

1 Corinthians 7:1-9 – “Marriage Instructions”

So far in our study through 1 Corinthians Paul has been addressing and correcting various issues of division and sin that has been taking place in this church at Corinth. Paul has dealt with these heavy and sensitive matters and now begins to answer various questions that the church had sent to him on a range of topics. He begins Chapter 7 by saying, ***Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me...*** We'll see him say repeatedly in the next number of chapters: *Now concerning...* And he will deal with questions about the unmarried (7:25), food sacrificed to idols (8:1); spiritual gifts (12:1); and a collection for the saints (16:1).

Now the content of Chapter 7 flows very naturally out of Chapter 6 where Paul has been dealing with sexual immorality and how our bodies are to be a temple of the Holy Spirit where we bring glory to God. He had said to *Flee sexual immorality* (6:18), which may have caused some to wonder if there's any place for any activity of this nature. *What if we're married? Should we just avoid this now?*

So Paul seeks to bring some needed counsel in this area of marriage and sex. Chapter 7 will cover a variety of things that pertain to these topics and we'll cover it over the next three weeks. We'll break it down the way Paul does, as we look at: **Marriage** in verse 1-9; **Divorce** in verses 10-24; and **Singleness** in verses 25-40.

1. Reasons for Marriage – 7:1-3

7:1 - *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

Some had come to Paul with this concern of a man touching a woman. Now this was not talking about some little love tap, or a little flirtatious poke. No, this was speaking of touching in a sexual nature. This word ***touch*** refers to fastening yourself to another in this act of intimacy.

As already mentioned, there were some who had that view of the body that it was inherently evil thus it had to be denied of all its passions and desires.

- But also, for the believer living in Corinth, seeing the spread of sensuality in such a strong manner, and the way that it was so abused all around them, it was easy to begin to think that perhaps sex should be avoided all together.

- The Corinthian Christians were beginning to wonder if celibacy wasn't the way they needed to be to stay pure in a polluted place.

And perhaps to your surprise, Paul concedes, it is good that a man doesn't touch (more so, have sexual relations with) a woman. Yet in **Genesis 2:18** it says: *"It is not good that man should be alone..."* So if it's good for a man not to be with a woman, and it's not good that man should be without a woman, which is right? Well, we certainly have to understand Paul is dealing with a specific question here that had a specific context. Some have thought Paul is coming down on marriage and isn't very much for it.

But Paul's not giving a complete teaching on marriage. In fact, when you look at other Scriptures where Paul gave instruction on marriage, you see that it is a beautiful picture of Christ's love for the church (as he shared in Ephesians 5:22-33), and he lists the forbiddance of marriage as one of the traits of apostasy in 1 Timothy 4:3.

When you take all these things into account, Paul is not against marriage. Nor does he contradict what God said in Genesis 2:18. Paul is simply laying out that there are times, under unique circumstances, where being single and not touching a woman is the better choice.

And there are times where it's not the best choice...

7:2 - *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

Paul isn't saying that everyone needs to get married, he's simply saying that if you are married, there's no reason to abstain from sex.

Now let me just say, the discussion of sex in Christian circles can be a very uncomfortable and awkward thing. I know some of you might be thinking, it doesn't seem to be that way with you, you haven't stopped talking about it for 3 weeks straight. That's fair, but we're dealing with it because the Bible deals with it. And it's important to see that sex is not wrong, nor is it bad. That is, when it is enjoyed in the boundaries established by God – between a husband and wife.

- **Hebrews 13:4**, *"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled..."*

Though sex isn't to be the typical social conversational piece, it is something that has been given to us by God.

In fact, if it wasn't for sex, none of you would be here today!

Now sex is not the only reason Paul is saying to be married, nor is sex the most important reason for marriage, there's all sorts of reasons for marriage other than sex. I'm not sure presently what they are, but I've heard from reputable sources that they exist 😊.

Here's what Paul is communicating, we have a sex drive given to us by God. It's meant to function within a committed relationship between a husband and wife. If a person doesn't have a spouse, that sex drive could potentially get the better of them and that individual could possibly engage in **sexual immorality** (any sex outside of marriage is sexual immorality - *porneia*).

So to help avoid the temptation that is prevalent in a sexualized culture (as Corinth was) Paul says to have a spouse.

- *Now marriage certainly doesn't stop all temptation. You still need to realize there will be times you simply need to crucify the flesh (Galatians 5:24). When my wife is watching Legends of the Fall for the 49th time and Brad Pitt shows up on a horse with that long flowing hair, it becomes all the more evident I'm no Brad Pitt. And it becomes all the more evident she needs to crucify the flesh.
- Marriage doesn't solve all temptation, nor does it satisfy all your needs. But it's the great institution God has given for a man and a woman to come together and enjoy this gift of intimacy the right way.

And notice the clarity we see given in this verse: ***let each man have his own wife***... This refers to a monogamous, heterosexual relationship.

7:3 - *Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*

Since we have normal and natural desires that God has given us regarding sex, it's important that we find a spouse that we can give ourselves to and enjoy the blessing of being in union with another.

The word **render** means to owe; to be indebted; an obligation. [look at various translations]

When you enter into a marriage, you are entering into a covenant. A commitment to love and honour your spouse and to give yourself to them.

You owe it to your spouse to say, *I'm yours!* We'll see that in the next verse.

It's your obligation to give the affection and care to your spouse – and that includes sexual intimacy.

In other words, physical contact is not something to be abstained from in marriage, it's to be encouraged. But again, we're not just talking about sex, Paul talks about **affection**. This in the Greek speaks of good will or kindness. It's possible to have sex without affection.

- In marriage you are looking to meet each other's needs. And those needs may vary. Understand, the husbands need may be very different than the wife's. Don't look to do that which you want in return. Give what the other is needing, this is your duty as a married couple.
- When you begin to give yourself for the betterment of your spouse, you will profit from it. You will both profit from it. The relationship becomes more of a *joy* rather than a *job*.

2. Regulations in Marriage – 7:4-6

7:4 - *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.*

Paul has already said in 1 Corinthians 6:19b, '*you are not your own.*' We don't live for ourselves as believers. Ultimately we live for God. And God has designed us to be in union with another in marriage where we are not our own, but we belong to another. And we live with that idea that my life and my body is for another.

- This for some might be a very troubling verse, because you are coming to the realization that your marriage has not been functioning in this way. Sex is a tool to build with not a weapon to fight with.
- Unfortunately, in marriages sex is used too often as a bargaining chip to get the other to do something. *That's it, no more sex until you clean out the garage!*
- But you see, we don't have the right to do that. As we come together in marriage, this is God's design for creating intimacy and oneness (not to mention pro-creating). Sex is a significant part of the marriage relationship which shouldn't be neglected. And it shouldn't be used to manipulate or control the relationship.

Now you might think, what if my spouse is a sex-crazed maniac that I can't keep up with, or want to do something I'm not comfortable with? And by *spouse*, I think we all know I'm meaning *husband*.

But again, the greater call of a husband is found in **Ephesians 5:25**, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*"

- God's instruction first and foremost is for husbands to love their wives in a sacrificial, unselfish way.
- His needs should not trump her care. And vice versa.

You belong to each other. Give yourself to your spouse. This is what creates a fulfilling relationship and union. That's the Christian way.

- To help you out, try starting with having sex on days that begin with 'T' – Tuesday, Thursday, today and tomorrow!

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.*

Married couples are not to take too much time apart from physical contact. When you do, let it be because you have both agreed to devote that time to spending in things that may need greater devotion – like ***fasting and prayer***. These are things that are going to feed the spirit, which is necessary. But don't take too long so that you won't be hung out to dry and fall into temptation.

- Sex is interesting because Satan will do all he can to get you to do it outside of marriage, but will do all he can to stop you from doing it inside your marriage.

I've seen too many marriages that have been on the rocks and have remained shipwrecked because they have deprived themselves of this act that is meant to bring them together in a more binding and intimate way.

This was God's plan from the beginning:

- **Genesis 2:24**, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."
- There is a wonderful dynamic that takes place in the relationship when you are joined together intimately and physically, and it's more than just pro-creating.
- If you want to build a healthy and strong marriage, serve one another through this gift God has given to ensure a closeness and a joining together.

Remember, there's a lot that goes into a relationship than just sex. Don't think you can be a jerk to your spouse and just demand that at the end of the day they need to yield themselves to you physically. You need to be connecting with the heart, not just other parts. It's more than just an act you fulfill in a moment, it's the investment you put in throughout the day to build that intimacy and closeness that bubbles over in an expression of physical union.

7:6 - *But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.*

This doesn't mean that what Paul is saying is not inspired words of the Holy Spirit. Rather Paul was clarifying, most likely, what he said in verse 5. It's not a command that you must deprive yourself from intimacy for a short time. It's a permission, if you feel that it will strengthen your relationship.

Couples didn't need to refrain from sex just so they could be more devoted to the Lord.

3. Recommendations regarding Marriage – 7:7-9

7:7 - *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.*

Paul was single. And he wished that all could live as he was. There's great benefit to that. But Paul also realized that everyone has his own gift. Some are equipped to be single, and some God equips to be married.

- Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 19:11–12**, *"But He said to them, 'All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.'"*
- A eunuch was one who remained celibate, and some did so for the service of the Lord.

We've kind of made marriage this highest goal or greater call of God. People have felt pressure to be married thinking they're coming up short. It's a shame we haven't done a better job of honoring singlehood and the blessings it can provide. Be careful not to look down on someone who isn't married – each one has his own gift. Don't try to force someone into something they've not been gifted by God to fulfill.

Now was Paul previously married? Lots of speculation has been made and it's very possible. But what we do know is that he was single at this time, and encouraged others in it.

It's possible that Paul was:

- a widower.
- he was married and his wife left him after his conversion. Many converted Jews were completely excommunicated from previous relationships.
- he was never married.

We have some hints in Scripture that he was previously married. In Acts 26:10 it seems by the authority he had he belonged to the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court). It was required of members of the Sanhedrin to be married and have children.

So it's very likely Paul has seen what life is like on both sides of the spectrum. And his conclusion is that he wishes all people were able to be like him – living free from the extra responsibilities that marriage brings.

- I mean, could you imagine Paul doing the things he did for the Lord if he had a wife and family? *Yea, honey, I'm just heading out with Barnabas here. I'll be back in about a year or two – if I make it.* That just doesn't fly. There's a benefit from being single, but again, it's not for everyone.

7:8-9 - *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.*

Now Paul switches his focus to those who are not married or widowed. And his counsel is for them to remain in that state. The single life is a life where you can be single minded. In other words, focused and devoted to the things of the Lord. He will talk more about this later in the chapter.

But this life of singleness is not for everyone. And we have some instructions in vs. 9 for those who are unable to remain single. If you cannot be at rest with the single state, if you are going out of your mind because your hormones are on fire, then get married. Don't try to live a way that you've not been designed or called to.

- But equally important is to not jump into a marriage just to satisfy some lustful urge. *So what are you looking for in a woman? Well, I would like a good pulse, after that it's really negotiable.*

- You see, too often, people who get married thinking it's going to cure that lustful appetite, find that those battles are still being fought after marriage.
- In other words, sex alone is never a good reason to get married. But it certainly is one of the bonuses of marriage and it benefits the marriage.

But we are without excuse if we enter into sexual immorality because we feel we are burning with passion. Or if we think our spouse is not giving us what we want. One of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

1 Thessalonians 4:3–8, *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit."*

You have the Holy Spirit. So honor the Lord with your life. Serve your spouse. Seek the Lord with how you can live for His glory in whatever state you are in.