there are some very tight guidelines he attaches to it. It's got to be mutually consented upon by both of you; the husband and wife must agree to do this. Secondly, it must be for a specific period of time. It cannot be open-ended.

Number three, the purpose of it should always be prayer. That's the whole purpose. You don't do it because you're mad at each other. You don't do it because you're upset. You do it for a spiritual reason. He says so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. And then the fourth guideline is you always come back together at a predetermined time.

And he says in verses five and six that the reason you do this is so that Satan will not have an upper hand on you and won't take control of you. So, it can result in spiritual progress.

Now, as a pastor when I do marriage counseling, I've seen couples struggle for different reasons. When I do counsel a brief temporary specific time of separation for this very reason right here, not always, not in every case, but sometimes it works. If the purpose is spiritual growth, sometimes it helps couples.

III. A CORRECTION CONCERNING SINGLE ADULTS (7:7-9)

There were a lot of single adults in this church at Corinth. Statistics tell us that over 40% of the adult population in America over the age of 18 are single. Paul says, "I wish that all men were as I am [meaning single], but each man has his own gift from God." The "unmarried" literally means those who have never been married. And "the widows" means those who've been married and their spouse died. As far as we know, Paul was single. There's some question about that because Paul claimed to be a Pharisee. And the only way a man could be a Pharisee was if he was married. So some people believe he was married at one time and his spouse had died. But for some reason at this time, there's an indication that he's single.

And he says to the single people, I wish everybody was like me, but if you don't have that gift, don't worry about it. He says two things about being single:

1. Singleness is a gift

It is both a privilege and an ability that God gives to some people. Now, those of us who are married sometimes have a hard time cluing in on that. And we sometimes look at single adults and we feel like we ought to be a matchmaker for them. Find somebody to fix them up. We feel like that they're unnatural if they're single. Well, no, they're not. The Bible says that it is not abnormal to be married. Neither is it abnormal to be single. I had a friend in my former church who was our organist. He was about 30 years old. A nice-looking guy who had a wonderful job. His mother was constantly trying to marry him off. I mean, it almost became a joke. She tried to introduce him to so many single, available ladies in the church. The biggest problem Steve had was his mother and everybody else trying to serve as a matchmaker.

Others said all kinds of weird things about him. They persecuted him really because he was single. And some people said he must be gay because he was not married. But Steve had just not felt that God had led him to the right person to

marry. And Steve firmly believed that it was much better to be unmarried than to be married to the wrong person. So he waited, and I think he was very wise to do that. He understood this verse and said perhaps God had given him the gift of being single. I learned he's getting married this year. He must have found the right girl, but he had the right kind of healthy attitude about it. If God brings him the right one, fine. But if he doesn't, he could be content because singleness is a gift. And some people have that gift. Now, if you have the gift of singleness, you ought to rejoice in it. You ought to be thankful for it. And one way you can tell it is a gift from God is that you have a sense of contentment in your singleness.

If you don't have the gift of being single, don't criticize somebody else that has that gift. If you don't have the gift of being single, then you ought to be asking God to direct you to the right person. It is a gift. He speaks to the unmarried and widows, too when Paul writes to Titus. He addresses this subject and he says to the younger widows, "I counsel you to remarry." And he says that specifically.

2. Singleness is a choice

Paul says in verses 8-9 that if you can't control yourself, you should marry because it is better for you to have that relationship than to burn. He's talking about burning up with passion. If it is a gift, receive it from God. But also it's a choice. If you feel like you cannot control your physical urges and you need to express them, then you should marry. And so Paul is saying, "If you are single, celebrate it, rejoice in it." Paul says he wishes everyone should be like him because he was undivided in devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Sometimes single adults are some of the finest, most fired-up Christians in any church. But the very simple reason is that they can devote themselves more purely and more devotedly to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so to all single adults in the church I say, "I honor you. I pray for you. I respect you. I admire you. If you feel like God wants you to remarry, then you ought to be looking for God's person. But if you feel like God's given you that gift of being single and you choose to be single, we'll support and love you. And we'll minister to you in that."

CONCLUSION

You never have to fear God's word because God's word is always true. And it is true. That always helps us. I heard about a "little brown church in the vale" where they perform a lot of marriages. And after the marriage ceremony, the bride goes out into the vestibule of the church, where there is a rope that goes up into the bell tower. And this rope is attached to a very large, heavy bell that's attached to a lot of other bells. She is instructed to pull the rope to make the music, but the rope is tied to a bell that's too heavy for her to ring alone. So the groom is instructed to pull the rope with her and, together, the two of them can make music. And there's a sign in the vestibule of that church that says, "Just remember in marriage, when the two of

you pull together, there will always be beautiful music.” When the two of you pull together, God will bless you.

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