

1 Cor. 7:1-24 My Body – On Assignment for God Falls Church AM 1/3/21

New Year's resolutions can be healthy, or they can reveal a discontentment in us. This passage helps us with that.

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

Let me review where we were in our study of 1 Corinthians.

Chapters 1-4 – when Christians become contaminated with the world's thinking, we lack unity.

Chapters 5-6 – when Christians become contaminated with the world's thinking, we lack sexual purity.

Beginning in chapter 7, when Christians become contaminated with the world's thinking, we develop confusion about marriage, singleness, and our bodies.

So, this letter helps us with is unity, purity, and clarity.

Where are the practices of the society around us showing up in church in muddled thinking about unity, purity, marriage, and the bodies God gave us.

Already back in chapter six, Paul six times asked “Do you not know?”

Another way to ask Paul's question is, “Are you confused about important basics?”

Chapter 7 is about knowledge. Do we know for sure, or are we confused?

The Prophet Hosea reported the concern of God for our knowledge, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...*” Hosea 4:6

Paul told Timothy to watch out for those who would “...*not endure sound teaching*” and would “...*accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.*” 2 Timothy 4:3-4

Christians who listen to the world, get muddled and confused about marriage, singleness, and the design of God for our bodies and our lives.

**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 our day, marriage is under attack. Society says two men can be married as husband and wife, and that is a lie that attacks the Bible. The truth is one man and one woman.

In Paul's day and in the city of Corinth, marriage was under attack.

There were two error views in the church in Corinth. Liberty and law.

Liberty 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, meaning that they could do with their bodies whatever they wanted. Given that, what do you think their views of marriage were? They downplayed marriage, and took a casual view of the immorality of the city of Corinth.

The other extreme error view in the church in Corinth was law. They looked at the sins in sin city of Corinth, and reacted with 3 errors. Error 1) they concluded that all Christians should avoid physical intimacy altogether. Error 2) they concluded that even married Christians should abstain from relations with their spouses and Error 3) they concluded that single life is more holy than married life.

Both the liberty view and the law view were attacking marriage with errors.

Paul protected marriage by correcting these errors. Paul was a Jew and a teacher of the Scripture. From the beginning to the end of the Old Testament, marriage is supported. From the beginning with Genesis 2:18, where God said it is not good for a man to be alone, all the way to the end with Malachi 2:14-16, where the Lord denounced divorce. God presented marriage as good and honorable, and Paul knew that. 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.

How is Paul protecting marriage here in this chapter of 1 Corinthians 7?

According to verse 1, first two words "now concerning..." Look at Verse 25, "Now concerning..." It becomes clear in verse 1, that the church in Corinth had written to Paul to ask him to confirm or deny the truth of their statement, which Paul quoted in verse 1, "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" So, the whole set-up for our study today is Paul signaling that he is going to address their question. Verse 1 is not a statement of Paul's. Verse 1 is a slogan from those who misunderstood Christianity regarding our bodies.

Paul is an expert on Christianity so Paul answered by saying said no. Paul denied their statement. Paul continued with verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 about the relating of husbands and wives. These verses stop all the errors of the law people who say that even married people should abstain. Paul denied that their statement in verse 1

is an overarching statement that always applies. No. Instead, in verse 2 Paul writes the correct Christian practice, that “*each man should have his own wife*” and that “*Each woman [should have] her own husband.*” Paul implies intimacy there – not just to have legally, and to have in the house, but to have in the marriage bed. Paul shows that their intimacy is more than just productive – that is only to participate in the process of bringing children into the world. No, Paul shows here that intimacy between a husband and his wife is a good thing, all by itself.

Paul shows that it was wrong for the law people (the legalists) to over-react to the appalling Corinthian immorality by calling not good what God had designed as a good part of marriage. When Paul considered taking the legalists’ wrong thinking into a good healthy and loving Christian marriage, Paul could predict the damage. To get married to a Christian and to live with a Christian person that you love, and to experience daily close proximity within a loving Christ-like relationship, to develop an atmosphere of giving and taking 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 three things a) constant desiring b) constant denying that desire, and c) always living with a person who stokes your desire and a rule that says the desire must remain unfulfilled. Paul shows how that scenario would contribute to the immorality problem of the church in Corinth, rather than solving it.

The God-created intimacy within the married life is good and as it is supposed to be. Especially this activity with the person whom we love the most. When you can be with your spouse, why would you want anyone else? Accordingly, Paul wrote against having multiple spouses in verse 2. This statement was needed, because the Old Testament has leading men having many wives. In the New Testament, we are called to live out God’s best plan, originally enacted in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. There was not a second wife or a second husband. That is God’s design for marriage – one man and one woman.

The words of verse 2 rule out all homosexual relationships. It does not make it right to use the terms husband and wife, or even to surgically alter one of them, when it is two men or two women, that is not a marriage. Paul is showing that one of each gender whom God has created, is what makes a marriage.

In verse 3, the husband and the wife are to fulfill the rights and needs of their spouse. In a Christian marriage, there is no depriving the other in this area. Marriage only works well when each partner serves the other person.

In verse 4, Paul corrected both husbands and wives on such selfishness and even the fleshly argument that one has authority over your own body. When each spouse is selfless and focused on the other person, then they will keep on getting together in a regular and holy pattern that is a blessing to both of them. Paul showed how the husband and wife are equals in this area of marriage, preventing

one person from forcing the other person to do something offensive.

In verse 5, there is a special time to abstain, only if both agree, and that is a time for prayer, with an ending point decided. When end arrives, activity resumes.

Skip to verses 10-11, where Paul observes that withholding oneself within a marriage is problematic. It can 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, therefore living a more holy. Paul has corrected that error. But what if the arrival of this letter is too late for some people in the church in Corinth? 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 arrives and now it is clear that celibacy in marriage is not allowed. What to do? Paul says in verse 10, that they should stay together. But if not, then remain unmarried and be celibate as a single person instead.

In summary of the teaching on holy bodies in a holy marriage, Paul showed the necessity of balance and reasonableness. There is no stigma attached to married people, such as the lie that they are claiming to be holy, but really are just following their fleshly desires of the body. No. They are following the spirit, and showing selfless love and holy commitment to God, on assignment where God has placed them. What is God's will for a husband and a wife? It is clear in these verses, so we do not give in to the flesh. Instead, we pray for the Spirit to help us live holy lives, in a balanced way. This is pure and holy. Married people were designed by God and then redeemed by Christ to enjoy your time with your spouse. It is not dirty. It is holy and pure. The passion is God's design. The mechanics are God's design. The urges are God's design. The blending of masculinity and femininity is God's beautiful design. The privacy of it is by God's perfect planning. It is to be enjoyed and protected. Protected against adultery and pornography and flirting and any other unholy form of damaging a marriage bond. As Christians, we avoid what God says to avoid, and we receive and enjoy what God says to receive and enjoy.

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

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

Verse 6 – Paul does not command singleness. However, in verse 7, Paul wishes that all were as himself – single! Yes Paul was single. Paul used to be

married, which is how in Acts 26:10, he could become part of the Sanhedrin ruling council. While it is possible that his wife left Paul after his Paul's Christian conversion, it is more likely that she died, making Paul a widower. In either case, Paul is single, and wishes all were as himself. Why? In verse 7, Paul sees that there are different gifts. Gift of being married, and the gift of being single. And some people have a change in gifting, like Paul, who earlier had the gift of being married, but now, since his wife is gone, has God's gift of being single. In verse 8, Paul now repeats that he has a gift from God of being celibate now. In verse 9, Paul responded to an error regarding singleness. Many were teaching it is 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 gift of celibacy like Paul does, it would have worked just fine for them even in sin city.

The problem was temptation in Corinth. If a single person found being single a burden and a struggle to live a holy life, it is better to marry. This is not referring to some slight and occasional sensations, but rather being so distracted and aflame that they can barely resist temptations. In those cases, notice that Paul does not give them permission to marry, but a command to marry. Verse 9, "They should marry." So, if in the providence of God they are widowed, becoming single again, they are to stay single, unless they cannot, then they are to marry in the Lord.

Paul teaches that singleness is good, and that we should not think less of someone who stays single as a Christian. A man who does not marry, or a woman who does not marry, should have the full support of every Christian in the church.

**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)**

I can summarize in two words - BE CONTENT.

This passage is filled with common sense advice from the apostle Paul for the new situations brought by his missionary work to the dark city of Corinth. His main point in these verses is that 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.

In verse 12, Paul wrote (I, not the Lord), and back in verse 10 Paul wrote (not I, but the Lord). What is that all about? Paul is always in agreement with the teaching of the Lord. However, there are topics that Jesus did not preach on at all. For example, here in verse 12 for a man and again in verse 13 for a woman, the question that Jesus never addressed is, "What is to be done in those cases where

one person in a marriage converts to Christianity, while the other does not?”

Answer – assuming there is no adultery factor, if the unbelieving spouse is willing to live with the Christian, then the Christian should stay in that marriage, even though it is now a believer married to an unbeliever.

It follows then, in verse 14, that the next issue is the children of such marriages. Are the children of such marriages considered to be covenant children? Yes. The children are considered the children of a believer. Because of the new condition of faith for one spouse/parent, now God is in the household, so the word “holy” is used to apply to the children, and even to the unbelieving spouse! The children are holy not in automatic salvation, but holy in the same sense of other covenant children in homes where both parents are believers. The children are holy in the covenant sense of being qualified as recipients of God’s covenant care from the blessing of having a believing parent in their home! You can imagine the next question – won’t the unbelieving parent taint the children, and even taint the believing spouse? No, the opposite is the case! The Christian spouse has the greater influence - having the effect of making the unbelieving partner holy. In some sense that unbelieving partner has a benefit of being involved in a holy matrimony with a holy believer. What do we call that? Paul calls it being “made holy” but not in a saving way. Verse 16 shows that salvation is not yet granted to the remaining spouse. So, here Paul has a different use of the word holy. 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 is shown clearly by the unbelieving spouse then committing adultery. In such a case, God has not called a believer to be enslaved to a spouse who does not want to stay there. We see that marriage is not for the purpose of evangelism. You can shine the light, but goal of evangelism does not override the purpose of having peace. Let the unbeliever have what the unbeliever desires. Stay or leave. The believer is expected to stay, if possible.

In verse 17, Paul broadens out to talk about life. Our station in life. God called you in His sovereignty to have the body you have, the marital status you have, the residence that you have, and the job schooling or retirement that you have. God assigned you. A body. A spouse or not. The exact spouse you have. Timing of conversions within your home. Occupation. Home. BE CONTENT. God has you right where He wants you. How do I know? Let me ask you – does God have the ability to change your circumstances? Yes. So, since God has not changed your circumstances, God is the One who has taken action to place you

right where God wants you.

In verse 18, Paul gives examples for the church in Corinth – spiritual actions such as circumcision, don't need to be done, and if previously done, don't need to be reversed. Jews and Gentiles need to accept each other, and take your identity from Christ. Why? In verse 19, Paul makes it clear – spiritual health is not about possessing or avoiding actions such as circumcision, but rather about obeying God with our hearts and our actions.

In verse 20, Paul repeats what he wrote in verse 17 – each one should remain. Stay put. BE CONTENT. In your home, school, church, and work, fulfill the job that God gave you to do. When an unbeliever gets converted, God does not call that person to a new occupation, but rather God gives your old occupation new significance. Same as it was for marriage, for circumcision, now applies to occupations. Maybe we should ask new Christians memorize these verses, because so often new Christians who are on fire for God, misinterpret their zeal and they want to leave their jobs and go into ministry. Paul halts that with just one question – what does God want? God wants you to stay put and be content. God is able to call you into ministry, if that is what God wants you to do. God runs the whole universe perfectly – He is able to manage your vocational development! Be content.

In verse 21 – we need to remember the context was Paul writing to people who were in no position to change the institution of slavery – yet. Later, Christians would have a key role in overturning slavery throughout history. Also, slaves in those days were not like American slaves, confined to manual labor and poor treatment. So, the same principle of being content applies to slaves. Stay a slave and serve honorably. Why? Because in your conversion, you were saved from something far worse than your time being a slave. You are delivered from slavery to sin, slavery to the law, slavery to the world, slavery to the devil, slavery to death.

In verse 22 both freedom and slavery are re-defined. In the Lord, you are free, even though you remain a slave to an earthly master. You might be a slave in a Roman city named Corinth, but you are a royal child of the King in the Kingdom of God. This is the perspective that led Christians to speak out against the institution of slavery.

In verse 23, we were bought with a price. In Christ's church, we love you if you are male or female. We even love you if you are confused about which gender God made you. All of society's divisions and distinctions are removed in the unity and love of the body of Christ. Christ said, "This is My body." We can say about the church - This is my body. We are together on assignments for God in the church. To be purchased by Christ is to be free, never again slaves of sin.

In verse 24 Paul repeated the principle a third time – BE CONTENT. An

essential part of our growth as Christians is to learn to be satisfied with our current station in life, and to realize that God has ordained these very circumstances for our own well-being.

Conclusion:

1. Look your situation right now as your assignment from God the Father, intentionally and lovingly. The reason that conversion is not a signal to change vocations to something more spiritual, is that all of life is spiritual. All of life is God's. 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, that's your house you're describing." Your body and family and career are right where God wants you to be. Look your situation right now as your assignment from God the Father, intentionally and lovingly
2. Be content. This is the cure for the "if only" syndrome. If only I had a husband or wife. If only I did not have this husband or this wife. If only I had children. If only I did not have these children. If only I had 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 I had a public ministry for God. If only I did not have these floppy ears on my body. If only my body were different. If only my finances were different. If only my medical status were different. If only the medical status of my loved one was different. If only we did not have coronavirus. If only we had a vaccine sooner. If only we had this governmental leader or that governmental leader. If only the church was stronger and better in this area or that area. If only...

SI - An ancient Persian farmer owned a very large farm that had orchards, grain fields, and gardens... and was a wealthy contented man. Then one day a visitor came and told the farmer all about diamonds and how wealthy he would be if he owned a diamond mine. The farmer in Persia went to bed that night suddenly poor - because he was discontented. Craving diamonds, he sold his farm to search for the rare stones. He traveled the world over, finally becoming so poor, broken, and defeated, and ended up dying. One day the man who had purchased the old farm back in Persia led



his camel into the garden to drink. As his camel put its nose into the brook, the man saw a flash of light from the sands of the bottom of the stream. He pulled out a stone that reflected all the hues of the rainbow. The man had discovered the diamond mine of Golconda, the most magnificent mine in all of world history. Had the old farmer remained at home and dug in his own garden, then instead of death in a strange land, he would have had acres of diamonds. If only is deadly to us, and Christ gives us contentment.

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

Be content.