To Marry or Not to Marry
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7
Code: 1828

We start this morning our study of this seventh chapter in our continuing look at 1 Corinthians and we are coming to a very important and controversial chapter. We're going to be in it for a few weeks because there is much to discuss and much to learn. As we begin this morning we're going to find some very practical information. The book of 1 Corinthians as you already know by now is intensely practical. It doesn't get into a whole lot of theology. It sort of hits it lightly and then it dives deeply into the practical application and this chapter is no exception.

It deals basically with the subject of marriage and marriage is, let's face it, a very hot item today. There are more books being written on that subject I think than any other one subject. It's a discussion topic constantly. The Bible has a lot to say about marriage. There is much in the New Testament about marriage.

Our Lord Jesus taught much about marriage. He referred to marriage many times in the Gospel records. He stated in Matthew 19 that man and woman were made for each other. God made them for each other. He states that they should join themselves together and become one flesh and that this was marriage and this was actually a joining together by God himself.

Jesus also emphasized that marriage was to be monogamous, that was to be two becoming one flesh, something that was first stated by God in Genesis chapter 2. Jesus also taught in Matthew 19 that marriage was to be unbroken. God hadn't changed His attitude at all about divorce. Jesus also taught not only that it was designed by God to be monogamous, to be unbroken but that it was only for this life. Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35, all of those indicate that marriage is only for this earth, not for Heaven.

The Lord had a lot to say about marriage but all that he said was pretty much theology, pretty much the basic identification of marriage. He didn't really get into the practical application of that. That He left for His later Word through His apostle so that when we read the epistles we find much more information about marriage particularly, of course, the apostle Paul who has much to say about the subject of marriage and says it repeatedly throughout his epistles from various insundry angles.

Now one of the chapters in which Paul elucidates the basic truths of marriage is 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Here Paul takes the basic things that the Lord said. He even refers to some of the statements of the Lord and he goes on from there to make application of those statements. There is a great gamut

of things covered in the seventh chapter and we'll have to take them as they come. I'm sure when we're done we'll have a great amount of information that will be very helpful to us. But of course the most important thing is not to just learn what it says but to do what it says and to make application in our lives. Of course that's our prayer.

Now a footnote to begin with. Many people unfortunately have decided that the first thing to do with the seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians is just chuck, just get rid of it because there are disclaimers throughout the chapter. Paul is trying to tell us that this chapter is nothing but his opinion. They say, you see, if you look, for example at verse 12 he says, "But to the rest speak I not the Lord." So he wants to make it very clear to begin with that this is his opinion, not God's.

Then these folks will tell us that verse 25 again supports this. "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord." "So I have nothing to say from God. I'm just going to shoot my mouth off here, take up some space." Then verse 40, "She is happier if she so abide after my judgment and I think also that I have the Spirit of God," and you know we find that he doesn't know whether he's got God or not. So they would say to us that this is a rather hopeless attempt at mixing opinion with revelation and the best thing to do is junk it.

However that's a rather ridiculous view since Paul's statements there are easily explicable if they're seen in another light. What Paul is saying here and I agree that there is no such assortment of sentences in any other chapter that he ever wrote what he is saying here is very interesting. The reason that he says in verse 12, "To the rest speak I not the Lord," is not to say that what he says is unimportant but to say that what he says is new truth. It is not quoting something from the Gospels that our Lord said.

Back up to verse 10 and you'll see what I mean. "Unto the married I command yet not I but the Lord let not the wife depart from her husband." You see, he quotes right out of the Lord's words in Mark 10. So when he says, "It's not the Lord but myself," he is saying, "I am no longer quoting the teacher of Jesus." He is not saying, "It doesn't matter what I say and it's human opinion. No. He is simply saying, "Sometimes I'm quoting Christ. Sometimes I'm not." It's as if he says, "Quote, end quote." Really what he's doing is putting himself on an equal basis with Christ in terms of revelation.

I've told you before I don't like red letter editions of the Bible because they assume that what Jesus said is more important than what anybody else said. It's all the revelation of the Spirit of God. When Paul says, "The Lord said this but I say this," he isn't saying, "What I say doesn't matter." He's saying, "We're on the same level in terms of inspiration. The Spirit of God has given me these truths." So Paul is simply saying, "If I'm quoting the Lord I'll say it. If I'm not I'll tell you it's not a quote of the Lord's, it's some new information."

Now let me open this up to you a little further. Our Lord when He was talking to His disciples after He gave them the parables of the kingdom called the disciples scribes. The disciples were scribes in the sense that they were going to write down the revelation, weren't they? They were going to be the New Testament writers. What He said to them was this, "Every scribe who is instructed concerning the kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a house holder or a house owner who brings forth out of his treasure things old and things new."

So He says, "You're going to be scribes. Some of the things you're going to write are going to be old things. Some of them are going to be new." In 1 Corinthians 7 you simply have an illustration of that. Paul is saying, "Here is something old and here is something new. This is what the Lord said. I'm quoting. This is what I say. This is new revelation." He is not disclaiming it as revelation. We'll look more at that as we go through the text.

Now he then begins in chapter to speak of the practical side of marriage sometimes quoting the Lord for the basic theological principle and then going on to speak the new truth of the practical. Now in order for us to understand the context of his writing we'd have to know something of the problems of the Corinthians and in order for us to know the problems of the Corinthians we'd have to know something about the time in which they lived. There's some most fascinating things to know. Marriage was a big problem to the Corinthian. They had all kinds of problems about what to do in terms of marriage.

Verse 1, look at it. "Concerning the things about which you wrote unto me." Now the Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul. It most likely was delivered by the people mentioned in chapter 16 verse 17, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus who came along from Corinth and the Corinthians had four major questions they were asking Paul. From chapter 7 through 11 he deals with the questions they asked in the letter.

Before that he speaks what he wants to and after that, chapter 12, he says, "Now I'm going back to spiritual things, back to the things that concern me." But this little block in the middle are the things they were asking him about. They had some specific questions. They wanted some information about marriage. Chapter 7 deals with that.

They had some questions about things offered to idols. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 deal with that. They had questions about women in the Church. Chapter 11 deals with that. And about the Lord's table also in chapter 11. Those four major areas were great concerns of theirs because they were having problems with the adjustment of the life of the Church and the community in relation to that. Marriage was one of the problems and that's the one he begins to deal with in chapter 7.

Now let me tell you a little bit about the Roman marital situation. In the first place, Rome had no uniform set of marital laws. You could get married at least four different ways all of which were

recognized as marriage in some sense. The first thing would be that there were many slaves. Tens and hundreds of thousands of slaves and they weren't even considered human. So they didn't even have any of the rights of a citizen really.

When they wanted to get married or come together in what really was just a living together rather than an official marriage the owner of the slaves would agree to what was called a *contubernium* which simply means tent companionship. The owner would say, "All right, you two can live in a tent together." That consummated a certain kind of slave marriage. Now if he didn't like the way they were doing together and he didn't particular care for the situation the slave owner could go in there and take them apart or he could sell off the husband or he could sell off the wife. So you had a lot of real problems in the early church because so many of the early Christians were slaves and they would have had such mixed up marital backgrounds.

Now what was the early church going to do? Was the apostle going to say, "All right, all of you who are just tent companions cut it out. Get out of there. It isn't fair. It isn't right." The Bible doesn't say that. It doesn't say they said that.

What Paul did do was not try to break up everything but to try to teach them the sanctity of the marriage that they had whatever the legal basis of it. If they were living together under a tent companionship thing he would simply say to them, "Stay together. Prove yourselves true to one another. Love one another. Make everything of that marriage that God designed it to be." Because that's really all the choice they had as slaves.

There was another way that you could be married, another kind of relationship. This was called *Usus* , U-S-U-S. Now this particular custom meant that a woman and a man could live together for one year. At the end of the one year they would become identified as a husband and wife. Today we would call that what? Common law marriage. That was a way to be married. So the church would have had to face people who were common law married, who had no legal paper or anything to identify their marriage. Again, the New Testament doesn't say anything about what they ought to do other than the sanctity of the marriage that exists under whatever it exists. Just maintain it.

There was another way, *coemptio en manum* which was marriage by sale where the father sold his girl to the husband. The guy would come across with the right price you could have the daughter. It was somewhat facetious but that's how it worked out. As I've said so many times depending upon the girl the price would vary. I suppose it could be from a couple dozen sheep to a lame chicken but it had a lot to do with the particular girl in mind. Maybe sometimes the father would have to make adjustments. So there was the kind of marriage, *coemptio en manum* which was a sort of a worked out thing financially.

But the most elevated, the most noble, the partition people married under the thing that was called *confarreatio*, a coming together on a high level. This was the classy kind of marriage. You want to know something very interesting? The entire marriage ceremony as we know it today in the Christian church comes from this pagan Roman marriage. It does not come from Hebrew custom in the Old Testament. It does not come from a New Testament basis.

It's entirely the Roman pagans' ceremony. What happened was the Roman Catholic Church simply picked up the standard Roman ceremony and when the reformation came nobody changed it. It had become tradition and pretty much the same today. In fact the Hebrew wedding lasted how long? Normally seven days. So you know we're not in that bag anymore. We're way far from the Hebrew customary wedding. But this was a one afternoon or a one evening thing.

The two families came together. They picked up a matron who would be like the maid of honor and a best man type thing. The couple joined their right hands. That's why we still do that in a marriage ceremony. They recited vows and after the vows there were prayers offered. That's the standard procedure only they offered the prayers to Jupiter and Juno.

There were flowers. Flowers were customary and the bridal wreath was really the beginning of what we know today as the bridal bouquet. The bride always wore a veil which was lifted. There was a ring and that's where the whole idea of the wedding ring began and it was always put on the same finger, this finger where I've got mine, where you've got yours because in their wonderful ability of medical science, in their dissecting of the human body they discovered that a nerve ran from the middle of this finger right to the heart. Since that nerve was connected to the heart that's the place where the ring ought to go. That whole thing was the Roman system of marriage. When all that was over they went to another place and believe it or not they had a cake. That's right. So now you know where the whole custom came from.

Now here are four different ways. They come into a church, a church is founded and people are married or sort of married or living together or what – there were all kinds of problems. What are you going to do? What are you going to do, draw new laws for the Roman Empire? You can't do that. The church can't impose its laws on the Roman Empire. What Paul does, what all the New Testament writers and teachers would do would be to simply teach the sanctity of marriage whatever way you happen to get into it. Just make the most of it now that you're there. That's the point.

Now those were some of the problems they were dealing with but add to that here were their real great problems. The moral character within marriage had so been destroyed that divorce was very, very rampant. There are records of people who had been married as many as 27, 28, 29 times. They counted their years by their wives and it was a high divorce rate.

There was immorality. There was rampant homosexuality, concubinage, men used their wives to clean up the house and cook the meals and do whatever else and then they had other women for their pleasure. This was a bad situation.

On top of all of that did you know that at the time of the apostle Paul in those days in the Roman Empire there was a feminist rebellion? Nothing new has ever happened folks. I want you to know that. Nothing new. Solomon was right, there's nothing new under the sun.

This is a quote from Jérôme Carcopino who has written an interesting book called *Daily Life in Rome* . It said, "Alongside the heroines of the aristocracy, the irreproachable wives and the excellent mothers who were still found within its ranks it is easy to cite emancipated or a rather unbridled wives who evaded the duties or maternity for fear of losing their good looks. Some took a pride in being behind their husbands in no sphere or activity and vide with them in tests of strength which their sex would have seemed to forbid. Some were not content to live their lives by their husband's side but carried on another life without him. Whether because of voluntary birth control or because of the impoverished stock many Roman marriages at the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries were childless."

The movement even became more widespread. Juvenal he says – this is a quote – "With spear in hand and breasts exposed and took to pig sticking. Other attended chariot races in men's clothing and some became wrestlers." You always wondered where women wrestlers got their start. Ancient Rome. Juvenal says this, again writing from the Roman viewpoint. "What modesty can you expect from in a woman who wears a helmet, hates her own sex and delights in feats of strength?" Not exactly my kind of woman I have to admit.

Before long marriage began to suffer. Vows were violated. Women demanded to live their own lives. As soon as the women wanted out the husbands could take about so much of that and then they were happy to let them out. Men began to discard their women as fast as women began to leave.

They would discard their women for going out without a veil, for speaking to the wrong person in public, for going somewhere or doing something without asking their permission. They would divorce a woman to get a richer one. Cicero did that. Women began to shed husbands. "Juvenile rights thus does she lord it over her husband but before long she vacates her kingdom, she flits from one house to another wearing out her bridal veil.

So you can see that the picture of marriage, it was a very confused thing. There was in and out of marriage. Divorce was rife. There were problems with who's really married and who's not married. What about the guy who used to live in tent companionship and somebody sold off his wife? Can he remarry again? They had a lot of problems about resolving everything.

Well let me add one other problem they had. In the midst of all of this some would suggest that the best way out is never to get married. Just forget the whole thing. They began to elevate that for the idea of celibacy becoming a spiritually elite people. If you weren't married and you were single and you were celibate you were sort of a spiritual super person. You had denied yourself the flesh. You had laid aside all of those things and totally devoted yourself to Jesus Christ.

There was a prevailing view in the Corinthian church that celibacy was the highest form of Christian life, to never get married, to have no sexual relationship at all. It got so bad that people were not only not getting married but condemning the people who were married and the people who were married were leaving their partners in order to be celibate so they could be more spiritual. People who were married to an unbeliever were getting out fast because there was supposedly a defilement in being married to an unbeliever and having a sexual relationship with an unbeliever. So the Corinthian church had a lot of problems about marriage. Some people were banging the gavel for celibacy and of course the Jews would be banging the gavel for marriage because they thought it was a sin not to be married.

That idea of celibacy being a high level of spiritual devotion is still with us. It got into the Roman Catholic Church and it's still there. The idea that a truly, godly, holy person can't be married is still in the Catholic Church and priests and nuns don't marry for that reason. They wear a wedding ring very often as a symbol of their marriage to Jesus Christ. That's a high level devotion. They say that makes them superior spiritually to the rest of us who are married.

So that isn't anything that we're not familiar with. That's been around a long time. In fact in the end times, 1 Timothy 4 says people are going to come along talking about forbidding to marry, aren't they?

So Corinthians had a lot of questions and they wrote and asked him, "Help us with the problem of marriage." So in this middle section he stops to help them about this subject of what to do about marriage and celibacy, et cetera, et cetera. Now I want you to look and we'll look at the seventh chapter. I want you to look at four key ideas that appear in the first seven verses and they deal with the whole problem of whether to be celibate or married, whether to be single or married. Some of you people are caught in the throes of this thing right now. You don't know whether to get married or not to get married.

Some of you don't have any option at this point. You're either single and haven't found anybody interested or you're married and you're stuck. But some of you do have that option and you don't know whether to look for somebody to marry or whether not to. You don't know whether it's right to remarry or whatever. So maybe the Spirit of God will pinpoint some things that will help you. Four key ideas coming at the problem from the standpoint of celibacy or being single. You can follow along as

we look.

Number one, celibacy is good. Verse one. “Now concerning the things about which you wrote unto me it is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Now we’ll stop there. If you just take that literally it sounds a little picky. Right? I remember when I was in high school it was advertised that this particular church group was going on a hay ride and there was this one lady who was going to be the chaperone. She was really, really a prudish person. So we had a hay ride with two wagons, boys on one wagon, girls on the other wagon. I will never forget that. I mean talk about a bummer. That’s it.

That rivals the school I heard about where the basketball team wore long pants. You can just take things a little too far. But this was the situation. Her justification – I’ll never forget we got this little talk about 1 Corinthians 7:1. If you were there you might be bumping, touching. It’s good for a man not to touch a woman. Well folks if you take that as a blanket literal statement Adam and Eve would have been the last people that ever lived on the face of the earth. That’s not the point. It’s not talking about that. The concept touching a woman is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. That’s what it means. That is its significance.

I can show that to you very simply from several Old Testament passages. The first one is Genesis 20 verse 6. Here was a potential case where adultery could have been committed in the family of Abraham but in verse 6 God said to him in a dream, “Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart because I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Therefore allowed I thee not to touch her.” So touch her means to have a physical relationship.

In Ruth chapter 2, Ruth and Boaz. Boaz had that desire to keep Ruth pure. “Let thine eyes be on the field – “ Ruth 2:9 “ – but they do reap and go thou after them. Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?” In Proverbs – I’ll give you one more – 6:29, “So he that goeth into his neighbor’s wife, whosoever touches her shall not be innocent.” And of course you know it isn’t talking about a tap on the shoulder. It’s talking about a relationship, physical, sexual. That’s the idea.

So verse 1 is saying it is good not to have a sexual relationship. He’s simply saying it is good to be single. It is good for a man not to be married. It is good. And you say, “Whoa John, how can you say” – that’s what it says in the Bible. Now notice something, folks, before you all panic. He does not say it is the only good. It is also good to married.

He is simply saying it isn’t evil to be single. That’s a problem today because so many people think if you’re not married something wrong with you. “Well she’s not married. I wonder where the quirks are. There’s got to be something wrong. There must be some skeletons in the closet.” We have these little innuendos and inferences. We say, “Poor fellow must have some abnormalities. Can’t find anybody in this whole world that will take you on. You’re in bad shape. Bad shape.”

But he says, “Look it is a good thing not to be married. He’s already talked about the sexual immorality thing in chapter 6. That’s not what he’s talking about. Here he’s talking about marriage. Now he doesn’t say it’s bad to get married and he doesn’t say it’s better to be single. He just says it’s *kalos*, it’s profitable, it’s beneficial, it’s good to be unmarried. Nothing wrong with that at all. It’s very good. He’s not using comparatives. He’s stating a fact.

Now the reason it’s so urgent that he say this is because of the Jews in the church. The Jews, you see, used to teach that if you didn’t have a wife you were a sinner. They said this, “A man who does not have a wife and a child has slain his posterity and lessened the image of God in the world.” Seven kinds of people couldn’t get to Heaven. They had a list. Number one on the list, a Jew who has no wife. Number two, a wife who has no children. The Jews said, “God said be fruitful and multiply and if you don’t you’re disobedient to the commands of God.”

Now no doubt this pressure was coming on the Corinthian church from the Jewish members. They were saying, “You have got to be married,” and the Gentiles who didn’t want to get into the big mish-mash of marriage and who wanted to get some higher devotional level to God were saying, “Forget it, man. We’re going to be celibate and we’re going to strictly remove ourselves from marriage and live a life totally given over to God.” Paul is starting out by saying, “It’s good to be single. It’s fine. Nothing wrong with that at all.”

You say, “What about the Old Testament? It says it’s not good for man to be alone.” Well you can be single and still not be alone. You can have friends. Psalm 68:6 says, “God sets the solitary in families.” Maybe your family is Grace Church. Maybe your family is somebody else’s family. Maybe your family is your friends but God will give you somebody to fulfill the need for other friends. But it’s good to be single. If you’re single it’s good. It’s not bad. It’s not evil. It’s not wrong. It’s good.

But point two. Celibacy is not only good, it’s tempting. This is usually the complaint of single people. “Yeah, I understand that it’s good. It’s just really hard to be single. Very difficult.” Verse two, “Nevertheless even though it’s good on account of immoralities let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband.”

Now notice the command. “Let every woman have her own husband. Let every man have his own wife.” Those are commands. He says, “Everybody get married. It’s good to be single but everybody get married?” Why? On account of what? Immorality. Listen, being single is good but it’s tempting. It’s tempting. The gross style of Corinthian life made it harder for the unmarried to be pure just like it does in our day.

So many unmarried people have problems today because of the constant barrage of sexual temptation being thrown at them. Now he’s not saying that marriage is the absolute demand for

everybody. He is saying the norm is everybody gets married because it is normal to have physical desire. And I'll show you how this works in a minute.

You say, "Well Paul sure got a rotten view of marriage. Marriage is just so you don't get in trouble and if you've got a lot of desire find anybody just so you don't get in trouble. Just get anybody to marry you." Is that what it's – no. He is simply answering one problem. He is simply answering the argument that everybody should be single by saying everybody can't be single or you're going to get into immorality because the desire is too strong. The norm is everybody has his own wife. Notice the word own prohibits polygamy and every woman have her own husband. That's God's design.

Now you say, "But is that the only reason to get married?" No, I've got six reasons to get married the Bible gives. Six biblical reasons for marriage all start with a P. You ready? Number one, procreation. Genesis 1:28 says to be fruitful and multiply and you're supposed to have children. That's one reason to get married, to have children. That's a good reason to get married. God wants to reproduce especially godly people.

Secondly, pleasure. Another reason to get married is pleasure. Did you know that God designed marriage just for physical pleasure, just to enjoy? Hebrews 13:4, "The bed is undefiled." In other words, it's an enjoyable experience. Marriage is honorable. Marriage is enjoyable.

Proverbs 5 talks about the satisfaction that a husband finds in the physical body of his wife and vice versa. Song of Solomon from beginning to end all it is is physical satisfaction, isn't it? Pleasure. You read in the Bible about one of the Old Testament patriarchs sporting with his wife. I always liked that. That's part of it. That's part of the marriage situation, pleasure. So procreation, pleasure.

Thirdly, marriage is provision. Another reason for marriage is provision. God wants a man to provide what a woman needs. The woman says Peter in 1 Peter 3 is the weaker vessel and God knows that a man can support the weakness of a woman. God wants the man to provide for the woman, to nourish her Ephesians 5 says, to cherish her, to strengthen her, to give her something to lean on, to fortify her. So it's procreation, it's pleasure, it's provision.

It's also partnership. Marriage is for partnership. In the Old Testament God says, "You need a helpmeet," right? You need a helper. You don't need to do things alone. You need a helper. So it is for partnership. God gives us a friend and I think really the key ingredient in marriage is friendship. A partner.

Fourth, marriage is a picture. Marriage is given as a picture. Ephesians 5 says, "It is a symbol to the world of God's relationship to his church." Lastly, marriage is for purity, to keep us from committing fornication. So marriage is for procreation, pleasure, provision, partnership, picture and purity. Those are the reasons the Bible gives. Paul isn't simplifying everything to this. He's just dealing with one

aspect.

So we are to get married then because if we don't we're going to put ourselves in a terrible place of temptation. But that doesn't mean that you run out without really considering what you're doing and marry the first available person just so you don't get in trouble. You'll be more trouble than then you ever thought you were in. But that's just one of the reasons. Don't just marry for the sake of purity if you're not also marrying for the sake of pleasure, if you're not also marrying for sake of the picture of Christ and His church and you're intending on nourishing and cherishing her, et cetera, et cetera. So marriage is the norm. Celibacy is good but let's face it, celibacy is also tempting.

Third point. Celibacy is wrong for married people. You say, "Well that's obvious." Well I don't know how obvious it was to Corinthians. Paul had to spend three verses clearing it up. Verse 3. Let me give you the background. What happens is here's these Corinthians, they get saved and immediately they say, "Well in order for us to be totally set apart unto God we're going to stop all of our physical relationships."

Some overzealous husband decides he's going to give all of his devotion to God and says, "I'm not going to do anything physical with you dear," or some overzealous wife says, "I'm now totally committed to Jesus Christ. I can't have anything to do with you especially since you're not a Christian. I don't want a thing to do with you physically." That's what was happening in Corinth. So how are you going to deal with it? Verse 3. "Let the husband render to the wife – " the translation is the debt " – Let the husband render unto the wife the debt and likewise also the wife unto the husband."

Look, you have an obligation in your marriage to give to one another what you owe one another. This is a debt. You are a debtor man to your wife. Ladies, you are a debtor to your husband. Even if he's a non-Christian you owe him a debt. Marriage has its obligations, friends. You are to pay your debts to one another, fulfilling your duty to one another, pay what you owe. Present imperative in the Greek continuous rendering to the wife the debt and likewise the wife continuously rendering to the husband the debt. What is the debt? I think he's talking about physical, sexual relationships.

What he's saying is, "Look, now that you're a Christian doesn't change that. You continue in marriage to fulfill the sexual desires of each other." I believe that's what he's talking about here simply because that's the context that immediately follows and I'll show it to you in a minute.

See, God made the physical a great part of marriage. I know there are some Christian people who even in their marriage are very prudish and I don't want to shock you. I just want to show you what the Bible says. But in marriage your union physically can be expressed in any way that you want. This is God's design for the fulfillment of pleasure.

The Bible glorifies it. In fact the Book of Song of Solomon has a whole book written just on the physical part of marriage. What is says in there, “Love – “ says Solomon “ – becomes a most vehement flame as passionate and hungry as the sea.” Song of Solomon gives us magnificent lyrics in praise to the physical desire of marriage.

Listen. This is what the man says. “Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your lips are like a scarlet thread and your mouth is lovely. You are all fair, my love, and there is no flaw in you.” Wouldn’t you like to hear that ladies? Could you say that again for a recording? Then he says, “You have ravished my heart.” This guy is sick with love, see? “You’ve ravished my heart.

She is equally thrilled. My beloved is radiant and ruddy. He is fairly than ten thousand.” She cries, “I am my beloved’s. My beloved is mine. His desire is toward me.” Then the coup de grâce. She says, “I am sick with love.” That’s talking about physical. I mean she is really excited about this guy and he about her but that’s how it ought to be. God designed marriage to be the physical expression of love. He honors the sexual desire of married.

So Paul is saying, “Look, you have an obligation to one another, to fulfill the physical desire and the physical love and the physical need that each other has.” Mutual sex through love and marriage is God’s design and it’s your duty to one another. It’s a vehicle for the expression of that love. The very act of sex itself strengthens that love.

Babbage says in an interesting book, *Sex and Sanity*, from one point of view it may be spoken of as a safety valve for irresistible desire but for the Christian man the sexual life is infinitely more than that. It is a breathtaking experience. As Bart says, “A bull in blessed intoxication.” Intercourse is not only the appropriate means for the expression of love, it is also the means by which love itself is strengthened and sustained. Sexual intercourse is far more than a physical act. He’s right. So Paul says pay your debt to one another.

Verse 4, here he explains it further. “The wife hath not power of her own body but the husband and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body but the wife.” Now two imperatives in the proceeding verses are followed by two indicatives here that state facts. Pay your dues to one another. Why? Because you have released the authority over your body to your partner.

Look at verse 4. The wife has not *exousiazei*, authority over her own body but the husband. Ladies, your body belongs to him. Men, your body belongs to her. That’s right. For whatever particular expression she has in mind or you have in mind. That sharing is the thing that God designed. It’s a present tense incidentally here, lifelong.

The wife continually lifelong does not have authority over her own body. So when you say to your wife, “Dear, you’re mine,” and she says to you, “Honey, you’re mine,” that is the truest thing in the

purest sense that you could say right out of the Word of God. You can quote this verse to each other in its fullness and know that God supports that desire that you have for one another.

Now in the simple sense the wife's body is her own as God has given it to her. In the spiritual sense it is the Lords according to Romans 12:1, "Present your body," but in the marital sense the body belongs to the partner and the same is true of the man. A beautiful way to express the sharing of marriage.

Go back to Hosea. We've talked about Hosea before. Remember he married this girl. God told him to marry her. Her name was Gomer. I've always thought she turned out of course to be a prostitute and with a name like who could wonder. But he wanted to tell her how he felt.

So at the very beginning in chapter 3 of Hosea he talks to his wife. In verse 3 he says this, "I said unto her, 'Gomer thou shalt abide for me many days – " Hosea 3:3 " – thou shalt abide for me many days – " you're going to be around a long time, dear " – thou shalt not play the harlot. No more do you need to wander in sin. Thou shalt not be for another man." Listen, "So will I also be for thee." You will be for me and I will be for you and he had it. Didn't he? That's marriage.

The physical, "I am for you and you are for me. If you need me then I am yours and if I need you then you are mine." That's it. Don't break up your marriage because you became a Christian. There isn't any high level of sanctity of celibacy. It's good to be single but listen; it's great to be married if that's what God's given you. Don't violate that. He's given you the gravy, man, if you're married.

Peter calls it the grace of life. What he means it's the whip cream on the Sunday. It's the gravy. It's the grace of life. Life is great and life is abundant and life abounds for the Christian but the gravy is to get married. It's exciting. Marriage then is a permanent surrender of everything I am to my partner. I am hers in absolutely the fullest and truest sense.

Now he goes a step further and he makes an application. Verse 5. "Stop depriving one thee other." Now here were these people depriving each other of the physical relationship. "Well I'm sorry dear. Now that we belong to the Lord we mustn't do that, too." No, no. Stop doing that " - except it for with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to prayer and come together that Satan tempt you not for your lack of self-control."

Now he says, "Look, there may be times when you agree not to have physical relationships because you want to pray. You have decided to pray." That's the exception he says. Now I want to give you some guidelines. Are you ready? Here they come. If you're going to not enter in sexual activity, physical activity here are the guidelines.

Number one, except it be with consent. You have to have a mutual agreement. The word with consent is the Greek word that is the source of our word symphony. Unless your hearts are in symphony. Abstention is involuntary on the part of one then forget it then forget it because if you force a withdrawal, if you force an abstention from the physical that's robbing the partner unless there is mutual consent.

Notice this, for a time, not for a long time but for a set time. Not indefinitely but a prescribed time. "We are going to pray for this next five days, dear, and we are going to agree to this because God has laid on our heart. We're going to give ourselves." That's a time. Notice and it is to be a prayer. Fasting is not in the better manuscripts. It's not that to be a part of the prayer time but it doesn't seem to be in the earlier manuscripts. You give yourselves to prayer.

Now this should be mutual agreement. It isn't you know and your wife whispers sweet nothings in your ear and you say, "Don't bother me, I'm praying." That isn't the idea. The idea is when you have agreed to pray about a specific thing. There's a definite article in the Greek, the prayer, indicating there was a definite and specific continuous kind of burden.

What may happen in your life and maybe you've experienced this, probably all of us have is that there comes into your life a great spiritual reality, a great spiritual struggle or something that you recognize as a tremendous need and you lose the desire and the craving for the physical and you become lost in the struggle of the spiritual in seeking out the will and the revelation of God's plan. That becomes the consuming thing. That may happen.

There may be times in your life when you've fallen into sin and you go through a time of purification and your heart needs to be given over totally to the Lord. If that's the case then you need to withdraw from the physical relationship for awhile. This was done in history, Exodus 19:15 for one place. The Mosaic Covenant had been given. God wanted the Children of Israel to straighten their hearts out and get right with Him. So he said, "Come not near your wives – " Exodus 19:15 " – separate yourself physically for a time " – talks about three days " – for a time of purification and concentration on the things of the Lord."

In Joel chapter 2 the Assyrians were threatening to destroy Israel and God says, "You better get squared away Israel or you're really going to be in trouble. You better concentrate on spiritual things," verse 12 of Joel 2. "Turn – " he says " – to me with all your heart with fasting, weeping, mourning. Tear your heart, not your garments. Let it be real."

He says in verse 16, "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that nurse at the breasts. Let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber and the bride out of her room." Separate even the bridegroom and the bride from their wedding chamber for a time of spiritual struggle and concentration. So there may be those times.

In Zechariah the future when our Lord comes and the great day when he arrives in the world and the Jews realize who they have slain in the past. It says in Zechariah 12:10 “God is going to pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication. They’ll look on me whom they have pierced and they’ll mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son,” et cetera, et cetera. It says, “Let – “ verse 12, it says “ - let every family be apart – “ the family of the House of David apart, their wives apart, the family of Nathan apart, the family of Levi, of Shimei, all the families that remain, every family apart and their wives apart and that great time of mourning and spiritual concentration, separation.

So there may be times, mutual consent for prayer, a greater desire for spiritual things takes over and that physical falls away. But notice the end of verse 5, “And then come together again.” Let it be only for that time of prayer, temporary. Why? Simply because of this that Satan tempt you not for your lack of self-control.

Listen, there are people who use the sexual aspect of marriage, I mean so many do to manipulate what they want. Well you know if the husband doesn’t do everything the wife wants that it’s, man. You know he’s on the couch. Or if the wife doesn’t do everything the husband wants he couldn’t care less. He doesn’t even bother with her. The husband knows just exactly what he has to do to get the right response. So he does it sort of like a poor little puppy dog who has to do what he has to do in order to get what he has to get.

Listen, when you withhold from your partner for any reason you put that partner in a place where Satan will tempt them toward their lack of self-control. The first thing that happens is not only the bitterness and the anguish and anxiety that comes between the two but then the evil thought that comes into the mind and then the entertainment of the evil thought and very often it can lead to an adulterous situation. Anytime you withhold from your partner that which is rightfully theirs you become the agent of Satan. Now you say you love your wife, men; women you say you love your husband? Then don’t ever put your husband or wife in a situation where they are open to the temptation of Satan simply because you’re selfish. It isn’t right.

Now this is practical stuff. This gets right down to where we live, right where we’re at but that’s the way the Word of God is. If I say I love my wife, if you say you love your husband, if that’s really true then you would never willfully, openly put that person in a place where Satan begins to tempt them to carnality. Sometimes we deal with people in the church and friends and we wonder why they have so much trouble walking in the Spirit.

Maybe the reason is because they are so frustrated physically in their own marriage that they are constantly being bombarded with thoughts of this. That’s not fair. You’re not only robbing that person, you’re putting them in a place of temptation and you become an agent of Satan. Celibacy is good. It’s

a good thing to be single but it's tempting. Thirdly, it doesn't belong for married people.

Fourth, and this sums it, celibacy is a gift. It is a gift, definitely. Some have it and some don't and the ones that don't find it very frustrating. Notice verse 6, "But I speak this by permission and not by commandment." You say, "What does that mean?" Well probably the word permission is not a good translation. The word in the Greek means in its verb form to think the same as someone, to think the same as someone.

In extrabiblical writings, for example, in 2 Maccabees 14:31 the same word is translated aware. It means awareness. Paul is saying, "I'm saying what I'm saying because I am aware of your human needs, not as a commandment." In other words, "When I said let everybody get married I don't mean that I am commanding you all to get married. I'm simply laying this out as the norm because I'm aware of your human needs. Look – " he says " – don't you people be celibate. Celibacy is a good thing but when you get married fulfill your marriage. I'm not commanding that you have to get married but because I am aware of your needs I'm suggesting this is the best thing."

The only reason you should not get married and fulfill that is verse 7. "I am that all men were even as I am myself but every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, another after that." "Well let's face it – " he says " – I wish you could all be like me and not have to be married but this is a gift. I happen to have it. You may not."

Now here's a beautiful thought, people. While marriage is not a command it is stressed as the norm because of the problem of staying pure. Within marriage the physical should be continually dealt with and fulfilled in order to keep that purity. It is best to be married. "But there are some – " he says " - like me and I wish there were more who don't have to be married because they have a special gift of God."

Next time you see a single person don't assume in their mind that there's something warped about them. Don't assume poor soul must have bad breath or socially unacceptable personality traits. Don't assume that. You might assume, first of all, that maybe they have a charisma of God, that they are a uniquely prepared and designed human being gifted with the Holy Spirit and gifted by the Holy Spirit for singleness.

Now I have a gift, several spiritual gifts. So do you. Well here is another spiritual gift that perhaps could be added to the list in a little different sense and that is the gift of being single. Paul says, "Sure it's the norm to marry. I wish you could all be like me." Say, "Well Paul, why would we want to be like you? Man alive, I couldn't stand being single." That's because you don't have the gift.

"What is the gift, Paul?" It's the gift to be single and not be consumed by lust." You see? The gift isn't just being single. That isn't a gift to some people. That is torture. The gift is being single and loving it.

The gift is being single and not being tempted. The gift is being single and not being preoccupied with not being single. That's the gift.

Paul says, "Hey I'm not married and I don't need marriage. Maybe he was once in his life but he isn't now." God, since he was saved, gave him the gift of celibacy, the gift to be single and never need a woman. You say, "I can't imagine it." No, because if you don't have the gift you can't imagine it. I can't imagine it.

But I've often thought to myself – I love my wife totally and completely and my kids and I wouldn't have it any other way but I can understand what Paul says when he says, "I wish you could be single." There are some things in the ministry that a single man could really do that a married man can't. Look at verse 32 of the 7th chapter. "I would have you without care." I mean wouldn't it be neat if you didn't have any care. "If he that is unmarried cares only for the things of the Lord." But verse 33, if you're married you care for the things that are of the world." What? How you please your wife. Well it gets right down to it.

If you're married, let's face it, you've got certain things you have to care about. You've got to prepare and you've got to take care of and you've got to give time to your kids and time to your wife. Man, if you're single sometimes I think, "Wouldn't it be amazing. You would just move and just be free." God has given some people this marvelous, marvelous gift.

I'll never forget meeting missionaries. I always think of Rachel Saint when about this, running around down there in the jungle from one Indian tribe to the next totally alone without any need for marriage, the gift of celibacy. Her life is absolutely fulfilled in pouring herself into these people. There are people like that around the world. What a unique and blessed gift. It comes from God. But not everybody has it. So Paul says to the Corinthians, "Look, some people be single. If you have a gift of God for it and you can be single and not be preoccupied with sex. But the norm is be married and stay married."

Jesus even said the same thing. Jesus talked about the fact that being single is a good thing. He didn't disparage it. In Matthew 19, listen to this. He said, "There are some eunuchs who are so born from their mother's womb and there are some eunuchs who are made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake – " that is people who have decided not to marry so they can serve the Lord " – he that is able to receive it let him receive it." I mean if you're able, Jesus said and Paul further defines it as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

You know to be single means you can do certain things that you otherwise couldn't do and God needs single people. Thank God if you're single and have no desire for marriage. That's a gift of God. Use it. If you're married you've got the gravy on life. Live it up. Enjoy it. One has one, one has another.

So he says to the Corinthian church, “Listen, every man has his gift. Most of you be married, stay married and fulfill the physical part of marriage. Don’t abstain from each other except for a brief time of prayer. You that are single, if it’s single and without desire for fulfillment in marriage, single and totally given over to the Lord and loving it then thank God for the beautiful gift that He’s given.” So he lays the principle. Celibacy is good. Marriage is good. It just depends on which God designs for you. Now we’ll see how he applies it beginning in verse 8 next week. Let’s pray.

Father, thank you for giving us such practical help. Thank you for taking what’s a delicate matter that some people would maybe not want to talk about or face and putting it right in the Word of God where we all have to face it. I thank you, Father, for blessing our church with moms and dads, with married couples who are so useful to you and set patterns for our whole church family, for our younger people, for their own children who bring up children in the things that you’ve designed, who raise new spiritual seed. I praise you for them and then I thank you, God, for single people, people you’ve given the gift of celibacy to, the gift of being single and not being preoccupied with not being single but loving their ability to be free and serving you.

Bless them Father. Fulfill them. Give them that family that you promised to give the solitary. Father I pray too for those who are still single but have not the gift of celibacy who are looking for that one that can fulfill their life. God, help them to have wisdom. Help them to choose with the mind of the Spirit and fulfill their life with that perfect partner that You’ve designed for them that we might be fulfilled in that relationship so vital to the usefulness that we might have in Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).