

## 10-12-14 – Just the Way You Are

### 1 Cor. 7

*A wife was sitting at the breakfast table and asked her husband, "What if something happened to me and I died first? Would you marry again?" He thought for a while then responded, "Yes, I probably would." Then she asked, "Well, would you bring your new wife to live in this house and have her sleep in our bed?" "Well, I hadn't thought about it, but I probably would," he said. She probed further, "Would you let her use my golf clubs?" To which he replied, "No way – She's left handed!"*

(Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes, Charles R Swindoll).

We are moving through the book of 1 Corinthians together. Today we will be looking at chapter 7. This is the popular chapter on marriage, which contains most of his teachings on the subject. I hope we will see some new perspectives this chapter. Since it is so popular, we have some presuppositions we need to see and address. I mean we all have in our heads past teachings and personal interpretations of this section of Scripture that we may need to deal with or possibly put aside in order to see what Paul actually intended in this passage.

Let's look at our text for today...

### **Instruction on Marriage**

*7 Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations.<sup>2</sup> But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.*

*<sup>3</sup> The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs.*

*<sup>4</sup> The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.*

*<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. <sup>6</sup> I say this as a concession, not as a command. <sup>7</sup> But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.*

*<sup>8</sup> So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust.*

*<sup>10</sup> But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. <sup>11</sup> But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.*

OK – So, when I started this series off, I mentioned that 1 Corinthians was possibly a two-part letter. Some people came from Chloe’s house to visit Paul to tell him about the outrageous things that were taking place in the church he founded in Corinth. Paul addressed those issues in chapters 1-6. Then Paul received a letter from Corinth asking him several questions on behavior and actions that he addresses in chapters 7-16. This letter may have taken a long time to put together and send to them, or it may represent two letters that were later joined together as one. In any event, there are two distinct sections to our copy of this powerful letter.

Pastor Jerry concluded the first part of this letter last week with chapter 6. He has been speaking for two weeks on sexual immorality. This must have been a prevalent issue for the Corinthians. As we have seen, they had some major cultural issues to deal with in the church. This city was steeped in sexual immorality, and so much time and energy had to be used by Paul to bring this into submission to God.

I don’t think so much has changed over all these years. We are just as subject to the sexual immorality around us as they were. The only difference is that you would think we should know better, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. The problem then and now is not that this is a problem in the world with unbelievers, but that this has crept into the church with believers too. So, Paul has addressed this issue head on, as we have heard for the last two weeks.

Due to the way Paul has addressed this issue so strongly in the first part of this letter, the Corinthians must have gone to the opposite extreme back there. Maybe he told this contingent from Chloe’s house some answers to their dilemmas before he wrote this letter to correct them. They may have returned and exaggerated his outrage or just explained Paul’s opinion about these things.

The Corinthian church started to take matters into their own hands and impose regulations upon themselves to avoid the sin of sexual immorality even within the confines of marriage.

If sexual immorality was such a big deal in the Christian life, then maybe they should just take sex out of the equation altogether. That would surely get them back on the right path. So they were talking about divorce and/or abstaining from sexual relations even within marriage. Hence their first question to Paul... What about marriage? It is better for a man not to have relations with a woman! This was their statement to Paul in their letter. So, this was the first answer Paul thought he should address since it effected the foundational unit of marriage.

Paul then had to address this question regarding marriage and its proper place in the Christian life. People in general, and partners in marriage have personal needs.

*A lady wanted to marry four different men in her lifetime. She said each one would help her with the four things she needed most. First, she wanted to marry a banker. Second, a movie star. Next, a clergyman. And finally, a funeral director. When asked, “Why?” She answered... “One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go!” 😊* (Charles R. Swindoll, Growing Deep in the Christian Life).

Paul addresses the questions asked of him in this letter to him by using the phrase, “Now About.” (peri de, Gr.) – “now concerning.” First up is Marriage...

So, now concerning marriage... The Corinthians went overboard thinking they should become celibate, or get divorced, if married, in order not to sin again this new God they wanted to know. So let’s look at our text...

Paul said, “Now concerning the questions about which you wrote...”

There is a distinct change in his letter starting in Chapter 7. He is now going to address some questions that were sent to him in a letter rather than that visit from Chloe’s house.

The expression, “now concerning,” marks Paul’s separation of the questions he is answering from the letter from the Corinthian church. We will see this several times in the next chapters.

“It is good for a man not to marry.” Or “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” Or as the KJV says it, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” The point is this... It all boils down to - is this a statement or a question? It appears Paul is addressing their question by quoting their statement to him. It is not Paul initiating this statement as if supporting people not to marry or have relations with their marriage partner.

We have to realize their situation in Corinth at the time of the writing. The Corinthians were having a dilemma about marriage and sexual relations. Some started claiming they should not be married in order to please the Lord, while others were claiming they could be married and still please the Lord. They needed an answer, since some were going to divorce their wives or husbands in the name of Christianity, in order to please God.

So, Paul counsels the church in Corinth very wisely (of course). He tells them that marriage is good and sexual relations in marriage is good. Celibacy is good if you’re called to that by God, but abstinence from sexual relations within marriage is not good and is not pleasing to God. The exception is if the couple mutually agree to abstain from sexual relations in order to pray and fast about a particular situation and for a limited period of time and then get back to normal.

In any event, people should not be reacting to what others tell them they should or should not be doing. They must have the mutual agreement in themselves as prompted by God - period. Many people then and now do what they think they should do because the church or people tell them what they should do. They are not compelled by God but by other people. This is wrong!

So sex is good and enjoyable, and should be a mutual and enjoyable part of marriage.

And all the men said, AMEN!

In the church, many married people were asking, “Should I get divorced?” All the unmarried people were asking, “Should I get married?” Paul had to address this with the wisdom of God. He did.

We have to understand too that Paul had made many converts to Christianity while he preached there for a year and a half, but then he left. They came into the church with their backgrounds and baggage in this and other areas. Things started on their own. Brand new believers were not so much the issue, since they were more concerned about the immediate things of coming to Christ. However, as they began to grow over time, the marriage situation came to the front of things. In the beginning the spouses may have thought this was a new passing fad soon to die, but when they continued to move closer to the Lord, things began to heat up.

I can remember when I first came to Christ. I didn't have a radical conversion, but a gradual one. I was still doing some seriously worldly things and dabbling in the Word and the things of God. My wife just thought this was another short-lived fad, and then I would be back to normal. I mean, reading the Bible and praying? Really? And still doing bad stuff at the same time? Are you kidding me? It wasn't a good witness to her, but I didn't know any better. When she saw it wasn't going away too soon, she began to rebel. I had considered this passage thinking if this was my mixed marriage situation that Paul describes here. After all Paul gave me a loop-hole in this section of this chapter, but Corinne didn't was out of our marriage. She just thought I was being foolish and allowing others to influence me. Eventually, God called her name too, and that changed everything. 😊

Eugene Peterson writes this comment: ***“We’re in the habit of thinking our married status, our vocational status, and our economic status make us who we are. They don’t. They’re important, but they don’t give us our identity. None of these things is unimportant, but none of them is of central importance. They are the raw materials that God takes to shape HIS life in us.”***

Paul's response to their question was that marriage was instituted by God and is sacred, as is having sexual relations with one's spouse. Do not deny these privileges from one another. He touches on a couple of areas. If you are married, do not separate. Paul tells them that they could serve God easier and better if they were not married, but that is not to say they should separate in order to serve God. Especially because of the prominence of sexual immorality in this region and in their culture, they should not deprive each other of natural and good sexual relations. Celibacy cannot be imposed on a person who is not called by God to be celibate. They were entertaining ideas imposed upon them by others and not a calling by God, so they questioned.

Then he addresses those who are not married in one blanket statement. If you are single and can stay that way, it would be great in your service to God. However, this is not a command. Paul is clear when he is speaking to the gray areas that his answers are his opinion and wise counsel, but not the command of God. If they cannot control their sexual urges, then they should marry. God has not called them to a life of celibacy. However, Paul's desire is that people would be sold out to the Lord above anything else including sex and marriage – Again, this is not for everyone.

<sup>7</sup> ***But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.***

When he deals with the married couples seeking his advice, he then clearly states what is commanded by God...

***<sup>10</sup> But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. <sup>11</sup> But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.***

God never condones divorce. If divorced, one should remain single unless they are reunited with their original spouse or the spouse dies.

Paul then goes on to deal with the question of mixed marriages – a Christian married to a non-Christian. He addresses both sides, but basically, he says, if an unbelieving husband or wife is willing to stick with the marriage, then the Christian must honor that and stay married with all privileges. However, if the unbelieving spouse decides to book out, then let them go without obligation. Again this is Paul's wise advice and not the Lord's command on this gray area.

***“Marriage is not so much finding the right person as it is being the right person.”***

Charles W. Shedd, *Letters to Karen*

Paul then brings home his main point... God wants you to serve Him just the way you are. There's no need to change your situation, in fact, you are right where God designed you to be right now.

***v. 17 – “And don't be wishing you were someplace else or with someone else. Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there. God, not your marital status, defines your life. Don't think I'm being harder on you than on the others. I give this same counsel in all the churches.”*** The Message

Paul then seems to shift gears in v. 18 a bit. He starts talking about being Jewish vs. Gentile and being circumcised vs. being uncircumcised and being a slave vs. being free. It seems out of place in a chapter seemingly about marriage. While marriage is a very important part of this teaching by Paul and dominates the chapter, his real bottom line message to answer their questions is we should remain just the way we are when God called us to himself. I don't mean there shouldn't be some moral and ethical changes in our lives, but that we need not change our marital status, our economic status, or our vocational status to try to serve God. He can use us right where we are and we should serve him just the way we are.

***v. 20-22 – “Stay the way you were when God called your name. Were you a slave? Slavery is no roadblock to obeying and believing. I don't mean you're stuck and can't leave. If you have a chance at freedom, go ahead and take it. I'm simply trying to point out that under your new Master you're going to experience a marvelous freedom you would never have dreamed of. On the other hand, if you were free when Christ called you, you'll experience a delightful 'enslavement to God' you would never have dreamed of.”*** The Message

Then Paul gets back on the marriage track and addresses the second major question from the church in Corinth.... Should virgins marry?

Paul offers his opinion on this topic since it is not explicitly addressed by a command by God or Jesus. Paul again suggests that it would be better if they could remain single and serve the Lord. Of course he's talking about Christian virgins here and not just virgins in general. That is the backdrop of all his answers. He is talking to the church, Christians, believers in these situations of life. They are dealing with real questions, and Paul is giving them real answers.

Here's Paul's bottom line on this topic...

***"I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master. Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse, leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God. I'm trying to be helpful and make it as easy as possible for you, not make things harder. All I want is for you to be able to develop a way of life in which you can spend plenty of time together with the Master without a lot of distractions."*** - The Message

So, what's the conclusion to all this? First, let's deal with marriage..

Matthew Henry said this...

***"A woman was not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side, to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved."***

Husbands, wives – love your spouse and yield to one another.

Whatever condition you were in when God called you to Himself, be thankful and know He is not demanding you to change your situation, only your approach to life and attitude. Serve the Lord with all you heart – Just the way you are.

Billy Joel had a song years ago that said partly:

Don't go changing to try and please me. You shouldn't have to work so hard. You'll always have my unspoken passion. I'll love you just the way you are.

AMEN!