



## A Study of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

### Lesson 11: What About Sex?... 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Now we come this morning to the beginning of the third section of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It is the third section because the letter contains both a brief introduction and a brief conclusion. But if you were to look at Paul's letter in terms of size and overall subject matter, what we really have come to is the second half of the book.

#### FIRST CORINTHIANS

- AN INTRODUCTION (1:1-9)
- TWO REPORTS
  - ABOUT DIVISIONS (1:10-4:21)
  - ABOUT IMMORALITY (5:1-6:20)
- ANSWERS TO 8 QUESTIONS (7:1-16:12)
- CONCLUSION (16:13-24)

Now the first half concerned a number of reports that Paul had received concerning the Corinthian church. You will remember that those reports concerned the divisions at Corinth...we saw that in chapter one.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 1:10**...I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

After that, Paul mentions a second report, which is contained in chapter five, concerning a notorious case of immorality in which one of the men in the church was living in an incestuous relationship with his step-mother. It is hard to forget Paul's disappointment and frustration with the Corinthians at the beginning of chapter five.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:1**...It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

It is also possible, though it is hard to come to a real measure of certainty, that when Paul mentions **"men going to prostitutes"** in chapter six that he may have been referring to an additional report that he had received. You will remember from our lesson last week that if that were the case it most likely would have concerned a group of men who were downplaying the significance of what they did with their bodies. That is, it would have concerned men who were saying something like ...**"Since we are so spiritual, since we by our union with Christ have transcended the realm of the material world...it is of no importance whatsoever concerning what we do with our bodies. If we should have any small remainder of fleshly lusts left...we can satisfy that lusts by visiting the prostitutes up at the Temple of Athena."**

Now I don't think there is much doubt that there was, in fact, a group of men at Corinth saying something like that. The only doubt concerns whether the men saying such things were simply talking through their hats<sup>1</sup>...that is theorizing without acting out their views...or whether they were putting their philosophy into practice.

Either way, Paul quashed their view with two absolutely wonderful verses at the end of chapter six. Verses where he says:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 6:19**...Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Now, starting in chapter seven, Paul turns from the reports he had received about the Corinthians to a letter that the Corinthians had written to him asking him a number of questions. Look at the opening phrase of chapter 7.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 7:1**...Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...

You see the Corinthians had written Paul to ask him about several things. How I would love to have that letter. I would love to know whether the letter was simply comprised of a number of theological questions regarding their faith and practice or whether it was something a little more sinister. Some commentators think that the letter that Paul is referring to here was a letter containing a corporate response from the Corinthians...a response to Paul's first letter (a letter we do not possess) to them.<sup>2</sup>

Now, if that is the case, then the tone of the letter would have almost certainly been defiant. In other words, the letter would more than likely have gone something like this...**“Now you wrote in your letter not to do such and such...but isn’t it true that for the truly spiritual...for the truly knowledgeable...that it is better to do such and such...”**<sup>3</sup>

And of course, you can imagine how such a letter might have troubled Paul’s great shepherd’s heart. He had invested so much time in Corinth. He had lived in their midst, worked in their midst and suffered in their midst and now they had more or less thrown him over...rejecting his advice for more spiritually triumphant teachers...rejecting his wisdom...even rejecting his authority.

I think understanding the letter that way helps us to understand some of the things Paul says to the Corinthians...thing like what he says in chapter 4.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 4:14**...I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.

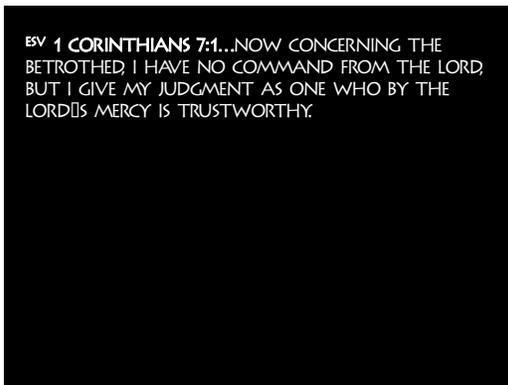
Anyway, Paul begins to address the questions that the Corinthians had posed in their letter starting in chapter 7.<sup>4</sup>

Now there is a part of me that finds great appeal in trying to figure out exactly what the Corinthians were asking. I like forensic shows and detective stories and

puzzles in general...and it is certainly necessary to do some sleuthing here. I say that because we are at a disadvantage here because we only have half of the conversation. I mentioned this in an earlier lesson (Lesson 1) but trying to figure out what the Corinthians actually asked Paul is a little bit like listening to one side of a phone conversation and trying to figure out what the other side is saying. It is easy to get in the ballpark but hard to be exact.

Now I want to skip for a moment the passage that we'll be looking at this morning and look at a few of the other questions the Corinthians raise to show you what I mean about it being hard to nail down exactly what was being asked. Look for example at 1 Corinthians 7:25.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 7:25**...Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.



Now what was the question that was being asked?

You can see clearly that they had some sort of question about virgins in the church...but it is hard to know whether the question concerned whether they should get married. Or whether they should stay virgins, or whatever?

The same kind of thing happens in chapter 8 verse 1.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 8:1...**Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1...**NOW CONCERNING THE BETROTHED; I HAVE NO COMMAND FROM THE LORD; BUT I GIVE MY JUDGMENT AS ONE WHO BY THE LORD'S MERCY IS TRUSTWORTHY.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1...**NOW CONCERNING FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS: WE KNOW THAT "ALL OF US POSSESS KNOWLEDGE;" THIS "KNOWLEDGE" PUFFS UP, BUT LOVE BUILDS UP.

Clearly the question concerns something to do with meat sacrificed to idols. But is the question whether they should buy such meat in the market or whether they should abstain from eating such meat whenever they offered it by their friends or by their families, or what? The same sort of things occurs in chapter 12 verse 1.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 12:1...**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1...**NOW CONCERNING THE BETROTHED; I HAVE NO COMMAND FROM THE LORD; BUT I GIVE MY JUDGMENT AS ONE WHO BY THE LORD'S MERCY IS TRUSTWORTHY.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1...**NOW CONCERNING FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS: WE KNOW THAT "ALL OF US POSSESS KNOWLEDGE;" THIS "KNOWLEDGE" PUFFS UP, BUT LOVE BUILDS UP.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1...**NOW CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS, BROTHERS, I DO NOT WANT YOU TO BE UNINFORMED.

Do you see what I mean? It is clear that they have a question about spiritual gifts but what is the question? Does their question concern the legitimacy of certain spiritual gifts or does it concern the issue of which gift is best or does it concern the use of spiritual gifts in public worship or in private devotions?

Now, one last example from chapter 16, verse 1.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 16:1...**Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1...**NOW CONCERNING FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS: WE KNOW THAT "ALL OF US POSSESS KNOWLEDGE;" THIS "KNOWLEDGE" PUFFS UP, BUT LOVE BUILDS UP.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1...**NOW CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS, BROTHERS, I DO NOT WANT YOU TO BE UNINFORMED.

**ESV 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1...**NOW CONCERNING THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS: AS I DIRECTED THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA, SO YOU ALSO ARE TO DO.

You can see that the question concerned something regarding an upcoming collection or offering. But was their question related to how large the offering should be or when the offering should be ready or how the offering should be delivered, or what?

I think it is obvious that you cannot readily tell from the verses we've read exactly what was being asked and that in order to get really close to what was being asked it is important to read all of Paul's answer and then work backwards. In other words, to determine what was really being asked we have to decide what question Paul really answers.

Now that is not always the case. Sometimes Paul actually repeats the Corinthian's question as he goes along. For example, in chapter 8:1 Paul hints at their question when he writes, "**Now about food sacrificed to idols...**" But then in verse three of that same chapter he spells out the exact nature of their question when he says, "**So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols...**" You see at first glance it is impossible to understand exactly what they were asking. But as you progress through Paul's answer...the actual question becomes clear.

Now I am making that point because the traditional interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:1, the first verse of the passages we're looking at this morning, answers the question about what the Corinthians were asking without really doing a very good job of taking into consideration the question Paul is actually answering. In some cases commentators come down with an answer that at best denigrates Paul's overall view of marriage and at worst pretty much slanders him.

Let me explain what I mean by quoting one famous commentator on Paul's words here. He writes:

In the detailed discussion of 1 Corinthians 7 one looks in vain for a positive appreciation of love between the sexes or of the richness of human experience in marriage and the family.<sup>5</sup>

Do you get that? He is saying, "**If you want a positive assessment of marriage you won't find it in Paul.**" Now, I have to tell you. I just think that is just downright goofy.

Another commentator accuses Paul of possessing only a grudging approval of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 and *that he is of the conviction that sex is in itself an evil and undesirable thing.*<sup>6</sup> I think that is wrong as well.

And then finally, one commentator writes:

**Paul's unmistakable pejorative attitude towards sex does raise insistent questions about his own tastes and practices. Evidently he felt a deep distaste for sex.**<sup>7</sup>

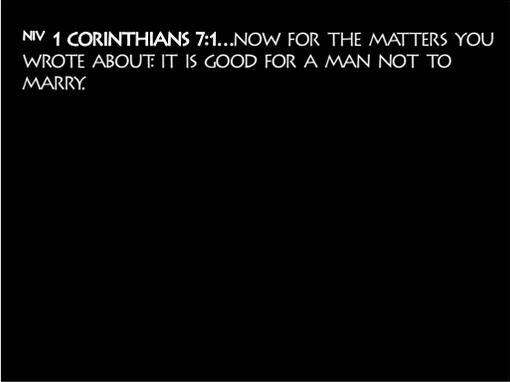
Now that is just too much. The man that said that, by the way, wrote a commentary on 1 Corinthians but is admittedly not even a believer.

That I why when read commentaries you have to have a sense of the commentator's worldview and background. That is why when you read a journal article or a magazine article or a commentary, you have to continually apply a little Christian common-sense. Listen to what David Garland writes:

In 1 Corinthians Paul is reacting to specific difficulties and aberrant views concerning marriage that have evolved in Corinth. He is not attempting to offer a complete systematic guide to marital ethics. The interpreter is at a disadvantage, however, in discovering what the specific difficulties and view, were. We can listen in on only one side of the conversation and can only guess from Paul's responses what it was that prompted them. But this must be done In order to understand aught Paul's intentions and to translate them to inform our present experiences.<sup>8</sup>

Now all that having been said, let's look at Corinthians 7:1.

<sup>ESV</sup> **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."

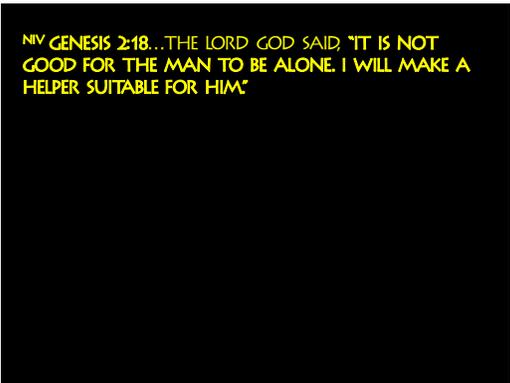


**NIV 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1...NOW FOR THE MATTERS YOU  
WROTE ABOUT IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO  
MARRY.**

Now having just read that passage you may be wondering, **“O.K. Tom, what’s the big deal? You’ve built up to a climax only there’s no climax.”**

Well let take a minute and explain in a little more detail the nature of the problem. The problem is there are a number of passages that seem to say the exact opposite of what Paul is saying here. For example, Genesis 2:18 reads like this:

**NIV Genesis 2:18...The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**



**NIV GENESIS 2:18...THE LORD GOD SAID, "IT IS NOT  
GOOD FOR THE MAN TO BE ALONE. I WILL MAKE A  
HELPER SUITABLE FOR HIM."**

Now that is not simply the voice of a prophet expressing his opinion. No, in Genesis 2:18 what you have recorded is the thought and mind of God Almighty.

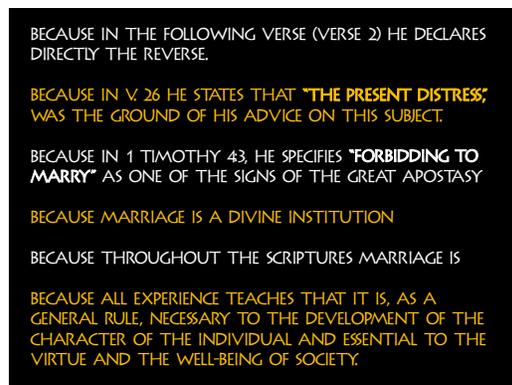
And it seems to me that His thought and mind is that it is not a good idea for a man to be alone...that is, that a man ought to have a wife if he can get one.

Now can you see the problem?

You see the problem is that in Genesis 2 you have God saying that it is not good for a man to be alone. While here in 1 Corinthians 7, you have the great Apostle to the Gentiles saying, **“It is good for a man not to marry.”**

Now the question is, **“Are both true and if they are both true, how can they be true since the two views seem to be mutually exclusive.”**

In fact, what you find in almost all the older commentaries on First Corinthians are commentators doing their dead level best to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory pronouncements.



Listen for example to Charles Hodge, the great Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century.

It is evident that there was a diversity of opinion on the subject of marriage among the Corinthian Christians. Probably some of them of Jewish origin thought it obligatory, while other members of the church thought it undesirable, if not wrong. Paul says, "It is good for a man not to marry."...That the Apostle does not mean to teach either that marriage is morally an evil as compared with celibacy, or that as a general rule it is inexpedient, is evident.

1. Because in the following verse (verse 2) he declares directly the reverse.
2. Because in v. 26 he expressly states that "**the present distress,**" or the peculiar circumstances of trial and difficulty in which the Christians of that day were placed, was the ground of his advice on this subject.
3. Because in 1 Timothy 4:3, he specifies "**forbidding to marry**" as one of the signs of the great apostasy which he predicted was to occur.
4. Because marriage is a divine institution, having its foundation in the nature of man, and therefore must be a good. God accordingly declared, "**It is not good for man to be alone,**" i.e. to be unmarried, Genesis 2:18. Paul cannot be understood in a sense which would make him directly contradict the word of God.
5. Because throughout the Scriptures marriage is spoken of as honorable, Hebrews 13:4, and is used to illustrate the relation between God and his people, and between Christ and his church.
6. Because all experience teaches that it is, as a general rule, necessary to the full development of the character of the individual, and absolutely essential to the virtue and the well-being of society. To depreciate marriage would be to go contrary both to nature and revelation, and such depreciation has never failed to be attended by the most injurious consequences to the church and to the world. If, therefore, Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, we must understand the Apostle as intending to say: '**Considering your peculiar circumstances, it is expedient for you not to marry.**'<sup>9</sup>

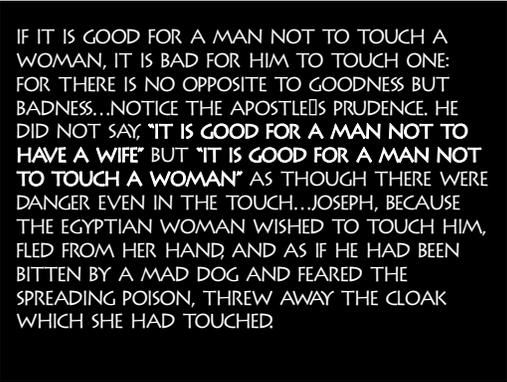
Do you see what I mean? Hodge spends a great deal of time talking about what it cannot mean and why it cannot mean what it cannot mean...before he gets to some sort of conjecture about what it does mean.

Even Calvin does pretty much the same thing. In fact, he concludes that the issue of marriage would have never been abrogated in any fashion had not the fall

occurred. That is, Calvin believed that since the fall the necessity or obligation to marry had changed...and it had changed because marriage had become the source of many miseries.<sup>10</sup> Well of course that is true in the sense that sin impacts every relationship in the world. But if you extend that sort of argument to its logical conclusion you could just as easily argue that those that do get married ought not to have children because those relationships might be the source of misery as well.

Now I love Charles Hodge...and I love John Calvin even more. One was a giant and the other was a titan. Still, I think this is one of those places where modern scholarship can actually give us a better understanding of the text.

You see if we're not careful we can wind up making the exact same mistakes that ancient writers like Tertullian and Jerome did when they argued on the basis of this passage that men ought to avoid women altogether.<sup>11</sup> Listen to what Jerome writes:



IF IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN, IT IS BAD FOR HIM TO TOUCH ONE: FOR THERE IS NO OPPOSITE TO GOODNESS BUT BADNESS...NOTICE THE APOSTLE'S PRUDENCE. HE DID NOT SAY, "IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO HAVE A WIFE" BUT "IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN" AS THOUGH THERE WERE DANGER EVEN IN THE TOUCH...JOSEPH, BECAUSE THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN WISHED TO TOUCH HIM, FLED FROM HER HAND AND AS IF HE HAD BEEN BITTEN BY A MAD DOG AND FEARED THE SPREADING POISON, THREW AWAY THE CLOAK WHICH SHE HAD TOUCHED.

If it is good for a man not to touch a woman, it is bad for him to touch one: for there is no opposite to goodness but badness...Notice the apostle's prudence. He did not say, "**It is good for a man not to have a wife**" but "**It is good for a man not to touch a woman**" as though there were danger even in the touch...Joseph,

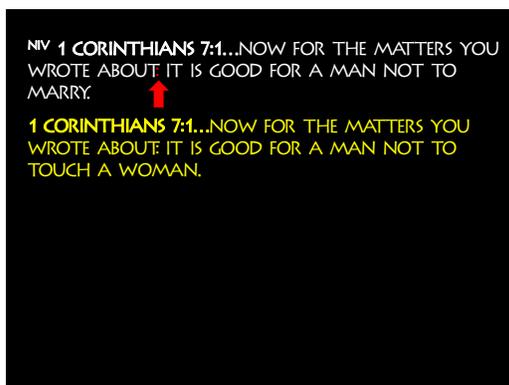
because the Egyptian woman wished to touch him, fled from her hand, and as if he had been bitten by a mad dog and feared the spreading poison, threw away the cloak which she had touched.<sup>12</sup>

Do you see what I mean? If a person is not careful, they can develop an interpretation of this passage that paints marriage as a secondary, even an inferior choice.

Now having said that, let me get to my point at last.

I don't think the passage is about whether a person ought to get married or not. I don't think that is the issue at all. That is, of course, the direction the NIV takes the passage. I say that because the translation of the NIV, the translation which I generally like very much does a lot more than translate the passage...it actually interprets the passage and it interprets it wrongly. Here's why. The Greek actually reads.

**1 Corinthians 7:1**...Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.



Now the NIV does get one thing right. It's a bad translation but at least it puts a colon after the phrase, "**it is good for a man not to...**" In doing that it makes the point that that phrase is a quote. In other words, it is saying that the phrase, "It is good for a man not to marry" was spoken by the Corinthians and not by Paul.

Now the NAS translates the text properly but chooses not to identify the phrase as a quote.

<sup>NAS</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:1**...Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW FOR THE MATTERS YOU WROTE ABOUT: IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO MARRY.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW FOR THE MATTERS YOU WROTE ABOUT: IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN.  
<sup>NAS</sup> **1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW CONCERNING THE THINGS ABOUT WHICH YOU WROTE, IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN.

The ESV, on the other hand, gets it exactly right...both translating it properly and marking the phrase as a quote.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW FOR THE MATTERS YOU WROTE ABOUT: IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO MARRY.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW FOR THE MATTERS YOU WROTE ABOUT: IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN.  
<sup>NAS</sup> **1 CORINTHIANS 7:1**...NOW CONCERNING THE THINGS ABOUT WHICH YOU WROTE, IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN NOT TO TOUCH A WOMAN.  
<sup>ESV</sup> **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."

<sup>ESV</sup> **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."**

You see Paul is not simply addressing the issue of marriage...rather, he is addressing a very specific question regarding the propriety of sex in marriage and he does that by quoting their question or restating their point which seems to have been that it would be better for believers to abstain from sexual relations even within their marriages.

Now if that is the case and I think it is, what we have here is the exact opposite of what we saw in the previous chapter. In chapter six, some of the Corinthians had been arguing that the body made no difference...and as a result it didn't even matter if someone joined themselves to a prostitute. This then is the flipside of that argument. That is, the other side in Corinth was saying that the body matters so much that it is important not to defile it by having sexual relations even within the confines of a legal and biblical marriage.

What they were saying then is that, **"It is good for a man not to have sexual intercourse even in marriage."** And what Paul is going to say in response is, **"Nonsense...in order for a man or a woman to fulfill their obligations to each other...they have to share their bodies."**

In fact, the way Paul is going to argue his position is by building on that wonderful phrase that he used in the last two verse of chapter 6 where he argued, **"You are not your own."**

He is going to apply that same logic to the relationship between man and a woman and is going to say something very much to tune that, **“It is no one individual’s decision to make. A man cannot make the decision for his wife that there will be no more sex and neither can a woman.”**

Now having said all that let me explain how the rest of the verse would fit together.

<sup>ESV</sup> **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.

You see the idea is not that each man should take a wife or that each woman should take a husband. Rather, the idea is that each man should be **“having”** the wife that is already his and each woman should be **“having”** the man that is already hers. The phrase **“to have his wife”** does not mean to take a wife. It means rather to actually **“have”** her...in sexual union.

IF 6:12—21 ADDRESSES THE PROBLEM OF SEX OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE, 7:1—7 ADDRESSES THE DANGER OF LACK OF SEX WITHIN IT. MOST SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT PAUL QUOTES THE CORINTHIANS’ LETTER OF INQUIRY IN 7:1. PAUL MAY REFUTE THEIR POINT ABOUT A MAN NOT TOUCHING A WOMAN BUT EVEN IF HE IS CONCEDING IT, HE APPLIES IT TO UNMARRIED INTERCOURSE ONLY (6:12—21); HE GOES ON TO DEMONSTRATE THAT MARRIED PEOPLE MUST HAVE INTERCOURSE (7:2—7).

IN VERSE 2, TO AVOID TEMPTATIONS TO THE SORT OF IMMORALITY JUST DESCRIBED (6:12— 21; ALSO 7:5), PAUL WANTS EACH MAN TO **“HAVE”** HIS WIFE, AND EACH WIFE TO **“HAVE”** HER HUSBAND. THIS WAS OFTEN A EUPHEMISM FOR HAVING THE OTHER SEXUALLY; THUS PAUL IS SAYING, LET THEM SLEEP TOGETHER.

Listen to how Craig Keener puts it:

If 6:12—21 addresses the problem of sex outside of marriage, 7:1—7 addresses the danger of lack of sex within it.

Most scholars believe that Paul quotes the Corinthians' letter of inquiry in 7:1. Paul may refute their point about a man not touching a woman (a regular ancient idiom for intercourse) but even if he is conceding it, he applies it to unmarried intercourse only (6:12–21); he goes on to demonstrate that married people must have intercourse (7:2–7).

In verse 2, to avoid temptations to the sort of immorality just described (6:12–21; also 7:5), Paul wants each man to “**have**” his wife, and each wife to “**have**” her husband. This was often a euphemism for having the other sexually; thus Paul is saying, let them sleep together.<sup>13</sup>

You see what had happened in Corinth was that some of the men and women were saying that they were too spiritual to defile their bodies by having sex with their mates and that was putting their mate in the unenviable position of having to satisfy themselves elsewhere. So what Paul does is address that issue straight up and the way he does that is by using three different parallel phrases that all mean the same thing. Those three phrases are found in verses 2, 3 and 4.

**ESV 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.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 7:3...** The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 7:4...** For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Now he does grant one exception to that general rule but even that is a temporary exception. It is covered in verse 5.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 7:5...** Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come

together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup> Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.

Now the point is that we are not to defraud each other. We have certain obligations by nature of our relationship to one another. In general, as members of the church we ought not to defraud each other and specifically as husbands and wives, we ought not to defraud each other...even with regard to sex.

Now that does not mean that celibacy is bad. But it is not something that should be viewed as superior. It is a gift like any other gift. And Paul is not beyond saying that he could wish it was more widely given. He says that in verse 7.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:7**...I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

But you can see that his point is that the issue is giftedness and if a person is married...celibacy is not a gift to be pursued...because it is a decision that one individual in a marriage is forbidden to make.

Now in the verses that follow after verse 7, Paul is going to apply the following rule... **“Stay in whatever state you were when you were called.”** I only want to introduce the pattern to you this morning and then we’ll expand upon it next week. Notice verses 8-9.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:8**...To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Now his point is that it is better to marry than to be consumed by lust...but if they can they ought to stay as they are.

In verse 10, he is going switch back to his original group, married believers and the principal is the same...stay as you are...if you can and you must recognize that if you end a marriage that you have to leave the door open for reconciliation.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:10**...To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

Now verse 10 always generates a lot of questions because of that little phrase (not I, but the Lord). Did Paul mean to say that that was not his opinion but God's and that he had a contrary opinion?

No...it doesn't mean that at all. Instead what it means is that the Lord Jesus Himself spoke directly to the issue of believers becoming divorced. Paul makes the point because in verse 12, he himself speaks to the issue of a believer married to an unbeliever...and he has to do so based upon his opinion as an apostle...because the Lord Jesus Himself never specifically addressed the issue.

Look at verse 12.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:12**...To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce

Now listen to how Charles Hodge explains that little phrase.

THE DISTINCTION WHICH HE HERE AND IN V. 12 MAKES BETWEEN HIS COMMANDS AND THOSE OF THE LORD, IS NOT A DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT IS INSPIRED AND WHAT IS NOT; NOR IS IT A DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT PAUL TAUGHT AND WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH...;

BUT *LORD* HERE EVIDENTLY REFERS TO CHRIST AND THE DISTINCTION INTENDED IS BETWEEN WHAT CHRIST HAD TAUGHT WHILE ON EARTH, AND WHAT PAUL BY HIS SPIRIT WAS INSPIRED TO TEACH. HE TELLS THE CORINTHIANS THAT SO FAR AS THE MATTER OF DIVORCE WAS CONCERNED, THEY HAD NO NEED TO APPLY TO HIM FOR INSTRUCTION: CHRIST HAD ALREADY TAUGHT THAT THE MARRIAGE BOND COULD NOT BE DISSOLVED AT THE OPTION OF THE PARTIES.

The distinction which he here and in v. 12 makes between his commands and those of the Lord, is not a distinction between what is inspired and what is not; nor is it a distinction between what Paul taught and what the Scriptures teach...; but *Lord* here evidently refers to Christ; and the distinction intended is between what Christ had taught while on earth, and what Paul by his Spirit was inspired to teach. He tells the Corinthians that so far as the matter of divorce was concerned, they had no need to apply to him for instruction: Christ had already taught that the marriage bond could not be dissolved at the option of the parties.<sup>14</sup>

Now in verse 13, Paul returns again to the principle that Christians ought to stay in whatever state they are in...and that is true even if they are married to an unbeliever. And the reason they are to do so is because of the benefits the relationship provides for both the children and the unbelieving spouse.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:13**...If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Now next week we'll come back to these last few verses before we move on in 1 Corinthians...and when we do we'll revisit this issue of why Paul advances the idea of the Corinthians staying in the state they were in when they were called.

But for now, I think I ought to draw at least one or two applications for those that are married based upon what we've talked about this morning.

The first thing that I think is obvious is that there is no such thing as doing your own thing in marriage. If it is true that a man or woman are not masters over their body...but their body does not belong to them alone...then by analogy the same thing must be true of emotions...of conversation...even of attention.

That is, a man or woman ought not to defraud their partner by being aloof in a marriage. I have known couples that have gone months without speaking...without sitting on a couch and sharing their thoughts and dreams or aspirations. No man or woman has the right to distance themselves either physically or emotionally from their spouse. No man or woman ought ever to betray their husband or wife physically. Nor should they betray their mate by sharing their deepest and most intimate emotions with someone else. They ought to be faithful body and soul.

Secondly, no man or woman ought ever to use sex as a tool to punish the other spouse. Since we are not our own but are the Lord's and since by virtue of the bonds of marriage our spouses have a right to our bodies, we are obligated to keep our relationships in good enough shape that we don't deprive our mates of the physical comfort intimacy affords.

Now with all that in mind, let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Lifted from the Word Detective: " "To talk through one's hat" was apparently a widespread idiom by the late 1880s meaning "to talk nonsense," although it initially seems to have carried the added connotation of "to lie." The precise logic and origins of the phrase are unclear. One theory, perhaps reflecting the earlier "to lie" meaning, maintains that the phrase refers to men in church who hold their hats over their faces while feigning prayer. Another possibility is that the phrase refers to the emptiness of the hat atop one's head, as if one were thinking and speaking with an empty head. It's also possible that "talk through one's hat" is an oblique reference to another phrase, "to talk off the top of one's head," meaning to speak speculatively, without thorough consideration."

<sup>2</sup> <sup>NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:9**...I have written (indicative aorist 1s...I wrote) you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians NICNT*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1987), 267. "...their letter was probably a response to Paul Previous Letter mentioned in 5:9. in which they were taking exception to his position on point after point In light of their own theology of spirit. with heavy emphasis on wisdom" and knowledge." they have answered Paul with a kind of Why can't we?" attitude in which they are looking or his response."

<sup>4</sup> Fee, 267-8. "So he takes up the items in their letter one by one, most of them introduced by Περὶ δὲ (now about": 7:1.25:8:1 cf. 8:41: 12:1: 16:1. 2), and at all appropriate place inserts one more item about which he had been informed (I 1:17-34). Since there is a certain logic to the whole presentation the present sequencing is probably Paul's own and is not dictated by their letter."

<sup>5</sup> Günther Bornkam, *Paul* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1980), 207-208.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Moiser, "A Reassessment of Paul's View of Marriage with Reference to 1 Corinthians 7" in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 18.01 (1983), 103-22. Moiser lists a number of strange conclusion commentators have drawn over the years regarding Paul's view of sex and marriage. His article is very good.

<sup>7</sup> Moiser, 103. Moiser is quoting Michael Grant.

<sup>8</sup> David E. Garland, "The Christian's Posture toward Marriage and Celibacy: I Corinthians 7" in *Review and Expositor*, 80.03. 351.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1994), 108-9.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 7:1-2. "I answer, that in so far as a wife is a *help* to her husband, so as to make his life happy, that is in accordance with God's institution; for in the beginning God appointed it so, that the man without the woman was, as it were, but half a man, and felt himself destitute of special and necessary assistance, and the wife is, as it were, the completing of the man. Sin afterwards came in to corrupt that institution of God; for in place of

so great a blessing there has been substituted a grievous punishment, so that marriage is the source and occasion of many miseries. Hence, whatever evil or inconvenience there is in marriage, that arises from the corruption of the divine institution. Now, although there are in the meantime some remains still existing of the original blessing, so that a single life is often much more unhappy than the married life; yet, as married persons are involved in many inconveniences, it is with good reason that Paul teaches that it would be *good for a man* to abstain. In this way, there is no concealment of the troubles that are attendant upon marriage; and yet, in the meantime, there is no countenance given to those profane jests which are commonly in vogue with a view to bring it into discredit, such as the following: that a wife is a necessary evil, and that a wife is one of the greatest evils. For such sayings as these have come from Satan's workshop, and have a direct tendency to brand with disgrace God's holy institution; and farther, to lead men to regard marriage with abhorrence, as though it were a deadly evil and pest. The sum is this, that we must remember to distinguish between the pure ordinance of God and the punishment of sin, which came in subsequently. According to this distinction, it was in the beginning *good for a man*, without any exception, to be joined to a wife, and even yet, it is *good* in such a way, that there is in the meantime a mixture of bitter and sweet, in consequence of the curse of God."

<sup>11</sup> Kiwoong Son, "Paul's Teaching on Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7". (London Bible College, England). Web article found at <http://my.dreamwiz.com/tulip7/RTS/paul.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, 1.7 in Phipps, 'Paul's Attitude', 126.

<sup>13</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Hodge, 7:12.