

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 5TH - 6TH, 2022 // BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS

## SEX, PURITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY (1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-6)

One of the questions this church asked was, "Is celibacy [remaining unmarried and never having sex] more spiritual than sex?" (vs. 1)

- Because of the **sexual brokenness, perversion, and dysfunction within Corinth and in this church**, some Christians arrived at the conclusion that sex was just dirty, unholy, and needed to be avoided at all cost. Sex is not a god, but sex is not **gross** or unholy.
- Instead of writing off sex as unspiritual and commanding celibacy, Paul commends sex within the covenant of marriage as a **good thing and a protection against temptation for sexual immorality (vs. 2)**. He's not saying that sex is the only reason someone should get married - just that sex within a marriage isn't impure, **it actually protects AGAINST impurity**.
- Sex is a **privilege and a blessing** (Prov. 5:18-19, Song 4:9-16), but sex comes with responsibility.
- This gift of sex within marriage comes with responsibility for each spouse to lovingly help the other in their battle against temptation by being sexually available (vs. 3).
- Husbands and wives have this **responsibility to each other because they are to be mutually submissive** to one another (vs. 4).
- When a man and woman "**become one**" (Gen. 2:24), their bodies stop belonging simply to them and now belong to their spouse. This isn't patriarchy/misogynism, and this isn't matriarchy/feminism (wives have the same authority over their husband's bodies that husbands have over their wife's).
- This is the **beautiful dance of willing, trusting, mutual and equal submission**.
- Within this dance of willing, trusting, mutual and equal submission, a husband and wife both understand that "depriving" the other person sexually isn't **right, honorable, or loving** (vs. 5).
- There are certainly times when sex within marriage isn't practical (or even beneficial), but it becomes unloving and dishonorable when the deprivation comes simply from a place of selfishness. Some of this passage is pastoral advice ("**a suggestion**," vs. 6) so we can't be legalistic about the application.
- Many have **twisted this passage** to use it as a license for abuse (sexual and emotional).
- At the same time, this verse is clearly stating that **the ideal state of a Christian marriage is for a husband and wife** to have sex regularly.
- If a husband and wife are not on the same page with regularly **having sex as a celebration of their marital intimacy**, then something isn't right (that doesn't necessarily mean it's sin).
- Verse 5 **DOES** allow for times of celibacy within the marriage, "by agreement for a limited time..."
  1. Both **celibacy AND sexual activity** within any marriage must be by mutual consent.
  2. It's for a specific predetermined, prearranged time (**for a time of spiritual or relational healing, after the birth of a child, during an illness, during certain times of the month, while on family vacation, etc.**)  
**"By agreement for a limited time..."**
  3. There should be tremendous caution and heightened awareness on the temptation to sin during this time (vs. 5b).
  4. As soon as possible refraining should be terminated with regular intimacy again.
- ...So, how **frequent and regular** should sex within marriage actually be?
- The Bible doesn't **give a magic number** - probably because we naturally lean towards legalism and every couple is different (**some may be perfectly fine with what others may consider quite scarce**).
- So how often is "**not depriving each other**"? Often enough to **help your spouse** (not yourself) with their own sexual needs, and often enough to help them avoid **sexual temptation**.

## SOME PASTORAL THOUGHTS...

This passage **isn't meant to shame** - if there are challenges in your marriage, help is available.

- Every couple (and person) is different - don't compare or feel **pressure/guilt/condemnation**.
- Quantity of sex doesn't always mean relational health (or even quality of intimacy).
- There's a time to **get selfless and serve** - either by agreeing to abstain or agreeing to engage.

## WHAT DO WE DO IF WE'RE NOT ON THE SAME PAGE?

Research shows that **almost always one spouse's drive is higher than the other** (there could be multiple reasons for this) - **a lack of desire is not sinful!**

- Sin occurs when there's no willingness to serve your spouse by working towards a mutual understanding of sexual unity. Intimacy is **so much more** than just sex!

## WORKING TOWARDS A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING MEANS...

- Honestly communicating about the issues.
- Confessing and **repenting of any sin** that may be present.
- Agreeing to **work on intimacy** as a whole.
- Scheduling dates to **be together and physically intimate** (physical intimacy is more than just sex!!)

## THE GIFT OF SINGleness (1 CORINTHIANS 7:7-11)

At the time of this writing, Paul was single.

- However, because Paul had been a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) and probably a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 26:10), he would've been required to be married at one time.
- We don't know what happened to Paul's wife, but **Paul understood his singleness as a wonderful gift from God** (vs. 7).
- "Singleness as a gift? I thought it was a curse!!"
- Singleness is a gift from God (Matt. 19:11) and it has its **advantages** (1 Cor. 7:32).
- Being single can be difficult, but singles must remember that **they're not 2nd class Christians**, singleness isn't permanent, they do have a family through the church, and **they're not alone**.

- You have **AMAZING** potential to display God's character and **serve God in your singleness!**
- For the **widows and unmarried people in this church**, Paul recommends they stay single as he is single (vs. 8). However, if they're not able to **practice celibacy and exercise self-control in their sexual desires**, they're to get married (vs. 9).
- Paul seems to understand that not everyone is physically able to **embrace celibacy** - and that doesn't make anyone more or less spiritual.
- If singleness is such an amazing gift, what about those who are **stuck in dead-end marriages?**
- Shouldn't they just **get divorced so they can be happier and serve God better?**
- Paul's answer (which comes from the Lord, not his own pastoral advice) is **absolutely not!** (vs. 10)
- If a divorce should happen without Biblical grounds, either the couple should be **reconciled or remain unmarried** (vs. 11).
- Divorce never was or **never will be God's will** (Mal. 2:16)- divorce always hurts.
- But because of the "**hardness of the human heart**" (Matt. 19:8), God allows it in certain situations.
- Scripture gives **two biblical grounds for divorce**, and one of them is, "sexual immorality" (Matt. 19:9) & the other is abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15).
- Scripture says that divorce is possible in these situations, but it's not commanded.

## GOD DOESN'T HATE DIVORCED PEOPLE.

He's **forgiving, merciful, kind, and ready to redeem** any situation that's been broken by past sin or mistakes.

- If you're divorced for a biblical reason and single, don't let anyone shame you, rest in the truth of God's Word, and honor God in your singleness or possibly **future marriage**.
- If you're **divorced for an unbiblical reason and re-married, repent, receive God's grace**, and stay married! Reflect the gospel in your current marriage.
- If you're divorced for an unbiblical reason and single, **repent and rely on the gospel to glorify God in your singleness**. Every **calling and situation** from God has its own set of challenges and responsibilities.

## THE UNBELIEVING SPOUSE (1 CORINTHIANS 7:12-17)

What about couples where only **one spouse is a Christian**? The Lord says (not Paul, but the Lord), "stay married" (vs. 12-13).

- God can be glorified in a marriage like this, and He just may do a work through the believing spouse to draw the unbelieving spouse to Christ (vs. 14).
- Not only that, but **the spiritual influence of a believing spouse also has great power** on children within the home. Paul counsels a **Christian married to a non-Christian to stay married**, but if the unbelieving spouse refuses to be married, then the marriage can be broken (vs. 15).
- This isn't initiated or sought out by the believer, but if this kind of abandonment occurs, "that brother or sister is not enslaved" to the marriage covenant and free to remarry.
- But **staying married** is always ideal!
- Many **Christians discouraged** in what feels like a hopeless, dead-end marriage to a spouse who doesn't share their faith can find hope in vs. 16.
- God **moves in the unseen** - and often we can't see how He may be using the testimony of our lives, our prayers, and our love for an **unbelieving spouse to work on their hearts**.
- No matter how hopeless, discouraging, or difficult your marriage may be - God can work!

## THE PRINCIPLE - LIVE AS YOU ARE CALLED (VS. 17)

No matter what your station, situation, or season of life may be - **single, married, widowed, divorced, remarried, etc.** - God can work in and be glorified in your life!

- If you're stuck in the past and think you can undo a past mistake by changing your relational status now, **God says to just repent and move on**.
- Live as you're called - **stop looking back**.
- Every calling and situation has its own set of **responsibilities, challenges, difficulties, and opportunities** to serve the Lord.
- Changing your situation or season will not make you a **happier, more fulfilled Christian**.
- Finding your **identity, contentment, and satisfaction** in Christ will help you **find fulfillment in whatever season or station of life you're in** (Phi. 4:12-13).

## LIVE AS YOU'RE CALLED BY ENJOYING THE SEASON.

- Don't fantasize about "**someday**" and don't fantasize about the "**glory days**" (Eccl. 7:10).
- Don't envy others in **different stations and seasons of life** and think that their life is perfect and **yours is flawed**.

- In the here and now - **find your identity, contentment, value, and satisfaction in Christ!**

## LIVE AS YOU'RE CALLED BY EMBRACING THE CHALLENGES.

- **Singles** - loneliness, temptations for sexual immorality, and the **inclination to become self-centered are challenges you must face** with community, accountability, and keeping God at the center of your life.
- **Marrieds** - dying to your self and submitting to your spouse, **loving your spouse in their brokenness/sin**, staying married and fighting for relational health, and the temptation to **make the family calendar an idol** are all challenges we must face.

## LIVE AS YOU'RE CALLED BY ENGAGING THE RESPONSIBILITY.

- You are where you are right now because of a **perfect plan for your life** that's being worked out for you by a **sovereign, loving, perfect Father** (Rom. 8:28).
- There's a reason you're married, single, widowed or divorced- are you simply feeling sorry for yourself or are you trusting God by **choosing to serve Him and others in and through the season and station** in which God has you?