

Glorify God With Your Body in Singleness and in Marriage [Slide 1] 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

The following email conversation occurred between a customer and the Happy Homes Tech Company. Read joke p. 7 Dog book. Today I want to talk about the Lingerie 7.7 program.

I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 in your Bible. 1 Corinthians is the seventh book in the Bible. We are going to be somewhat out of order in our sermons for the next three to four weeks, skipping around a little in 1 Corinthians, but we will cover all the passages. However, since I have not yet covered 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 I would mention the key message of that passage because our passage today takes that message and applies it to marriage and singleness. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 teaches that your body belongs to God. He paid for it with the death of Jesus and therefore you are to flee all forms of immorality. What we are going to learn in chapter 7 is that not only does your body belong to God, but he gave it to your spouse to have authority over it. The main idea of this passage is that we glorify God with our body by meeting our spouse's sexual needs or by exercising self-control as a single.

[Slide 2] In 1 Corinthians 7:1-6 we learn that spouses are responsible to meet each other's sexual needs. Let's read those verses. Read.

Verse 1 is a little puzzling at first glance. Paul is referring to something the Corinthians wrote him. Apparently they had written to Paul saying that it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman. One of the Bible commentators on 1 Corinthians tells us that the phrase "to touch a woman" was a Greek idiom or common expression. It occurs nine times in ancient documents covering six centuries and it always refers to sexual intercourse.

Now, in chapter 6 Paul covered the topic of sexual immorality or sex outside of marriage, so he is not bringing up the same topic again. Apparently some among the Corinthians thought it was a good thing to abstain from sex even within marriage.

There has always been a strain of thinking within Christendom that sex is somehow shameful or dirty and that you shouldn't do it except as necessary to have kids. That attitude does not come from the Bible. Abstinence certainly is the right and godly thing to do when you are not married, but some had become deceived into thinking that it was somehow the right and noble thing to do after they were married. In fact, in early Christianity the thinking spread that you were more spiritual and pleasing to God if you lived a life of celibacy, rather than marrying. People who were virgins by virtue of Christ's calling were more honored and prestigious than the rest of us who just could not control ourselves and had to get married.

The Corinthians were just odd. They had this range from sexual libertines on the one hand like the man who was sleeping with his stepmother in chapter 5 to another group that was calling for sexual abstinence in marriage. They had error on both sides of the balance beam. In fact the practice of celibacy in marriage may have been why some were going to prostitutes in chapter 6.

[Slide 3] Paul says in verse 2 that because of immoralities let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband. The idiom "to have one's wife" meant "to have sexually." So back then, people used euphemisms to refer to sex just like we do today. Because of the temptation to immorality, which was rife in Corinth, husbands and wives were to meet their sexual needs through their own spouses. I want to point out that the Greek verb "let have" is an imperative or a command. Paul is not giving them permission to have sex in marriage, he is commanding them to have sex in marriage.

In verse 3 Paul says the husband and wife are to fulfill their duty to one another. I don't think "duty" is the best way to translate what he is saying. The Greek word is debt or what is owed. The husband and wife are to render what they owe to their spouse. I can see why, if you don't want to render what is owed, it becomes a duty, but to me the word "owed" emphasizes the idea that because of our marriage vows we owe something to our spouse. We owe it to our spouse to fulfill their sexual needs, their desire for tenderness and their need for togetherness. I recall that I made a vow to love and to cherish her until death do us part and that vow includes what happens in the marriage bed.

Invariably one partner has a greater need or desire for sex than the other. This means that sex is not just a matter of gaining pleasure, it becomes a matter of serving and meeting the needs of my spouse. It becomes another arena in which I live out what I vowed to God and to my spouse in the company of witnesses. This should be an arena not of control or manipulation, but of service. Both partners need to be willing to compromise and to serve the other.

[Slide 4] Then Paul brings out one of the most revolutionary understandings of the body in marriage. He says the husband has authority over the woman's body and the wife has authority over the husband's body. How did this happen? In chapter 6 we learned that God has authority over our bodies not only because he created us but also because Jesus paid a great price to redeem us. We don't have ultimate authority over our body, God does. God owns us.

If the wife has authority over her husband's body the only way she could have that authority is because God gave it to her and if the husband has authority over the wife's body, the only way he could have that authority is because God gave it to him. One of the ways we glorify God with our bodies is by using our bodies to serve and bless our spouse. It is as if God said at the moment of your vows, "Now your body is under her authority to bless and meet her needs and her body is under your authority to bless and meet your needs." I like how Joni Erickson Tada explained this point. Read Joni quote.

Each of us should be invested in the health and well-being of our spouse's body because their body belongs to us. It is interesting in the abortion debate that the pro-choice people say that even in the case of a married couple, it is the woman who should make the decision on whether to keep the child because she has a "right" to her body. They have it completely wrong. The husband has authority over the wife's body. He is the one who ultimately has the authority to decide what to do in that case.

On the other hand, you husbands who don't go to the doctor even though your wife keeps telling you to get a check-up, you're sinning. She has authority over your body. If she tells you to go see a doctor, you go or you are disobeying God who gave her authority over your body.

Imagine how different things would look if we seriously practiced this truth. "Hey, I don't want you stuffing my body with candy and soft drinks. You need to start exercising my body and getting it in better shape. When was the last time you took my body to go see the dentist?"

Of course, Paul's comments about authority over the other person's body are made primarily in the context of the marital relationship so the comments might be more like: "I think I would rather see lingerie on my body and not flannel." "You need to shower and clean your body first." "Have my body touch here." "Have my body rub here." And that's all I need to say on that point.

In verse 5 Paul warns the husband and wife to stop defrauding one another. This is a present tense command with a negative which means they were defrauding one another and he tells them to stop it. So, again, he is addressing some in the church who thought abstinence in marriage was some kind of spiritual achievement. He says, "Stop it. Get that nonsense out of your head.

All you are doing is giving Satan an opportunity to tempt you to sin. Your translation probably has the word “deprive” but that is too soft a meaning. The Greek word actually means “to steal or rob” someone of something that belongs to them. Marital intimacy rightfully belongs to each spouse as part of their marriage covenant. To refuse is to rob.

I’m not going to address the topic of frequency because that is a couple’s decision, but Paul warns in verse 5 that if a spouse’s sexual needs are not being met, they eventually become a target for Satan’s temptation. I would never justify or excuse adultery or prostitution; but a spouse who consistently refuses to meet their partner’s sexual need should not be surprised if their spouse begins to look for love in all the wrong places.

Paul does make an exception to what he said. You can practice abstinence for a short time for the purpose of prayer. I think what Paul is referring to is separating from your spouse for a period of time such as going to a monastery or some kind of retreat where you have no contact. He permits that exception for a short period of prayer, if mutually agreed to by both partners. Paul is quick to note that he is not commanding them to do this kind of separation.

I’ll close this section of Scripture with advice from a pastor. Read Hybels quote.

The issue of sexual self-discipline affects all adults both married and single, so now Paul turns his attention to those who are single. He teaches that singleness is a good state if God has gifted you with self-control. Let’s read verses 7-9. Read.

[Slide 5] In verse 7 Paul wishes that all men were like him, that is single and with God’s gifting or anointing to be single. Paul makes clear that singleness is a good thing, an honorable condition, a truth that we in the church often miss. He goes on in verse 8 to say to the unmarried and widows that it is a good thing for them to remain in their single condition., but if they lack self-discipline it is better for them to marry rather than to burn with sexual desire and passion and engage in prostitution or immorality.

By way of application, sometimes when a couple is real young the parents may try to get them to delay getting married because of their age. That may not be a good idea if they are feeling a lot of sexual desire and attraction. I am a big proponent of long courtships and short engagements. Once you make the internal decision to commit all of yourself to some other person, I think the drive to consummate that commitment becomes ever stronger. Take all the time you need to decide whether to marry the person, but once decided, move toward marriage quickly.

I want to conclude with a number of points about singleness. Marriage is certainly a fine gift from God. It illustrates the relationship between Christ and the church. God designed marriage to meet the need for companionship.

[Slide 6] However, God enables and empowers everyone for singleness until they get married, because no one is born married. Everyone lives as a single for some time, but not everyone gets married. Singleness is not a holding pattern until you get married and live the real life. No, singleness is a divine calling for everyone, to be used for God’s glory until or if he calls you to marriage. Do you realize that Christianity was established primarily by two single men: Jesus and Paul? Our faith rests disproportionately on the basis of the efforts of Singles.

Before I came here, I led a singles ministry in a large church in New Jersey. Precisely because they were single, we were able to accomplish all sorts of things, inner city missions, overseas missions, service projects, etc. because singles have resources of time and energy that married people don’t have.

[Slide 7] So I want to give some counsel to the married today in regards to singles. First, don’t feel sorry for singles because they are single. What, you think you’re smarter than God? If

God has not led them into marriage up to this point, it is because in his wisdom and goodness they are already on the best path. Marriage does not necessarily make your life better. Being married to the wrong person is infinitely worse than being single. Singleness brings with it a number of strategic advantages for the person as well as for the kingdom of God. Singleness is not a second class calling. It is a first class calling until or if God decides otherwise.

[Slide 8] Second, don't ever ask a single person why they are not married. That's a seriously dumb question. How is someone going to answer that question when the only one who has the answer to that question is God? Even asking the question implies that the person is somehow in an inferior position from which they need to be rescued. When I was single I was never in a big hurry to get married because I always thought, "God I would rather you spend as much time as you need to refine the person I'll marry so I don't have that much work to do when I meet her." I believe Julie was praying the same thing.

[Slide 9] When you are in a public gathering like our church meals or ABF classrooms, or whatever, set out an odd number of chairs. It is a subtle thing, but if a single person consistently walks into an area where there are always chairs in pairs, it subtly sends the message that we expect pairs. Send the message that we expect and want singles.

[Slide 10] Don't play matchmaker. That is so uncomfortable. Do invite singles into your life groups, your homes, and your retreats.

[Slide 11] Over time I have tried to do little things that highlight singles such as asking singles or widows to light the Advent Candles. Put singles in leadership positions. Challenge them to do great things for God because in many ways they are better positioned to do exactly that. That is why Paul said he wished everyone was as he was. Paul could travel. He could get himself jailed or beaten or chased from town to town and there was no wife or children he had to protect or take care of. He could be all in and totally devote himself to serving God because he was unencumbered with family responsibilities. Don't minimize singleness.

The theme running through this passage is that we glorify God with our body whether married or single. If single we glorify God by using our body to serve him and by not giving into sexual immorality and if we can't do that, we get married. If married we glorify God by meeting our spouse's needs, especially their sexual needs. So, go apply God's word. Pray.