

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

Title: Intimacy: Don't Leave Home Without It ¹

Truth: Marital intimacy is a crucial part of marriage.

Date/Location: June 7, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Monogamy is clearly the divinely-ordained pattern in Scripture. God's simple rule one man and one woman until death parts them. But there is much more to marriage than that.

I. Concerning Things

- A. The apostle Paul turns his attention now to things about which the Corinthians had written to him. I've titled this section "concerning things" with an intended dual meaning. Paul wrote, "Concerning the things you wrote to me..." by which word *concerning* he means "about" or "with regard to." But the matters *concerning which* they wrote to Paul were *concerning* to them. The Corinthians were somewhat confused, anxious or disturbed about these matters.
- B. There were several general areas covered in their questions, and many specific questions. The God-breathed answers to these questions at the hand of Paul take up most of the remainder of the book, that is, the final 10 chapters. This is the best Q&A session you can imagine!
- C. The first set of questions had to do with marriage. They were asking questions such as:
 - Should I be married?
 - Should I be celibate?
 - Should I be celibate *in* my marriage?
 - Should I divorce my unbelieving spouse?
 - Could I be remarried after divorce?
 - I am a widow. Can I remarry?
 - Will I be distracted by marriage?
 - Can I marry a non-Christian?

¹ This is the catchy title of an article by David J. MacLeod in Emmaus Journal, Winter 2011.

D. There were other questions from Corinth as well. They asked about food offered to idols—can't we just eat it? They asked about the roles of men and women, and the Lord's Table and spiritual gifts, perhaps also about the resurrection of Christ and the saints, and about collecting finances for an offering for other believers in need.

II. Euphemisms

- A. The round-about language in the text refers to the union of a man and woman in marriage, and sexual intercourse in marriage.
- B. "To touch a woman" meant to have intimate relations with her and, since it is only legitimate to do so in marriage, it implies marriage as well. Similarly with the "affection due" and "deprive" and "come together again." The temptation and lack of self-control speak to the same issue of sexual lust and abstinence and so on. To burn is to suffer severe sexual desire and temptation.
- C. The Bible speaks very frankly of the issues of human sexuality. In fact, once you understand the indirect language used to refer to marital love, the book of Song of Solomon is downright graphic. It is *not* an allegory about the love of Christ for His church. It is an account of the love between a man and a woman, including the ups and downs that come in such a relationship in this world.
- D. The Corinthians had asked Paul about marriage and sexuality, and Paul dealt with it head-on. He wasn't bashful about it, because it is an *important* part of the human experience. In the proper context, it is not shameful or lewd.
- E. These issues concern all of us in one way or another. When we come of age, most of us are interested in relationships and marriage. If we are Christians this is especially true, because we are hopefully aligned with God's purposes in the world.² Next, I speak generally, but not exhaustively. We grow up in a home, hopefully with two parents. We get an early introduction to the problems in

² These purposes include propagating the race to the next generation. A normal, healthy marriage—barring health problems preventing pregnancy—will bring forth children into the world. I have noticed that marriages in which this does not happen within a few years of the wedding are likely marriages in trouble.

marriage especially if we are in a single-parent or broken home. Then we find ourselves in a marriage relationship and see that it is not easy. We experience the tensions around finances and sex and inter-personal conflict all the rest. Hopefully we overcome those challenges and settle into a peaceful, long-term, happy marriage. Then we help our kids repeat the process, and counsel them when they have problems, and hopefully see a good number of grandchildren before we go to heaven. God is so gracious in those ways. These are the basics of life.

But today, young people think about themselves and put off having children, sometimes until it is too late. You've heard the case of a young couple that is just wrapped up in themselves and don't want to have children. They want to travel or focus on their career advancement and have upward mobility. Babies are an inconvenience—for every 1000 live births, nearly about 200 other babies are aborted. Sex becomes merely for erotic pleasure. Although God *has* designed it for the pleasure of spouses, it is warped to see it *only* as that.

But I am getting off track. Let us return to the message of 1 Cor. 7.

III. The Teaching of the Passage

- A. Verse 1: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Some consider this another slogan of the Corinthians. It could be, but—and this is different than the case of 6:12-13—it can also represent Paul's true belief. He says later in the chapter that it is good for a person to be single, like he is (7:7). It is good to be able to serve the Lord without the cares that come with having a spouse (7:32-35). But this does *not* mean that "it is **bad** for a man TO touch a woman." It is a good thing NOT to be married, and it is another and different kind of good to be married."

I have known people confused at this very point. A woman thinks, "Boy, if it is good not to be with a man, then should I ever reduce myself to be married?" A man thinks, "I can't be married because it is not as good as being single and it reduces my ability to serve the Lord." That is NOT the case, and it is NOT normal. **The normal state for most men and women is to be married**, have children, etc. If

you understand it properly, you know both states are good. Both have advantages. The undistracted-ness of singlehood is counterbalanced by the multiplicative effect that two can have by working well together.

- B. Verse 2: Marriage helps to alleviate a problem, namely sexual immorality.³ It is good to be single, but it also has drawbacks. The temptation to fornication or adultery can be tremendous—especially if you lived in Corinth. In fact, the apostle uses the plural “sexual immoralities” because of the plethora of temptations in the world. Marriage provides the fulfillment for sexual desire in a holy and God-honoring way. You get married, in part, so that you can have sex. Conversely, if you are not having sex, then why did you get married? If you are married and not regularly having sex, then you are in effectively the same place as a single person. The temptations are dangerous.
- C. To solve that, Paul says in verse 2 that people should get married. He doesn’t give the details yet, and he leaves room for varieties of cultural expression on the matter. But here is the thing: almost every society has some form of marriage. This comes from the beginning when God created male and female and brought them together. And by the way, if you as a young person hesitate to be married because you think sex is defiling, think again. Hebrews 13:4 says that marriage is to be honored among all and the bed kept undefiled. That indicates that it is undefiled if spouses are living properly together.
- D. Verses 3-4 teach that the intimate union in a marriage is *an obligation* upon both spouses. Celibacy is right for singles, but wrong inside your marriage. Notice that the requirement is completely symmetrical. Both husband and wife do not have “authority” over their own body. The text tells us the husband has authority over the wife’s body, and the wife has authority over the husband’s body. When you are married, you commit to give over a piece of your authority to your spouse. This gives “rights” to your spouse that he/she did not have before the wedding day. Before you are married, there is no such split authority. This means that

³ Marriage obviously does not entirely solve this problem.

you give of yourself for the pleasure of your spouse, and you do so at a regular frequency and in a way that is desirable to your spouse. This is *essential* to marriage. That is, it is of the *essence* or *substance* of marriage. Notice two additional factors:

1. This is about giving yourself to your spouse. It is more blessed to give than receive, even though that is hard to see without looking two or three moves ahead.
2. Paul puts men and women on equal footing. The symmetry is notable in a time and society dominated by males in everything.

E. Verse 5 speaks of deprivation. To *deprive* means to withhold oneself sexually from one's spouse. The KJV actually uses a stronger term which does convey something important—do not *defraud*. Something that is **owed** to your spouse—by virtue of the fact that you are married and you agreed to give yourself to your spouse—cannot legitimately be taken away afterward. Friends, Paul knows the tendency of the human heart. Even moreso, God knows those tendencies. He knows our **selfishness**.

1. What kind of excuses have you given your spouse for not enjoying the marital bed? Too tired, headache, spouse hasn't met up perfectly with your expectations that day, don't feel close, just aren't in the mood, never are in the mood, etc.? You need to work hard to make sure those things are not the case. Take care of yourself to avoid tiredness and headaches and get the kids into bed at a decent hour, etc. You need to repent of selfishness. Be diligent every day to care for one another. Make an *effort* to be obedient to God in this area. Keep accounts short, so to speak, when it comes to sin and forgiveness. Your marriage literally depends on it. I don't want to see another couple under my care to be divorced. Whether it is a cause or a symptom of other causes, lack of intimacy in marriage is a huge red flag indicating major problems present and it will only get worse.
2. If there are legitimate health issues, then by all means get to your doctor and try to get things fixed. If there are spiritual issues, pray seriously, get into the Word, and if needed, get help from your pastor.

3. Afraid you will get pregnant? Do what it takes to handle that concern, but it cannot hold you back. For healthy people, what is the problem with pregnancy—is it a disease or something? The Hebrew mindset would be delighted to be pregnant and have another child because that is a blessing from God.

4. The Bible says “do not deprive” except for one reason only. There is one exception—and that is what it is—an *exception*. And that exception is to take time for a season of concentrated prayer. This season of prayer is not something that one spouse can unilaterally decide—both must mutually agree to this. And when the time period is up, Paul commands the couple to come together again to avoid the temptation of effectively being like a single (7:2). That temptation is worked by Satan who tries to take advantages in weakness in the area of self-control. His work is powerful—do not underestimate it.

It appears that some persons in the Bible did not observe this. Solomon is a prime example. Also, Esther indicated she had not seen her Persian king husband in thirty days (4:11). King Ahasuerus was not living like he should with his wife.

5. This means that long distance relationships are not obedient to the Lord. A job that requires a lot of travel is not right for a Christian husband (OTR trucking—unless you drive together, some types of sales and consulting, etc.). It is too easy to make excuses and get into trouble by being away from your spouse for long periods of time.⁴

F. In verses 6-7, the apostle corrects a potential misunderstanding of his words. He is saying that his instruction is not a command to be married, but that marriage is better than temptation. It is a concession to the imperfect state in which we live. He would love to see people dedicated to serving God as singles who were also free of the temptation. But not everyone is able to do so. He is obviously not commanding either outcome.

⁴ Military service and perhaps some other pressing reasons are understandable but even these should guide a young couple’s wedding plans.

1. The gift from God in this situation is two-fold: some are uniquely “cut out” to be able to handle singleness, and others are “cut out” to be outfitted for marriage. Both are given by God and are part of God’s design of each unique person.
2. You can tell generally which young adult falls into which category by asking a simple question: “Do you desire to be married?” If the answer is yes, that is a good indication that the person is not gifted for singleness. If they answer “no” then they likely, at least at this time, are best outfitted to remain single.

Conclusion

Paul is answering some specific questions in this chapter. One of those questions is *not* “What are all the reasons to be married?” But he does address one very important reason that we have discussed in detail.

How does this apply to you? Well, if you are married, the application is obvious. Do what it says. Recognize that you cannot make excuses.

If you are a young person not yet married, store this up. If you are an older person who has passed through marriage already, then please share these principles with those under your care: younger family members and disciples of Jesus. Our world needs this basic teaching.

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