#  Sexual Purity

 ***27So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:27-28 NIV)***

***Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Hebrews 13:4 NIV)***

**Proper Application**

**February 5th, 2023**

**1 Corinthians 7:1-40**

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**Introduction:**

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to **1 Corinthians 7** on page **1737** in our chair Bibles. As we continue in Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth, I want to remind you that Paul is responding to a series of questions and concerns that he has received about the church at Corinth. The first six chapters deal with a report he has heard from ”Chloe’s household”. From chapter 7 Paul to the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul responds to a letter he received from the church in Corinth. Paul started dealing with Chloe’s reports of sexual immorality in chapter 5, and he concludes this subject in chapter 7 as he answers the questions the church sent him.

This was a difficult sermon to write because we shorten the length of our sermons for the communion service, and this chapter is 40 verses long. But I must respect your time and the content of Paul’s letter. We will focus on a common saying in the Corinthian church, ***“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*** Almost every problem Paul deals with in chapter 7 hinges on this saying. While this saying encourages sexual purity, the Corinthians applied it to every life situation, creating unnecessary restrictions within marriages, causing frustrated spouses to be sexually immoral, and it raised questions about divorce and remarriage. Singles and engaged couples who were looking forward to being married someday asked if was possible to be both spiritual and married.

**The saying – 7:1**

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

It is possible this saying ***“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman”*** originated in Paul’s first letter mentioned in **1 Cor 5:9**. Knowing Paul from his writings as we do, he was likely teaching singles about sexual purity and abstinence. Abstinence is a decision to avoid sexual relations for a specific period of time, such as abstinence before marriage. The Corinthian believers insisted this common saying was about celibacy. **Minoa Chang** says that “**Celibacy is more than just abstinence: it includes an invitation to solitude, which fosters a holistic path to spiritual maturity.**”[[1]](#footnote-1)

To understand how some Corinthians drew this conclusion, it is helpful to remember that spiritual giants such as John the Baptist and Jesus were celibate because they were never married. The New Testament frequently calls us to “**walk in the same way Jesus walked**” (**1 John 2:6**), or to “**follow in Jesus’ steps**” (**1 Peter 2:21**). Later in **1 Corinthians 11:1** **Paul** tells the Corinthians to “***Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ***”. **Jesus** was perfect, and Jesus says in **Matthew 5:48** “***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** But becoming like Jesus is about living out the implications of the gospel[[2]](#footnote-2). Jesus never called every believer to a life of celibacy.

**Implications of a saying – 7:2-3**

***2But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.***

When you look at ancient cultures, Paul was ahead of his time by insisting that husbands and wives have equal and reciprocal commitments towards each other.[[3]](#footnote-3) The problem was that some Corinthians were spiritualizing their marriage by insisting upon celibacy. Emma read **Genesis 1:27-28** this morning where **God approves of, and blesses marriages between a man and a woman, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply**. Marriage must be authentic, and not spiritualized.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Marriage is a high calling, and **Hebrews 13:4** says that ***“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”* Craig Keener** notes that “**Jewish people saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality**”[[5]](#footnote-5), so Paul’s solution to this first problem is simple; fulfil your marital duties as equal partners to respect your marriage commitment to each other.

**Marital authority – 7:4-5**

***4The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.***

The familiar mantra we hear today “**my body my rights**” is a foreign concept within the bonds of Christian marriage. In Pastor David’s sermon two weeks ago titled “**The theology of the body**”, Paul already established the fact that our bodies are not our own. We were bought with a price and our bodies belong to God. God has ordained husbands and wives to surrender their bodies to each other for the purpose of mutual care and generosity.

In verse 5, the Greek word for deprive “**is a strong word, used also of defrauding or robbing.**”[[6]](#footnote-6) There are legitimate situations where a spouse is physically unable to fulfil their marital duties, but Paul is not addressing that issue because that is not the question the Corinthians were asking. Paul is focused on willful neglect, and it is necessary to balance this area of marriage by mutual consent. I like how **Warren Wiersbe** summarizes this issue,

**As in all things, the spiritual must govern the physical; for our bodies are God’s temples. The husband and wife may abstain in order to devote their full interest to prayer and fasting (1 Cor. 7:5); but they must not use this as an excuse for prolonged separation. Paul is encouraging Christian partners to be “in tune” with each other in matters both spiritual and physical.[[7]](#footnote-7)**

A mutually agreed upon time of abstinencerequires self-control and **Galatians 5:23** tells us that **self-control is a fruit of the Spirit** that is “**to be applied to every area of the Christian’s life**”[[8]](#footnote-8). This time is to be limited, navigating between the feeling of being deprived and the feeling of being abused.

**Embrace the gifts God gives you– 7:6-7**

***6I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7I wish that all of you were as I am.  But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.***

Paul now turns his attention to singles, and he expresses a personal opinion, “**I wish you were like me, not having a wife, and having no need for sexual fulfilment.**”[[9]](#footnote-9) Paul is not exercising an extreme form of self-denial because God has given him the “**gift of singleness”** or the **“gift of celibacy**”. When Paul says “***another has that***”, he is referring to the “**gift of marriage**”. These gifts equip the believer with the potential to live in purity in the life situation God places them.

In our “**Through The Bible In One Year**” devotional, Nicky Gumble recently explained what Jesus said about being single in **Matthew 19:12**.

**Jesus speaks of three types of singleness. First, some ‘were born that way’ (v.12a) and ‘never give marriage a thought’ (MSG). Second, there is involuntary singleness (v.12b) – those who ‘never get asked – or accepted’ (MSG). Third, there is voluntary singleness – those who ‘decide not to get married for kingdom reasons’ (v.12c, MSG). Singleness can be temporary or permanent, but it is never regarded in the New Testament as second best. Both marriage and singleness are high callings and, according to the New Testament, there are advantages and disadvantages to both.**

**Divorce and Remarriage – 7:10-16**

***10To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.***

Paul is not answering every question there is on the subject of divorce and remarriage. He is only answering two narrow questions the Corinthians had regarding divorce and remarriage. Paul has already dealt with the first half of the married couple who has self-imposed celibacy upon the marriage. Paul now deals with the frustrated second half who wants an easy divorce. I think Paul is saying that “**The issue of celibacy is not a legitimate reason for divorce. Understand the saying correctly and resume your marriage properly.**”

The second narrow question relates to married couples where a believer is married to a nonbeliever.

***12To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.***

***15But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?***

The Corinthians were concerned about unbelieving spouse’s influence that may limit or hinder the believer’s spiritual growth and life in Christ. But the believer is to remain in the marriage if the unbeliever is willing, because it is the believers influence that may lead the spouse and children into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

If the unbeliever initiates the divorce, the believer is no longer bound in such circumstances. In Pastor David's sermon "Theology Of The Body", he explained that the Greek word for "unite" conveys the idea of gluing together. We might say that in this situation, God dissolves the glue that binds the spiritual aspects of the marriage, allowing the believer to remarry.

**Created for a purpose – 7:17; 20**

God has created us for a purpose and God has assigned us to a life situation. That is why we pray to discover and live in the center of God’s will for our lives.

***17Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.***

***20Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.***

**Singles – 7:25-40**

Paul wraps up this chapter by addressing the never married, engaged couples, widows and widowers, and eligible divorcees. And this section we can cover quickly. While Paul agrees with the Corinthians that the proper application of this saying is towards this group, Paul disagrees that they must remain celibate to be spiritual. **Gordon Fee** notes that Paul’s “**problem is two fold: 1) If he agrees too much, they will not hear his Christian reasons; and, 2) His own preference for singleness is not the only Christian attitude.**”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Paul’s Christian reason to “**stay in the situation you are in**” is about God’s gift within the situation God called them. If God assigns us to a live a life of celibacy, God will give that individual the “**gift of celibacy”.** The celibate individual will be able to devote their energies to serving the Lord in ways a married person is unable. If an individual does not have the gift of celibacy, then they are free to marry and be sexually intimate within the bounds of marriage.

**Closing**

In closing, I believe there are two lessons for us today in Chapter 7.

First, the Corinthians abused a valid saying about sexual purity by misapplying this saying to other situations. Then believers were unnecessarily burdened by this saying, it caused unnecessary frustration and it resulting in creating the problem the saying was trying to avoid. Misunderstanding and misusing scripture can result in serious consequences.

Second, the apostle Paul is dealing with issues that could seriously damage the cause of Christ, and Paul could have treated the Corinthians harshly which only causes more injury. The gospel of Christ offers us life and a way of living that is beneficial to us. We should remember the value in teaching and leading believers to live out the implications of Christ’s gospel.[[11]](#footnote-11)

To that end, let’s pray together

1. Minoa Chang, “Singleness,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 754. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paul Carter, “1 Corinthians 2.” *Into the Word with Paul Carter*, Paul Carter, 27 Aug. 2020, https://intotheword.ca/audio-bible-commentary-with-paul-carter/listen/1-corinthians-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gordon Fee, *Corinthians: a study guide* (Irving, TX: ICI University Press, 1996), 130 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1968), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Co 7:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 591. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Derek Prime, *Opening up 1 Corinthians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominister: Day One Publications, 2005), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Paul Carter, Preaching Workshop discussion, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gordon Fee, *Corinthians: a study guide* (Irving, TX: ICI University Press, 1996), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Carter, Paul. “1 Corinthians 2.” *Into the Word with Paul Carter*, Paul Carter, 27 Aug. 2020, https://intotheword.ca/audio-bible-commentary-with-paul-carter/listen/1-corinthians-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)