

1 Corinthians 7:1-24 Holy Bodies, Married or Not. Falls Ch. AM 4/7/2024

Christians have a different view than the people in the world regarding marriage, singleness, calling in life, unity, purity, and how to use our bodies. The book of 1 Corinthians is about these things.

Beginning in chapter 7, when Christians in Corinth became contaminated with the world's thinking, they developed confusion about marriage, singleness, and our bodies. So, this passage addresses unity, purity, and clarity.

Already in the previous chapter, Paul six times asked "Do you not know that...?" In other words, "Were they confused about a basic truth?"

Since Jesus bought our bodies with the price of His death on the cross, we must accept God's calling for our bodies.

1. God's gospel calling for your body - marriage. (v.1-7, 10-11)

In the culture of the city of Corinth, marriage was under attack.

Two errors in the world were influencing Christians. What pleasure was allowed for Christians? Everything or nothing?

Error 1) everything was allowed. We could call this for their bodies. "Liberty for" was the error view that their bodies, and all the activities of their bodies were morally neutral. They wrongly believed that there was no right or wrong, leaving them free to do with their bodies whatever they wanted.

Error 2) nothing was allowed. We could call this for their bodies. "A law against" was the other error view in the church in Corinth. They forbid all Christians, even married Christians, from physical intimacy altogether, and they concluded that single life is more holy than married life.

In verse 1, the church in Corinth had written to Paul to ask him to confirm or deny the truth of a statement. If Paul answered no, it would sound like error 1. If Paul answered yes, it would sound like error 2, nothing was allowed. Here is their statement, which Paul quoted in verse 1, "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" So, the teaching in our passage today was Paul answering their question. Verse 1 was not a truth statement by Paul. Rather, verse 1 was a slogan from those who misunderstood Christianity regarding our bodies.

Paul in verse 2 denied their statement from verse 1. Paul denied that their statement in verse 1 was an overarching statement that always applied. No. Instead, Paul wrote the truth as over against both errors - the correct Christian practice was, that "*each man should have his own wife*" and that "*Each woman [should have] her own husband.*" Paul taught intimacy – not just to have a spouse legally, or in the home, but to have the spouse in the marriage bed.

Paul continued here in 1 Corinthians 7, by writing verses 3, 4 and 5 about the relating of husbands and wives. These verses refuted the people who said there was a law against all intimacy - or that even married people should abstain. Paul showed that their intimacy was more than just productive – that meant, more than

just the process of bringing children into the world. No, Paul showed here that intimacy between a husband and his wife is a good thing, all by itself.

Paul showed that it was wrong for the law people (the legalists) to over-react to the appalling Corinthian immorality by declaring not good what God had declared good - as a holy part of a holy marriage. When Paul considered the consequences of their wrong thinking, Paul could predict the damage. To get married to a Christian and to live with a Christian person that they love, and to experience daily close proximity within a loving Christ-like relationship, to develop an atmosphere of giving kindness and receiving kindness and care and cherishing, but then never to express that marital love in this physical way with their bodies, would be to sentence those two spouses to a) constant activity that stirred up desire b) constant denying of that desire, and c) living with a person who lovingly stirs up their desire for always yes and a rule that says always no, the desire must remain unfulfilled. Paul showed how that scenario was contributing to the immorality problem of the church in Corinth, rather than solving it.

The God-created intimacy within the married life was good, was designed to be good, and must be left to continue as it is supposed to be.

In verse 5, there is a special time for a Christian couple to abstain, when both agree for the purpose of prayer, with an ending point decided.

I'll come back to verses 6-9, so right now let's look at verses 10-11, where Paul observed that permanent withholding themselves within a marriage was problematic. It could lead to separations, desertions and divorces. The failure to cooperate in the conjugal act becomes worse when the person claims to be doing the right thing. Paul corrected that error. What if a person receiving the correction of this letter had already gotten married, thinking that he or she could remain celibate in that marriage in the church? The letter arrived and now it was clear that celibacy in marriage was not allowed. What to do? Paul says in verse 10, that they should stay together. But if they cannot, then remain unmarried and be celibate as a single person instead.

Paul corrected both errors by teaching that marriage is supported in the Bible. From the beginning to the end of the Old Testament, marriage was supported. In Genesis 2:18, God said it is not good for a man to be alone. In Malachi 2:14-16, the Lord denounced divorce. In addition, Paul wrote Ephesians chapter 5, which is a beautiful description of Christ being married to His Bride the church as a model for human marriages. Paul taught his young student Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:3, to be on guard against those who attack marriage by forbidding it.

In this passage about holy bodies in a holy marriage, Paul showed the necessity of balance and reasonableness. Christian husband and Christian wife living in sin city were to follow The Holy Spirit. They were to show selfless love and holy commitment to God, on assignment in the marriage where God has

placed them. Marriage and intimacy were designed by God.

2. God's gospel calling for your body - singleness. (v.6-9)

Verse 6 – Paul did not command singleness. However, in verse 7, Paul expressed his wish that all were as himself – single! Yes, Paul was single. Paul used to be married, which was how in Acts 26:10, he could become part of the Sanhedrin ruling council. While it was possible that his wife left Paul after Paul's Christian conversion, it was more likely that she died, making Paul a widower. In either case, Paul had become single again, and wished all were as himself. Why? In verse 7, Paul saw that there were different giftings. One gifting of being married, and another gifting of being single. And some people experience a change in God's gifting, like Paul, who earlier had the gifting of being married, but now, since his wife was gone, now had God's gifting of being single. In verse 8, Paul now repeated that he had a gifting from God of being celibate now. In verse 9, Paul responded to an error regarding singleness. Many were teaching it was best for everyone to be celibate, but then some people were distracted with passion, and in a place like Corinth, they were falling victim to temptations. If they had God's gifting of celibacy like Paul did, it would have worked just fine for them, even in sin city.

The temptation in Corinth was a problem. If a single person found that being single was a burden and to live a holy life was a struggle there, it would be better to marry. This was not referring to some slight and occasional sensations, but rather a person who had become so distracted and aflame that they could barely resist temptations, and were in constant danger of sinning. In those cases, notice that Paul did not give them permission to marry, but rather a command to marry! Verse 9, "*They should marry.*"

Paul taught that singleness is good, and that we should not think less of someone who stays single as a Christian. On the flip side, we also do not hold up singles as more holy. That is the same error of belief that somehow intimacy is dirty. A man who does not marry, or a woman who does not marry, should have the acceptance of every Christian in the church. We don't assume there is something wrong with single people; we don't pressure singles to get married.

3. God's gospel calling for your whole lifetime – with changes. In redemption, your body tracks along the unique avenue that the Lord has sovereignly designed for you! (v.12-24)

God calls people to remain in the condition that they were in, when God called them to faith and conversion to Christianity.

Why? Because the gospel coming to Corinth was not designed to break up families or end marriages. The pastor-missionary wrote here to prevent unnecessary disruption of social ties and relationships. The gospel brings blessings, unity, and peace.

Here in verse 12, Paul wrote (I, not the Lord), and back in verse 10 Paul wrote the opposite phrase (not I, but the Lord). What were these phrases all about? Paul was always in agreement with the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Jesus gave principles, Jesus did not speak to every possible case. For example, Jesus did not speak to the question, “When two unbelievers married, and then one spouse converted to Christianity, while the other spouse did not, what is to be done?” The answer to that case came from Paul, who was applying the Lord’s teachings to this special set of circumstances: if the unbelieving spouse was willing to live with the Christian, then the Christian should stay in that marriage, even though it was now a believer married to an unbeliever.

It followed then, in verse 14, that the next issue would be the children of such marriages. Were the children of such marriages considered to be covenant children? Yes. The children were considered the children of a believer. Because of the new condition of faith in the heart of one spouse, now God was in the household, so the word “holy” was used to apply to the children, and to the household, and consequently, even to the unbelieving spouse! The children were holy not in automatic salvation. The children were holy in the covenant sense of being recipients of God’s covenant care through the great blessing of having a believing parent in their home! You can imagine the next question – won’t the unbelieving parent in the home taint the children, and even taint the believing spouse? No, the opposite is the case! In some sense that unbelieving partner has a benefit of being involved in holy matrimony with a holy believer. That marriage has an atmosphere of holy as opposed to an atmosphere of unclean. The growing godliness of the newly believing spouse does more to clean up the marriage than the ungodliness of the unbelieving spouse does to mess up the marriage.

In verse 15, even though all of this is true, if the unbelieving partner wants to leave, let him or her leave. Sometimes that desire to leave was shown by the unbelieving spouse committing adultery. In such a case, God had not called a believer to be enslaved to a spouse who violated the marriage. Verse 16 confirmed that salvation was not yet granted by God to the unbelieving spouse who decided to remain, but it yet could be granted! The believing spouse was expected to stay, if possible, that is, if peace can be maintained. We see that marriage was never for the purpose of the evangelizing of the spouse. A believing spouse would shine the light, but a goal of continuing to attempt to win the soul of that spouse did not override the purpose of having peace in that home. Let the unbeliever have what the unbeliever desires. The unbelieving spouse may stay or may leave.

In verse 17, Paul broadened out beyond mixed marriages to talk about the Christian life more generally. Here Paul gave wisdom for the Christian’s whole situation in earthly life. In His sovereignty, God has called us each person to have the body we have, the marital status we have, the residence that we have, and the

job schooling or retirement that we have. God assigned us! We each have a body on assignment. The lesson of Paul is clear. BE CONTENT. God has us right where He wants us.

In verse 18, Paul gave examples for the church in Corinth – spiritual actions such as circumcision, were not now required to be done, and if previously done, didn't need to be reversed. Jews and Gentiles needed to accept each other, and take their identity from Christ. Why? In verse 19, Paul taught that a spiritual walk was not about gaining or avoiding circumcision, but rather about obeying God with our hearts and our actions.

In verse 20, Paul repeated what he wrote in verse 17 – each one should remain. Stay put. BE CONTENT. In our homes, schools, churches, and work, fulfilling the roles and jobs that God gave us to do, we are to be holy and content.

In verse 21 –they were delivered from slavery to sin, slavery to the law, slavery to the world, slavery to the devil, slavery to death. They had gained their spiritual freedom, which was more important than gaining their physical freedom.

In verse 22, Paul expounded on slavery and freedom. In the Lord, they were free, even though they remained enslaved to an earthly master. While they remained slaves in Corinth, they were royal children of the King in the Kingdom of God.

In verse 23, they were bought with a price. All of society's divisions and distinctions were removed in the unity and love of the body of Christ.

In verse 24 Paul repeated the principle a third time, let him remain where God has called – BE CONTENT. An essential part of their growth as Christians was to learn to be satisfied with their current station in life, and to realize that God had ordained these very circumstances for their own well-being.

Conclusion:

1. Trust that your situation is God's wise assignment for you to be holy where you are. God has been orchestrating all of our lives from day one. The masterpiece of God's work is yet to be revealed. SI - A man became envious of his friends because they had larger and more luxurious homes. So he listed his house with a real estate firm, planning to sell it and to purchase a more impressive home. Shortly afterward, as he was looking on the website, he saw a new ad for a house that seemed just right, but no pictures were posted yet. He promptly called the realtor and said, "A new house described on your website is exactly what I'm looking for. I would like to go through it as soon as possible!" The agent asked him several questions about it and then replied, "But sir, you are sitting in that house! That's your house that we're listing for you!" Your home, your marital status, your family, your body, and your career are right where God wants you to be. Trust Him and be holy where you are.

2. Be content. This is the cure for the "if only" syndrome. If only my body

were different. If only my finances were different. If only I had a husband or wife. If only I did not have this husband or this wife. If only I had children or grandchildren. If only I had a different job. If only I had gone to a different school, majored in something else, and went in a different direction with my career. If only my medical status were different...or the medical status of my loved one.

SI - An ancient Persian farmer owned a large farm with orchards, fields, and gardens... a contented man. Then one day a visitor came and told the farmer about diamonds and how much more wealthy he could be if he left farming and instead bought a diamond mine. The farmer in Persia went to bed that night suddenly discontented. Craving diamonds, he sold his farm to search for diamonds. He traveled the world over, finally becoming so poor and defeated that he died. Back at his old farm in Persia, a new farmer led his camel into the garden to drink. As the new farmer watched his camel put its nose into the water, he saw a flash of light from the sands at the bottom of the stream. The new farmer pulled out a stone that reflected all the hues of the rainbow. The man had discovered a diamond mine. Had the old farmer remained contented at home and dug in his own garden, he would have also had many diamonds. The “if only” syndrome is deadly. Christ gives us contentment. Be content.

1 Timothy 6:6, “*godliness with contentment is great gain...*”