

January 31st, 2020

Sex, Satan and the Supremacy of Christ

1 Corinthians 7:1-7

The pleasure and pain of marriage and singleness

This is the kind of message where I either be fired for preaching it, or perhaps our baby population will double in the next nine months. I believe marriage is the simultaneous the most pleasurable and painful institution that God ordained. I can't remember a week the elders have had *more* phone calls, *more* conversations, *more* critical issues to think through regarding this topic of marriage and sex. Some of our marriages have perplexing problems, some are stuck, some are falling apart, and some are dead—both spouses have become roommates instead of lovers

Then there is the issue of singleness. Single people are often treated like they are broken or that something is wrong with them *because* they're not married. They can feel alienated, misunderstood, and lonely. Like their married counterparts, they also experience pleasure and pain. Pleasure because they are free. Pain because they are free. So whether you are married or single, in a sexual relationship or not, you are subject to great temptation and great pain. Here's the question: Why did God even create this thing called marriage and sex if there would be so much temptation and pain connected with it? We were meant to ask that question.

Sex, singleness, and the supremacy of Christ

Think of it, the Lord could have created human beings to be unisex, no gender, no sexual desire, no distinction between married and singles.¹ He is God. No one forced Him to create us the way He did. So then why create sex

¹ Thanks to John Piper who used this line of thinking in relations to hunger and thirst. cf. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2013), pg. 23

and marriage? Why ordain that some would remain single? He created sex and marriage so that we would have some idea what is meant by the Scripture that says “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes *one spirit with him*.”² And He ordained singleness so that we would have some idea what is meant by the Scripture that says “...though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them...I do it all for the sake of the gospel.”³ Don’t you see beloved? Sex and singleness were both ordained for the glory of Christ. They are both precious gifts, meant to show us more of Jesus.

The Big Idea...

Both sex in marriage and celibacy in singleness are gifts from God meant to show us the supremacy of Christ

- ☆The Unselfishness of Sex (v.1-4)
- ☆The Seduction of Satan (v.5)
- ☆The Supremacy of Christ (v.6-7)

I. The Unselfishness of Sex

The transition of chapter seven⁴

Please look with me at **7:1** “Now concerning the matters *about which you wrote*.” Stop. This verse marks a transition in Paul’s letter. In chapters 1-6, Paul was responding to reports that he had heard from Chloe’s people (**1:11**) about the problems the Corinthians faced. Now here in chapter 7 and following, Paul

² 1 Corinthians 6:17

³ 1 Corinthians 9:19, 23

⁴ Evidence of the inspiration of Scripture! An unmarried man is giving husbands and wives principles on sex within marriage.

is responding to their direct questions in a letter they wrote him. If you have an ESV Bible, you can detect their question because the translators put quotation marks in the first verse. What was the *issue* the Corinthians wanted Paul to address? They said in v.1 “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” In other words, ‘It is good for a man *not* to have sex with a woman to satisfy his hunger for sexual gratification’—including his own wife.

Two views of sex in the Roman world⁵

You have to understand that there were essentially two views of sex in the ancient Roman world that the Corinthians lived in. Chapter 6 represents one view, and chapter 7 the other. In chapter 6, we saw that some of the Corinthians were pursuing pleasure and gratification *outside* of the marriage bed with prostitutes. They were influenced by gnosticism. Gnosticism taught the body doesn’t really matter, it is the spirit that counts, therefore what you do with the body is of no consequence. In other words, chapter 6 reflects the **antinomian impulse**: “God doesn’t care how morally or immorally I live.”

Here in chapter 7, we see the other view, namely that sexual gratification should not be sought at all, *including* in the marriage bed. Procreation is ok, but not pleasure. This crowd was influenced by asceticism—‘the do not handle, do not taste, do not touch crowd’⁶—that taught that severity to the body produces godliness. In other words, chapter 7 reflects the **legalistic impulse**: “God requires that I pry blessings out of His tightly closed fist through my performance.”

Now these two views seem like opposites, but they both have something sinister in common: both taught that sexual pleasure should *never* be sought *within* marriage.

⁵ Much help here from Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 250

⁶ Colossians 2:21-23

1st view: Sexual pleasure is to be sought *outside* of marriage.

2nd view: Sexual pleasure is not allowed including *inside* of marriage.

In other words, both views agreed that the marriage bed was restricted to utilitarian purposes. It is only for making babies, it is not for enjoyment.

The Corinthian error throughout history

But this error was not restricted to the Corinthians. It found its way into many of the Church fathers who went even further. Leland Ryken writes:

“[The Church father] Chrysostom said that Adam and Eve could not have had sexual relations before the fall. Origin agreed and [said] that if sin had not entered the world, the human race would have been propagated by some mysterious angelic manner rather than sexual union. Gregory of Nyssa claimed that Adam and Eve had originally been created without sexual desire and that if the Fall had not occurred, the human race would have produced itself by some harmless mode of vegetation.”⁷

This view poisoned further poisoned what became known as the Roman Catholic Church which taught “throughout the Middle Ages...that sexual love itself was evil and did not cease to be so [even] if its object were one’s [own] spouse.”⁸ They glorified virginity and celibacy. In the counter-reformation, the Catholic Council of Trent denounced anyone “who denied virginity was superior to the married state.”⁹ Marriage and sex were for procreation, not pleasure.

⁷ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), pg. 41. Furthermore, “Tertullian and Ambrose preferred the extinction of the human race [over] its propagation through...sexual intercourse...Gregory the Great...added that whenever a husband or wife engage in sexual intercourse for pleasure rather than procreation, their pleasure befouls their sexual act.” pg. 40

⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 40

⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 41

What does this doctrine say about God?

Let's just pause for a moment and ask: what does this doctrine say about the Lord? It says that Satan—not God—introduced sexual pleasure *through* the fall. It wasn't God's idea. It says that God's heart isn't generous towards us, but is restrictive and stingy. It says Christ—our Bridegroom, our Heavenly Husband—doesn't want us to enjoy Him, He just wants us to reproduce for Him converts and disciples. He wants us for utilitarian purposes." It was no wonder why the Apostle Paul said in 1 **Timothy 4:1-2** that any doctrine that forbids marriage (including the pleasure of the marriage bed) is a doctrine of demons.

Three purposes of marriage

The Scripture gives three purposes of marriage, and the order is so crucial. To get the order wrong is to get God's design for marriage wrong. Here's the order: God ordained the union of husband and wife in marriage **1) For pleasure; 2) For procreation; and 3) For purity.** Consequently this is the *exact* order found in the WCF 24.2.¹⁰ Let's examine these one at a time.

1. Marriage and sex is for pleasure

Please turn with me to Genesis 1. Historically, Catholicism has eliminated *pleasure* altogether, while Anglicans in their Common Book of Prayer have confused this order, putting procreation first, purity second, and pleasure last. In other words, they put the emphasis on procreation. It seems at first glance that they have a case. Look at **v.28**. This is after the Lord created man and woman, what does he tell them to do? "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"—Procreation. Therefore it *seems* procreation is the first purpose of marriage and sex. But that's wrong. Genesis 2 tells us that there was a space of time between God creating male and female. Look at **2:18**. The Lord says "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." After Adam named the animals, it was discovered Adam didn't have his own companion. He

¹⁰ "Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife [*pleasure*], for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed [*procreation*]; and for preventing of uncleanness [*purity*]." *Italics mine*

was alone. v.20 says “But for Adam there was not found a helper *fit* for him.” So what did God do? He didn’t form woman out of the dirt like He did with man. No, He caused Adam to fall asleep and took one of Adam’s rib—bone of his very bones and flesh of his very flesh—and formed Eve. Eve came from Adam. At last Adam had an equal, a complimentary being. They discovered *in each other* mutual companionship, mutual help, and mutual pleasure. When Isaac’s mother died, how did God care for him? **Genesis 25:67** “Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.” When Bathsheba’s child died, what was one of the ways the Lord cared for her? **2 Samuel 12:24** “Then *David* comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her, and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. And the Lord loved him.”¹¹ **Proverbs 5** tells men the only place they are permitted to look for sexual pleasure. “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well...Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth...Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (v.5, 18-19). That is the **first purpose** in marriage: that man and wife have mutual companionship, help, and pleasure.

2. Marriage and sex is for procreation

After God created Eve to be Adam’s fit companion, then He gave them the command to ““Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (**Genesis 1:28**) So chronologically procreation *comes after* the pleasure of companionship. And it must be this way logically. Why? Think about, if a couple can’t have children because God closed the wife’s womb (**1 Samuel 1:6**), does their marriage fail to meet the end for which God created it? No. Although the Lord did ordain marriage *so that* humanity would increase and a holy seed would be created, procreation is not the main purpose of marriage, relationship is. Children are the

¹¹ Genesis 26:8 “When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelek king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac *caressing* his wife Rebekah” (NIV). Hebrew may suggest an intimate relationship

fruit. Companionship is the root.¹² That is the **second purpose** in marriage, and the order matters.

3. Marriage and sex is for purity

Now this last purpose of marriage only exists because of the fall. Please turn back with me to **1 Corinthians 7**. Paul is now going to address their claim in **v.1** that ‘It is good for a man *not* to have sex with a woman to *satisfy* his hunger for sexual gratification’ He answers in **v.2** “But because of *the temptation to sexual immorality*, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” The fall of mankind has brought in the temptation to *sexual immorality*—πορνεία porneia—where we get the word pornography. πορνεία porneia is any sexual activity *outside* of marriage. God absolutely forbids it. Paul already told us that the unrighteous—including the sexual immoral—will not inherit the kingdom of God (**6:9-10**). That’s a disaster, because many in this room including your pastor have been sexually immoral. Where do we turn? To Christ. He is our only hope in life and death. Only by trusting Jesus Christ, and giving ourselves to Him can we be washed, and sanctified, and justified. However, the temptation to be sexually immoral doesn’t vanish. What should we do Paul? Halfway through **v.2** “...each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” It is the imperative mood, a command. Meaning: each husband *should have* sexual relations with his wife, each wife *should have* sexual relations with her husband.¹³ In this fallen world, the Lord has provided only one type of sexual activity that is pure in His eyes—that between a husband and his wife. That is the **third purpose** for marriage: that we could remain sexually pure.

¹² Consequently this is why a child-centered marriage is upside down and sinful.

¹³ “The verb in 7:1 links the present discussion with that of incest in chapter 5: in one sense the solution to “having” (sew with) your father’s wife (or any other inappropriate woman) is to “have (sex) with your wife.” Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 277

What is sex?

What then is sex? The reason why there is so much pain around this issue, is because we are letting the world define it for us. The world defines sex as a *merely* physical act. Dear congregation, if it is *merely* physical, then what does that make us? Animals. And that is exactly in line with Darwinian evolution and a materialistic universe. We are more than *merely* physical beings. We have souls. We have an invisible part to us that encompasses our minds, affections and wills. This isn't to minimize our bodies. We're not gnostics. But it is to say, that there is a hierarchy between body and soul. Human beings are **first** living spirits, and **secondly** physical and sensual beings. Therefore sex between husband and wife is not *merely* a physical act. Yes the two shall become one flesh, but that oneness extends past the physical. "[Sex] is part of a total union of two persons, including their minds, emotions, and souls as well as their bodies."¹⁴ To the degree that is *not* happening, is to the degree that we degrade God's gift. One Puritan rightly asked "How can two...become one flesh lawfully, [if there is no] union and [agreement]¹⁵ of *the heart*?"¹⁶ Milton said "When love...vanishes...the fleshly act indeed may continue, but not holy, not pure, not beseeming the sacred body of marriage, being at best an animal [exercise¹⁷]."¹⁸

How does the Bible describe this most sacred bond? **Genesis 4:1** "Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." Adam *knew* Eve. The Lord didn't use this word because he wanted to hide what was happening. No, He used this word because He wanted to reveal what was really happening. Adam *knew* Eve his wife. He didn't *merely* become one body with her, but his

¹⁴ Ryken, pg. 45

¹⁵ original—"conjunction"

¹⁶ Ryken, pg. 48 William Perkins said "Nothing is more shameless than to love a wife as though she were a strumpet."

¹⁷ original—"excretion"

¹⁸ Ryken, pg. 48. "The Puritan ideal was wedded romantic love. Without such love, sex in marriage was doomed to be a disappointment...love was the cement of the Puritan family and sex was viewed as one of the means of expressing that love." pg. 51

mind, heart and will were united with hers at the same time. He gave all of himself to her and she to him. Everything came together at once: covenant promises, physical pleasure, romantic love. That's what sex is, it is a "...total giving of yourself to your spouse."¹⁹ So let's consider three principles when it comes to this act.

1st principle: Married sex is an act of worship to God.

There are six imperatives in this passage—two in v.2, two in v.3, and two in v.5—six commands from the God-inspired words of the Apostle Paul for husbands and wives to have sexual relations with each other. Also consider the connecting verse between chapter 6 and chapter 7. Look at **6:20** "...for you were bought with a price. So glorify God *in your body*." For those of you who are single, Paul is going to show you how to glorify God *in your body* in a few verses and throughout this chapter. But husbands and wives, how do you glorify God in your bodies with each other? He gives us six commands so we would wouldn't miss it. Make love to each other. That's the **first principle**: married sex is an act of worship to God.²⁰

2nd principle: Our spouses are entitled to this act *because they are entitled to all of us and not just part of us.*

Please look at v.3. "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband." Conjugal literally means "to join together." Paul calls this a right, meaning it is something that is owed, it's a debt. And he tells both spouses that we are *to give*, or to render to each other what is due. It's the same word Jesus uses in **Matthew 22:21** "...render (or give) to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." We are to render to our wives what is their due, and wives are to render to their

¹⁹ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 278

²⁰ One author described Martin Luther's view on this: "Luther's faith was simple enough to trust that after a conscientious day's labor, a Christian father could come home and eat his sausage, drink his beer, play his flute, sing with his children, and make love to his wife—all to the glory of God." Piper & Taylor, pg. 235

husbands what is their due. In other words, celibacy is a sin for married believers. Leland Ryken observes that once in Puritan times, “When a New England wife complained, first to her pastor and then to the whole congregation, that her husband was neglecting their sex life, the church proceeded to excommunicate the man.”²¹ Someone may ask at this point “Am I disobeying Scripture if my spouse and I can no longer have sex?” No. Of course not. There is no law against necessity. The Lord determines how long our bodies will work. But for those of us whose bodies still work, the Lord says we owe our spouses what is *due* to them. Loved ones, our spouses are *entitled* to all of us, not just part of us. **Test yourselves:** Husbands do you want your wives to give you all of herself to you? But are you giving all of yourself to her in *other* areas? Wives, do you want your husband to give all of himself to you, not just in the bedroom, but that he would give all of himself to you always? But are you giving him all of yourself? Don’t hear me wrong, this is not quid pro quo. We are not to trade services with one another. Neither did Paul intend for you to take his words and go home and give your spouse the “see I told you so” speech. Rather, this text is meant for you to take the log out of your own eye *before* you address the speck that is in your spouse’s eye. Paul’s point here is that our spouses have rights, and we are to give them their rights *even if* they fail to give us ours. That’s our **second principle:** our spouses are entitled to all of us *and not just part of us*.

3rd principle: Husbands and wives have equal authority over each other’s bodies.

Please look at v.4 “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his

²¹ Ryken, pg. 39. “Henry Smith called verse 3 of that passage ‘a commandment to yield this duty [of sexual intercourse],...and not to do it is a breach of commandment.’ According to Whately, neither husband nor wife can ‘without grievous sin deny’ sexual intercourse to the other. To deny sexual union, said Gouge, ‘is to deny a due debt, and to give Satan great advantage.’”

own body, but the wife does.”²² Now the first part of this verse is not anything new for the ancient world or for the contemporary Church. But, as one commentator says

for the wife to be given authority over her husband’s body “...was revolutionary in the ancient world where patriarchy was the norm...It was understood that the husband had authority over the bodies of virtually all the members of his household...[*but Paul also affirms the reverse*] that ‘the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.’”²³

Now Paul is not inventing this view. Mutual authority and belonging has always been the Lord’s view throughout Scripture. The common chorus in **Song of Solomon** is “*I am my beloved’s and he is mine.*”²⁴ Now Paul is *not contradicting* the roles between husbands and wives in Ephesians 5. Rather he is *emphasizing* it. Husbands, because you are to love you wife *as Christ loves the Church*, you are to give yourself sacrificially up entirely for her. Your body is no longer *just* yours. You share it with your wife. Likewise wives, you are to submit in everything to your husbands, *as the Church submits to Christ*. Your body is no longer *just* yours. You share it with your husband. That’s our **third principle**: Both husband and wife have authority over each other’s bodies.

What Paul is teaching us in this **first point** is the unselfishness of sex. Sex is not what the world says it is. It is not *merely* a physical act. The Lord gave it to us for pleasure, procreation, and purity. It involves a total giving of yourself to your spouse—body, heart and mind, *and* it is an act of worship to God.

²² J.B. Phillips paraphrases this verse to say “The wife has no longer *full rights* over her own person, but shares them with her husband. In the same way the husband *shares his personal rights* with his wife.”

²³ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 281

²⁴ Song of Solomon 2:16a; 6:3a; 7:10a

II. The Seduction of Satan

Don't steal from your spouse

Paul continues in v.5 “Do not *deprive* one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer.” Let's stop there. Paul says “Do not *deprive* one another.” Jesus uses the same Greek word in **Mark 10:19** when He gives the 8th commandment to the rich young ruler: “Do not defraud” or do not steal. Paul is applying that here. In other words, withholding intimacy from your spouse is stealing. “To refuse to have relations with one's spouse is to withhold what is properly theirs.”²⁵

The exception clause

Now Paul gives an exception to this. He says “Do not deprive one another, *except* perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Notice the three conditions to this exception. The **first condition**: ‘Don't withhold sex from each unless *you both agree*’—“by agreement” Paul says. It literally means “with a common voice.”²⁶ This follows from v.4, if both spouses have authority over each other's body, then it follows “any decisions regarding those bodies must be consensual.”²⁷ Scripture disallows unilateral decisions *not* to have sex. This must be agreed upon by husband and wife. Which assumes something doesn't it? It assumes “that husbands and wives will communicate openly about sex.”²⁸ How can you agree about something if you are not talking about. Husbands and wives, do you talk about your sex life with

²⁵ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 282

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Consequently, this completely undermines a wife's decision to unilaterally abort her baby. Of course there are many other reasons this would be sinful, but this is an additional reason, namely, that her body is not her own—she must come to consensus with her husband.

²⁸ *Ibid*

each other? If it is a part of your worship to God, and your love to each other, why in the world would you not?

The **second condition** Paul gives in v.5 is ‘Don’t withhold sex from each other except for *a limited time*.’ Abstinence in marriage is the exception, not the rule. It should be limited, just as a fasting from food should be limited. Our mouths were designed to feast, and husbands and wives were designed to be intimate with each other.

The **third condition** Paul gives in v.5 would be *the purpose* of such abstinence: “...*that you may devote yourselves to prayer.*” In other words, because sex is a sacred thing, only special times of devotion to the Lord should disrupt it. Carolyn Mahaney, wife of pastor C.J. Mahaney, was teaching on this verse at a conference back in 2004. She said that she heard a man once say: “I’ve heard many excuses for not having sex—not in the mood, headache, too tired, don’t have time. Prayer and fasting has never been one of them.”²⁹

Truly there have been times when the Lord called husbands and wives to refrain from one another—at Mt. Sinai when God visited Israel at Mt. Sinai (**Exodus 9:9-15**); later when the prophet Joel was calling wicked Judah to return to the Lord (**Joel 2:12-14**). God is more ultimate than sex, and our relationship with Him must take precedent over everything.

Come together!

But when these special seasons expire, Paul tells us that husbands and wives should come back together. End of v.5 “...but then come together again, *so that* Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Perpetual abstinence in marriage is a tool of Satan.³⁰ In other words, it is dangerous for married couples not to have sex. Abstinence in marriage is how Satan tempts husbands and wives towards sin.

²⁹ Piper & Taylor, pg. 206

³⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 158

I can imagine a spouse saying at this point: “But I am not tempted to sexual immorality. That’s not where I struggle, so we can go without sex nearly perpetually.” Two answers: **First**, perhaps you’re not tempted to sexual immorality. But you are tempted towards selfishness, and self-centeredness. You are tempted to live for yourself and ignore your spouse. Don’t you know that sex helps fight both the temptation towards immorality *and selfishness*? Why? Because sex is by it’s very nature self-giving. **Secondly**, withholding from your spouse is *itself* a form of sexual immorality because the Lord commands us to give ourselves to our spouses, that our bodies are not our own. This is one of the ways that we grow in our love towards each other.

Experimental intimacy

So test yourselves: Wives, do you understand that because sin has come into the world, your husband is constantly bombarded with sexual temptation? Are you helping him or are you depriving him? Husbands, are you depriving your wife of emotional intimacy? Are you attentive to her, or do you deprive her until bedtime?

That’s our **second point**: Satan will tempt us to immorality and selfishness if we deprive our spouses of the marriage bed.

III. The Supremacy of Christ

Eunuchs for the Kingdom

Paul as a single man, now take great care for those who are single, and even exalts singleness. Please look at v.6 Paul says “Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.” He’s essentially referring back to what he just said. In other words, he’s not commanding that every Christian be married. He continues in v.7 “I wish that all were as I myself am.” Meaning he wishes all were single. He explains why near the end of this chapter. Paul says in v.32 “I

want you to be free from anxieties. *The unmarried man* is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.” Do you see? Both in Paul’s day and often in our, singleness is often looked upon as a “second-class condition.”³¹ Paul says *exactly* the opposite! The single person is *most free* to please the Lord, *most free* from the anxieties of having a spouse, *most free* to give undivided attention to Christ and the Church.³² Now Paul is *not* saying that being single is for the super-spiritual, and being married is for the less-spiritual. That’s not Paul’s point. As a single man, when Paul says ‘I wish that you were like me,’ his statement can be compared to something a full-time pastor might say to someone in his congregation: ‘I wish that you were in the same position as I was, so that you could experience much more unbroken communion with the Lord in study, in prayer, in Scripture reading.’

Marriage and singleness are grace gifts

After all Paul recognizes that marriage and singleness are ultimately *not* human decisions but gifts from the Lord. Look at the rest of v.7 “But each has his own *gift* from God, one of one kind and one of another.” These things are *gifts*—the Greek word χάρισμα charisma—the root word χάρις charis begin grace. Marriage and singleness are gifts of God’s free grace—a person receives them without any merit of their own. Married persons are only married by God’s grace. **Proverbs 18:22** “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.” Single persons are single by God’s grace. **Matthew 19:11-12** “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to *whom it is given*...there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”³³ Singleness, like marriage is a *gift* from the Lord.

³¹ MacArthur, pg. 158

³² Please don’t try to fix single people. They are some of the greatest blessings to the Church.

³³ “Just as it is wrong to misuse a gift that we have, it is also wrong to try and use a gift we do not have. For a person who does not have the gift of celibacy, trying to practice it brings moral and spiritual frustration.” MacArthur pg. 159

A showing of the Spirit

But what is the purpose of these gifts? Paul is going to tell us in this letter. Please turn with me to **12:4** “Now there are varieties of *gifts* [same word—*χάρισμα* *charisma*], but the same Spirit.” Isn’t that interesting? Paul is calling marriage and singleness by the same word as he calls these other gifts like prophecy and miracles and tongues. All are *charisma*. Why does he do that? Because they all serve the same end. Look at **v.7** “To each is given *the manifestation of the Spirit* for the common good.” Do you see? He’s called these *charismas* a *manifestation* of the Spirit. A manifestation is *the act of disclosing what is secret*.³⁴ When God created the world He manifested His infinite power, meaning He revealed it, He disclosed it, it no longer remained hidden. Paul is saying the Holy Spirit uses these gifts—marriage and singleness—to *reveal something* that is secret.³⁵

Marriage and singleness are temporary

What *secrets* do marriage and singleness reveal? First, they show us that they themselves are temporary things. At death we will forever part with marriage and singleness. No one will be married in Heaven *and* no one will be single in Heaven. Well which one is it? No one will be married, *or* no one will be single. Both. No one will be *humanly* married. **Matthew 22:30** “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” And no one will be single. **Revelation 19:7** “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.”

³⁴ Websters’s 1828

³⁵ John 16:13-15 “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

How does singleness and celibacy tell the gospel story?

You see both marriage and singleness tell the secret of the gospel. How does *singleness and celibacy* tell the gospel story? What did Paul say about his singleness? That because he was free the anxieties of married life he was able to become a servant of all. **1 Corinthians 9:19** “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more...” Beloved, who was *the ultimate servant*? **Philippians 2:7-8** says that it was He who “...emptied himself, by taking *the form of a servant*, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus laid aside his rights, so that He could serve up eternal life. **Mark 10:44-45** “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

To my single brothers and sisters: The Lord has given you a most precious gift of singleness so that you can serve Him and His Church. **1 Peter 4:10** says “As each has received a gift [charisma], use it to serve one another...” You have been gifted for the benefit and common good of the local Church.³⁶ Ask yourself: is that important to you? Do you see the unspeakable privilege you’ve been given? You can imitate Christ in a way that married people cannot.

How does marriage and sex tell the gospel story?

How does *marriage and sex* tell the gospel story? Christ was not only a lowly servant, He was also a lover. **Ephesians 5:25** says “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Christ loved. Christ gave. Remember that sex is “...a total union of two persons, including their minds, emotions, and souls as well as their bodies.”³⁷ It is a “...total giving of yourself to your spouse.”³⁸ No one has given more of Himself to us *than Jesus*. He has held nothing back. “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him (**1 Cor. 6:17**).” And marriage and sex show us this so deeply. Listen to how one author put it:

³⁶ Paul says at the end of **v.7** this is “*for the common good*.”

³⁷ Ryken, pg. 45

³⁸ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 278

“Sex is like religion not only because it is objectively holy in itself but also because it...*subjectively* [gives us] a foretaste of heaven, of the self-forgetting, self-transcending, self-giving [which] our deepest hearts are designed for, long for and will not be satisfied until they have, because we were made in God’s own image and this self-giving constitutes the inner life of the Trinity.”³⁹

Jesus withholds nothing from us because that’s who the Trinity is—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity have lovingly, and eagerly given themselves to each other in perfect, holy Divine love.

To my married brothers and sisters: Sex can either be a source of exploitation and pain in your marriage or it can reveal more of Jesus. If you disconnect sex from this self-giving, self-forgetting nature, if you use pornography or use your spouses as objects, you lie about the gospel. You have made yourself a little god, because you have displaced Jesus with your own private pleasure. Sex was to teach us about Christ. Listen to how Mark Dever puts it:

“God set up good sex as part of evangelism. That does not mean we practice evangelistic dating, let alone evangelistic mating. It means that the sexual intimacy of marriage helps our spouse love God, it helps us understand how much Christ loves the Church, and it builds a marriage that is distinct from unfaithful and non-Christian marriages.”⁴⁰

³⁹ *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, Ed. John Piper & Justin Taylor, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2005), pg. 15-16

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 Elisabeth Elliot echoed a similar sentiment that I think applies to husbands and wives: “The essence of sexual enjoyment for a woman is self-giving... You will find that it is impossible to draw the line between giving pleasure and receiving pleasure. If you put the giving first, the receiving is inevitable.” *Ibid*, pg. 206

⁴⁰ *ibid*, pg. 264

What do you need most?

Finally for those of you are not Christian at all. If you are single, your greatest need is not to be married. If you are married, your greatest need is not better intimacy or a better marriage. “Your greatest need is to be delivered from the wrath of God.”⁴¹ Like marriage and singleness, your life is temporary. You will perish from this earth as quickly as the morning dew evaporates in the summer heat. Your life is a vapor. Wrath is coming for your sin. But you can be delivered. There is a Savior who offers Himself to You as a Bridegroom this morning. He will wash you of your sins. He will clothes you in white. He will bring you into His everlasting Kingdom. But you must repent of your sins and believe on Him. **John 3:18** “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pg. 189