

THE QUESTION ABOUT CELIBACY AND MARRIAGE

1 CORINTHIANS 07:01–07

DIVISION OVERVIEW: (1 Corinthians 07:01–40)

Marriage, Celibacy, Immorality and Society

Corinth was a cesspool of immorality, one of the most immoral cities in the world of its day. All forms of sexual deviations ran rampant and were openly displayed. Loose living was the practice of spouse and neighbour, friend and stranger. Practically everyone dressed to draw attention and to attract, and they peppered their conversation with insinuations to let each other know that they were available and desired. A decent person could not walk down the street without being eyed and thought about by the tempter or temptress. Sex was the goddess of Corinth society. It permeated the government, commerce, recreation and religion of the Corinthian. It abounded everywhere.

Now, imagine a church of the Lord Jesus Christ sitting in the midst of such an immoral society. Imagine men and women desiring to live pure and godly lives for the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine the temptations they would face, the pressure to look, touch, and experience; and it was out of such a life that so many had been saved. Think of the enticing temptations and pull that would confront them to return to the world.

Because of all this — the pressure of the temptations that abounded at every bend — the Corinthian believers began to search for the best way to handle the situation. The conclusion of some believers was that celibacy was the best way. They felt that never to touch a woman (or man) was the surest way to stay pure and gain the strength to conquer the temptation. By controlling himself, a person would eventually become so strong that the temptations would have no effect upon him. The idea caught hold, and some, apparently a fair number, began to practice celibacy. There is even indication that some married men and women began to practice celibacy either within the marriage or by leaving their spouses (cp. vv. 3-5).

The matter of handling the temptation of fornication and of celibacy had become such an issue that the church needed guidance. Therefore, they wrote and asked Paul what the Lord had taught regarding fornication, celibacy and marriage. Note Paul's immediate words: "Now for the matters you wrote about." Beginning here in Chapter 7, Paul is answering specific questions the church had written and asked him.

Introduction (1 Corinthians 07:01–07)

The church needs to be concerned about marriage. Believers must understand God's concept of marriage, for marriage is God's institution. He created both man and woman and gave them the union of marriage. Even if society falls apart in the divorce courts of the world, and immorality and cohabitation run rampant, the church of the Lord

Jesus Christ must hold high the truth of the marriage bond and union, the truth as it was ordained by God. This passage answers some very practical questions that often nag and cause problems both for the single adult and the married partner.

- I. There are special situations for not marrying (v. 1).
- II. There is a condition necessitating marriage (v. 2).
- III. There are mutual duties within marriage (v. 3).
- IV. There is to be mutual ownership of one another's body (vv. 4-6).
- V. There is the gift of marriage and the gift of being single (v. 7).

1 CORINTHIANS 07:01–40 SCRIPTURE, INSPIRATION

Throughout this passage Paul is giving a command without directly quoting Christ (cp. vv. 6, 10, 12, 25, 40). The Lord had said nothing about this matter. Paul is not disclaiming inspiration, but he is actually claiming the same authority as the Lord's own words. Of course, this does not void the apostolic teaching in any sense. □

I. 1 Corinthians 07:01 Celibacy, Marriage and Moral Purity

There are special situations for not marrying. There are situations that require celibacy. The word “good” (kalon) means advisable, advantageous, expedient, profitable, wholesome. There are times when it is wise not to marry and to take on the responsibilities of marriage. Paul mentions two of the situations in this chapter.

1. First, some “present crisis” made it advisable for the unmarried believers not to marry (v. 26). What the crisis was is not known, but the application to us is clearly seen. There are times when marriage is unwise because of situations arising from the persecutions of Christians, world wars, economic collapse, revolutions, death, obligations, disease, sicknesses and accidents.
2. Second, God's will and call need to be closely considered. God calls some men and women to remain unmarried. As Paul says: “that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord” (v. 35). Note that Jesus Christ Himself taught celibacy in obedience to God's call:

Mat 19:12 “For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Now note Paul's exact words: “It is good [wholesome, pure] for a man not to marry.” The Greek more accurately says that it is good for a man “not to touch, handle or cling” to a woman. This deals with all touching and not just celibacy. It deals with all physical relationships, literally men and women who are not married. It means that single men and women are not to go too far on dates or to cohabit with each other. There is to be no immoral sin between the singles of God's church.

Mat 5:28 *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

1 Cor 7:1 *Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.*

1 Th 4:3 *It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.*

Rev 14:4 *These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb.*

II. **1 Corinthians 07:02** *Reasons for Marriage*

There is a condition necessitating marriage. Note three points.

1. This verse is a command; it is to be the rule of the church.
2. *Every man and every woman is to be married.* “Each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.” The reason is clearly stated: to avoid sexual immorality. Sex is the gift of God; it is the way God has made us. It is the way God has ordained for a man and woman...
 - to propagate and carry on the human race.
 - to grow in intimacy, building a solid foundation for the family, society and human survival.

Therefore, every believer is commanded to marry. There are only two exceptions to the rule, both of which are given in the previous verse (1 Cor. 7:1).

3. This teaching is not a low view of marriage; it is extremely wise advice. Note two points.
 - a. Paul is not discussing the Scriptural teaching on marriage. His views and doctrine on marriage are the highest teachings imaginable (see Eph. 5:22-33).

In this particular passage Paul is dealing with specific problems of temptation and sexual immorality, and how to handle the temptation in a most vile and immoral society: Is celibacy or marriage the better answer?

- b. It is extremely wise for every man and woman to marry unless God has given them control over sexual desire. In a world of where sex is worshipped and flaunted, it is *almost* impossible to remain pure apart from God’s presence and power in life — unless the person is married and has a good, wholesome, and giving marriage.

Gen 2:24 *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

Jer 29:6 *Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.*

Prov 18:22 *He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord.*

1 Tim 3:12 *A deacon [lay believer] must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

1 Tim 5:14 *So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.*

Heb 13:4 *Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

III. 1 Corinthians 07:03 Mutual Duties within Marriage

There are mutual duties within marriage. Note two significant points.

1. The words “marital duty” (ten opheilen) mean the debt; to render what is due. The husband and wife owe some things to the other.

⇒ Both have rights; each can expect to receive some things from the other.

⇒ Both have the responsibility to pay to the other exactly what is due.

2. The word “fulfil” is continuous action. The rights and duties of each are to be continually fulfilled. (Note: this verse is usually interpreted to refer only to sexual rights and duties within marriage. However, it is certainly applicable to all the rights and duties of husband and wife. The lesson is the same.)

Thought 1. Some of the Scriptures that speak to the duties of husbands are these:

Mark 10:7 *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.”*

1 Cor 7:11 *But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

2 Cor 12:14 *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.*

Eph 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Eph 6:4 *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

1 Tim 3:2 *Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.*

1 Pet 3:7 *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

1 Tim 3:4 *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*

Deu 6:7 *Impress them on your children. Talk about them [the Holy Scriptures] when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

Deu 24:5 *If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.*

Prov 5:18 *May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.*

Prov 22:6 *Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

Eccl 9:9 *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun — all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labour under the sun.*

Thought 2. Some of the Scriptures that speak to the duties of wives are these:

1 Cor 7:10-11 *To the married I give this command: A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

Eph 5:22 *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. (cp. Col 3:18)*

1 Tim 3:11 *In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

2 Tim 1:5 *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

Titus 2:4 *Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children.*

1 Pet 3:1 *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives.*

IV. 1 Corinthians 07:04–06 Mutual Ownership in Marriage

There is to be mutual ownership of each other's body in marriage. Note the clarity and forcefulness of this verse. The reason is obvious throughout society. Far too many marriages have dissatisfying sexual relationships; therefore, seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere has become so common that it has become an acceptable practice in some circles and societies.

As stated, God is clear and forceful in His instructions. And what He has to say in these few verses could go a long way in solving many of the problems existing in so many marriages.

1. Both the husband and wife have equal rights over the other's body. Neither spouse has full authority over their body — not in God's eyes. The body of each belongs to the other; each has obligations to the other. That is part of the marriage union wrought by God. (See *Cleave, Unite*, Mt. 19:5.)
2. Both the husband and wife belong to each other so fully that to withhold is an act of *fraud*, of cheating the other of what is due. Each owes his or her body to the other.
3. Both the husband and wife must consent to abstain — only for fasting and prayer. This is the only exception given by Scripture. So long as health allows, the married couple is to cleave together, fulfilling God's purpose of growing more and more into the intimate family structure that is so desperately needed...
 - by society
 - by children
 - by the church
 - by government

However, note that a husband and wife must not stay apart for too long a period because of temptation. This is crucial to note, for Satan is strong in his temptations, especially in a sex crazed society. Yet, this is a common mistake made in many marriages.

Thought 1. Any thinking and honest person knows that the closer the union and preciousness between the husband and wife, the stronger the love and loyalty and security of the family and its society and church and government. The crying need today is for husband and wives to straighten out their marriages by surrendering their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ and by living as He said to live. Only His presence and power can straighten out a marriage.

Note the supreme importance of prayer in the life of a family. It is the only exception accepted by God for a married couple to stay apart.

Eph 5:28 *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

Eph 5:33 *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

Col 3:19 *Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*

Heb 13:4 *Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

Gen 2:18 *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Gen 24:67 *Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

Song 8:7 *Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.*

MATHEW 19:05 UNITE, CLEAVE (KOLLAO, PROSKOLLAO)

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”? **Mathew 19:05**

To join fast together; to glue together; to cement together; to be joined in the closest union possible: to be bound together; to be so totally united together that two become one. Therefore, to unite means a spiritual union. It is a union higher and stronger than the union of parent and child. It is a union that means more than living together, more than having sex and bearing offspring. Animals do this. It is a union that can be wrought by God alone (v. 11). It is a spiritual union that places man above the physical plane of animals. It is a spiritual fullness, a spiritual sharing of life together: a dedication, a consecration, a completeness, a satisfaction that makes a person the exclusive possession of God and of the spouse. As said, such a uniting or spiritual union is wrought by God alone. Both husband and wife must be willing and submissive for God to bring about such a union in their lives. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21).

There are three unions within a true marriage, that is, a marriage that *really unites* and is really *joined together* by God (Mt. 19:6).

1. There is the physical union: the sharing of each other’s body (1 Cor. 7:2-5). But note: physical sharing cannot reach its ultimate fullness unless it is experienced while conscious of God’s warm and tender mercies (Eph. 5:25-33).
2. There is the mental union: the sharing of each other’s life and dreams and hopes and the working together to realize those dreams and hopes. It is important to note that this union still deals only with the physical and material world.
3. There is the spiritual union: the sharing and melting and moulding of each other’s spirit (Eph. 5:25-33). This can be wrought only by God. Therefore, there has to be a sharing together with God for there to be a *nourishing* and *nurturing* of the spirit.

Now here is the point: the greatest thing in the world is to know God personally and to be perfectly assured that we shall live now and eternally — to have life abundant with all the love, significance, meaning, and purpose humanly possible. But a man and a woman cannot experience abundant life of and by themselves. They can only nurture the mind and mesh themselves together mentally and physically. To be meshed together spiritually, the couple must share God and His saving grace together. When a couple shares God together day by day, God works supernaturally within their spirits, *melting* their beings and *moulding* them

into what He calls *one flesh*. They actually become as *one person*. This is what is meant by “What God has joined together.” The Greek word for *joined together* (sunzeugen) actually means to *yoke together*. It is God’s yoking, God’s joining, God’s binding the couple together into a spiritual union that causes them to become one person.

A couple who is spiritually united does two very practical things.

1. The couple “submits themselves to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). They submit, yield, surrender, sacrifice, give themselves up to the other as they live day by day in the fear (trust) of God. Day by day, they deliberately set out to nourish and cherish the other, even as the Lord feeds and cares for the church (Eph. 5:29). They work to become part of each other — so deliberately that they seek to become part of each other’s body, each other’s flesh, each other’s bones (Eph. 5:30). They seek to be joined “as one flesh,” no matter the surrender and sacrifice required. The meshing together is done by God. God takes such deliberate purpose and behaviour, such a melting of one’s being, and moulds it into the flesh of the other — so much so the two actually become as one, not only physically and mentally but spiritually as well.
2. The couple shares the presence of God and His saving grace together. As a result, God gives them a spiritual assurance and strength which they share together throughout life. They share the knowledge and confidence...
 - that God shall care for and look after them now and forever.
 - that God shall carry them through the devastating trials of life that confront every human being every so often.
 - that God shall bless them with all that is necessary as they walk through life together.
 - that God shall give them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ — forever and ever.

Again, the point is this: God takes such deliberate sharing of spiritual things and melts and moulds the man and woman into *one flesh* spiritually — so much so that they actually become one. A man and a woman being spiritually united by God as one person is what being united means. Being united to one another in God’s Spirit is true marriage — the glorious gift of God. □

V. 1 Corinthians 07:07 Gifts of Marriage and Celibacy

There is God’s gift of marriage and God’s gift of being single. God is the One who should determine if a believer should marry or stay single. Paul had remained single because of God’s gift, and in light of the present crisis (perhaps persecution lay over the

horizon), he wished every person could be as he was, single. However, every man must do as God gifts him.

1 Cor 7:1-2 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

1 Cor 7:8-9 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Cor 7:26-28 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

1 Tim 4:1-3 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

Rev 14:4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. ■