

# The Divine Antidote to Sexual Impurity #5

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Now let us turn together in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 7. I shall read the first seven verses of this chapter of God's Word.

"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that."

The moral face of American society looks more and more like the face of the first century Greco-Roman world, the world into which the Gospel came with life-transforming power in the early days of the Christian church. There was a time in my own brief lifetime when such passages as Romans 1:18-32 seemed like a description of a society long ago and far away. But now it is as current as tomorrow's newspaper and as current and relevant as the next TV sitcom that becomes the rage of the TV-watching set. As a result of this parallelism in moral degeneracy, there are many portions of the New Testament that take on an entirely new relevance, especially portions in those letters (portions we call epistles) written by the apostles or the apostolic-approved penmen helping to guide new believers in the midst of a climate of extensive moral degeneracy, epistles written to ground them in their faith and teach them how to live out the life-transforming power of the Gospel in the midst of such decadent societies. And so we come tonight to the fifth message in a series in which I've been attempting to open up some of these relevant Biblical passages and perspectives dealing with the subject the divine antidote to sexual impurity or, to state it positively, a divine prescription for sexual purity.

In the first three messages, I set before you four propositions that form the foundation for a Biblical perspective on this issue. In the next message, last Lord's Day evening, we looked at 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, a passage in which the central contribution is this: as a Christian, a Biblical understanding of my body is essential to sexual purity. Now, those four foundational propositions and the exposition of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 are all on tape available in the lending library of the Trinity Church, or you may purchase from the Trinity Pulpit. I'm not saying a thing by way of review. I simply will not have time to do that and open up the passage that I wish to address in your

hearing tonight, that passage being 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. If I were asked to give in one sentence what the distilled essence of this passage is, I would answer in this way: ordinarily, a Godly marriage in which a husband and wife are fulfilling their Biblically defined sexual responsibilities and privileges is a primary means for the avoidance of sexual impurity.

Now, my method in opening up the passage for tonight will be similar to the method I used last week. We're going to work down through the verses consecutively. And I've chosen this method because the more I've studied the passage, the more I became convinced that, as the Apostle Paul took up this subject in response to a concern raised by the Corinthians, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was led to address it in such a way that each statement seems to flower into the next and into the next, and that the best way to grasp the mind of the Spirit of God in the passage is to work one's way through it as it stands before us in the text itself. So then, we come to consider this ordinary and oftentimes a primary means in the avoidance of sexual impurity: a Godly marriage conducted within the framework of Biblical directives for mutual sexual privileges and responsibilities.

Verse 1: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me [whether this was the first concern in their communication with Paul, or whether he picked it out of a list and inverted the order, we do not know. But it obviously was a question or questions concerning the whole matter we are addressing]: It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

If we take this statement in the light of the entire context, here's the heart of what Paul is saying: under certain circumstances (yet to be mentioned), celibacy is a good thing, and in some cases, a desired option. Now the key word in the passage is the word "touch" or the phrase "touch a woman." This is a euphemism for sexual relations. In Genesis 20:4 and 6, if we were reading this passage in the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, we would find this very word used in both of these verses:

"But Abimelech had not come near her [he had not touched Sarah, that is, he had not had sexual relations with her]: and he said, LORD, wilt Thou slay also a righteous nation? ...And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her"

You find a similar usage in Proverbs 6:29. It is a euphemism; this is a term which is obvious to all who hear it. And it is used not because Paul was a prude. As he further unfolds the teaching, it is clear he is not prudish. He is very earthy; he is very frank and straightforward. But you see, Paul understood that there's no virtue in being prude. And euphemisms are the dress of a civil society. If you want to know how much we have lost common civility, just see how there are so few euphemisms left in our language. The "in thing" is to be crude under the guise of being up front and telling it like it is. No one can read this passage and misunderstand what Paul means. He's not saying anything about men shaking hands with women. If he is, we ought to have absolutely no physical contact. But that's not what he's saying. It is a euphemism for sexual relations. And what he is saying is this: it is good for a man (all other things being equal under circumstances that he will yet mention in this chapter) to be celibate, and in some cases, it is a desired option.

Now notice, the text does not say it is better or best. There are Greek words for "better"--the word of comparison. There are Greek words for "best"--the superlatives. Paul uses none of them. He simply says if someone is in a celibate state and remains in that state, it is a good, not an evil state. It is not morally superior; it is not spiritually advanced. That is the nonsense of Roman aestheticism and of any other kind of aestheticism. Paul may have been quoting a phrase that had become common at Corinth in reaction against all of the moral degeneracy. I can't prove this, but there are a number of commentators who feel there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Paul may be taking one of their own phrases the same way he did in chapter 6. ("All things are lawful.") He may have picked up something that had a familiar ring: "It's good for a man not to touch a woman." All he is saying is that under certain circumstances yet to be mentioned, celibacy is a good thing and in some cases a desired option.

Now what are the circumstances yet to be mentioned? The first is mentioned in verse 7: "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." A man is to remain celibate, and it will be a good thing if he is given the special gift of celibacy. Without such a gift, he will have sexual burning, not merely feel (as Calvin said, "sexual heat"). And in which case, he says in verse 9, "But if they cannot contain [have not been given a special gift of celibacy], let them marry: for it is better [now the word of comparison: from good to better] to marry than to burn." So that's the first condition: a special gift. Secondly, if one is living in unusually stressful times. Verses 25-26: "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be." Here he expounds that it is good for one to remain celibate if he's given the special gift, if living in unusually distressful times. Thirdly, if one may serve God more single mindedly. Verses 32-36. It's not my purpose to expound them. You can read them for yourself as well as I.

But verse 1, now, look at the teaching: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." That statement read in its context sets before us this fact: that under certain circumstances yet to be mentioned, celibacy is a good thing and in some cases a desired option. Verse 2: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." What is the teaching of this verse? It is this: Paul says that in the light of the real danger of various forms of sexual impurity, everyone who does not have the gift of continence should enter into a monogamous, heterosexual marital commitment. Note the transition: celibacy is good under circumstances that are yet to be mentioned.

"Nevertheless [here Paul has a word of transition--there's another side to the coin. Notice now how realistic he is], to avoid fornication [not fornication singular, but fornications plural--on account of the various forms of sexual deviation and impurity to which you Corinthians are continually exposed], let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

Now what were those various forms of fornication? Well, just look back at chapter 6 and verse 9:

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators [used in its more limited sense: the sexually impure, that is, those who traffic in extramarital or non-marital sexual relations], nor idolaters, nor

adulterers [those who break the marriage covenant: extramarital intimacies], nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind [various forms of homosexual deviations]...shall inherit the kingdom of God."

These are some of the forms of fornication, which in a very heightened way were part of the very air of Corinth, even as they are a part of the air of our own present national moral climate. To read as I did in *The New York Times* two weeks ago Monday and shared with the singles a week ago Friday, half a page with an elected representative in Washington daring to speak so shamelessly of being a homosexual pervert, and how for six years he's been committed to converting the Republican Party to make it the party of the perverts. Of course, they used their euphemism: those of differing sexual preference (gays etc.). But that's the climate in which all forms of sexual perversion are constantly paraded before us seeking to erode the conscience, stir up the passions, and lead us into paths contrary to the will of God.

Paul, the realist, new what it was like at Corinth. He labored there for eighteen months. He had to receive the report that he had to deal with in chapter 5. He said, "There is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles." He was a gutsy realist. And he says now the celibate state is good, given certain factors. But the reality is this: "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man [singular] have his own wife [singular], and let every woman [singular] have her own husband [singular]." What is mandated as the only divinely ordained framework for the avoidance of sexual uncleanness by legitimate sexual activity? It is not same-sex perversion. It is not self-sex indulgence. It is not other-creature abomination. It is monogamous, heterosexual marital commitment. Do you see that in the text? It is monogamous, that is, one (mono)--no bigamy, no polygamy. The man is to have a woman for a wife, and the woman to have a man. Ten years ago, I wouldn't have had to underline that in the text. It would have been there; I would have preached over it and said everybody knows heterosexual monogamy is the will of God. No, everyone does not know it.

When you can read the stuff and hear the stuff from so-called Christian gays and lesbians, you know that Corinth is dictating the morality of large segments of the professing Christian church. No, Paul says that under certain circumstances (yet to be mentioned), celibacy is a good thing and in some cases the desired option. However, in light of the real danger of the various forms of sexual impurity, everyone who does not have the gift of continence should enter into a heterosexual, monogamous marital commitment.

Now note, in this passage (v. 2), Paul is not giving the reason for which marriage was instituted. You go back to Genesis 1 and 2 to find out the reason. You go to Ephesians 5, and you learn that before the foundation of the world, God envisioned a situation in which His highest and most marvelous work would be mirrored in the marriage relationship (Christ and the church). And marriage was designed way back in the garden, that it would be the great picture of that greatest work of God in which Christ would have the preeminence, even the work of redemption. There were no dangers of various kinds of sexual impurity in the original creation. But in this realistic setting after the fall in the midst of a society dripping with pressures to impurity, Paul is identifying the persons for whom marriage is a necessity. And what he says is that because of these various forms of sexual uncleanness, "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." "Let" sounds like a word of permission, but it isn't. It is a present imperative--it is a mandate, not a suggestion,

not mere permission. It is an imperative--two present imperatives. Because of sexual uncleanness in all of its forms, "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." Now we say we believe in plenary verbal inspiration, that when the Biblical writers sat down to write or dictate to others who wrote for them, the very words, the very tenses are dictated of God. These are two imperatives. I didn't make them imperatives, the Holy Spirit did.

Now we come to verse 3: "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." Now what's the basic teaching of this verse? It's this: marital commitment is a means to maintain sexual purity only when each partner freely responds to the legitimate sexual needs of the other. The key words in this verse are "render" and "due." And if you were to take up a concordance and look up the use of these words as they are found in their various families in the original, you would find that the word for "render" is "apodidoto." It's a commercial word; it's commercial language that refers to the paying back of a debt. Remember the parable our Lord gives in Matthew 18 when Peter said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" And the Lord gives a parable to show that forgiveness doesn't keep any check list of numbers and times. It is a disposition of the heart. In that parable where He talks about the servant who had much forgiven and the other servant who had less forgiven, seven times this verb is used and always translated "pay." It's a commercial term. And the word "due" is also a commercial term, and it speaks of an obligation as with a debt. In Matthew 18:32, this word is used: "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst Me." Now put the two words together and what do we have? We have the Spirit of God saying to a gathered assembly of saints at Corinth with men and women, married and single, boys and girls--that's why I have no embarrassment preaching the mind of the Spirit of God in this passage. That's how it came originally, and we're just going back and taking that letter in our English versions and seeking to understand it in the light of the use of these words. Here's what God's Word says to all of the husbands and all of the wives--remember now, this is in the context of avoiding various forms of sexual impurity. Paul has not lost his track.

"Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." Here is absolute equality in rendering of due to one another. And Paul starts with the husband's due to his wife and then the wife's due to her husband. In any areas of the marital relationship, there is a divine structure of hierarchy. The husband is head as Christ is head of the church. But in treating this aspect of marital privilege and responsibility, there is a level playing field--absolute equality. And once again, we are met with an imperative: "Let the husband render [a present imperative]." The husband must render to the wife her due, and likewise, also the wife unto the husband.

Now that raises the question that I'm sure is in the minds of some already. What is due? What is owed as a debt? Once one enters the marriage covenant and incurs a perpetual indebtedness to one's marriage partner (the wife to the husband, the husband to the wife), what is involved in what is due? Well, Paul doesn't tell us in this passage. He doesn't have a little footnote saying this is what is due and give us a mini marriage manual. He assumes that there would be an understanding of what I have called the legitimate sexual needs of the other. And we must turn to other passages in the Word of God to understand the Biblical framework of what constitutes legitimate sexual needs. For example, in Romans 1:26, twice Paul speaks

of sexual perversion, which is culpable even among those who have never seen the pages of a Bible. He uses this term: "[They do] that which is against nature [women with women, men with men]." Twice he says, "against nature." And in 1 Corinthians 11:14, he says, "Doth not even nature itself teach you...." There is a natural use of the woman and a natural use of the man; there is a perverted use of the woman and a perverted use of the man. This notion that a marriage covenant and a marriage license gives license to any form of sexual activity is pagan; it is not Biblical. If that which is against nature is a moral culpability in pagans, how much more among believers. Well, what is against nature? I'm not prepared to tell you because the Bible doesn't. You must wrestle that through before God. There are passages such as Leviticus 18:19-30 which speak of certain sexual practices for which God says, "The land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." God had to specify practices that were considered acceptable sexual behavior among the pagans, and He says to His covenant people, "Don't do it." Yet the Scriptures says that eventually they did worse than the nations.

The pressure of a decadent society is exceedingly powerful. That's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5: "That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God." Paul makes a marked distinction between believers in all the facets of marital intimacy being marked by sanctification and honor. Set-apartness unto God, under the eye of God, within the framework of the law of God--and it is marked by honor. And that's said in direct contrast to the passion of lust. Ungovernable lust drives the passions, and unbridled passions frame the lust. And Paul says that should not mark intimate life of believers. He is telling us that if marriage is to be a means of sexual purity, that marital commitment will be such a means only when each partner freely responds to the legitimate sexual needs of the other. When any man or any woman has sexual desires framed by pornography, romance novels, and popular sex manuals, that does not fit what Paul is talking about in this passage. And I warn any of you men that would seek to impose upon your wife notions that you glean from pornography--God have mercy upon you! And any of you women that want to impose upon your husband what you may be more tempted to glean from romance novels--these things are to have no part in touching the sacred sanctuary of your intimate life together.

So we come, then, to verse four: "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." What is flowering out of the previous statement? Here's what it is: the basis for this duty of mutual responsiveness (which was mentioned in verse 3) is the fact that God has conferred mutual authority over each other's bodies. You see the element of equality. Now the key word, of course, is "power over," and this verb means to have and to exercise a right or power of rule. Look at the only other two uses in the New Testament, one in chapter 6 and verse 12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power [rule or dominion] of any." The same Greek word is used in Luke 22. The Lord is going to give His disciples a lesson in the spirit of humility that is to mark them. Verses 24-25: "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." There's our verb.

So you see, when Paul writes that the basis for this duty of mutual responsiveness is the fact that God has conferred mutual authority over each other's bodies, he chooses a very vigorous word. He says that there is a God-conferred authority over the body of the husband, and that authority is in the hands of the wife and vice versa. And notice how evenhanded Paul is. He says in verse 3, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." Now obviously, Paul is not saying that a husband has absolute authority over his wife's body or that the wife has absolute authority over her husband's body. There's only One who has absolute authority over the body, the One who bought it and created it. Remember 1 Corinthians 6:19-20? "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price...." As in Ephesians 5, the headship of the husband is not absolute. Christ is the Head of the church; the wife is united to Christ as a member of His church. The husband's authority over her does not rival, let alone supersede, Christ's headship; it is subsumed under Christ's headship. And if the husband ever seeks to exercise his headship in a way that makes the wife disobey Christ, she has to say, "I must obey Christ rather than you." Now likewise, with this authority over the body--and notice how crass and earthly it is. You who are platonic romanticists are going to find this passage very unsuitable to your taste. There is a crass earthiness that just doesn't sit well with abstract romantics. But that's not where you and I live. We live in the kind of world that these Corinthians live in. And here is what Paul says: the wife is not possessing power over her own body, but the husband--not absolute authority, but a delegated power, and in the context, it is a power to rightly expect his due and vice versa. It is a delegated power that she has a right to expect her due from her husband. And though it is not absolute authority, it is a real bona fide authority, and it is constant. (A present indicative is used.)

Last week in trying to underscore by way of illustration what it meant for us to think in terms of our bodies being Christ's blood-bought possession, I used the imagery of having the sign of the cross branded upon all of our physical members. I'd like to build on that to underscore what this passage is saying. For everyone who is married, when you enter the marriage covenant under the sign of the cross on every member of your body, there is in smaller letters the initials of your husband or wife. And as surely as being branded with the cross as the mark of Christ's ownership of you, so those smaller-case letters of husband or wife is the brand of divinely conferred authority over your body. If this passage isn't teaching that, I've got to fold up my Bible and say, "I'm going to find another way to serve Christ than try and expound the Scriptures. "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife."

Now that brings us to verse 5 (and in many ways this is the cruncher for some):

"Defraud ye not [that's a nice old word. When's the last time you ever used that word in an ordinary conversation? You would say somebody robbed or cheated you. But you wouldn't say somebody defrauded you] one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer [more accurately rendered 'the prayer']; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

What is verse 5 saying? This is what it's saying: in light of this mutually conveyed authority over each other's bodies, the unnecessary or unilateral withholding of sexual relations is a form of thievery. Obviously, the key word is "defraud." And it

means to take away or withhold property that belongs to another, and to do so by deception--to cheat another. Again, it was used in chapter 6 two times. Christians were going into law before pagan judges about rights and possessions, and Paul says in verse 7, "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" In other words, if your brother has cheated you out of some bucks, rather than bring the name of Christ into a pagan law court, leave the case with God and walk away. Then Paul says in verse 8, "Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud [you keep back that which belongs to another; you do it by duplicity and deception], and that your brethren." That's the very word Paul uses here. The other place it's used is James 5 where James is castigating wealthy landowners and employers, and he says in verse 4, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud." Again, this is a commercial concept. That's why I've said that in the light of this mutually conferred authority over each other's bodies, unnecessary or unilateral withholding of sexual relations is a form of thievery. That's not overstating the intention of the Spirit of God using this word "defraud." Now you notice my qualifying words: "unnecessary or unilateral withholding." Under "unnecessary," I'm assuming there are times when one does not need to discuss that there is a necessity for the withholding of sexual relations. I need not go into those details. You know them well as married couples. But I've used the word "unilateral." Paul says not to withhold yourselves one from another except it be by consent. That word "consent" is the word from which we get our English word "symphony." There's got to be a symphony of mind. That assumes the husband and wife talk about these things. She doesn't pull the headache routine; he doesn't pull the "I'm too tired and distracted from work" routine. There is open-faced, honest discussion seeking to come to mutual, harmonious consent. That's the exception; hence, I've asserted verse 5 teaches that in the light of mutually conferred authority over each other's bodies, the unnecessary or unilateral withholding of sexual relations is a form of thievery if there is any withholding for other than obvious reasons of health, such as advanced pregnancy, time of the month, and postpartum physical condition.

What are the conditions according to the Word of God? Look at the text. There are five of them. God's so good to give us this practical instruction. The first one we've already indicated: mutual agreement ("except it be with consent"), no unilateral withholding. Secondly, for a relatively brief period of time (for a season). Thirdly, for purposes of concentrated engagement in higher spiritual priorities. Paul defines what ought to be the situation that precipitates this season, this brief period in which there is this symphony of agreement to withhold sexual favors from one another: "that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer." Some render it, "that you may find leisure for prayer." The sense of the word is that the pressures of life are such that it's necessary to have enough time to give oneself to a concentrated season of the "the prayer." It doesn't seem to be referring to generic prayers, our ordinary devotions. But there is something in the life and experience that demands "the prayer," a time of prayer, giving oneself to prayer. A husband or wife talks this through with his or her partner. And there is an agreement that in the light of this pressing issue which demands intense concentrated spiritual priorities, there is an agreement that for a season they will withhold sexual intimacy. Fourthly, it is to be done looking forward to the resumption of normal relations. Look at the text: "that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again." And in the context, that doesn't mean just sitting down holding hands and looking at the moon. It's very down-to-earth,

crass, yes, earthy, yes, but not unclean, not unholy. It is realism. And you and I need to take it seriously. To step outside the boundaries of these guidelines is to be disobedient to Christ who is speaking through His inspired apostle. Fifthly, "...that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." Why are you married? One of the reasons is to avoid sexual uncleanness. It is better to marry than to burn with uncontrollable passion that will lead you into the wasteland of pornea, sexual uncleanness. Now Paul says if you mark out an inordinate length of time--what are you doing? You're cooperating with the devil to tempt you to sexual sin. That's what Paul says. ("...that Satan tempt you not.") When will he come to tempt? When there has not been the normal, natural fulfillment of God-given sexual desires that are constantly on the verge with many of stepping over the boundaries because of the devil and because of remaining sin and an ungodly world--Paul says the devil is just waiting for this hyper-spiritual couple who says we'll forgo relations for x-number of months because we're going to prove that we're spiritual. He says the devil's just waiting, and he's laughing up his sleeve, and he's going to come and nail them. And every woman and every man needs to have this Biblical realism woven into the fabric of their thinking about this aspect of their lives. So what does verse 5 teach us? In the light of this mutually conferred authority over each other's bodies, the unnecessary or unilateral withholding of sexual relations is a form of thievery.

Now verse 6: "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." My understanding is this: Paul is saying that in light of all the clear imperatives, the exception of verse 5 is a matter of sanctified accommodation and not a divine directive. A key to any understanding of this verse is the word "this." And the commentators differ. What is Paul referring to? Is it what he just said in verse 5 or what he said up in verses 3 and 4? My judgment is that he is referring to the exception, because the other things are commandments. But when he says, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time," he's giving accommodating apostolic counsel: here is the exception to the general rule, but even that's a command. So if you're not coming upon mutually agreed times to withhold from one another, you're not sinning against the divine commandment.

Verse 7: "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." Very simply, while Paul wishes for all the freedom to serve God without distractions as a single man or woman, he recognizes the sovereignty of God in giving or withholding the gift of celibacy. It was right for Paul to say, "I would that all men were even as I myself," the same way I could say I wish all men had the privilege of preaching the Word of God and being involved in the care and the oversight of God's people. Is it wrong for me to say that? Of course not. If you thoroughly enjoy and are satisfied with your calling in life, there's a sense in which you'd like all to share in it. Paul knew the benefits of being a single man. Whether he was ever married is debated, but he certainly was a single man. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:5, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?", proving that Paul was not a eunuch. He had normal, wholesome heterosexual desires. But he had a special gift of singleness so that, though he may have felt some heat from his normal sexual passions, they did not become a burning. John Calvin makes that distinction between feeling heat and burning. And Paul would not have had a right to lead about a wife had he been a eunuch. It is not right for any man who is sexually impotent to enter marriage under the guise that he's going to meet the sexual needs of a wife. So when Paul says he has a right to have a wife, he's acknowledging that he was a normal heterosexual man with normal, wholesome

sexual capacities and desires. But he had a gift from God and wishes all men were as himself: free from the encumbrances of a wife and family to serve Christ. But his wish was not the measure of what God wants. "Every man has his own gift from God, one after this manner and one after another."

Well then, I've tried to walk through those seven verses with you. What do we say by way of concluding observation and application? Someone said, "Pastor Martin, this will always get you in trouble--the application. The exposition normally doesn't get you in trouble; it's the application." Well, if it gets me in trouble, so be it, because the Bible has been given to us to be applied. It is profitable not only for teaching but for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. I lay before you these three observations and applications.

First of all, this passage exposes the sin of presumption and tempting God in some single men and women. As we read in verse 9: "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." And there are some of you who are burning. And the reason you are not married is not because there have been definable, clear providential hindrances that have shut you up to singleness. For some of you, it's because you have not been aggressive in obeying the Biblical injunctions--you're too passive. You're part of a generation of men that have in great measure been partially castrated in terms of normal, wholesome male aggressiveness. I know that's a blunt term, but if the shoe fits--to change the imagery--please put it on. The text is clear. "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." In your state of singleness, no one, I trust, in this place looks down their nose at any single man or woman of marriageable age. That's a good state, but because of various forms of sexual uncleanness, each man is to have (imperative) his own wife; each woman is to have her own husband. But you say, "Pastor, in our culture and my understanding of the basic structure of things Biblically, it's not my liberty as a woman to go chasing a man." I know, but you don't have to be aggressive to be aggressive. There are ways to be subtly aggressive and still maintain your reputation as a modest, Godly Christian woman. I'm speaking primarily to the men, for some of you (and this may be more for some of you women), you're just plain too picky. You're to marry only in the Lord; that's why my initial statement was "a Godly marriage." And in this very passage Paul says, "...she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." But then the rest of the list some of you have, the Lord has very little to do with it. In the Lord, but six feet tall. O yeah, where do you find that in the Bible? In the Lord, but at least a ten inch drop between his chest and his waist. Where do you find that in the Bible? In the Lord, but interested in this and that. Where do you find that in the Bible? Some of you are just plain too picky, and I have no individual in mind. I speak before God's face, but I fear that some of you are just plain too picky--men and women. Some of you are just plain too slow. And apparently they were slow back in the 1600s, because when they drew up the Westminster Standard, the Confession of Faith for the Larger and Shorter Catechism, under "What are the ways that we break the Seventh Commandment?" One of them is undo delay in marriage. People were just moping around and weren't getting with it. Surely this passage ought to be a spur to some of you. It ought to be like spurs in your side to say, "Lord, I've not really been honest with the plain sense of the passage. Help me to be more honest with it."

Secondly, this passage exposes the sin of being an occasion of sin to your husband or to your wife. Turn with me to Luke 17:1-2. This is the passage I have in mind in making this application:

"Then said He [Jesus] unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come [the human heart being what it is, the world being what it is, the devil being what he is, Jesus said it's impossible but that people are going to find occasions to fall, to stumble into sin. That's the realism of our Lord. But look at the next part of the verse]: but woe unto him, through whom they come! [that is, through whom the occasions of sin come] It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."

The little ones are those who believe in Him: His little ones; His precious ones. Now do you see the relevance of this passage in Corinthians? "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." And what introduced all of this? It's good for a man not to touch a woman, but because of the various pressures towards and temptations in the direction of sexual impurity, let each man have his own wife; each woman have her own husband. And within the commitment of that marital covenant, let there be this perspective regulating their sexual desires and their sexual relationship. To withhold yourself from your partner in an unnecessary or unilateral way is to expose him or her to adultery--if not to open adultery, mental adultery or forms of perversion. Don't go to the extreme of prudery or to the extreme of perversion, but read through the Song of Solomon together where sight and sound and smell and taste and atmosphere all enter into the holy sexual union of a man and his wife. Read Proverbs 5:8-14 where the writer speaks of her love causing you to go astray; causing you to be intoxicated. Some of you, I know, there was abuse. There was a background of uncleanness and perversion, and it's so hard for you to think that this can now be something that is clean and holy and pure before God. But I beg you, pray in the Song of Solomon; pray in Genesis 1 and 2. Think of Adam and Eve in their innocence before God; the creation account ending (as we saw several weeks ago) with a description of Adam and Even, not on their knees praying, but in nakedness in the marital embrace. And God saw everything that He made, and it was very good. And when your heart can resonate with God's, then God has flushed away all of that negativism borne of the scars that were imposed upon you, perhaps some of you, no choice of your own, others because of your own willfulness. But one sin never makes right another sin. Don't be guilty of being an occasion of sin to your husband or wife because you're not fulfilling the clear directives of 1 Corinthians 7. You say, "But I'm not made that way." No, you may not be made that way when you read, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." But you ask God the Holy Spirit to work in you the spirit of forgiveness. You can't exempt yourself because you're just not naturally forgiving. It has nothing to do with what you are naturally; it has to do with what you can become graciously. And you can become the instrument in God's hands to keep your husband or wife from unnecessary temptation to sexual impurity. God's given you that privilege, no one else.

Third and final application is this: this passage must never form the soul basis for marital commitment. Over the years of pastoral work, I've counseled with men who've said, "I want a wife because I'm tired of burning with sexual desire." They're self-centered. They're sloppy. They're narrow in their interest. There isn't a woman on the face of the earth that I have enough ill-will to wish upon such people. But they go around saying, "If you're burning, get a wife." Ah, but the same apostle had some more things to say. You're thinking about being a husband, then make sure you're ready to take on a role that mirrors Christ and His self-giving love for His church. When you're ready to take 1 Corinthians 7 and bring it into the full blazing light of

Ephesians 5 and say, "I'm prepared to lay down my life for this woman in self-giving, sacrificial, tender Christ-like love," then you're ready to talk about a marriage covenant, not just because you're burning. Take the whole thing. It's no good if detached from application number three. And there are a lot of witnesses who will rise up and point the finger at you and say, "You should have known better than that." Don't ever take this passage to form the soul basis for marital commitment. When you're ready for Ephesians 5, then you talk about marriage. Look at the latter part of this chapter. Paul is not condemning this fact. He says this is the way it is if a husband takes his role seriously. He says in verse 33, "But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." Is he condemning that? No, he's saying that if he's worth his name as a Christian husband, he's going to be careful how to please his wife. And you women better have some good indication that he knows a little about that before he puts a ring on your finger and says "I do" in front of the church building. Then it's too late. If he's a self-centered, insensitive, self-serving man, saying "I do" is not going to change him. So I say to you men who may experience a good measure of burning, and you say, "This passage does speak to me," remember, it's no good if detached from Ephesians 5; detached from the latter part of this chapter when it comes to seriously reflecting upon seeking the consent of a woman to give herself to you in marriage and vice versa. You women, don't detach Ephesians 5 from 1 Corinthians 7. Men are tempted to detach 1 Corinthians 7 from Ephesians 5, but the temptation with most women is to detach Ephesians 5 from 1 Corinthians 7. "O, the idea that I would be loved as Christ loved the church. That's romanticism of the highest form." Are you ready to have his initials branded upon your hands and on your primary and secondary sexual organs and regard yourself as this man having authority over you? If not, then don't talk about marriage, my dear sister. That's part of the whole package.

Now we did not have the privilege of premarital counseling with all of you, and this is my closing challenge to every married couple. It's been a while since you've read through this passage and talked together honestly before God, honestly as you would if the Lord Himself summoned you into His presence. "Now, we're going to discuss this passage." And He looks the man in the eye and says, "Are you rendering your wife her due?" And He looks at the woman and says, "Are you rendering your husband his due? Are you living within this framework?" Some of you have never done that. You don't even discuss these things. Some of you have a pattern of "turn out the lights and get it over with." That mentality is entirely anti-biblical as much as the wretched perversion and hedonism that has glutted our society, and in great measure, has even inundated the Christian world so that Christian bookshops have stuff that would be regarded as pornography 25 years ago. Only God can keep us from prudery and perversion, but He can. As we're determined to walk in the light of His Word, God will give us grace to do that.

My final word is to you who are not Christians. You may have sat here tonight and said, "Man O man, if being a Christian means that I'm going to let God come in and dictate the parameters and the dynamics of my most intimate relationships and tell me what is and what is not in bounds and what is out of bounds in the bedroom, forget it." I wouldn't be surprised if that's your attitude. That just proves Romans 8:7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." My friend, preaching on a passage like this--the entrance of God's Word exposes you for what you are. You're a rebel against God, and your need is to have a heart-change that only God can effect, and to have the consequences of all your acts of rebellion cleansed and washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ, and

He stands ready to save even you. Well, may God be pleased to take His Word, write it upon all of our hearts and enable us, by His grace, in the midst of a society so much like the Greco-Roman world, that we may in the language of Philippians 2 shine as lights in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation.

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