

I want to invite us on a journey back in time when shopping online was not an option. Before, marketers targeted you via email, through Facebook ads, and online influencers. You used to go to something called a mall, filled with stores, and as you would walk by the store, in the window, you would see some mannequins.

I used to be pretty creeped out by the often headless and faceless statues. But I realized when I was younger that the purpose of the mannequin was to display the glory of the designer. They would display them for those on the outside to look in and say, I want that!

So today, I want to borrow and carry that thought as we look at marriage, singleness, intimacy, and even divorce.

We are in the middle of a letter that Paul has written to the church in Corinth, a church plant in a pagan city, and he has addressed a number of things that he knew needed to be said. But let's not forget as we read this letter and break it down into small chunks it's like we are walking into a room where someone is on the phone, and we hear half of the conversation. You only hear the person on the phone in the room with you. (*unless you are at Walmart and there is that person who always talks on speakerphone*) and with that. And with this, we are only hearing a small portion of half of the conversation.

And now Paul is doing his own sort of version of a Q & A Sunday as we have around here at CCC from time to time. So we get a little more of a glimpse of the other side of the conversation. He is addressing the congregation's questions regarding life as people who are followers of Jesus. This is all relatively new to these first-century believers who have encountered Jesus and chosen to live a life against the norms of culture.

In answering these questions, he was walking into a cultural minefield - and I am fully aware of that reality this morning as well.

## **PRAY**

So today we will look at the questions that were asked and the answers Paul is giving.

### **1 Corinthians 7:1-2**

**1** 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.

I want to invite us back even further into time to understand this question. To us, it seems almost silly to ask a question like that. Is it good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

As these first-century believers living in a sex-saturated culture, Paul has addressed fleeing from this lifestyle and temptations. Additionally, in this culture often marriage was sort of optional and transactional. People would often not marry for romance but for status. And even when people were married, it was normative to have multiple wives or at least partners outside of the marriage have different needs met.

So these people are living in a sort of distorted culture and they want to know what this should look like for those who follow Jesus. So, Paul is going to remind them of the original intent and design for marriage

### **1 Corinthians 7:3**

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

Paul has absolutely dropped a bomb on these people at this moment. It would not be surprising for him to suggest that a husband has authority over the body of his wife, but to suggest that a woman has equal authority over the body of her husband is wild in such a patriarchal society. I don't want to underplay how radical this was.

We also see that Paul is clear on how he defines marriage. In this culture, you could have a wife who takes care of the house duties, a wife to bear children with, and another wife for intimacy, and for these people in this culture, this was a normative experience.

Paul isn't saying, well, because of where culture is, we are going to follow it and rewrite the rules and intention for marriage. Paul leans into the original design of marriage. Way back in Genesis 2:21-24, we see the first mirror and marriage as God created it.

The first moment Adam saw Eve was his first full glimpse of the beauty of His designer (same for Eve seeing Adam). They didn't have a mirror, but what was different about them from any other created things as they were made in the image of God to testify of the Glory and goodness of their designer! Individually.

And then God said, I am going to bring you together as one again through a covenant too multiply and reflect to the rest of creation, **the Glory of our designer!**

Where God took two people and said I am going to join them today for the **purpose of displaying the beauty of their designer.**

Paul knows this and wants this to be on display for the culture, and this new Bride is rising up, called the Church. Paul also knows this marriage covenant is just an echo of something that is a more eternal and everlasting covenant. A covenant that will point the covenant God has

promised to people he says “I will never leave you or forsake you.” This is why the vows at a wedding are that of permanent covenant language. Better or worse. Sickness and health. Richer or poorer. Until death does us part. This is supposed to be a “Nothing can separate us type of covenant”

When the world sees this type of selfless sacrifice and mutual vulnerability, they are getting a glimpse of the profound mystery that is the best news ever.

For those of us who are married here today, the ultimate purpose of your marriage is to display the glory of the God who designed it in the first place!

**Dr. Timothy Keller - *The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.***

This glorious juxtaposition is on full display in deep meaningful relationships and marriages - Through Christ-centered community, we discover that we are more flawed & broken than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time, we can see that we are more loved, and accepted than we ever dared hope.

There is not a person I know who preaches and presents the Gospel to me more than my wife Erin. As flawed & broken as I am. Her encouragement and Grace are a constant reminder to me of the Gospel.

So, for all of us in this room who were created for relationships (which is all of us in this room), here is a question I want you to ponder a bit over the next few days. Individually and then have a conversation together. - If you want to be really bold, ask the people closest to you

**Where are my closest relationships declaring the truth about Jesus?**

**Where are my closest relationships declaring false things about Jesus?**

Speaking of having a conversation together about sensitive topics, Paul continues to address the married people in verse 5.

**1 Corinthians 7:5**

*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.*

Now Paul is wading into even more sensitive territory here, which means we are too by reading this.

Paul is calling out that there is a high volume of sexless and non-intimate marriages and says this is a problem. One of the unique designs and gifts in marriage is physical intimacy. Sex was designed by God as a way to love and serve your spouse in a way that only you can and should. It is a vehicle for engaging the whole person in an act of selflessness and seeking to fulfill the desires of another.

There is a unique and mysterious union that happens through this that is designed to be experienced in a regular and ongoing way.

Unfortunately, far too often in some marriages it becomes distorted and used as a bargaining tool or as a source of leverage. If you do this for me, then I will give you this. And Paul is saying, you need to have conversations about this in a marriage.

Again, he leans into this mutual covenant idea. This is a big deal that Paul wants these people to understand. If you talk about it and agree about it for a time for a specific reason, then that is all good. Obviously, there are situations medically, physically, and Paul is even saying Spiritually for this for a time. But you are called to have a conversion about this and not make it too long!

This will keep you out of Satan's crosshairs because he knows this is something God designed and does not want you to experience it. He wants you to start looking somewhere else for satisfaction.

Your marriage is a gift from God and there is an enemy wanting to do all he can to wreck it. In verses 6-9 Paul shifts his focus briefly onto those who are not married.

### **1 Corinthians 7:6-9**

*I say this as a concession, not as a command. 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. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

Paul says, as a concession and not a command, that he wishes that many could be like him. Which at this point in his life we know is single. There is some debate as to if Paul was ever married, which if in fact if he was a part of the Sanhedrin, he may have been at one point.

Textual clues and translation also lead most scholars to this. Paul is specifically writing to those who are 'no longer married' and those who are widowed here. So those who were once married and wrestling with if they should get married again or not, especially if they still have sexual desires. Paul is walking sort of a tightrope between the pressure from both cultures that say you need to get remarried to have value and some religious teachers claiming to be single and celibate was the ultimate spiritual act.

So Paul is saying, I prefer this lifestyle at this point in my life, but if you still have desires and are burning with passions, it is totally permissible to get married and not live a suppressed life.

But one of the things I love that Paul highlights here is the fact that both singleness and marriage are both a gift. They are not competing gifts. But they are both opportunities to display the glory of the Designer - Paul has a lot more to say about this later in the chapter, and thus there will be more on that next week from Jen Ashby who will share.

But now Paul goes back to answering questions about the married people.

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

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

One important thing for us as readers to pick up here is those words (no I, but the Lord) here. Paul is pointing back to the words and commands of Jesus here.

Understanding some of this narrative is largely important as we read this. See there was this story in **Matthew 19** where some teachers of the law came up to Jesus and they wanted to test him and asked if it was “lawful for a man to divorce His wife?”

And what happens here is fascinating. Jesus answers their question with a question of his own, saying “What did Moses command you?” and in their answer they head back to Moses's words in **Deuteronomy 24:1** where it says ***If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house***

In this portion of the Bible, God is giving this new set of rules to God's covenant people who had strayed away from His covenant and trying to help these people who had been lured into the chaos of sin establish order... So here, Moses was giving an accommodation to those hard-hearted people who had disregarded God's standard for marriage

And at this time when Jesus answers these guys, men were using this verse all out of context as some kind of opportunity to get out of their marriage for nearly anything they found “displeasing or indecent” which was happening literally over things like burnt breakfast, to poor hygiene, or really whatever they wanted to give that label. Which was causing all sorts of problems, especially leaving the women vulnerable.

And then Jesus says - no, let me take you back to what Moses said in Genesis about my original plan and design for marriage, Jesus repaint for them the beauty of marriage.

So he takes them back to the very first marriage covenant where God created male and female to come together in an inseparable covenant as no longer two individuals, but one joined unit **whose purpose was to display the glory of their designer!**

The Christian view of marriage is one of permanence. Now it was not lost on Jesus to know that in a broken world, marriages will break. In Matthew 19 Jesus acknowledges this when he says this is permissible when there is sexual immorality that takes place and breaks the marriage covenant.

Paul is going to talk a little more about concessions for divorce in the next session as well. But before we go there I want to slow down and acknowledge that this is messy and confusing.

And there are people in the room who are living through, have lived through, and are still in the wake of divorce and all that led up to it. Paul and Jesus know that divorce is damaging to something that God designed.

But in a broken world, marriages will break. And throughout Church history as this has been navigated and the overall consensus from Scripture that, and what the family of the Christian & Missionary Alliance that we are a part of has three pretty general concessions for divorce. Adultery, Abandonment, and Abuse.

There are complexities and crossover that can happen with all of these. How we define each of these can get more complex than we have time for this morning.

And listen... if you are in one of those situations I want to encourage you today to talk to someone about this. Especially if you are in an abusive situation, whether finding a minister after the service or making the phone call to law enforcement, abuse is not OK. And it breaks the heart of God.

I have not talked to one person who has been through a divorce that planned for this to happen, in fact it is always the opposite.

I also want you to know that if Jesus died and resurrected, he can revive and redeem any marriage and I have seen that happen to the glory of God many times.

If you are looking for resources that will help you in your marriage and tools to help you can check out [cccomaha.org/marriage](http://cccomaha.org/marriage)

We have a team of people and resources that would love to come alongside you and Jesus in the healing and restoration process.

### **1 Corinthians 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.*

\*Not miss the intentionality of Paul here. Previous he said, “**Not I, but the Lord**” and now he is being clear and saying “**I, not the Lord**”- What a refreshing dose of honesty and humility here

So who is the “rest” here? The text tells us he is now talking about those who are following Jesus and married to someone who is not following Jesus. This was not Paul’s petition for missionary dating, in fact in his next letter to the church in Corinth he tells them to yoke themselves together intentionally with believers and unbelievers

This was the infancy moment of the Christian Church and most people who were following Jesus were first generation Jesus followers. So they are wondering if now that they are a part of this new family, if they should just automatically abandon their spouses and family members who do not yet know Jesus.

And Paul tells them “NO” do not automatically divorce your spouse because of this.

In fact Paul even steps on another land mine here suggesting that a woman could find salvation without her husband and she even had any sort of authority to make a decision about divorcing him or not. These were both radical ideas in the elevation of women and the mutuality of this covenant. And Paul gets to the “why?”

### **1 Corinthians 7:14-16**

*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.*

*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?*

Paul is wanting them to continue to understand what he will say even more plainly in his next letter to these people, that anyone who is in Christ is a NEW Creation - and as a new creation, their life has new meaning and **purpose of their life is to display the glory of their designer!**

And there is no one better to display this to your unbelieving spouse than you! That you have been made brand new! That you are a servant who wants something for them and not from them.

Paul is not saying your spouse will automatically be saved or believe as a result of this, but he is saying they have never had a closer seat to Jesus.

That word Holy there means “**set apart**” Because of your decision to follow Jesus, your kids have been set apart, they are in a position where they can see the goodness and glory of God on display!

And if they decide to leave, let them leave and continue to live in peace with them. He may still be working out His plan of salvation in them.

And perhaps they will see the glory of your designer on display in your life and say! I want that!

Church this is our purpose and our call, no matter what our status. That is the charge of Paul to all of us in the next 7 verses. He says no matter what your status, or label... married, unmarried, slave, Jewish or Gentile - that be the goodness of God, you have been bought with a price and you have been given an inheritance that is not based on you, but it has been placed on you to display to the world walking by on the outside, the Glory of your designer!

So church, here is the dream! That every single one of us in our relationships with one another, would live in such a way that displays **the Glory of our Designer** to the to the people walking by our doors every day.

Imagine what the impact could be if the thousands of people that interact with each of us cumulatively every single week, would see the way we interact with them, would not just see us, but they would see the glory of our designer on display through our lives!

I imagine that through the hustle and bustle of life, that they would see something so beautiful and glorious that it would draw them to want to come in and see what this thing is all about!