

Biblical Principles for Marriage & Singleness Pt. 1

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[0:00] Let's pray. Lord, we come before you this morning, and we ask, Lord, that you would give us ears to hear. We ask, Lord, that you would help us to see that all of our lives is indeed shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And help us, Lord, to see how what you are saying to us in these verses this morning. Give us ears to hear. Help me, Lord, that I will get out of the way and your words will come.

I will be a vessel for you, for your people. In Jesus' name. Amen. Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called them.

Chapter 7. We're in Chapter 7 of Paul's letter to the 1 Corinthians. Again, Pew Bible is on page 1135 of your Pew Bible. Please open your Bibles and follow along.

Now, this chapter mainly concerns marriage and celibacy and a person's role or status within a household.

[1:12] Now, these are practical, everyday matters. But it's easy at this point to say to yourself, well, some of these don't actually affect me.

Either because you're not married or you're too young. But I want to encourage you not to check out at this point. Don't say, this has something to do with me or where I am in my life currently.

There's two reasons for you not to check out. One, you might come to that stage of life eventually.

So it's good to know what the Bible says about it. Two, the church is described as a body and it's good in the body to know how to take care of each part of the body for the good of the whole.

So it is important then, for that reason, to check in rather than check out. So starting from chapter 7, Paul begins to address the Corinthian questions.

He has been, at this point, he had been really addressing some issues about their past. Now he's starting to answer some particular questions, specific questions they put to him.

[2:26] Starting from chapter 7, he will do that all the way to chapter 14. Remember that this letter was a response, actually, by Paul. This letter that we have as 1 Corinthians was a letter that is Paul's response to reports he had heard about the divisions that was going on in the church in Corinth.

And it's also a response to a letter that the Corinthian church themselves had written to Paul. So this is a response back to them. Now, as we will come to see, the questions the Corinthians were asking indeed revealed how so much of what they considered spiritual thinking, what they considered spiritual thinking, were in fact worldly thinking.

You know, their spiritual immaturity was clearly seen by how they have come to be misapplying the truths of the Bible to their lives.

They've started, because they're so spiritually immature, they're misapplying the truths of the Bible to their lives. Their relationships with each other is also disordered. And their relationship with the outside world, it's also disordered.

And now you might ask, why couldn't they interpret Scripture rightly? After all, Paul had said that Christians have the mind of Christ.

[3:56] So what's their problem? What's their issue? Well, the problem with the Corinthian theology, I say that specifically, I said that last week too, the Corinthian theology, it's not Christian theology.

They have this Corinthian theology, and there's a distinction between the two. The problem with their theology is that, and it's a problem, by the way, which is prevalent even today in our world and in the church today.

But the problem is that they are interpreting Scripture through worldly colored lenses. And in fact, what you look through, this is important, what you look through affects what you see.

You know, do you guys know what drunk goggles are? You don't have to be inebriated, but if you put these things on, these drunk goggles, you start to act as if you were drunk.

You won't be able to walk in a straight line. You'll be disoriented. Well, that's what happens when Christians start to look through worldly lens rather than true biblical lenses.

[5:02] We are not indeed worldly anymore. We are indeed saved. We've been adopted into the family of God, but we're called, as people in the family of God, to look through biblical lenses at the world around us.

And the Corinthians have stopped doing that. They're using worldly lens to read their Bible. They're interpreting God's word through the worldly lens.

And it's the same, the tantamount to wearing drunk goggles and walking around the world. They're wearing worldly goggles. And in fact, that will color how they operate in the world.

So the first issue from their letter that Paul addresses is their statement. In verse 1 of chapter 7, Paul says, what they say, they say rather, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

That's what they are saying. That's not Paul. Paul is actually quoting them. Concerning what you wrote to me, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Now, this was their statement.

[6:09] And we ought to understand that even though it says man and woman here, it might be easier for us to understand it as husband and wife. Because they're saying it in the context of marriage.

And as we saw last week, the only context in which such relations, that is, sexual relations, the only context in which such relations are in fact ordained by God is within marriage.

Between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife. But since the Corinthians have gotten it into their heads that the body does not matter, this wrong thinking that the body does not matter lands you into two erroneous groups.

The first group is that the group one says, well, the body doesn't matter, so we then have license to do whatever we want with it. And as we saw last week, Paul spoke to such people.

He says, your body does matter. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. So what you do with it matters very much to God. But then there's also a second group.

[7:22] They also say, well, the body doesn't matter, so they fall on the other spectrum. It's this other side of the same coin. So in fact, because the body doesn't matter, they deprive their body.

they practice strict asceticism, strict disciplining, and those in that camp who are married are now saying, well, since the body doesn't matter, it is good for a man, that is a husband, not to have sexual relations with a woman, that is his wife, or vice versa.

What they really mean is that it is good, again, for a husband and wife not to have sexual relations. And if that is good, if that is good, because the body doesn't matter, then it is even better not to even enter into marriage relationships.

And if you're married already, it is probably better for you to get out of such marriage relationships. Because it is not good to have sexual relations. because they understood that marriages and the expectation of physical intimacy within it keeps one from being spiritual.

That's their understanding. This is wrong. This is wrong. And this is what Paul then goes on to show them. Paul especially is saying in verse 2 to 4, really 2 to 7 here, there is no abstinence in marriage.

[8:58] There is no abstinence in marriage. Paul thankfully corrects their wrong thinking with all the negative consequences that comes with it. And then instead he gives them a Christian view of marriage.

He says to them, stop depriving each other of physical intimacy because in doing so, you are denying your spouse of that which is rightfully theirs by right.

Now, lack of physical intimacy between a married couple does not make you holier. This is what these people are starting to think. And Paul is saying, no, that is wrong. In fact, Apostle Paul says, it is wrong to deprive each other of this God-ordained gift in the context of marriage.

Remember that it's Paul himself who said that we ought to glorify God in our body. And the same Paul is saying here that a husband and a wife do in fact glorify God by enjoying the gift that God has given them in the context in which he has given it.

Now, this is counter-cultural to these people, to the 1 Corinthians because they live in a culture and that culture is not so different from ours.

[10:16] They live in a culture where sexual immorality is so rampant. It's so rampant. Each husband and his own, each, and so, in that culture, they are trying to, most of them were pagans before they came to Christ.

They had, they have, they've practiced and they were involved in the bondage of so many different sort of sexual immoralities. Remember last week I briefly mentioned that even in their pagan worship, the temple, they're at what's called temple prostitutes.

And so, they are overstepping the boundaries that God has, they're really sort of trying to build guardrails against falling back into sexual immorality.

But they're overstepping. That's really what's going on here. It's noteworthy to see how the Bible does not, that is, the Bible does not invalidate, but rather the Bible encourages God's good gifts in its proper context.

Most, the world says of God and the Bible that, you know, it's, when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, it's, you start, you stop having fun, you stop actually being human, you become a robot.

[11:38] That is actually a lie from the pit of hell. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you're enabled to be properly human, the way God created you to be.

And so, the Bible says, if you're not married, abstain, abstain from sex. If you are married, do not abstain from sex.

In our culture, as in the Corinthian culture, we've flipped that upside down. And this is, this is the nature of a world that is anti-God.

In a nature and a culture that is anti-God, this is what happens. We so twist God's good gifts for selfish aims. And that's what's been, what's been going on in the Corinthian culture. That's what we see around us too.

Satan, the prince of this world, offers us poisoned fruit. Just as he did with our first parents, Adam and Eve. And he will say to us, look, take this fruit.

[12:48] It looks good to the eye. It's pleasing to the senses. And once you take it, what happens? It becomes a poison to which you are enslaved.

If you need evidence of what I've just said, just look around at our world. The world and our culture preaches free sex without attachments.

It tells, our world, our culture tells men and women that their sexuality is at the core of who they are. And by embracing it, whatever their appetites may be, they will find their true self.

But the reality is that for all the talk of freedom and sexual freedom, for all that talk, all really that we have is that the world offers is bondage.

Bondage and slavery to addiction. That's what underlies all the lie that the world is selling. But here, notice the picture that the Bible gives us.

[13:56] notice the mutual and reciprocal nature of this command in verse 2-4. This is human dignity as it's portrayed in these verses.

And it's in contrast to the Corinthian culture. Because in the Corinthian culture, human dignity is, in the Corinthian culture, was very low.

this is a culture where there was slavery, there was, as I said before, temple prostitution. This is a culture in which women have very little to no rights.

This is a culture in which injustice and exploitation was across the board. Not unlike our culture today. And it's within this context, Apostle Paul offers this beautiful and godly picture of mutual self-giving love.

If we view these instructions through tainted worldly lenses, what's going to happen if we do that?

It's easy then to take offense. If you read verse 2-4, it's easy, in fact, I can promise you that if I were to read this, these words that Paul writes in verse 2-4 in front of, you know, in the market square of today, they will be offended by the words.

[15:23] Although it is words of freedom, they will be offended by it because they're seen in true worldly lenses. And it's easy for us as well to take offense to it if we only read it through worldly lenses.

If we buy into the lie that the culture tells us, my body, my right. If we buy into that lie, which is just a lie towards selfish hands, we will be offended by what Paul has to say here.

But here, so I invite you to look through biblical lenses, and here, what Paul says to us is, your body is not your own. Well, we know last week that he already told us, your body belongs to God, who has bought you with his precious blood.

And, if you're married, your body also belongs to your spouse. So, wives, your body belongs to your husband.

And, husbands, your body belongs to your wife. Now, this biblical vision of bodily devotion to one another in marriage is at the heart of the marriage vow in the book of common prayer.

[16:45] When the husband vows to his wife, with my body, I thee worship, or honor. That's the old, the worship there is not worship as God, but honor.

That's what it means. With my body, I thee honor. So, Paul then says, you belong to one another in marriage.

So, verse 5, do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourself to prayer.

So, Paul says that do not deprive one another. The word that Paul uses in verse 5, the Greek word that we translate deprive, is the same word that Paul uses in chapter 6, verse 7, when he speaks of defrauding someone.

So, how much does Paul, what's the weight that Paul puts on this? He's saying, do not defraud in marriage, do not defraud one another. Physical intimacy in marriage is not to be used as a currency, as a bargaining chip, to get one over against your spouse.

[18:02] The world may use it as such, but it must not be so in a Christian marriage. So, Paul gives in this verse only one exception under this principle of mutual self-giving.

He says, the only time you may do it is if you both beforehand, look at all the qualifications he gives, both beforehand for a limited time to devote yourselves to prayer.

By the way, this is why it's also important, Paul is emphasizing the importance of husband and wife praying together. That's implied in here. Husband and wife pray together.

This is a challenge for all of us in the modern world. And specifically he's saying here, not only just when you pray, he's saying here when you devote yourself to prayer.

So, I think what he's implying is maybe you devoted a time of fasting and dedicated time of prayer. But he quickly warns only for a limited time and then quickly, right, come back together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

[19:14] So, what's the principle? The husband willingly and freely gives his body to his wife and the wife to her husband. That's the principle here. There is no selfish lording it over the other.

Rather, it is a mutual self-giving in love. Now, that's the principle. And since each couple is different and each marriage is different, it is enough to say what God's heart is regarding this matter. and then to each couple submit ourselves to God's word in the context of each of our marriage relationships. Paul continues in verse 6.

He says, now, as a concession not a command, I say this, I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

Essentially, what he's saying is, I wish that all of you were as I am myself. I wish everyone has a gift of singleness as I do. But by that, he's not saying that singleness is better than marriage, he's merely saying, I wish that all of you are like me, but I understand that and I know that not everyone is like me.

[20:38] Each of us are gifted differently. Each person is gifted differently as God, the giver of the gifts, chooses to give it. So we'll see this when we come to verse 17 because the principle in verse 6 and 7 is really, we'll see that in verse 17 next Sunday, but the principle is contentment.

Be content where God has you presently. That's what Paul means by the grace and the gifts. If you're single, God has given you the gift of singleness for the time at which you're single.

If you're married, God has given you the gift of marriage. It is a grace. Both, not as better than the other. Both are gifts given by God and he will equip you for that stage of life that you're in.

So, Paul continues in verse 8. To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, that is, if they have no power over their passions, they should marry.

For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. He's saying here, it's better to marry than for your passion to burn. Notice that in verse 8, Paul again says, I wish all have the gift that I have.

[22:06] But that, he's not saying, it's just like me saying, it is good to go into ordained service in the church.

To say something is good is not to say that other things are not good. He's not saying it in exclusion of other things. He's saying it is good to be single. To be as I am, as I am.

It's very likely that Paul is actually a widower. Because he was a Pharisee, and to be a Pharisee, and to be as advanced as a Pharisee, it would have been a sin for him not to be married. So, most theologians think that he was either married and is a widower, or because when he became a Christian, his wife left him. That's all conjecture, but there's some validity to it. But at this point, Paul is a single man in his ministry. And the reason why he says it is good for them to remain single, in the culture that he's writing to, we have to understand that in the Corinthian culture, as in it's prevailing in antiquity, is that women married early teen. [23:21] And so, a lot of what would have been very likely in the church, in all of the early churches, is that when we talk of widows, we generally think of older women when we speak of widows.

But it's very likely that some of the widows, and many of the widows, among them, actually the Bible makes a distinction between older widows and younger widows. And this is why, because some of them could still be very much marriageable age.

And it was the custom in Greek culture and Roman culture that if you are widowed or divorced, you are actually encouraged, in fact, almost forced, to be married within a year.

And so Paul is saying here, as a concession and as an encouragement to them, do not operate by the timetable of the culture. It is good for you to remain single, if you want to remain single, in order to devote yourself to the work of the ministry, as I am.

But then he also says, it's not a law. Singleness is not a law. If you cannot exercise self-control, by that it means if you have no power over your passions, if you don't have the gift of celibacy, or the calling of celibacy, as I do, then you should marry.

[24:34] For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. That's the principle there. And then he goes on, he says, to the rest, to those who are in mixed marriages.

Now, again, we ought to understand that the Corinthian pagan context means that there are so many different kind of marriages in the Corinthian church. there were marriages between believers, husband and wife who are believers.

Remember, a lot of these people were saved from pagan context. So there would be probably many of them also who were married to unbelievers. Either the husband is a believer and the wife is not a believer or vice versa.

And so Paul, being pastoral here, is speaking to all of them in their different contexts. And he says to the rest in mixed marriages, to those whose spouse is an unbeliever.

And this is part of what's going on in the Corinthian church, right? They think that marriage and physical intimacy is of no value. And so it's very even much more likely for those who have spouses who are not believers to say, well, I'm a Christian now, I need to get out of that marriage.

[25:51] But Paul says here, remain in your marriage. Remain in your marriage, even if your spouse, as a non-believer. If your spouse will have you, remain in that marriage.

This is God's high view of the institution of marriage. Remain in your marriage without fear. Some of them also had fear.

And you have to understand also that in the pagan world, where we talked about it last week, to worship other gods, to worship idols, is not just to go away to a sanctuary.

It is every part of your life. You have idols in your homes, you have all of these totems of idol worship. So if you're married to an unbeliever, he probably has all of that.

And so these Christian believers are like, well, we can't live under these circumstances. We're living, we are now the temple of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

[26:51] We cannot live in a house where there are idol worship. But Paul gives them here a comfort. It says, you can live and you can remain in your marriage without fear or anxiety that your status as the temple of the Holy Spirit will be impaired in such a marriage.

In fact, the opposite is true, Paul tells them. If you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, your presence in those marriages, it sanctifies your home and your household.

Your children are sanctified because you bear the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have resided in you the living God. All of those things are just dumb and dead idols.

And so you don't need to have any fear. And then he goes on in verse 14, for the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife. And the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

It doesn't mean holy as in saved, but it means set apart, sanctified. Your home is holy. Otherwise, your children will be unclean. But as it is, they are holy.

[28 : 03] We were talking about infant baptism downstairs at Sunday school. This is another sort of implied import of our children. Children of believing parents are under the covenant of God.

And this is what Paul is saying to them. Remain in your marriage. Now, there is a warning here, and I know it is prevailing in our age. We ought to be mindful that what Paul is saying here is not saying it is okay to flirt to convert.

Do you know what that is? Are you familiar with that phrase? He is not saying that here. He is not saying, if you are not, this is only for those who are married. If you are married to a non-believer, remain in your marriage.

But the Bible also says, do not be unequally yoked with a non-believer. And so, do not enter into a married relationship, if you are not already in a married relationship, you are a believer in Jesus Christ, with someone who is not a believer.

Do not. It will be disobeying God's word and God's commandment to you. Do not be unequally yoked. Lisa and I are friends with two couples.

[29 : 18] And this is important because Paul then goes on in verse 15, he says, but if the unbelieving partner separates, I'll tell you about that soon, but let me read verse 15, but if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.

That is, if your spouse who doesn't believe says, I don't want anything to do with you anymore, this is probably likely what happened with Paul. If they separate, then let it be so.

In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. By that, it means they're no longer bound, right, in that marriage relationship.

If your spouse, unbelieving spouse, abandons you, you're no longer bound in that marriage relationship. You're free. That's what it means. You're not enslaved. You're free. I think this means that you're free then to remarry.

But he, and then he says, Paul says, God has called you to peace. God has called you to peace, for how do you know? And here, the peace that God has called you to is, wherever you are, whatever state you are, God has called you to peace.

[30 : 26] Whether it's in marriage, whether it's singleness, God has called you to peace. And even if you're married to an unbeliever, God has called you to peace. How do you know, why, whether you will save your husband? How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

That's not a promise, mind you, because many people have used this, again, to flirt, to convert.

Well, if I marry them, then, you know, God will save them. No, that's not a promise. God, what Paul is saying is that you do not know.

Be faithful where God has called you. You don't know how God will use that, better to save. And I have a good example of this. I have two friends who are dear friends of ours, both married to unbelievers, both prior to becoming believers.

They came to faith in Jesus Christ. Their spouse didn't come to faith in Jesus Christ. One family had, there are no one here in this church, so you don't have to look around, but one family, one family where the wife is not a believer, was very antagonistic to the gospel.

She came to church once for a while, but she always come under duress. Not because her husband forced her, she would come, but you could tell she was, while she was in the church, she was always on the duress.

[31 : 40] Eventually, she, wonderfully, the children in this family are believers in Jesus Christ, but unfortunately, sadly, tragically, the wife decides to eventually end that marriage and divorce her husband.

That is, that could happen, but in that context, that husband was faithful, even though it was not easy. This is why the warning is there, do not be unequally yoked.

It is a burden. It was a burden on this brother, but he was faithful to his marriage vows, he was faithful to his wife until she chooses, she chose to separate from him. And there's another one where the wife was a believer, and for a long time, for years, we were praying for her husband. We came to church also with her once in a while. He didn't believe, and he was honest about his unbelief, but it was about a year and a half ago, I saw friends of ours, we don't live in the same place anymore, but I saw friends of ours saying that husband has come to faith.

That is God's grace, free grace. But here's the, in that regards too, the wife was faithfully living out her faith. So here's the invitation and the warning and the command of God in this context for us.

[33:04] Wives, be faithful in your calling as wives. Husbands, be faithful in your calling as husbands. Do not be self-giving in the context of self-giving love.

As husbands, your body is not your home. It belongs to your wife. Wife, your body is not your home. It belongs to your husband. This is not a license than to lord it over one another and to say, I must have my right.

It is actually, look at the agency. The agency throughout all of this is given to each person. You are commanded and you're invited as the children of God to love in self-giving love.

It is not compulsory, but because you have the mind and heart of Christ, you love one another in a self-giving way. And if you're in a relationship with an unbeliever, remain faithful where God has you. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

You do live faithfully so that your life, your conduct will speak about the gospel of Jesus Christ to your unbelieving family.

[34:14] And as we do so, we also speak to the world around us by the goodness of God who has called us into his family and given us the power of the Holy Spirit.

let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the institution of marriage. We thank you, Lord, that you called us, all of us, and as you called us to yourself, you called us in the context of different stages of our lives.

Some of us are married, some of us are single, but yet you've called us and you've given us the gifts of the Holy Spirit to sustain us in whatever stage of life you've called us. Help us, Lord, to be faithful where you have us.

Help us, Lord, to live content and trustworthy lives, trusting in you, Lord, abiding by your word, and loving as Christ loves in every facet of our lives, even in our marriage.

We pray, Lord, for marriages in this church that you will continue to strengthen us in a world where the institution of marriage is maligned and ridiculed. Help us, Lord, in our marriages to speak the truth about the gospel of sinners who have been saved by grace who have come together in Christ to love one another and to then image Christ's love for his church.

[35:42] Help us, Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.