

## ***Why Doesn't God Let Me Make my Own Choices with my Body?***

***Be Ready to Share*** Summer Sermon Series 2016

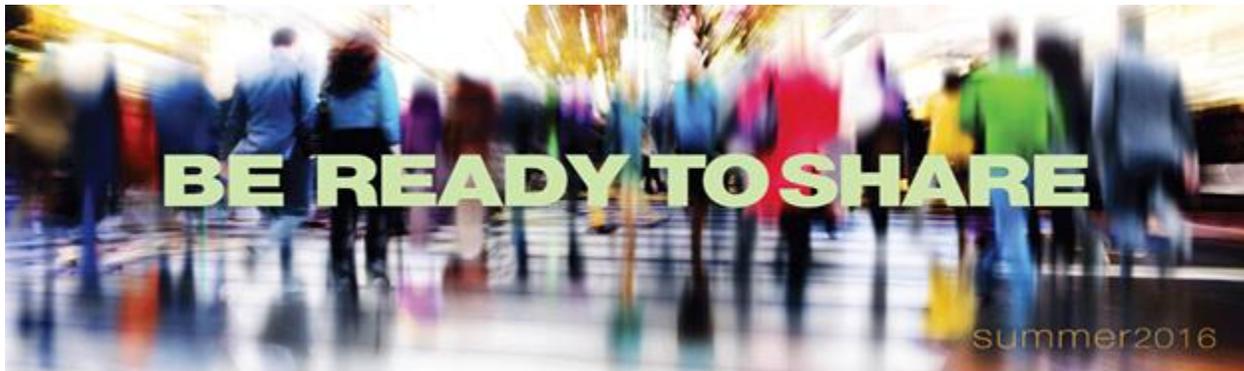
1 Corinthians 7:1-17

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

July 24, 2016

**TEXT:** 1 Corinthians 7:1-17



We continue this morning in our summer series *Being Ready to Share*, and part of being ready to share Christian faith is having our ears open to the questions that are being asked around us. The question that we're looking at this morning is: "Why doesn't God let me make my own choices with my body?" This question actually manifests itself in a variety of specific situations. As Americans, as postmodern people, we take for granted the assumption that we are free, and we often define freedom as personal autonomy, the right to choose whatever we want to do. We like to have the freedom in what we eat, what we say, the freedom to say things electronically that we would never say face-to-face. We want the freedom for what we watch, what we listen to, freedom in what we do, what we drink, with whom we share our lives, freedom to enter relationships for our own pleasure with no commitment of uncertain duration, freedom to end such relationships when we no longer find them satisfying, freedom to abandon these relationships when the responsibilities outweigh the pleasures, or freedom to withhold support or even destroy the consequences of such relationships. We're a society that is saturated with this definition of freedom. In a world saturated with this mentality, Christianity can seem strange; it can seem repressive, oppressive. It can seem, as one social commentator said: "Christianity is a straitjacket. There's no room for me at all. I want to live for myself rather than following God."

This morning, I am going to take the risk of addressing this important, but somewhat controversial topic. We will talk about our intimate lives and how this affects us and plays out and what the gospel call to us is. I want to assure you right from the beginning that I find the

scriptural vision of intimacy and the sanctity of life beautiful and compelling, and something that we need to be taught. It won't get any easier next week as we will talk about the question of homosexuality. These are important questions, and so I ask you do to look with me at God's Word. As we get started, I want to note for you some statistics recently published by the Barna Group in 2016 in a survey of Americans related to the question of the meaning of physical intimacy. The highest respondents, 63%, said that the purpose of sexual intimacy is to express intimacy between two people who love each other. Only one third of the respondents said that that should take place within the context and commitment of marriage, just one third. The second highest percentage of respondents said that the purpose of intimacy was self-expression and personal fulfillment. As we will look at in Scripture, the Bible actually has a much higher view of us than we do of ourselves.

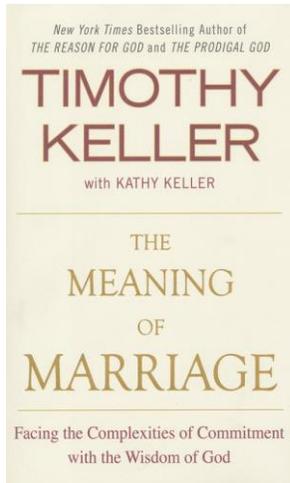
Let's turn to the text, 1 Corinthians 7. We have license in 1 Corinthians 7 to ask and respond to questions. When you come to Christ, or if you are in process of coming to Christ, it's very legitimate to have big questions, and we have been trying to ask and answer those throughout the summer. Paul loved the church in Corinth. Corinth, you remember, was the Las Vegas of the first century world. There was lots of new money, lots of new opportunities, and lots of social behavior that goes with quick, easy money. Most people don't build libraries with quick easy money, and that was true in Corinth. Corinth had a reputation for immorality, for idolatry, yet Paul loved this church, although they drove them crazy at times. As new followers of Christ, they had a series of questions for him, and they exchanged a set of letters. They actually wrote to Paul before the letter that we call 1 Corinthians, and they said they had a whole set of questions: What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ? What does it mean to have a Christian marriage? What is the relationship between men and women? What about food sacrificed to idols? What about collecting money and giving that money away to other Christians that we might not ever know? What about the bodily resurrection? Paul patiently answers those questions. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 7, and all the way to the rest of 1 Corinthians, is just a set of answers to their questions. In a sense, it legitimizes our whole series this summer.

The first question is the question that we are asking this morning about physical intimacy and what it means for a Christian marriage. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:1:

*“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*

We find out immediately what the topic is. For many modern people, this seems like arrestingly terrible news. For a sex-saturated culture, it almost seems like the Bible could be rejected just on this point. They say: “What do you mean that's not good? It is good. That's what we're living for! That's what I'm seeking.” If you were to survey the college students down at UC this morning and start with 1 Corinthians 7:1, the Bible looks bad. This teaching of abstinence seems

shocking to many modern people. Many even believe that it is psychologically unhealthy and harmful, that physical intimacy is on the level of food and water. In a recent study conducted by Michigan State University, 94% of the sexual behavior in mainstream media is between unmarried people. They think that's normal, that's what life is, and so the news of 1 Corinthians 7:1: "Guess what, it can be good to abstain," is like: "What! What are we talking about?" Yet, the historic teaching from Scripture, from the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, the entire Christian tradition, has said that actually intimacy is best expressed within the commitment of marriage. It seems shocking, and yet we have to ask that since people have



really taught this for millennia, is there something life-giving and true here? Tim Keller explains this in his important book, *The Meaning of Marriage*. I love that title. Marriage is not a social contract; marriage is a covenant. It has a meaning to it. Keller says it this way:

"The Bible does not counsel sexual abstinence before marriage because it has a low view of sex but because it has such a lofty one. The Biblical view implies that sex outside of marriage is not just morally wrong but also personally harmful.

"Physical intimacy is designed to be part of making a covenant and experiencing that covenant's renewal, a whole life entrustment and self-giving. It makes us feel deeply connected to the other person and bound with ongoing obligations to one another. But if you have no legal, social, moral responsibility then there is a profound incongruity that leads to jealousy, hurt feelings, and obsessiveness."

Intimacy without the covenant commitment degrades and turns it on its head. Instead of saying it is not good, the Bible actually has a beautiful vision of intimacy within the context of this covenant commitment. It is very lofty and beautiful. It is a view that is characterized by mutuality. I really want you to see that, because you will not find this view expressed anywhere else in the world. No other religion teaches the mutuality of men and women as created in the image of God, and in 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul is sometimes slandered in our contemporary culture as being against women. Actually, he has an incredibly lofty view of the mutuality of men and women. Look at this; it's absolutely stunning. Look what he says in 1 Corinthians 7:2:

*"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."*

We are all prone to that temptation, and Paul unrolls this vision of mutual commitment to one another and says that each man should have or be committed to his own wife, and equally, each woman should be committed to her own husband—a mutuality, men and women to one another within this covenant commitment. He says also in 1 Corinthians 7:3:

*“The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.”*

Most of us don't use the word *conjugal rights* often. It doesn't have a very romantic feel to it. The original text is even a little more scandalous. Just on flat reading of it, it says to *give what is owed or what is due*, which on its own terms is also deeply unromantic. I counsel husbands never lead with this line: “Let's talk about duty, obligation.” But, actually, this is interesting because it is the same word that Jesus uses in the Lord's Prayer: “Forgive us of our debts.” It is not an economic metaphor. Forgive us what we owe. It is not a spreadsheet. It is: “Forgive us for what we should give to God and have withheld.” The expression in 1 Corinthians 7:3 is that men should not withhold their affection for their wives. That is what was being described. Trade in the bass boat and give your wife your full attention and affection. That is what he's saying. He says similarly: “Likewise, wives give of yourselves to your husbands. Make sure that there is nothing that has a greater hold on your heart affections that are siphoning off your time and energy and affection. Make sure that you are in this relationship, not only of mutual commitment, but to a mutual sharing with one another.” Inside of marriage, we don't have the freedom to withhold ourselves from one another. He continues in 1 Corinthians 7:4 with another profound statement of mutuality, and this is a stunner, making me almost feel like my American passport becomes invalid. This strikes me as an American with absolute terror. If I weren't a Christian, I'd run away from this verse in panic. He says in 1 Corinthians 7:4:

*“For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.”*

There are men in our society, and there may be some men here this morning, who respond with: “Yes, thank you! I've wished someone would say this,” and they close the Bible. But, thankfully this verse has a second-half. The second half tells us: “Oh, and by the way, husbands don't have authority over the theirs either, but their wives to.” So to the question: “Don't I have the right to do whatever I want with my body?” the Bible says politely and yet forcefully: “No, actually you don't.” Freedom is found not in self autonomy, but freedom is found in a mutual commitment, a mutual sharing. This language of authority strikes us with terror, but really I think the idea here is that it's a commitment of enduring, ongoing responsibility, for another. When you assert that we have the right to do whatever we want with our own body, part of the reason why we feel that way is that we feel we are responsible to take care of our own body: we eat what we eat; we watch what we watch; we say what we say, as a way of maintaining our own sense of self, but the beauty of 1 Corinthians 7:4 is this mutual responsibility for one another. You don't have to assert the right for your own body, because someone else has responsibility for it. That's freedom. Husbands and wives in the Bible are called to outdo one another with taking responsibility. You don't have to worry about yourself. You don't have to meet your own needs. You don't have to pursue your own pleasures. You don't have to take care of yourself, because I am taking care of you. You don't have to worry about what will be your joy, because I'm worrying about that. You don't have to hold tightly to pursue your own

satisfaction. You don't have to put up guardrails and boundaries to prohibit you from sharing your heart, because I'm watching out for you. This is the beautiful biblical picture of committed relationship, and I cannot stress enough that in 1 Corinthians 7:2-4, these descriptions are expressed with mutual obligation. Husbands and wives share this relationship with each other as equals made in God's image. It's an extraordinary vision of marriage. Keller says this:

“If you have sex outside of marriage, then you will have to steel yourself, harden yourself, against sex’s power to soften your heart toward another person and make you more trusting. That is what physical intimacy actually does. It makes us more trusting. It is powerful to soften our heart, and if you engage in this outside the commitment of marriage, you actually have to harden yourself against its power because sex loses its covenant power for you. Ironically, it eventually works backwards, making you less and less able to commit and trust.”

The Bible celebrates intimacy. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ; wives submitting to their husbands as unto the Lord; husbands loving their wives as Christ loves the church—a beautiful, profound picture. The Bible is not against intimacy; it celebrates it within the covenant commitment of marriage in certain passages that seem almost shocking to us. The Bible has love poetry in it. In Proverbs 5:18-19, we read:

*“May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”*

You may not want to put that on your refrigerator, but that probably should be written out on a card or two along the way. That’s God’s Word. I always give couples a copy of Ed and Gaye Wheat’s book, *Intended for Pleasure*. Ed Wheat is a physician. He and his wife wrote a wonderful book, about intimacy in marriage. Dr. Wheat says:

“Some people have felt uncomfortable about sex because they somehow equate the sexual desire of men with the sexual drive of animals. They should remember that animals breed according to instinct with biological motivation. But man has intercourse as a whole person. Let us realize how the bodies of men and women are designed by God. Even in the sex act itself we are reminded that this is a relationship of persons, not just bodies, for it is no coincidence that man is the *only* creature of all of God’s creation who relates sexually face-to-face.”

God's design is for mutual sharing, a celebration. I love the Song of Songs as it continues. Some of this poetry is just beautiful. In Song of Songs 4:1-15, the man says of his beautiful bride:

*“Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is*

*lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. You are altogether beautiful, my love; . . . You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; . . . How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! . . . A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. . . a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.”*

This is God's Word. Husbands, this imagery is available to you. Contextualize it as you need to, but God's Word delights. This is God's idea. Freedom is found within the commitment, not in the absence of it.

In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul says:

*“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.”*

Don't hold back from one another, except—and here's another statement of mutuality—unless you've agreed together that there is a season of life for a time when you want to devote yourselves to God in prayer. He says this is okay to do, but he reminds them to come together again, do not be tempted from your lack of self-control. Inside the church, marriage is celebrated. Intimacy is celebrated as something good and beautiful, but not ultimate. It is not the meaning of our whole lives. It also does not exclude a holy calling to singleness, which can be a lifelong calling. All of us in this life live a portion of time with a call to consecrated singleness. It grieves me how early young boys and girls are pressured to pair up and see themselves in dating relationships in elementary school. That's not the ultimate purpose of why we're here. There is a consecrated singleness season. For some of us, it will extend for our whole lives. Jesus lived a perfect, full, complete human life as a single man. The Bible celebrates marriage, but it also celebrates singleness. If God has called you to a lifetime of singleness, or even singleness as a widow or widower, that can be holy. If you are at the beginning part of your life, don't be in a rush to be in a dating relationship. Be patient for God's revealing to you of the man or woman that He is giving you to share your life with. Paul says that singleness is a gift. It is a gift that he describes as having himself, and he says it's a good thing. In 1 Corinthians 7:9, he says:

*“But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*

If you have a desire to be married, that's a good thing. Not everyone is called to singleness, but how we conduct ourselves in our singleness often brings huge consequences in our lives. It is at this point in the message that I want to address the topic that was in a chapter that we read in

our book, *Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*.

I thank God for Bev's vulnerability with us and sharing what God has done in her life. I want us to have a real picture, because sometimes in the church we speak about the lives of people living without knowing Christ and we condemn behavior that people are already suffering for. They actually don't need us to condemn. That is already happening. What they need is the Word of the Gospel to come forth. Abortion is a devastating and terrible evil in our day. Over 50 million children have been killed the United States in the last 40 years; 1.3 million children a year lose their lives. That's more than the combined number of American soldiers killed in the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf and Afghan Wars combined. Every year that number of children is killed, and yet, for many in our society, they don't even perceive it as a moral evil. It is presented as a 'choice.'

The Scriptures teach us that life begins in the womb and should be protected and guarded. On the very first day of conception, all 46 chromosomes are present and human life has begun: unique, can never be reproduced or replaced. Three weeks after conception, the heart begins to beat, pumping the child's own blood which is different from the mother's blood. In the fifth week, about the time that many mothers confirm that they are pregnant, the child's eyes, legs, and hands begin to develop. By the sixth week, the child's brain waves are detectable. In the seventh week, the baby starts kicking and swimming. Just under two months into the pregnancy, every organ in the child's body is in place: the bones are taking shape; fingerprints have already begun to form. By the 10th week, teeth begin to form and fingernails develop. The baby can turn his or her head and can even frown. By the 12th week, a baby can grasp objects with a hand. By the 16th week, the baby can begin to dream. The biblical vision of human life and protecting it guards the lives of us all. The question, "Why can't I be left alone to make my own choices about my body?" is actually not a path of freedom. It's a path of tyranny in the end, a path of regret. The scriptural teaching that life begins in the womb is not to repress us. It is not anti-women. It is pro-life, made in the image and likeness of God. Statistics show that 84% of mothers decide not to have an abortion after seeing the ultrasound of the child. This is part of the reason why Kenwood is involved in supporting Pregnancy Care Center, Healthy Beginnings, and other places, to let moms see there is life here. That is not a statement of God against us, but it's for us.

Abby Johnson, former director of a Planned Parenthood Clinic in southwest Texas, when she saw the ultrasound image of an abortion actually taking place, resigned. She quit her job and joined the pro-life movement. She said: "I could see the whole profile of the baby, head to foot. I could see the baby try to move away as the abortion was taking place. She later explained that this experience changed her, and she just asked herself: "What am I doing?" And she thought: "Never, never again!"

Christians are accused and often slandered and tempers flare on this topic. We don't like to be told that we can't just do whatever we want. The reason for that happened a long time ago in the Garden of Eden, but God's statement for us that we don't have autonomy over our persons is for our good. It's for our life and the lives of those around us. It's interesting that among Millennials, among Gen X, we are a nation increasingly concerned with social justice, equality, civil rights for people, the protection of the weak, disabled, and the poor. We acknowledge it's wrong to determine a person's rights based on skin color, and yet we regularly determine a person's most basic right, the right to life, based on someone else's desire. When we talk about these issues, the goal of our series this summer, we need to be willing to engage, We need to do this with humility. We need to do this with kindness. We need to stress for people where Keller ends up—and I love where he ends up—that Christianity is not a straitjacket. He says instead that freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions but finding the right ones.

I have seen more and more people playing Pokémon GO. You know, a group of guys just walked right off a cliff and died looking for a Pokémon. That's not freedom. It would be funny if it weren't true, and yet sometimes we assert the right to do what we want to do, thinking that's where life is to be found. Yet it's death-dealing. So, don't come down heavy on someone. Offer instead the treasure of Christian faith. The treasure of Christian faith is that we find joy, freedom, not in the absence of restrictions and boundaries, but in the right ones. He who has the compass has the freedom of the seas. He who drives on a road with guardrails can enjoy the scenery. The Bible's vision of intimacy is not a low one, but a high one.

Many of you remember Eric Metaxas' visit to Kenwood in the spring and his book, *Miracles*. At the end of his book on miracles, one of the stories that he tells is about his dear friend April Hernandez who grew up in a rough part of the Bronx. She discovered at age 19 that she was pregnant and felt she had no other choice than to pursue an abortion. She had no one to stand with her, no one to voice an alternative. I commend her full story to you in the book. You can read it online and hear her own testimony as well, what she went through, and the subdued colored florescent lights, impersonal process, and then the guilt that she felt afterwards, and the brokenness in which she lived. I want us as Kenwood Baptist Church to approach this topic with the courage of humility. I want us to approach people that you think disagree with you, not with anger or hostility, but with compassion. You might hear April's story and find out what she did, and you might just join in with the throng saying what she did was wrong. When she left the abortion clinic, one of the protesters outside the clinic looked at her and said: "You're going to hell for what you just did." She spent years thinking God could never forgive her. She started going to church after several years. Towards the end of one service, the pastor called people forward for prayer asking if they needed forgiveness. When she got to the altar her eyes shut tight, she reached out her hand desperately, wanting a touch from God, and the words came out: "Father, forgive me for what I have done. Please forgive me. I'm so sorry." She

continued to sob and kept repeating: "Father, forgive me," and suddenly she heard a voice in reply as a whisper at the altar of this church: "I forgive you, my daughter, cry no more." We are the only ones who can offer this in the Name of Jesus Christ, and if we are going to take seriously being ready to share, that means entering into the real brokenness of people, not statistics not a Venn diagram of opinions, but real lives who sometimes make devastating choices that they themselves regret. The Word of Christ offers a beautiful vision, greater than our own desires. Jesus says in John 8:36:

*"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

Being a Christian means that we have the freedom to express our commitment to Christ in our singleness. Being a Christian means we have the freedom to express our love for Christ within a faithful marriage. Being a Christian means we have the freedom to offer our repentance to Christ and receive forgiveness for all of our sins. This is part of the Good News of Christ.

I want to challenge us in closing as a church to keep engaging people. The scale and scope of need is immense. It's delightful to start these conversations and to hear a reply. Some of you I know don't have any non-Christian friends, and I want to challenge us this summer to keep seeking out people to start conversations with, and I am going to give us a very concrete way to do that. I want you to take this brochure from the bulletin. This is an outreach that we do every summer. It's fun and it's a very practical way of getting to start some conversations. Not all of us have a person in our life who can take us around Cincinnati or bring us into a prison and give us opportunities to share, but this is a really simple, easy opportunity to share, and we really need your help. We go to the festival in Deer Park, and there is a way for each of you to participate, from setting up tents to manning the Kenwood booth to many other opportunities. We need about 40 of you to sign up to make this happen. It's really a lot of fun and a great way to engage the community. If you haven't done it before, sign up with Pastor Scott as you leave the sanctuary. It's really a joy. It's simple, and it's just a way to be present and encourage each other. Stories like Bev's story and stories like April's are there in our community, and we need to be present to offer of the life-giving vision of our lives that answers the question: "Why does God not allow me to do whatever I want with my own body?" The simplest answer is because God loves you and has a higher view of you than you do. Let's pray.

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your word. We thank You for thinking more highly of us than we tend to think of ourselves. Lord, I pray this morning that You would speak the word of freedom, that You would lift our vision of what it means to be made in Your image and likeness. Father, we pray that You would give the word freedom, the freedom to love You in our singleness, the freedom to find that You are enough to satisfy us. I pray that You would give us the freedom to express a mutual commitment, a shared affection, a not withholding of ourselves within the safety and commitment of marriage. I pray, Father, this morning that You would speak a word

of forgiveness. Most of us have some brokenness in this area of our lives, from a relationship that we have regretted, to a life we may have taken, to a promise not kept. I ask You, Holy Spirit, to move among us right now, that the Word of Christ would pierce our soul, and that You would breathe forgiveness and new life. Help us as a community of faith to take a step together. Thank You for the nearly 30 people that just spent a week in Mexico, for their safe return and the blessing of ministering to the vulnerable. I pray, Father, that You would motivate and stir hundreds of us to step across the street and start a conversation. We give You the praise, for everyone needs Your compassion, and that compassion comes to us in Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah! Amen.