

“Concerning the Things Whereof Ye Wrote unto Me”

Concerning Marriage

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Chapter seven, although a continuation, in part, to the previous two chapters in the issue of sexual immorality, begins a series of answers to specific questions that Paul was asked in a letter that was written and sent to him from the church in Corinth.

With this chapter commences a new section of the Epistle; the topics, and perhaps their order, suggested by a letter of formal inquiry brought from Corinth: vii. Marriage; viii. Things offered to Idols; ix. Support of Ministry; x. Lord’s Supper and Love-feast; xi. Women in Public Services, Lord’s Supper; [x., xi. Public Worship, sundry topics connected with;] xii. Spiritual Gifts; (xiii. parenthetic, “Charity”;) xiv. Spiritual Gifts resumed; xv. The Resurrection. (Preacher’s Homiletical Commentary)

As will be seen, the first question he answers (whether they were given in this order in the original letter we cannot be certain) is that regarding marriage and how (initially anyways) it applies to the greater context of the previous two chapters in relation to sexual immorality. It seems that he leads up to this answer with giving some very important foundational principles first.

The first question could be asked from the perspective of a single person – “Is single life wrong?” The question was asked apparently from the other perspective – “Is being married wrong?” The answer to both questions is answered here –

and it is a simple and emphatic, "No."

"Their impurity in sexual matters was rampant, and evidently the question had arisen among these Christian people as to whether, in view of these evil condition, it were not good to remain unmarried. That is the plain question, in the plain language of our own time, that they had written and asked. In view of all these conditions, would it not be safer to remain unmarried?" (G. Campbell Morgan)

With the attack on marriage that is prevalent today, and with the seeming complete disregard for the sanctity of the marriage bed, Paul answers the question regarding marriage verses being single with some fairly clear directives.

One thing to remember as we study this chapter is that this is not the ultimate and final word on marriage (Eph. 5 gives more detail on marriage). This is given as an answer in response to a specific question in a specific place at a specific time. Yes, there are clear principles to see here that will help us understand the biblical teaching on marriage, but we need to remember that this is not the final word, nor an all-encompassing teaching. This text needs to be taught in accordance with other passages on marriage (Jesus's teaching on marriage in Matthew, Paul's teaching in Ephesians, etc.). What is found here is some basic principles to follow.

Dr. Kenneth Chafin in his commentary on 1 Corinthians found in *The Preacher's Commentary*, writes this on this chapter: We need to remember some things that are very elemental in all interpretation of the Scripture passages. First, Paul was not writing a general treatise on marriage. He was answering very specific questions which had been asked of him.

Second, we must understand his answers in terms of some of the very twisted views that some of his readers had about marriage. Third, we have to isolate from the whole situation those aspects which were obviously local and temporary. Fourth, all that he said to them must be interpreted in the light of the feelings that he had about the imminent return of Christ to the earth and the inevitability of persecution in the days ahead. Finally, we need to realize that it was not possible for Paul to respond to their questions except in the light of his own personal experience with marriage. All of the above needs to be kept in mind, or we will find ourselves using this passage as "proof-text" for something that does not seem in tune with the rest of Scripture.

I. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL MARRIAGE – VS. 1-2 (SPECIFICALLY, VERSE TWO)

A. The simple, basic premise established in these verses is that established at the very beginning of creation – one man, one woman for life (seen in verse two).

Genesis 2:24

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

B. A second basic principle established here (and further developed in the next point) is that the only time an intimate relationship should take place is within marriage. That is the only time allowed by God as established in Scripture. That means any sexual relationship outside of marriage goes against Scripture.

C. Verse one is a verse that often is taken out of the context for which it is meant and used in a much wider sense than intended – “it is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

1. Let me say at the outset here, this has nothing to do with shaking hands or hugging a lady as a means of greeting or kindness. There is other evidence in Scripture to show that is not what is meant here. For instance, 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; and 1 Thess. 5:26 all say, “Greet one another with an holy kiss” (or some variation thereof). 1 Peter 5:14 says, “Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity.”
2. The words “it is” are in italics in some older English versions and they are that because there is no word in the Greek to correspond to them. They were added for clarity by the translators. The literal translation simply states “good for a man...” – it’s an adjective describing the principle.
3. The word for “good” (καλός) is one that means “expedient generally: more for a man’s best interests under present circumstances” (Henry Alford quoting Jerome). The present circumstances of Corinth, and those within the church, was one of rampant sexual immorality (fornication). Paul, in answer to the question that had been posed to him on how to deal with this issue was that it was best for them at that time to abstain from

anything that would lead to fornication.

Dr. Wuest interprets it as this: "It is perfectly proper, honorable, morally befitting..."

4. "For a man" – this is gender specific based on the context of the previous two chapters, but the principle behind this point is found later in the chapter to apply to women as well.
5. "Not to touch a woman"
 - a) The word for "touch" (ἀπτομαι) comes from one (ἀπτω) that means to handle an object so as to exert a modifying influence upon it, to fasten to (Zodhiates). Thayer and others have it as to set fire to, to kindle, to light. As used here, there is universal understanding of this as a euphemism for sexual relations outside of marriage (as the context would dictate).

A term of modesty to express any contact with sexual purpose or feeling (Daniel Whedon).

Genesis 20:4

⁴ But Abimelech had not **come near** her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

Genesis 20:6

⁶ And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not **to touch** her.

- b) Some teach this whole passage as it's

better to NOT marry than to marry – to remain celibate. That is not what is taught, nor is that even Scriptural. The only time that is better is if God has given that “gift,” as it is called later in the chapter, to someone for the purpose of greater service for the Lord in a capacity that being single would have greater influence. In fact, Paul teaches that to forbid someone from marrying is a “doctrine of devils.”

1 Timothy 4:1-3

¹ Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

² Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

³ Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

- c) The consensus by most translators (and this is seen in almost all modern versions of the Bible) is that Paul is teaching in this point, as well as throughout the chapter, that it’s best to not be married, or at the very least, not to have sexual relations with a woman. It may be true that he is saying that is “good” – maybe even better or best under certain circumstances – but he is in no way saying that is the answer for all. Here’s how some of the more egregious and dangerous translations of this verse in modern versions:

(1) *The BBE (Bible in Basic English)* – “It is good for a man to have nothing to do with a woman” – that is about as bad a

translation as could be done with this text;

(2) *The CEV (Contemporary English Version) is better but puts this as the question that was asked of Paul when it was the answer he was giving to the question – “Is it best for people not to marry?”*

(3) *The ISV (International Standard Version) has a similar question – “Is it advisable for a man not to marry?” Again, showing that they interpret it as the question rather than the answer, which the greater portion of the context clearly indicates it is.*

- d) The ESV (and others) seem to connect this properly, and use what is referred to by some as a Jewish euphemism (a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing) - Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”
- e) The Apostle is simply saying that there is nothing wrong with living in celibacy, with restricting oneself to service to the Lord without any hinderance by marital status. And, as will be seen, in the case of those in the church that were struggling with the world, this was actually the best course for them. But that is not true of all those that serve the Lord, and he makes that clear.

D. Verse two gives that basic principle of “one man, one woman for life” in marriage.

1. "Nevertheless" – often translated "but" – in this case, the word "nevertheless" carries a better understanding in this context. It is "strictly adversative, but more frequently denoting transition or conversion, and serving to introduce something else, whether opposed to what precedes or simply continuative or explanatory" (Zodhiates). What follows does not negate what was before (which the word "but" often points to); what follows in this case clarifies and adds to what is before. "Considering the principle of celibacy for some (vs. 1), it is not for everyone and for those that would be in danger of fornication (sexual immorality), it is better to be married" (my reading – not a quote of someone else).

The former course is expedient – would avoid much trouble 'in the flesh:' but as a general rule *it may not be*, seeing that for a *more weighty reason* the contrary course is to be recommended (Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary).

2. The words "to avoid" are in italics in the KJV to help facilitate the reading but the corresponding word in the Greek (διὰ) carries the idea of "because of" or "on account of." It is because of the lifestyle of wickedness that was being lived in Corinth that this issue even came up, and to avoid that lifestyle, it was better they married if they could not live pure and holy.
3. "Fornication" ("immoralities" in the NASB)

- this is plural in the Greek - "[T]he many instances of fornication current. The plural of an abstract noun implies repetition, or varieties of the occurrence" (Alford).

4. "Let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

a) This was given to refute the notion that some had (and some even today have) that, although the passage was written to married people, they were to refrain from having intimate relations (remain celibate) even though they were married.

b) There are two different Greek words used in this verse for the word "own"

(1) His own wife (ἑαυτοῦ) - properly belonging to himself in marriage (Heinrich Meyer)

(2) Her own husband (ἰδιος) - speaks to relationship rather than ownership.

(3) These two speak particularly to polygamy, showing it was not to be done, as well as having intimate relations outside of marriage.

(4) "The variation [in the terms] distinguishes the husband as head and principal" (The Expositor's Greek Testament - W. Robertson Nicol).

c) John Gill: Let every man that has a wife enjoy her, and make use of her, and let every woman that has an husband, receive him into her embraces; for these words are not to be understood of unmarried persons entering into a marriage state, for the

words suppose them in such a state, but of the proper use of the marriage bed; and teach us that marriage, and the use of it, are proper remedies against fornication; and that carnal copulation of a man with a woman ought only to be of husband and wife, or of persons in a married state; and that all other copulations are sinful; and that polygamy is unlawful; and that one man is to have but one wife, and to keep to her; and that one woman is to have but one husband, and to keep to him.

Conclusion: The basic principle of marriage – the principle upon which all else is built – is that found in Genesis, and carried throughout Scripture (although there are those that violated this principle and still were used of God) is one man, one woman, for life.

With the attack on marriage from so many directions, it is necessary we get back to the basics.

The evidence is convincing that the better our relationships are at home, the more effective we are in our careers. If we're having difficulty with a loved one, that difficulty will be translated into reduced performance on the job. In studying the millionaires in America (U.S. News and World Report), a picture of the "typical" millionaire is an individual who has worked eight to ten hours a day for thirty years and is still married to his or her high school or college sweetheart. A New York executive search firm, in a study of 1365 corporate vice presidents, discovered that 87% were still married to their one and only spouse and that 92% were raised in two-parent families. The evidence is overwhelming that the family is the strength and foundation of

society. Strengthen your family ties and you'll enhance your opportunity to succeed.

Source: Zig Ziglar in *Homemade*, March 1989

II. BASIC PRINCIPLES WITHIN MARRIAGE – VS. 3-5

III. BASIC PRINCIPLE OUTSIDE MARRIAGE – VS. 6-9