

GOD'S WAY OUT OF SEXUAL TEMPTATION

1 Corinthians 7:2-5

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **1 Corinthians 10:13** "No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it."
2. The Bible says that God will always provide a way out of temptation.
3. What is God's provision for sexual temptation?
4. The answer might surprise you. I'll give you a hint. It has to do with marriage.
5. Some of you might be uncomfortable with a sermon about sex. Let me address that.
6. First of all, how do I decide what to preach? I ask three questions:
 1. Does the Bible address it?
 2. Does God care about it?
 3. Will this help my church?
 - ii. The answer to all three is an emphatic "Yes" when it comes to sexual immorality.
7. Bruce Wilkinson tells a sad story about the importance of the church teaching about God's standard for sexual conduct. At a Bible conference in a hotel that he was speaking at, many of the attendees were scattered around the pool hanging out. He engaged several of them in conversation. One young woman said announced that she had flown in from another state with her boyfriend. She said that her boyfriend wasn't at the pool because he was upstairs in their room watching a baseball game. Bruce asked if he was attending the conference as well, and she said no because he wasn't yet a Christian, but he still wanted to come and stay with her at the hotel. As Bruce continued to prod, the young woman unashamedly said that they had been living together for almost two years. Bruce said, "Are you a Christian?" She said she had been a Christian for almost five years. Bruce asked, "How do you think God feels about the two of you living together?" "It's fine!" she

answered with a smile. "I think he's going to become a Christian, and when he does, then we'll be married." Bruce asked, "If God were to say that you shouldn't have sex or live together before marriage, what would you say?" She said, "It would be hard, but I would have to ask him to leave. Why?" Bruce said, "How about going up to your room and bringing down your Bible. I'll show you something important about the will of God for you and your boyfriend. I think you'll be very interested." Off she went. Bruce had her read several verses aloud. Then she became uncomfortable for the first time. "Then what I'm doing is fornication -- and a big sin in God's eyes, right?" Bruce nodded. "Well, then my boyfriend has to leave. We can't live together until we are married. Right?" Bruce nodded. Then she said, "I grew up in a totally non-Christian home. I didn't know anyone who was a Christian. All my friends slept together, so I never thought much about it. But I've been a Christian for five years, going to church almost every week. How come no one ever told me that sleeping together before you were married was a sin?" (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart: Discovering Personal Victory Through Holiness*, p. 140.)

8. **Bruce Wilkinson** wrote, "Sexual immorality is clearly the most widespread and destructive of all sins in our culture, yet it is rarely preached about or openly discussed in Christian circles. Left unchallenged, it eventually rules and ruins the lives of those under its dominion. Soon these men and women lose all hope of ever being free and clean again, and they slide into a dark, solitary prison of defeat and despair." (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart: Discovering Personal Victory Through Holiness*, p. 140.)

II. **TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:2-5**

1. 2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. 3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time,

to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

2. In this passage we can find four facts about sexual temptation.

III. 4 FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL TEMPTATION

1. God wants us to stay away from sexual sin.

- i. **1 Corinthians 7:2** “But because sexual immorality is so common...”
- ii. The Greek word for “sexual immorality” is porneia, from which we get our word “pornography.” Sexual immorality refers to all sexual activity outside of marriage.
- iii. Of course, the Biblical definition of marriage is the union of one man and one woman. (This now has to be spelled out.)
- iv. Bruce Wilkinson defines sexual immorality as the following (Set Apart, p. 144):
 1. Sex before marriage.
 2. Intercourse with anyone but your spouse.
 3. Any sexual activity with anyone but your spouse (i.e., sexual activity other than intercourse).
 4. Anything done by yourself for the purpose of sexual arousal.
 5. Lustful thoughts.
- v. Sexual immorality includes premarital sex, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, etc.
- vi. Notice what the Bible says about sexual immorality:
 1. **Hebrews 13:4** “Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.”
 2. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5** “3 For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, 4 that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don’t know God.”
 3. **Colossians 3:5** “Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.”

- vii. What is the big deal with sexual sin? Let me give you NINE REASONS TO AVOID SEXUAL SIN?
1. It destroys marriage. Marriage is meant to be permanent, but the Bible mentions one thing that can destroy it -- sexual sin (Mt 19:9).
 2. It violates your marriage vows. It breaks the promise of faithfulness and exclusivity that you made to your spouse on your wedding day.
 3. It breaks your spouse's heart. There is perhaps nothing more hurtful than betraying your spouse with infidelity.
 4. It hurts children. Sexual sin often leads to divorce, or to children born out of wedlock. Both of these harm children.
 - a. Stan Guthrie wrote, "Children from divorced or never-married homes are more likely to die in infancy, more likely to get divorced themselves or become unwed parents later in life, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to fail in school, less likely to graduate from college and get a good job, less likely to be in good physical health, more likely to abuse drugs as teens and adults, have lower life expectancies, have higher rates of mental illness, be at greater risk of suicide and child abuse—and on and on." Stan Guthrie, "Take a Stand for Marriage," 1/25/19, Breakpoint.org.
 5. It spreads diseases.
 - a. As of 2019, the CDC report that STDs reached an all-time high for the 6th consecutive year. There were 2.6 million STD cases report in 2019. (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2021/2019-STD-surveillance-report.html>)
 - b. According to the CDC, one STD, congenital syphilis, can cause miscarriages, premature births, stillbirths, or even death of newborn babies. From 2015-2019 cases of congenital syphilis quadrupled.

- c. In his book *The Secret Battle of Ideas*, Jeff Myers said that in the 1950s there were only two significant STDs -- syphilis and gonorrhea -- both of which are treatable with penicillin. Today there are more than twenty-four, with half having no cure.
6. It leads to personal misery.
 - a. Both 1 Cor 6:13 and 1 Cor 6:18 indicate that sexual immorality is a sin that uniquely hurts oneself.
 - b. Jeff Myers writes that studies show that engaging in premarital sex is closely connected with depression (*The Secret Battle of Ideas*, p. 55).
7. It is addictive. According to neuroscientists, sex and porn are addictive in the same way that many drugs are. Once you start engaging in sexual sin, it is difficult to stop.
8. It hurts your future marriage.
 - a. Research shows that pre-marital sex is closely connected to sexual unfaithfulness and marital disruption. In other words, engaging in pre-marital sex increases the chances that you will cheat on your spouse and have marriage trouble. (Jeff Myers, *The Secret Battle of Ideas*, 2017, p. 55).
 - b. Those who save sex for marriage are far more likely to experience lasting sexual satisfaction with their spouses. (Sean McDowell, "Why Should I Wait Until Marriage to Have Sex?," *Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, p. 1227.)
9. It hurts your walk with God.
 - a. It separates you from God. In other words, it interferes with your intimacy and closeness to God. See Ps 15:1-2.
 - b. It offends God. See Heb 13:4.
 - c. It invites God's discipline. See Heb 12:5.
 - d. It ruins your witness. See Col 4:5.
 - e. It disqualifies you for church leadership. See Titus 1:6.

viii. God wants us to stay away from sexual sin, and the good news is that He has provided a way out of sexual temptation.

2. God has given marriage to provide a way out of sexual temptation.

- i. **1 Corinthians 7:2** “But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband.”
- ii. The Greek text is much simpler. It says, “Because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”
- iii. Several ideas jump out from this verse:
- iv. First, notice the biblical definition of marriage. One man and one woman. Heterosexuality, and monogamy. This verse rules out homosexuality, polygamy, and polyamory.
- v. Second, sex is not a bad thing.
 1. Some people think that sex is a necessary evil that should only be used for procreation.
 - a. They used to tell women in England when they had sex with their husband to think of the queen. The thought was that the reason you are having babies is so that England will have more soldiers. Sex is part of the curse. Sex is only for reproduction.
 - b. But this passages commands married couples to have sex purely for enjoyment. Sex is a good thing because it is a God-thing. He created it. It’s not dirty or sinful as long as you keep it within God’s context.
 2. I’ve heard it put like this. Sex is like fire. Fire is a wonderful thing as long as you keep it in the fireplace. If you let it out of the fireplace it can wreak havoc. In the same way, sex is wonderful as long as you keep it in marriage. It’s only bad when you let it get outside of the context of marriage.
- vi. Third, don’t misunderstand. Paul is not saying that the only reason to get married is so that you can avoid sexual sin. Marriage has a number of purposes:

1. First, God made marriage for our happiness. Remember Genesis 2:18? “It’s not good for man to be alone.”
 2. Second, God marriage for producing and raising children. The absolute best context for a child to grow up in is under the care of its married mother and father.
 3. Third, God made marriage to be a picture of the gospel. The husband’s sacrificial love is a picture of Christ’s love for the church; and the wife’s reverential submission is a picture of the church’s submission to Christ.
 4. Fourth, God made marriage to grow us. For a marriage to flourish, both the husband and wife have to grow in love, humility, generosity, and selflessness. **Gary Thomas** wrote all about this in his book *Sacred Marriage*. He wrote, “If you want to be free to serve Jesus, there’s no question— stay single. Marriage takes a lot of time. But if you want to become more like Jesus, I can’t imagine any better thing to do than to get married. Being married forces you to face some character issues you’d never have to face otherwise.”
 5. Fifth, Paul is saying that one of the purposes of marriage is to help us overcome sexual temptation. It is God’s provision for sexual temptation. It provides us a way out. As human beings, we naturally have sexual desires. You might even say that we have sexual needs. These sexual desires can be pretty intense at times. Rather than having to suppress those desires, God has given us a holy and healthy outlet for our sexual desires – marriage. Through marriage we can meet one another’s sexual needs so that we are less drawn to sexual sin. To put it another way, if our sexual needs are being met by our spouse, then we won’t be tempted to get those needs met elsewhere.
- vii. If you are married, then this passage is saying that you need to strive to have a fulfilling sex life with your spouse. If you don’t, then you will face the same temptation that singles face. Marriage is not the solution to sexual temptation; sex within

marriage is. Don't let your marriage grow cold; keep the fire of romance burning bright.

- viii. Let me put it this way. If you are married and you are struggling with sexual temptation, then it may be because you don't have a vibrant sex life in your marriage. It may be that you and your spouse have traded romance for roommates. You need to get back to God's design for marriage.
- ix. This passage isn't just for married couples. There's a message here for singles. If you are single and you are struggling with sexual temptation, then get married.
 1. **1 Corinthians 7:9** "... it is better to marry than to burn with desire."
 2. Now, I know that some singles have a hard time finding a spouse, and that's a different challenge. But I'm talking about those singles who are simply avoiding marriage because they don't want the responsibilities of marriage.
 3. You have two choices. You can burn with lust and struggle with sexual temptation and the guilt and consequences that comes with sexual sin, or you can get married.

3. We are commanded to satisfy our spouse's sexual needs.

- i. **1 Corinthians 2:3-4** "3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does."
- ii. There's much more to this passage than simply the revelation that marriage is God's provision for sexual temptation.
 1. It begins with God's will – no sexual activity outside of marriage.
 2. Then it gives us God's provision for sexual temptation – sex with in marriage.
 3. And then it gives us our duty and responsibility in marriage – to satisfy our spouse's sexual needs. This is where it gets uncomfortable.

- iii. First, notice that this command is given to both husbands and wives.
 - 1. "A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband."
 - 2. Both spouses are commanded to satisfy each other.
- iv. Look at the word "fulfill."
 - 1. "A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband."
 - 2. It means to make full, to bring to completion, to develop the full potential (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, p. 146).
 - 3. Apply that word to your spouse's sexual needs. You are to fulfill, make full, bring to completion, develop the full potential.
 - 4. **Daniel Akin** says the word "fulfill" means "satisfy." He writes. "The principle of satisfaction means that each party is to provide sexual enjoyment (which is "due" him or her in marriage) as frequently as the other party requires." (Daniel L. Akin, "The Bible and Sexuality," CSB Study Bible.)
- v. Look at the phrase "marital duty."
 - 1. A "duty" is a moral or legal responsibility or obligation that arises from one's position (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, p. 14p).
 - 2. Marriage is a delight, but it is also a duty.
 - 3. It is your duty to meet the sexual needs of your spouse.
 - 4. **The Reformation Study Bible** says, "Sexual union is an expected part of marriage, not only a delight but also a debt owed to one's wife or husband."
 - 5. The **Dake Reference Bible** says that in marriage you have a matrimonial debt that you must pay; a conjugal duty that you must render – to mutually satisfy each other's sexual needs.
- vi. Notice the word "right."
 - 1. "A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does."

2. Sometimes it is translated “authority.”
3. The word “right” or “authority” in this passage literally means “to have rights over or exclusive claim to.” (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, p. 152)
4. **Bruce Wilkinson** “In uncomplicated terms, God gave my body to my wife and I have nothing to say about it.”
5. The **Dake Reference Bible** says, "The husband and wife belong to each other. Neither of them has any authority to refuse what the other needs or demands in normal temperate, relationship."
6. But let’s be clear. This passage does not say that you have the right to force your spouse to have sex. “The duty does not belong to the person who initiates sex, but to the person who responds.” (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, p. 149)
7. This passage addresses two misconceptions about sex within marriage (Bruce Wilkinson, *Set Apart*, p. 152)
 - a. Sex is never to be withheld from your spouse as punishment or bestowed as a reward. You don’t have the right to do that.
 - b. Sex is not an optional part of marriage depending upon your mood. It is your duty.

4. Depriving our spouse of sex exposes them to temptation.

- i. **1 Corinthians 7:5** “Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”
- ii. **Bruce Wilkinson** (*Set Apart*, p. 155) "The word 'deprive' literally means 'do not rob one another,' or 'do not defraud one another.' Defrauding occurs in a marriage when one partner cheats his spouse of what is properly hers. If you withhold your body when your partner seeks sex, it is biblical fraud."
- iii. Why is it wrong to deprive your spouse of sex? Because it exposes them to sexual temptation. We have sexual needs, and when those needs aren’t met, Satan tempt us to get those needs met in a sinful way.

- iv. The **NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible** says, "Married couples should have intimate relations so that they will not be tempted to have sexual encounters outside the marriage, which is what Satan would want them to do."
- v. But this passage does give some conditions under which you can deprive one another:
 - 1. When you both agree.
 - 2. For a specific period of time.
 - a. This word doesn't mean infinite; it is for a limited time. Notice that it says, "Then come together again...."
 - b. And it doesn't mean indefinite; it is a specified time. In other words, you can't just say, "Not tonight." You can say, "Not tonight, but we'll resume tomorrow night." The decision to deprive must be coupled with the decision of when you will resume normal relations.
 - 3. To devote yourselves to prayer.
 - a. A couple may give up sex for a period of time as a form of fasting, to focus more on prayer.

IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. God knows how you are made, and so he created marriage to meet your needs and protect you from temptation.
 - i. The devil knows how you are made, so he will tempt you when you deprive each other.
 - 1. The question is, do you know how you are made? And will you listen to God's wisdom?
- 2. I want to talk to two groups of people this morning:
 - i. Some of you are struggling with sexual immorality. I want to encourage you to repent this morning and commit your sexual life to God. Remember, life works best when you do it God's way.
 - ii. Some of you might be depriving your spouse. I want to encourage you to repent and surrender to God's plan for marriage.