

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 - The Marriage Bed

So here's one of the things I love about the Bible: God has given us a comprehensive guide for how we as his redeemed people are to live our lives to his glory. God didn't just drop hints or give us nice stories. He gives us a complete understanding of how we are to live our lives all the way down to what pleases him in the marriage bed.

Now, this might be a little embarrassing to some. Maybe we'd rather not talk about it. But God is not embarrassed about this. He's not shy. He wants every aspect of our lives devoted to him including the most intimate aspects.

I mean, have you ever wondered why God instituted circumcision in the OT? Think about this: He created every inch of our bodies - foreskin included - and then he tells people, "That perfectly good piece of skin I made, well if you're following me chop it off." Such a weird thing. Why'd he do that? Most people believe God did that because his point is "Every part of your life and your body is mine, including the very last little bit of the most intimate and sensitive part of your body." If you don't cut that off, I'll cut you off. If you don't dedicate that to me, I won't bless you.

So when we come to issues of sexual intimacy we need to understand God has a plan for what brings him glory and honor. And this is a big deal because it's avoided so often and misused so often.

And again I want to emphasize that it is extremely important for us as followers of Jesus to have comprehensive understanding about what the Bible says concerning sex. God has given intimacy to humanity to be enjoyed for his glory as long as it's done so in the proper setting, which is marriage. If we only play the note about sexual immorality is bad or only play the note that homosexuality is bad but miss the whole proverbial keyboard of teaching about this issue, we are severely hindering our witness. And we are limiting our worship.

When Jesus saved us and sanctified us, the redemption he had in mind also included our understanding of how the marriage bed is to work. For us who are married, we need to be reminded of this. For those of you who want to be married one day you need to have a proper perspective as well. Again, I'm going to keep this PG. I think in good conscience I could say all that I'm going to say to anyone here.

Now, just to give you an idea about how crazy the Corinthian church was concerning the issue of sexual immorality, remember in chapter 5 there was the guy sleeping with his step mom and many, if not most, in the church were applauding this. Then you've got the people going to prostitutes down at the temple. Then, apparently, you had married people who were refusing to be intimate with each other. You had people betrothed (engaged) to each other committing sexual immorality and you had widows and widowers wondering if they could remarry because they were burning with passion.

This was all in the same church - or, realistically multiple churches - in Corinth. Christians have always been sketchy in our understanding of sexual ethics. The confusion we see today by those who claim to be Christian is nothing new. It's been going on a long, long time.

And especially since most people will be married, it's important for us to know the role of intimacy inside of marriage. Now, for most guys they're probably thinking "I know the role! I'm good to go! This is my life verse." Well, we need to slow down a little and unpack this for everyone's benefit.

This section is basically the start of the Q and A portion of the letter. Remember the first 6 chapters were all addressing issues going on in Corinth that the Corinthians conveniently forgot to tell Paul about but that he had heard through other people. This section is addressing specific issues that the Corinthian church had written Paul about.

And the first issue he wants to address - which connects to the last chapter - is this issue of sexual relations.

**Read 1**

So some of you have not to touch a woman, or not to touch his wife. It seems as though there were some in Corinth who believed that when you become a Christian, sexual intimacy is no longer an option. They would say that following Jesus and having sexual intimacy with your spouse is not allowed.

This, by the way, is basically the position that the Roman Catholic Church takes concerning its priests. Whether official, or simply functional, they would say that a person in ministry cannot be faithful to the church while being married.

This is completely contrary to all of Scripture. What we're going to see here is that intimacy within marriage is not just optional or a concession. Intimacy within marriage is a good and healthy thing that pleases the Lord because it's what he designed us to do.

So what did God design intimacy for? Why have sex inside of marriage?

1) To curb sexual immorality. Read 1-2

So one reason - not the primary reason - but one reason for intimacy in marriage is to curb sexual immorality.

In the original language, man and husband are the same word. And woman and wife are the same word. So sometimes things can get tricky because the translators need to make an interpretation for us.

For instance, one translation could say each man should have his own woman, which could sound like what he's saying is that every individual is required to get married. I don't think that's the case.

Or it could be "each husband should have his own wife and each wife her own husband" meaning that the married couple should be pursuing intimacy with each other in the context of marriage. I think that's the correct interpretation: each husband should have his own wife, meaning the married couple should be seeking intimacy with one another.

He doesn't mean that every single person should get married, because he'll say that he'd rather everyone be single just like he is in a little bit.

He's countering the false argument that somehow Christians should never have sexual fulfillment, not even with their own spouses. That's just not true.

Here's the amazing thing: sexual intimacy inside of the marital union actually has spiritual benefits. There is a sanctifying effect that intimacy has for your spouse, and vice versa. Intimacy can actually help keep your spouse from being tempted to sexual immorality.

**Notice Vs. 5. Read**

We'll unpack this more, but for a couple who are able to have intimacy and one or both refuse to do so there is the very real danger for Satan to wreak havoc in their marriage. I'll talk about some exceptions in a while.

But intimacy in marriage has a sanctifying effect of curbing temptation. Sexual temptation is strong. There are only a small percentage of people who truly don't face temptation and who have what Paul will call the gift of singleness. For most people there is a desire for intimacy that is only to be fulfilled in marriage. And temptations add fuel to that fire.

You can drive through Spokane and see billboards and coffee shops and storefronts that are outlets for some kind of sexual immorality. People are jogging, or swimming, or whatever. Temptation is strong. And it always has been strong.

Did you know in late 1700s England, some estimates say that almost 1/4 of the women in the country were involved in some kind of prostitution? You literally couldn't walk in downtown London without being physically assaulted by women. Usually the prostitutes wanted to get close to men just to pickpocket their money. This has always been rampant.

That was true in ancient Corinth and Rome as well. This was everywhere. The solution is not to give in to the temptation because “well, it’s just a body.” No, the God-ordained solution is that a husband and wife can serve one another through intimacy and help curb temptation.

Now, let me say something about that, because it’s important. Especially to you young, unmarried people: Just because you get married doesn’t mean sexual temptation will vanish. And just because you can be intimate doesn’t mean you won’t ever struggle. There’s a misconception that young people often have that when they get married their pornography problem will finally go away or they won’t look lustfully at men anymore or whatever. That’s not true.

The sexual union just minimizes temptation. It doesn’t remove it completely. We put granola bars in the car in case we’re out longer than we planned and need a snack before we get home. Those granola bars in the car just keep me from pulling over in a hungry rage pounding down a Big Mac. In the same way, being intimate doesn’t remove all temptation, but it does curb it.

The other thing I want to say is that your spouse is not responsible for your sexual sin. “If only we were intimate more I wouldn’t sin”... no, you are responsible for your own sin. Maybe the reason you’re not intimate more is because of your sin. You know the difference between the desire to eat and the desire to be intimate? You will die without food. You won’t die without intimacy. At the end of the day, every person is responsible for their own sin.

## 2) God designed sexual intimacy as a mutual giving. Read 3-4

So what we find out is that the most intimate act between a man and his wife is all about giving.

The problem with all sexual *immorality* is that ultimately it is about taking. It’s taking what is not ours to have. We take sexual gratification from images or people or sinful thoughts. Sexual immorality is all about us. What can we get, what can we do, who can give us pleasure. Me, me, me.

That’s not actually God’s design at all. Intimacy in Christian marriage is not about taking anything from your spouse. It’s not about what can I get out of this?

It’s very much about how can I serve my spouse’s desires? In **Vs. 3** does the husband give or take? He gives. Does the wife give or take? She gives.

See, in Christ, our entire lives become completely contrary to the world. They curse us, we bless. They laugh at sin, we mourn over sin. They want vengeance, we show mercy. They love pride, Jesus loves meekness. The Kingdom of Jesus is completely contrary to that of the world, and intimacy is no different.

The world says take. Take all you want, take whoever you want. Manipulate and coerce. View the opposite sex as someone simply for your pleasure. College campuses, I kid you not, are trying to come up with a set of rules about what constitutes proper consent for a sexual relationship. What verbal boxes and physical cues does everyone need to check so you can take what you want? And the list gets longer and longer and more complicated and more complicated.

The Bible has a very simple solution for this: There’s one thing that you can do that is universal consent for the person you’re with: marry them. **And** even that isn’t so you can take, it’s so you can give.

Jesus says true God-honoring intimacy isn’t about taking. It’s about giving. Giving the most intimate aspect of who you are - your naked, imperfect, God-designed body - as a gift to your spouse.

And the beautiful thing is that when you have a husband and wife who both have the same goal of mutual giving, it’s an absolutely God-honoring thing.

Now, before I go further, let me just say that sexual intimacy for many people can be very, very difficult. A good 40% of my pre marital discussion on intimacy is basically simmer down, kids - it ain’t like what you see in the movies. Just because it’s legal doesn’t mean things are easy.

- Some people deal with past abuse and previous relationships that make intimacy difficult. Because they're thinking about how they've been hurt, not how they get pleasure.
- Others have medical issues that make intimacy difficult or impossible. Medication or surgeries or mass trauma all can render intimacy, at least intercourse, non-existent.
- For some people intimacy is physically painful.
- Some people are unable to have children and intimacy just reminds them of the joy of childbirth that will never come.
- For others who have difficult marriages for whatever reason, intimacy might be frustrating or non-existent.
- Maybe you're pregnant, or just had a baby - those are complications.
- For some age catches up to them - plumbing just doesn't work for some folks after a certain age.

You remember when God told Abram and Sarah that she would get pregnant she laughed because she was 90 and Abraham was 100. She says, "After I am wore out and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" The birth of Isaac was a double miracle: Sarah was barren, God fixed that. Then she was old, and God superseded that too.

We live in a world affected in many ways by sin. All of these issues affect every single couple at some time.

And at the same time Hollywood wants to tell us you can have perfect pleasure with anyone off the street. R.C. Sproul says what they sell is "super sex" - the ultimate experience with a complete stranger.

It just doesn't work that way. But for believers, we don't need it to work that way. Because intimacy isn't about taking. It's not about getting some thing out of my spouse. It's about giving ourselves in every way to serve them in what they want.

"But, Jason. doesn't **Vs. 4** say her body is mine and mine is hers?" Doesn't that mean I get to do what I want?

#### **Read 4**

Answer: no. "Honey, I have authority over your body so we're going to be intimate." "Well, I have authority over your body, and your body will be sleeping on the couch."

Even the God-given authority you have over your spouse's body - and you have authority over your spouse's body - is not for your own advantage but to serve them.

So when my wife starts dropping hints about going to the gym more often at Christmas time because my cookie intake goes up 900% I realize she gently expressing how I can serve her. She's not demanding or nagging, she's saying "Your body is mine and I'd it to have less cookies and more jogging."

It's not a demanding thing. It's knowing my body is hers, how would she want me to serve her with my body? Intimacy is a mutual giving.

Now, the next point is about to sound completely contrary to what I just said, so hold on to your hats. Intimacy is about giving but...

#### 3) God designed intimacy to satisfy our desires. **Read 3**

So almost every translation renders this sentence in a different way and rightly so.

Literally the original says "the husband should give to his wife what is owed. And the wife should give to her husband what is owed." And the reason most translations smooth that way out is because that can sound cold and transactional, rather than warm and tender and loving.

NIV: Fulfill marital duty

ESV: give conjugal rights

NASB: husband must fulfill his duty

NLT: fulfill his wife's sexual needs

But what he's getting at is that when people get married they are signing on to meet one another's sexual desires. And within the covenant of marriage that's a right each spouse has.

God did not design marriage for celibacy. The saying of the Corinthians "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman" is not true in marriage. It is good and it is the right of a spouse to seek sexual satisfaction with their spouse.

**Look** back at **Prov. 5** for a minute. This is the classic chapter in Proverbs on avoiding the sexually immoral woman. One way you do that, Solomon says, is to delight in your own wife. He's saying the same thing Paul is saying.

Now, there's some odd imagery for us 21st century people. Just know that back in the day there was no indoor plumbing, no running water. If you were mega rich you have a cistern, an underground cave that stored water or you had your own well. But most people had to go to the community well or community river or cistern. Solomon says being married is the intimacy equivalent to having indoor plumbing. **Read 15-17**

He's saying, your wife is for your own enjoyment. It's like having indoor plumbing. Why would you take your water and go cast it into the street? You're wife is for you to drink of like water - go drink! **Read 18-23**

Rejoice in the wife of your youth. She ain't always going to look like she did when you first got married. And new flash: neither are you. But that one you married then is your wife now.

I know it's hard to imagine but I was more attractive when I was 21 than 39. Where are all these wrinkles coming from? What is that spot on my head? We get old and break down. But we rejoice in the same person we married all those years ago. We delight in their body - specific anatomy - like we did then. We are intoxicated by them.

Not by some airbrushed non-existent supermodel. Not by some buff Arnold looking Men's Health guy. But by our spouse. God commands us to delight, to rejoice.

In **Genesis 26:8** King Abimelech finds out that Isaac was lying about Rebekah being his wife because he caught them laughing together. Laughing, is a euphemism so touching each other intimately. They're playing in only a way a husband and wife should. But I like that word laughing - it's fun and joyful. And laughing together is something that can be difficult.

Now, when I've got 2 people who want to be married to each other and I tell them this is hard they look at me like I'm crazy. Why would anyone ever have to be told they need to please their spouse? Or find pleasure in their spouse.

Ah, kids. Because they've never gone through long season of marriage where nothing you say comes out right and you're wondering if you made a massive mistake and you don't want to be in the same house as this person, let alone the same bedroom. They've never had a spouse who has chronic bad breath or smells or snores or is always too tired or occupied with their phone to pay attention to them.

They've never had a spouse who has plumbing issues and won't go see a doctor to get it fixed. They've never had a spouse who looks at porn all the time and has no desire to be with someone who isn't perfectly airbrushed. Or who has been injured or a myriad of other situations where you don't feel like being anywhere near your spouse.

See, in marriage, serving each other in the bedroom usually begins way, way before that. It begins in how you treat each other through the day, through the year. It begins with how you prioritize your schedule. How you take care of your body. Remember your body is the Lord's body - it's his temple. But it's also your wife's body. If you're a married Christian your body and your life belong to everyone but you.

And here you are called to satisfy your spouse in this way.

I've known husbands who have difficulty with intimacy because their job is too stressful. Or they're incredibly unfit. Or their schedule rarely, if ever, allows them to be home at a time when intimacy is possible.

Or wives who ignore their husbands, or won't ever get off of social media, or harbor bitterness for years and years rather than work through things.

There are going to be times, even in the best of marriages, where one or the other person is not up for intimacy. They're tired or have a headache or whatever and, in love, they serve their spouse anyway. Not begrudgingly, but knowing this is part of serving each other in marriage.

But physical intimacy is really just an overflow of emotional and relational intimacy that we need to be pursuing all the time anyway.

I had a professor in seminary who preached a sermon on **Song of Solomon 2:15**: Catch the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

And the idea is that it's little things in our marriage - like little foxes that can ruin a beautiful vineyard - can spoil intimacy. Little habits that drive us nuts. Jabbing words, bitter comments, inconsiderate behavior. Laziness, pride. Not taking out the garbage **and** putting in a new bag. We laugh, but you add up a few irritations throughout the day along with chronic problems that aren't dealt with and foxes will destroy the vineyard.

Many times the solution is to catch those things and kill those things so that we can find pleasure in our spouse.

**Look** back at **1 Cor. 7**. I mentioned that there are some legitimate considerations we have to consider that would hinder intimacy. For the most part it should be normal. Paul gives us one exception.

#### 4) God gives an exception for mutual prayer. Read 5

So there's a command here: don't deprive each other. Literally, the Greek word is don't rob each other. Don't steal. Don't hold out on your spouse. That's not what God designed. There is an exception, but it's a very, very specific exception:

1) mutual agreement 2) short time 3) to pray 4) feast

So this is a type of intimacy fasting that can happen in in marriage. But notice that both the man and the wife have to agree. If the wife isn't on board, there's no fasting. The word for agreement is where we get our word symphony - this needs to be worked out together.

It also needs to be for a limited time. A short season. Not weeks or months. Limited time.

And for one specific purpose: for prayer. This is the husband and wife engaging in intense prayer together for a very short season. And then returning together.

And notice, even this exception is loose. It's not a command that you have to fast from intimacy. **Read 5**

He's saying, here's maybe, maybe the only reason to go without for a while. The problem is that usually when people deprive each other it's not mutual, it's not short and it's not for purpose of prayer. They weaponize intimacy against God's design.

And here's the bad thing about that. **Read 5**

If spouses are depriving each other Satan comes in. One way Satan trashes marriages is through deprivation of the marriage bed.

You guys know pastor Barry from CPC. He said that intimacy is sort of a thermometer of the entire marriage. If intimacy is going well, usually many other things in the marriage are going well. If intimacy is bad or non-existent, there's usually a lot of other issues going on too because Satan now has an in.

He knows that there is no defense against temptation and he's going to exploit that. Here we see the clearest link between intimacy in marriage and sanctification. Serving our spouse in this way is a way to protect them from Satanic temptation is a good thing to do.

As crazy as it sounds, God gave sex in marriage to crush Satan and to bring glory to himself. Worship accordingly.

**Pray**