

1Corinthians 7:3-7 "Live God's Will For You"

1CO 7:3-7 "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 Yet, I wish all men were even as I am myself. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that."

As we look at this portion of God's word we need to keep in mind that this is part of a larger context in which Paul has been trying to deal with the wrong thinking concerning holiness.

There were those in the church at Corinth who were reverting back to Greek thought and philosophy on the physical aspects of this world and on the flesh. In the case before us it had more to do with wanting to deny the flesh in all circumstances, thus supposedly creating an environment for righteous living, thus inspiring Paul's positive command to husbands and wives concerning sexual relations.

1CO 7:3 "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

This certainly would have been more than appropriate as it relates to sexual immorality outside of marriage. And that's why Paul started this section with the exhortation in verse one.

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

But to make a blanket statement like that without taking into consideration God's design for a man and a woman in a marriage relationship, this would have been ludicrous.

And so, this is the basic context of what we're dealing with, where, evidently, married couples in the church at Corinth were doing this very thing of cutting off the physical side of their marriage relationship to provide a better environment for holiness.

With Paul's response we're going to see that this does not produce holiness, but actually could produce sin in that relationship, not to mention some real tensions after a while.

But, before we get into our text this morning I want to bring up here the necessity to always go to God's word when it comes to the way in which the Lord wants us to live to His glory.

To assume that we can make up our own way of pleasing God, like some of these Corinthians did, even if they were sincere, thinking that it was a good thing, is to miss the point that we do not have the prerogative to alter God's will, no matter how sincere we may be.

And yet, unfortunately, there are many "Christian" groups today who have taken that attitude in many different areas of life, be it worship, counseling, holiness, or even salvation.

God has told us how He wants us to worship Him and that is in Spirit and in truth. It is important that we approach our God in the Spirit, but it is equally important that we approach Him in the truth He has revealed, which is the word of God.

And so, for groups of professing Christians to worship the Lord in ways that are out of accord with His revealed word, is not true biblical worship; again, no matter how sincere they may be.

To bark like dogs and howl like wild beasts or enter into something which is closer identified with an epileptic fit, in the context of a worship service, does nothing more than give the world a legitimate excuse to mock Jesus Christ and His church.

Of course, I'm explaining an extreme case which is referred to as the Holy Laughter movement, or in the past was referred to as the Toronto blessing, or the Brownsville revival.

These are clear cases of inventing your own way of trying to worship God. Now, I'm not suggesting that there aren't truly born again Christians involved in these different activities, only that if these activities are contrary to the revealed will and word of God, despite all their sincerity, they are not worshipping the Lord in Spirit and in truth, thus they are not worshipping the Lord as He desires.

And why in the world would anyone want to do anything as unto the Lord, if it doesn't please Him?

The same can be said of holiness. I'm sure that most Christians want their lives to demonstrate a holiness which would glorify

Christ. And yet, many Christians are trying to create a holiness which is not supported by the word of God, thus it is not a true pursuit of biblical holiness.

When denominations decide to make up their own rules for the way a person is considered to be holy, then they have stepped outside the bounds of true holiness and have entered into Pharisaism. Paul dealt with this very thing when writing to the church at Colossae.

COL 2:20-23 "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

How many have of us have experienced or knew of different groups within the church-at-large who had such a set of rules for their congregations? How many churches will not allow someone through their doors if they're not dressed in a coat and tie? How many women are looked down upon if they're not wearing a dress as opposed to pants, for example?

Is it the church's business to bind the consciences of its members for going to a movie, or attending a dance? Should we be setting the standard for what kind of foods the church should be eating? Is it sinful, according to the word of God, if women wear any make-up?

I believe it was J. Vernon Magee who once made the statement to the effect that in some cases it's sinful if they don't.

When the church gets in the business of directing the lives of its members, where the word of God gives no such permission, then the Church usurps the role of the Holy Spirit.

I mean, we as Christians do have certain liberties, but even with liberty we need to consider what the word of God may say on any particular subject. But, that's different from going down a list and mandating to the congregation that you can do this, or you can't do that as they decide according to their own agenda.

Or consider the area of counseling. All counseling, in a Christian context, is meant to move people toward godliness in a way that

pleases the Lord; be that in marriage counseling, or whatever. It's called sanctification.

And so, when the church adopts methods and ideas which originated with men and women who clearly made no pretenses that they were anti-God, then how can Christians dress up these ungodly philosophies concerning man and life with bible verses and then contend that this is the way in which we can grow in our salvation?

Men like Freud, Jung, and many others came up with their philosophies so that they could exclude God from their life-experience and not be accountable to Him. And yet, "Christian psychology" has become a normal way of counseling believers, all the while using the same methods as Freud and others, but just using Christian sounding language.

You can dress a duck up with floppy ears and put a black spot on its beak and tape a furry tail on his feathers and call him Rex. But that duck won't bark and it won't hunt. It's still a duck.

And you can take psychology which was designed by ungodly men to exclude God and you can dress it up with as many Christian looking and sounding things, but that system will not, in the long term, sanctify the life of a Christian. It can't.

There is only one thing that can. Jesus has the last word on this when He prayed to the Father. "Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth." The Holy Spirit uses the word He inspired to enable us to grow in grace and strength which only God can supply.

We don't need the word plus some wisdom found in the world to grow in Christ. Does this mean that psychologists, Christian or otherwise, never give the truth? Of course not. There is such a thing as, for lack of a better word, sanctified common sense. And you'll find this all throughout the world, without the need for a psychology degree.

But where any system of counsel, be it from Christians or the world, is out of accord with the pure word of God, then it is to be rejected.

2PE 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may

participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

To add water to oil and shake it up to look like one pure substance, only confuses the issue, because sooner or later they show themselves to be at odds with one another. To add the world's way with the way of God's word does the same thing eventually.

I like things simple and so does God when it comes to our sanctification. We don't need to spend thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours getting "godly" direction in the office of some Christian counselor or psychologist, when the brother or sister sitting next to you can come along side and encourage you with God's word and do it for free.

PSA 84:12 "O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you."

If doesn't get much simpler than that.

And so, when Paul addresses these Corinthians who have tried to create their own way of doing God's will, he feels compelled to direct them back to God's word to simply follow the way of the Lord.

In the case of marriage, where these people felt that denying themselves any physical aspect of their union with each other, it turns out to be a feeble worldly attempt to accomplish holiness. It was clearly contrary to God's word.

So, what is Paul's counsel regarding these people denying themselves this aspect of their marriages?

1CO 7:3 "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."

It's as simple as that. There is no godliness or holiness which can come out of an ungodly approach to something which God instituted. According to God's word, as it relates to a marriage relationship, it is not simply the privilege of the couple to enjoy all aspects of marriage, but as Paul says here, it is the duty of each.

Why? Well, look at the way Paul describes it. He essentially goes back to the original marriage in the Garden of Eden and expounds on that truth given to us by God, who created man and woman for each other, which says that they shall become one flesh. And because of that he goes on to explain what that entails.

1CO 7:4 "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."

In other words, they have covenantally given themselves to each other. They no longer are two separate autonomous beings in this relationship, but two people united to each other in every aspect, and not just the physical. This doesn't negate the fact that they are individuals, but this teaches us that they are no longer individuals going in two separate directions.

They have agreed to enter on a path of life and that path will be one path where the two of them will travel together, loving each other, discussing life with each other, helping each other and giving themselves to each other.

Now, keeping the context in mind, Paul exhorts them, in light of the fact that they are obliterating the oneness of marriage, that they should not deny themselves each other. They cannot simply decide to go contrary to God's word and not practice oneness, even in its most intimate sense.

God would not deny them this, how can they possibly deny each other? Paul says, don't do it. But, then he qualifies that statement. He essentially says, if you were ever to deny each other it must be done under rare circumstances and only for a short time and for a good reason.

1CO 7:5-6 "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."

What does Paul mean by this? Well, he does recognize that the sincerity of some of their hearts is to draw closer to God, even though it's through their own twisted unbiblical means.

And so, in recognition of this, he shows them how they can take their desires to draw close to God and use it in a biblical way. What way is that in light of them denying each other in their marriages, in a physical way?

He basically says that if the two of you in your marriage discuss this and both of you conclude that this would be a good thing, for the sake of devoting yourselves to prayer, then go ahead and do it. Go ahead and abstain from each other.

Again, notice that he specifies that it must be by mutual consent and only for a time. If one of the parties in that marriage decides that he or she does not want to enter into that arrangement then it must not be done.

The other party should not be made to feel that he or she is being unspiritual, because the spiritual thing to do is abide by God's word regarding that marriage, which includes the physical relationship.

But he places a caution in here which is most instructive, if the two decide to enter into this arrangement. It should be done 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.

What these couples may be entering into, with the idea of being more spiritual and growing in holiness, can actually turn into something which is counter-productive to their original intent.

In fact, Paul says that Satan himself can use what is unnatural to the marriage relationship and turn it around to bring disgrace and dishonor to both the couples in that marriage and to Christ Himself.

Paul says that Satan knows that you're going against that which God has ordained and he will take advantage of the situation knowing that your lack of self-control could lead you into sin. What kind of sin? Lusting after some other person, or actually taking that lust and acting on it.

You see, there is always a danger of going against the revealed word of God, even with good intentions, and falling into a greater sin. This is why it is always better to just follow God and His word.

Now, basically what Paul is saying here is that they still have a liberty to abstain from each other, but only for a limited time as they use that time to seek God in prayer. But they must resume the natural aspect of marriage as God ordained it.

And then he concludes by saying, "I say this as a concession, not as a command." (verse 6)

In other words, 'for those of you who want to do this, then you may proceed, but only under certain conditions. But in no way do I

command this for everyone in the body as though this was normally God's will for the entire body.'

But Paul also knows the advantages of being single, to where these types of issues don't have to cloud or confuse the question of what God desires for you, because His will is real clear for singles regarding this.

1CO 7:7 "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."

Is Paul saying that it's better not to be married? Of course not. He's simply stating a fact about the freedom he has to serve the Lord that a married couple might not. His desire is that all men, and by this he simply means both men and women, would be able to be as free as he is to serve the way he does.

But he also realizes that this is not the way God designed it. He's not trying to rewrite the word of God on the issue of marriage. He's stating that if God has called you and gifted you in a particular way then you must consider that and follow God in that way.

Notice that he says, "I wish that all men were as I am." And then immediately uses the imperative "but" or "however" in connection to the gifts that he recognizes God gives.

"However, I realize that many people don't have the gift that I have", Paul says. Many people have the gift which includes a marriage partner. And he assumes that it is a gift, not a burden, just as he assumes that a person who has a desire to be single is also a gift, not a burden.

This is in keeping with leading a God directed life. If God directs you to seek a partner in marriage then He will provide the partner in His time. If God directs you to lead a single life, then He will also provide the desire and the grace to live that life out to His glory. That's all Paul is saying. He realizes that his gift allows him to go places and do things for the Lord that a married person couldn't do.

And like someone who is excited about a gift they have and desire that everyone had it, he makes the statement he does, with the qualification he adds, knowing that it's not God's will that everyone has the gift he has.

But in making that statement he elevates the state of singleness as it is used for God's glory. That doesn't mean that he expects every single person to remain single, but that in whatever state we find ourselves, married or single, it is still a high privilege to be used by God in that state as we should desire to be used by God.

And by the way, we should not assume that since Paul is now single at this writing that he always was.

There is a very strong case to be made that Paul was married at one time. One commentator makes the case that according to Jewish custom, a Rabbi was obligated to take a wife. And Paul was a Rabbi, a teacher of the law, who made the claim that "he had failed in none of his duties which Jewish law and tradition laid down."
(William Barclay)

According to orthodox Jewish belief, "if a man did not marry and have children, he was said to have slain his posterity, to have lessened the image of God in the world. [Jewish tradition states that] Seven were said to be excommunicated from heaven, and the list began, A Jew who has no wife; or who has a wife but no children....

.... The age for marriage (among common Jewish custom) was considered to be eighteen; and therefore it is [highly unlikely] that so devout and orthodox a Jew as Paul once was [that] he would have remained unmarried." (William Barclay)

Another consideration is that Paul was actually part of the Sanhedrin which was the ruling body in Israel at the time of Christ. He took direct orders from the chief priest.

ACT 26:10 "... On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them."

He had a vote and the authority to do what he did against the church of Jesus Christ as he was empowered by the chief priest.

"It was a regulation that members of the Sanhedrin must be married men, because it was held that married men were more merciful." (William Barclay)

We're obviously not told about Paul's wife. He makes no direct mention of having been married, but this doesn't mean he wasn't. She may have remained faithful to Judaism when he became a believer, and then left him. She may have died early on. But, the

fact remains that it would have been highly improbable, that a Pharisee, a rabbi and one who was part of the Sanhedrin, was unmarried during those years.

But, be that as it may, nowhere does Paul allude to the fact that he didn't have a right to be married and in fact he defends that right.

1 Corinthians 9:5 ⁵ Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

But, again, Paul's point is that the days are short. And he desired that we be about doing our Father's business. That can be done whether you're married or single.

But, it must be done. There is no excuse that we can bring to Christ, who called us and gifted us for works of service, to turn around to Him one day and say, "I didn't have the time or the ability to serve You."

From a human stand-point, if that's the case, and since God is Sovereign and all-knowing, then why would He have chosen us at all, knowing we didn't have the time or the ability?

The fact is, that all of God's people in Christ are given the privilege to serve the Lord with the gifts He has given us. There is not a Christian in this room who has not been given gifts by the Spirit of God for the building up and the edification of the people in this body, and for those outside of this body.

If we find ourselves not having the time to be a part of the body in which Christ has placed us, then we need to pray to the Lord that He would provide the way to have that time, and the desire to be more involved in what the Lord is doing in us and through us.

There are so many gifted people here and so much that the Lord wants to do through this church and the individuals in this church, not only for those outside of these walls, but also right here in our own midst.

There's the tendency to want to get fed and go out to others and serve them, which by the way, is so vital a part of our service to the world, but it should never be to the exclusion of our ministering to one another.

The days are short and we need each other. We are to be a light to the world, but we are to be connected and united in such a way that whatever gifts we have, whether married or single, we are a body

united to love and serve each other as well. This is what the writer of Hebrews tells us.

HEB 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Paul picks up this theme of being there for one another in the local body when he wrote to the church in Rome.

ROM 12:10-11 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Let me end with the words Paul wrote to the Colossians as he encourages them to consider God's word as the guide in their lives, and to live those lives in thankfulness to God.

COL 3:16-17 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."