

MARRIAGE AND SEX
I Corinthians 7:1-7
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They came in together. You could tell by the body language that they weren't happy with each other.

A little different that talking to engaged people or newlyweds

He began by admitting that it was embarrassing to even talk about this but the truth of the matter is that he is so angry at his wife he can hardly speak to her.

And then he said, "And the bottom line is that she makes him feel like a rapist if I even suggest sex.

"For years, she has been treating me like a little boy who wants candy and has to beg for it and be good enough.

"I can't seem to ever figure her out - everything depends on her moods.

She could hardly contain herself as he was talking and when she had the first opportunity she exploded in words:

"Of course he feels like a rapist, that what he's doing.

"He is so inconsiderate of my feelings that I can't believe he has the audacity to even suggest we have sex.

"He will scold me for something, make me feel like nothing, and then minutes later want to be physically intimate -

"Well, there's more to intimacy than sex.

"And I won't be treated like an object for his pleasure.

"If he can't treat me like a human being he forget about sex.

Well, does anyone still not know the subject of the sermon today?!

I do not have any desire to be sensational by preaching on this subject today.

I hope to embarrass no one.

But in order to accurately communicate what the Apostle Paul teaches, I will be clear without being crude.

As we have seen over the past few weeks, in I Corinthians the Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians in the church in the Greek city of Corinth.

Like people in any society these men and women had been greatly influenced by their culture.

There were some who thought that since a relationship to God is spiritual and since the body is physical and will die anyway - anything goes - "The body is for sex and sex is for the body".

In chapter six Paul responds to their error.

But there was another group as well, as we have seen in the last couple of weeks.

In chapter 7 verse 1 we discover that Paul is responding to a letter written by the Corinthian Christians.

He writes, "Now for the matters you wrote about".

The first subject he mentions is the one we have already introduced:

Some of the Christians in Corinth were saying:

Verse 1: "It is good for a man not to marry a woman"

As we saw two weeks ago the word "marry" is an euphemism for "not touch"(It is good for a man not to touch a woman) which is itself an euphemism for "not have sexual relations with (it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman). It is important to note that the phrase is not saying it is good for a man not to get married. The subject here is not a marriage ceremony but sexual relations as your NIV marginal note will indicate.

Maybe make a note to yourself in your Bible so that you don't misunderstand this phrase when you come back to in the future.

Paul begins with quoting the Corinthians and in essence saying:

"Some of you Christians mistakenly say, it is good for even a married Christian not to have sexual relations."

These were the Christians who thought sex, even sex in marriage was wrong.

They had the false idea that sexual relations conflicted with a true relationship with God.

They thought that if they were to be truly more spiritual they would abstain from sex altogether and give themselves to spiritual pursuits - reading the Bible, fasting, etc.

Not everyone agreed and it was especially troublesome when it was a husband and wife who didn't agree.

Today we speak of the battle of the sexes.

And in part we are talking about a battle about sex.

Even among married Christians, sex is often a particular problem:

There is the conflict of perceived "rights".

The wife or sometimes the husband feeling that they have the "right" to control their own body and the husband or sometimes the wife feeling that they have the "right" to have sex.

There are men and women in marriages who complain that their spouses are unwilling to respond sexually.

There are men and sometimes women who demand sex.

There are men and women in marriage who are tempted to (or in fact do) use sex as a tool to reward or punish their spouse.

There is also sometimes the hidden and maybe even subconscious idea that sex is somehow "bad" - at least it is not good. And men (but probably more often women) who see sex as nothing more than an accommodation to baser animal instincts.

And women and even men who feel that they would be more spiritual if they didn't have sexual desires or didn't have to accommodate their spouse sexually.

Paul says in essence, "Wait a minute" - you have it all wrong!

I want you to do two things with me this morning:

I want you to look with me at the biblical text and see just what Paul does say here about sex in marriage.

And I also want you to think with me about several implications of what God through Paul here writes to us as well as the Corinthians.

Let's go back to the biblical text and see just what God instructs:

You Corinthians say: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

BUT God through Paul says: V 2 "each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

When he writes "each man should have his own wife and vice versa, he is not saying each person should "get" a wife or "acquire" a husband.

As is obvious from the text, Paul is addressing husbands and wives and is saying each husband and wife should have his wife or her husband.

To "have" in this context means to engage in sexual relations.

Some of the Corinthians were saying husbands and wives shouldn't have sexual relations BUT Paul is telling them on God's authority that husbands and wives should have sexual relations.

Some of you quickly noticed that I left out a phrase when I quoted from verse 2.

The phrase is, "Since there is so much immorality".

The Corinthians, like us, lived in a day when sexual immorality was rampant.

It was as openly practiced in their temples as it is openly displayed in our media and practiced by too many people we know personally.

At first glance it might seem that Paul is suggesting that the only reason for sex in marriage is to legalize their otherwise immoral behavior.

That idea seems corroborated when you look at verse 5 and see Paul writing about "your lack of self control".

And in verse 9 when Paul writes that you should marry if you can't control yourself.

But to suggest that Paul is here saying that marriage is just for the purpose of legalizing sex would be to contradict the rest of Scripture and Paul's own teaching on marriage.

No. Paul adds these phrases in verse 2 about "since there is so much immorality" and verse 9 about "your lack of self-control" because he is talking very practically to people in a particular situation - one very much like our own, I might add.

I think he is simply noting a fact - A spouse's refusal to have sex does contribute to the temptation to sexual sin.

I dare say that in that culture as in our own the availability of prostitutes and others willing to engage in sexual sin made both men and women more vulnerable.

And what would happen then as now is that men and women would rationalize their immorality by saying their spouse refuses them so they are forced to go elsewhere.

But it would contradict the rest of Scripture to say that a spouse's refusal to have sex is justification to commit sexual sin.

Vulnerability and availability are never an excuse for sin.

In Egypt, Joseph of the Old Testament had every opportunity and even good rationale for sinning with Potifer's wife but instead he fled.

Again, I believe what Paul is doing is recognizing a fact that there are legitimate expectations in marriage and when they are not met it adds fuel to the fire of temptation.

And while the one who is tempted to sexual sin can never use that as justification to sin, the spouse does bear some responsibility for their own actions.

But let's go back in our thoughts to the main point of the statement:

Contrary to the thinking of the Corinthians, husbands and wives should have sexual relations.

The verb translated "should have" is an imperative - a command.

God is saying sexual relations are to be part of the marriage relationship.

Let me tell you the first implication I draw from this passage:

Sex in marriage is good not evil.

Sex in marriage is desired by God, approved by God, commanded by God.

There is an idea in our culture, even in the Christian sub-culture that sex is somehow slightly evil - a not so good activity that we must engage in because of our need to procreate and our need to satisfy our passions.

Even in the popular media it is presented as if or because it is a taboo, a forbidden.

It is often most titillating because it is somehow flirting with evil.

Somehow, like many of God's good gifts, the gift of sex is denigrated because it is so often abused.

Yes, sex out of marriage is wrong but that doesn't taint sex itself - Used properly, in marriage, God says it is good.

In our minds we must be rid of the notion that sex is a necessary evil - an accommodation to our baser instincts - a less than God-honoring activity.

No, Sex in marriage is good not evil.

In verse 2 Paul has written that each husband should have sexual relations with his wife and each wife should have sexual relations with her husband.

Verses 3-4 explain further what he means.

Look at V 3 READ

Each spouse should fulfill his or her marital duty"

Literally: "The husband should pay the debt that is due"

"the wife likewise (implied: should pay the debt that is due"

Many obligations go along with marriage.

In marriage we take on the obligation of caring for the other person.

There is an element of duty in the relationship that we voluntarily take on at marriage.

We assumed responsibility for our spouse's welfare.

In the context of sex in marriage, what is Paul's point?

Sexual relations are included in the obligations we voluntarily took on when we married.

V 4 goes on to explain that still further. READ

"The wife's body does not belong to her but to her husband.

And the husband's body does not belong to him but to his wife.

Paul emphasizes that in the responsibility husbands and wives took on when they married they have made even their bodies available to serve the other person.

Again in the context of sex in marriage, what is Paul's point?

When you marry you take on a responsibility even with regard to your very body and sexual relations are a part of that responsibility with your body.

Let me note now the second implication that I draw from this passage:

Sex in marriage is not only good, approved by God, but sex in marriage is necessary.

When in verse 4 it says a person's "body" does not belong to them but to the spouse, that word "body" probably carries more meaning than just the flesh and blood physical body.

As in 6:18 it probably carries the idea of the entire person, body and spirit - the person, the "you".

When we marry, our desire is to love that other person, to respond to their needs, to help them become all they were created and designed by God to be.

When we marry we recognize that one of the needs the other person has is for intimacy - to be unconditionally loved - to be fully, completely known and still loved and cherished.

Our spouse has the need to know that even when they are completely vulnerable, they can trust that in spite of their weaknesses, their failings, they are loved.

We sometimes speak of our psychological or emotional vulnerability as "nakedness".

Sometimes when we have finished baring our soul (do you hear the metaphor? "baring our soul") to someone we say we felt like we were naked - we had told them everything.

Physical nakedness is a metaphor for a far deeper issue - our vulnerability, the laying open of our deepest selves.

From the beginning of time that relationship between physical nakedness and emotional nakedness has been understood.

Genesis speaks of Adam and Eve being aware for the first time after their sin that they were naked.

There's a play on words there.
Both their physical and their emotional nakedness.

And so from the beginning the physical sexual union of a husband and wife was to be both actually and metaphorically an act of deepest intimacy - the most open two people could be with each other. Exposed, naked, vulnerable, known, and still Loved!

Sex in marriage is a powerful act.

It touches the soul of a person - It touches "you" in the most basic sense. It is designed by God to communicate powerfully in the most sensitive way, at the root of who we are, that we are loved unconditionally by another.

Paul told us in Ephesians 5 that marriage more than any other human relationship pictures, reflects, the intentions of God himself toward His people - an unconditional permanent relationship of love.

Sex is COMMUNICATION.

A sexual relationship between a wife and a husband is the highest order of communication.

Husband what are you communicating in your sexual relationship with your wife?

Understanding that sex is far more than intercourse what are you saying to your wife?

Wife, what are you communicating to your husband?

Sex was designed by God for intimacy not just biology.

It doesn't take much to stimulate the desire for sex:

T.V., magazines, books, videos, the various stages of undress that some people walk around in - all can easily stimulate the desire for sex.

But it takes something quite different to stimulate the desire to communicate unconditional love.

It takes a commitment.

It takes a trust.

It takes a will to love - truly love.

That is why I reminded you a few weeks ago that sex outside of the permanent commitment of marriage between a husband and a wife is a violation of everything sex is intended to be.

Sex in marriage is necessary to communicate what a marriage commitment is all about.

It is a responsibility, a duty, an obligation, and a privilege to communicate an unconditional love.

A third implication I want you to see from these verses is found in verses 2,3 & 4.

When Paul speaks of the responsibility of husbands compared to the responsibility of wives - what do you notice?

As we saw last week, Paul says what is "good for the goose is good for the gander". No gender distinctions made here.

Both husbands and wives have the same responsibility!

There is not one set of rules for wives and another for husbands.

The implication? Sexual responsibility in marriage is mutual.

Both husbands and wives carry equal responsibility.

The great temptation throughout this passage is to judge how our spouse is not doing what the text says. BUT

The emphasis in the Bible continues to be on what you are doing.

That's a very significant principle in marriage.

Paul does not address our rights in these verses.

What does he address? Our obligation.

Notice that in every verse the emphasis is on responsibility not our rights.

Every verse stresses not what the other person is supposed to do but what we are commanded by God to do.

So wives, listen to God's instruction to you not to your husband.

Likewise, husbands, we must listen to God's instruction to us not God's instruction to our wives.

These are not verses for men to use against their wives.

Too often sex in marriage has been perceived as a husband's right and a wife's obligation.

The mutuality in these verses points out that a husband's body is to meet his wife's needs, every bit as much as a wife's body is to meet her husband's needs.

Remembering that sex is more than intercourse.

Husband, are you meeting your wife's sexual needs?

Sexual responsibility in marriage is mutual.

Fourthly I'd like you to see from these verses the implication that sex is for the purpose of giving not taking.

In verse 3 Paul said, "fulfill your marital duty".

In verse 4 Paul wrote, "your body does not belong to you."

In verse 5 Paul writes, "Don't deprive each other."

In every case it is spoken of not as a right to receive but a freely chosen obligation to give.

Verse 5 starts out with, "do not deprive" or more literally "do not defraud (or cheat)" your spouse.

The idea is "don't withhold something that rightfully belongs to them."

So sex should never be used as a bribe or a reward or as threat or punishment.

It is a marital obligation - you granted that obligation when you married.

But this doesn't work just one way.

Let me be necessarily pointed in my remarks:

In what ways do husbands deprive their wives sexually?

When we know that sex is more than intercourse do we cheat our spouses when we reduce sex to that?

Is it possible that verses 3-5 could and maybe often have been abused?

Is it possible that some would use these verses as a kind of biblical stick with which the sexually more aggressive in the relationship threatens the spouse into more sex.

When we study this we find that quite the opposite is intended.

SEX IS FOR GIVING, FOR MINISTERING, FOR SERVING, FOR EXPRESSING LOVE, in an unconditional commitment of a husband and a wife to each other for life.

Yes, sex in marriage is for the purpose of giving not taking!

The fifth implication I want you to see is in verse 5: READ

Sex in marriage is normal and usual not exceptional.

In verse 6 Paul writes that he gives the instruction of verse 5 as a concession not as a command.

Some might read verse 5 and conclude that Paul thinks that sexual abstinence in marriage is actually preferable.

That it is somehow holier to abstain so you can attend to more spiritual issues in life.

But Paul's point is that while abstaining from sex is permissible it is clearly unusual and should be the exception.

And furthermore he writes that it must only be by mutual permission, in fact he literally says, both must be in sympathy with the intention to abstain.

And furthermore it must be only for a time.

The implication is that it must be for a short time.

And he adds it must end - "the two must come together again."

Sexual relations in marriage are normal and usual not exceptional.

From these verses I draw the clear implications that

First, Sex in marriage is good not evil.

Second, Sex in marriage is necessary to communicate what is intended in marriage.

Third, Sexual responsibility in marriage is mutual.

Fourth, Sex in marriage is for the purpose of giving not taking.

And fifth, Sex in marriage is normal, usual, not exceptional.

There are husbands in this place this morning who have reduced sex to a "right" that is theirs with little or no thought for their obligation to their wives.

There are wives in this place this morning who have reduced sex to a battle in which they hold the high ground and dictate the terms.

There are husbands and wives in this place who are cheating their spouses.

I did not say they are cheating on them as in committing adultery but are cheating them out of what God intended.

Sex is for the purpose of giving, for the purpose of communicating unconditional love.

Don't withhold true God-intended and God-defined sexual relations from each other.

Talk with your spouse about your sexual desires and needs.

Yes, there are fears that they will use this information to threaten or abuse you.

Or maybe there is pride that will not let anyone know of your "needs". But if you fear your spouse, then there are other issues that need to be addressed.

And if you need help talking about it then get help.

Don't be so private and proud that you let this issue grow into a cancer that eats the heart out of your marriage.