

1Corinthians 7:1-2 "The Advantage of Marriage"

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 ^{NAU} Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

As we come to our text this morning we discover that Paul is going to deal with some issues that some might consider personal and yet are issues that go to the heart of the word of God as it concerns the very make-up of man and his relationships with other people.

What Paul desires for these people, and for all Christians, is that every aspect of our lives be used to the glory of God, and that includes body, soul and spirit. This is why he concludes his thought in our previous study.

1CO 6:19-20 "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

Our Lord Jesus says it another way when putting into perspective how we should give our all unto Him as He brings up the first and greatest commandment.

MAT 22:37 "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

There is no aspect of our very being we should hold back from God as we honor and glorify Him with our lives. And even in the mundane things of life, even in those areas we might consider personal, we should still desire to honor God according to His word.

And it appears that in the midst of some of the carnality that is taking place in the church at Corinth there is still a spark of desiring to do what pleases God. And as we come to our text this morning Paul is going to address some things which have to do with real life.

After all, if God's word doesn't affect and help us consider how to live every day life, then this book is only a collection of clever sayings to be used only at cocktail parties. The fact of the matter is, this book is life, in that it is about the one who says, "I am the

way and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me."

And when Jesus talks about life He includes not only the most important aspect of life, which is a place reserved in heaven with Him, but also this life as it is to be used to testify about the eternal life we've been given through faith in His atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

And so, it is vital that we read and meditate upon and study this book to show ourselves approved that we might grow in this relationship and honor God with our bodies, until at which time we receive our glorified bodies when He returns for us.

What we're about to see is the answer to a number of questions these Corinthians posed to Paul in a letter they wrote to him some time back. And the questions, interestingly enough, were, for the most part, not what some might consider to be weighty theological issues, though there does appear to be some of those in this section of the letter, but rather the kinds of questions that deal with everyday life.

Questions on marriage. Questions on celibacy; meat offered to idols; worship; spiritual gifts; the collection of money for the Jerusalem Christians and Apollos. And possibly questions on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The answers Paul gives to these questions start here in chapter seven and extend all the way through to the end of this letter. He gives some of the most practical advice and encouragement to these Christians to help them understand what the will of God is for their lives on real life issues.

These were not hypothetical questions. They weren't asking things like, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Since nothing is impossible for God can He make a boulder so large that He can't lift it? Or where did God come from?

This church in Corinth is in the process of falling apart if it continues down a path of self-seeking carnality and approaching the Christian life without considering the will of God.

They knew something was wrong, but many of them were not willing, or convicted enough, to take that step to turn away from the ways of the world and do those things that would honor our Lord. But praise God, some of them had enough spiritual sense to get a second opinion from someone who knew God and His will.

1CO 7:1-9 "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to [touch] a woman." 2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Now, I'm sure there are those who would suggest that this is the kind of personal discussion which is best left for more discrete circumstances. And yet, interestingly enough, Paul writes a letter meant to be read by the entire congregation, and then to be copied and given to every other church.

And though this may certainly involve personal aspects of their lives, it's the kind of information everyone needs to know, even though they may not be willing to bring it up. It's kind of like that question no one wants to ask at a bible study in front of everyone else, and yet which most people in the class don't have the answer to and wished they had enough nerve to ask.

This is important enough for Paul to address, even though it involves some personal matters. But, more than that, it is important enough for God the Holy Spirit to want to address, since this letter is inspired by God for our edification. And so, God Himself wants this area of our lives addressed in a public setting.

And so, as is always a good idea, let's start at the beginning.

1CO 7:1 "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to [touch] a woman."

For those of you who have the NIV you'll notice that your version reads: "It is good for a man not to marry." This is not the best translation and we'll see why in just a moment. But, just by way of reminder, Paul brings up the matter of this letter which came from the church at Corinth.

He may very well have this letter before him as he begins writing his response. We're not told in what order their questions were written down, but in light of the matters Paul had addressed prior to getting to these questions, which had to do with sexual immorality, it seems appropriate for Paul to start with matters of marriage and sexual behavior within marriage.

He begins with a statement which seems to have addressed the question as to whether or not it was appropriate for a man to abstain from having sexual relations with a woman. Keep in mind that in the ancient Greek world it was not uncommon to treat sexuality in one of two ways:

- 1) That the body was only a temple or tent housing the soul; the soul being the most important aspect of man, and that the body or the flesh was not that important compared to the spiritual side of man. Therefore, we can treat the body any way we want, since it will be discarded one day anyhow, and if that means being as carnal as possible, then so be it.
- 2) The other view is that "the body is evil; therefore, we must bring it into subjection; therefore, we must completely obliterate, and if that is not possible, we must completely deny, all the instincts and desires which are natural to it." (William Barclay)

It's the second problem Paul seems to be dealing with here in our text. Remember, that the Corinthians' mindset towards these issues was shaped by their own customs and pagan religions. Upon becoming Christians they were bringing much of this baggage into the church with them.

Now, granted they had been taught by Paul himself concerning many of these things, but with the pressures to conform to the world around them, these Christians in Corinth are mingling the old ways with the new life they have in Christ.

This is not a new thing. It happens today as well. When a person, who has lived according to the world for most of their lives, comes into a relationship with Christ, they don't necessarily change every aspect of their thinking over-night. It takes time to learn what the will of God is, according to His word, on any particular area of life.

I can remember as a young Christian talking with other young Christians who felt that it was biblically okay to date unbelievers. And their reasoning sounded pretty good. What better way to

share the gospel with someone whom you've come to know and who trusts you.

Of course that reasoning blew up in their faces when a few weeks into that relationship the unbeliever made it clear that he or she wasn't interested in Jesus Christ; and now they were emotionally attached and couldn't break off that relationship.

Paul is having to re-correct some of the bad thinking these people were involved in and help them see life the way God ordained it. Evidently, some of these Christians in Corinth saw the dangers of taking license with sexual behavior and were now going to the other extreme.

Their thinking went something like this. Since sexual promiscuity is not good, then we will simply take all aspects of sexual activity and eliminate it from our lives, thus making us holier than if we continued to let it be a part of our lives, under any circumstance, including marriage.

Paul's answer addresses the first part of their thinking. Yes, regarding sexual activity outside of marriage it is good for a man not to touch a woman. This is in line with what he previously told them in this letter.

1CO 6:18 "Flee from sexual immorality...."

This is, by the way, why the NIV misses the mark when it translates this portion as, "it is good for a man not to marry." The context prior to this has to do with fornication, not marriage.

Paul is not saying that getting married is a bad thing. He's not saying that living a celibate life is always better than getting married. In fact, this would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture.

GEN 2:18, 21-24 "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, ' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

Paul understands this and actually has a very high regard for marriage as is seen in Eph.5:22-33, as he compares the marriage relationship between a man and a woman to that of Christ and the church.

Does that mean that Paul teaches that singleness is bad? Absolutely not. But, as we'll see he has a very biblically balanced approach to human relationships according to the word of God which includes both singleness and marriage.

And so, as we go through this portion of Scripture, it needs the backdrop of what has been going on in Corinth and the questions these believers have raised. Regarding sexual immorality, it is good that a man doesn't touch a woman. And, by the way, this a "common Jewish euphemism for sexual intercourse." (John MacArthur)

Paul may be very frank in the subject matter he is dealing with, but he is still trying to be discrete in the choice of words he uses to make his point. And so, he continues to address the questions posed to him.

1CO 7:2 "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

Here Paul addresses the reality of sexual license in the culture of their day. The word immorality is actually in the plural form in the Greek and addresses all the different aspects of sexual immorality.

And this is really a message for us today as well, since our culture has a similar attitude toward sexual behavior. Some of you might remember when premarital activity was not promoted as a good thing. That doesn't mean it didn't happen, but it wasn't always applauded as it is today, where our public schools actually promote it by handing out condoms to teen agers.

Our public schools also teach that homosexuality is a legitimate alternative lifestyle. We're not so different, as a culture, from the city of Corinth that Paul addresses in this letter. And so, as the saying goes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same", is true of us as well. And so, this is a modern day message, even though it was written over 1900 years ago.

Paul goes on to say, "each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

Now, there's the temptation to think that Paul is simply suggesting that people get married so that they can enter into sexual activity legally. This couldn't be further from the truth. "Marriage cannot be reduced to simply being God's escape valve for the sex drive.....

..... Paul doesn't suggest that Christians go out and find another Christian to marry only to keep from getting into moral sin. He had a much higher view of marriage than that. His purpose here is to stress the reality of sexual temptations of singleness and to acknowledge that they have a legitimate outlet in marriage. Therefore, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." (John MacArthur)

It's interesting that Paul intentionally repeats the words "each" and "own" as it applies equally to both the husband and the wife. Each man should have his own wife, each woman should have her own husband.

In terms of marriage being available and desirable equally, to both men and women, Paul is saying that the pursuit of marriage is not restricted to one or the other person. It is not entirely up to the man to be the aggressor, if you will, when it comes to seeking marriage. There is nothing wrong with a woman desiring and pursuing a man with the intent of uniting herself to him for life.

Now, I suppose the way she pursues him might be up for debate. But, there's nothing that says she has to be a wall flower waiting for some man to come along and pluck her up.

But whatever approach is used in seeking a mate, all must be done to the honor and glory of God and in a way that is beyond reproach, according to the word of God.

This also teaches us that the normal expression of intimate relationships is found in marriage. This is the way God designed it. In a way, a woman completes a man and a man completes a woman. And if the two desire to honor God as they compliment each other, that marriage relationship can be very satisfying in every aspect.

And it should be noted that there are a variety of aspects to a marriage that should be considered and rejoiced in, and God has made this clear in His word.

First, we know that marriage is a covenantal union where a man and a woman come together for companionship and to help each

other. That's why God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen.2:18)

That phrase, a helper suitable for him, in the Hebrew is one word, *Ezer*, and it simply means an aid.

Now, some of us men may not want to admit it, but we need all the aid we can get. And God, who is our Creator, and who by the way, created the first man perfect in nature, knew that Adam needed an aid as well to have someone share his life and compliment his life as only a woman could.

So, it's a good thing. And we don't need to approach marriage as a necessary evil, as though the expression has some validity: "Women, you can't live with them, and you can't live without them."

Not true. In a marriage relationship, men must live with women as though they were the crown to a man, and a woman must live with a man as a solid foundation under her feet.

And so, companionship and a helper is part of what forms a marriage. But, there are other aspects of marriage which are also important. Procreation, for example, is a part of the reason God instituted this relationship.

GEN 1:28 "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

If God blesses a marriage with children then He should be praised. If He doesn't bless in that particular way, He should still be praised.

Marriage is God's way of filling the earth with people. But, as is seen in the body of Christ, it is also a way of filling the church. Our children have the opportunity and privilege of being born into a Christian family and participating in all the blessings of the church.

But, filling the church from the inside through having children is certainly no substitute for going outside of ourselves and sharing the gospel with the world, inviting them to come into the haven found in Christ and His church.

Now, that might seem like a no-brainer, but there have actually been churches which feel that to invite those from the outside to be a part of their church would only taint their little church with the baggage they may bring in. But the church was never meant to be

a closed community. It's a hospital for all sinners willing to repent and embrace Christ by faith alone.

Marriage is also, contrary to the belief among some Christian circles down through the ages, an institution which is designed to bring pleasure. This is not limited to sexual pleasure, but it would certainly include it. Sexual intercourse is necessary for procreation, but marriage is not limited to procreation.

Proverbs and the Song of Solomon speak extensively on this God-given aspect to the marriage relationship. Using the metaphor of waters running deep with the love you have for your mate Solomon says this:

PRO 5:15-19 "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.
16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? 17 Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. 18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving doe, a graceful deer - may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love."

Much of the Song of Solomon is a personal look into the life of a man and woman who are in love with each other and delight in each other's love and pleasure which comes from that love.

SON 4:3-5,7,9-10 "Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. 4 Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance;... 5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. 7 All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you. 9 You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. 10 How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!"

How many of you guys spoke something to that effect in the last week to your wife? The last month? The last year? Ever?

These words convey a love and an intimate pleasure each share in that relationship. Yes, it is meant to be personal, but it is meant to be a "given" when it comes to enjoying this aspect of marriage.

Much of the Song of Solomon is written with the idea of sharing the feelings each has in that marriage relationship as it applies to the physical attraction each has for each other.

And this should encourage each one who is in a marriage relationship to consider how to let your mate know how much you do love him or her in ways that include the physical; and by that I don't mean merely the sexual.

Giving hugs and kisses in a way that assures the other that you still find them desirable and lovely. Writing love notes on occasion, like Solomon does here, is a nice touch to show our love. Marriage is meant to include these aspects of pleasure for each other.

Solomon concludes the Song of Solomon with these words.

SON 8:14 "Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains."

This is a picture of two lovers who are exhilarated with each other and just love life together as they share it with each other. Friends, lovers and helpers. This is all part of what God intended when He instituted marriage.

Interestingly enough, there is much to be said in the Song of Solomon about our relationship with Jesus Christ. We being the bride and He being the bridegroom.

There's much more we could say on marriage, but Paul's point in our text is not to go into an exhaustive teaching on the subject, only to show the advantages of this relationship and how it is to work itself out when it is applied properly and biblically.

And as we come back together next week we'll see how some in Corinth were making up their own rules for marriage as they actually thought they could eliminate some of these things we've looked at, while thinking this will make their relationship with Christ a better thing.

It's good for a man to have his own wife, and for a woman to have her own husband, but all must be done in a way that honors God.

For those of you who are single, for whatever reason, Paul has some very encouraging things to say to you as well, so that whatever state we find ourselves, we might understand, that whether married or single, we must still consider our relationship with Christ as we are used in the body to show our love for Him.

Again, it all comes back to the first and greatest commandment.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your mind.' (Mat.22:37)