

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

*Sex, Marriage, Singleness & the Glory of God Pt 2 –
“The Dethroning of Sex”*

April 23, 2017 – Spence Shelton

Turn to 1 Corinthians 7

1. Today probably falls into the PG-13 rating. Not crass language or anything of shock value, just the nature of the subject. So, if you have a little one who isn't ready to hear this, I encourage you to check out our awesome Mercy Kids programming.

Ok I want to take a second and say how awesome last weekend was. We had so many people sacrifice so much to make it happen and WOW what a weekend for Mercy Church. I don't normally share numbers because we are not about numbers we are about people. BUT, sometimes a big moment happens that really pictures the culture of the church and in those moments, numbers just help paint the picture.

Last weekend I believe was a big moment in our church because our church collectively bought in and invited many people to come hear the gospel. I think last weekend was a glimpse of what is possible when we all band together around one mission. I know you invited your friend and so I

want you to know you were not alone! All told 658 celebrated Easter with us last weekend. Praise God!! I met at least three practicing Muslims who graciously came with a friend, several people who grew up around church but left it behind when they moved out from mom & dad and are now kind of returning...People from all walks. And many of you are back this weekend and I want to thank you for being here.

And listen wherever you are in your faith whether you are brand new to the Christian message or kind of returning to the faith of your childhood I want to tell you that you picked an awesome time to be here.

The reason is, we are walking through a letter in the NT where our author Paul is taking the core truth of Christianity, the gospel message, and he is applying it to basically every arena of life. So if you spend the next 6 weeks with us (which I believe is what you need to really get a feel for a church and if you fit) you'll hear the core message & how it plays out in real life. If I was a skeptic, that's what I'd want to see. Not just "what do you believe" but how do your beliefs hold up under the weight of real life pressures and situations. That's what this letter is all about. Core truth playing out in real life.

Review

When we opened this series of messages we said Paul is going to treat the gospel like a pair of lenses that Christians are to put on and see the world through. He's going to say

everyone sees the world through a certain point of view. Through certain lenses. And if you recall Paul opened with the idea that our default point of view, our default lenses, are defective. We see the world through a point of view that has been corrupted by sin. Our lenses are defective. So what happens? We make decision after decision that *seems* logical and good based on what we see in front of us. But in actuality those decisions turn out to be harmful to us. I joked that sin creates lenses that act like beer goggles. Decisions that *seemed* good when intoxicated turn out to be bad when you sober up. This is what sin does all the time to us. Which is why a 25 year old will throw the next 30 years of their lives into climbing the corporate ladder, and a 55 year old will talk about how unsatisfying life is at the top. Faulty point of view. We *were* created by God to find satisfaction and meaning in life, and we search like crazy for it. There are enthusiasts about EVERYTHING because we keep looking for the thing that we can say "That's my people, that's who I am." And we keep going from thing to thing hoping to finally find fulfillment but the reason nothing works is the whole time our vision is distorted by faulty lenses. Wrong places + wrong lenses

And this whole letter is arena after arena of Paul saying take OFF these faulty lenses that lead us down disappointing and unfulfilling searches and instead put on gospel lenses. Look at every area of your life through the lens of the gospel. And then, Paul says, you will finally experience the soul satisfying life you were created for.

So what we've been doing for the past few weeks is following Paul through this letter as he shows us how the gospel becomes our lens for the different arenas of life. Up to this point we've seen how the gospel reveals to us the true, soul satisfying way to look at Pride, Wisdom, Leadership, Purpose, Conflict, and Sex. With each one he said sin distorts how we look at them, but the gospel shows us a way to redeem them. On our blog you can find a fuller recap?

That brings us to chapter 7. Last week was the beginning of Paul's foray into how the gospel informs the way we view marriage & singleness. We've got a couple of weeks here in chapter 7. There's a lot to cover. But for today let me give you the one big overarching idea: Paul is going to say that in Corinth the temptation to sexual immorality was really strong. It was a sex-saturated culture. So the faulty lens of the day would say to indulge your sexual urges as often as they arise and that will satisfy you. But Paul is going to say...NO WAY. There is so much more to you than your sexual desires. When you take those faulty lenses off and put on the gospel you see that God sees you as so much more than a being with sexual desires. Hear this: you are more than your sexuality. There is a higher purpose; a higher calling that God has created you for. And when you see through the gospel lens...you are able to put sexual desires into their proper place and live a life that isn't consumed with or controlled by sex.

And Paul is going to talk about how the gospel informs the way we handle our sexual desires. While that may sound taboo to talk about in church, It's just one of those things that is so practical and relevant to our everyday lives.

If you are new: You might find what the bible says right here pretty eye opening. Listen this is just where we fall in Paul's letter. Just like you would read a letter written to you, we read it in order and this is where we are. I hope you see this as evidence that Christians do not believe something abstract, but something that clearly informs our lives. That was Paul's whole point in this letter.

Ok I'm going to walk through 1 Cor 7, 1-9 and just try to explain what Paul is saying to us. Now, because I'm going to go just straight through these verses I'm going to address everyone in first two verses, then married people in 3-5 and then unmarried people in 6-9. That is *not* order of importance, that's just order of verses. Got a problem, take it up with the author.

Here we go first to everyone:

[1] Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

Now I mentioned 2 weeks ago that Paul is quoting a comment from a letter sent to him from the Corinthians. Do you see the sentence structure here? Paul is going to refute the idea he's quoting. Verse 2 is him saying "on the

contrary." Paul is a student of the bible and knows God is the one who created man & woman and when they came together as one God said this is VERY good. Remember last time in chapter 6 we said sex inside of the marriage of a man and a woman is something God blesses and says is a really good thing. He should know right? He created us. He didn't stumble upon Adam & eve having sex and say WHOA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? No, he designed it, blessed it, and celebrated it.

[2] But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

Ok this little comment "because of temptation to sexual immorality" is key for Paul. Remember, sexual immorality is the word "porneia" which means any kind of sexual activity outside of husband & wife marriage. Paul is acknowledging temptation to engage in sexual immorality is a real thing. Which should encourage some of you about the bible. The bible speaks to your human-ness. And in your human-ness you were created with a sex drive. And Paul says the devil himself (pretty intense language) can come in and corrupt that sex drive and can start to tempt you to apply that sex drive the wrong way. That's what temptation to sexual immorality is. It's the desire to misuse God's gift of sex.

So Paul says, and he does say it as a concession, that a man should have "his own" wife and each woman "her own"

husband. You know what he's saying is very counter-cultural then and now. Paul is calling Christians to monogamous life long heterosexual marriage. He's using the possessive "have your own" because, well, there was a lot of sharing going on. Let me pause right here and say something:

Sex is a good gift from God. But sin has distorted our view of it and now we can become consumed by the temptation to sexual immorality. That is, the temptation to engage in sexual activity outside of the marriage of a man & a woman. And Paul's goal in this chapter is to charging Christians to be all-in for the mission of God. That's the last verse in this chapter we'll see in a few minutes. He wants to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. So this teaching on sexual immorality is NOT some out of date moral code. It's God going back to gospel lenses. Sexual immorality won't satisfy you. Maybe for a minute but that's it. But God has a calling on your life that will bring true joy here and now. And he's about to talk for many chapters about that but if you are distracted by this temptation you will miss it! That's why he's talking about it.

In fact to really get to where you can apply today I want to lead off with one driving gospel truth for all of us:

Christ frees you from the control of the temptation to sexual immorality

Paul said this in Romans 6:

[20] For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [21] But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. [22] But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:20-23

Hear that? You are FREE! Paul is saying you gotta start living in your new reality! Sometimes in our sinful flesh we live like we are still slaves to sin but that's not who we are anymore! So maybe you feel like you are in sexual sin that is dominating you right now. If you are in Christ, you are free!! Now maybe you aren't living in that freedom right now but freedom is yours.

Some of you need to hear that passage again from Romans 6. The wages...what you get from sin...its death. And you are feeling that in your life. Sin is not delivering, it is destroying. But the gift of God is life in Christ. Your step today is to give your life to Christ so you can be set free from your sin. And God's promise to you is that he will set you free. You are not enslaved to Sexual sin anymore! And listen that's the gospel lens you now have to see your sexual desires with.

Moving on, Verses 3-5 are infamous. The verses I'm about to read to you have made Paul a favorite author for some

spouses, & a villain for others. These verses have been abused & misused by some. And they have on the other hand been the key to incredible breakthroughs in some marriages. You ready?

[3] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. [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 own body, but the wife does. [5] Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Ok everyone remain calm and let me show you what he's saying to couples. I told you he would talk to married couples first so here is your application point:

God commands married couples to have sex regularly
Don't forget the context these sentences are in. The bigger picture is that because of temptation to sexual immorality, each should have his or her own spouse. And in marriage, you should literally give one another what you are "due" sexually. That conjugal rights language is actually what you are "due" to receive as a spouse. So spouse, it is your duty to meet your spouse's sexual needs. Now listen...I know some of you just perked up like "FINALLY...A BIBLE COMMAND I AM READY TO OBEY...TODAY!" LET'S PASS

THE BUCKETS AND GET OUTTA HERE! Slow down for a minute.

You can read verses 3 & 4 in any language you want to and it is going to come back to this simple truth. Husbands & wives should be having sex. I hope you have a great time applying God's word this week! In fact we are marking the calendar. 9-10 months from today we'll see if the nursery is growing. Kidding!

Listen let me say a couple things first. While this is true, this statement is not made in isolation from the rest of what the bible teaches about marriage. And the bible teaches that marriage is a gospel reenactment. Where you sacrifice yourself out of a love for your spouse just as Christ sacrificed himself out of his love for you.

So the God honoring approach to your spouse here is to *talk together about your sex life*. Not just demand sex or you will condemn your spouse. Think if God treated you that harshly every time you sinned. No, he loves you & is patient and gracious with you. So, You gotta sit down, look at each other, and say ok how are we going to obey God's command in this area? I want to give you some guiding principles for that conversation. Hopefully these will help you. Because before you can have a healthy sex life you gotta talk about it. Here are some things you have to be able to say to one another to have a healthy, god honoring sex life:

First, **My Body is Your Body**. Listen I imagine this one might get me some emails. Charlie@mercycharlotte.com But Paul is very clear that **a spouse does not have exclusive rights over his/her body anymore.**¹ That's what happens in marriage. As a single person you belong to you and to God. But when you get married Paul is acknowledging that you surrender some of that autonomy. Now this is completely counter cultural. Our culture casts sex as a form of self-fulfillment. Sex is about your own pleasure. But Paul is saying PUT ON THE GOSPEL LENS...

Your whole life is not about satisfying yourself but about serving others because you are satisfied in Christ. Even sex, especially sex, now is an act of self-giving. Sex isn't about getting your needs met, sex is about meeting the needs of your spouse. You understand that? That's a mental shift that will keep this from being a command you lord over your spouse. You are to be fulfilled enough in Christ that you aren't worried about your spouse meeting your needs. Your fulfillment in Christ is to free you to be concerned about meeting your spouse's needs.

This only works if you remember that the main driving idea here is the gospel. That your primary concern in sex is not what you get but what you are giving. In fact, when you get to the place where giving your spouse pleasure is what

¹ I'm choosing to follow Thiesleton's interpretation of the word "exclusive" as I agree with him that such an interpretation is consistent with Paul's teaching on the "one flesh" union of husband and wife elsewhere.

gives you the greatest pleasure, that's when you'll know you are getting this whole principle.²

And when you get to the point where you can say my body is your body, what you are actually saying is "I trust you" and it says, "I trust God." This is the ultimate statement of vulnerability. Listen I know when I say that some of you recoil because you've been hurt by extending that trust. And now in your marriage to be able to get to this point you may need to say to your spouse "I want to say that, I want to get there, but I'm not there because of _____." And if that's true you need to follow that with a willingness to go see a counselor together so that you can deal with whatever that thing is. See a regular sex life isn't the GOAL of marriage. Holiness and closeness to Christ is. A regular sex life is more like a thermometer that measures the temperature in your marriage. So if something is keeping you from giving yourself to your spouse, it means there is a problem that needs to be addressed. And you guys need to have mountains of patience as you work through it together.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS, and I want to say this gently, is that if I am giving my body to my spouse, I need to take care of it. If my body is for my spouse, and I am called to serve my spouse, it follows that I should make an attempt be attractive to my spouse. As a way to serve them. You can go off the deep end either way on this. One end: obsess about

² From Tim & Kathy Keller's *Meaning of Marriage* 267-268.

every wrinkle & Lb. GOSPEL LENS: God approves of you so you don't need beauty. Not to mention, as Scott Urbanek said to me this week: at some point gravity is gonna win in the end and we will all droop & sag.

Scott@mercycharlotte.com. Other end though: You don't let yourself go. Some people obsess over image, get married and never think about it again. Instead let's see our bodies as gifts to give our spouse.

We need to figure out what "regular" means for us – Ok

I say this because I know you want me to define what "regular" means and I'm just not going to start throwing numbers out ok. I know if you say well every year on my birthday...that isn't regular. But, different seasons of life present different challenges and the point isn't a magic number. The point is Paul saying part of what a healthy sex life does in marriage is satisfy sexual desires in such a way that helps to subdue the temptation towards sexual immorality. Let that be the barometer of what regular is.

And listen GRACE needs to win the day here ok. I promise you no two spouses have the exact same sex drive. Now if you are like "yes we do" then that means one of two things: you just got back from your honeymoon recently, or your youngest just moved out of the house and now its just the two of you. Either way, I'm happy for you. But this is still a thing. For the rest of us, listen let's have grace in trying to apply this principle. My old pastor used to coach married couples to have a 48-hour rule as like training wheels in figuring this out. So if you have to say "no" to your spouse,

try to find a way to say "yes" within 48 hours. Now there is nothing biblically binding about that. Just an idea that may help you work towards "regular." Again my email is john@mercycharlotte.com

Again: Sex is not the goal of Paul's words here. Carrying out the calling God has given you...that is Paul's goal. And Marriage can be a great asset or a great liability to that end.

Let's spend some quality time together

I cannot stress this enough. When I look at the Old Testament book Song of Solomon, I see a guy who studies and pursues his bride. He romances her, compliments everything about her, and takes his time celebrating her. He doesn't show up in the bedroom wearing nothing but business socks saying "Hey Wife."

So, to both spouses, honor God in your romantic life. Husbands, make a sincere effort to enjoy your wife for who she is. Go out together. Get creative outside the bedroom before you get creative inside the bedroom. Courtney and I try to have a date night once a week. It is one of the big-ticket items in our monthly budget because we just believe maintaining a healthy romantic relationship is vital to having a strong marriage that encourages one another to be devoted to God's calling on our lives.

Ok with that I want to move to verses 6-9 and what Paul has to say to unmarried people:

[6] Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. [7] I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

[8] To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. [9] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

When Paul was writing this, he was single. And if he had it his way, everyone else would be too. Why? Well that's down at the end of the chapter but you gotta see it real quick

[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. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. [35] I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

He's saying as a single person there is an opportunity to have a singular focused attention to the ministry God has given you that you cannot have in marriage. That's why he wishes what he wishes in verse 7, but then he refers, and this is critical, to both status', marriage and singleness, as

gifts from God. Singleness, in Paul's view, is not some kind of incomplete JV adulthood that you mature out of when you get married. It is an opportunity! There is this unspoken culture that can exist in churches that sort of marginalizes singleness. And the older you get its like "ohhh, what's wrong with you? Why aren't you married?" But Paul thinks the opposite. He's like HEY, you are single? SWEET! Baller Status! You can *really* get after what God has called you to.

I want you to hear Paul affirming the single individual here. Married people sometimes you can accidentally communicate that single people have it easier than you and you, again unintentionally, make yourself seem like real adults and unmarried people like extended adolescents. But listen unmarried DOES NOT EQUAL incomplete. Singleness is a gift from God and I hope we are a church where both single and married people can grow and thrive in the gift God has given them.

Couple of points of reflection for you if you are single

What am I giving myself to?

See Paul's point was that you would be freed from anxieties in order to secure your undivided attention to the Lord. God has called you to something much greater than your sexual desires. In fact he has uniquely wired you to serve him in a way that points others to his goodness and glory. Listen that is a life purpose that will be deeply fulfilling. The question is though, what are you giving your life to?

I know a single woman here at Mercy who is crushing this. And honestly I see Paul's point because she uses her time SO WELL to this. She hops on planes to other countries with missions agencies regularly because she can. I can think of a few guys who gave their entire weekend last weekend to Mercy's Easter services because they had the opportunity. Listen I am grateful that our single people are leading us the way you are here at Mercy. Honestly I look around and single people run over 50% of our Sunday ministry teams and our ServeCLT ministry teams. Bottom line, don't sit around pining for a spouse. Throw yourself into the gift he's given you now and trust him with your future.

Should I get married?

Ok real quick: The one group Paul only kind of addresses is couples who are dating. And his address to you is right towards the end. If you can't control yourself, you need to get married. Now this is a concession ok. If you are a Christian, Christ has freed you from enslavement to any master, sexual drive included. You have God's spirit and are free to follow Christ! You just have to walk in that freedom.

But, Paul does give a realistic non-sinful solution to you in your human-ness. Especially to dating couples: if the temptation to sexual immorality is a problem, get married! Marriage is a good God Honoring thing! Get married!

How do I need to fight temptation to sexual immorality?

This is actually a question for married people too. But if you are single, God has called you to forgo satisfying those desires until marriage. So what do you do? You may think...I'd be game for a spouse. Monday night we actually have Mercy Speed Dating...I'm kidding! Listen, I promise you temptation to sexual immorality doesn't vanish because of marriage. Yes, there is an outlet for satisfying those desires. But those desires can still consume you in marriage if you let them.

And I know our crowd enough to know that some of you hope to get married and at the same time you are being dominated by some sexual sin. You need to tell somebody and you need to develop a plan to fight with the power of the gospel that says you are free from that!

In fact let's close here: Remember how chapter 6 ended?

[20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

The gospel lens says you deserved death, but God purchased you away from that. He redeemed you and has given you new purpose. Now your purpose is to glorify God and find ultimate fulfillment in him. You know in your heart of hearts sex is a false God. Lures you, entices you, for a time it satisfies you temporarily. Eventually you have to give more and more and find less and less of that satisfaction. That's a false God. Maybe you are ready to own that today. You've been searching in the wrong place.

The true love you are looking for is Christ. The search can be over today.

CLOSE