

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:1-8

Session 25: Marriage Instructions, Pt. 1

Beginning in chapter 7, Paul begins to answer questions about several different issues, the first one being that of marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

As we said in session 23, Paul is referring to sexual intimacy outside of marriage when he says “not to touch a woman.” Especially compared to heathen writers who used coarse language when writing about these matters, Paul is using some delicacy as he writes. And he will continue to do so down through the passage.

2 Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

We covered this in session 23. Paul is talking about sexual intimacy only being allowed by God within the marriage relationship.

In vv. 3-5, Paul will talk about the responsibility that each partner has toward their spouse with regard to the physical relationship in marriage. Before we get into the verses, I want you to have a look inside the mind of Paul, as he writes to answer their questions. The conjugal relationship within a marriage is meant to be a pleasure and a joy, but it is also a responsibility. Husbands and wives are supposed to be in a marriage relationship to please one another in every area of the relationship. But also, and this is what is in Paul’s mind, marriage is a big deal and it needs to be done right because it is a picture of the relationship of Christ and the church!

That means the man will be striving to love his wife as Christ loved the church, and the wife will behave toward her husband as the church toward Christ. We will see this in detail in our Sunday study in the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore **as the church** is subject unto Christ, so **let the wives be to** their own husbands in every thing.²⁵ **Husbands, love** your wives, even **as Christ also loved** the church, and gave himself for it; 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Now, let’s move back to our passage in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 7:3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

I want to talk about this term “due benevolence.” This is another indication of Paul trying to be delicate as he deals with a very personal issue. In your bible, you should write out in the margin: affection/kindness/tenderness. For the husband, this affection includes sexual intimacy, but it is not restricted to that alone.

Paul says “due benevolence” as a reminder of the sacredness of their vows that in every respect they belong to each other, and therefore have a debt of conduct toward each other. In other words, husbands, render to your wives the affection and kindness that you owe them (not based on their deservedness, but based on our responsibility as the husband.)

Paul may have been giving this instruction in response to the idea that was promoted by the philosophers of his day, that there was some kind of special virtue and merit to couples living separate from each other, and behaving as though they are single.

Philosophers such as Lycurgus, Thales, Antiphanes and Socrates thought that, [considering “the intractable \(stubborn, obstinate\) tempers of women, and how troublesome and fraught with danger was the education of children,” it is wise not to get married.](#) Many philosophers who allowed marriage, considered it to be “a necessary evil.”

At some point during the DoGG, a doctrine of celibacy was instituted within the Christian religion where the clergy were not allowed to marry.

Eventually, celibacy was imposed upon anyone involved in the Christian religion as an occupation and it was required for ordination. The fact that this question is asked of Paul may indicate that this doctrine is already making headway back in his day.

The Jews, on the other hand, defended marriage as proper, and a duty. They regarded marriage as an ordinance of God. To this day, Judaism holds that a man who is twenty years old and has not married, is sinning against God. Why? Because it is thought that this unmarried man is breaking the divine command to “be fruitful and multiply.”

Dr. Lightfoot produces some examples from the Jewish writers: ["The man is commanded concerning begetting and multiplying, but not the woman. And when does the man come under this command? From the age of sixteen or seventeen years; but, if he exceeds twenty years without marrying, behold he violates and renders an affirmative precept vain. The Gemara says: It is forbidden a man to be without a wife; because it is written, It is not good for man to be alone. And whosoever gives not himself to generation and multiplying is all one with a murderer: he is as though he diminished from the image of God, etc."](#)

1 Corinthians 7:3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

In the strict context of the passage, both the husband and the wife have a conjugal responsibility to each other. Now, Paul is going to enlarge on this issue.

1 Corinthians 7:4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

Some scholars believe that in Corinth, there were people who believed that acting single within a marriage was holy. They thought that refraining from sexual relations within the marriage was somehow holier than if you enjoyed the marriage relationship. Instead of being holy, it was actually setting their spouse up for temptation, as Paul will say.

When a spouse refuses to have sexual intimacy with their spouse, Paul says they are defrauding their spouse. Paul gives 3 parameters for the proper withholding of sexual intimacy within marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:5 Defraud ye not one the other, **except it be with consent for a time**, that ye may **give yourselves to fasting and prayer**; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

- 1) **It is with consent.** Let's sit down and talk about this and agree on abstaining from physical intimacy.
- 2) **For a time.** Let's agree on the time frame, when this will begin and when this will end.
- 3) **For fasting and prayer.** The reason for withholding sexual intimacy is not because "I'm mad at you," but because we are giving ourselves to prayer and fasting.

Prayer is something we should always do, but fasting is something that we might occasionally do for certain reasons. Typically, a person will fast for a short period of time, a few days usually.

But then Paul says when this agreed on time of prayer and fasting is over, they are to "come together again" which means to resume the physical relationship. Why?

1 Corinthians 7:5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, **that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency**.

So that Satan does not tempt you for your lack of self-control. In a marriage, neither of you own yourselves any more. Once you exchange those vows and become married, your body belongs to your spouse. You are to serve your spouse and be sensitive to their needs. Sex is not a weapon to fight with; it is a tool to build with. It is totally unscriptural, and ungodly, for either spouse to use lack of sexual intimacy as a punishment to their spouse, or as a bargaining chip for something they want.

1 Corinthians 7:6 But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.

What does Paul mean when he says “I speak this by permission?” He is saying that this is not part of what the Spirit was inspiring him to say, but he did have permission from Christ to say it.

When Paul says “and not of commandment,” he is saying that what he spoke by permission is not supposed to be taken as a command.

What is the “this” to which Paul is referring? What did he speak “by permission”? Is he talking about not defrauding one another? No. Is he referring to the husbands and wives not having power over their own bodies? No.

He is talking about what he said in the first half of verse 5 – the temporary interruption of normal marriage intimacy for the purposes of prayer and fasting. That is what he spoke by permission.

Paul is not guessing when he says that withholding that intimacy is defrauding your spouse. Neither is he guessing when he says that Satan will tempt those who lack marriage intimacy. But Paul is referring to the exception for a time of prayer and fasting.

Why would Paul give such an instruction? Probably because of the nature of fasting and prayer. (I am not talking about fasting for health reasons.)

The kind of fasting Paul is talking about is, in essence, the letting go of the physical in order to concentrate on the spiritual without distraction.

Ordinarily, we live every day with one hand on each; the physical and spiritual. But, there are times, when we need to devote our full time and attention to the spiritual, so we let go of the physical (we stop eating, we don’t watch TV, we turn off our phone, we don’t invite folks over, we don’t mow the lawn, we don’t go to work, we don’t pay our bills, we don’t schedule doctor’s appointments, we don’t play games with the kids, we don’t go to the movies, etc.) and we take hold of the spiritual (with both hands), by spending time in God’s word, praying constantly through the process, and focusing solely on those spiritual things to which we are attending.

For some, as Paul is saying, this would include sexual intimacy as it, for them, may not tend to be spiritually beneficial at that time of spiritual focus. But this abstinence is not a command. Why? Because, even in that act of coming together, it can be a godly expression of love and gratefulness for your spouse; that is perfectly in union with what God created for a husband and wife, so that even then, prayer and spiritual work can continue. But, that is up to each couple.

1 Corinthians 7:7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

What does Paul mean when he says that he wishes all men were like him? Is Paul talking about being celibate? Does Paul want every man to be single? That seems unlikely when you consider the repercussions.

What about the Genesis passage where God says that it is not good for man to be alone? If Paul means he wishes every man was single, and men cannot have sexual relations outside of marriage, then the birth rate would drop to zero unless people would sin to have children. So that cannot be what Paul means.

When Paul says that he would that all men were even as he is, he is talking about the “gift” of continence, which he had. In other words, his desire is that men might not be in any danger from Satan’s temptations that whether married or single, that they might be more fit for and pursue the service of Christ.

At this time, it seems obvious that Paul was unmarried, as he has the “gift” of celibacy.

1 Corinthians 7:8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

But this brings up the question, was Paul ever married? Some scholars say “yes” and others say “no.” The bible has no mention of Paul’s wife.

Some deduce that Paul used to be married since he was evidently a member of the Sanhedrin (as he cast his vote in Acts), and it was a requirement for members of the Sanhedrin to be married. Again, we are assuming, as Paul never identifies himself as part of the Sanhedrin and the scholars are divided.

So, supposing that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and that he was married, we can now assume that either his wife died, or, that once Paul became a believer in Christ, she left. But either way, she is never mentioned.

I want us to back up for a moment to verse 7 and look at the issue of the “gift.”

1 Corinthians 7:7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But **every man hath his proper gift of God**, one after this manner, and another after that.

Paul is going to say that if you can stay single, and keep temptations at bay, it is a “gift of God.” He will also say, that if you need to be married, that also is a “gift.” And we will explain this a little further down in the passage.

The problem is not singleness. But it is a problem to be married and act like you are single or to be single and act like you are married.

Is it possible for a man to have both “gifts?” I think the answer is yes. I think it is possible to be completely happy and satisfied in marriage and then it is also possible to be completely happy living as a single.

God established the relationship of marriage, and hence, marriage is a divine institution. Paul is not trying to contradict this, but he makes the point that it is not bad, it is not evil, if you remain single. It is not the norm, but it isn’t evil either. So, Paul says that celibacy is a good lifestyle, if you can remain unmarried without falling into sin and suffering the spiritual consequences that come from that.