

**Biblical View of Romance Part 2—1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-9—2/18/18**

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As the month of February draws to a close, the emphasis on romance in the promotion of Valentine's Day has waned.

Now it's simply a good memory if you want to buy the leftover candy at discount prices.

But the passing of Valentine's Day for the year does not mean the whole topic of sex & romance has passed from the scene.

Sex & romance are constantly emblazoned on everything almost everywhere you go in our culture.

And aberrant, even dangerous, wicked views of it that formerly were never spoken of & rarely thought of are now popularly promoted.

I went to see the Avengers Black Panther movie with my son & couldn't escape the promotion of another shades of grey movie.

I should clarify that I only know a little about those series of books & movies from warnings in Christian blogs & magazines & I don't want to know any more because it's scary & dark & devilish.

But it's normalized & shoved in your face by the entertainment industry & Satan's schemes to warp people's minds.

And as more problems with sexual assault continue to go public, it's obvious that our hypersexualized society has some huge problems.

It's not helping anyone for sex to be sold as the main advertiser for everything from hair products & deodorant to health products & beverages.

It's not helping women to be treated as objects of public ogling.

And it's not helping men who fall into the addictive trap of pornography & its downward spiral into darkness.

So we as God's people need to say something—we need to speak up not only about the dangers & moral sins that are rampant.

But we also need to talk about the biblical antidote, the alternative lifestyle that Scripture extols to fight against the immoral lifestyles being promoted.

We need to rejoice in & display the blessings of biblical marriage between one man & one woman

And we need to share & show God's design for the marriage bed to be undefiled as Hebrews 13:4 says.

Of course, that means privacy for the physical pleasure of a married couple, but it must also include open, honest affirmation of God's good design for marriage that includes romance & pleasure.

In the midst of a culture confused about love & relationships & sex & manhood & womanhood, we don't merely need to know what's wrong & what to avoid.

We need more than only the negatives of prohibition.

We also need to know what is good & happy & pleasurable in God's plan & how He lovingly commands that for us.

Romance is one of those areas with many wrong views that seep into the church & into our minds & the minds of our spouses & kids.

So we need to correct the errors that tempt us & train our minds to practice what is right & be ready to pass it on.

We need to model God's good design in our marriages or in your youth or singleness if you are single.

God is shown & proclaimed as wise & good when His design is lived as a light shining in the darkness.

And we want that in this area of romance.

Whether we are married or single, we need these reminders to guard against the devil's lies & rationalizations & to guide how we relate to one another in pure & peaceful wisdom.

When I mention romance, I AM speaking partly about sex, though sex in biblical thinking is broader than the mere act itself.

It is part of a whole emotional and physical relationship and lifestyle as one flesh.

So my outline as we began was given in terms of romance.

Two weeks ago we began looking at this topic & started into 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 with two of four points that we'll pick up tonight.

We need to study this to combat the consumer-driven, self-focused, me-first focus all on appearance & animal passions.

And the answer is not a prudish, never-talk-about-this that previous generations often tried in dealing with it.

It's not like avoiding the topic will make it go away when God is the One who created beauty & sex & romance & love.

So people need to hear & know that there is another way, a way that our good & loving Creator commanded for our joy.

God is the One who created pleasure & He has wise & loving & protective bounds within which it flourishes.

That's not found in chasing immorality nor homosexuality nor transgender confusion nor divorce nor polygamy.

All such experiments have failed & continue to fail.

But God has made clear His good & satisfying ways.

For men, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7 makes this important as a part of living with our wives in an understanding way so our prayers are not hindered.

And we'll see tonight how God's design protects us from temptation by fighting wrong fires with the right fire.

And most of all, we want to enjoy & model the love of God in Christ for His people & the submission of God's people to Christ in the blessings of marriage mimicking Christ & the church.

So sex and romance are important.

They are vital for our lives & homes & kids & our testimony & for the glory of God & our outreach to a lost & lonely & lust-driven world.

So to be faithful as a pastor, I believe I must speak about this area just as God has spoken of it repeatedly in His Word.

The Song of Solomon is quite a sensual & involved romance story & God didn't blush in giving that as Scripture.

The Proverbs speak repeatedly about the blessings of marriage & the dangers of illicit relationships.

And I could turn us to numerous warnings in this area as well.

But tonight I want to continue with a few brief biblical thoughts from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-9.

As I said last time, I'm not covering the text in detail.

I'm just hitting highlights to help you know this text at some level & connect it to your regular practice.

So let's return to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-9 & read it—follow along as I read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-9. [READ]

I offered 2 applications last time & I'll offer 2 more tonight.

The 1<sup>st</sup> broad principle from this text that we began with last time was that romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

Romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

***#1—Romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.***

That is, sex & romance are commanded by God to be prioritized & enjoyed within marriage.

Verse 3 is a command for each spouse to fulfill their duty, to obey God as He commands sexual enjoyment in marriage.

And verse 5 is also a command to stop depriving one another, to stop failing to prioritize the enjoyment of & ministry to your spouse.

So romance is commanded in marriage.

In verses 2-3 when Paul wrote, "Let each man or woman", he put that in the imperative mood in Greek, which means it's a command.

It's not an option to take it or leave it.

There is a place for the romance he's describing and it is mandated.

That means it needs to be an area you pray about, think about, & prioritize in your marriage.

And if you do not do so, then you are disobeying God's Word.

But sex is only to be enjoyed within marriage.

It is confined to those secure & intimate boundaries.

Hebrews 13:4 says "*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, & the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators & adulterers God will judge.*"

The confined bounds of God's love & wisdom appear in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 by seeing that the commands toward the husband & the wife & only to the husband & wife.

These commands are only within a biblically defined marriage.

Anything outside of that is considered immoral.

The mention of immoralities in this section tells us that there is such a thing as a moral, right definition of marriage.

The right way to experience romance & sexuality is in a committed, lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman.

Marriage is not a cultural contract between two consenting adults who self-identity as they wish.

Marriage is specific because God's design is specific for male & female, defined biologically in clear & complementary categories.

The Bible teaches complementarianism, meaning equal persons with different roles that complete & fulfill each other.

The beauty & celebration & enjoyment & glory of that complementarity is best experienced & displayed in marriage.

And we know from Jesus' words in Matthew 5 that it's even wrong to have lustful thoughts after a woman.

So this draws a circle of confinement where romance flourishes and where it should stay.

That puts any lust or cultivation of sexual desire not toward your spouse as out of bounds & wrong.

If you want to know where to draw the line, then think of this—don't pursue anything you wouldn't want your spouse doing right now with someone else if he or she were married to you.

If you wouldn't want your spouse with someone else like that, you shouldn't be with anyone other than your spouse like that.

And Jesus' warnings against lust warn against stoking any desires that can only be fulfilled within marriage.

So stay away from anything that arouses desires that can only be fulfilled in marriage.

Sex & romance were wisely & beautifully designed by God to be confined to marriage, to be enjoyed in marriage.

But it is commanded to be enjoyed within marriage.

And it's important to remember as men that we must lead & it will take sacrifice & service to be loving leaders in this area.

Men are leaders in marriage as a general rule in Scripture.

We lead in this area to obey God's Word, to display the Gospel, to honor our wives, & to model God's design.

So that's point #1—romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

Now read verses 2-4 again to recall point #2. [READ]

***#2—Romance is role-related and reciprocal in marriage.***

We said 2<sup>nd</sup>ly that romance is role-related and reciprocal in marriage.

The husband is still the leader, but both the husband & the wife have a duty and an authority according to these verses.

Paul carefully explained the reciprocal nature of this—one for the other and the other for the one.

Verse 3 speaks of the duty of the husband but then doesn't leave it for us to fill in that the wife should do the same.

He says it explicitly—the wife has her duty too.

Verse 4 speaks similarly of authority over the other one's body.

It's reciprocal—both equal & each for the other.

The husband's duty and authority are mentioned first in both verses and that hints as his leadership role.

But the emphasis here is on the reciprocity—on each one having a ministry to invest in and give toward the other.

Each one has authority or ownership over the other.

So the picture is that we do not sit back and wait for your spouse.

And you also do not approach your spouse all for purpose getting what is yours selfishly.

The picture here is that of serving in a God-ordained ministry to bless your spouse in this area where both husband & wife give.

Both must embrace this as God's joyful duty to give.

And both must seek and recognize God gave authority to seek.

God's design is good and gracious and loving for us.

He commands what is good for us and this is one example.

There is no part of life that is not spiritually defined where we depend on God's Spirit & pray for God's blessing.

And then we also praise Him when He blesses.

So we remember that it's all grace when we enjoy His commands in this area.

God doesn't owe us blessing in this area or in any other area.

But He loves to give good gifts to His children in HIS time in His way for His glory & so we seek Him in prayer & pursue obedience.

We trust God to bless in whatever measure He chooses for our good & then we thank Him for however He does bless.

This is biblical ministry within marriage.

God does care about this & He does speak directly to it.

So point #2—Romance is both role-related & reciprocal in marriage.

Now read through the section again to get the 3<sup>rd</sup> purpose that is highlighted in verse 2, verse 5 and again in verse 9. [READ]

***Point #3—Romance is protective not pointless in marriage—2, 5, 9***

*#3—Romance is protective not pointless in marriage.*

This design of God is a protection against immorality, verse 2 says.

What he's teaching here is because of immoralities.

The Corinthians must have asked a question about whether it was good for a man not to touch a woman because that's how verse 1 starts.

The outline of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians follows questions they asked.

In Greek, it's *peri de*, translated usually in English as “now concerning” & so here in verse 1 he comes now to the issue or question raised concerning a man not touching a woman.

And what's ironically a way that you can agree with our sex-crazed culture is found here in verse 2.

Our sex-crazed culture says it's not realistic to ask people to abstain from sexual immorality or to have self control.

I read a headline about the Olympic village at the winter Olympics that warned of the record number of condoms given out & how many shameful stories would result.

The concern now is about Olympic athletes getting their image tarnished, especially if they are male, for some type of harassment.

But the world thinks that promiscuity is normal, that especially young people can't control their urges & so we need to give up on trying to make moral judgments & commands about it.

So guess what—they are wrong because God has made moral judgments & given clear moral guidelines.

But guess what else? God has recognized the intense dangers of the temptations to sexual immorality.

God knows because He made us—He's our Creator & Designer.

And so there's also a sense in which we can surprise people by agreeing with them that the human sex drive is intense & so that's why God said to get married & enjoy your spouse.

Recognizing the dangers of those temptations to immorality, God said through the Apostle Paul that the answer to that is a faithful marriage.

If that's not clear enough in verse 2, look at verse 5.

The command is to stop depriving one another of romantic involvement of each other in marriage.

That may sound really spiritual, but it's not.

If you think somehow your body or physical pleasures are bad, you are wrong because that's never brought up as the point here.

In contrast, the command is to stop abstaining, stop depriving one another of what God designed for our enjoyment.

Romance is not pointless—it is purposeful for pleasure & purposeful for protection against temptation.

Verse 5 explicitly says for a married couple to come together again because it is a help against a lack of self-control.

Brothers & sisters, this is Scripture.

This is God speaking through His Apostle Paul to address the issue of regularity & frequency of sex within marriage.

He does not give specifics of how often, but the only reason to abstain is for the purpose of prayer—like fasting to focus on prayer.

And that's only supposed to be for a time, a short season just like you may fast from food for a day or week or something.

And it's only to be done by mutual consent—by agreement of both husband & wife that abstaining will take place to allow for prayer.

That's the only scenario given for such a pause in the pursuit of a regular pattern of pleasure within marriage.

And again, note why—because Satan is ready to grab you otherwise.

Satan is ready to tempt you & drag you down into sin.

Why can Satan do that?—because of your lack of self-control.

Again you can agree with the world about the power of these passions & yet offer a different answer.

That different answer likely means turning OFF the TV or the tablet or the phone or computer or whatever other device or distraction is preventing married couples from going to bed together.

Put the kids to bed, lock the door, turn off every possible interruption & give priority to this area commanded by God.

And obviously, it's more than that because romance must happen all day long in the shortest texts or phone calls to the long conversations about the day or the week or whatever burdens you may face.

Please don't misunderstand that this is merely a physical part of obedient living that can just be checked off a list.

No. This is all part of a regular cultivation of love & understanding & honor & affection & grace & forgiveness & encouragement & prayer & sharing of all of life as one flesh.

The privacy of your bedroom is only part of your life together.

Then we'll come back to verses 6-8 for our last point.

So skip down to verse 9 for an added support for this point that romance is protective not pointless in marriage.

In verse 9, marriage is offered as a solution to the burning for this physical relationship within marriage.

Yes the Bible really does say that.

Of course, that's not the only reason to get married or even the main reason to get married.

But marriage can be an answer to the fire of physical desire.

The fires of love within marriage protects against fires outside.

So a single person who longs for intimacy should guard against every form of immorality & lust, but you can also know that that desire for intimacy is not in itself evil.

It can be a motivator to be the kind of person that is ready for marriage, to be the kind of man or woman who is mature & stable & secure in the Lord & ready to love someone other than yourself.

In that motivation can then be the openness to the Lord providing a potential spouse, for a man to pursue leading a relationship or a lady being open to a man's pursuit.

So verses 2, 5, & 9 all get at this point that romance is protective & purposeful & not pointless in marriage.

So prioritizing marital intimacy protects marital fidelity.

Making time for physical enjoyment with each other in marriage is vital to guarding & strengthening your marriage.

If you want to guard your life & your spouse against temptations from outside the marriage, then be sure to work to stoke the fires within your marriage.

Again, this is not an optional accessory that you can add to your life or take it or leave it as not that important.

It's not like a sunroof on a vehicle that may or may not be included & may add value but is not necessary.

This is like one of the wheels of marriage or part of the engine that must not be left out.

Romance within marriage has a purpose.

This same correlation also appears in Proverbs 5 where warnings about sexual immorality are given & the alternative is also given.

The alternative, meaning the positive practice to prevent immorality & protect against it is passionate enjoyment of your spouse within marriage.

Proverbs 5 gives unblushing & yet graphic physical commands for a man to enjoy his wife in all her beauty.

Clearly physical terms are interwoven with romantic figures of drinking water from your own cistern.

So Proverbs 5 also include clear commands for marital intimacy in the context of warnings against immorality.

It's in that sense that you fight the immoral fires with the moral fires—you fight the fires of temptation & lust with the fires of romance & investment & enjoyment in your marriage.

So romance is protective, not pointless in marriage.

Then 4thly & quickly ...verses 6-8 teach us the last point-#4, romance is normal for some but not necessary for everyone.

**#4, Romance is normal for some but not necessary for everyone.**

Paul had gift of singleness and it was a good gift and still is.

He was free to have central devotion to God alone, which we should all start with and be satisfied in.

But some especially are given, for a season of life or for all of life, to be single for God's glory.

That's not a curse because Paul called it a gift.

Paul spoke of it as a good grace from God.

Though most will normally be married, some will be single.

And the freedom of singleness is a blessing & gift to be appreciated & invested in serving & enjoying God.

Don't underestimate the reality of that freedom to serve God.

Even the command to pursue romance & to give to your spouse proves that being married means having more responsibility.

It is more work, more relationships, more burdens & cares.

Marriage has many joys & delights & blessings, but there are ways that singleness is a gift too.

So we must see here in this passage on the centrality of sex within marriage that singleness without sex is also a gift from God for some people for part or all of their lives.

And that's what I mean by this 4<sup>th</sup> point in saying that romance is normal for some but not necessary for everyone.

Read verses 6-8 again to see that as why Paul gives these commands as a concession. [READ]

To remain as Paul was would've meant remaining single.

And it was not necessary for everyone to get married to obey God & enjoy His goodness.

So these truths were a concession at some level to apply to those who were married or who had a passion to be married.

Marriage & the place of sex & romance within marriage are certainly normal for some & that's why Paul taught on this.

But they are not necessary for everyone & that's why he gave the caveats & clarifications of verses 6-8.

So that's a quick overview last time & this time on this topic.

I pray it has been helpful.

***#1—Romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.***

***#2—Romance is role-related and reciprocal in marriage.***

***Point #3—Romance is protective not pointless in marriage***

***Romance is normal for some but not necessary for everyone.***

Now let's take some time in groups to pray for our country & the church in our country to live not only our marriages but all of our lives with a sense of mission.

We want to be renewed & revived to live & preach the Gospel & to be distinctly set apart from the culture in ways that help us to reach the culture with the hope of salvation & change.

With all the divisions & dangers in our culture & the troubles & concerns over children & safety & more, we need to pray for mercy on our nation & for focus & fruitfulness in the church.

Break up into groups & let's spend the rest of our time praying.