



1 Corinthians 7:1-9
There Is No Need To Get Burned

NKJ 1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;

9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

We saw last week that the tendency within the church is to always fly to extremes, acting as Luther pointed out, like a drunk who attempts to mount his horse and is always falling off on one side or another. We also tend to want to have easy to apply all or nothing answers, rather than the more difficult work of daily applying the doctrines of the Christian faith to the differing circumstances of life.

Let me give you an easy example of that, drinking. In the approach to alcohol, we are tempted to adopt an “all or nothing” approach. Either banning its use entirely, an approach which is contrary to scripture in the fact that Jesus and the Apostles drank, and that “wine that makes glad the heart of man” is described as one of God’s good gift.” Or on the other hand, putting no restrictions on its use, an approach which ignores the fact that drunkenness is always considered a grave sin in scripture. Many Pastors and Christians who have understood that Christians are permitted to drink, have acted as though Christians are *commanded to drink*, and have ended up abusing alcohol. It is easier to ban it or abuse it, than to simply be careful with it and use it wisely and temperately as God intended.

In the Corinthian congregation, as we have already seen, there were grave misunderstandings about sexual relations in the congregation, some of which had led to terrible immorality. The Corinthians as a general rule were obviously confused about several dimensions of the Christian life, and had written to Paul asking for assistance in resolving this questions. That is why Paul indicates that from here on, his letter is going to be devoted to tackling the problems they had written him about. They are in order:

- 1) Questions about marriage (chapter 7)
- 2) Questions about food offered to idols (“” 8-10)
- 3) Questions about worship and the Lord’s Supper (“” 11)
- 4) Questions about Spiritual Gifts (“”12-14)
- 5) Questions about the resurrection of the Dead (“” 15)
- 6) Questions about tithes and offerings (“” 16)

So here in chapter 7 he begins tackling their questions about marriage, most importantly whether Christians should marry or not, and here Paul is seeking to lead them out of the all or nothing extremes that their cultural prejudices might have lead them into.

Regarding marriage, there seem to have been at least 3 groups within the Corinthian church who had wrong views of marriage.

- 1) The first would have been Jewish Christians who thought that marriage was obligatory, and singleness actually sinful.
- 2) The second group would have been made up of Greeks influenced by the philosophy of dualism which said body bad, spirit God, who determined that the best approach was to abstain from marriage if single, or to abstain from sexual relations if you were already married.
- 3) The last group, already tackled in chapter 6 would be those “libertines” whose view of the unimportance of the body and what you do lead them to develop a very casual view of sexual immorality. Their answer probably would have been along the lines of “***When it comes to the appetites of the body, do whatever you want***”

I’m not going to spend much time with the third group as we have already addressed why this view was unscriptural and sinful, and led to all sorts of gross sins, Paul has already addressed it and doesn’t spend any time with that viewpoint here either.

A) Paul starts out by tackling those, probably from a Jewish background who would have said, “all believers must marry” and that it was sinful not to marry and raise children, and he starts out by saying that this is not a requirement. In fact he says that it is Good (expedient or profitable) for a man not to touch a woman, using a phrase that they would have understood as implying sexual relations, and therefore marriage. In other words, guys, its ok for Christians not to marry. It is not wrong for a man to remain single.

In fact, Paul is going to point out in verse 7 that there are advantages for Christians to remain unmarried as he was in serving the Lord. Paul was able to get up and travel widely on missionary journeys for years at a time, in part because he didn’t have wife and family following him. He was also very bold in his proclamation of the faith in part no doubt, because the persecution that resulted fell only on him. Paul saw himself as a soldier of Christ actively campaigning in difficult circumstances, and knew that bringing a wife along would be hard. In fact, he writes to Timothy elsewhere:

2 Tim. 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

But, having said that it is possible to remain single in order to serve Jesus, Paul immediately places a restriction on it. You may remain single if, like Paul, you have the gift of self-control and do not burn with desires that will get you into trouble.

Most Christians *do not have this gift*. In my lifetime, I have only met one man whom I thought did, everyone else I've met who thought they did were deluding themselves, and asking for trouble. So while Jesus, who was sinless did not need to marry, it is noteworthy that only one of his Apostles, Paul had the gift of singleness, and even he admitted that it would have been ok for him to marry, for two chapters later he asks rhetorically "***Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?***"

So not marrying is good when it is *possible* and safe for the Christian, but marrying is normal, and often frankly NECESSARY.

B) And here, Paul turns his attention to the other group, the aesthetic Greeks who would have said, "Let them not marry or if they are married let them abstain from bodily contact."

To this he answers in verse 2 that most often what God decreed in Genesis 2:18 is the case and that it is "It is not good that man should be alone." One of the reasons that God ordained marriage, was to prevent sexual immorality. Also please note that here Paul follows the biblical standard for marriage, one man and one woman in that one flesh relationship. He doesn't say for instance, or let the man have his own husband, or two or more wives, etc. ***One Husband, one Wife; any other relationship would not prevent immorality, it would facilitate it.***

Within marriage, he reiterates an important point, he has already told the libertines, that they are not their own, that they don't "own" their bodies, and he goes on to point out that within the married relationship, our bodies are given over to our spouses. To deny our spouses their conjugal rights, he compares to defrauding them, robbing them of what they are due. Therefore the counsel of the esthetics not to have conjugal relations was sinful!

The only time he said it might be permissible to abstain from normal relations within marriage, for a time would be for the purpose of a very limited period of prayer and fasting but even then he counsels get that over with quickly and then resume normal relations, so that *Satan*, who is always looking for a foothold in your marriage doesn't use this as an occasion to provoke you to immorality.

But finally, he wants them to be absolutely clear, *he is not commanding marriage, he is permitting it*. If people have the gift of celibacy they may exercise it, but if not they should marry. God never puts us in a position where we must burn with unfulfilled passions.

Applications:

1) The call to priestly celibacy is unbiblical and dangerous, and inevitably leads to sexual immorality as we have seen again and again in history. He even writes associating those who deny the right to marry as a mark of heretics.

NKJ 1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

2) If you do not have the gift of singleness – you should be working towards getting married to another believer, not placing yourself constantly in danger of sexual immorality.

This also applies in the case of remarriage after a divorce or being widowed, if you didn't have the gift prior to being married, you certainly didn't develop it after many years of normal conjugal relations.

“We are therefore in hearty accord with the Westminster Catechism of Faith which declares: “ In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead ” (Chapter 24, section 5).

In his excellent piece, “ Of Marriage after Divorce in Case of Adultery, ” John Owen pointed out that to insist that divorce simply secures a legal separation but does not dissolve the marriage relation would bring in a state harmful to men. God has appointed marriage to be a remedy against incontinence (1 Cor. 7:2), but if innocent parties lawfully divorced may not marry again, then they are deprived of this remedy and debarred from this benefit. If the divorced person has not the gift of continency, it is the express will of God that he should marry for his relief; yet on the supposition of the objector he sins if he marries again, yea is guilty of the horrible crime of adultery. Is not this quite sufficient to expose the untenability of such an anomaly?

Again, can we suppose for a moment that it is the will of a righteous God for an innocent person to be penalized the remainder of his or her earthly life because of the infidelity of another? Surely the very idea is repugnant to all who are really acquainted with the Divine goodness and mercy. Why, if an innocent man upon a divorce is not then at liberty to marry again, he is deprived of his right by the sin of another, which is against the very law of nature; and on such a supposition it lies within the power of every wicked woman to deprive her husband of his natural right. The right of divorce in case of adultery, specified by Christ, for the innocent party to make use of, is evidently designed for his liberty and relief; but on the supposition that he may not again marry, it would provoke a snare and a yoke to him, for if thereon he has not the gift of continence, he is exposed to sin and judgment.” - A.W. Pink

3) Finally, do not treat those who are able to remain single as a problem to be solved

They are not to be pressured into the “meet-market”

“So many churches are marriage and family dominated, to the extent that the unmarried and childless are almost ‘frozen out’. Of course we want to build strong Christian marriages and families, but to emphasize that to the exclusion of valuing, supporting, and using the many unmarried members of our congregation is an imbalance, that can become sinful.” – David Jackman