

In this chapter, we start by reading the first seven verses of 1 Corinthians 7 (ESV):

“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’ But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 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. 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.”

That is the word of God. I wish we had time to cover the entire passage, but mostly we have time for verses 1-3. But before we begin, I want to say that this is the last sermon in the series *Mortify*. We’ve been talking about biblical strategies for killing sin generally as well as sexual temptation particularly. I want to let you peer behind the curtain for a bit so that you can continue to mortify on your own and so we will continue to mortify corporately.

In John 8 Jesus says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples” (v. 31, ESV). The one who abides in his word is the one who dwells in the Bible and makes the Bible their home, lives in it, and so it lives in them. So, if you abide in his word, you are truly his disciples. Then he says, “And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (v. 32, ESV).

How do you know the truth? How do you attain true freedom? Abide in the word. That’s the strategy and responsibly that we have. And by means of the word, you are set free. When Jesus was teaching this to the religious folk of his day, they said, “Well, why do you say this? We’ve never been a slave to anyone. We are the children of Abraham! We don’t need to be set free; we *are* free. We are already liberated.”

Of course, they have a very short memory, because they were, in fact, enslaved by the Egyptians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Assyrians, then the Greeks, and in Jesus’ time, the Romans. The Israelites had been slaves for thousands of years. In fact, their whole story is about being freed.

Jesus comes and says, “If you want to be free, abide in my word. Then you’ll know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Then he goes on to say, “So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:37). Free from what? They, like religious people today, whether they believe the religion of Buddhism, Hinduism, false Christianity, or

even the religion of the sexual revolution, argue, “We *are* free! We don’t need to be liberated. In fact, we have found the path of freedom!”

And Jesus says, “Oh, no.” And he defines slavery for them. Anyone who practices sin—that is, anyone who wilfully, continually, impenitently practices sin and embraces it—is a slave to sin.” If this is you, then you’re dominated by it. It controls you. It owns you. You have a ring in your nose and it’s pulling you to slaughter.

Jesus was not talking about enslavement to the Romans. He was talking about enslavement to spiritual darkness and evil, the enslavement to sin. And you know you are a slave when you are continually, wilfully, impenitently practicing it.

And Jesus says that if he sets you free, you will be free indeed. Free from what? Free from the domination of sin in your life. And therefore free from the perpetual practice of sin. And the means through which he sets people free from the power of sin—the means through which he sets you free from your addiction to sex, from your addiction to pornography, from finding your identity in your sexual proclivities—is the word.

And our responsibility is to abide in the word. If you abide in it and follow him as a disciple, over time, progressively, he will set you free from your former slave master, sin. So the aim of this entire series is that we would abide, so that corporately we might be set free from the power of sin in our lives.

When we close the chapter and with it, the series, you will have to continue to abide in the word if you are to continue to mortify and to walk in freedom instead of slavery. So you must continue to read, reflect, and respond in prayer to the word, both individually and corporately, in community group and in church.

Last chapter, we abided in three words: “Flee sexual immorality.” Today we’re going to abide in three verses. These verses are a persuasive argument and it is necessary for me to go through the verses in the order they are in the Bible, following Paul’s argument.

Paul’s Response to Sexual Immorality

The Corinthian church had written Paul a letter, so he starts with, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...” They had some problems, and Paul responds with, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (ESV). King James translates this more literally: “It is good for a man not to *touch* a woman” (emphasis mine).

It’s a euphemism for marriage. In other words, “It is good for a man to pursue celibacy/singleness and to not get married.” Notice he does *not* say that it is “better” or “best.” Those are Greek words that he deliberately chooses not to use because those are words of comparison. He would have used them if he was comparing celibacy and singleness to marriage, but that’s not what he’s doing here. He is simply stating that, because of reasons that he has not yet explained, it’s okay to stay single.

Singleness or celibacy is not more “holy”; that is a horrendous error. It is not evil. It’s good. It’s okay if by God’s providence you never get married. “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” So it’s good to stay single, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, pursue marriage.

When Paul refers to the “temptation to sexual immorality,” he doesn’t say exactly *what* sexual temptations he means. There are several possible translations here for “sexual immorality.” However, if we read the beginning of the book, we know that there was immense debauchery and raunch taking place inside the church itself.

Inside the church of Corinth, there was sexual immorality going on that would make the Pagan Corinthians themselves blush. Paul says there is sexual immorality going on inside the church that is not even named among the Pagans. Some intense, perverse things were going on inside of the Corinthian church.

Sexual immorality was *inside* the church, but the city of Corinth was an immensely debauched, sexually immoral city itself. In fact, to “Corinthianize” was a derogatory, vulgar term. Can you imagine if “Lafayette” were turned into a verb that was equal in obscenity to the “F” word?

This is what Corinth was known for. What is your city known for? Ours is known for the food and festival. Corinth was known for sexual immorality. The Corinthian’s television and radio would have been even more filled with smut—filled with debauchery, violence, adultery, homosexuality, etc. This debauchery was among the religious and the irreligious, the educated and the uneducated alike.

This is true of us as well; we are daily assaulted by sexual temptation outside the church as well as inside. Let each man take a wife and each woman take a husband and get married. Once again I’ll say that singleness is good. But in the situation we’re currently in, just like the situation the Corinthians were in when Paul wrote to them, pursue marriage.

That’s wisdom; that’s the word. And in fact, when he says, “Let each man and each woman,” that is not a suggestion; it’s an imperative. It’s a command. “To the Corinthians, pursue marriage. You are not in a particular state where you should be pursuing celibacy. If providence means that you have to stay single, that’s good, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, pursue marriage.”

So what is our strategy for resisting temptation? It is marriage. What is the antidote to the sexual sin inside the church? Marriage. What provides our inoculation from sexual temptations outside the church? Marriage. What can make us a community inside of a community that has a wholly different and godly sexual ethic? Marriage. What can allow each one of us to have a pure heart and clean conscience and sweet fellowship with Jesus Christ amidst a world of sexual immorality? Marriage.

It is a strategy for getting our lives together. It is a strategy for fighting sin. It is a means of grace through which Jesus Christ grants us self control. It is a conduit of

grace through which God protects us from being swept away by the tide of sexual immorality in our nation. A community pursuing marriage is going to be a community that has a different sexual ethic so will look different and stand out as a city on a hill. Marriage is offered to us by the apostle Paul, by Jesus, as a means of grace to fighting sexual temptation.

Let me apply this. I think everything I said is fairly obvious; now I'm going to say some things that aren't as obvious. I'm going to put myself out there, and some of you are going to think that's just my opinion and others will be fully persuaded. I guess it just depends on what you believe before you get here. But I'll open myself up to some objections.

I believe as a church we should pursue marriage young—not “weird” young, but legally. People these days are getting married in their 30s. I read a horrific thing recently about companies like Google and Facebook that are offering, as a perk of employment, for women to freeze their eggs so that they can “work, work, work” and still maybe one day be able to have kids when they finally settle down and get married and start doing “the family thing.”

Our society for some reason—well, for a lot of reasons that we don't have time to go into—is pushing marriage farther and farther away, so that even now for a 22- or 23-year-old to pursue marriage is considered culturally weird. I do believe that we as a countercultural revolution under the rule of King Jesus—instead of under the rule of the sexual revolution—ought to listen to Paul and notice that there's a lot of sexual temptation both outside and inside and decide to pursue marriage young because we're not naive and we don't underestimate the power of temptation.

The Undue Delay of Marriage

Granted, there are providences that occur and individuals aren't allowed to get married or can't get married or don't meet anyone, etc., and I know it's good. But as a general rule we should pursue marriage and pursue it young. And it's not just me saying this.

There are some folks called “The Westminster Divine.” They're the big shots of church history. They are known for having written the Westminster Confession of Faith, which has been around for a few hundred years. This is a statement of faith globally recognized as legitimate.

There are a few things that we would disagree on as a church, but as a whole, it is a beautiful piece of work. The Westminster Divines—these learned scholars and saintly men—came together to write a confession, or a summary, of what the Christian church holds. And this “catechism” of sorts was used to educate children.

In Question 139, it asks, “What are the many ways in which a young man or young woman might violate the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery?’” And then

they list all the ways by application that young men and women might violate that commandment.

And one of them, interestingly enough, says “by unduly delaying marriage.” And I agree with that in this chapter. Of course there are providences. Of course things happen. But the Westminster Divines, whose authority I would like to appeal to, believe that when you unduly—unnecessarily, arbitrarily, naively, etc.—delay getting married, you are making a place for adultery in your life. I do believe that we should heed this today.

You may object, “But I need to get a college degree; I need to have a PhD in molecular physics, etc.” I’m going to tell you this from personal experience: It’s way easier to go to college married than not. Blasphemy? There are so many baby boomers who think that if you get married you can’t go to college, but it’s because they haven’t been to college in years.

They don’t know what it’s like out there. You’re not graduating with a diploma empowered for “soul success.” You *may* get a job; you *may* not. It’s not as big a deal, in my opinion, as it used to be. I finished a degree married, my wife finished a degree married, and I’m currently working on a degree married with six kids. It’s a myth that marriage makes it all of a sudden impossible to go to college. It’s a myth that you have to get your life together before getting married.

In fact, marriage is a means of grace through which God helps you get your life together. That doesn’t mean you get to be a slob and say, “Listen, Lady, God says that we gotta get married because I gotta get my act together.” No, that’s not what I’m saying. There are a lot of other things we need to consider as well, but don’t let these myths keep you from being faithful to scripture and properly applying these verses.

Biblically Defined Marriage

Yes, Paul teaches that the strategy for fighting sexual temptation is marriage, but we must notice how Paul defines marriage. We are at a time in our country where marriage is defined by some other definition. There are individuals, prophets of the sexual revolution and priests of the new sexual identity, who have propagated a new definition of marriage—a rather ambiguous one, in fact.

They have opened our dictionaries, turned to the page that has “Marriage” and revised that definition that has been there for thousands of years, across all nations, tribes, and religions and all cultures to something considerably more ambiguous. But Paul is very clear that you are to pursue marriage as it is biblically defined.

And notice how it is biblically defined. “*Each man* find a wife, and *each woman* find a husband.” When we put those two together—*each man* and *each woman*—we see that he defines marriage as monogamous, heterosexual, and covenantal. To pursue

marriage by any other definition is *not* an antidote to sexual sin; it is in fact an accelerant to sexual sin and will be sexual sin itself.

Moreover, not only are we to pursue biblically defined marriage, but notice we are to practice within that biblically defined marriage the pleasures, privileges, and rights of marriage. In verse 3 Paul says, “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.”

There *is* a hierarchy in marriage; husbands are the head. The Bible is clear. But in this, there is no hierarchy. There is total equality in this area. And under total equality, mutual responsiveness, and mutual authority, the husband is to render what is due and the wife is to render what is due.

And to unilaterally decide by yourself to withhold that which is due, that which is a right, is to steal and to defraud. The word “right” is a legal word; it is a contractual word. When you enter into marital union, there are pleasures, privileges, and rights that go along with it, and the husband is to render what is due and the wife is to render what is due.

If marriage is to be for us a strategy for fighting sin, we must pursue a biblically defined covenant. Do you love your spouse? Do you want to enable them and empower them? Do you want to be a means of grace through which God helps them fight sin? Then you must together pursue a biblically defined marriage. You must enter into that monogamous and heterosexual covenant and practice the privileges, rights, and pleasures of that marriage.

To do anything other is to provide a stronghold for the devil and temptation. Paul says it explicitly. He goes on, and he says that if two spouses should by consent—notice no unilateral decision to withhold—take a “fast” of sorts to devote some time to prayer, that’s fine. “But then come together again” so that you don’t give place to the devil (v.5). To withhold is not only to defraud your spouse of their rights but to put a stumbling block in front of them. Temptations must come, but woe to those through whom they come.

Marriage is a potentially successful strategy for fighting sin but only if it is pursued biblically. Only if a biblically defined marriage is pursued and only if you practice the privileges, pleasures, and rights of that marriage will it be a strategy for fighting sin. Fighting sin doesn’t have to be drudgery and misery.

We must go one step further, because we do live in a debauched land. We do live in a sexually immoral society. When you hear the word “rights,” I can guess what comes to mind. We can stomp our feet and say “I have rights!” Meaning, “I have privileges. You have obligation.”

Remember, there is no hierarchy in this. This is total equality. One has no more right to demand anything than the other does. But for one to stomp their feet and demand their “rights” be met, they had better make sure that those rights are biblically determined and not determined by their porn-filled mind.

If your interpretation of conjugal rights is defined by the world or by your insatiable lust or by your porn-filled mind, then you will not be using marriage as a strategy to fight sin; you will be using sex inside of marriage as an accelerant to all sorts of sexual depravity. It is clear from Romans 1 that there is sex that is natural and that there is sex that is unnatural. We must fight perversion. And we must also fight prudishness.

Romans 1 speaks of both unnatural and natural sex. We don't need to go into what that is, but the one thing we need to clarify is that what you demand as a right had better be natural. 1 Thessalonians 4 says that Christian men are to treat their wives not as the pagans do, but with honor.

That means when you stomp your foot and demand your rights, you had better take into consideration that there is a way to treat your wife like a pagan would, and that you are not to treat her that way. Your conjugal rights must be biblically defined, not defined by your lust-filled imagination. They must be holy, honorable, and natural, or else you're producing—even inside of your very own marriage—a churning cauldron of lust.

As a church, we need to pursue biblically defined marriage, practicing the rights and privileges of that marriage and ensuring that the rights of that marriage are biblically defined and not defined by the world. If and when we do this, marriage becomes a strategy for fighting sexual temptation, both individually and in families; then we become a community with a radical sexual ethic—a community that is faithful to Christ and is completely and utterly counter-cultural.

Resurrection Hope

Where do we get the power to do these things? You may say that sex is just not your natural inclination. I do believe these scriptures condemn all sorts of “hit the lights and get it over with” mindsets. These passages call for us to cheerly give and pursue. But what if that's not your natural inclination? What if it's not your “chemistry”?

We're not talking about what you are or what you were. We're talking about what you can become by the grace of Jesus Christ. “Pastor, you don't understand what happened to me as a child. You don't understand what I've done.” We're not talking about the past. We're talking about a future that is inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We're talking about what you can become. The gospel of Jesus Christ can change you. As Paul gives the Corinthian church his motivation for pursuing sexual morality and for pursuing monogamous, heterosexual marriage in 1 Corinthians 6, he says, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality” (v.13).

Christianity has a lot to say about the body. It's not just about the spiritual realm but about the physical realm as well. King Jesus is Lord over all dimensions. The body is not meant for sexual immorality—it's not designed for it, but for the Lord (v.13). This is the theology of the body; it belongs to the Lord. It's meant for the Lord. “And the Lord for the body” (v.13).

Your body is for him and he is for it. How much is he for it? “And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power” (v.14). He’s so much for your body that he died and was raised again in order that your body might be raised up again as well. We’re not talking about what your body was or is but what it can be through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But moreover, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (v.15). Your bodies themselves have been stamped by the cross of Christ. That means “forgiven.” That means no condemnation. That means removal and sanctification from the power of sin. That means new definitions and new desires and new life and new possibilities and new hopes. Resurrection hopes.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (v.19-20a). What was bought with a price? Your body. What was the price? Christ’s body. “So glorify God in your body” (v.20b).

Why glorify God in your body? Why not pursue sexual immorality? Why pursue marriage as it is biblically defined, practicing the pleasures of marriage as *they* are biblically defined? Because your body belongs to the Lord. Not because he’s bigger than you or stronger than you. But because he gave his body for your body.

Love compels love; sacrifice compels sacrifice. You can lay down your body for your husband or wife because Christ laid down his body for his bride. Let *that* compel you. That’s the only power I know of. That’s the only compulsion—the only thing I know that will actually sanctify you, grow you, and help you to do this regardless of your own sin and what sins have been done to you. That’s the power. To the degree in which that gets inside of your heart, you can pursue biblically defined marriage and its pleasures.

“Father, we thank you for this teaching. We pray that your word would not just die here but that it would go forward into our individual lives and into our community groups and into the community. We’ve prayed over and over again, but we ask again that chrith Church would be a community, set apart, generous with our money and greedy with our beds. May we pursue your sexual ethics and pursue marriage and its pleasures as they are biblically defined, that we might be a holy city, a holy community, a gospel witness both in word and in deed. In Jesus Christ’s name, amen.”