

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-7

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 starts a new section of this book, in chapters 1-6 Paul basically dealt with two subjects. He dealt with unity and he dealt with the subject of sexual immorality. Now from chapters 7 Paul begins to answer questions that the believers in Corinth had written to him about (v 1).

The first of those questions has to do with the subject of marriage an area in which the Corinthians had serious problems and no wonder when you think about the views displayed about sex by some of the members of this church. Many of their problems with marriage stemmed from the society in which they were living.

It is possible that because so many in the church were using their freedom to sin sexually that there were others in the church who took the other extreme view and saw sex as something wrong and evil and therefore chose not to marry and even those who were married denied sex to their partner. It is into this situation that Paul writes.

1. SINGLENES IS GOOD (v 1)

Verse one does not use the word “marry” in the Greek. It reads like this in the Greek “it is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Now the idea behind the word “touch” means sexual relations. Paul is not so much talking about marriage as the intimacies of married life. Paul therefore indicates that it is good to refrain from sexual intercourse; that is that there is nothing wrong with being single.

You see if it was normal in their society to give in to your sexual drives and to engage in sexual immorality then it is not hard to see why those who were godly and refused to do so stayed single and therefore were seen as abnormal by the rest of society and it seems by the church as well. However we must be careful not to put words into Paul’s mouth. Paul does not say that singleness is better than marriage or that singleness is the only good condition to be in.

He is not comparing marriage and singleness here but is simply stating the fact that singleness as long as it is celibate is good. We must remember that marriage is not a human idea but God ordained marriage. He made marriage for companionship and for pro-creation (Genesis 2:18 & 1:28). All people need companionship and God ordained marriage to be among other things the most fulfilling and common means of companionship. God allowed for singleness and Paul states that it is not an inferior position but it seems that the church at Corinth looked on marriage as the ideal state and looked at singleness as inferior and somehow wrong. After all did not God command Adam and Eve to be fruitful and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28)?

It is possible that because of wrong views concerning singleness that some Christians in Corinth were applying pressure on single people to be married. Those who were single probably deliberately choose singleness because of the sexual immorality all around them and as a result they probably had wrong views of marriage and considered singleness to be the superior state.

So Paul is simply writing to correct both views and he does so by declaring and celibate singleness is good, honourable and excellent but Paul does not support the view that it is better or superior to marriage. It is simply on a par with marriage.

Now my dear friends we too must be careful that we do not give the wrong views about singleness or marriage. How many times have we asked a single lady or man if they have found a girlfriend/boyfriend yet? At times we even jokingly suggest we do a bit of matchmaking for them. But is the way that we talk about singleness and marriage not giving the impression that there is

something wrong with singleness and that marriage is superior. It also piles the pressure on the single person to find someone and that could lead them into making rash and wrong decisions about relationships.

We do it with our young people and our young people do it among themselves suggesting that if you do not have a boyfriend/girlfriend then there must be someone wrong with you. We also are simply increasing the pressure upon a group of people who might be anxious to find a life partner and feel inferior because they haven't done so.

So let's be careful how we talk to single people and let's be careful that we do not give the impression that singleness is inferior to marriage. Singleness as long as it is celibate is good. Those who are single here today should accept your position as good, do not be anxious about finding someone to marry enjoy your singleness for we will see later that there are advantages in being single.

2. SINGLENES BRINGS TEMPTATION (v 2)

Paul here speaks about the dangers of singleness and one of the dangers with remaining single is the danger of sexual immorality. Single people have the same sexual drives and desires that married people have. Married people find those desires fulfilled through their life partner but the single person does not have that opportunity, therefore the pressure and temptation to indulge in sex outside of marriage is great.

The temptation was made greater in Corinth and is great in our own day because of the way that sex is promoted and the way that it is encouraged as immorality is freely practised and even glorified. Now of course marriage cannot be reduced to being God's escape valve for our sexual drives and desires.

Paul is not suggesting that single people should find someone to marry so that they will not fall into sexual sin for Paul had a much higher view of marriage than that as a look at Ephesians 5:22-23 makes clear. But Paul's purpose here is to stress the reality of sexual temptation for single people and to acknowledge that marriage is a legitimate outlet for sexual drives and desires.

This is why Paul says, "Let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband." In other words if there is an opportunity for marriage take it, is what Paul is saying for it will help to overcome the sexual temptation that singleness brings. For those of us who are married do we ever think about the temptations that single people face that perhaps we don't face in the same way?

Married people find sexual fulfilment in their partner but the single person has to cope with the same sex drives and desires that any married person has but has no outlet for them.

This is why the temptation upon single people is greater when it comes to sex. We ought to pray for our single brothers and sisters in this area for the temptation that they face in this area is greater than it is for those of us who are in a happy married relationship. If you are single here today then you must be aware of the sexual temptations that you face and you must not put yourself into a situation where that temptation can raise its ugly head.

Young people it's good to have lots of true friends of the opposite sex but can I encourage you to avoid being left alone with someone of the opposite sex for sexual temptation is powerful more powerful than perhaps we even realise. Many a Christian testimony has been lost in a moment of passion. So be realistic single person.

Don't think that you can overcome sexual temptation easily, you can overcome it but you must pray about it get others to pray and avoid situations where that temptation can overcome you.

3. SEX SHOULD BE A NORMAL EXPECTATION WITHIN MARRIAGE (vs. 3-5)

Sexual pleasure and fulfilment should be something that is found in marriage and marriage alone. That truth is so obvious that it almost doesn't need to be stated. But it was not obvious for at least some the Christians at Corinth. Because of erroneous beliefs and because sexual temptation was great and sexual immorality was rife some felt that it was better perhaps more spiritual to be celibate even within marriage.

Some Christians decided to deny their marriage partner sex probably in the name of spirituality. But of course in doing so they were denying their life partner sexual fulfilment and were increasing the temptation upon them to indulge in sexual immorality. So Paul states clearly that husbands are to fulfil their duties to their wives and likewise wives are to fulfil their responsibilities towards their husband's.

Marriage is sacred and within the marriage bond God declares that husbands and wives have sexual obligations towards one another. Sexual relationships within marriage are not just a privilege and a pleasure but they are also a responsibility. Husbands and wives have a duty to give sexual satisfaction to each other. Both have responsibility to one another the husband or the wife has no right to withhold sex from their partner.

The reason for this is stated in verse 4. Our bodies do not belong to us within a sexual relationship no partner has any right to withhold sex from their partner. God honours sexual desire and expression within marriage. In fact failure for Christian husbands and wives to submit sexually to one another brings dishonour to God because it dishonours marriage.

Sexual expression within marriage is not an option or an extra to be tagged on for the pro-creation of children. Sex is far more than a physical act, God created it to be the expression and experience of love on the deepest human level and to be a beautiful and powerful bond between husband and wife. God intends marriage to be permanent and he intends sex within marriage to be permanently participated in.

Therefore Christian couples are not to deprive one another sexually except when both agree to do so and only then it must be for a limited period (v 5). It is right and proper to agree together to forgo sexual activity in order that you can devote yourselves to prayer. Notice that one of the partners in the marriage has no right to decide that both will refrain from sex in order to spend extra time in prayer over a matter.

It must be a mutual decision both partners must agree and the purpose is so that they can pray over a matter that concerns them. But the time period should be a set period agreed upon as the words "for a time" suggests. It might be that God places upon a couple's heart a real burden to pray for someone or about something.

One of them or both want to give the matter their undivided attention and want to spend a concentrated time in prayer so they decide that they will refrain from sex for a brief period of time so that they can give the matter their full attention and spend extra time in prayer. But when that time of intense prayer is past a married couple must continue with normal sexual relationships.

The reason why a married couple must not deprive one another for any longer than is agreed or necessary is so that Satan does not use this period to tempt one or both partners because of their lack of control. Satan knows our weaknesses, he knows where we are prone to attack and most men especially are prone in the area of sex.

The old saying absence makes the heart grow fonder is certainly true concerning sex and so if a couple have had a period when they have chosen to refrain from sexual union then the desires will probably be even greater than normal therefore it would be wrong and morally dangerous to deprive one another for any longer than is necessary.

4. SINGLENES IS A GIFT (vs. 6-7)

I do not think the word “concession” is the best translation of the Greek word (sungnome), which means, “to think the same thing as someone, to have a joint opinion, a common mind or understanding.” The word can also mean awareness. I think Paul is saying that it is the common opinion that the best way ahead for single people to cope with their sexual temptations is to get married.

But Paul will not command marriage upon people it is not the Christians duty to get married but it is one way ahead for those facing sexual temptation. Paul has no desire to see the church consisting of only married people he understands the importance of having single people in membership of Christ’s Church.

Paul as a single man personally knew the benefits of singleness and in many ways he wished that people could remain single for single people have more freedom to serve Christ, they do not have the same family responsibilities or ties.

However Paul realised that it is not God’s will or purpose for everyone to remain single. Generally speaking marriage will be the norm for most people for it was instituted by God and is a great blessing for mankind. But if someone remains single they do so because God in his kindness grants that person the gift of singleness. He enables that person to remain single and to cope with the pressures that singleness brings.

He enables that person to use their gift of singleness for the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom in a way that a married person couldn’t be used. Just think how many single women have gone to the Mission Field with the gospel and have been used greatly of God. Those people could not have done what they did if God had not of blessed them with the gift of singleness.

Now does this not fly in the face of some attitudes that are displayed towards single people in our society and even sadly in the church? Often singleness is seen as inferior to marriage, the single person is often viewed as a little odd or else we simply spend our time joking about their singleness.

But God grants people the gift of singleness, that is God’s will for that person and they must exercise their gift to the glory of God in the same way that a man might have the gift of teaching and has to use it for the glory of God. A person who accepts the gift of singleness and uses it for serving Christ will live their life of singleness in perfect happiness and contentment.

Now singleness has many practical advantages single people have much greater freedom than married people do. A single person can set his own hours and schedule, she only has to consider herself when making decisions and she will have fewer cares and concerns than married people (vs. 32-34). However singleness is not for everyone just as marriage is not for everyone, each person has his own gift (v 7).

Our task is to discover and use the gifts that God has given to us and if God has granted us the gift of singleness then we are to use it for God’s glory. We must accept whatever gift he gives to us and use it faithfully and joyfully in the service of our God. Single people should not envy married people and married people should never envy single people, we simply should trust God and accept our position in life.

If it is God's will for a Christian to be married then God will bring that future partner along your pathway. Until that happens single people should use their gifts in God's service. However should God's will be that a single person should remain single then thank God for that gift and use your singleness for his glory and for the benefit of his church?

Amen