

God Says “Yes” to Sex, But “No” to Immorality

Jack Hughes

July 5, 2009

This morning, we are going to continue looking at 1 Corinthians 7, so if you have your Bible[s] you can turn there. We’re doing a series on singles in the church. Since [over] the last three weeks we have talked primarily about problems facing singles, especially immorality, and what the Scriptures say about how to avoid immorality, kind of a negative approach, [saying] “Don’t do this,” I thought it would be good to also include the positive side this morning and see what God does want us to do in this area of marital relations.

The world doesn’t really know what to make of Christians and their view of sexuality. They’re confused about it mostly because Hollywood often portrays Christians as not really enjoying sexual pleasure, that [Christians think] those things are bad [and] evil. God hates immorality and sinners go to hell is what they hear. But they don’t really hear the good part. Part of the reason is [that] they don’t *want* to hear the good part because they want to justify their rejection of God and the Scriptures. They create a straw man. A straw man is a certain kind of argument [in which], if you want to reject somebody’s view, you create a very weak view that they don’t hold, but you pretend they do hold it. You create a straw man and then you light it on fire, and say, “See? It burned up. It’s not any good.”

This is what they do. They look at Christians, and say, “Well, Christians don’t believe that *any* sort of intimacy is good in any context. They are totally against it. Therefore it’s so ridiculous, it’s so absurd, light it on fire, and we’ll just do our own thing.” They distort the truth and then attack the distortion as an absurdity in order to justify their immoral lifestyle[s]. In their minds, being morally pure, saving oneself for marriage is kind of a monastic, extreme idea that should be rejected.

Puritans have been, and still are, being attacked, though they are not even around to defend themselves. They are being attacked for a view no Puritan ever held. The straw man is that Puritans believed that husbands and wives were only to come together for the purpose of having children and that’s all. [First:] The Puritans, as well as Christians in every age, [were] against ungodly expressions of intimacy. Just read any work of any solid Christian, and [you will see that he is] against immorality. You say, “Well, why are they against immorality?” Because God is against it, [that’s why]. The Scriptures are full of promises that it brings the wrath of God [and] that the immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God [see 1 Corinthians 6:9–10]. So, because [Christians] love people, they’re warning them [against immorality].

Second, Christians have always been against forced celibacy. That is, telling somebody that singleness is more godly and more holy or that you should be married, but you should abstain from all physical intimacy because it’s at some sort of higher plane of sanctification. Of course they would be against that because that’s not what the Scriptures teach. As a matter of fact, they teach quite the opposite. For instance, Paul, in 1 Timothy 4:1–3, says this:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

The first doctrine of demons that he mentions, in [1 Timothy 4:]3 is: “Men who forbid marriage.” It’s a doctrine of demons. It’s not a holier state to be single. This is illustrated very thoroughly in the Roman Catholic Church, [in which] men and women have made vows of celibacy, thinking it would put them on a higher spiritual plane, and [instead] have been brought together in groups and engaged in some horrendous acts of immorality. They have found monasteries where entire wells have been filled up with the skeletons of babies who were born and pitched in there.

But Christians have always been against the improper use of intimacy, even within marriage, of husbands and wives treating each other like prostitutes, gratifying their own sel[ves] and yet not serving the other person for [his or her] good and the glory of God. So, yes, they are against all these ungodly expressions because God is against all these ungodly expressions and that is what it means to be a Christian. But, do not believe that God is against [physical intimacy] altogether.

One of the most notorious women in history, who is often put forth as a representative of the Puritans, though she didn’t live until 200 years after them, and a representative of Christian thought, is Mrs. Ruth Smythers. [She was] the wife of Methodist minister Rev. L.D. Smythers, [and she] wrote an article in the *Madison Institute* newsletter, the fall issue, 1894, entitled, “Instruction and Advice for a Young Bride.” Mrs. Smythers counsels:

To the sensitive young woman who has had the benefits of proper upbringing, the wedding day is, ironically, both the happiest and most terrifying day of her life. On the positive side, there is the wedding itself, in which the bride is the central attraction in a beautiful and inspiring ceremony, symbolizing her triumph in securing a male to provide for all her needs for the rest of her life.

On the negative side, there is the wedding night, during which the bride must pay the piper, so to speak, by facing for the first time the terrible experience of [marital relations].

At this point, dear reader, let me concede one shocking truth. Some young women actually anticipate the wedding night or deal with curiosity and pleasure!

Beware such an attitude! A selfish and sensual husband can easily take advantage of such a bride. One cardinal rule of marriage should never be forgotten: **give little, give seldom, and above all, give grudgingly!**¹

Mrs. Smythers then goes on to describe God’s blessing as a “terror,” as “revolting,” and counsels young brides to feign illness, sleepiness, and headaches, as these, she says, “are a wife’s best friend.” She also encourages young brides to make themselves odious to their husbands by “arguing, nagging, scolding, and bickering” so that their husbands will leave them alone. Of course, [when] somebody who is a minister’s wife writes something like this, the world sees this and [they believe that] this is Christianity. [No,] this is the doctrine of demons. It’s people like Mrs. Smythers [who] have given Gentiles occasion to blaspheme what God has created to be good.

Therefore, it is necessary to come out and state the truth about what God says about intimacy in marriage and about the relationship between a husband and wife so that we know the truth and we know that it is a good thing and that God is all for it. So, we pick up where we left off last week. We’ve looked at reasons to abstain from immorality from 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, and also from 1 Corinthians 7:1–2. Paul tells men to not physically touch a woman in a sensual way so that they don’t ignite themselves in

¹Ruth Smythers, “Instruction and Advice for the Young Bride,” *The Madison Institute Newsletter*, Fall Issue, 1894. Available at:

http://www.mnstate.edu/holland/stuff/Misc_Humor/Instruction_and_Advice_for_the_Young_Bride.htm.

the fires of passion and be drawn into immorality [see 1 Corinthians 7:1–2]. Second, Paul instructs those who have strong, passionate desires to get married [see 1 Corinthians 7:2] because that is the God-ordained sphere [in which] people are to enjoy the desires that God has given them to be enjoyed in marriage.

It’s clear that some in Corinth had come to believe that the act of marriage was unholy, or that abstinence was more holy, as is often the case where there is false teaching. Paul is answering questions, such as, “What if one partner is willing and another is not?” Or “Is it OK to deny your partner attention physically for any reason at all?” This leads Paul into the whole discussion of marriage. He’s still talking about immorality and cures for immorality and now he’s talking about cures for immorality within marriage. He stated that marriage is part of the cure, but it is only part of the cure if God’s plan is followed. If [God’s plan is] not followed, then it’s not the cure or protection at all.

Please look in your Bibles. I’m going to read [1 Corinthians 7:]1–5, just so we have a little bit more of the context, and then we’ll get into [today’s] text. Paul says this:

Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

We’ve already noticed that in [1 Corinthians 7:]1–2 Paul gives a couple more ways to abstain from immorality, and now he is going to give some

regulations between husbands and wives in the context of marriage so that immorality can be avoided, so they can be blessed, [and] so God can be glorified.

The first is this: Fulfill your marital obligations. Having stated that marriage is a protection against immorality because it is a holy place to satisfy the God-given desires He has placed within us, Paul says this in [1 Corinthians 7:]3: “The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.” The New King James version translates it “render. . . affection due,” and the English Standard version translates it [that] they must “give. . . conjugal rights.” The word “fulfill” is a compound word [in Greek]. It’s the word “give” with the word “from” attached to it: to give from one’s self to another person. It is to pay a debt, to pay a duty, to serve, to give to somebody else that which is owed [him]. Here, of course, it is talking about the continual debt that husbands and wives have toward each other. It’s actually a present active imperative, which requires ongoing obedience. When you enter into marriage, you are agreeing to ongoing obedience to serve your spouse.

The word translated “duty,” or “conjugal rights” as the ESV has it, is “that which is owed to another in obligation or duty.” So, really, the word “fulfill” and the word “duty” are pretty much the same word. They’re two different words in the Greek, but they have the same meaning. It’s like [this verse is saying], “Pay your debt. Pay your debt” [or] “Pay your obligation, meet your obligation.” Give what is due. In the New Testament, it is used in a lot of places to talk about our responsibility to be thankful to God, to be godly parents, to give to others sacrificially, to show hospitality, etc. These are things we have to give because we’re Christians.

Well, in marriage, just as Christians have to do general things, these are specific things, these physical obligations, [that Christians are supposed to do]. We have to meet each other’s physical desires, not as Mrs. Smythers counseled, but to [ful]fill our duty so that we can be blessed in marriage and so God can be glorified. So, if you are a wife, you need to make sure that you’re not grudgingly following the counsel of Mrs. Smythers, that you’re

not using yourself to punish, to inflict pain upon, [to] deprive your husband because you have that ability. Husbands, do not be lazy in your service to your wife. Don't treat your wife as a mere means to gratify your lust, but serve her. Find out how to serve her. Many a husband has so shamefully treated his wife that her love has grown cold, and understandably so. Then the husband goes, “I don't know what's wrong.” It's his fault and he doesn't even know it.

The idea here is not what someone else owes you, but what you owe someone else—what you owe your spouse, your husband or your wife. You owe your husband or your wife. God commands you to pay the debt you owe, that you signed up for when you made that solemn oath to love that person until death. This does not mean you love her in a selfish way, or to give grudgingly, and be a letter-of-the-law-type person. No, you are to say, “I want to be a blessing. I want to serve this person. Men and women are different, so I need to find out about my wife.” A lot of women and men treat each other like their own kind. Men [often] think that a woman is just a man with a woman's body, and [they try] to love [their wives] in a manly way. [But women] will never be m[e]n. And women, guys are guys, that's why they act the way they do. They'll never act like a woman—hopefully. And so, [men and women] need to find out [how] each other is different.

[Having] relations outside of marriage is the sin of immorality. Within marriage, it is commanded. It is holy, good, [and] righteous. It's obedience to God because He commands it. God expects husbands and wives to continually pay the debt that they owe each other in this area to protect them from immorality. Solomon counsels young men in this very way in Proverbs 5:15–19, where he says this:

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your
own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,

Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

This word “exhilarated” here means “intoxicated.” *Really* love your wife. Just be sick with it, drugged with it. That’s God’s idea. God is not against passionate expressions of intimacy. He says, “Be intoxicated with your spouse.” The problem is not with what God says, the problem is when we take something good, which God has created, and then we twist it or pervert it, or use it outside of its sphere, and then we suffer for it. But that’s not God’s fault. I mean, drugs are good for medicine, but they’re not good for pleasure seeking. Hammers are good for pounding nails, but not for smashing thumbs. Guns are good for sport and protection, but they’re not good for murdering people in cold blood. Food is good, but gluttony is not. Rest is good, but not laziness. God has given us all of these things, and we can use them for good or evil. They’re blessings or curses depending on how we use them. Intimacy in marriage is a good thing; outside of marriage it’s a bad thing. It’s a wrong purpose.

It comes down to this: Does God know what He’s talking about or not? Is God up there going, “Let Me see how I can put more restrictions on them to make them miserable”? Is that how you see God? God wants you to be happy. He wants you to be joyful. He wants you to be fulfilled. He wants you to have peace. He [has] your best interests in mind. He wants to save you from hell *and* bless you. Are you going to believe that God knows best, or are you going to follow yourself or the counsel of the world? That’s what it comes down to. God is not trying to make you miserable. He wants you to freely enjoy all His gifts in their good, proper time and place. He knows, because He has purposely made it this way, that if you disobey and you take what [He] has made to be good, and use it improperly or out of its place, then you suffer consequences. He does that because He loves you and He wants to protect you from yourself.

People who engage in immorality are plagued with problems. They’re emotionally trashed and they feel miserable, empty, and hollow. A lot of

times they don't even know why their lives are meaningless. They keep plunging themselves into greater expressions of immorality, thinking, “Oh, this time it will satisfy.” [It] never does. It leads to abortion, abandoned babies, crushed hearts, broken marriages, pillaged children, sexually transmitted diseases, and single parents raising children. Every time I read things about, “Oh, we need to find a cure for AIDS,” [I think], “There *is* a cure for AIDS: it's biblical morality. That is the cure.”

Many people continually striv[e] in this world to try to find a way to have their sin but not the consequences, [but] there are [always] consequences to sin. Let's just say you are going for a walk and you're walking in this big neighborhood. There's this huge piece of property [and] off in the distance, you see this giant mansion. You think, “Man, I'd like to go check out that house. Maybe I could knock on the door and walk through it and look inside.” But there's a little picket fence there and a sign that says, “Keep out.” So, you go through the fence. Then you walk up [a distance] and then there's another fence [that] says, “Warning: Electric Fence. Shock Hazard.”

You [think], “Hmm.” So you [move] back, run at the fence, jump, and start climbing over. It starts shocking you. Your hair is sticking out and you fall on the other side [of the fence], and [yell], “Ah! Ah!” You're kind of twitching [and] you've got a little twitch in your cheek. You say, “Man, that hurt! Whoa. Whoa!” Then you keep walking toward the house [again]. You come to another wall with a nice wrought iron gate, and it says, “Beware: Guard Dogs.” You go through [it]. Now, hello? Two German shepherds come out and start chewing you to pieces. Hello! You rejected the warning [and] you're suffering the consequences. So you go further. Hello! There is a word for that: insane. Why would you do that to yourself?

That is exactly what happens [with sin]. God says, “Keep out of immorality,” [and] you head for it. You begin to suffer the consequences, [but you say], “I'll go the next step further.” You suffer more, [and say], “I'll go the next step further.” You suffer more. You keep going, [and eventually] you wind up in hell.

[If] you go through the Scriptures, you’re going to find so many warnings about the consequences of immorality. You have to say, “Does God know what He’s talking about or not?” I went through Proverbs, and this is what I found. [In] Proverbs 2:16–19, God says adultery causes one to suffer abandonment [and] the covenant of marriage [to be] broken and [it] leads to hell. Proverbs 5:20–23 says immorality leads to being captured by the “cords” of one’s own sin and leads to death. Proverbs 6:26–33 describes one who is seduced into adultery as being “reduced to a loaf of bread” to be consumed and forgotten. [Immorality] is as smart as pouring hot coals down our shirt or walking on fire. It is to seek punishment, to seek self-destruction, to volunteer to lose one’s reputation so that it can never be blotted out. It is to put one in danger [from] a jealous spouse.

Proverbs 7:21–26 describes the immoral person as a dumb ox [that] willingly walks toward the slaughter, as a deer [that] willingly walks into the hunter’s ambush, or as a bird [that] cluelessly hastens to the snare. Proverbs 9:13–18 speaks of those who engage in immorality as joining with those who are on their way to hell. In Proverbs 23:27–28, it says those who engage in immorality are those who fall into a deep pit or a narrow well, [and describes them] as being robbed [and] as being faithless. In Proverbs 2[7]:13, it says committing adultery is to sign on the dotted line that you want God to judge you. Proverbs 29:3 says immorality is a sin that causes one to waste [his] wealth. Proverbs 30:20 says adultery leads to a seared conscience and a denial that one has done any wrong. You just need to stand back, and say, “What do you think would be best to do? I’ve got blessing, peace, joy, the glory of God, and happiness here, or all of these things I mentioned and more.” Yet the whole world is taking the wrong way. They’re suffering and they go the wrong way. They suffer; they go the wrong way.

Some of you like to go to the beach. Why, when they have the big signs out there [saying that] there are big riptides, don’t you go swim in the riptide? You say, “Well, that would be foolish! Why, you’d be sucked under and spit out at Catalina Island, dead.” You’re right. Some of you like

to run, so why not run on the freeway at night with black clothing [on]? You say, “Well, that would be dumb. You’d die.” That’s right. Some of you are taking powerful medications for various things. Why not take ten times the dose? You say, “It would kill me.” Think about that, though. This is what people are doing. They’re digesting the fatal dose of immorality and you know what they’re saying? [They’re saying], “It’s not hurting me.”

They’re like a person who has just taken ten times [his] prescription allowance, [and says], “It’s not hurting me. I’m fine. I don’t feel anything right now.” Well, right now you don’t feel anything, but what about in ten minutes, twenty minutes, [or] a half hour, when they’re carrying you out on a stretcher, cold. What about then? We need to never confuse a stay in judgment [a]s [an] absence of justice. Never confuse a delay in execution as pardon. Never run toward the raging inferno, and say, “Because I haven’t felt its heat yet, it’s not there,” because justice *is* there, pardon will not be extended, and hellfire waits for those who run into immorality and will not repent of it. You have to turn from it.

If you’re living an immoral life, you are swimming in the riptide zone, you’re running on the freeway at night, you have taken the fatal dose [of medication] and you will die, in this life and the one to come, unless you run to the Physician of your soul. Unless you run to Christ and receive His forgiveness, have His shed blood wash you clean, unless you are born again by the Holy Spirit of God, you will not escape. Jesus died to save sinners and He is more than happy to save you from this if you’re willing to turn from it. But you can’t be facing Christ and immorality at the same time. They are in opposite directions. You cannot follow Christ and follow sin at the same time. They are in opposite directions. If you want to satisfy your physical desire, get married. There, you can enjoy it to the full, receive the blessings of God—the pleasure, the happiness, everything that God intended. He wants you to do it.

You just need to read the story of the Song of Solomon a little bit and there is no doubt that God is into passionate, romantic love. He’s not some killjoy here. You just [have] to read [Song of Solomon] a little bit,

and you find out, “Whoa! Whoa!” There are some metaphors in there that are...phew! Husbands, you need to try this. What you need to do is read through the Song of Solomon, learn from Solomon how he does it, and then you need to write your wife the same thing, just replac[ing] some of his metaphors with your own.

Let me tell you a little bit about what Solomon writes about the Shulamite maiden [in Song of Solomon]. He says [that] she is as beautiful as the “tents of Kedar” [see 1:5]. Now, you think, “Well, pfft.” So, you write in yours, “My love, you are as beautiful as Dodger Stadium.” OK? There you go. [Solomon says the Shulamite maiden is] as beautiful as a well cared for vineyard. She is like a mare among the chariots of Pharaoh [see 1:9]. You think, “I don’t know if my wife likes horses that much.” I’m not saying you have to use the same [description]. You might have to fix it, you know? [Say something] like [your wife is like] a snap-on line wrench or something. Something she’d really appreciate.

The Shulamite [maiden’s] eyes are like doves, deep as the pools of Heshbon, her nose is like the Tower of Lebanon [see 7:4]. (You probably don’t want to use that one. It sounds large, doesn’t it?) Her hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Her teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes, her lips like a scarlet thread [that] drip[s] honey. Her temples are like slices of pomegranate beneath her veil [see 4:2–3]. She is the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley among the thorns [see 2:1]. Her neck is like the tower of David [see 4:4]. It’s like, whoa! Sounds large. But, Solomon was into architecture [and] horses. He was into these things, so he said, “You know what? Guys, this is what you do. [You say], ‘Honey, your eyes sparkle like the finest finish of an Orvis fly rod,’ and I’m telling you it will just totally slay her. You’ll get huge mileage out of that. ‘Your form is beautiful like the curves of a Ferrari.’ I’m telling you, you just need to try it guys. I’m telling you, it works.”

Women, you need to do this same thing. You need to learn from the Shulamite maiden. This is how she describes Solomon. It’s like his hair is a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyard of Engedi [1:14], or like

an apple tree among the trees of the forest, like a gazelle or young stag, leaping on the mountains of Bether [2:17]. His head is like pure gold, his hair like clusters of dates and [as] black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the streams of water [5:11–12], his abdomen like carved ivory, and his legs like pillars of alabaster [5:14–15]. So, you just need to take these images, and say, “Honey, you are so strong and handsome. You remind me of a KitchenAid mixer. You’re as hot as my iron!” Work it, you know? So, that’s your homework if you’re married.

You say, “Why does Solomon write this way?” [He writes this way] because the Holy Spirit is inspiring him to write this way. [These are] the words of God. He wants married couples to enjoy [their physical relationship], to have passion. When you read [the verses], [they’re] almost too gooey, [with these two people saying], “I’m lovesick.” They’re delirious with passion, desire, and love for each other. This is what God wants in marriage. He is not some killjoy saying, “Well, whatever you do, stay sober.” No, He says, “Stay passionate, loving, affectionate, romantic.” If you get married, you’re agreeing to fulfill the responsibility for your good, for the blessing of your spouse, [and] for the glory of God. If you selfishly withhold from your partner what you owe [him or her], it’s just going to drive you apart. It’s going to make you miserable.

Some people say, “Well, you know, I guess [this is what I’m supposed to do],” and then they reluctantly or grudgingly following through with what they have to do. That is pharisaical intimacy. That’s [saying], “Well, I’m going to fulfill the letter of the Law, but I’m not going to do it from my heart.” Well, then you’re not loving your spouse, you’re not loving God, and you’re sinning. This kind of behavior is evil. It’s wicked. It’s selfish.

This is why Paul didn’t stop in [1 Corinthians 7:]3, but went on to say what he did in verse 4. Look there. We get to our second point: Submit yourself to your spouse. In [1 Corinthians 7:]4 he says, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does,” and all the husbands say, “Amen!” Then, the wife must willingly submit herself to her husband. But not only that, the middle of [1 Corinthians 7:]4 [says]: “And

likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” She says, “Amen!”

This is very interesting here. Both husband and wife are said not to have authority. The word “authority” is “to be over somebody, to have control of somebody.” Usually we’re in control of our own body. We do what we want. We move where we want. We go where we want. We are masters of our own body. But in the area of marriage, we forego mastering our own body, and we give that control over to somebody else, that dominance over to somebody else: our spouse. So, we must not be selfish in how we love. We need to be kind, respectful, and reverent. It must be the joy of both husband and wife to obey God in this area and serve one another. Why? So they can be happy, so God can be glorified, [that’s why]. The golden rule must be applied.

You find out what your spouse wants and you serve [him or her], just like you would have [him or her] find out what you want and have [him or her] serve you. You talk about it. You find out. You have to realize that you’re different. You have different needs. You find out, you talk about it, and you figure out how to love each other.

A common scenario encountered in counseling couples goes something like this. At first the husband and wife are married and they’re like Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. Over time, they settle into some routine, and the husband, being male and usually having stronger desires, begins to not really serve his wife. She, then, begins to resent her husband, which makes her begin to act like Mrs. Smythers. The husband, then, doesn’t understand what’s going on, and it frustrates him to no end, and [his wife] is wishing that she would be treated with more respect. But the husband isn’t asking, so he’s not doing it because he’s selfish and then she becomes selfish, and pretty soon they begin to drive themselves apart. This, then, makes the husband vulnerable, [and] he goes after pornography, or they both go after another person and commit adultery, and the whole marriage falls apart.

Well, it’s not because God’s plan is broken, it’s because they aren’t following God’s plan to meet the obligations they have to one another. This is

especially a problem with men who have saturated their minds with pornography because in pornography you’re looking at images [in which] women are being paid to act like men. A lie is being presented that this is how women are when women are not that way. The lie, then, sticks in your mind as a man, and when you get married you wonder why your wife isn’t acting like a man. [It is] because she is not [a man]. It’s a lie!

So, the woman is frustrated because her husband isn’t meeting her needs. She expects to be treated like a woman, but she is not because her husband is selfish and he has been deluded and has polluted his mind. So, she begins to act like Mrs. Smythers, giving little, giving seldom, and above all, giving grudgingly. The husband and the wife then find themselves at this stalemate. What needs to happen is both of them need to repent of their sins, both of them need to obey the Scriptures, and [then] both of them will be fulfilled. If they don’t do that, they are ripe candidates for adultery and then divorce.

That’s why Paul foresaw this. He saw this. He knew this would happen. It’s amazing how Paul anticipates things. He [thinks to himself], “You know what? There are going to be people out there, and they’re all going to be in a place where they aren’t obeying this command. They’re going to start falling apart. What do I need to tell them?” [First Corinthians 7:]5 tells us [our third point]: Stop depriving one another. Look there: “Stop depriving one another.” [This] literally [means], “stop defrauding, robbing, plundering, cheating, stealing from one another.” If you buy a house, a car, or something on credit, you have to pay it back. If you don’t, you’re robbing, you’re stealing, you’re cheating. Well, the same word is used here [in 1 Corinthians 7:5]. God says, “[If] you don’t meet the other person’s needs, you’re robbing, stealing, cheating from them.” Think of yourself as a thief because that’s how God sees you if you don’t meet your partner’s needs.

What we need to realize is that when the Bible speaks of marriage, it speaks of marriage as a man and a woman becoming one, not only physically, but spiritually [as well]. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 19[:6]? He [said], “What God has joined together, let no man sep-

arate.” There is a spiritual bond. That’s why they are said to be one. [They are] one in marriage. That’s why divorce is never part of God’s plan because God says [that] what He made together He wants to stay together. One man [and] one woman for life is His plan.

[If] you neglect your spouse, what are you doing? You’re neglecting yourself. Think of it that way. If you could do this, would you ever decide to refuse to have blood flow to half your body? [You’d say], “Well, no. That would be bad.” Yes, that would be bad for you. Or, maybe, when you breathe, [would you choose] to have oxygen only flow to half of your body? Or, maybe, when you eat, [would you choose] to have that nourishment only flow to half of your body? You say, “Well, if you could do that—and you can’t—*why* would you do that?” Well, yeah, that’s the whole point. Why would you harm your own self? That’s what you do: When you don’t follow God’s prescription you harm your own self in marriage.

Calvin said this:

Satan [has] prevailed so far as to drive many to unlawful divorce, from a corrupt desire for an unmarried life. The husband, leaving his wife, fled to the desert, that he might please God better by living as a monk. The wife, against her husband’s will, put on the veil — the badge of celibacy. Meanwhile they did not consider that by violating their marriage engagement they broke the Lord’s covenant, and by loosing the marriage tie, they cast off the Lord’s yoke.²

Calvin is speaking of a time when a lot of people would abandon their partner to go be a monk in the desert or some nun in a nunnery, breaking the covenant and casting off the Lord’s yoke. In other words, [they were] rejecting the Lord as their Master as they [went] to pursue their “religion.” Husbands and wives listen to me: If you work at meeting your spouse’s

²John Calvin, *Commentary on Corinthians*, 1 Corinthians 7:5. Available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom39.xiv.ii.html>

needs, you’re going to be fine. [If] the goal of your life [is to] meet your spouse’s needs, you’ll be fine.

Does this mean that there is never a time when a wife or a husband can deny [his or her] partner? Well, surely there are certain circumstances that get in the way. Paul gives one such example. He says, “Don’t deprive one another,” look at [1 Corinthians 7:]5, “except by agreement.” Here we see that there is an exception to the rule. There has to be an agreement. Whatever the exception is, you have to be agreed. If you aren’t agreed, you can’t have an exception. Not only that, if you look at [1 Corinthians 7:]5 again, he says: “for a time.” So, both need to agree and it’s only for a time—a short period of time. It can’t be permanent. If you look at the middle of verse 5, it must be for a holy purpose so that you may devote yourself to prayer.

Maybe you’re in grief, maybe a loved one died, maybe you’re concerned about a friend, maybe there’s some huge catastrophe in your life and you just want to pray. So, you have to have an agreement from your partner and you ask [him or her] if you can postpone intimacy for a time, and [he or she] grant[s] you that for a time. That’s fine. That’s what Paul is talking about.

I want you to take note here about something that is very fascinating. [This] struck me as I was studying this [verse]. We know God tells us to pray, to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thessalonians 5:17], [to do] “everything by prayer” [Philippians 4:6], [and] to boldly approach the throne of grace [see Hebrews 4:16]. There’s a constant exhortation to always be in prayer. God wants us to come before Him, to beseech Him, to approach Him in prayer, but get this: God Almighty is willing to submit Himself to us, to couples, while they have an agreement. God is saying [that] though prayer is important this [physical relationship] is more important.

We often think of this thing [as] a fleshly thing and [of] prayer [as] a spiritual thing, but no. Intimacy is a spiritual thing and prayer is a spiritual thing, but intimacy is a higher priority. God says, if you don’t have mutual agreement, [choose] intimacy, not prayer. Think about that. That tells you

how holy God considers this. Why would God put something that at first thought seems so fleshly [in] such a high state of priority? Well, if you look at the end of [1 Corinthians 7:]5, we find out: “And come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” That’s why: “to prevent” what? {To prevent] immorality. God wants you to be so holy and pure [that] He says, “I’m giving you priority over prayer. This takes priority over prayer, just so that you don’t fall into immorality. I don’t want you to fall into immorality. No immorality.”

God wants you to be blessed, to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be satisfied. He gives us these desires, and says, “Enjoy them in marriage. Enjoy them freely. Fulfill your duty. Don’t deprive one another. Give to each other what is due and do it willingly, for the Lord, for the blessing of others, and the glory of God.” That’s so good.

I want you to turn over to Song of Solomon. If you’re wondering where that is, it’s past Proverbs a little bit. You’ll run into it [after] Ecclesiastes. [Turn to] Song of Solomon 8, the last chapter. If you ever have anybody say, “Well, I don’t know if God is for this or not,” this text here is the pinnacle text. This is probably the most expressive, picturesque text about how God feels about the intimacy between a husband and a wife in marriage and the degree to which it can be enjoyed with His full agreement, purpose, and pleasure.

[In Song of Solomon 8:]6, the Shulamite maiden tells Solomon here, “Put me like a seal over your heart.” Think about that. Your heart, to [people at this time], was your emotions, your intellect, your will, your thoughts. [The Shulamite maiden is saying], “I want to be on your heart. I want to be on your mind. I want you to be consumed with thoughts about me. Put me like a seal on your heart.” Not only that, [she goes on to say], “Like a seal on your arm.” [Your] arm is the instrument [with which] you do things. So, [the maiden says], “I want you to be thinking about me, and whenever you do, I want you to be consumed about me, thinking about me.” [She goes on in the next verse]: “For love,” and we’re talking about physical, passionate, romantic love here, “is as strong as death” [8:6]. Now, death

is pretty strong. Once somebody dies, it’s hard to get out of that situation, OK? So, we’re talking about a strength of passion that is like death.

[Then she says], “Jealousy is as severe as Sheol.” Both people [must] understand their right[s], their dut[ies] to have their partner and their partner alone in the marriage relationship, and it’s like jealousy [a]s severe as Sheol. We’re talking about ultimate strength here. “Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the LORD” [8:6]. I don’t know what that means, but that’s intense. Since God can basically melt the whole universe we’re talking about some intensity here—the very flame of the Lord. [Someone might ask], “Well, just how passionate can it be?” Well, “Many waters cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it” [8:7]. You can’t drown it, you can’t smother it. It burns underwater.

Not only that, in line with the great prophets, the Beatles, [the maiden says]. “If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised.” You can’t buy love. You can’t make somebody love you this way with money. You can’t pay for it. If you pursue immorality, you will never know this. God wants you to know this. He wants you to experience this. In your marriage He wants you to have the full blessing and intensity of what He’s talking about here. But if you go outside the means, or [if] even within marriage you don’t fulfill what God tells you to do, you’ll never have this blessing. You’ll cheat yourself of this blessing. When you have this blessing, it makes you so thankful, constantly praising God, that if you don’t do it this way, you’ll steal [from] God His praise, and steal [from] God His glory because God knows what’s best.

So, that’s the positive side: God is all for intimacy within its place, in its time, and to a radical degree of silly passion and lovesickness, to the point of intoxication. So, that’s it. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You have given us instruction, that we can see Your purpose, and Your perfect plan for marriage. Father, I pray for each person who is married as they look at this, and say, “Well, that’s not what I’m experiencing.” Well, then, may You give them the motivation to begin to pursue the kind of way they need

to love their spouse so that You can be honored, so they can be blessed, so You can receive the praise, [and] so they can experience what we just read in the text. For those who are single, I pray that You would give them contentment, peace, and the grace to live a holy and pure life. For those with the gift of singleness we praise You that not all need to be married. But for those who feel they do have the need, may You, by Your providence, bring that right person into their [lives] at the right time and may they then begin to experience the great blessings and joy you have for them in this sphere.

Father, I pray that Calvary Bible Church would be a holy church. I pray that You would help all of us to pursue holiness in our relationships. Father, I pray that if there are people here who don't know You, maybe people here who have fallen into immorality and they're wondering if You know what's best, may You convince them that You know what's best. May they repent of their sin, may they turn to purity and holiness, and following Christ. For those who are in marriage who are struggling right now, who have not submitted, may they be broken because of their own sin, not thinking of their spouse's, [but] their own sin. May You humble them because of their own sin. May You give them resolve to obey You regardless, and then, as a consequence of that, may You give them joy, peace, and happiness because that is Your plan for marriage. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible[®], ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.