

Principles For Life and Marriage

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman.² Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.³ Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife.⁵ Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.⁶ But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.⁷ For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;⁹ but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn.

When the gospel hits our lives and is received it radically changes us. It changes the way that we look at others and how it is that we treat them. The Bible is not a book slated to advance immediate social revolutions. As such the Bible doesn't seek to address every social evil. The Bible doesn't have a direct word on slavery, for example; it doesn't address fully the evils of alcohol; it doesn't speak to directly advance republics or democracies either. It certainly doesn't tell us what kind of car Jesus would drive or whether he would recycle or not. The reason the Bible doesn't address directly these social issues and many others is because it was **not** written to change the faces of nations but the hearts of people. And yet when a certain tipping point is reached...that is to say, when enough hearts have been radically changed in any given society... the impact of that change and the implications of the Bible's teachings begin to flow into society itself. And over time these teachings and their implications have a bearing on that society. And so Paul will write to the Corinthian church, which, because of the vast abuse of sex found in their society, was massively confused as to its place in marriage or in their lives at all. And Paul will address the topic of marriage with some practical words and in the address will crack open principles that reflect the radical change of the gospel on all our lives and should tip into the societies in which we live.

Paul already recognizes that the call of God is greater than any cultural demands. He himself has been changed by the gospel in such a way that it has separated him from the culture mores of his society. That is apparent by the very first words of this chapter. He writes, "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*" Paul is speaking about the rights and roles of a man with his wife. Paul knew God's own words in Genesis, "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" God made a man for a woman and a woman for a man and said "*it is good.*" And every physical part of the privileges that are opened up to a man and woman in marriage is good. **Hebrews 13:4** puts it this way, *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled.* The Jewish teaching of Paul's day had taken this declaration of the goodness of marriage and also God's command given to Adam and Eve, "*To be fruitful and multiply*" and turned it into a religious requirement.

The rabbinic teaching was that if a man didn't marry and have children that he had "*lessened the image of God in the world and slain his own posterity.*" And yet Paul had met Christ and had heard from him a call to go and preach the gospel to the nations and Paul had determined that to keep that call he would not have a wife. He would go against the demands of his own culture. And here Paul even says, "*It is a good thing to do as he has done and not to marry and touch a woman.*" And in saying this he revolts from his own culture.

Now there was another culture of asceticism that was laying hold of the Greeks... It was a view rare in Corinth but not in Greece. It was a view on the opposite pole of the promiscuous Corinthians... It said that physical pleasure was an evil and to be avoided and so, called for those who sought the highest spiritual attainments to lives of complete abstinence. This message would be appealing to many in the Corinthian church who were fleeing from the sexual immorality and multi-formed expressions of fornication that had once dominated their lives. **Some of these may have easily been convinced that celibacy was the higher spiritual model for the radically changed person.** This cultural influence in Greece may have appealed to them. They likely thought that Paul, the single man who was a Eunuch for the Kingdom's sake would have to agree with this idea. But in the very next verse Paul rejects that culture as well.

Being single is good. Being married is good to. Being single and celibate takes a rare gift from God. Being married and intimate is the natural, common gift of God. And in these two sentences we see that the change that Christ has produced in Paul's life has catapulted him out of the demands of one culture and kept him from the false claims of another. Christians let us ask God to so radically transform our lives that we live free from both the moral pitfalls and social legalisms of our own culture. May we set a new standard for our society as we are led by the transforming implications of a God's redemption of our bodies.

In the following passage Paul demonstrates that kind of radical change of attitude towards something so central to any society as a marriage. What Paul will say about marriage, the Christian marriage, expanded and broadened marriage to its fullest expression of purpose and teaches all of us something of the broadness of life that God wants us to enter into.

I. Marriage is for the mutual rendering of pleasure/happiness/ a commitment to please

³ *Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband... Do not deprive one another...*

Revelation 21:2 *I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

Revelation 22:17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

God has so constituted us that we find joy and happiness in life. **Happiness is nothing more than taking pleasure in something.** The Goodness of God is that attribute of God which makes God pleased to please us.

Ex. We parents at Christmas time find pleasure in the pleasures of our children. This is an expression of the image of God in us. **Luke 12:32** *“It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”* God is pleased to please and to give gifts to those He loves.

So let us reason that God is not opposed to our pleasure and happiness or even the pursuit of the same. What God is opposed to is a wrong pursuit of those things; A settling for a momentary pleasure that may ultimately seal us away from the eternal joys and pleasures that God intends for us. **God’s pathway to joy and happiness and pleasure for our lives is to draw us up into a covenant relationship with Himself in which He promises to bring to us the delights and joys of His eternity.** Every Christian ought to take delight in the knowledge that it is God’s good pleasure to please us. He will ultimately be faithful to this end.

And God gives us the mirror of that pathway to joy in the marriage relationship. You enter into a covenant relationship with your wives and your husbands and commit together to render to one another that which brings the other joy and pleasure. It is a model on earth of the purposes of God for his people in heaven. And so when our Lord speaks of coming for us to bring us to heaven he speaks of it as a wedding day and heaven as a place of a great marriage feast.

II. Marriage is for parity/ an equal possessiveness – and an mutual submissiveness

⁴ *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife.*

Paul’s word’s here are not a reflection of any society of his day. Not one society put woman on par with men in the marriage relationship or in any relationship in those societies. Women were chattel to be moved about at a man’s pleasure. In the ancient Greek culture a woman was married as a teen to a much older man arranged by the parents. Her one role was to give that man sons. He could satisfy his sexual appetites in many other ways apart from her. She was to serve to give him a family and to serve that family. She may keep one daughter in the home but usually if more daughters were born they were turned out to die of exposure or to be picked up as slaves.

Plato himself (who lived hundreds of years before this time but reflects the wisdom of this age) taught that only men were born with souls. *“It is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are ‘cowards or [lead unrighteous lives] may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation’. This downward progress may continue through successive reincarnations unless reversed. In this situation, obviously it is only men who are complete human beings and can hope for ultimate fulfilment; the best a woman can hope for is to become a man”*

The Jewish view of women was much higher and yet it's rabbinic traditions effectively downgraded a woman's status so that a Jewish man would rise every day to thank God that he wasn't a gentile dog and that he wasn't a woman.

The Gospel of Christ comes along and declares that there is no substantive difference between a man and woman. **Both are equally lost in sin and separated from God and both are equal candidates for the saving grace of God and both receive in salvation the same great work that unites them with the life of God. Galatians 3:26-29** *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* The New Testament makes clear that men and women have different roles to play in relationship to one another and in the church but these roles do not reflect in any way worth or a lessening of equality.

This truth radically impacts the Christian's understanding of the marriage relationship. The husband's body was property of the wife and the wife's body was property of the husband. Both had equal claims on each other. Both had equal duties to the other. This is the radical cultural shift the gospel brings to life and tips into society. Men are not given the advantage in this relationship. **Right at the most central component of society... the family... the marriage... These two are given an equal stake and afforded equal authority over each other.**

Much is made of the requirement in **Ephesians 5** that wives submit to their husbands. But the context of that submission is that they both be found submitting to one another in love (**Eph. 5:21**). Joseph Parker a great Preacher in London during the Victorian era wrote on this passage in Ephesians, "*Service is submission – help given to others out of a generous, because regenerated, heart is the sign and is the seal of a genuine submission. What is this wonderful submission? It is two persons doing the same thing at the same time to one another. Where is this submission? These acts are not consequent one upon another; they are concurrent. You bow just as I was bowing, I submitted just as you submitted... that is submission. There is nothing here of some high and mighty one waiting until some lowly and inferior one kisses his boots... But we delight to tear these little sentences out of their place and to found theories upon them, so that some poor miserable preacher, of whom his mother might be ashamed, claims to be the head of the wife; a man who can hardly get out of bed in the morning; a man who has great difficulty in making bread enough to sustain his wife and family; a little, miserable, poorly-made toy of a man who is head of the wife because he could not make himself head of anything else! That is not Christian teaching. The two are one; they submit themselves one to the other. How to be first in the act of submission is the great problem, the happy, delightful enigma, which both parties, if filled with the Spirit of Christ, can instantly and sufficiently answer and resolve.*"

The equality of marriage demands a life of service to the other that seeks the others satisfaction and not our own. This is submission and in the Christian home it looks like

two people bowing before the other and not looking out of the corners of their eyes to see who is bowing lower. Our equality through the saving grace of God is not a banner in which to claim rights but a certainty out of which we graciously give ourselves to serve one another.

III. Marriage is for prayer/ a partnership in petitions

Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer;

Here it is clear that only one reason allows for a temporary break in the pattern in which husband and wives live to please one another. That is when they agree together to pause to pray. And here God elevates this central component of society into a match made for the purpose of petitioning God. Our lives together are not complete unless they bring the blending of our voices together in seeking God's favor and God's work outpoured.

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:19** *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.* There is potency in the prayers of two hearts seeking God's will and this is to be one of the great bonds and practices of the Christian marriage; Two praying together. Christian marriages are to pause to be prayerful.

In **1 Peter 3:1-7** wives are called to live in humble submission to their husbands and husbands are called to a likewise response... to both a common end is to be sought... verse seven *Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, **that your prayers may not be hindered.***

One commentator, David Prior, concludes *“Peter is thus suggesting that the most profound purpose in Christian marriage is to release the power of God through a truly united prayer-partnership.”* This deepening life of prayer will mean times in which they agree to forgo other marital privileges in order to pray. The Greek here is that they must agree to give themselves time to give themselves the leisure of prayer. Prayer is meant to be something that is not rushed and hurried but carried out with an undistracted focus.

IV. Marriage is for purity/ a guard against temptation

2a - Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality

5b - and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul in **2 Corinthians 11:2** says to the Christians *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* Paul knows the temptations of this world and its assault to direct our natural desires into disobedient and defiling expressions. God has given the place where those desires express his highest for us and form the lasting bond of marriage. In this place those desires are good and undefiled

(pure...holy). Outside that bond they are defiling and sin and they bring damage into our society by cheapening the expression and devaluing its highest meaning. God's desire is our purity and marriage gives us a place where that purity is to be exercised in the mutual giving ourselves to our spouses. There our natural delights are satisfied in a holy way and removed from the temptations thrown against us by an unholy world.

Conclusion: But understand marriage is for maintaining pleasure, parity (equality), prayer and purity. These are to be the marks of the Christian home. These are to also be the marks of all believers. We are to be those given to seeking God's pleasure and enjoy and pleasing ourselves in God. We are to be those who consider others better than ourselves and treat all with an attitude of submissive service. We are to be those who prioritize a place of prayer in the midst of our blessings. We are to be those who see ever relationship with the aim of maintaining holiness and purity... with the goal of being unspotted from sin and the world's defiling influence.

V. Marriage is for pursuing the affairs of the Lord/ a pursuit of the Kingdom's advance

Vs 7 - For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

Vs. 29 - But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,

Vs 32-33 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.³³ But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.

Paul's real concern is that marriage justify itself in the pursuit to please God and serve the purposes of furthering his Kingdom. In this way the question and reason for marriage ultimately rest in this idea... can we do more together for the Kingdom of God than apart.

Ex. Of Harold Frieliagh... In love with a young woman and both sensed the call to missions in China but Harold was physically too weak to pass the physical that would approve him for such service. So he withheld his claim of love upon that woman and let her go to the mission field. His love followed her there I am sure and his prayers. After some years she contracted complex small pox and miraculously survived but was after this too weak to continue on the field and returned to the States. It was then the Harold declared his love for her and they were married.

Ex. Of Priscilla called to missions who would not date or seek a deep relationship with any man who did not have on his life this same call to missions.