

Purposes for Marriage, Part 4—1st Corinthians 7:1-9—8/17/25
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Today I return to the marriage refresher series that's been our summer break from normal exposition as we sure up our thinking in this area.

As I've said, this truth matters to you whether you are married, want to be married, used to be married, or are never married.

It matters because the family is God's basic unit of society & it is always under attack & you must be equipped to speak truth to yourself & to others on these issues.

We started in Genesis 1-2 with how God designed marriage for companionship & for completion or complementary roles.

We added how God designed marriage for co-laboring & for children.

Those were four overall purposes for marriage—God designed it for companionship, completion, co-laboring & children.

Then 5thly, we noted how God designed marriage for consecration, for being set apart to serve God together, to be holy to Him, to honor Him.

That's why God's people are only to marry in the Lord, to enter marriage only with another Christian.

Then as a 6th point, we said marriage is for covenant commitment.

A 6th purpose of God for marriage we noted was covenant commitment & last time we expanded that in 2 ways.

We said that covenant commitment defines our view of marital vows & it defines our view of divorce.

To add another C word to that list, today we're going to unpack a bit of how God designed marriage for consummation.

That's the topic today & we'll unpack it in 4 points that contrast our culture's confusion & corruption in the areas of sex & romance.

That's what I mean when I say that God designed marriage for consummation—I mean He designed for the man & woman to become one flesh in the physical sense of sexual intimacy.

That one-flesh partnership involves far more than the physical, but it does not involve less.

God planned pleasure & purity in a marriage being consummated as a husband & wife enjoy physical intimacy.

I'm going to call that romance for today's outline because I know it's not a typical topic for public speech in a pure way.

But with all the garbage promoted from every angle in our society, we need to be engaged in the battle for truth in our own minds & in our marriages & with everyone we influence.

We need to be invested in conversations with our children about God's plan for sex in ways that include both the blessings & the warnings.

We want to guard children from temptation & transgression, but to do so we must guide them to honor & appreciate the beauty & wisdom of His plan.

And if you read the Bible with your family—especially the Proverbs like a faithful father should—then you cannot escape this topic.

So I pray that both young people & parents are not shocked to hear that the Bible says a lot about sex in God's good design.

And I should clarify that I am speaking partly about sex, though the world would make this topic all about sex and only about sex.

And sex is part of a biblical picture of romance, but it also involves other emotional & physical aspects of a relationship.

It includes a husband living with his wife in an understanding way as 1st Peter 3:7 commands & connects to our prayer lives.

Husbands, this is an area for prayer & for sensitivity to your wife as the specific one that you are to study & serve & lead.

And God did not blush in honoring romance in the Song of Solomon with imagery of passion & delight.

But for today, let's turn to 1st Corinthians 7:1-9 to consider 4 points about romance in relation to God's design for marriage.

We'll not cover this text in detail or do a thorough exposition of it, but I pray we will profit from 4 applications from these verses.

So let's start by reading 1st Corinthians 7:1-9. [READ]

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

Romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

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

This is about a man morally or immorally touching a woman.

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.

Verse 3 is a command for each spouse to ***fulfill their duty***, to obey God as He commanded physical intimacy 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.

We don't have time to read it, but Proverbs 5 also gives lavish commands for a man to enjoy his wife in all her beauty.

Clearly physical terms are interwoven with romantic images of drinking water from your own cistern to command marital intimacy.

As you read Proverbs 5, you know God is not against pleasure.

He created pleasure & He commanded pleasure as part of marriage.

It is not an option to take it or leave it.

There is a place for the romance Paul described and it is mandated for men who are husbands & for women who are wives.

So this needs to be an area you think & pray about & prioritize in your marriage as part of your Christian life.

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

For men, this matters first because we are leaders in our marriages and so romance needs to start with us.

And it starts with a heart to sacrificially serve & satisfy your wife.

As men, we are the initiators who must sacrifice to love our wives like Christ loved the church as Ephesians 5 says.

As a general rule in marriage, men must be the leaders.

So guys, that means we need to make the plans, to think ahead.

And we need to do so not just to make our wives happy or to get what we want physically in intimacy.

We should want to love & serve our wives & give them joy.

And we should want to simply truth & obey God's Word in this area.

As in all of life, this also is for God's glory.

God cares & He has spoken & so this is another area of living by faith in His wise commands & promises for His glory.

That means you can pray for marital intimacy & pleasure as something God has commanded & wants to give in marriage.

Husbands & wives can seek God for the servant hearted pursuit of loving God by loving your spouse.

This is about worship & obedience in holy devotion to God.

Please get that—this is not an area to treat like God doesn't care or like it's dirty or off-limits when talking to God.

We should talk to God & to each other in marriage about this.

But we must add that sex is only to be enjoyed within marriage.

It is confined to the secure & intimate boundaries of marriage.

God promised judgment for sexual sins outside of marriage.

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.*”

So #1, romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

We see this confinement in 1st Corinthians 7 by seeing that the commands toward the husband & the wife are specifically confined 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 tells us that there is such a thing as a moral, right definition of marriage.

The mention of immoralities reminds us that there is a moral, right way to view & experience & enjoy romance & sexuality.

That one right way is within the confines of a committed, covenant, marriage relationship between 1 man & 1 woman.

So marriage is not a cultural contract between any 2 consenting adults who can self-identity as any number of gender options or non-options.

Marriage is specific because God created only male & female, defined biologically in clear & complementary categories.

And God defined marriage from the beginning as this lifelong commitment between one man and one woman to be one flesh.

Being one flesh involves much more than sexual intimacy, but that is part of God's loving & pleasurable plan for marriage.

And outside of marriage, pursuit of such intimacy is immoral.

To state the obvious, to call it immoral is to say that it's wrong.

And 1st Corinthians 6:18 says to flee immorality.

1st Thessalonians 4:3 says God's will is our sanctification, that we abstain from sexual immorality.

And Proverbs 7 illustrates not even going near such sin because doing so would be lacking sense.

Proverbs 22:3 says a prudent man sees evil & hides himself.

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

All such verses draw a circle of confinement where romance flourishes & also a circle in which romance should stay.

That means sensual daydreams or voyeurism or pornography or any lust or cultivation of sexual desires not toward your spouse are wrong.

That means that flirting is not cute or cool or fun whether you are married or not because it draws out affections & interests that can only rightly be fulfilled in the confines of marriage.

And by the way, if you don't know what flirting looks like, ask others to watch you & tell you & keep you accountable.

Kids—this is an area where you need to seek the input of your parents & mentors & be humble to listen & receive counsel.

You need to trust the wisdom of those older & more experienced than you & those who have walked with God & applied His Word through various stages of life & with all kinds of people.

For example, suggestive comments, even as jokes, can be dangerous, even if you think it's innocent or harmless.

And Proverbs 7:5 & 21 warn of the flattery of an adulteress.

So be on guard for whatever may puff up your head or feed your ego or manipulate your feelings.

Again, sex and romance are for only within marriage.

So we dare not cultivate romantic feelings or situations or relationships with those that you are not married to.

A good guideline that Pastor Rick Holland used to say in college ministry at GCC was this—don't do anything with a girl or lady that you would not want your wife to do with someone else.

That rule works for single people too, so listen if you ever ask the question where to draw the line in your relationships.

Listen—don't do or even pursue what 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 when we factor in Jesus' warnings against lust, we should warn against stoking any desire that could only be fulfilled within marriage.

Instead of asking how far is too far, ask how to stay away from arousing any desire that can only be fulfilled in marriage.

Those desires are lusts & those lusts must be battled as sin if you are not married to that person.

Applying such truths can guard relationships from a lot of heartache & confusion both before & after marriage.

We must also guard against all daydreaming or planning or wishing for some romantic caress or climax that is outside of marriage.

And asking how far is too far is the wrong question because we shouldn't be trying to get as close to sin as possible.

And let me add one more note to anyone not ready to be married.

If because of maturity, financial responsibility, or stage of life, you are not ready for marriage, then you don't need to be pursuing or thinking about romance with anyone.

You are just creating temptation rather than fleeing it.

So leave it for later and seriously labor now to prepare yourself to be ready for marriage in every area of life.

So #1—romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage.

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

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

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

The husband is still the leader, as in every area, so this is role-related.

But clearly here both the husband & the wife have a duty and an authority according to these verses.

Note how carefully Paul explained the reciprocal nature of this—meaning, one for the other and the other for the one.

There is giving and receiving, duty & authority, of both the husband & the wife, not merely one or the other.

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 also has her duty.

Verse 4 speaks similarly about 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 at his leadership role that we see throughout Scripture.

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.

That's not merely for the husband OR the wife—it's for both the husband AND the wife.

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

Of course, it's also not to selfishly approach your spouse only for purpose getting what is yours.

The picture here is that of serving—my body exists to serve my wife.

I have a duty, a God-ordained ministry to bless her in this area.

Both husband and wife must give.

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

And both must also seek enjoyment from the other & both must recognize that God gave each spouse that authority to seek enjoyment.

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.

So we dare not get bitter or impatient or despairing if we don't grow to enjoy this area as quickly or completely as we wish.

We walk by faith to seek God's help to obey & trust His wisdom in however He provides & blesses.

But we can trust that God loves to give good gifts in His time for His glory & so we seek Him in prayer & pursue obedience.

We must remember every blessing we receive is grace, not deserved.

We don't get angry because as in every area, we wait on God by faith & hold our hands for Him to give or take away & to bless in whatever measure He chooses for our good.

And in whatever He does bless, we praise Him.

We rejoice & give thanks for God's good designs in marriage.

We seek that as both husbands & wives as equally responsible to desire & give & seek & serve & enjoy sex in marriage.

#2—romance is both role-related & reciprocal in marriage.

Now let's read through the whole section again to get the 3rd purpose that is highlighted in verse 2, verse 5 and again in verse 9. [READ]

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

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Verse 2 says this design is a protection against immorality.

What Paul was teaching here was because of immoralities.

What he was teaching was to protect against 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 1st Corinthians follows questions they asked.

In Greek, it's peri de, translated as now concerning & here in verse 1 the issue or question was concerning a man not touching a woman.

There's a sense in which we might surprise people by agreeing that the human sex drive is intense & powerful.

Of course, the world's answer to that is to give in to that drive & feed your lusts & obviously that's a dangerous lie & immorality is wrong.

But realize that God did give an answer to His design of the sex drive—He said to get married & enjoy your spouse.

Recognizing the dangers of temptations to immorality, God said the answer to that is a faithful marriage—read verse 2 again. [READ]

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

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

It may sound spiritual to abstain from intimacy, 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.

You see here that 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 that will be a help against a lack of self-control.

Listen, 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, here we can agree with the world about the power of sexual passions & yet we find a different answer to them.

That different answer likely means turning off the device or screen or distraction preventing a married couple 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.

Now obviously, this area requires more than that because romance must happen all day long with the shortest texts or phone calls & the long conversations about the day or the week or whatever else.

So 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.

God's commands for this area work in concert with commands for all the other areas of marriage & the Christian life.

But we must see how He commanded purity & marriage to be protected by regular attention & affection with your spouse.

And that makes sense because immorality rarely, if ever, happens all of a sudden.

Immorality or adultery usually develops through stages of discontent & sliding into sin at increasingly deeper levels.

The further the chain of events goes, the more difficult it is to break it or to come clean of it.

It often starts with distance the marriage that stirs discontentment.

All kinds of rationalizations & enticements & arranging of circumstances get excused or ignored when they should be warnings to get help & get to work on your marriage.

Hear God's Word on this topic & heed His commands for your good.

We don't need to publicize our intimacy, but we can show simple affection in appropriate & discreet ways even in public.

We can protect our self-control & guard against temptations by investing in God's priority provision within marriage.

I trust you see how romance is protective & not pointless.

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

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.

A great offense can work as a great defense & that means continually cultivating caring love & affection in marriage.

But again, the Bible affirms the desire for intimacy in marriage as good & biblical to want & pray for & pursue in right ways.

So a single person who longs for intimacy should guard against every form of immorality & lust & do not make excuses for sin.

But you can also know that a desire for intimacy is not evil.

It can be a motivator to be ready for marriage, to be mature & stable & secure in the Lord & ready to love someone other than yourself.

Of course, as we've said before, you only marry in the Lord.

You be sure you are a solid follower of Jesus & stay committed to only marrying a solid follower of Jesus.

But in that readiness, a man can then be open to pursue leading a relationship or a lady can be open to a man's pursuit.

Paul speaks similarly in 1st Timothy 5 about younger widows seeking to be remarried to guard them against sensual desires.

And these truths should heighten our compassion for those who have lost a spouse whether to death or to the pain of divorce.

We should note how hard it is to lose these protective purposes & reciprocal pleasures after enjoying them in marriage.

We should also note that there is hope for struggling marriages because God loves to show grace as His people seek Him.

There is hope as you pray & talk about it & ask for help.

God loves to use the means He has commanded to bless & use His people for His glory.

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

See that 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, 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.

Again, Proverbs 5 also connects warnings about sexual immorality with the alternative of enjoying marital intimacy.

We fight immoral fires with moral fires—fight the fires of temptation with the fires of romance & investment & enjoyment in marriage.

If you are married, that includes showing your spouse often your love & affection in writing & in words & with touch.

It may mean putting aside work for time together, taking date nights or whatever other ways to strengthen & sustain love in marriage.

I trust you see romance as protective, not pointless in marriage.

Again, we've said, #1, romance is commanded in marriage but confined to marriage; #2, romance is role-related & reciprocal in marriage, & #3, romance is protective not pointless in marriage.

#4-romance is normal for some but not necessary for everyone.

4thly & quickly—verses 6-8 teach us the last point-#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, either 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, 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.

It can be a gift from God for some people for part or all of their lives.

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

Read verses 6-8 again as Paul explains this as a concession. [READ]

To remain as Paul would've meant remaining single.

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

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

So #4—romance is normal for some, but not necessary for everyone.

As Paul continued in this passage, each of us can remain as we are, or the unmarried can pursue marriage if that's desired.

I pray these principles can help us do so with clear direction.

And if you have heard all this today & don't know where to start because you feel like you've missed so much of this, then let me remind you where we always start.

We always start & return to the promise of forgiveness of all our sins through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We start & return to God the Son who came to earth to live perfectly, die sacrificially & rise victoriously to provide a right standing with God & eternal life for all who trust Christ.

Knowing God through the mercy & merits of Jesus gives treasured clarity to how we approach today's topic & all of life.

So return to Him & let us know if we can lead you to Him & let's all now close in prayer & singing as we seek Him.