

13. Principles regarding marriages – Part 1

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Greek philosopher Socrates once told his students, “By all means marry. If you get a good wife, twice blessed you will be. If you get a bad wife, you’ll become a philosopher.” And Socrates was a good philosopher. Marriage seems a complicated unit. It takes a tremendous effort to keep it flourishing, however, it takes literally no efforts to tear it apart.

Up to this point, Paul had been dealing with the sins reported to be known in the Corinthian congregation. Now he takes up one of the questions about which they had written to him: marriage. As we study 1 Corinthians 7, let’s keep in mind that Paul is replying to a definite question. He is not spelling out a complete “theology of marriage” in one chapter. It is necessary to consider as well what the rest of the Bible has to say about this important subject.

A. THE IDEAL MARRIAGE LIFE

1 Corinthians 7:1-6 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 does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 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.

By looking at the text, the Corinthians were asking Paul to agree with their idea of celibacy. Why would the Corinthian Christians suggest complete celibacy? They probably figured that if sexual immorality was such a danger, then one could be more pure by abstaining from sex altogether, even in marriage.

A husband must render to his wife the affection due her. It is wrong for him to withhold affection from his wife. Every wife is due affection because she is a wife of a Christian man. With that in mind, let me ask you questions: Husbands, when was the last time you dated your wife and showered her with your loving affection without hoping to have sex with her? Wives, when was the last time you started to show your loving affection to your husband and where do you see in the Bible that it is the job of husband only? Not according to v3.

I am the first one to admit that husbands, including me, are often insensitive and flat our jerks in many ways. But it doesn’t give you ladies the right to treat your husband like one of your children or barely putting up with him. Remember, you ought to respect him with your love and affection, not thumb him down.

Let’s make one thing clear: Man’s idea of intimacy is so much different than woman’s idea of intimacy. Man’s idea of intimacy is sex, it stops there. Nothing else. But a woman can be with her man in the middle of a football stadium with 50,000 crazy screaming people around them. If she knows and feels that her husband is in love with her only and care about her and confirms his love to her that is intimacy for her.

Paul also emphasizes what the woman needs: not merely sexual relations, but the affection due her. If a husband is having sexual relations with his wife, but without true affection to her, he is not giving his wife what she is due. Affection also reminds us that if a couple is unable – for physical or other reasons – to have a complete sexual relationship, they can still have an affectionate relationship, and thus fulfill God’s purpose for these commands.

V4 does not justify a husband abusing or coercing his wife, sexually or otherwise. Paul’s point is that we have a binding obligation to serve our spouses with physical affection.

Let’s look at v5 again:

1 Corinthians 7:5 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.

Harm can come when they deprive one another, as they open the door to the tempter. The word for “deprive” is the same as “defraud” in 1 Corinthians 6:8. When you deny physical affection and sexual intimacy from your spouse, you are cheating that person.

Sexual deprivation in marriage has not only to do with frequency, but with romance also. This is why Paul tells husbands to render to his wife the affection due her and the same goes for the wife to her husband. Listen, sexual love is one of the God-given beautiful tools to build for a better and long lasting marriage, not a weapon to fight with. Either deprivation gives occasion for the deprived to look elsewhere for fulfillment – to the destruction of the marriage. DO NOT use it to get at back each other.

According to v6, God will permit, reluctantly, as a concession, a married couple to abstain from sexual relations for a short time, for the sake of fasting and prayer. But if this concession is used, it is only to be for a time, and then husband and wife must come together again in a sexual sense.

God makes it clear that there is nothing wrong, and everything right, about sex in marriage. Satan’s wicked strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to encourage sex outside of marriage, and to discourage sex within marriage. It is an equal victory for satan if he accomplishes either plan.

B. THE IDEAL MARRIAGE LIFE

1 Corinthians 7:7-9 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 with passion.

Paul recognizes the benefits of singleness, but also of marriage; all is according to how God gifts.

Though Paul was unmarried at the time when he wrote this letter, he probably had been married at one time. We can say this because we know Paul was an extremely observant Jew, and an example among his people. In Paul’s day, Jews considered that marriage was a duty, to the extent that a man reaching 20 years of age without having been married was considered to have sinned. Unmarried men were often considered excluded from heaven, and not real men at all. Paul was a member of

the Sanhedrin. An unmarried man could not be a member of the Sanhedrin. So, what happened to Paul's wife? The Scriptures are silent, so we won't go any further. Though Paul knew singleness was good for him, he would not impose it on anyone.

A godly sexual relationship within the covenant of marriage is God's plan for meeting our sexual needs. Though Paul preferred the unmarried state for himself, he doesn't want anyone to think that being married was less spiritual, or more spiritual. It is all according to an individual gifting. Remember that Paul told Timothy that forbidding to marry was a doctrine of demons:

1 Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

At the same time, if someone has a problem with lust or sexual sin, they should not think that getting married will automatically solve their problems. Many Christian men have been grieved to find that their lust for other women did not magically "go away" when they got married, because they didn't put their lust under control.

C. KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE VOWS

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

Before we expound this portion of the Scripture, I need to remind you what we recited at the beginning of our study this morning: "The Word of God, the Absolute Truth, the Final Authority." It means that your opinion regarding marriage and divorce means nothing in front of what the Bible says. Are we still in agreement with that?

With that in mind, let's start here. Paul is addressing marriages where both spouses are Christians in v10 and 11.

The Corinthian Christians were wondering if it might be more spiritual to be single, and if they should break up existing marriages for the cause of greater holiness. Paul answers their question straight from the heart of the Lord: "Absolutely not!" In fact, if one were to depart from their spouse, they must either remain unmarried or be reconciled.

This connects with the two specific grounds under which God will recognize a divorce:

- 1) **When there is sexual immorality** – Matthew 19:3-9
- 2) **In the case when a believing partner is deserted by an unbelieving spouse** – 1 Corinthians 7:15

On any other grounds, God will not recognize divorce, even if the state does. And, if God does not recognize the divorce, then the individual is not free to remarry – they can only be reconciled to their former spouse.

Someone will ask, “What if the former spouse married someone else?” Then, you are free to remarry.

Jesus said the one who divorces for invalid reasons, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery according to Matthew 19:9. He carefully says divorce is permitted, and that the permission was given because of the hardness of people’s hearts in Matthew 19:8.

This time Paul is going to talk about divorce and remarriage when a Christian is married to an unbelieving spouse in v12-16. We should not think Paul is any less inspired by the Holy Spirit on this point. When he says, “not the Lord,” he simply means that Jesus did not teach on this specific point in His Gospels.

Some of the Corinthians got saved after they already married. What now to those people? “Certainly,” thought the Corinthians, “God can’t be glorified if I’m married to an unbeliever; for the sake of spirituality, I should divorce them.” To these, Paul says let him not divorce her.

God can be glorified in such a marriage, and do a work through the believing spouse to draw the unbelieving spouse to Jesus Christ. In this context, “sanctified” does not mean that the unbelieving spouse is saved just by being married to a Christian. It simply means that they are 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.

The second half of v14 is a beautiful assurance that the children of a Christian parent are saved, at least until they come to an age of personal accountability which may differ for each child.

However, we have no similar assurance for the children of parents who are not Christians. Before you get all upset and stone me, hear what I explain to you. As sons and daughters of guilty Adam, we are each born guilty as well. If such children do go to heaven, it is not because they are deserving innocents, but because the rich mercy of God has been extended to them as well.

Paul has counseled that the Christian spouse should do what they can to keep the marriage together. But if the unbelieving spouse refuses to stay in the marriage, then the marriage can be broken; however, this should not be initiated or sought by the believer. If the unbelieving spouse should depart, the Christian is not under bondage to the marriage covenant. This means they are, in fact, free to remarry because God has recognized their divorce as a valid divorce.

Tragically, much of the early church did not heed God’s Word to keep marriages together, as much as possible, when married to unbelievers. One of the great heathen complaints against the early Christians was that Christianity broke up families. One of the first charges brought against Christians was “tampering with domestic relationships.”

Listen carefully, please. If you were a born-again Christian and went through a divorce and remarried to your current spouse before your former spouse remarried,

the Lord DOES NOT want you to go through a divorce from your current spouse. Repent of what you've done before and stay in your marriage and flourish in it by adoring and loving your spouse.

D. APPLICATION

The biblical principles of marriage triumph any human opinion.