

## Church Purity in a Polluted Culture - Part 9

1 Corinthians 7:1-16



"Now for the matters you wrote about..."

### Marriage, Celibacy, and Divorce

Paul now turns to a series of three issues raised in a letter that the Corinthians had written to him. The first of these issues is related to marriage, divorce, and one's lot in life (7:1-24).

#### Marriage and Celibacy (7:1-9)

Paul had spoken in chapter 6 on the dangers of sexuality outside of marriage, and how the perversions of God's design for sex will lead to destruction.

Since God gave us our sexual desires, how do we have sex and please God at the same time? Paul answers this question in this section...

**7:1. "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry."**

1. The phrase not to marry in the NIV, may be an over translation of the Greek phrase "not to touch a woman", and a euphemism for sexual intercourse.
2. Some in Corinth argued that even the married should abstain from sexual intercourse, since God would look more favorably upon them for their celibate lifestyle.

**7:2. "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."**

1. Sexual intercourse in marriage is biblically sanctioned and beautiful.
2. To try to maintain a celibate state apart from the enablement of God (v. 7) would lead to immorality.
3. Paul characterizes a marriage as both monogamous ("own wife"; "own husband") and heterosexual ("man" and "woman").

**7:3-4. "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife."**

1. Paul stressed the responsibilities of each to satisfy the other.
2. The Christian's body is his own to take care of and to present as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1). However, in the marital relationship, our bodies also belong to our marriage partner.

**7:5. "Do not deprive each other except 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."**

1. Some in Corinth tried to practice celibacy within marriage unilaterally. Such a practice sometimes led to immorality on the part of the other mate.
2. Paul commanded that they stop unless three conditions were met:
  - a. Abstention from sexual intercourse a matter of mutual consent.
  - b. Agreed upon time period after which normal intercourse resumed.
  - c. Refraining was to enable devotion to prayer in a concentrated way.

**7:6. "I say this as a concession, not as a command."** - Paul presented this possibility for temporary abstention from sexual intercourse in marriage as a concession if the preceding stipulations were met. He did not want his advice construed as a command. In other words, I give permission for the exception.

**7:7. "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."**

1. Paul affirmed that celibacy was good.

2. Marriage or remaining single was more than a matter of weighing alternative benefits; each was a gift from God.

**7:8-9. "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."**

1. Paul affirmed the suitability of the gift of remaining single (v. 7).
2. One who lacks sexual control does not have the gift of celibacy.

#### Marriage and Divorce (7:10-16)

Paul now addresses married Christians in two ways, individual Christians married to one another (vv. 10-11), and Christians married to non-Christians (vv. 12-16).

**7:10-11. "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."**

1. To separate (v. 10) and divorce (v. 11), are parallel terms emphasizing physical separation of all kinds, not only a legal divorce.
2. This command by Paul to unhealed Christian marriages simply regulates the wrong when it takes place, it does not legitimize its happening!

**7:12-13. "To 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. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him."** - Paul affirmed that the same principle should operate in a believer-unbeliever marriage as in a marriage of two Christians: as a rule, no divorce.

**7:14. "For 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."**

1. Divorce was to be avoided because the Christian spouse was a channel of God's grace in the marriage.
2. It is in this sense that the unbelieving spouse was sanctified and the children were holy.

**7:15. "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace."**

1. If the unbeliever insisted on a divorce, he was not to be denied.
2. The marriage covenant made in the past, which is normally binding in the present, is dissolved if the unbeliever leaves.
3. Christians should strive to preserve the union and to keep the peace, but with the understanding that marriage is a mutual not a unilateral relationship.

**7:16. "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"** - Paul is saying that because there is no assurance that an unbelieving spouse will be saved, the believer should feel free not to pursue the spouse who has left.

#### Conclusion

1. Do I understand that God has called me to holiness and that what I do with my body in respect to sexual activity is included in my holy pursuits?
2. Do I understand that marriage and celibacy are both gifts from God and therefore are both as important in furthering the Kingdom of God?
3. Do I understand that marriage is a life long binding covenant relationship between one man and one woman before a holy God?

Remember...scripture calls us to a higher standard than the world.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet 2:9 ESV)