

Series: 1 Corinthians

Title: Happily Unmarried, Happily Married

Text: 1 Cor 7: 1-9

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1 Corinthians 7: 1: Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me:...

The saints at Corinth wrote to Paul asking questions about whether it is better to remain unmarried or to marry. They were seeking how they could best serve Christ. All of Paul's answers revolve around Christ. His answers all have one motive, Christ's honor.

So this is for God's saints. Saints are sinners too sinful to do one thing to save ourselves. Saints give all the glory to God the Father because he chose us in Christ before the world was made. Saints give all the glory to the Son of God because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, making us the righteousness of God. Saints give all the glory to God the Holy Spirit because he regenerated us to faith in Christ. Saints put no confidence in our flesh: our will and works—our confidence is Christ our Righteousness.

They asked these questions because only God's saints order their lives around Christ. Only God's saints seek to order our lives so as to cause the least amount of distraction from Christ and his gospel. Only God's saints seek how we can best honor Christ in our lives, avoiding sin. It is because, to God's saints, Christ is our Life.

When it comes to the question of remaining unmarried or of marrying, the motive for God's saints is to do whatever best honors the Lord Jesus Christ, while avoiding anything that would bring dishonor.

Our subject is "Happily Unmarried, Happily Married."

REMAIN UNMARRIED OR MARRY?

First, to the unmarried saints, the Spirit answers this question, "Should a child of God remain unmarried or should they marry." In verses 1 & 2 Paul writes, "*It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*" (1 Cor 7: 1-2)

If a believer has been given the gift from God—of self-control, temperance, continence—so that he or she is able to avoid fornication, it is good for him or her to remain unmarried, celibate. It is not a requirement that a believer remain unmarried. Only false teachers forbid marriage. (1 Ti 4: 3) Nor does remaining unmarried make one more holy. Only God makes a sinner holy, sanctified, pure in heart and spirit. And we do not become more holy than we are when Christ first begins dwelling in us.

So this word only applies to saints whom God has given the gift of temperance, along with a desire to serve Christ, who know they can serve Christ better without the weighty responsibilities of a spouse and a family. If this is the case you can remain happily unmarried.

NEVERTHELESS

Yet, if God has not given a person this gift—he says, "*Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*"

Look down to verse 6, Paul writes, “But I speak this by permission, *and* not of commandment.” (1 Cor 7: 6) Paul is speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. He was moved by the Spirit of God to write everything we read here. The Spirit of God moved him to write that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman”, along with everything else he says here. Yet this was not an express command spoken by Christ himself when he walked this earth. It was not a command which required a man to remain unmarried. But this is Christ’s word on this subject, being now delivered through the apostle Paul through the Spirit of God.

The Apostle Paul was given this gift of temperance from God, so he says, “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” (1 Cor 7: 7-9)

What does “contain” mean? When preparing themselves for games, athletes “contained.” It meant they abstained from unwholesome food, wine, and sexual indulgence. Paul said, “to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”

AVOID FORNICATION

Notice how much emphasis is put on avoiding fornication. Why? God instituted marriage because it pictures the union of Christ and his bride, the church.

Isaiah 54: 5: For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. 2: For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.

Christ saved his bride from the awful spiritual fornication which we committed against Christ our Husband when we sinned in Adam. We played the harlot against Christ our Husband. All our sins are spiritual fornication. All our sins are against Christ our Husband. Listen carefully, since marriage is one of the best pictures of Christ and his bride, sex outside of marriage is among the worst of sins before God.

Yet, even after our awful betrayal, Christ’s love remained unchanged. Christ came to this world—this red light district—to redeem and call out his bride. To do so he had to put away our sin and make us righteous in him. Christ lived in all righteousness under the law on behalf of his chosen bride, his people—he avoided all sin perfectly! Christ went to the garden—presenting himself as the spotless Lamb of God—laying down his life, the just for the unjust. The Lord laid on him all the sin and shame of his elect bride, even our fornication.

2 Corinthians 5: 21: For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

In our place, on the cross, Christ was made a curse for us—God justly poured out on Christ, the stripes which justice demanded—he suffered the hell we deserved—he suffered separation from God his Father—until at last, he satisfied justice for his people, putting away all the sin and shame of his bride. So he cried, “it is finished.” Then he commended his spirit unto the Father. Our great holy High Priest entered into the presence of God. He entered with his own blood having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Now, he sends his preachers into this world, and through the gospel, Christ comes and robes his bride—each member in particular—within and without in his perfect righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 5: 25: Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

So Paul's desire for the Corinthian saints, and all God's saints is this:

2 Corinthians 11:2:...I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.

So if God has given a man the gift so that he can avoid fornication and better serve the Lord and honor him then remaining unmarried is fine. But if not, to avoid fornication, he should marry.

Hebrews 13:4: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

DUE BENEVOLENCE

Then, to the believing husband and the believing wife, the Spirit of God says in verses 3-5, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power [authority] of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other,..." (1 Cor 7: 3-5)

"Due benevolence" means "kindness, good will, love." Here, it means the union of husband and wife in the marriage bed. It is called "due" benevolence because it is justly owed the one to the other. It is justly owed because God ordained husband and wife to be one flesh; it is justly owed because husband and wife each entered covenant promising to be one flesh; it is justly owed because it typifies our union with Christ. So not to render due benevolence is to defraud—to rob—my spouse of that which they are justly due.

Remember how God made a woman for Adam in the garden?

Genesis 2: 21: And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22: And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23: And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24: Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

God created that marriage in the garden to show how Christ made his bride one flesh with him. On the cross, Christ, the last Adam entered a deep sleep; out of his wounded side flowed water and blood; God draws each one, his bride, to Christ; so Christ loves his bride and they two are become one flesh.

Ephesians 5: 28: So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29: For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31: For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32: This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33: Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.

Christ and his bride are one flesh. He gives us our due benevolence because he loves us as himself. He gives us righteousness, holiness, reconciliation, peace, a good hope because it is the just due he owes his bride because Christ justified us and now the law demands it. It is our due benevolence.

His bride does not have authority over our own body but Christ our Husband does. We are bought with a price—so we are to love him as we love ourselves. Truth is, because we are so one with Christ, Christ does not have power over his own body. He is his brides and his bride is his. We are one flesh. This is a great mystery but Christ and his bride are one flesh.

Husband and wife are one even as Christ and his bride are one. So my responsibility as a husband is to love my wife as I love my own body, like Christ loves me. Her responsibility is to love me as her own body, like Christ loves her.

THE EXCEPTION

The only exception for a husband and wife to not give due benevolence is so that in her heart and his, Christ might have the preeminence—“Defraud ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” (1 Cor 7: 5)

“Fasting and prayer” stands for all worship and service to Christ. We are to give one another consent, for a little time, so that our spouse might give themselves to worship and serve Christ. For example, there have been times, when I am travelling preaching for over a week at a time and am separated from my bride. We are apart by consent but it is for Christ and his people. This is because, as much as we are to love our spouse, we are to love Christ more. Christ must have the preeminence in all things.

Husbands and wives, be sure you love each other above all but love Christ above each other.

Yet, this separation is only to be for a time, then we are to “come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” Satan seeks whom he may devour. Fornication, adultery, every sin greatly hinders God’s people from worshipping him.

1 Peter 3:7: Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, [love] giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

When it comes to the question of remaining unmarried or of marrying or when it comes to the benevolent duties of husbands and wives—the motive for God’s saints is Christ and his love for us. Do whatever best honors the Lord Jesus Christ, while avoiding that which would bring him dishonor. This is the believer’s rule of life. It is called “faith which worketh by love.” (Gal 5: 6)

Amen!