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St. Stephen's Church (Sewickley, PA)

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Series: Pillars of Corinth/Sub-series: Sex and the Body

Title: "1 Cor7: Bracing Candor on Sex"

**1 Corinthians 7:1-11** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. <sup>2</sup> But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. <sup>3</sup> The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup> Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup> I say this by way of concession, not of command. <sup>7</sup> I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. <sup>8</sup> ¶ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. <sup>10</sup> ¶ To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) -- and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

### 1. Intro

- a. The Bible is amazing. It's great as a doorstop. It's great to prominently display on your mantle. It's a great place to keep photos and bookmarks.
- b. No seriously, it's great because it addresses every single thing you can think of in everyday life. And today it addresses something we all think about.
- c. **Disclaimer: this passage is about marriage, celibacy, and sex. In this sermon, I acknowledge the existence of sex. It's not graphic, but it's not G-rated. So if you are concerned about any difficult conversations**
- d. **Moving on:** This passage applies to everyone! Because each one of us is either married or not married.
- e. Everyone is thinking about sex!
  - i. One of my all-time favorite movies is *When Harry Met Sally*.
  - ii. There's a great scene where Harry, played by Billy Crystal, says, "Men and women can never be friends because the sex thing always gets in the way."
  - iii. So the sex thing is always there. For Married AND Single people.
  - iv. NOTE: Language is hard. Don't like the term "single." It sounds like a lonely person—just one. Unmarried is better, but still not great. Defines

it negatively. Celibate is better in some ways, but sounds like it's only about not having sex. A person who is not married is not necessarily single—there is still rich community in the life of an unmarried person, and an unmarried person still has a “sex life.” So the language is problematic. I'm going to use unmarried, but know that we need to find a better word.

**2. Segue:**

**a. 1 Cor 7: What's it about?**

**b. Paul is answering the Corinthians questions about sex: Is it better to get married or be unmarried?**

i. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman.

ii. So: married or not? Which is better?

c. This is the kind of question Christians ask when they think Christianity is about behavior and moralism. Like Youth Group: How far is too far? Can I listen to so-called Non-Christian music?

d. Fails to understand that the Gospel is about FREEDOM!

e. So to this question, Paul can say that it's not either-or but that BOTH ARE GIFTS!

**3. Main Point:**

**a. Both are gifts! (Although both have hard parts): Just want to talk about each.**

**b. If you are called to be Unmarried:**

i. You're not a second-class citizen.

1. Our culture has a hard time with this because of how we worship romance and sex. They put a bad spin on singleness—but it's not true!

a. Look at Disney princess movies or any romantic comedy. The goal is marriage because that's where you become a real person.

- b. Churches have a hard time with this too! Lots of events that assume “normal people” are married people, and can be hard to fit if you’re unmarried.
  - 2. But Paul actually says “I wish that all were as I myself am.”
  - 3. So this is something our culture and our churches need to consider.
  - 4. And if you’re not married, this is something to consider. If you’ve never been married, have you ever asked God, “Am I called to celibacy?” Or do you reject what Paul says about this being a gift? Do you worship at the Altar of marriage, as if it would solve all your problems (Tip: It will actually make them worse!)
- ii. Not being called to marriage is a gift! You have the gift of being undivided. You can pursue ministry, you can pursue a depth and breadth of friendships—in a way that married people can’t.
  - 1. Examples:
    - a. A woman friend who’s a missionary in Rome, previously in Central Asia.
    - b. Anglican Evangelicals: John Stott, Charles Simeon
  - iii. I’m not saying it’s easy—the loneliness and longing are very real. But St. Paul says it’s a gift.
- c. **If you are called to be Married:**
  - i. This passage is so affirming to marriage—there have often been times where it’s seen as somehow less spiritual to be married.
    - 1. Medieval times were like this. Comes from a “Sex is Bad” mentality—and was probably going on in Corinth since Corinth was like Vegas on steroids.
    - 2. And marriage is seen today as this huge killjoy. Almost all sitcoms see marriage as a ball and chain. And it’s a sexless wasteland.

- ii. **But Paul says NO!** He comes from a Jewish worldview—which is wonderful and earthy—and knows that Marriage part of God’s plan in creation. A beautiful thing!
- iii. **What else does he say: Two things**
  - 1. **Sex is Good:** Your desires are real and in light of that, Sex is GOOD! What a great affirmation of the goodness of our desires.
    - a. Martin Luther echoes this. Says that putting men and women next to each other is like putting Fire next to straw. There will be fire.
    - b. No “Sex is dirty” stuff here in this passage.
    - c. But, Paul is so aware of the “temptation to immorality” (Don’t you love that the Bible has no illusions about this for Christians, that they are immune to temptation? The Bible is for real people—who have real desires!)
      - i. That’s why God gives an outlet for it!
      - ii. Verse 9. “For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.”
    - d. So If you’re married, you should be having lots of sex.
      - i. <sup>3</sup> The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.
      - ii. The only reason that Paul gives to take a break is Prayer! Only God is more important!
    - e. If you’re not married but want to have sex, get married!
      - i. <sup>2</sup> “But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”
  - 2. **Level Playing Field: AMAZING in Paul’s context!**
    - a. When married: you belong to each other

- i. <sup>4</sup> For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup> Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.
  - ii. Note: Sex is so important because you have an enemy! Satan wants to bring you down. And Paul knows self-control is often weak.
  - iii. So you belong to each other, mutually, and that is your PROTECTION!
- b. This passage is not a weapon to get what you want!
- i. There are often different levels of desire in a relationship. And what this means is that both people submit.
    - 1. High desire people know their spouse “rules” their body, so they put their desires in check.
    - 2. Low desire people know their spouse “rules” their body, so they give themselves even if they don’t feel like it.
    - 3. It’s give and take, mutual submission.
- c. Notice: Emphasis on giving, not getting.
- d. If you have problems in this area, get counseling!

**4. Final Word:**

**a. Sum up: What have we said: Both are Gifts**

**b. Final Note:**

- i. This is an area where there is lots of failure.
  - 1. There are unmarried people having sex

2. There are unmarried people who have an idolatrous love of the idea of romance and marriage.
  3. There are unmarried people who are self-righteous about their celibacy.
  4. There are married people forcing their desires—either for sex or to never have sex—on the other person.
  5. Or people who use sex as a negotiating tool.
- ii. This is such deeply rooted stuff. And we all fail in some way.
  - iii. And me telling you to do the right thing is not all it takes.
  - iv. Just want to mention two things:**
    - 1. The cross.**
    - 2. The Spirit**
  - v. And now that we are free in that, I pray that God will lead you to either a fuller life as an unmarried person, or if married to a deeply fulfilling sex life.**

5. **Conclusion:** Pray