

CELIBACY IS WRONG FOR MARRIED PERSONS

Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (7:3-5)

That celibacy is wrong for those who are married should be an obvious truth, but it was not obvious to some of the Corinthian believers. Because of their erroneous belief in the spiritual superiority of total sexual abstinence, some members in the church practiced it even within marriage. Some overzealous husbands apparently had decided to set themselves apart wholly for God. In doing so, however, they neglected or even denied their responsibilities to their wives, especially in the area of sexual relations. Some wives had done the same thing. The practice of deprivation probably was most common when the spouse was not a believer. But Paul applies his command to all marriages, as is clear from vv. 10-17. Married believers are not to sexually deprive their spouses, whether or not the spouse is a Christian.

The apostle made no exception to the instruction that **the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. God holds all marriage to be sacred and He holds sexual relations between husband and wife not only to be sacred but proper and even obligatory.** Paul makes it clear that physical relations within marriage are not simply a privilege and a pleasure but a responsibility. **Husbands and wives have a duty to give sexual satisfaction to each other.** There is no distinction between men and women. The husband has no more rights in this regard than the wife.

In verse 4 Paul reinforces the mutuality of obligation. **The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. God honors sexual desire and expression within marriage. In fact, failure for Christian husbands and wives to submit sexually to the authority of their spouses brings dishonor to God because it dishonors marriage.**

The present tense of *exousiazetei* (**have authority over**) indicates a general statement that is always true. **Spouses' mutual authority over each other's bodies is continuous; it lasts throughout marriage.** In the normal realms of life, a Christian's body is his own, to take care of and to use as a gift from God. And in the deepest spiritual sense, of course, it belongs entirely to God (Rom. 12:1). But in the marital realm, it also belongs to the marriage partner.

Sexual expression within marriage is not an option or an extra. It is certainly not, as it has sometimes been considered, a necessary evil in which spiritual Christians engage only to procreate children. It is far more than a physical act. God created it to be the expression and experience of love on the deepest human level and to be a beautiful and powerful bond between husband and wife.

God intends for marriage to be permanent and for the sexual relationship within it to be permanent. His original plan for marriage did not allow for divorce or for celibacy. Christians are not to forsake unbelieving spouses (vv. 12-17), and they are not to sexually deprive spouses, whether believing or unbelieving. The prohibition is inclusive: **Stop depriving one another. It is an emphatic command. Sexual relations between a husband and his wife are God-ordained and commanded.**

The only exception is both mutual and temporary: by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer. As in the case of fasting, if both partners agree to abstain from sexual activity for a brief period to allow one or both of them to spend time in intensive prayer, they may do so. Both the ideas of a specific period of time and of a specific purpose for prayer are implied. The length of time for physical separation and the specific need and purpose of the prayer should be agreed on in advance.

God may give us a strong burden about a person or a ministry, a burden that requires our undivided attention and concentrated prayer. Grief or serious illness, for example, may lead to this. Or we may fall into a particularly harmful sin and need to withdraw for awhile to get straightened out with the Lord.

After the covenant at Sinai had been given, the Lord planned to come down and manifest Himself before Israel “in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with [Moses].” In preparation for His coming, the people were to consecrate themselves by washing their clothes and by abstaining from sexual intercourse for three days (Ex. 19:9–15).

Hundreds of years later, in response to Judah’s extreme wickedness, the Lord commanded:

Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments Now return to the Lord your God, ... Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, ... Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders. Gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber. (Joel 2:12–14, 16)

The need of forgiveness was so great that even brides and grooms were to leave their nuptial chambers to join in national mourning and penitence.

When Jesus Christ returns He will “pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, ... the land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves” (Zech. 12:10, 12). Marriage relations will be forsaken during that time of mourning.

But when such urgent spiritual needs are past, normal marital relationships are to resume. Husbands and wives then are to **come together again**.

The reason for coming back together is explicit: **lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control**. When the time of concentrated prayer is over, normal desires and temptations will return, often with greater intensity. Satan knows that Christians can be especially vulnerable after a mountaintop experience. Our defenses are apt to be down and our pride may be up. Or, because of the experience, we may simply not have the desire for sex for a while afterward. Our spouse, on the other hand, especially if he or she has not shared in the prayer, may have developed a particularly strong desire during the separation. **As a guard against falling into temptation ourselves, or of causing our marriage partner to fall into temptation, sexual relations are to resume immediately.**

Unless it is by mutual consent, for a specific prayer need and for a brief period of time, sexual abstinence can become a tool of Satan. It is never to be used as pretense for spiritual superiority or as a means of intimidating or manipulating one’s spouse. **Physical love is to be a normal and regular experience shared by both marriage partners alike, as a gift from God.**¹

¹MacArthur, J. (1996, c1984). *1 Corinthians*. Includes indexes. (1 Co 7:3-6). Chicago: Moody Press.

Helping Married Couples Who Struggle Sexually

Introduction:

I. The Purpose

A. Sex is for _____. God uses it to bring life into existence Genesis 1:28.

B. Sex is for _____. Mutual enjoyment – Prov. 5:18,19.

C. Sex is for _____. What are you communicating?

II. The Problem

A. Presentation

“we are having sex problems”

B. Deprivation – I Cor. 7:5

“stop depriving one another”

deprive – to defraud or rob, to rob of that which is due.

Helping Married Couples Who Struggle Sexually (Hankerson) Many couples who are struggling sexually do not realize that their problems with sex are symptomatic. What are some underlying areas that could be the trouble? Does God have anything to say about sex? The Word of God gives us what we need for healthy sex lives.

C. Satan _____ in this area to cause marriages to fail.

Conclusion: The counselor in some instances will need to assist the couple in the areas of anatomy and technique. God uses these areas for His glory as well.

Nathaniel (Hank) Hankerson Jr.
Urban Missions Pastor
Briarwood Presbyterian Church (PCA)
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham AL 35243
(205) 978-2290
Fax; (205) 978-2241
Email; lhankerson@briarwood.org

6. Sexual incompatibility is a _____.
7. Husbands and wives should engage sexually _____
and _____.
8. We are not to _____ sex from one another.
9. No sexual _____.
10. The question is not when shall we have sex but when
_____ to have it.
11. Biblical sex is _____ idea – Gen. 2:24.
12. God _____ us to _____ sex in
marriage – Prov. 5:18,19; SOS 4:9-11, 5:1,2.
13. Sex is _____ to your spouse.

V. The Precaution – I Cor. 7:5

- A. Sex is an area that _____ attacks.
- B. Only _____ is more important.

10. Unforgiveness

This process will uncover specifics that hinder the sexual relationship. When the individual problems are dealt with biblically the sex life will improve.

IV. The Principle

- A. It's not about _____, it's all about your _____.
- B. The principle explained – I Cor. 7:2-5.
1. Sex is to occur in _____ only – vs 2.
 2. Husbands and wives are _____ to one another sexually – vs 3
 3. The husband nor wife has the _____ to say _____ to one another – vs 4.
 4. There is a _____ responsibility to one another.
 5. The wife _____ and _____ initiate sexually.