

Thorsten Evans / General

The Church Built Up / Marriage; Sex / 1 Corinthians 7:1–16

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I once had a pastor tell me: "I don't ever preach on Money or Marriage because I haven't been particularly good at either." Today we are going to tackle the subject of marriage because that is what 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 is about. It doesn't matter if I'm the best husband or have the best marriage, God's Word has something to say to me and to you about the subject.

Before we read the passage, it is important for us again to understand the context of these words. Paul has written a letter to the church at Corinth in an effort to answer questions they had, clear up some misunderstandings and to also speak out against overt sin.

Today's passage is less a speaking against sin, and more of the other two. There is a air of Paul speaking to some questions the church had about sex in marriage, singleness and divorce and about some misunderstandings they had about these topics.

Remember, Paul's goal is to build the church up in Christ that they might be effective in reaching the lost by glorifying God in all that they did. It is clear from the entirety of the letter that the Corinthian church was in many ways no different than the culture and the world around it. That was the challenge to the church at Corinth, and it is the challenge to us today.

Let's start reading in chapter 7

### **1 Corinthians 7:1–2 NIV**

<sup>1</sup> Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." <sup>2</sup> But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

If you look back at the last part of chapter 6, Paul speaks against sex immorality. Specifically, he was addressing the practice of sleeping with prostitutes. Then chapter 7 starts and it appears that not having sexual relations is good.

Paul is clearly addressing something they wrote and asked him about. Let me give you a little more context to the culture.

It was not uncommon for people who were married to only have sex when they wanted to have children. The marriage bed was for function, not pleasure. So, there was this idea that if they abstained from pleasure, they were more holy.

However, the men would go elsewhere for the pleasure such as prostitutes or servants

which is what got us chapter 6 last week.

Paul is saying that sex is OK if it happens between a husband and a wife. The genders are specific here, man and wife in case anyone is wondering about that.

Let's continue

### **1 Corinthians 7:3–4 NIV**

<sup>3</sup> The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> 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.

This is probably the most misquoted scripture when there is a spouse who wants something from the other. This is a mutual debt that is owed to one another. The word translated to marital duty literally means debt or what is owed. Often it is used in the context of what a slave owes their master, but in this case, both are indebted to one another. The needs of both are to be met.

Then verse 4 is interesting given the people the original letter is written to. First it says that the wife yields her body to her husband.

This is how it already was in this society. In fact, in this culture and time, everyone in the household yielded their bodies to the man of the house. He already had access to do what he wanted with whomever he wanted in the house. This included him having control over what they did with their bodies with someone else.

The man of the house had a say over who a servant girl could be with. By nature of her position, her body belonged to him.

But then Paul says, the husband in the same way does not have authority, but yields his body to his wife. This was an entirely new concept. This was not the thinking of the day.

Paul is saying that the wife has a say in what her husband does with his body and who he is with. There is a mutual understanding that their sexual bodies are intended only for each other. They have yielded those rights to to each other.

### **1 Corinthians 7:5–6 NIV**

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> I say this as a concession, not as a command.

Pretty straight forward here. Not much to say about verse 5, but what does Paul mean by this being a concession?

Remember, there was this idea that sex in a marriage was only for the purpose of having children. There were some in the church that wanted Paul to agree with this.

Here is their thought process...Paul is not married and has chosen celibacy. We are married, but we really want to be like Paul, so no sex. I can imagine one spouse saying this and the other protesting this.

Paul is saying if you do refrain, only do so when you both consent, and really only for the purpose of prayer and devotion to God. But don't do it too long before coming together again.

Paul is saying...ok if that's what you want to do, alright, but here is how you go about that. And oh, by the way, this is not a command.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:7 NIV**

<sup>7</sup> 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.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:8–9 NIV**

<sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Pretty straight forward. This is not a reason to just marry anyone..."We're getting married so we don't burn with passion..." Um no.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:10–11 NIV**

<sup>10</sup> 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.

A little context will help this. In this culture, the marriage vows and contracts were written assuming divorce. It wasn't until death do you part, it was until you divorce each other. It was very common in this time for people to divorce because they found someone else. They called it a no-fault divorce. Basically we're just done, moving on.

There are valid reasons for separation - abuse, infidelity...but that wasn't the overwhelming reason that was happening. Paul is saying you don't just get to come and go. This vow is forever and reconciliation is the way. I believe as much as is possible that is still the way today. Our God is one of reconciliation and restoration. That must be our first choice.

#### **1 Corinthians 7:12–13 NIV**

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

We'll talk more about this when we cover the second half of chapter 7. Ideally, a believer marries an believer, but there are times when one spouse is saved, but the other is not. What do we do with that? Paul says to stay. Show your spouse what it

looks like to follow Jesus. Love your spouse like Jesus loves them. Then he says this:

**1 Corinthians 7:14 NIV**

<sup>14</sup> 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.

The word sanctify means to make holy or set apart. The concern for some of the Christian married to unbelievers was that their spouse was not holy and that by being married to them and then having sex with them made them not holy as well. There was a concern about the purity of the believing spouse.

Paul says that in this way your unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife is made holy through you and their position as your spouse. This doesn't mean that the spouse is saved or forgiven, only that through the marriage the relationship is sanctified.

Our passage ends with this:

**1 Corinthians 7:15–16 NIV**

<sup>15</sup> But 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. <sup>16</sup> How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

You never know what the witness of a spouse will have on the other. Perhaps the spouse will come to the Lord through the witness they see.

I think this is a good example of why we are also to stay engaged in the world around us. If we retreat and remove ourselves from interacting with the world, how will the world around us get to see Jesus at work.

There may be some of you in this kind of marriage, but there are far more of you that are committed to a job that is full of unbelievers. How do you know if you might be the person that the Lord is sending to be the one who leads them to the cross.

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What is God's design for marriage? Mutual submission. Mutual taking care of the other. Paul is talking here in the context of sex, but this extends to other areas of the relationship. Yield to each other. Even if the other is not, we are called to yield. Take care of the other even if the other is not.

What happens when we get God's design for marriage right?

1. God is glorified - God uses marriage as the comparison for our relationship with Him.
2. We strengthen our witness When we get our marriage right, we show the world what God's design for marriage is.

3. Our children are shown what marriage should look like.