



THE PILLARS OF MARRIAGE

MEN OF THE WORD | GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

PILLAR 3 – COMBINATION: THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH

Introduction

Marriage is the God-designed combination of a man and woman, in marriage, to become one flesh. There are several aspects of the “one flesh” relationship. In this session we will focus on the significance and implications of physical oneness. In a future session, we will look at the other joys and opportunities of combination: 1+1=1.

There is much confusion about the role and place of physical intimacy. This is evidenced by sexual immorality and sin on pervasive levels in our culture and even among professing believers. The impact on marriages is undeniable. The Bible is starkly clear on the issue of immorality of all types. We are going to follow the thinking of Paul under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit as we move towards application of the one-flesh relationship in 1 Corinthians 7.

THE ONLY CONTEXT FOR PHYSICAL INTIMACY

To set the context, we must begin with the Bible’s simple, clear, and direct moral clarity: physical intimacy happens in marriage with one person: *your wife*. Four words summarize what the Bible says about this one-flesh relationship:

1. **Exclusivity** – God created men and women to live in an exclusive (monogamous) intimate relationship for life. Genesis 2:24 – “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*” If you are not committed to zero intimate physical relationships (singleness), you are called to one intimate physical relationship (marriage). God created every person to have marital relations with one person—and only one person—for life. The exceptions to this are narrow and rare.
2. **Unashamed** – Genesis 2:25 – “*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*” This reflects the deep pleasure and satisfaction of behavior and activity that is not sinful. Physical oneness and intimacy are authorized, blessed, and encouraged by a holy God. They fulfill His creative design. The one-flesh relationship is exactly what God designed for our pleasure, for the expression of oneness in marriage, for procreation, and most importantly, for His glory.
3. **Abstention** – 1 Thessalonians 4:3 – “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.*” There is NO sexual activity that God authorizes outside of marriage. Our culture laughs at the concept of abstention. But for rare exception, God did not create you to abstain from sex. However, if you are unmarried, there is no other option. Abstention is God’s will for you. But once in marriage, abstention is prohibited.
4. **Consequences** – The failure to embrace God’s design results in devastation. The Bible describes the consequences in great detail, both in principle and by illustration. There are deep and profound effects for both individuals and their cultures when this truth is ignored. Some examples:
 - a. Proverbs 5:22–23 (the adulterer) – “*His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.*”
 - b. Proverbs 5:3–4 (the adulteress) – “*For the lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death...*”

Violation of these principles is to be expected among those who reject Christ. But what about within the church?

PAUL’S CASE FOR MORAL PURITY – 1 CORINTHIANS 6:11–20

Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that sexual sin can no longer be a part of a person’s life once he has been saved. He makes the argument why that is so in the rest of 1 Corinthians 6. Then, in 1 Corinthians 7, he makes application of the argument to marriage and singleness.

THE PREMISE

“Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Cor 6:11–12).

THE ARGUMENT – The Four P’s

- 1. Permanence.** Your body (flesh) is temporary: *“Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them” (1 Cor 6:13).*

“Both” of what? Food and stomach. Your current body. It will pass away. God is permanent. Your soul now is permanent. Your current physical body is not. In fact, it is very temporary:

James 4:14 – *“You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”*

Isaiah 40:6–8 – *“A voice says, ‘Call out.’ Then he answered, ‘What shall I call out?’ All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”*

There is a great contrast between the passing and temporary nature of our current physical existence with the permanence of the truth of God’s word. This is not a statement of futility, but a reminder of *perspective*. Remember what matters. Remember what is permanent. Then let that truth dictate decisions about what is temporary. The foolishness of a fallen world is that so much attention and focus is on what is temporary. A lack of self-control over what is temporary (the body) damages and destroys that which is permanent (the soul). A focus on the permanent keeps a proper perspective on that which is temporary and passing away.

1 Peter 2:11- *“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.”*

- 2. Purpose.** Your body (flesh) is for the glory of God: *“Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” (1 Cor 6:13).*

A life of immorality disregards and abuses the purpose of the physical body. That pursuit is presented as the opposite end of the spectrum from the glory of God. Living life for the glory of God is exactly what you were given a body for. That is why your soul dwells in a physical body. Your body is the physical means you have to glorify God by living in obedience and submission to the Creator’s design.

- 3. Possession.** Your body is not your own. *“Now God has not only raised the Lord but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (1 Cor 6:14–15). “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (v. 17). “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price” (vv. 19–20).*

He created us. He bought us. He owns us. We are his slaves. We are now the property of another Master. To understand and live in accordance with this truth requires humility and submission.

If you claim to be a Christian yet live contrary to 1 Corinthians 6, there are big questions about your claim to faith in Jesus Christ. If you really are saved, you must be warned that you cannot join Christ to your behavior. There are consequences.

- 4. Poison.** What is the consequence of sexual immorality? *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, ‘The two shall become one flesh’” (1 Cor 6:15–16).*

In Proverbs 5 through 7 (among other places), a father teaches his sons about the peril of immorality. Within those chapters is a very graphic description of the wreckage caused by sexual immorality. If that teaching is not enough, you can live several decades on this earth and see it for yourself as men around you destroy their life for the sake of momentary pleasure and gratification.

Illicit (outside of marriage) sexual relationships are a poison. The venom may take a while to act, but it is there—and it destroys. Immorality for a Christian is to join Christ with a prostitute. For a believer the consequences of this are severe. Hebrews 13:4 – “*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*”

1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 – “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.*”

THE COMMANDS

1. **Flee Immorality** (1 Cor 6:18). Run. Don’t walk. Escape! Get away! Remove yourself. Don’t wait for it to pass by. Don’t be passive.

2 Timothy 2:22 – “*Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*”

2. **Glorify God in Your Body** (1 Cor 6:20). How does moral purity/abstaining from sexual immorality glorify God?

- **Obedience/submission** – it is God’s will. Fleeing immorality is His design for your good and His glory. Putting a genuine, morally pure, life on display glorifies God. It is what Christians do. Philippians 1:20 – “*Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be in life or by death.*”
- **Example** – living a demonstrably pure life shows others who follow and watch you that **a)** it is possible by God’s grace, and **b)** the Bible is right! It vindicates the design of the Creator and that glorifies Him.

PAUL’S APPLICATION FOR MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESS – 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–9

1. **Singleness requires contentment with abstention.**

“*...it is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (v. 1).

If you are single, you are to be content in your marital status because it is what the Lord has for you right now. It is good. It is equally good, and expected, that you remain sexually pure. Singleness and abstention go together. They are good.

2. **Marriage requires contentment with exclusivity.**

“*But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband*” (v. 2).

Paul is not calling married people immoral. Nor is he saying that immorality is a fact of life and that marriage is therefore a safe harbor for such behavior. His argument from 1 Corinthians 6 was that God created us, He makes the rules. We are His. We know from Genesis 2 that He created us for an exclusive one-flesh marital relationship. The one-flesh relationship is with one woman—your own wife. Sex in that context is exactly what God purposed, designed, and created. It gives Him glory.

“*Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion*” (vv. 7–9).

The desires in a man for intimacy with a woman is from God. Those desires are not evil, shameful, or sinful. Expressing or fulfilling those desires outside of marital monogamy is immoral, shameful, and sinful. If a man is single and struggles with strong desires for intimacy, that is God-given and God-designed. Such desires can only be fulfilled within marriage and indicate that such a man may not be called to singleness.

3. Physical intimacy, like marriage, is complementary.

“The husband must 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” (vv. 3–4).

Intimacy is only to happen within the relational confines of marriage. Therefore, marital intimacy, like marriage, is complementary.

- Marriage is complementary (equals) – Paul reinforces an important principle in these verses. The **duty** of the husband and the **duty** of the wife to each other in the context of this intimacy are **the same**. Likewise, the **authority** of the husband and the **authority** of the wife are also **the same**.
- Marriage is complementary (different) – The husband and wife are different. They view and interact with intimacy differently. This is not explicit in these verses, but it is inferred and every married man knows this is true. The inference comes from the command. Paul would not be commanding us to fulfill this “duty” or to recognize equal “authority” in this area of marriage if there was no difference between the sexes.
- Live with your wife in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7). Understanding someone else’s wife does you no good. You cannot carry into marriage some kind of “expertise” or “understanding” about physical intimacy that comes from past relationships, books, movies, podcasts, the internet, or pornography. This is one of the devastating long-term effects of the ubiquitousness of pornography—believing that what you see on the screen has any relevance or applicability to your marriage.

4. Marriage Means Abstention is Left Behind

“Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (v. 5).

Intimacy in a marriage is exclusive, guiltless, and commanded. It is a critical function that God built into marriage to express oneness and union. Abstention is required (a MUST) if you are single. When you marry, abstention is prohibited—except for very limited circumstances.

The physical expression of oneness, joy, exclusivity, and pleasure is endorsed by God. It gives Him glory. It is also an expression of obedience and submission to Him. Physical separation is to be short term, agreed upon, and for the purpose of prayer. This is important because of a lack of self-control.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Questions for Discussion

1. Proverbs 5, 6, and 7 address the traps and warning signs of moral failure. What are they?
2. Who is in your life that has the closeness and visibility to see moral trouble in your life? How can they help you?
3. How can you lead your wife now (or in the future if you are single) towards a biblical, one-flesh marriage?
4. How can you help your brothers in Christ lead in his marriage towards a biblical one-flesh marriage?

Additional Resources:

1. **Read** *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins*, by John Street
2. **Listen to** “Sexual Purity in the Church,” a sermon preached by John MacArthur on August 24, 1986. Transcript and audio available at <https://www.gty.org/sermons/80-25/sexual-purity-in-the-church>.
3. If you are currently struggling with sexual sin or acknowledging and reconciling a history of moral failure, spend time reading and meditating on Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. These psalms were written by David after terrible personal moral failure (described in 2 Samuel 11) and while enduring confrontation and then severe consequences of that sin for the rest of his life (2 Samuel 12:10–15). David understood the forgiveness and love of God during the discipline of the Lord: *“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven . . .”*

Audio, video, and handouts for this session: www.gracechurch.org/motw

Next meeting: January 28, 2026, “Assurance and the Lifestyle of Love,” 1 John 3:11–24 (Brad Klassen)