
God's Direction for Sex - Joy

1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Proverbs 5:15-20

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Introduction

As people of the Book, we must come to grips with the subjects the Bible deals with. While some subjects might appear to awkward to deal with, sometimes they are critical to our Christian life. This has been our concern over this subject of sexuality. It is easy at one level to simply declare the ethics of the Bible on this subject – its clear commands, consequences and condemnations. The church has largely done this in the last 50 years. We basically had an ethics of sexuality, but no Canonical-Biblical Theology of sexuality.

In this Family Enrichment Conference, we have been wrestling through and unpacking a Canonical theology of Sexuality. Here are our aims in doing so.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality.
- To counter the world's influence in this area.

As we have studied and preached, we have come to discover an unexpected treasure. We have found that the ethics, the do's and don'ts of sex are grounded in a Theology. Our marriages and our marital oneness are shadows of a greater spiritual reality. From the beginning, God designed to use our gender, our physical and spiritual oneness in marriage to reflect the image of God and His oneness with His Bride, the church. Marriage and physical union were designed by the wisdom of God to exhibit in the physical world that greater reality. Further, it allows us to experience now what is to come when we will be with the Lord Jesus, albeit in a smaller, dimmer and lesser way.

And we have discovered that this is why God is so full of wrath against sin in this area. Sin in the sexual sphere is first, vertical. It is not only against God, but it is about God. Immorality, sex before marriage, denies the great value of this period when we, the Lord's betrothed are awaiting Him in purity. Adultery, sex with someone not our spouse in marriage, mars, stains and sullies the witness we are to give as well as denying the Lord as having exclusive claim to our love. Homosexuality and lesbianism, sex with someone of the same gender, corrupts the good and perfect design of God to portray His image, His union with His people, through male and female. Pastor Greg will be taking us through God's Word next week, illuminating these terrible sins from this perspective.

When we pick up our Bibles, we hear a very important two themed symphony over sexuality. There is the theme of delight – motivations directed at our wants and desires holding up as desirable and delectable the pleasures of God in all the good gifts that He has given us. Lest we turn these into idols and sin, there is the theme of di-

rection – commands, instructions, expectations with accompanying warnings, counsel, consequences and condemnations.

The story is told of a young Christian couple getting ready to be married. They had waited with Godly purity for the day they would be one. They had planned a simple, but God-honoring and beautiful wedding. The family was all there. The groom and pastor were at the front of the church. The bridesmaids had gone down with the groomsmen. The music was just changing to the wedding march. As the father and the bride waited by the back pew, an elderly aunt reached up, grabbed the bride's hand and pulled her down to whisper in her ear. What words wisdom and joy would she share in this moment of wedding joy? The aunt grated, "Be ready for what is going to happen tonight. Sex is awful and for his sake, pretend like you enjoy it."

Well this aunt needs to hear the Word of God – as probably at this point, so does the bride. What direction does God give for our marital intimacy?

The Directives for our Intimacy

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

As we open to 1 Corinthians 7, we are confronted with a church that had gone seriously awry in many areas. They were immersed in carnality while making public claims to high spirituality. Many things Paul had taught them were being denied, misused, over applied and questioned. This is the case in this chapter as well.

As a result of Paul's teaching on marriage and celibacy, several problems and confusions had emerged. They wrote Paul a letter raising questions and making assertions about a number of these issues. Paul keys in on one quote from that letter and gives us straightforward direction for our sexual intimacy.

Sexual Intimacy is Required

(v.1-2)

Their assertion, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman", is in regards to either asceticism or platonic love (v.1). This is properly in quotes in the ESV – it is something they wrote and it is wrong, as Paul will show. To quote this as though God is saying to us, "Don't touch a woman (v.1) unless you are married to her" is to miss the point entirely. All Paul had taught them was that celibacy was a good thing and not to be despised. This teaching from Paul was probably a response to accusations made against him as an unmarried Apostle. So, he had explained that singleness in the church was to be accepted and honored as long it was used for the sake of the church.

Now, I want to pause here and speak to something. Consider Paul's words to singles and widows (7:8, 32-35; 1 Timothy 5). Singleness whether a lifelong gift from God or a temporary station of life, is not to be used to serve self. It is a time in your life when God expects you to dedicate your singleness for service to God and to His kingdom. Too many young people stay single in order to enjoy life, make money, advance a career and other self-serving agendas. If you are single, you should dedicate the time you have to the Lord and the service of His church.

But the church had evidently misunderstood and misused Paul's teaching. It is also possible that they were trying to respond to the situation around them of persecution, a rising food shortage in the city and increasing difficulty in raising families in the cultural milieu, what Paul calls "the present distress" (v.26). They

also seem to be asserting that a higher level of spirituality was to be gained by abstaining from sex, even in marriage. Not that they were asserting that sex was wrong. Just, as they did over many other things, they had a second level of spirituality that was measured by misusing Paul's teaching. Now, Paul's response to their assertion is that sexual intimacy is required in marriage (v.2). The word "have" here is a euphemism for marital oneness, for sex. In contrast to asceticism or Platonism where a woman is not to be "touched" rather spouses are to be sexually active.

Just to be sure that he is understood, he uses a reflexive possessive indicating that each man is to have sex only with his own wife and each wife with her own husband. You can almost hear him thinking and writing very carefully. He has just spent chapter 6 warning them of the dangers and deadliness of sex outside of marriage. He does not now want to be heard to be contradicting himself. His instruction is emphatic: there must be marital oneness in marriage and only within marriage.

Sexual Intimacy Reduces Temptation (v.2,7)

While grace enables us to resist temptation, grace has also provided for intimacy in marriage as a way to decrease our vulnerability to temptation. This is the great blessing of marriage and it is why life-long singleness with purity is a gift from God. The more sensual the culture in which we live then the more we must pay attention to this principle. God has ordained that spouses help reduce sexual temptation through all the directives given in this paragraph.

This is why we believe and counsel that a spouse who withholds sexual intimacy in marriage may be contributing to their spouse being vulnerable to temptation. When we are dealing with adultery, this is always a question to be raised and, when true, repentance is called for and forgiveness is to be sought.

Sexual Intimacy is a Responsibility (v.3)

Each spouse has a responsibility to meet the needs of the other. We are to regard it as a right. It is not a right to be privately asserted, but one to be personally granted. We must be careful as Christians when we hear this that we do not become aggressive in demanding our right but rather we become assertive in meeting our responsibility.

This means that there will be times when you will give to yourself to your spouse simply for their good, but not as a duty to be endured, but a joyous sacrifice. Remember that we have seen in the Song of Songs, a poise to respond through having thoughts in our hearts that are pleasing to God.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Reciprocal

The man is not given rights superior to the woman. It is clear, then, that mutual initiation and mutual stimulation are to be encouraged. This means that shared, active participation is to be expected. This requires a real surrender of ourselves to our spouses. Thus, there is to be a kind of engagement with one another that is like the Song of Songs.

Now understand this. These kinds of instructions are placed within a loving, caring marriage where one spouse is not going to be taken advantage of by the other. That is the expectation. But, it does make us more vulnerable to being sinned against in marriages where sin and lust rule the hearts of spouses. Thus a man may take advantage, not to make love to his spouse, but merely to satisfy his physical desires without regard for her. Or, a woman may trade her favors for attention and advantage from him. She may use them as a lever to gain what she wants. She may punish or reward “good” behavior from him. These are sins of unloving attitudes and actions in your marriage.

Beloved, if those are the kinds of concerns you have in your marriage when you hear these instructions, and those concerns are well grounded in the actual realities of day-to-day living in your home, then you need to speak to your elder. You need one another and you need Biblical counsel from God’s Word. And if this sounds dangerous to you, then please call us so that we can get involved to give you help and hope from His Word.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Rewarding (v.4)

Now, bear with me as verse 4 and 5a speaks to a very personal aspect of our marital union. *Our aim in sex is to bring our spouse pleasure.* It is not to be primarily self-focused. It is to be mostly about what pleasure you can give, not what you can get. The greatest joy in sexual intimacy is when both spouses are focused on giving pleasure and on helping their mate to know best what gives that pleasure.

This is where we are most vulnerable to our own sin and to the shaping influence of the world. Sinful sex is primarily about your pleasure and satisfaction. It is seeking your pleasure through the use of another, usually seen as an object. It is about what you can get, you can achieve, all about *you*. The Bible takes Philippians 2: 4 sets it as the watch guard over almost every area of life. You are to pursue your joy in the joy of another – to experience the greatest pleasure in bring pleasure to your spouse.

So, many of you need to repent of the sin of self-interest in your marital intimacy. You need, today, to confess your sin to God and to ask forgiveness from your spouse. You need to replace your self-focused thoughts and wants with words and thoughts for your spouse. You must talk and share and become skillful in the way that brings your spouse pleasure while not demanding what your spouse does not enjoy giving nor what is sinful itself.

Sexual Intimacy is to be Regular (v.5)

Finally, Paul becomes very plain and pointed about frequency. While some in Corinth may have begun to abstain from sex in marriage without the consent of their spouse, Paul says this is not right. He expects that marital union will be a regular part of marriage.

He gives several guidelines for abstaining in marriage. Refraining from sex is to be:

- By mutual agreement – both the husband and the wife are to agree to it. There is to be no unilateral abstinence, particularly, when it leads to greater vulnerability to temptation.
- For spiritual exercises – interestingly, Paul sees fasting for prayer as either the only legitimate reason or is an example of legitimate reasons. Now, I know that there may be physical incapacity or illness. But the proverbial “headache” or “hard day at work” may simple be a symptom, not a reason. And it is possible to agree to abstain based on principle – for example, many Christian couples agree to abstain during monthly periods.
- Over a short period of time – Paul says that mutually agreed upon, for spiritual exercise abstinence is to be for a short period or for a set period. In other words, it is for a short and a defined period of time. No open ended agreements are allowed here even if it is mutually agreed upon. I am of the considered and hopefully, Biblical view, that Christians should not have platonic marriages where there is no physical attraction or attention. Long-term abstinence is here forbidden.
- With alertness to temptation – during this time, both spouses are to be alert to the temptations Satan may troll across our abstinence. It is vital that we not be naïve and foolish during these times, but guard our hearts and lives.
- And ended with planned and mutually pleasurable consummation. Paul sort of states the obvious – a Biblical time of abstinence is ended with a Biblical “coming together.”

So, clearly, the Bible is concerned with the problems of sensuality that leads to immorality and adultery. But it is also very concerned with worldly and cultural views that make sexual intimacy in marriage less than what God intended.

Here is the core of God’s direction for marital union; *MAKE YOUR SPOUSE’S JOY AND PLEASURE THE FOCUS OF YOUR LOVING.*

The Delight in our Intimacy

Proverbs 5:15-23

This is an important time to talk about the use of metaphor and euphemisms. This is the way the Bible speaks. It uses metaphors both to hide and heighten what is being discussed. To children, the words of the metaphor appropriately clothe what is being described. But to spiritually minded adults, the words serve to help us see it in our imaginations without grossly, direct description. The Bible’s way in Proverbs and in Canticles (Song of Solomon) gives us direction: we strive for Biblically used metaphors that hide when necessary, and heighten and help at all other times.

And just one more word as we come to this text and to Song of Songs later. We cannot have a standard of words and ways between married couples that would effectively ban this text and Canticles. My exposition of Canticles is not reading all the

text publicly, but will explain it well enough for you who are married to take it home and obey Proverbs, to delight in your spouse.

In the context here, Solomon is warning his son against immorality, fornication and adultery. Since he is writing to a son, it is couched in language that warns against the process of belief and want in a man's heart and the seductive temptations presented by a woman. Thus, it is truth in particulars. We must be able to take the particulars and transfer them. Therefore, young ladies and wives, you must also guard your own hearts and be alert to the forms in which you are tempted and your heart is seduced as well.

And we must also see that in this text we hear the wanderings and warnings of our own sinful adulteries against our great heavenly Betrothed. We must guard against allurements and seductions presented as wise, beautiful, desirable pleasures that steal our hearts and affections from God. Adultery in either realm will take us down a long and destructive path to damnation. Beware, my beloved.

But from verses 1-14 with all its warnings, we pick up with Solomon as he places before us a vision of godly delight in our intimacy.

An Intentional Faithfulness

(v.15-17)

First, we must have a single minded focus on our spouse that excludes all others. Solomon uses the analogy of wells and cisterns which is largely unfamiliar to us. We go to a tap, turn it and get (we hope) clean water. I grew up in Africa where we had a cistern that was filled with water during the rainy season and became a carefully tended and monitored resource during the dry. Solomon was very familiar with this. Taking water from someone else's cistern was a crime. It would be like hooking up your electric and water to your neighbor's meters without their knowledge.

The analogy of water, springs, wells and cisterns as a way of speaking of sex was quite common and familiar to people of Solomon's day and still so in many parts of the world. So Solomon's counsel here is for each of us to have a careful, intentional and focused faithfulness. This kind of godly faithfulness must be committed to and cultivated. It will not happen passively – it is intentional and active on our part. The seductions to turn the gaze of your eyes, your ears, your hearts and even your body to some other source of delight usually come through unguarded means and ways.

This intentional faithfulness also recognizes our exclusive relationship with our spouse and their absolute claim on our heart, mind and body (v.16-17). The very important sense of "I am hers and she is mine" is not just about titled ownership, but is real and practical. It establishes an overarching call for exclusive purity – my body is not my own, it is the Lord's and it is Esther's for her alone.

And this is true in the spiritual realm as well. God owns us, yes as a servant, but also in this same exclusive, for-Him-alone sense. We are God's and God's alone. Give yourself whole and totally to Him in surrender. Resist all other claims on your attention and affection that will woo and win your soul, and then destroy it. And it is the great glory of all this – I am God's and He is mine. I am Esther's

and she is mine – this is a great and glad affirmation in my heart that works its way out in my affections and actions.

An Intoxicating Fullness

(v.18-19)

This exclusive commitment arises from having a single minded desire for our spouse that intoxicates us. This counsel comes to us, not only in the fresh flush of newly married love, but also in the long steady pace of persevering delight through old age. The exhortation here is to sustain in your maturity what filled you in your youth. Take joy in your spouse. Be exhilarated with their love and loving.

Notice how these have the force of commands. Rejoice, be filled with delight, be intoxicated. This means you have a responsibility to love in this way. Is this how you would describe your feelings about your spouse? Is this kind of delight and desire for her how you think? Do you think of your husband in the parallels of these for a lady?

And we also must consider the problem that a false modesty raises in this. Husbands and wives, there must at all times be modest and appropriate behavior in public and among each other as is fitting for the saints. And there should be a shameless and pure openness with our spouses in private. We will see this more clearly in the Song of Songs, but many ladies would be embarrassed by this kind of language and attentiveness from their husbands. If the husband has an imperative to focus on his wife like this, then the wife has an imperative to relish and revel in this attention.

Why, because we are to so love and focus on all the wonderful attributes of our Beloved Redeemer and Ruler who is perfect and beautiful in all His grand holiness and winsome love. Should we not rejoice in God? Should we not be intoxicated by His love? Should we not delight in all the extravagant care and delights He has stored up for us, holy pleasures beyond our imagination at His right hand? And do we struggle with this in our communion with God because we struggle with it in our relationship with our spouses? Are you getting the connections?

One final thing on this note: if you do not have this kind of earthly relationship, either because of your singleness or because of your spouse, that does not prevent you from so glorying in your God. God has shown Himself merciful, gracious and wholly satisfying to hundreds and thousands of singles or lonely spouses who have little experience of this at the human level but who experience it in the grand mystery of their union with Christ.

An Iniquitous Foolishness

(v.20-23)

Solomon moves seamlessly between two opposites. We may be intoxicated with our spouses or we may become intoxicated with someone else. Briefly, we must guard against the intrusion of another in our thoughts, in the object of our desires, lest we become bound in the cords of sin and folly. Sending our hearts down that path to another ensnares us, binds us, destroys us and then leads us astray in many other areas of folly.

But here is the centerpiece of it all. We are loving our spouses before the face of God (v.21). His eyes are on our hearts, listening, weighing, evaluating and responding to words of belief and want that flow through them and then surge outwards in actions and affections.

So MAKE YOUR SPOUSE THE DELIGHT OF YOUR EYES, YOUR BODY, YOUR WHOLE PERSON.

Conclusion

Reflection and Examination

To the unmarried, examine your own heart for wrong beliefs and wants even though you are unmarried. Where do you need to change? Teenagers, you must prize your purity and protect your heart so that when you marry, you will be ready to be pleasing to God.

To the married, there is so much here that lands, maybe somewhat uncomfortably, on our lives. It strikes that we are sucked either into a sort of Christ prudery that makes our marital oneness almost a necessary concession or duty or else into a sort of worldly defined, carnally driven licentiousness where our minds are dominated by a gaze of lust and occasionally our spouses wander into our field of vision. It is our prayer that the plainness of these texts and the pointedness of these messages will pop the shallow facades we hide behind.

Repentance and Change

So, renew your mind to believe what God says and discard unbiblical lies. Many of you need to go through your whole view (I believe that... I do not believe that...) and examine it in the light of Scriptures and then change it.

Turn your desires towards your spouse so that they are the delight of your eyes. Make their joy and pleasure your primary aim. Surrender yourself and give yourself completely. Purpose to give them exclusive place in your heart, in its thoughts, desires and affections. For many of you, this will involve a conscious choice to repent, a distinct decision to turn away from or to turn lovingly toward.

Ask forgiveness for your sinful attitudes and actions that have been exposed to your heart today. Many of you need to go home and over lunch or over the afternoon ask forgiveness for the mess you have made, not just generally, but with the specific bits the Holy Spirit will tenderly and powerfully illuminate.

Response and Commitment

And I call on you (as I do myself) to be a doer of the Word you have heard this morning and not a hearer only, lest you deceive yourself. Cry out to God for His mercy and grace to help in this your time of need. Ask Him for that wisdom He promises to give to those who will humble themselves.

May God help us to glorify him in the grand mystery of our marriages and oneness.