



DID GOD REALLY SAY...DON'T ACT LIKE YOU'RE MARRIED BEFORE YOU ARE? ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-9

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¹ Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. ² But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷ I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.



Grace, mercy and peace are yours through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

"We love each other," "Everyone is doing it," "Nobody is getting hurt," "Waiting until marriage is so outdated." "It makes more financial sense." These are excuses that many people will use to defend their actions of physical intimacy before they get married. Another is "you have to try it before you buy it," comparing physical intimacy with driving a new car. And really we should not be surprised by this. 50 years ago, it would have been unheard of to hear of people sleeping together before marriage (not that it wasn't going on, but it was considered more shameful than it is today). Now, our culture embraces it, they say they are throwing off the yoke of oppression that the church and outdated society had placed upon it.

Now even Christians ask the question, DID GOD REALLY SAY DON'T ACT LIKE YOU'RE MARRIED UNTIL YOU ARE? But they are generally not willing to seek the answer in Scripture, but follow their emotions and then find that answer in Scripture. It is a question that when you let God's Word speak, it has a clear answer for us. But let us not think for a moment that if you haven't been physically intimate before marriage you are completely innocent, and God is just talking about those "sinners" who are physically intimate before marriage. Because as we heard in our gospel for this morning, God isn't only concerned with the outward actions but also with the desires of the heart. And we live in a culture that tugs at those desires. So this question is just as important for the non-acting-out Christians.

In this section of God's Word you find the apostle Paul giving words of practical advice to the question of acting married before you are. The summary of which are:

1. Avoid temptation
2. Exercise self-control

Of all of the congregations which the apostle Paul established or visited, the Corinthian congregation probably gave him the most challenges. It was a congregation that seemed to have every problem – from a man who slept with his father’s wife to members arguing which of their gifts were better. It was a congregation who thought they were superior Christians, but in reality were still infants in the faith. To their credit, they did write several letters to Paul to ask for clarification on a number of issues. One of these issues had to do with physical intimacy.

Because of all the physical intimacy going on all around them from pagan rituals and heathen immorality, physical intimacy was looked at as something not good, something evil, and since it came from the flesh, something that shouldn’t be done. You were seen to be more spiritual if you were not married, if you could dedicate your whole self to God. Paul had to make very clear that physical intimacy is not a shameful thing, but a gift of God done within the God given bounds of marriage.

Paul responded very clearly to **“the matters you wrote about.”** He said **“It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.”** It might sound here that Paul is speaking against marriage. Nothing could be further from the truth, he’s giving very practical advice about marriage. The city of Corinth was not known for its high moral standards, and temptation was everywhere to engage in the practice of the day. Paul did not want believers to be dragged through the mud when it came to physical intimacy, and so he encouraged them to avoid temptation and get married, so that they could express physical intimacy in a God pleasing way. **“For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”**

Avoiding temptation is a good reason to get married, and an even better reason to stay married. Continuing to show love to your spouse is a great way to avoid the temptations that the devil will continue to throw at you. He knows your weaknesses, he knows the chinks in your armor, in fact most of the time there’s more chink than there is armor. It takes self-control to avoid these temptations.

That’s really the difference between how the Bible treats temptations and how much of the world thinks about temptations. The rest of the world thinks of temptations as just something natural that comes up, and since it is something natural, then it can’t be wrong or bad. People who bring religion into it will say God made me addicted to _____, so it can’t be wrong for me to do. While temptations are not something natural, but something the devil brings in this sinful world. And so when God wants you to avoid temptation, he says it for your own good, not for his own good.

The whole purpose of temptations is to make them look appealing. Do you think people on a diet would have a hard time resisting chocolate cake if it didn’t look and taste so delicious? It’s the same with other temptations, especially of physical intimacy. And it’s not just those who actually succumb to those temptations that need to be concerned either. Because we are bombarded with the idea of physical intimacy before marriage everywhere. A common phrase in the advertising business is “Sex sells,” boy is that true. We are all confronted with physical intimacy and it’s all damaging whether it’s at a bar, online, or on TV. I’ve heard that there was even a mini baby boom that happened because of the recent best-selling book turned movie *50 Shades of Gray*. Tolerance, while a virtue, is no virtue when it is used to cover over sin. The loving desire to tolerate sin also comes from the devil.

But when you peel back the shallow veneer of this temptation, you see it for the sin that it truly is. Hollywood would like you to believe it's all happy and lovey-dovey. But behind all of that you see hurt, pain and sadness – physically, emotionally, spiritually. Paul speaks to this in another part of 1 Corinthians: **“Every other sin a man commits, he commits outside his body, but whoever sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.”** It doesn't take long to see the problems that stem from the root of this sin.

Instead of confronting the reality it is so easy for us to slink away from it, just like Adam and Eve slunk away from God when they were confronted with their sin. The reality not only is that we have not avoided temptation and not exercised self-control, but we have condemned ourselves in our own sins, and there's nothing we can do about it. Even our sorrow after our transgression is not enough to make God love us anymore.

The only thing that makes a difference is a different gift of God. Paul here talks about the gift of self-control, which some people have to a greater degree than others. But even the gift of self-control doesn't save us. The gift that saves us is the gift that Paul talks about to another congregation, in his letter to the Ephesians. **“For it is by grace you have been saved...it is the gift of God.”** Grace that does not rest in our perfect repentance, but grace that rests in our perfect Savior – Jesus Christ, this is what saves us. It is this gift of God which gets us to heaven and no other. It is this gift of God that was self-controlled and did avoid all temptation, that is what made him our Savior.

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The gift of God, the Savior, makes all the difference in the world. He not only saved the world, but he changed it. The world has now become a difference between those who believe, and those who do not believe, there is no fence-sitting, there is no middle ground. Grace changes everything – people either turn in faith to a Savior, or continue to steadfastly refuse him. We know plenty about the latter, because that is what we were, and that is still something we fight against every day. And the devil would love nothing more than for us to hear the gospel once and think we know it and not hear it again. It is the new life in grace we must constantly be reminded of, the life of faith we must constantly live.

We live knowing our bodies have been washed anew in Jesus' blood. Just like the Old Testament Israelites sprinkled blood to cleanse their sanctuary, the sanctuary of our body has been cleansed in Christ's blood. All sins are forgiven. Paul knew it was going to be a struggle, he was a realist. But he didn't let the worldly idea of intimacy affect how he talked about God and his Word. There's Christians out there who think that because Christ saved the world it doesn't matter how we act. Did the apostle Paul think that? No! And neither did the apostle John when he wrote, **“no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”** This is not a command God gives Christians, but an exhortation to be who you are, to live as a child of the light, not of the darkness.

So it no longer is about making us feel good, it's about giving thanks to the God who loved us. And when we remember this, it gives a different outlook on Paul's words here. The married are no longer looking out for themselves, but for their spouses. Physical intimacy is nothing bad, it's another wonderful gift of God for married couples. To the unmarried and widows, he says to exercise self-control, not just because God says so, but because it's good for you and it pleases God.

The world will still give excuses. We may even be tempted to believe them, or maybe give them a pass. We may be tempted to turn our noses up at those who have sinned in such a gross way against the 6th commandment. But none of this does any good, because the focus is on self instead of God. But our answer as Christians should not be to just excuse these sins, or to turn a blind eye to them. But to give a word of warning, to turn it back to grace. To turn it back not to our “perfect” obedience of the law, not to our perfect repentance, but to our perfect Savior. To the one who brought together Adam and Eve, to the one who brought us to himself. Amen.