

The Refusal, Removal and Renouncing of Marriage

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading, and you'll find that this morning in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. That is page 955, I think, if you have one of our church Bibles.

We're reading in this chapter last week, and we're going to look at some more of its teaching this week. And we're going to read two main sections, verses 17 to 24 and verses 29 to 35, which are important parts of this passage in amongst all the particular guidance and advice and commands that Paul is giving about and around the subject of marriage and sexual relationships.

But let me just read verse 7, and then we'll move on to verse 17. In verse 7, Paul says, Each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

And so verse 17, Let each person lead the life that God has assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call, that is his call to faith, already circumcised?

Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision, for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commands of God.

[1 : 3 5] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it.

But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who is called in the Lord as a slave is a freed man of the Lord. Likewise, he who is free when called is a slave of Christ.

You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Verse 29. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none. And those who mourn as though they were not mourning.

And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods. Those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

[2 : 4 0] I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. And the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.

And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord. And how to be holy in body and spirit. Now, the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

I say this for your own benefit. Not to lay any restraint upon you. But to promote good order. And to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. May God bless you.

These last few weeks about marriage. About the reason for marriage. About the road to marriage. About the relationship of marriage itself. And also, last time sadly, about the very difficult problem of marriage rupture.

[4 : 17] But of course, not all are married. And not all can be married. We saw in Matthew chapter 19 that Jesus says clearly that some are deprived of the sexual relationship for various reasons.

Either for a time or indeed lifelong. Like our Lord himself was. And so, I want to focus this morning particularly on those for whom marriage is refused to them.

For whatever reason that might be. Or indeed is removed from them. Having once been married. Having once been married. Either through death.

Or perhaps sadly through divorce. Or those who renounce marriage, as Jesus says, for the sake of the kingdom of God. Because God's call for them is to celibacy.

For whatever reason that might be. Whether their natural inclination is for marriage and would like to be. Or whether it's not. And indeed whether their affections, their attractions are heterosexual.

[5 : 26] Or indeed of a same-sex nature. So, I want to think about living with singleness in the church. And also about living with our sexuality.

And also dealing with sin in this whole area. So, first of all, I want to think about a biblical attitude to singleness in the church. Now, again, I can't do any more than touch on some of the main issues involved.

But, again, I do think that 1 Corinthians chapter 7 gives us some key pointers to our thinking. Which will give us a right attitude in all of this. And it is a right attitude that is the key in everything in this.

As in most areas of life. This is why you need a wife. Now, singleness was once regarded as a very honorable state.

And not in any way deprecated. But, of course, with our society all around us having so deified sex. And so idolized sex.

[6 : 32] To the point at which if you're not having a sexual relationship. You must be, in the world's eyes, very unfulfilled in life. You must be very deprived. Then singleness takes on a bit of a different flavor for many people.

Now, we've already gone into the whole notion in a lot of detail that this is entirely false. That the Bible rejects the idea that to be fulfilled in life you must be having a sexual relationship.

It is just not true that sex means fulfillment in life. And nor is sex required for any sense of belonging.

Or for the true intimacy of real friendship. Or for the completeness that every human being does need in life. So, according to the Bible, singleness, by which I mean the denial of the sexual relationship of marriage.

Not the kind of singleness that's popular today. Where people just refuse the commitment of marriage. So, they can have serial sexual relationships. But chaste, celibate singleness.

[7 : 38] That kind of state, according to the Bible, is not a deficiency. It is not a disease. Not at all. And that is very clear from what Paul says in verse 8 of our chapter here, 1 Corinthians 7.

Where he's speaking to the widows and the unmarried. Which very probably here means widowers. And he says it is good for them to remain single. As Paul himself now was.

We can be almost certain that Paul himself was once married. Because almost certainly he was a rabbi. And Jewish rabbis were required to be married. But he was no longer in that state.

Either because he himself had been widowed. Or perhaps because when he became a Christian, his wife abandoned him for his faith. But Paul says here that being single is good.

But of course, there's no question that Paul is saying that celibacy is some kind of higher way of life. Some more spiritual way of living.

[8 : 35] And that's plain because in 1 Timothy chapter 4, he says that people who teach against marriage and deny marriage are in fact demonic. And in that same chapter, he gives a very clear command to young widows that they must marry and that they must have children.

So as we said last time, here in 1 Corinthians, he is dealing with a specific situation of a time of crisis. Whatever that was. Very probably a famine.

And he's saying that remaining single is a perfectly good thing. And it may be a very wise and even better thing in such times. But clearly, he is obviously saying it is not a bad state or a deficient state to be in.

But not everyone, of course, can cope all that easily with singleness. Just as not everyone can cope all that easily with marriage. And verse 7 says that each has his own gift from God.

One of one kind and one of another. So, verse 8, for these widowers, it's good to remain single. But he also says it's good to be married. And certainly, he says, if some are in a situation where they're getting a flame, whatever that means.

[9 : 45] Literally, it just says it's better to marry than to burn. Maybe that he means they burn with shame because of their lack of self-control. Well, then it's better to marry.

But at any rate, from these verses, it's very plain, isn't it? That Paul is not saying that either singleness or marriage is some sort of superior spiritual state to be in.

Now, I don't think Paul means here that some people have a sort of special gift of singleness in the sense of relishing celibacy or always enjoying being on your own.

Unlike people who might find it hard and might instead want to be married. Not, I think he's saying that some people have a gift of marriage either, where marriage to them always seems a wonderful bed of roses, unlike others who find that marriage is quite a struggle.

I've never yet met anybody who finds marriage a wonderful bed of roses all the time. I think what Paul is saying is something different. What he's saying is that the gift that every one of us has by God's grace is the life and circumstances that God has given us at this time.

[10 : 55] And he wants us to be content in our life situation. Within the life that we have is where God wants us to seek his blessing and his calling, not hankering after the situation that we don't have, as if that was going to be the answer to all of our needs.

And that's often where we go wrong, isn't it? We think that our lives would be so much more happy and more fulfilled if only things were different, if only I had the situation that so-and-so had.

But no, says Paul, each has his own gift of God's grace, and each is called to embrace the life that we do now have, not the life that we don't have.

Each of us is called to trust God and serve him in the circumstances we are in, not circumstances that we wish we were in. And that, in fact, is the main message, I think, of this whole chapter in the verses that we read earlier.

And it explains these two sections that we read, which seem rather to intrude, don't they, in Paul's discussion of all these different situations of marriage relationships. Look at verses 17 to 24.

[12 : 04] Each has his own gift from the Lord, so, verse 17, let each person lead the life that God has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.

Because what matters much more than any of our temporal circumstances, says Paul, is our eternal calling, our calling to belong to his eternal kingdom. You see how many times he refers to that call all the way through this passage, and the climax in verse 24.

In whatever condition each was called, that is, to faith in Christ, let him remain with God. You see, this whole passage is about the contentment that comes from our true calling in Christ.

What matters far more than your earthly calling, be it in terms of racial status, or work status, or marital status, what matters much more than these things is your eternal calling in Christ.

So don't be unduly worried. How about your particular status in life, he says in verse 20? Each should remain in the condition in which he was called.

[13 : 13] Maybe you're single, that's fine. Maybe you're married, that's fine. You don't need to change it. Now, Paul isn't saying, don't mistake, Paul isn't saying that you can never change your life situation.

That's obvious in verse 21. Were you a slave? Don't be concerned about it, he says. But if you can gain your freedom, well, of course, that's great. Go for it. But don't think that finding that change is the answer to all your needs in life.

That's his point. And it's plain, Paul is saying, that God calls people to himself from all sorts of different life situations, including those who are married and widowed, or those who are single and celibate and so on.

Just as he calls people from among the Jews and the Gentiles, from slaves and free, and so on. What he's saying is, seeking a better situation in life, whatever that is for you, that doesn't elevate your status in God's eyes.

Seeking to be circumcised or to become uncircumcised, verse 18. No, verse 19, that counts for nothing, he says. What counts is obedience to God's commands.

[14 : 27] That's what God wants for your life. That's God's will for your life, whatever your situation is. And just as circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't affect your status with God or in the church, neither does marriage or singleness.

So don't seek out a change in situation in life and try and seek status with God or with other people by seeking these things.

Because your identity does not lie in your marriage status, any more than it lies in your ethnic status or your work status. And so Paul is saying, don't be enslaved to other people's thinking about that.

That's what he means in verse 23. You're bought with a price. You're precious to God. As you are, you're precious to God. So don't become the slaves of men.

Don't become slaves to the expectations of society or the culture around, or to other Christians. You might think that a certain marital status or whatever, whether you're married or single, is something superior, something to be grasped at.

[15 : 36] Now, if you can improve your particular situation to one that's more congenial to you, like getting a better work position, that's what he's saying in verse 21 to the slaves, or by the same token, by getting married.

If you want to be married and you can be married, if you can do that, great, go ahead. But if not, verse 21, he says, don't be concerned about it. Be content.

There's nothing inferior about you as you are in God's eyes. Now, friends, sometimes I think it's true that single people today can be made to feel a bit like that in the church, a bit inferior.

Perhaps especially if the church is largely made up of families and folks with children. And sometimes people find that living alone or whatever, they feel rather inferior in their church status.

But that should not be so, says Paul. You mustn't feel that. And at the same time, those who are around you, who are in a different state, who are married, mustn't make others feel like that.

[16 : 43] See, the Corinthians were a church very taken up with status, issues to do with spiritual status. That's why when you get to chapter 12, Paul's very insistent that he says, God gifts a whole variety of grace gifts to different people, but they're all for the common good.

They're all for the good of the church. It's nothing to do with status. If you read there later on, you'll see he says, they'll come from God's spirit as God wills. And that means there can be no pride, no superiority among any of you, not in any way, whether you're married or single, or whatever it is that your gift is.

Each has his own gift from God, chapter 7, verse 7. And to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good, he says in chapter 12.

And each is to be content in their calling. We're to be content in our own current gift of God's grace, because above all of that towers our eternal calling in Christ.

And that's the message of this chapter. It's very, very plain. As Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, godliness with contentment is great gain in life.

[18 : 02] So singleness is just as honorable as marriage. And in some situations, Paul is clear. It might be more favorable. It might spare people the additional burdens of family life in a time of crisis, as verse 28 implies.

Or indeed, it might provide liberty for the service of Christ's kingdom, where in some callings, having a wife and a family might make it very much harder indeed.

No doubt that was the case in Paul's own ministry. I think of some of our brothers who have escaped from dangerous and hostile countries because of their faith.

And those who are single certainly find themselves with much less burden than those who are worried about a wife and children who are left behind in that country. Isn't that so?

I think of some who serve Christ in many places in the world, not least in our own church fellowship here, in tireless ways that simply would not be possible perhaps if they themselves were married and had family.

[19 : 05] And I thank God wholeheartedly for these people. It is an honorable calling indeed, according to Scripture. But nevertheless, Paul is very careful at the same time, not in any way to undermine the blessing of marriage as the normal order of creation.

And in this chapter, as we've seen all the way through, he extols it and he protects it because it is God's good gift. But again, it's all to be seen within the context of serving the kingdom of God, not just serving yourself because God's call is to his eternal kingdom.

And that's always to be our focus. So not only are we to be having contentment that derives from our true calling, we're also to live with detachment that derives from this true destiny that we're called to.

That's the message of verses 29 to 35, isn't it? Verse 29, the time is very short, says Paul. Verse 31, this present world is passing away.

So what matters above all is not our devotion to mere earthly things, including marriage and sex and so on, property and anything else.

[20 : 18] But rather what matters, verse 35, do you see? Is total devotion to the Lord. And that will mean, won't it, that we have a certain degree of detachment about all other things, even legitimate and good gifts from God himself for this life of ours here.

And that's what verses 29 to 31 mean. He's not saying at all that we're to become ascetics, not that we're to abandoning all these good gifts of God, but he is saying we're not to live as though these things were everything in life.

Not to live as though these things were the permanent things in life. They aren't. And we need a perspective that sees what truly is permanent, not immerse ourselves in our thoughts in the things which are not, which are passing.

That's all he means. He doesn't mean for married people to pretend that they're not married anymore, but he means that we're to pretend and not mourn when we're sad. He certainly doesn't mean for married people to ignore their spouses.

He just means that we have to keep all of this in perspective. Our true destiny is the everlasting kingdom of Christ. That's what we seek. That's where we invest.

[21 : 39] Not in treasures that moth and rust will destroy and the thieves will eventually take away. He's just repeating what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6. And that is the only way, friends, to be really free from the crushing anxiety in this life, whether we're married or we're single or rich or poor or whatever.

And Paul says in verse 32, that's his concern. I don't want you to be anxious. He's just like Jesus. And the key is in your attitude.

Be content with your present calling, whether you're married or single, because your eyes and your heart are on your true calling in Christ, which is everlasting.

And be detached, not investing yourselves ultimately, even in the blessings of this life that God has given you, as if they were eternal. Because your eyes and your heart are taken up with your true destiny.

It's all about attitude. And that's the key to that contentment and detachment, which alone will bring us peace and happiness in this life. Whatever our situation is, it's undivided devotion to the Lord that will liberate us from anxiety and from discontent.

[23 : 00] Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things that you need will be added to you, says the Lord Jesus.

So Paul says to the Philippians, whatever my earthly calling, I press on towards the true goal, the prize of the upward calling in Christ Jesus.

And friends, that's how we need to think about both marriage and singleness. We need to have that biblical attitude that sees the bigger picture, so that we too might live with contentment and detachment.

But of course, most of us, if not all of us, indeed I probably would say all of us, all of us do face issues of sexual temptation. And that is very probably especially true for those who are deprived from a sexual relationship by not being married for whatever reason.

And so we must be realistic about this. And we must also have a biblical attitude to sexuality in the church. Now there are a number of reasons, aren't there, why people are deprived from sexual relationships.

[24 : 15] For many today, the issue is simply that of delay. They want to get married, they probably will get married. They may even have been going out with somebody for a very long time, but they're not yet married.

And so they find themselves increasingly with a great struggle to remain pure. Well, brother or sister, if that's you, the answer to that is very straightforward indeed from this passage.

Paul says two words, get married. Right? Just get married and do it soon. Verse 9, if they're not exercising self-control, they should marry.

Right? Verse 36, let them marry when passions are strong. And he says the same in 1 Timothy 4 to young widows, get married.

There's no dubiety about it, get on with it. And then that means you need to get the finger out, step up, kneel down, pop the question, and get on with it. I'm actually being serious.

[25 : 19] We need to confront this biblical delay, this unbiblical delay in marriage. It's wrong. It's harmful, according to Paul. And if we're stopping people growing up and becoming adults, it's not good.

And parents, we've got a responsibility. We mustn't try and stop our children from growing up. We think our kids are not mature enough by the age of 20 to get married.

Then that is an indictment on our upbringing of them. What have we been doing? We need to be real, don't we, and realistic. If we expect a young couple to be together for years and years and years, or to be engaged for years and years and years, and not fall into sexual temptation, we're living in la-la land, believe me.

The church, I think, needs to take a firm stand on this against the worldly wickedness of these ridiculously expensive weddings, which is one reason why couples delay getting married.

Isn't that right? And against long engagements, which are terrible for the couples. And often, let's be frank, are entirely for the benefit of the mother of the bride who wants to indulge herself in planning a fairytale wedding.

[26 : 38] Mothers, that's true. And you know it. Here is the word of the apostle of Christ. They should marry. Let them marry.

It is no sin. So, argue with him. Don't argue with me. That's the answer for sexual temptation when there's delay. That's easy.

But, of course, there are other situations. Not all can marry. Not all can find a partner. And as Jesus says in Matthew chapter 19, sometimes there is disease, sometimes there's debility from birth or due to life circumstances, either physical or psychological.

Or whatever it is, something that makes it very hard or impossible to find someone to marry. Perhaps it's just disappointment that seems very hard to explain.

We all know people, don't we, who are not married, and we think, why on earth have they never been married? And, of course, there are those who are deprived of the sexual relationship that they once did have, either through the death of their partner or, very sadly, through divorce.

[27 : 46] And I think it's probably much harder still for those who have had that relationship and have lost it than for those who have never had it at all.

And then, of course, there are those who are denied a sexual relationship because of disorder or disoriented sexuality, such as homosexuality. And they know that their calling must, therefore, be to celibacy if they're to be obedient Christians.

And I want to say a little about these situations, which, although different, are all in many ways similar as well, and perhaps none more difficult than that unwanted same-sex attraction, which these days, with the world all around, and indeed, sadly, even many in the professing church, want to normalize these feelings and want to encourage their expression in sexual activity.

And that puts an intolerably difficult burden on those who want to live a godly life. And so the first thing I want to say in matters of sexuality like this is that, as in everything, the church is called to love sinners, but also to hate sin and to be working and praying to help one another separate each other from our sin.

Whatever our orientations, whatever our nature is as regards all sorts of issues, we are not helpless, are we? The Bible tells us we are now children of light.

[29 : 21] We're called to walk in the light. We're called to keep in step with the Spirit of God who is within us. And matters of sexuality are just a part of that whole bigger picture. They're certainly not the only area that we want to be taken up with when we're talking about sin.

Of course not. But at the same time, what is no help at all to godly discipleship is to avoid the truth about God's commands and God's promises for ongoing renewal in this whole aspect of life as in every other area.

And we must both faith up to the biblical truth that we find very hard and we must never underplay the grace and the forgiveness and the power of the gospel to bring new life.

And such were some of you, is what Paul says to these Corinthians, gross sexual sinners of all kinds. But you were washed and made holy and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

I want to read to you something that a Christian homosexual person has written about that. In 1 Corinthians 6, 11, a pivotal statement is made and such were some of you.

[30 : 37] Evidently radical change has taken place and is playing for all to see. And he says, we homosexuals who have repented and believed the good news have abandoned our futile, godless way of life.

What's more, the miraculous has happened to us. We are in Christ having a new status. We are new creatures. The old has gone. The new has come. Something of the life of God has entered us carrying with it far-reaching implications, not least in how we perceive and cope with our particular sexual tendency and how we relate to those in similar circumstances.

So in all deliberations involving the homosexual question, one important fact must be borne in mind. Certain brothers and sisters now seeking to walk in that newness of life and experiencing true freedom for the first time have been rescued, sometimes from appalling homosexual degradation and very likely premature deaths.

Some of them will undoubtedly carry deep psychological scars for a long time to come. Because of that, it causes many of us profound distress and hurt to witness the extraordinary spectacle of spiritual leaders charged with feeding or ruling the flock of God, apparently encouraging same-sex practices, however sophisticated and refined they appear to be.

The last advice any of us redeemed homosexuals need to hear in our daily battles is that in certain circumstances, the deeds that are natural to us are permissible after all.

[32 : 14] We must speak the truth. But secondly, we must speak the truth in love. That is, we must exhibit the perfect balance and the compassion of the Lord Jesus himself.

As I've said, no one's identity lies in their sexuality or their perceived sexuality, but for many homosexual people, they feel and they have been taught to feel that that is the case.

And so they feel that they can't be accepted unless this aspect of their identity is accepted and even celebrated. So even to hear people in the church talking about homosexuality in terms of sin makes these people feel that we are rejecting them completely in their whole person, in their identity.

That's what they perceive. And that means, friends, that we must in the church be very, very careful to exhibit the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all that we say about these things, we must take great care in how we speak about these things. And sadly, that hasn't always been the case. I want to quote to you from William Stowe from a chapter he's written on pastoral perspectives on our fallen sexuality, which must be one of the most helpful things I think anyone could read on this.

[33 : 39] He was a man of thunderous truth but also of tremendous compassion. He says this, we must return to the basic fact that God hates what is unnatural and nothing can make him change his mind about the abuse of the natural functions he has ordained for man as for his other creatures.

That's the truth. This is where we must start whoever we hurt, he says. But I want to appeal for a new degree of understanding. I have in view those who through no fault of their own are afflicted with perverse desires and may be cruelly hounded to the point of suicide by misguided use of the name of God and Christ in the church.

On their behalf, one must register a protest of complete condemnation of judgmentalism which utterly ignores the infinite understanding of the Holy Jesus who though he never excuses sin must ever condemn it always loves the sinner.

Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more. Shows the perfect balance of Christ's attitude towards all sin but with particular reference to sexual sin.

In the interest of the compassion of Jesus Christ there needs to be a far greater degree of understanding of why people do these things however rightly disapproving we must be of their acts.

[35 : 10] Jesus' understanding of the woman of Samaria the woman taken in adultery and Zacchaeus a very different case shows us how sad it is that in biblical Christian and evangelical circles there can be so much harsh cruel and ruthless dismissal of problem people too often not the slightest attempt is made to understand why they behave as they do or to bring them to our blessed Lord's touchstone neither do I condemn thee go and sin no more.

We need to take truth seriously but we can speak no truth without the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ and how terrible it is that some struggling believer might be driven into the open arms of those who will encourage them to sin with impunity because they've been crushed in the very church the very gospel church that ought to have given them a home.

Now friends our fellowship must be a place where people can find their true identity and their true belonging in Christ and among Christ's true people. That sounds obvious but it isn't always so and single people of all kinds often find it very difficult.

And those whose gift is marriage and family we've got a responsibility as I've said to play our part to give the genuine opportunities for friendship for family for belonging for intimacy that all human beings need regardless of their sexual position.

Here's some more very helpful words from John Stott. At the heart of the homosexual condition is a deep loneliness the natural human hunger for mutual love a search for identity and a longing for completeness.

[37 : 06] If homosexual people cannot find these things in the local church family we have no business to go on using that expression. The alternative is not between the warm physical relationship of homosexual intercourse and the pain of isolation in the cold there is a third option namely a Christian environment of love and understanding and acceptance and support.

He goes on to speak about the need to encourage widespread same-sex friendships and to challenge society's suspicion of these as if all such relationships were sexualized.

No. It's a healthy friendship culture in the church as we've already said whether you're married or single that is what we need to battle loneliness.

And thirdly therefore we must think about a right attitude to living with our sexuality and we need to remember that the goal in all of this is for the godly transformation of all of our weaknesses all of our thorns in the flesh whatever nature they may be to be used as instruments of God's purpose by the grace of his power and by the power of his grace.

Sometimes the very struggle sometimes the very affliction that near brings us to despair is the very thing that God will use to bring the greatest blessing and fruitfulness in our lives.

[38 : 42] Is that not so? That's what Jesus said of the man born blind in John chapter 9. It was that the power and the grace of God might be displayed in his life.

Listen once more to William Still. He says, I've known those who were faced with extreme temptation to unnatural sin who so resolutely refused to succumb to what fatally attracted them but which they knew was wrong that I was astonished.

But on reflection I knew why their aesthetic, pastoral, and preaching gifts were signally used of God. That very drive which could have ruined them was used when transmogrified into an instrument of God as the means of saving and blessing many.

But let me emphasize again that all such godly sublimation of seemingly innate sexual abnormality must be accepted and given over to God for death and transformation.

This can be done only when the tendency has been recognized as a fault and a flaw and not as another kind of normality. This is therefore to be mortified, put to death with a view to seeing how the Lord will re-channel its drive towards something to be used by God.

[39 : 59] It could then become as beautiful as the fruit of those to whom the gift of natural union is given. God has used people who endure agonizingly painful deviant tendencies but who have given their maladjustment to him for transformation.

This is true of far more than many who are rigidly moralistic in the Christian world would believe. Some people hold up their hands in holy horror at even hearing that so and so has such a problem but if they knew how sympathetic the Lord is to their affliction and how he stands ready to use it when we give it to him they might be shocked out of their self-righteousness.

Jesus is far more daring in what he does and whom he employs than many exceedingly pious souls dare to believe. That's why hypocrites don't like to get too near to him because he's a shocker.

So friend if you find yourself living in agony about something like that that can be true of you also.

That's the message of the gospel. God can and God does use our greatest thorns of affliction sometimes for a great everlasting glory and fruitfulness in Christ.

[41 : 22] Ask the apostle Paul God's grace was sufficient for his terrible thorn and it is sufficient and it will be fruitful even with yours if you bring it to him if you come under his yoke because my yoke is kind says the Lord Jesus my burden is light and he will bring rest to your souls.

It's only Jesus it's only bearing his yoke that will give you contentment and fruitfulness if you're in a marriage relationship and it's only Jesus and his yoke that will give you contentment and fruitfulness without marriage.

And that's a biblical attitude to living with our sexuality. Otherwise you'll either be a miserable and unhappy and unfruitful single person or you'll be a miserable unhappy and unfruitful married person with your partner.

But lastly I just want to think before we close about a biblical attitude to sin and to especially sexual sin in the church. And again the nub of the issue is that we must show the balance of our Lord Jesus Christ both his words and his actions.

We must have no self-righteousness we must show no wrong discrimination and judgment but we must show right discrimination and judgment.

[42 : 50] We're to distinguish aren't we between proud and defiant sinners and penitent desolate sinners. And the way we think about sinful actions and the way that we deal with those in the midst of them will be very very different.

Where there is proud and defiant sin where there is flagrant flouting of God's law where there is unrepentant sin and refusal of God's truth then we can't pretend that God doesn't take that sin very seriously and we must warn those engaged in that sin and if there's no response if there's no repentance we're to act accordingly.

You just have to turn over a few pages in 1 Corinthians to chapter 10 to see Paul uses various examples from the Old Testament and he says to the church don't you be immoral sexually as they were or you will face the same kind of judgments that they faced.

Cites an example from Numbers 25 where there was flagrant flamboyant sexual sin publicly being flouted in the community and it led to fearful judgment and the same thing had been going on in Corinth chapter 5 we've seen it all kinds of things sexual promiscuity incest homosexual practice and so on and Paul's answer was very clear wasn't it where there's no repentance expel the immoral brother purge the evil from among you he's quoting the Old Testament God takes sexual sin very seriously and if it's proud if it's provocative if it's defiant if it's saying look at us we don't care look God is blessing us in this well beware says the Bible beware any such church beware any such people no matter how you think Paul says to the Corinthians you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of demons are you stronger than he chapter 11 he reminds the Corinthians that some of them have been struck down with terrible illnesses and even died because of their sins friends that is a solemn warning to the church you need to read what Jesus says to his church in the

New Testament read Revelation chapters 2 and 3 the Lord is in the midst of his church he promises that where there is pride and defiance in sin of any kind there is he will bring judgment we can't escape that biblical attitude that Christ like attitude to unrepentant sin if we're going to be truly Christian but that is very different isn't it from the penitent desolate sinner those who are struggling in sin seeking to be godly caught into temptation and falling into sin which they hate and they despise and which often makes them feel utterly despairing there says the bible we must have great humility great sensitivity because some who have begun like that hating their sin and struggling against their sin have been turned into proud impenitent sinners because of the treatment that they have had from moralistic judgmental

[46 : 05] Christians who have not helped them and that's the greatest tragedy of all no Paul says Galatians 6 verse 1 those who are caught who are trapped in sin we are to restore them gently not in a spirit of condemnation yet keeping watch on ourselves yes we fall into temptation there's great realism there isn't there we're to go out on a limb we're to take risks in order to help save people from their sin but we're not to be stupid we're to be humble because there but by God's grace we might find ourselves too might very well have been us caught in that very sin that they're caught in do you ever give any thought to that I wonder before you judge somebody else how often do we give thought at all to the immensity of the struggle that that person might have been enduring and how much they have resisted before that one time in which they've fallen and which is so obvious to us we just might not have any idea mightn't we of the loneliness the misery the hunger for love and acceptance that might have driven them into that sin

I don't know if you know Robert Burns his poem addressed to the unca good or the rigidly righteous he's not my favorite theologian he's certainly not my favorite poet but he does have a word here in season listen oh ye who are so good yourself so pious and so holy ye've not to do but mark and tell your neighbors faults and folly you whose life is like a wheel-gone mill supplied with store of water the heap it happens ebbing still and still the clap plays clatter hear me ye venerable core as counsel for poor mortals that frequent pass grave wisdom's door for glake at folly's portals I for their thoughtless careless sakes would hear proponed defenses their stupid tricks their black mistakes their failings and mischances you see your state where theirs compared and shudder at the niffer of the exchange but cast a moment's fair regard what makes the mighty differ discount what scant occasion gave the purity ye pride in and what's off mere than are the rest you're better are to hide in think when you're castigated palskies now and then a gollop a wallop what ragings must his veins convulse the still eternal gallop we wind and tide fair in your tail right on ye scud your seaway but in the teeth obeyth to sail makes a great leeway a great difference ye high exalted virtuous dames tied up in godly laces before ye give poor frailty names suppose a change of cases a dear loved lad convenient snug a treacherous inclination but let me whisper in your lug you're maybe nay temptation and gently scan your brother man still gentler sister woman though they may gang a wee bit rang to step aside as human one point must still be greatly dark the moving why they do it and just as lamely can ye mark how far perhaps they rue it who made the heart does he alone decidedly can try us he knows each chord its various tone each spring its various bias then at the balance let's be mute we never can adjust it what's done we partly may compute but know not what's resisted do we see our state exchanged with others do we think about how we might be in their case before we rush to condemnation if we did wouldn't we much more gently scan our fellow man or sister woman and though we realize what's done we see in part we have no idea do we what someone has resisted at the pastor's training course last week a consultant psychiatrist who was teaching the men said that he'd never forgotten something that he'd heard my father say years ago in church where he was a member where somebody was loudly declaiming somebody else's behavior and demanding that they be rebuked and condemned and apparently my father just said quietly well just think how much worse they would be were the grace of God not at work in their life well I'm very thankful that I had a father like that and a pastor like that who was like

Jesus more full of grace than I have sinned and I've been asking myself this week am I a father like that am I a pastor like that am I a friend to others like that are you that won't break the bruised reed or snuff out with harshness the smoldering wick we can be so quick can't we to see what's done but we have no idea just how monumental the battles that have been fought might be before the fall or how deep the pain and the penitence and the shame might be or how in their place faced with their struggles we might find ourselves far far more greatly fallen than ever they've become that was Jesus' challenge wasn't it to the women in John chapter 8 to those lifting up the stones against her by not condemning her he wasn't saying it wasn't sin he wasn't excusing it but what he was saying to all the rest was this there but by God's grace it might have been you suppose a change of cases which of us can stand tall in the realm of sexual purity of body of mind even of imagination whatever our proclivities might be which of us and yet the Lord says to every one of us my grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in your weakness so there's hope isn't there for all of us and so in our attitude to all let us look hard into our own hearts and let's look long at the grace and the mercy that's in our

Lord Jesus Christ let's cherish the truth and love one to another in such a way as to say and to truly act like our Lord Jesus Christ who said neither do I condemn you but go and sin no more let's pray heavenly father help us to be a church that holds firmly to your truth about sin never denying sin is sin and helping no one to deny it to their eternal peril and remind us Lord that we will all stand before you as the judge of every deed every word every thought but help us no less to cherish that truth in love to remember that we are a church for sinners that we should always be a true family where all can find a home where together we are devoted to loving one another to hating our sin and to helping one another separate from our sin and grow instead in your beauty in your true humanity so help us Lord to keep the Lord

Jesus Christ always in our view and his love always in our hearts for we ask it for his great name's sake amen amen to olsun little d wave a d