



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Title: The Gift of Marriage

Date: April , 2024
Passage: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 and Philippians 2:5-8

Take a moment to celebrate Easter last week and encourage people to continue to reach out to friends and neighbors.

Vision: Be a community being transformed by the gospel who love and serve where we live, work and play.

Intro: We are picking back up in 1 Corinthians this morning as we move into chapter 7. Fair warning as we discuss this chapter, especially if you have kids in the room, we are going to be talking about God's views on marriage and sexual intimacy today. When we look around our culture we see all the ways sex has been taken out of God's original design and the destructive nature of sexual immorality. One of the reasons that is true is because talking about sex in the local church has been a taboo topic and since the Church hasn't talked about sex in a way that glorifies God and paints a picture of the beauty of His design for this aspect of marriage, the world has stepped up and dominated the conversation. As a result when we stand at the crossroads of the culture and the Kingdom, the culture's voice is typically way louder and more received. So the culture's prevailing thoughts about sex often times become the way Christians think and talk about sex. Fortunately for you, I have no problem talking about sex in front of a bunch of people! Aren't you glad?!

Recap: Before we jump into chapter 7 we need to pick back up with the last part of what Paul discussed in chapter 6 verses 19-20.

:: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

The starting point to help make sense of what we are going to talk about today is that when we become followers of Jesus we give up some of our personal rights. We yield to the authority of Jesus over us. I am not my own, I was bought at a

price. We live in a culture that is all about self-empowerment and self-determination.

Culture's View: My body, my choice.

That's most frequently said in the conversation regarding abortion, but it is certainly not limited to that in the thinking of many people.

Kingdom View: Honor God with your body.

Again, in Christ we are not our own, we were bought at a price. We yield to His thoughts and His ways as we learn to live as citizens of His Kingdom.

Now, let's look at how Paul applies this to the concept of marriage, singleness, and divorce. We are going to do this over the next couple weeks, but let's start with the first seven verses of chapter 7. To set this up you need to notice a transition that is taking place. Up to this point Paul has been addressing issues in the church he found out about because someone within the church brought them to his attention. Now Paul is going to begin responding to things the Church in Corinth has written him about and wants to know how to deal with as they are attempting to follow Jesus in a very pagan culture. I hope by the time we are done today you are both challenged and encouraged with the message of the gospel that Paul lays out and how culturally radical these views are.

:: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

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

2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

4 The 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.

5 Do 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.

6 I say this as a concession, not as a command.

7 I 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.

There are a couple issues historically it would be good for us to know about and understand as it relates to the way the Corinthians are thinking as they ask Paul this question:

1. There was a prevailing line of thought that was invading the church which said that anything done in the body was evil. So the goal was to move to a higher spiritual plane. This was an evil the church would fight for

- generations. We are embodied beings- God created with bodies and He equipped us to experience things in our bodies. To deny that is false teaching. But this teaching led some people to say, "It's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." Why? Because the act itself was seen as sinful in this line of thought.
2. In Corinth there was a practice of Temple Prostitution in the pagan rituals of worship. The people who were being saved and brought into the church came with this background and idea that having sex with women you weren't married to was acceptable. So as a way of completely reversing that practice they seem to be saying, "Let's just not have sex altogether- not even with our spouses!"

That's the thought process. Now the problem that arises from that thought process is addressed: Sexual immorality is occurring (vs2).

Paul tells them the problem with withholding sex is that it causes one of the spouses to go looking for intimacy elsewhere, which is in direct violation of God's command. Sex is supposed to be reserved for a man and a woman in a marriage covenant. Anything else is sexual immorality.

Now let's look at how Paul brings a solution to this issue:

1 Corinthian 7:2-5

² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

⁴ The 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.

⁵ Do 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.

I want you to notice a few things Paul says here:

1. Marital sex is exclusive.

² Each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

Paul is going to eliminate the use of Temple Prostitution as a means for sexual fulfillment. The cultural practice had no place in the life of a follower of Jesus. Jesus spoke to this in Matthew 19 when He upheld the view God put forward in Genesis with Adam and Eve:

:: Matthew 19:4-6

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’

5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?

6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

God joins a man and woman together in marriage and there is an intertwining of their whole lives together- physical, emotional, mental, spiritual connection. And on a deeper level the Bible is going to point to marriage as a picture, a metaphor to our world, of the deeper idea behind God’s union with Israel and with the Church as the Bride of Christ. These are exclusive relationships in which God does not share! Therefore, in marriage, we do not share our spouse with anyone else- it is exclusive.

2. Marital sex is expected!

³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

In a healthy marriage with healthy bodied people there is an expectation of enjoying the sexual relationship. When I do premarital counseling with couples we have a whole session we devote to talking about their thoughts and expectations on sex in marriage. You don’t want to get to the honeymoon night and one person look at the other and say, “The idea of sex really grosses me out! I don’t want to sleep with you!”

When I say marital sex is expected and we read the words of Paul, this may raise the question of how often you should have sex in marriage. And truthfully there is no one answer to that question. In fact, new research by Shaunti Feldhahn in her book, *Secrets of Sex and Marriage*, reveals that almost 80% of couples feel mismatched in how often they want sexual intimacy.

Illustration: Here’s how most marriages work- there is a higher drive person and a lower drive person. Don’t start pointing at each other... The best way I have come up with to describe the thought process of these two people is to think about your favorite restaurant and the best meal you’ve ever eaten.

- One person says: That was amazing, we should eat here as often as we can!
- The other says: That was so good...we should come here for special occasions!

Now you can point at each other! Here’s what I would say to this issue: Talk with each other openly and honestly about your desires. And then in a giving way, attempt to meet each other’s desires. You bring the gift of marriage to your spouse. This is really one of those areas where we look at the principles that drive our lives. One of the principles of Christianity is generosity. In fact, it’s one of our Core Values at GFC. We want to be generous with our time, talents and treasures. We want to

find ways to bless people and be generous towards them. When you look at your life is it marked by generosity or scarcity? Now apply that same question to your marriage and to sexual intimacy. Do I want to be generous towards my spouse, or do I have an attitude of scarcity in this area of my life?

Alright, let's move on to the next idea Paul addresses:

3. Christian marriage is liberating!

⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband.

In every culture and in every institution in the first century this is where the sentence stops. This was the norm. Women were little more than property in most cases. But then Paul comes along under the authority of Jesus and armed with the gospel message and he says something that NO ONE else was saying: In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

There is a mutual yielding of bodies to one another in the marriage covenant. We are meant to serve one another with our bodies. This was revolutionary- especially in a culture where men could go have sex with woman anywhere and anytime. For Paul to bring equality to marriage in this idea of yielding to one another was so life giving! Where do you think Paul got such an idea of self-sacrifice and surrender, that we would yield ourselves in order to serve one another? He got it from Jesus!

:: Philippians 2:5-8

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

**⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;**

**⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

**⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!**

Jesus is our greatest example of what it looks like to lay down our lives for someone else. Jesus is God in flesh, and yet He came as a servant to lay down His life for us.

- Wife, in marriage, lay down your life for your husband.
- Husband, in marriage, lay down your life for your wife.

The gift of marriage is that we give ourselves to one another freely, striving to serve one another.

Question: Is there a time or way to properly refrain from sexual intimacy in marriage? The last thing we are going to see today is Paul giving us three parameters for any withholding of sexual intimacy with our spouse.

:: 1 Corinthians 7:5

⁵ Do 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.

Before we get to the parameters, notice this: Paul tells us not to deprive one another of sexual intimacy in our marriages. Too many people use sex as a weapon when God intended it as a tool.

Sex alone doesn't make a marriage, but depriving of sex will destroy a marriage.

God gave us the gift of sex as a tool to build three specific things in our marriages:

1. Intimacy
2. Pleasure
3. Family

So Paul is going to give us three parameters to make sure we don't deprive one another of this gift in marriage.

3 parameters for taking sex off the table in your marriage:

- 1. It's done by mutual consent.**
- 2. It's only for a short time.**
- 3. You devote yourselves to prayer (and fasting).**

When Paul mentions these things he concludes his thought by saying this is a concession, not a command. There is nothing that mandates a removal of sexual intimacy from your marriage.

I'm sure in addressing a topic like this that many other questions get raised and many challenging thoughts come about. Our Life Groups are great places to ask those questions and explore those thoughts. Or if you want to speak with me or one of our Elders we are happy to do that.

Come back next week and we will have some conversation around being single and what the Bible says about divorce.

Prayer: A blessing over marriages and a commitment to sexual purity.