



First Corinthians chapter 6 ends with Paul saying, **“You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”**¹ The sermon this morning is directed towards those who are married. If you are unmarried, more is coming for you, but also this message (I hope) encourages you to see the gift of the physical union that is intended within marriage alone. The main idea of the sermon is **Glorify God in the physical union in marriage.**

Glorify God in your body. Why? Because God bought you at the great price of his Son. Because Jesus sacrificed all, left the incessant worship of Heaven’s throne room and came to this world where he was ignored, mocked and murdered. Because Jesus did this all for the magnifying of God’s glory and out of great love for humanity, he took the punishment we deserved. He paid the price we could never pay to be reconciled to God. This is what Jesus has done for everyone who has turned from their sinfulness and turn to Jesus to reconcile them to God. If you’ve never turned to Christ, do so now! There is no greater love than this. There’s no greater sacrifice than this. If you know this tremendous love, Paul says, “So glorify God in your body.” In the here and now and in the flesh and bones that you have! Glorify God!

This is the persistent message of Paul in 1 Corinthians. As I was reviewing this text, I was thinking back to many of the issues Paul addresses, and he seems to always have three components in many of his arguments: **Worship, Wisdom, Will.** I’ll take a moment to explain. Pay close attention because this is going to shape the rest of this sermon.

Worship. I’m going to make a bold claim: All human beings worship, whether you say you’re religious or not. The word “worship” simply means “worth-ship.” In other words, what do you ascribe great (or, the greatest) worth to? If you highly value certain things, that value is going to affect how you live. When Paul says, “Glorify God in your body,” he’s saying because of God’s great value and because of what he’s done, hasn’t he proven his immeasurable worth? Now, reveal his worth in your body! Or, go to the earlier issues of division among the Corinthians. Who are they worshipping when there’s division? Themselves. Paul says they are acting fleshly – on the basis of elevating themselves.

Wisdom. Whatever we worship will inform how we live. When I was in middle school, I collected old American coins. Over the course of probably 3-4 years, I spent thousands of dollars on coins. Can you tell that I valued them? Because I valued coins, I lived a certain way. My money was spent in a certain direction. But then came Tracy. When I began dating her, my coin collecting essentially stopped. Why? Because someone more valuable came into my life. Think of Paul’s teaching. From chapter 1, he redirects the Corinthians away from the cultural wisdom of Corinth and tells them that we don’t just have informational teaching to inform us how to live, but Jesus has become for us wisdom. As a result, Paul consistently applies Jesus to how we live. If we worship God, then we look to Jesus as our strength and our example for how to live. And that leads to the third point:

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 6:19–20.

Will. How then do we live in practice? The Corinthian/Roman mindset was to elevate yourself and exert your power over others to show your worth. Find the things that are best, align yourself to those things and then boast in how spiritual you are. This is exactly the opposite of glorifying God on the basis of Jesus. Instead, in every single issue Paul brings up, he calls the Corinthians to sacrificial living. Why? Because what you worship will call you to sacrifice. Coin collecting summoned my sacrifice of money. Because I love Tracy, I direct my attention, affection and even my money her way.

Yet, the Corinthians were failing to see this regarding worshipping God. They said they worshipped God, but in practice, they were still worshipping themselves because they were always functioning with self-protection and self-exaltation as opposed to self-giving and self-sacrificial. **What you worship affects how you think about living (wisdom) and motivates your will to sacrifice.**

But as I say “sacrifice” you might cringe. I was talking with a member this past week and they said something like, “You’ve been talking a lot about self-sacrifice recently. Can I just want to do what I want? I mean, it’s not sinful to want something, is it?” I went on to say to them that if that’s what they got from the phrase self-sacrifice, they’ve misunderstood me because we sacrifice for what we love. That doesn’t mean we always love the types of sacrifices we must endure through but because we *love* something superior, we will sacrifice. Therefore, if you think sacrifice is, “Well, I did this for you, so be grateful!” But you didn’t really love God or the person, you didn’t have Christ-centered sacrifice. Or, if you think, “God, I sacrificed. I should get some points for that,” you didn’t really sacrifice because you didn’t do it out of love. You sacrificed in order to get something for yourself. You are still the center of the sacrifice. Sacrifice is done out of supreme love for God and then love for others. So, when Paul is addressing the Corinthians to sacrifice, he’s really asking them, “Who do you value? Who do you love? Look at your actions.” Their will reveals they’re valuing self. They need to repent because Jesus is far superior. God is immeasurably more glorious! So, glorify God in your body.

Now, we come back to this text today in 7:1-5, and Paul starts by saying, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. . .” Paul is now ready to answer their direct statements. And this direct statement fits with what he’s just taught about. What was he talking about in chapter 6? Not going to the temple prostitutes. In the Corinthians culture, this was commonplace. Almost like going to the store to buy bread, people would go to the temple prostitute and then go home. Paul makes clear that Christians who persist in this are not worshipping God and dividing themselves from Jesus in their actions.

At this point, Paul calls the Corinthians to *glorify God in their bodies*. Then, in moving into chapter 7, we have a statement of the Corinthians, in their letter to Paul, saying, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”² What is going on in Corinth? The same thing that happens in many churches. You have licentious people – individuals who can tend to think anything goes. And then you have aesthetic people – people who think spirituality means renouncing many bodily things. So, the licentious person over-emphasizes the body and the bodily needs at the expense of the spirit. The aesthetic person over-emphasizes the spiritual at the expense of the body.

What does it mean to glorify God? It means that we have a right understanding of our body as it relates to the spiritual. Here’s another pendulum swing. We have people saying, “Let’s engage in the temple prostitution.” And then, when we hear that activity is sinful, we throw the baby out with the bathwater and say, “Sex is bad; therefore, it’s better to just never engage in sex ever again.”

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:1.

Corinth wasn't alone in this view. A 1st century Jewish philosopher named Philo once wrote that married individuals who participate in the physical union for pleasure and not solely for procreation are "pigs and goats" (see Garland, p. 259). This was not an uncommon way of thinking in the early church either, and I know there are people in our era who think this way as well. And, let me say this. If you are a follower of Christ, that's a sinful mentality. It's not a worshipful one. You are sacrificing to the wrong god if you live this way.

Paul now addresses glorifying God with our bodies as those who are married and those who are single. Today we focus on those who are married. Let's go back to my previous statement about Worship, Wisdom and Will. What we see in this discourse of Paul is his statement of glorifying God with our bodies. Then, in verse 17 Paul points to Jesus as our wisdom and Lord: **Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.**³ Do you really worship God? Ask yourself if you submit to Jesus as the Lord who assigned to you your marriage or your singleness. On the basis of God's worth and Jesus' providential Lordship and decrees over your life, what does this look like for married couples? Would you be surprised that Paul says that glorifying God in sex, on the basis of Jesus, is expressed through self-sacrifice?

When I do premarital counseling with couples and we get to our final session on the physical union, I express to them that most people are probably shocked when they hear that the best sexual relationships are those where the couples are serving the other person. I also say godly sex is worship. The reason these statements are so foreign is because people either have viewed sex as a god or as gross. Maybe it's gross because you've been abused in the past or you might have been taught it was a necessary evil. Maybe your spouse has been consistently selfish and so your spouse has destroyed the picture of the sexual union. When you view it as gross, you're not self-giving, but self-protective. Others of you view it as a god, and as a result, you only think in terms of your own pleasure. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis: **Lust is going after the body. Love is going after the person. If an individual is passionate about someone just for her body, that means he doesn't love that person – he just wants the body.** To live this way is anti-Christian. It's not worshipping God with your body. So, instead of viewing sex as a god or viewing it as gross, how does God want us to view it? Answer: a gift. A gift to be practiced within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman.

With all of this backdrop, let's read verses 2-5 to see how exactly Paul calls married believers to behave and serve within the sexual union: ²But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For 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. ⁵Do 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. ⁴

When you look at these verses, you can see how verses 2 and 5 connect, and then verses 3-4 connect together. I want to take verses 3-4 first and then move to verses 2 and 5. So, what does it mean to glorify God in your body in marriage? And, by the way, when I say that, I hope you hear me saying, "Worship God in sex with your spouse!" Your sexual union can be an act of worship when done in

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:17.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:2–5.

obedience to the Lord! This is phenomenal to me! I hope it is to you as well. And, if you're someone who says, "That doesn't sound right" or, "That doesn't sound good" or "Yeah but. . . ." The question goes back, "Who are you worshipping?" Even as I say this, I do want to be sensitive towards those who have been abused. Please hear me when I say that your healing may take a long time, and I'd recommend you find a godly person to help counsel you (or, find a counselor who knows the Lord) and find greater healing). Either way, God's intention is that even in the physical union we would worship him!

1. Recognize your spouse's conjugal rights (vv. 3-4).

³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For 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. ⁵

Paul talks to husbands first, then wives. Verse 4 starts with wives and then moves back to husbands. The ideas are similar. You owe your spouse this because your body is not your own. When you covenanted together, you gave your whole self to the other person for their growth in godliness, for their ability to glorify God in all things. This wasn't just a promise to spiritually help them but not physically help them. Part of helping them is encouraging them physically in this way.

Paul states that our spouses have conjugal *rights*. I am reminded of the Bill of Rights (the first 10 Amendments of the United States). These are considered *rights* for every American citizen. We ought to expect them to be upheld. If any of those rights are taken away, people can get angry. But those rights were written by fallen humans. In 1 Corinthians 7, the Spirit through Paul states that the physical union with your spouse is a *right*. And, in case you say, "Well, what about what I want?" Paul uses the word "for" in verse 4, saying that the wife does not have authority over her own body – and same for the husband.

The way Paul writes here emphasizes self-sacrifice. For someone to use this verse and say, "Hey, your body is mine. I can do whatever I want," is selfish and unloving towards their spouse. Remember, these verses do not promote abuse. They promote love. The same is true for someone who says, "Hey, my body is mine. You can't have this," can also be selfish and ungodly. Let me quote from John Piper: [Paul] does *not* say "Therefore stake your claim! Take your rights!" He says, "Husband, give her the rights that belong to her! Wife, give him the rights that belong to him!" (v. 3). And in verse 4: "Do not refuse one another." In other words, he does not encourage the husband or wife who wants sexual gratification to seize it without concern for the other's needs. Instead, he urges both husband and wife to always be ready to give his or her body when the other wants it. **I infer from this and from Jesus' teaching in general that happy and fulfilling sexual relations in marriage depend on each partner aiming to give satisfaction to the other. If it is the joy of each other to make the other happy, a hundred problems will be solved before they happen.** (*This Momentary Marriage*, Piper, pp. 133-34).

In other words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It truly is! To those who are married, remember that the word "give" here is a command. Paul is not saying that spouses should simply say, "Ok, you can have it." You are to serve and give of your body to the other person. The physical union isn't intended to be passive. It's to be unifying between the two. Give. This giving is God-glorifying, Jesus-exalting giving towards the spouse.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:3–4.

For those here who are not married and long for it and hope for it. For those who experience all sorts of sexual temptations, fight against fornication. Sexual sin tells you that sex is all about you. Instead, worship God with your body. Revel in the Savior who died for you, and anticipate the day you serve your spouse *if* the Lord grants you a spouse. So, glorify God in your body in the physical union by recognizing your spouses' conjugal rights. And we also see we are to

2. Seek to encourage your spouse's godliness (vv. 2, 5).

Verse 2 says, "2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."⁶ Verse 5 adds, "5 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."⁷

This is not the *only* reason for the physical union, but Paul states here that the self-giving physical union between husband and wife helps us in our fight against sin. In fact, if the regular pattern of your marriage is not consistent, regular sexual activity, there is something not right. Of course, there can be times when there isn't consistency due to health reasons. Some marriage suffer more because of physical inabilities. However, the general pattern should be regular, consistent. Interestingly, if you go back to read the Puritans or Reformers on the sexual union, you find them emphasizing the utter importance of the sexual union for our own godliness. Why? Because God didn't make us simply spiritual. He made us physical, too. Our physical and spiritual go together. Godly sexual union strengthens us spiritually and physically. I hope you've experienced this, but if you haven't, take heed to Paul's words here.

Don't "deprive" one another. To deprive means you're stealing from your spouse. Since your body isn't your own, to keep yourself from your spouse is stealing from your spouse what is theirs. The opposite then would be true, to give yourself to your spouse is to live in the freedom of self-sacrifice. By the way, some may say, "Then the sexual union will go crazy!" Only if both or one of you is self-focused. Others may say, "I can't live this way. I have this or that going on in my life. I'm overwhelmed, busy, etc." Now, let's read Paul's final words in verse 5. You can refrain from the sexual union *only* if you both agree. And, Paul says, "perhaps" if you agree. And it must be for a limited time. And, during that potential, agreed-upon, limited time, you must *devote* yourselves (both of you) to prayer.

I find it amazing that God commands the sexual union – such a gift. And he commands it with great seriousness, for our good and his glory. Therefore, for your spouse's godliness, engage in regular, consistent, self-giving to your spouse in the sexual union.

At this point, I've had some people say, "Well, how long *can* we separate and it be ok?" Or, "How often can we not participate?" If that's your question, there's already a problem. People who say, "Well, we're fine without it, and we only participate in this on occasion," there's a problem. Are you both devoting yourselves to prayer and conversing about this length of time away? If not, you're not glorifying God in your body and submitting to the Lord. All-in-all, I want to ask you, "Do you desire to follow the Lord and worship God if your will isn't changed to one of sacrifice?" Or, "Why isn't your will affected? Maybe you're worshipping something else."

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:2.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 7:5.

But let me end on this. For those who trust and want to obey the Lord, you may think, “How can the physical union help us in our fight against sin and Satan?” Interesting, in Ephesians 6, Paul says that the shield of faith battles against Satan’s fiery darts. In this chapter, the physical union fights against Satan! So, which is it? Is it faith or the sexual union? The answer is both. God works in our spirits and bodies. For people that Jesus has assigned to marriage, the physical union is a God-ordained means to fighting against sin, fighting for godliness. And, faith accepts all the good gifts of God as such and thanks God for them.

At this point, I want to transition to communion, and that may feel somewhat odd for us today. Moving from this text to remembering the cross, but actually, let’s contemplate the cross for a moment. At the cross, Jesus decisively killed sin. He suffered our consequences of sin, so we could be granted his righteousness. He rose again in order to give us the victory over the power of sin. Now, think about chapter 7 again. **Through faith in Jesus, in worshipping God and knowing Jesus as our wisdom, God has ordained for even the physical union to be a picture of the cross-work. Jesus killed sin at the cross. And, through faith in Jesus, spouses who serve one another help each other to kill sin through the physical union! Therefore, glorify God in your bodies in the marital, physical union.** But again, this is all because of the amazing work of the cross. At the cross, we see ultimate self-sacrifice, which compels our worship, wisdom and wills. So, let’s contemplate the cross a little.

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