

# Glorify God in Your Body with Marital Fidelity – 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

**Introduction** – While Paul is now turning to address questions the Corinthians wrote to him, he is not changing the subject. He is building on his argument to “...therefore glorify God in your body,” and so all of 6:12-20 should be kept in mind. Fighting a low view of the material body, Paul teaches a biblical view of marriage and sexual fidelity as a means of glorifying God. You may think we have talked enough about this subject, but apparently Paul (and God) do not think so. This is sensitive stuff and it has and will deeply affect us all. We are well served to be steeped in the light as we live in such dark times in this topic.

**To Touch a Woman** (vv1-2) – The phrase, “to touch a woman” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen 20:6, Prov 6:29) and so some English translations are plain wrong to translate this as saying it is good for a man not to marry. Paul is repeating a phrase that the Corinthians may be using inappropriately to teach that foregoing “touching” even within marriage was a way to flee immorality. This is quite the opposite of the teaching of Scripture. Marriage is an institution given to us by God, before the Fall, and designed as the means of procreation (fulfilling the Dominion Mandate – Gen 1:26-31) as well as close, relational pleasure (Gen 2:18-25). After the Fall, marital lovemaking also became a primary protection against sexual temptations. And so, while the phrase is true when it comes to a woman who is not your wife (like the harlots in 6:16), a husband should in fact “have” his wife and a wife should “have” her husband as a means of fighting all sorts of sexual immoralities (the word is plural in v2).

**The Duty and Gift of Marital Affection** (v3) – Because of their vows, married couples are indebted to one another, and this intimacy is required for all three reasons of the marriage institution. But the emphasis should be stated this way: not “you owe me,” but rather “I owe you.” Each individual is responsible for the vows they have taken. Both the husband and the wife are to render themselves freely to the other, with the various and different temptations of the other in mind. In a healthy marriage, the fact that temptations exist is not resented, but instead addressed in a very earthy and practical way. Proverbs speaks this way - “*Drink water from your own cistern ... rejoice in the wife of your youth.... For why should you be enraptured by an immoral woman?*” (Prov 5:15-20).

Note that I said, “in a healthy marriage.” This kind of rendering does not just happen. Discipline and work on all aspects of the relationship are absolutely necessary or such rendering will deteriorate into demanding. Paul addresses far more about marriage (i.e. Eph 5:22-33) which must play a role as well. A husband and a wife must study one another, for their needs, temptations, and solutions are very different.

**The Responsibility of Marital Authority** (v4) – When it comes to the marriage union, the authority (or responsibility) for the wife’s body is the husband’s and likewise the authority (or responsibility) for the husband’s body is the wife’s. This means far more than simply a right to conjugal privilege. The husband must take responsibility for his wife’s desires, fears, thoughts, distractions, energy, and her frame in rendering to her all that she needs from a one-flesh union. The wife must take responsibility for her husband’s desire, temptations, and his frame as a man. Embracing their authority this way means one will have abiding loyalty towards the other, will gladly listen to the other with the attitude of sacrificial service to the other – “my life for yours.”

**Only One Exception** (vv5-6) – For a married couple, Paul is saying that such intimacy is the way to glorify God with your body. It is good, it is beneficial, it has been promised and should be given. As a concession only, Paul grants just one exception. There may be a time when a husband and wife mutually agree to a time of intensely seeking the Lord (fasting and prayer) and abstain from their normal relations. But he warns that this must only be for a time lest Satan find an open door to temptation. A husband or a wife does not have the authority on their own to decide to abstain for an extended time, whether from misguided asceticism or mutual resentments. As one man said, “married couples are called by God to act like married couples.”

**Celibacy and Singleness** (vv7-9) – Paul is content in his singleness and this would be due to God’s gift to him of celibacy. Rightly understood this means that Paul was free from any desire or need of sexual fulfillment. Celibacy is a rare gift which has unfortunately been ill-defined in ways that have led to all kinds of sexual immorality. Most likely, due to an impending *present distress* (v26), Paul wishes all had the gift, but

knows God has given other gifts in His wisdom to others (v7). In other words, this is not a passage exalting celibacy to a higher level of spirituality. Finally, to singles, he exhorts them to a similar contentment and self-control unless it is causing them to burn with passion (vv8-9), which is a signal that such a person should prepare for and pursue marriage.

**The Chief End of Marriage** – Paul affirms the goodness of sexual relations within marriage as a reflection of the community of God and His self-sacrificing love for us. We reflect that community and that gospel as we live with our spouse, giving ourselves in the most intimate of ways (as well as in countless mundane ways), even as He gave Himself for us in dying on the cross. “Christ crucified” is declared in marriage. This gift of intimacy is no place for exploitation or manipulation. It is a place of mutual submission, love, and respect. It is the only place where such activity brings forth no guilt. Instead, it is the place where we glorify God with our body.

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## Notes for Little Saints

**Hebrews 13:4** *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

What does it mean that something is honorable?

What does it mean that your mother is your father’s wife? How does he show special honor to her?

What does it mean that your father is your mother’s husband? How does she show special honor to him?

When the scripture says that *“the marriage bed is undefiled”* it means that your father and mother sleep in the same bed together only because they are husband and wife and have made promises to one another.

Sometimes you might see your mom and dad hugging or kissing and you think it makes you feel a little uncomfortable. But it shouldn’t. It is “undefiled” which means it is a good thing for them to do. God approves. So should we.

And that is also why we should never give ourselves away to someone who we are not married to in the ways that we see a husband and wife do so. It is a special gift from God only to be given and received in marriage.