

SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE

A.) FIT MARRIAGES, FIT SINGLENES

(1 Cor. 7:1-40)

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INTRODUCTION:

One look at what I intend to cover this morning, and there will be no remaining doubt that I am indeed insane! Both the nature and extent of the material is intimidating. However, there is a common motif and frame throughout this section as it deals with aspects of marriage, divorce, remarriage and singleness. To show and maintain this singular thread, we will be looking at this with a focus on the main points rather than all the nuances.

As such, this will be a look at the issues of marriage, divorce, remarriage and singleness that were most relevant to the situation in the early Corinthian church. Please understand that neither this morning's text nor my treatment are intended to be an exhaustive analysis of all that Scripture teaches about these subjects. Another time, we will walk through a series that deals with these issues more exhaustively across the Word.

What, then, is the situation being addressed to the early Corinthian church? **First**, we must remember that Corinth was a pagan mega-city known for its immorality and sexual freedom. **Second**, the Corinthian Church was comprised of young Christians most of whom were gentile converts from the pagan religions. **Third**, many of the Corinthian Christians have embraced the false view that the body belongs to the world, but the spirit to God. **Fourth**, they further embraced the false view that they had already achieved full spiritual completion and had already been made (at least in spirit) what they would be in heaven – *'like the angels.'* **As a result, some of them began to develop, teach and pressure others toward views of marriage, sex, divorce and singleness that the Holy Spirit used the apostle Paul to correct.** Let us ask the Lord to guide us as we take a closer look at these issues and what we may learn and apply to our own situations today.

PRAYER

The first issue that is addressed is . . .

1.) **MARITAL SEX** (vv. 1-5)

Now that I at least have the men's attention . . .

This phrase, *"It is good for a man not to have relations with a woman,"* is the Corinthian slogan that Paul is correcting in the following verses. Apparently, those in the Corinthian Church who considered themselves to have been already re-made in perfection – *'like the angels'* – interpreted this to mean that as the angels were sex-less so should they be. Therefore, for a man (even a married man) to have sexual relations with a woman (even his wife) was something they sought to forbid as inappropriate for a 'transformed Christian.'

By the way, reading these same verses, mistaking the Corinthian slogan as the words of God and therefore misinterpreting Paul's response is the basis of the Catholic Church's requirement of celibate priests and condemnation of any sexual relations between husband and wife that is not specifically for the purpose of procreation.

a.) **Husband & Wife**

- By strong contrast, Paul (inspired by the Holy Spirit) makes it clear that husbands and wives should be engaged in an active sex life.
- To do otherwise, is to 'play with fire' and risk your spouse's falling into extra-marital temptations.

b.) **Love & Pleasure**

- Further, we see that Scripture acknowledges and even encourages intimate relations between a husband and wife that is simply for the purpose of expressing love and for one another's pleasure.

c.) **A Mutual Offering**

- Please note some important points here:
- 1.) The '*authority over his/her body*' principle is given to both spouses.
- 2.) The '*do not deprive*' principle is spoken to both spouses equally.
- 3.) The 'giving in' to one another is to be as *a willful love offering*, not a commanded obligation.
- 4.) The only exception is for a focused period of devotion to God, but even that should not be long lest temptation overtakes.

2.) **TO BE MARRIED OR SINGLE (vv. 6-9)**

- This had become a HUGE question and point of contention in the Corinthian Church. The argument was that as 'completed Christians' who were 'to live as the angels live' there should be no marriage.
- In defending this perspective, it seems the Corinthians pointed to Paul's own single status as evidence.
- Paul, however, defends and honors both marriage and celibate singleness.
- *Do keep in mind, however, that while Paul was apparently single, he was most likely previously married.* Before his conversion, he was a Sanhedrin and it was required to be married in order to be a Sanhedrin. What happened to his wife? Scripture is silent, but this mention here seems to imply that Paul is a widower who chose not to remarry and was gifted by God to live in such a way while maintaining celibacy. The phrase 'unmarried and widows' is connected together. Because it was so uncommon for men to remain so for long, there was not a word in the Koine Greek Paul is using to refer to a 'widower.' It is reasonable, based on context, that he is here referring not to all unmarrieds but to widowers and widows.

3.) **INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT DIVORCE (vv. 10-16)**

- The above question was also posed to those already married: *as 'completed Christians' should they still be married or should they separate to devote themselves more fully to God and live 'as the angels do'?*

a) **God Hates Divorce (v. 10)**

- The first and foremost principle of our Lord Jesus, Paul immediately points out, is that divorce should never happen. It is a violation of God's plan and of the couple's covenant before Him.

b.) **Christian Spouses (vv. 10-11)**

- “*But if she does leave . . .*” Yet, even among Christian couples, it does happen and therefore it must be addressed. Even Scripture here acknowledges this as a sad but somewhat expected reality. Specifically, what are the implications for both spouses and/or the Christian community when there is a divorce?
- The spouse who leaves is responsible to remain unmarried (and celibate), at least until reconciled with the other. Similarly, the one abandoned is to remain unmarried (and celibate), at least until reconciled with the other. So long as this is maintained there does not appear to be any cause for church discipline.
- If not maintained, the offender is guilty of adultery.
- What happens if one remains faithful and the other doesn't is not addressed here, but was already clearly addressed by Christ (Mt. 5:27-32)
- The relevance to this situation in Corinth is that it appears some among them had decided that marriage and sex within marriage was wrong because the angels were single, but that once divorced sex with whomever was okay because it 'only affected the body.' Scripture here says 'hogwash!' to both ideas!

c.) **'Mixed' Spouses (vv. 12-16)**

- But what if one spouse has been saved and redeemed in Christ, but the other one remains opposed?
- The argument of at least some Corinthian Christians seems to have been that to stay in such a relationship would defile the believer and that, therefore, any Christian whose spouse did not similarly convert, should immediately seek a divorce.
- Paul tells them that they've got it all upside-down!!! Rather, he says, you should stay with your unbelieving spouse for their benefit. Having been saved, you can not now lose your salvation but your spouse can yet gain theirs.
- “Sanctification” here does not refer to 'saving.' Rather, the point is that by staying with them you continue to expose your spouse to the wonders, grace and truth of God whereby they may yet grow closer and – by grace through faith – be saved.
- There is, however, a biblical exception, if the unsaved spouse insists on leaving. The unbeliever is not bound as the believer is and should then be allowed (but never pushed) to leave and even divorce.

d.) **Contentment in the Lord (vv. 17-24)**

- The mention in this next section of circumcision and slavery is simply meant as illustrations of the over-riding principle to this whole section and all of the questions being addressed.
- **Put simply: Honor God in the state in which He has called you!**
- If you were an uncircumcised gentile, stay that way. If a slave, serve God as a slave. If saved as a slave and then made free, serve God as a freeman. If born a freeman and become a slave, serve God as a slave.

4.) **SINGLE, BUT NEVER ALONE (vv. 25-40)**

- Paul now puts everything back together in view of the above principle of contentment in the Lord and His calling.

- While single, be content and serve God as a single person. If married (whether to a believer or unbeliever, happy or unhappy, rich or poor, in sickness or in health), serve and honor God in that – in ALL things content in the Lord!
- Both marriage and celibate singleness can be honorable before God.
- However, “*because of the present distress*,” Paul advises it may be best to remain single if one can do so in a manner honoring of the Lord.
- “*The present distress*” was the reality of living in a highly sexualized, pagan culture that persecuted and oppressed Christians. *Why might it be better to be single than married in such a situation?*
- With marriage comes greater personal responsibility and burden for others. With greater responsibility and burden for others, there is much more to risk losing. With much more to lose, there is naturally less boldness and freedom to serve the Lord no matter what!

a.) Advantages (vv. 25-35)

1.) **Flexibility** (vv. 29-31)

2.) **Undivided** Devotion (vv. 32-35)

b.) The **Challenge** (vv. 36-38)

- Married or single? First time or second time?
- It is a matter of the heart!
- If your heart is right before the Lord, then to marry is well and to remain single is well.
- In circumstances such as those the Corinthians face, to remain single is even better. If you can resist the sexual urges, the advantages of being a single Christian in such a situation outweigh those of being married.

c.) **Widowed** (vv. 39-40)

According to Scripture,

- A Christian is bound to their spouse while that spouse is living. A widow or widower, however, is free to remarry.
- Yet, at least in circumstances such as these, it would still be better to remain single and devoted to the Lord for those able to remain pure while doing so.

What about me . . . here . . . today?

Where is your heart? Before the Lord? Before your spouse or loved one? Where is your contentment?

It can be difficult for us born in a society of religious freedoms and Judeo-Christian laws to translate the Corinthian experience. But friends, if you haven't noticed things, aren't what they used to be! *Our society's attitudes about marriage, sex, the body, the Bible and religious freedom for Christians are rapidly eroding away and radically changing.* **How will YOU respond to this in your attitudes and decisions regarding your purity, situation in life, singleness or marriage?**