

“Stop Depriving One Another”

1 Cor 7:1-9

Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly

Several times in 1 Corinthians Paul begins the thought with “Now concerning.” This same formula is used in 7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, and 12. Paul received questions from the Corinthian fellowship and he writes to them from a pastoral position. I can envision Paul sitting with the individual or couple and teaching them what this entire idea of sexual purity is to look like as the centrality of Christ is celebrated in the local assembly. His instruction meets people where they are living.

The Corinthian’s have swung the pendulum to two extremes. The first extreme is to gratify all sensual appetites. The second extreme is complete abstinence. Paul goes about correcting both excesses by showing the biblical view of physical intimacy in the context of the marriage covenant.

I. The demand for sexual purity (v. 1)

In verse 1, Paul notes how it is good to keep oneself morally pure. He is using a euphemism to speak of the act itself. He is not speaking of hand-holding or even kissing for that matter, although both can be sexual stimulants. He is using the part (“not to touch a woman”) for the whole (“physical intimacy”).

His contrasting connector introduces one of the reasons why marriage is to exist.

II. The divinely established solution for moral purity (v. 2)

One of the reasons for marriage after the fall is to stop immorality. If one cannot be morally pure, then they should seek to be married (v.2).

Marriage is to be a safeguard against immorality. Whatever is the cause for the aforementioned vices, marriage is the divinely established answer/solution. In 7:1 and following Paul unfolds a biblical view of sexual purity.

III. Sexual equality in marriage (vv. 2, 3, 4)

The language Paul employs strongly teaches that each member within the marriage covenant has a “right” to receive and is obligated to give physical expression and intimacy (v.3).

Paul uses language that makes us uncomfortable; language such as “must fulfill his duty” (v. 3), “does not have authority over her own body” (v. 4), and “stop depriving” (v. 5). Yet Paul’s reasoning behind such language is two-fold: First, it is right for couples to celebrate this area of marriage and secondly, to guard against sexual impurity.

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Physical intimacy in the marriage covenant is to be cultivated and celebrated.

IV. The warning (v. 5)

Paul does say there is a legitimate reason to separate for a time and that is by agreement, for the purpose of spiritual enrichment through prayer. Paul warns that after a time of abstinence because of prayer, the couple is once more “to come together” in order that neither one be tempted by the devil toward sexual immorality because of a lack of self-control (v.5).

Physical intimacy is a part of the whole. It is not the whole. If you make it the whole, you will have a lopsided relationship. It is not the whole, but it is a part and to have an intimate relationship requires that this part be celebrated.

V. Paul’s pastoral concerns (vv. 6, 7)

Paul opens up this paragraph with an interesting thought, “Now as a concession, not a command (v.6).” Paul’s concession is that abstinence is permissible when the requirements in verse 5 have been met. As a Pharisee and as a member of the Sanhedrin, Paul was most certainly married. His wife either died or left him, but now as a singled individual, Paul celebrates his non-married status (as he would have his married status) as a gift from God. His status of celibacy is a gift from God, not a requirement for all.

A FINAL WORD

Physical intimacy within the marriage covenant is an activity through which “God is glorified in the body” (6:20). It is the marriage covenant that elevates the act in such a way as to make it an expression of one’s worship of God. Like all other commands in the Scripture between the husband and the wife (Col. 3:18-4:1, Eph. 5:22-6:9) in the act “it is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col. 3:24).