

1 Corinthians 7:1-16  
"Marriage, Singleness & Sex"

In approximately 56 A.D. the apostle Paul (being found in the city of Ephesus) received a letter from the Christians in Corinth. – We often think of the apostles writing to congregations, but we don't often think of congregations writing to apostles! But they had questions, they had concerns, they couldn't readily consult their bibles (bibles didn't yet exist) & the N.T. was still being written, much less readily available & circulating. So what do you do? You write a letter & wait for a response. What we have before us is Paul's response. Up to this point, the things he's addressed didn't really have anything to do w/what they wrote *to him*, but what he'd come to learn *about them*! But here in Ch 7 he begins to bring clarity in some of these, their areas of confusion.

Now, let's not forget that Paul had been speaking on the sin of sexual immorality. Sex outside of marriage. How that the body is not for sexual *gratification* but for the Lord's *glorification*. But now he turns the page. In answering their questions, he moves from the *dangers* of sex *outside* of marriage to the *duty* of sexual relations *w/in* the marriage.

I also want to say this from the very onset. A marriage relationship is one of *faithfulness*. We don't know; perhaps there was a neglect of the duties found in Ch 7 which played a part in some of the sin discussed in Ch 6. & It's true that if you neglect your spouse sexually, it can create an opportunity for the enemy & the lusts of the flesh to take advantage of their weakness whereby they fall into sin. Having said that, we can never blame our spouse for our own lack of self-control or unfaithfulness (God forbid). If someone is unfaithful to their spouse, it's not their spouses' fault. They're accountable for their own decisions & the ramifications that ensue. – I just want that to be clear right from the beginning w/regard to a study like this.

Vs 1-2

Many of you remember the game show, "Jeopardy" where the answer would be given, then the contestant would have to present a question that would provide the said answer. – That's kind of what we have in 1 Cor Ch 7 ☺. We have Paul's answers, but we don't have the questions that provoked the answers. So, we sort of surmise what the question was.

Again, let's not forget that we're coming out of a section that has to do w/the sin of sexual immorality. The fact that God's purpose for the body will continue on into eternity, that our bodies (having been redeemed by Christ) are to be used to bring Him glory...

Coupled w/the fact that no less than 1,000 prostitutes literally invaded Corinth nightly seeking sexual relations *religiously*.

So it seems obvious to me that these questions had to do w/marriage, singleness & sexual relations. “How do all these things work? If you’re telling us sex is sinful, should we even engage in sexual relations? Should we abstain, even if we’re married?” & Paul reminds them, “Sex *is not* sinful, it’s a gift that God has given us for multiple reasons, not the least of which is the strengthen & unify the marriage bond. *Sexual immorality* is sinful. Sex outside the context *of marriage* is sin.” Remember? We spoke out of Vs 18 of the previous Ch. When it comes to any kind of sexual temptation, or connotation outside of marriage; flee! But if you’re married, as it pertains to your spouse, no need to flee... feel free!

We want those Pentecostal marriages in the body of Christ! (All *kinds* of tongues & *lots* of laying on of hands ☺). (Had to throw it out there again ☺). However, anything outside of the marriage union has a price tag attached to it that (believe me) you don’t want to pay.

It will ultimately lead *not* to your benefit, but to your detriment. – Remember the mathematics of sin? It adds sorrow, subtracts joy, multiplies your problems & divides your heart. That’s why Paul says here, “It’s good for a man not to touch a woman.” Of course he’s not saying that as a man, you shouldn’t shake a woman’s hand or give her a hug in an appropriate manner. This word “touch” is a euphemism or an idiom meaning “to have sexual relations with” (Gen 20:6, Prov 6:29, Ruth 2:9). It’s good for a man not to have sex with a woman... However, (again) it seems as though the angle that the Corinthians were coming at it was along the lines of, “Since sex can be associated w/sin, then is it more *pure* to simply abstain from sex altogether? Even if we’re married?”

& That’s what Paul addresses here in Vs 2. He says categorically, “No! As a married couple, if you’re not being together intimately w/some form of consistency, that’s the kind of thing that can *lead* to sexual immorality.”

Now; when he says, “Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, & let each woman have her own husband.” He’s not commanding people to get married so as to *avoid* sexual immorality (though later on he will certainly concede to the fact that that’s one safeguard of the marriage union, it helps deter sexual immorality). But here, all he’s saying is that if you’re married, you should live like a married couple (specifically in the sexual arena). When he says that husbands should *have* their own wives & wives should *have* their own husbands, he’s speaking in a sexual sense.

So, “Yes” (he says), “it’s good for a man not to have sex w/a woman, but it’s *not good* to avoid sex w/*your own wife!* Or *your own husband!*” We’re all tracking, yes?

2 Things quickly. #1 Embedded w/in these Vs is the fact that God does not approve of polygamy, nor does he acknowledge or approve of homosexual marriages. One man (husband) w/one woman (wife) has been God’s purpose/pattern from the beginning.

#2 We need to realize that Paul is not seeking to give a complete theology of marriage in this passage. He’s answering specific questions w/regard to marriage, singleness & the place of sex w/in those contexts. If you want a more complete theology of marriage you might want to study up on Eph 5:21-33 & Col 3:18-19 as well.

### Vs 3-6

Forgive me ladies if it offends you that I feel inclined to run to your defense real quick here (I know you don’t need my defense), it’s just that I recognize that there are times when husbands (primarily, not categorically) will take scriptures like these & use them to manipulate or guilt their wives so that they get what they want.

But we need to recognize a balance here. Paul says, “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.” & Many a man has taken Vs like this & said, “See! It says so right in the bible, now you need to give me what I want.” But they completely ignore the next Vs, “*Likewise* the husband does not have authority over *his own body*, but the wife does.” There is an equality & a reciprocity in play here.

The proper perspective in a marriage relationship (regarding the sexual aspect) is not on my *rights*, but upon my *responsibility*. This goes both ways. There’s to be a mutual giving, enriching & satisfying of one another. It’s not a matter of *taking* or *getting*, but of giving... It’s the same principle that Jesus emphasized in placing the needs of others before my own.

Notice Paul says in Vs 3, “Let the husband *render* to his wife the *affection due* her & likewise also the wife to her husband.” 3 Words I want to highlight. #1 “Render”, again the idea is not one of getting, but giving, thinking 1<sup>st</sup> of my spouse. #2 We note the word, “affection”. It’s a word that speaks of kindness, benevolence & good will. Marriage is a place where *affection* is to abound.

The man isn’t to see sex in the marriage union as simply/selfishly a way to have his own needs met, he’s to render affection to his wife. He’s to think of her needs, which may vary vastly from his own. (Which we could elaborate on but suffice it to say it will require communication w/her & consideration *of* her).

Placing your own needs 1<sup>st</sup> is a recipe for all kinds of problems... But far from “*not touching a woman*”, w/in a marriage union we’re to *regularly* render *affection*. I should also say that though “affection” in this context may include sex, it’s certainly not limited to sex. Again, communication/consideration.

The final word I want to isolate here is the word “due”. Husbands, affection is “due” it’s “owed” to your wife. He doesn’t qualify this. He doesn’t say, “Husband, you owe your wife affection if she’s a great cook, or if she’s submissive. If she does the laundry...” or whatever. By the sheer fact that she’s your wife, you owe her affection, give it to her. It’s your *duty* as a Christian husband. Last week we spoke of debts, today it’s duty. We owe a *debt* to the Lord; we have a *duty* to our spouse. – If you want to build a strong foundation for a successful marriage, focus on the needs of your spouse. On giving & not getting.

& *This goes both ways as well*, “Likewise also the wife to her husband.” Paul is describing a relationship where both people are taking initiative, both desire to bless each other. There are mutual obligations. Listen, sexual intimacy should never be used as a weapon to fight with, it’s a tool to build with... To refuse one another is to rob one another & invite Satan to tempt your spouse... don’t be ignorant of your enemy’s devices.

Think of it like this. Out of the billions of people upon the planet, God has chosen you & you alone to meet the sexual needs of your spouse. It’s an incredibly important responsibility that God has entrusted to you singularly...

That’s why he says (in Vs 5), “Do not deprive (or defraud) one another”. Nothing helpful comes from sexual deprivation in a marriage. In fact, it can be quite harmful. But I also want to say this to you husbands... Before you start talking to your wife about how “deprived” you are (which I hope is never the case & every marriage here is flourishing & fruitful). But just to keep the balance, if you’re feeling “deprived”, perhaps you should consider the “affection” you’re rendering to her... Again, maybe it’s there. But look there 1<sup>st</sup>. Too often we want to highlight our spouses shortcomings when we really should be considering & repenting of our own...

Now; Paul says, “You *can* abstain for a time (again speaking to married couples) so long as the consent is mutual & the purpose is spiritual (prayer & fasting).” But even in *that*, Paul says, “It’s a *concession*, not a command.” In other words, there’s nothing more holy or pure about abstaining, as a matter fact (Paul would say) I think it’s kind of weird! He’s not recommending it at all!

It's more like he's saying, "If you *both* feel like you need to, you can I guess, but keep the time brief & then return to normal relations lest the enemy tempt one or the other of you because of your lack of self-control."

I brought it up last week, it's worth repeating. One of Satan's great strategies, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to *encourage* sex outside of marriage, and everything he can to *discourage* sex within marriage. He's winning on either side of that...

As a married couple, you should refuse to accept a poor sexual relationship. There may be things that need addressed, that aren't easily overcome or quickly solved. But God's heart for you is to enjoy & be strengthened in your marriage bond through a fruitful sexual union w/your spouse. He wants that area of your life to be a blessing, not a burden.

### Vs 7-9

From this we can deduct that when Paul wrote this, he himself was unmarried. & He recognizes the benefits found in *being* single. He says, "Truth be told, I wish that you were all like me." He's saying, "Time is short, the harvest is ripe & the laborers are few. The more people who can devote themselves entirely to serving the Lord & sharing the gospel, the better!"

I also want to point out that though Paul was unmarried at *this* time, it's way more than likely that he'd been married previously. The reason we say that is because one thing we know about Paul is that he was an extremely observant Jew. He was previously a Pharisee which was an elite class of Jews who observed all manners of traditions & minute details of the law religiously. & Paul said of himself that he excelled above his peers. That all plays into the fact that in Paul's day, Jews considered a young man to be in sin if he wasn't married by the time he was 20. So much so that they were often considered excluded from heaven & not real men at all! ... They based that rationale upon the creation account. After everything God made He said that it was good. But in Gen Ch 2 we read, "*And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone;"*"<sup>1</sup> So they deduced that if you're not married, you're not in God's will (it's something not good) & if you're not in God's will, you're in sin... (this was the train of thought).

Add to that the command of God to man to be fruitful & multiply, if you're not married you're not obeying God's word. Add *to that* that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 26:10) & an unmarried man *couldn't* be a member of their group. – They felt that you were more likely to show mercy if you were married.

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ge 2:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So what happened to his wife? We don't know. It would seem that she either died, or perhaps she left him when he gave his life to Christ & lost all of his prominence & power in the Jewish community.

But he was well qualified to speak on the relative gifts & responsibilities both of marriage & singleness, because he had experience w/both in his own life.

What we want to note is that one is not more spiritual or "subspiritual" than the other. Both being married & being single are equally gifts given by God. It simply depends on God's plan & purpose for each of our lives. There are pros/cons, advantages & disadvantages on either side.

For Paul, he preferred singleness. & He was *gifted* w/the ability to remain single & not struggle w/an unrelenting sexual passion. Jesus touched on this when He said, "*...there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.*"<sup>2</sup>

For some, whom God has gifted in this capacity, being single isn't a burden, it's a blessing. They're free to serve God unencumbered, undistracted & it's their joy to do so. Having said that, Paul says, "But God hasn't gifted everyone in this capacity & it's not less spiritual to be married, one is gifted this way, another that way, both are blessed of the Lord." Often times people find themselves in the "grass is greener" trap. Single people wishing they were married, married people wishing they were single, each state is a gift from God. Be content where God has called you.

If you're single, you may wonder, "Well, is this what God's called me to?" I would say this, if you're comfortable being single, & sexual temptation isn't overwhelming to you. Be blessed, be single! Serve God freely! But as Paul says here, "If you 'burn w/passion' it's better to marry." It doesn't mean you're more immature spiritually, it simply means that God hasn't gifted you w/the capacity of singleness.

Now when Paul uses the phrase, "to burn w/passion". It's not what we might call "normal temptation". This is something that you can't stand up against. Feeling heat is one thing, burning is something altogether different. – At the same time, if you have a problem w/lust, don't deceive yourself into thinking that getting married will cause that to somehow "magically" disappear. It won't. That's something that needs taken *to* the Lord & repented of *before* the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 19:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## Vs 10-11

(This would be a separate question he's answering now). The short is this. The resolution for marital problems among Christian couples is to be found in reconciliation not divorce. If, however the wife or the husband feels for some reason they must depart (separate), they're to remain unmarried or to reconcile. They aren't to break up the marriage in some misguided search for higher spirituality.

& When he says that it's not him, but the Lord who commands it. He's saying that he's referring back to Jesus' teaching. That apart from sexual immorality, God doesn't recognize divorce (even if the state does). That's why Paul says, "Either remain unmarried or reconcile." If you move on, you commit adultery as far as God is concerned... (Matt 19:9)

That's what prompted His disciples to say, "Man, then it would be better *not* to marry!" & Jesus said, "If you can receive it, you're right." The marriage covenant is a serious thing to God. This is how we know people are simply seeking to justify their own sin when they say things like, "God doesn't want me to be married to them anymore." Or "God brought me someone better." No, He didn't, & you're not hearing *from* nor speaking on behalf *of* God at all!

Now; a Christian couple may separate for reasons that don't justify divorce... general unhappiness, a misguided sense of spirituality on behalf of one or the other, conflict, misery, addiction, poverty... Paul recognizes (w/out at all encouraging) that one might depart under such circumstances. But they can't consider themselves divorced & they have no right to remarry, only to reconcile. Even in a separation, God expects His people to honor their marriage vows, because they're still married.

& I might add; even in the case of sexual immorality, Jesus never *commanded* divorce, He simply conceded to the fact that if it's too painful for you to reconcile God would honor that. But reconciliation is always His 1<sup>st</sup> desire.

But many times in a marriage we're prone to think that a change of circumstance would be the answer. I've discovered the problems we face are rarely around us & they're generally w/in us. At the heart of every problem is a problem in the heart... The problem w/new circumstances is that we carry our own problems into them... A Christian lawyer once said, "About the only people who profit from divorces are the attorneys!"

## Vs 12-16

Let me address something real quick here. When Paul says, "I, not the Lord, say:" He's not saying, "This is just my opinion so take it or leave it."

This is just as much the inspired word of God as any other portion of scripture. What he's saying is, "Jesus didn't touch on this specifically as He did the previous topic." Pertaining to marriage & divorce between two believers, Paul simply reiterated the principle that Jesus taught. But pertaining being married to an unbeliever, Jesus didn't teach on that specifically. So His inspired apostle will.

Simply put, salvation doesn't alter the marriage state. You get married as unbelievers, one gets saved, the other doesn't, what do you do? Stay married. That's the short of it.

If they're willing to stay, then stay. You become a channel of God's blessing into their lives. As God blesses you, they benefit from that. Now when he says that they're "sanctified", it doesn't mean they're saved. But you exert a spiritual influence in the home that can *lead* to their salvation. They're set apart for a special working in their lives by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of being so close to someone who is a Christian.

Not to mention the benefit it brings to your children. The influence of the godly spouse is invaluable, irreplaceable & needed. You provide a covering for them spiritually that otherwise wouldn't be there.

One might wonder, "What about the children of unbelievers, are they saved?" The bible doesn't really address that issue. I know that God is just, God is good, & God will always do the right thing. But I'm uncomfortable living where there's a question mark as it pertains to eternal issues. Best to give your life to Christ & be the covering for your children that they need... **(Closing)**

"But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart." So, adultery & abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. Those are the 2 justifications we see from moving on from a marriage bond. – "For how do you know whether you will save your spouse?" This could actually mean 2 different things. #1 Stay together because you don't but that God might use *you* to be instrumental in saving *them* (1 Pet 3:1-6). #2 If they go, let them go because God doesn't need you to save them.

Either way, exercise caution & seek God's heart. If you're married, or will one day *be* married, God wants you to have a *fruitful & flourishing* marriage. Love God, love one another, render to one another the affection due & you will be blessed indeed.