

"Blessed are the Marrieds AND the Singles"

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

So far Paul has been addressing problems that needed confronting in the Corinthian church. From 7:1 to almost the rest of the letter, Paul now addresses questions the Corinthians had for him. Ch. 7:1 begins, *Now for the matters you wrote about:*

And so we see headings in the rest of the letter where Paul addresses a new topic. In Ch. 7 the topic is sex, marriage and divorce. In Ch. 8:1 we read,

Now about food sacrificed to idols

Which he rabbit trails into a few other related topics. Then in Ch. 12:1

Now about spiritual gifts,

And then in 15:1 he wraps up the letter with,

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you.

And as we'll see, the reason why they were asking questions about these things was because they were having disagreements in these areas also. He probably begins with marriage in 7:1 because it's a great continuation of his teaching in 6:12-20 where he confronted sexual immorality, which some of these new believers were still involved with. Here in 7:1-9, Paul is going to elevate intimacy in marriage, he's going to elevate women but he's also going to elevate singleness as well. We don't have to make the Bible relevant. When we read it and study it we see that God deals with the most relevant aspects of life.

Now for the matters you wrote about [and some of our translations have this next statement in quotes, meaning it was something they said, not something Paul was teaching, like we saw in Ch.6]. Because as we read Ch. 7:1-9 Paul would never

Say

It is good for a man not to marry.

Technically, the word is not marry, but 'touch'. This word for 'touch' means sexual touch. So the translation 'marry' recognizes Paul is talking about sexual union within marriage. Remember how we said last week that Christians sometimes take things to an extreme? Well, some Corinthians, felt that perhaps the solution to marital infidelity with the prostitutes at these banquets mentioned in Ch. 6, is that Christians should abstain from sex period. Whether married or unmarried. If we just deny ourselves then that will solve the problem. Well, it would solve the problem if we could separate our bodies from our minds; something that Paul just proved was impossible. And he will counter that argument with this truth; the best way to prevent sexual immorality is not abstinence but a healthy sex life with your spouse. But he does have some words for those who are unmarried or widowed also. Paul is going to show us that Those who are single and those who are married should

See Both as Gifts from God **(7:1, 7-8)**

I'm going to try to speak primarily to singleness first from vv.1, 7-8 and then primarily marriage in 2-6, 9 although there will be some overlap. In v.1 there is the comment made that it's better to be celibate. Paul's not going to completely disagree with that and point out that

Celibacy is not the norm but it can be a blessing (v.1)

Not in the context of marriage – no, enjoy a healthy marriage – but in the context of being unmarried at the time, single or widowed. Is it better to be unmarried? Paul's going to show us that God made male and female with the intent of filling the earth and to enjoy the blessings marriage brings. But being single has blessings too. Sometimes people who aren't married are pitied by others or, even worse, are shunned or looked down on by others. Something must be wrong with them. Why aren't they married? God makes some of us wait a little longer before we can find His partner for us. That's His plan. And for some, His plan is not to be married. The apostle Paul was not married as far as we know. Look at v.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.

Paul points out that married or unmarried

We are all uniquely created by God (v.7)

'Each one has his own gift'. What's the gift? The gift is marriage and not marriage. Both are gifts. Both are from God. Paul says, not everyone has the gift of being unmarried like himself. God designs us to be sexual beings and designed for us to enjoy that gift in the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Something our culture has warped tremendously and it is almost a crime now to say that. And our culture is telling us that's what life is really all about. God says, no, that's not what life is all about. It's a gift from God to enjoy for sure, but our identity is not in whether we're married or not. Our identity is in Christ and Him alone. Our purpose in life is to glorify God, whether married or unmarried. Both are gifts from God to be enjoyed.

Each have opportunities for service the other does not (vv. 8, 32-33)

⁸ Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.

Why does Paul say that? Later on in this chapter he talks more about not being married. He says in vv.32-35,

³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— ³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Without showing favoritism towards either, Paul logically says, if you're not married you don't have the same responsibilities as if you are married. They are good responsibilities of loving your

spouse and raising kids that require your necessary care and attention, but not being married can free you in ways to serve God that marriage may not have.

In marriage, a lot of our ministry is focused on our immediate family. If you are unmarried your ministry can be broader. The danger of course here is to envy the other. Let's play pretend for a moment. If you were not married, what do you imagine yourself to be doing with your life ... Now, I am going to make a wild guess and say that most of you were not thinking about how you could live for God more with your life, of having an undivided devotion to the Lord.

Can we have an undivided devotion to the Lord if we're married? I believe we can but it could be harder for the married than the unmarried simply because we have more responsibilities. The God-given responsibilities of raising a family, helping them know the Lord and interacting with the sphere of influence and connections that that brings. One is not better than the other. They are both gifts. Remember that. Paul says, God gifts some to be unmarried because they have found that being satisfied in God is enough. But most of us are not gifted that way. And this is where Paul focuses on here.

Paul says no to the idea that stopping physical intimacy will actually prevent sexual immorality. No, he says, that makes it worse because we are sexual beings and God designed marriage to be the context where that is healthily enjoyed. What Paul says here was counter cultural. Sadly, the culture Paul lived in was male dominated and focused. That men could and should satisfy their needs in and outside the marriage. Which means women were not equal to men, because women who did were prostitutes yet men weren't? In marriage, God says,

Each Spouse is Mutually Obligated to Meet the Other's Needs (7:2-6, 9)

And yet, how many Christian men and women think marriage is to fulfil their needs? If you are a Christian and you think marriage is to meet your needs – the need for approval from parents, friends; the desire to be envied by others; the desire for human security; to have your physical needs met – you not only misunderstand marriage you misunderstand what it means to be saved. Salvation teaches us that life isn't about us; that we are all flawed and selfish and would pursue our own agendas if the Spirit of God did not break into our heart and show us our need for Jesus. We accepted Jesus who exchanged His life for ours. He came to serve us and sacrifice Himself for us, and now that we're saved we live an exchanged life. We are no longer to live for ourselves but for others. Love God and love others is our mandate and that starts with serving and loving our spouse by meeting their needs not demanding our needs be satisfied. When we both have a healthy view of salvation we'll have healthier marriages. Specifically here Paul is responding to questions regarding physical intimacy in marriage.

If some Corinthians actually thought that abstaining from sex would prevent spouses from committing sexual immorality, they couldn't be more wrong. Instead, Paul says

Healthy intimacy protects your marriage (vv. 2-4)

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.

Each spouse has a marital obligation to meet the other's needs, not demand their own needs be met. In marriage we are one. The wife gives her body to the husband and the husband gives his wife her body. Remember, we are bought with a price therefore honour God with our bodies by satisfying each other's needs. V.4 speaks against the culture of Paul's day let alone our day. Women do not have authority over their own bodies and neither do men. Paul is speaking about equality here, something radical for his hearers.

The only time Paul suggests abstinence within marriage is for prayer (and probably fasting also). There's a great need that needs praying for. Or you have a big decision to make and you want to pray and fast about it. Your focus is on God then not yourselves. Your greatest need at those times is to be able to hear from God. But Paul says, don't make it long. Why? Because you have needs and you need to meet each other's needs. And if you're both meeting each other's needs, why would either of you be looking outside your marriage (whether its an affair or visual satisfaction of some sort) for those needs? Healthy intimacy protects your marriage.

Focus on pleasing God together (vv.5-6)

Whether its for prayer or whether its just living out your married life, ask yourself everyday how can I please God by pleasing my spouse? By helping them be happy in God. By making our relationship something that is cherished, valued and protected. Wedding vows are meant to be taken seriously. God takes them seriously. When we obey God by living according to His Word we build each other up, meet each other's needs and appreciate how God has blessed us by giving us to the other.

That's the main point Paul is making here in marriage. We have an obligation from God to meet the other's needs, not demand our own needs be met. They will if we're both obeying God in this area. The key here is to

See your spouse as God's gift to you (v.9)

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.

Some are gifted by God to not be married; that God alone satisfies them. While many of us are given the gift to be married. 'This 'burning of passion' is God's gift to us to know the joy that a healthy marriage brings.

Prov. 18:22

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.

Marriage, Paul says is a gift from God. Not needing to be married at all or again is also a gift from God. Thank God for His gifts to us. Listen to these verses about God's gifts;

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

The specific context here is salvation but the principle applies to all God's gifts. In regard to how God has made us for marriage or not for marriage, it is God's good and perfect gift. To be appreciated and valued. Elsewhere Paul said in 1 Tim. 4:3-5,

³[false teachers] They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴For everything God created is

good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

If we're married, thank God for the gift He gave you in your spouse. Please God by seeking to serve each other. You belong to her; she belongs to you. Each of you are mutually obligated to meet each other's needs.

If you are unmarried and don't feel the need to be or if you are temporarily unmarried, see this also as God's gift for you to seek His will for your life, to serve Him where you're at and being able to have a little more freedom and opportunities to serve Him at this time.

It is no surprise that Satan has so confused and twisted the world into thinking physical intimacy is a right we must deprive ourselves of. Which has created so many problems. Instead, enjoy God's gift in the context for which He designed it and you will please Him and serve your spouse as God designed.

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