LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 7 :1-16

Essentials for marriage

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're back with our study in 1 Corinthians, so please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, and we're going to get started in today's study, and we're going to be talking about marriage. Actually, that's not totally true. We will definitely touch on issues related to marriage, but far and away, the overall theme of what Paul is really going to talk about here is singleness, and you have to remember something about the Apostle Paul when he talks about things like marriage. He can't help himself, but to talk about things like marriage within the context of ministry. He doesn't remove marriage from ministry, not very often anyway, and what we're going to see here in chapter 7 is the Apostle Paul making statements that are even going to look a little surprising, but we have to remember to take it in context and to learn why he's saying what he's saying, and the very first thing he says coming right out of the chute here in chapter 7 verse 1 is, "...now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." Okay, and we kind of read that verse and we go, what?

Is he saying that when a man gets married, he shouldn't ever touch his wife and never have relations with her, and is he saying sexual relations are bad between a man and a woman? Not at all, and we covered these things in the last study to a large degree. You have to understand this statement is made within the context of ministry with an eye toward how singleness is better from a ministry standpoint because it has less distractions for the person who is ministering, okay? That's the context. That's the underlying theme of why Paul is saying what he's saying in these things, so this is one of those statements.

Boy, let me tell you, you could take verse 1 of chapter 7, and if you didn't read anything else of the whole chapter, I suppose you could create a whole doctrine of, you know, sex is bad, sex is wrong, don't ever, you know, have sex. Obviously, we talked about this last week, sex was created by God, relations between a man and a woman within the context of marriage, and it's a beautiful thing, and it's something to be enjoyed. So let's read more into this chapter. Let's find out what the apostle is saying. He goes on here—in fact, let me just read verse 1 again, and then we'll read it in the context with the other verses.

Now, concerning the matters about which you wrote, Paul's been dealing with issues up to this point about things he had heard that were going on in the Corinthian church. Now he's addressing things they actually wrote to him about in the form of questions. He says, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, and by the way, this statement does appear in quotation marks in many English translations, and many believe that this was something, that this was yet another slogan that they had adopted. I don't think so. I think this is Paul talking about relationships in the context of ministry.

He goes on in verse 2, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, and it was very strong in Corinth, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. There you go. Paul is not forbidding marriage and what goes with it. And then he goes on in verse 3 to say, the husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise, the wife to her husband. Conjugal rights, marital rights, we know what we're talking about here.

For the wife, he says, does not have authority over her own body. In other words, she's not the only one who can lay claim to that body, he says, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Now he's talking about the responsibilities of marriage, right? And it's kind of put in an admittedly weird kind of a way, okay?

We probably wouldn't say it like this, but Paul is making some important points about the fact that when a man and a woman come together in marriage, they literally give themselves to the other person physically. Now, not just physically, they give themselves to the other person in other ways as well. But here he's just talking about the physical element of it. In marriage, you don't have the right to say, you can't touch me to your spouse, just because maybe, you know, you're being angry or they said something you don't like or something like that. We can't punish the other person, right?

He says, hey, they have a right. They have a marital right. You have a marital right. They have a marital right. All right?

And that's why he says in verse five, do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer. But he says, then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This is an interesting statement because, and I've always kind of liked this, Paul is saying that a couple can forego having physical relations for a period of time, but only by agreement and for the purpose of doing something like devoting themselves to prayer. In other words, what Paul is showing us here is that there are more ways to fast and pray. We think of fasting as withdrawing or withholding food for a period of time, but I believe fasting can come in many ways, shapes, and sizes.

I believe you can fast from a lot of different things. You can fast from the internet. You can fast from food. You can fast from physical relations. I think there's a lot of things you can fast from.

And whatever you set aside to devote time for prayer, I think, is a kind of fasting. And Paul is not using the word fasting here, but he's applying it in the very same way that we would fasting. So again, a man and a woman, I should say a husband and wife, can, by mutual agreement, say we're going to fast from being together physically in a sexual sense so that we might devote ourselves maybe this week or for the next few days to prayer. It is not appropriate for a husband to say to his wife, I'm not going to let you touch me for the next few days because I'm praying. This needs to be by mutual agreement.

Okay? Mutual agreement. You agreed upon it. All right. But Paul says, don't make it too long because the enemy loves to exploit our weaknesses.

And if we allow something like that to go on too long, we create a weakness that the enemy could very well exploit. So be very careful about that. Verse six, he says, now as a concession, not a command, I say this, I wish that all were as I myself am. And he's referring to single. I wish that you were single.

Now, why does Paul wish that other people were single? Again, you have to understand his statements are made within the context of ministry. I wish, he's really saying, I wish all of you didn't have the distractions that I am free from. I wish you all could enjoy the freedom from distractions that I have. Because when you get married, it's a distraction.

You've got to take care of your spouse. You have to see to their needs. You're not living a solo, solitary life anymore. Right? Once you enter into the marriage union.

So that's why he says, I wish you were like I am. I wish you were single. Now, the last part of verse seven is really interesting. Listen to what the apostle Paul says. But each has his own gift from God.

One of one kind and one of another. The reason I emphasize this part of verse seven is because you'll notice that Paul refers to singleness here, which he's been talking about as a gift. And this is where we actually get our term, the gift of singleness. He's talking about how he would rather you be single. He'd rather you not have to deal with all of the distractions of marriage from the context of ministry, right?

But he says, you know, but some people have one gift and some people have another. And if you don't have the gift of singleness, you know, you need to be married. You really need to get married because you just don't have the gift or the ability to remain single and be satisfied with that kind of a state. So this is a very important part of this verse. And then he goes on in verse 8 to say, to the unmarried and the widows.

So these are people who have not yet been married, may never get married. And these are people who have lost a spouse, particularly speaking to women here, lost their husband. I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. I want to remind you, we have to look at all of these statements that the Apostle Paul makes about singleness or about even not getting married to ministry. That is the whole idea.

He is not decrying marriage in any way. He's not saying that people shouldn't get married. He's speaking from the context of serving the Lord with a whole heart. And he says, if you find yourself single, if you find yourself widowed, it's probably best under the circumstances to stay the way you are, single. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.

For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. That's a good statement. I have told many couples over the years, be very careful when you get engaged, not to have too long of an engagement, because the drive toward fulfilling and completing our one-flesh union for a couple is very strong, very strong indeed. And so don't play with it in a way that is going to create problems for the both of you. It's better to marry.

If you're going to get married, if you've made the decision, you're going to get married, and this is the one, and you've prayed about it, and the Lord has, you got a green light from God, you're going to get married, don't have an exceptionally long period of engagement, unless you are separated. It could be that the man is in the military and he's about to go on some sort of a situation where he's going to be gone for three months, six months, but they want to get engaged before they leave, fine, fine. There's not going to be an issue there because you're going to be separated. But if you're living together, and I'm not saying living together outside of marriage, but if you're living in the same community, you're seeing each other on a regular basis, don't make your engagement period very long, because passion could easily get the better of you. And it's better to marry than to burn with passion.

Verse 10, to the married, I give this charge, not I, but the Lord. All right, so pay attention. He says, this is from the Lord, the wife should not separate from her husband, but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to him eventually, and the husband should not divorce his wife. So this goes both ways. So what is Paul saying here?

We have learned in other areas, other scriptures, that what we call biblical grounds for divorce is sexual infidelity. Sexual activity outside of the marriage union is grounds for a man or a woman to divorce their spouse. The assumption here is that that has not happened. This is not a divorceable situation, at least as Paul is laying it out here in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. And he's saying, if there is a need to separate, then just stay unmarried.

Right? And if you can ultimately be reconciled to your spouse for whatever the reason, great. If you can't, then just stay unmarried. Because this relationship here was not divided because of sexual immorality. It was divided because of some other reason.

He's not giving those reasons there. And it's unwise of us to throw in a whole bunch of our own personal examples. He's just giving a general sense here. Okay? If you feel the need to separate, then just stay unmarried.

Because again, the assumption is you separated for reasons other than sexual infidelity. Okay? We're just going to stick to the text here. Verse 12. To the rest I say, and now Paul says, this is me talking, not the Lord.

That's why it says there, at least in the ESV, it's in parentheses. I, not the Lord. So Paul is giving advice. He's giving his thoughts, his opinions. But he says, I have to confess, this was not a message from the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, she agrees to stay married to him.

Because some people who were pagans refused to stay married when their spouse came to Christ. And he said, that's it, I'm leaving. But he says, in the case where a man has a wife and she agrees to stay with him, he says he should not divorce her. There's nothing there that is divorceable. Right?

Just because she doesn't believe. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. Okay? And then he gives the reason why. For the unbelieving husband is made holy, your Bible may say sanctified, because of his wife.

And the unbelieving wife is made holy, sanctified, because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy, or set apart. All right, we need to stop here for a moment. We need to talk about these verses, because these have been misunderstood.

Here's the question. Is Paul saying that when a believer marries an unbeliever, that that unbelieving spouse is automatically set apart for salvation, or automatically saved? No, he is not saying that. He is saying, by virtue of the fact that you are married, and that as God has said concerning marriage, when the two come together, they are one flesh, that there is something shared, a unique shared blessing in the marriage, whereby even the unbelieving spouse is set apart by virtue of the fact that they're married to someone who is a member of the body of Christ. So here you have this couple, one a believer, one an unbeliever, and yet the believer is joined with Christ, the unbeliever is not from the sense of salvation, but there is a connection through marriage, through the one flesh union.

Now, if you ask me to explain all the dynamics of how that person is made holy, or I shouldn't say how necessarily, but what that connection means, I really can't explain it to you, except to say there's a special connection with an unbelieving spouse. It doesn't mean they're born again. It doesn't mean they are promised heaven. Listen, there's only one way that we are saved, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross and subsequent resurrection. Bottom line, okay?

We're saved by grace through faith. We are not saved by grace through marriage. And the reason I emphasize that is because there have been well-meaning believers who have read this passage and come to the conclusion that their unbelieving spouse is covered. it relates to salvation. Paul is not saying that at all, but he is saying there is a special connection.

What that dynamic produces in the life of the unbeliever, I'm not really sure, because the scripture doesn't really go on and comment about it, but it has something to do with the mystery of the one flesh union. Let's keep reading verse 15. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

All right, so this is a situation where the unbeliever in a marriage says, I want no part of this marriage because you've come to Christ, and I'm leaving. I'm getting out of this thing. Paul says, in such cases, the brother or sister, and the word here in the ESV is enslaved, is not enslaved in that sort of a situation, is not encumbered. The inference here is that Paul is saying that in those situations, that person would be free to remarry because the unbeliever abandoned them, left them, said, I'm done, and presumably went off and married somebody else. All right.

He says, God has called you to peace. Verse 16, for how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Okay, now here's a good verse to think about in terms of what we just talked about. Is an unbelieving spouse saved by virtue of the believer? No, obviously not, because of what Paul says here.

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? How do you know if they're ever going to come to the Lord? Unless the Lord has given you a personal promise. Now, that's one way you would know, but apart from hearing a personal promise from the Lord, where the Lord says, your spouse, your husband, your wife is going to come to me eventually.

Other than that, you don't know. You don't know. You pray for them, and you should. And if you have an unbelieving spouse, you should pray for them every single day that their heart would be open to the

gospel of Jesus, and they would one day bow the knee and surrender to him and put their complete faith in what he did on the cross. But other than that, you don't know.

You don't know. And that's why the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Now, when you're married first, and then you come to Christ, yes, you are unequally yoked, but you're not free. You're not free to get out of the marriage simply because you're now unequally yoked, because the marriage union came first, and you're married, and God wants you to honor those marriage vows. So let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for your blessing, the blessing that comes from studying and learning your word, and we pray that you would speak to us, and that you would guide and direct our hearts day by day in your word and through your spirit. We look to you and ask all of these things in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen. I wanted to take a moment here at the conclusion of this study to address some questions that often arise whenever we do a study in the Word of God that covers the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and particularly when we're talking about subjects like biblical grounds for divorce.

I have to tell you that one of the most asked questions that I get is surrounding that whole issue of what is biblical grounds for divorce, and specifically people want to ask about abuse, whether the abuse in a marriage takes place physically, spiritually, or even emotionally, and of course we could add verbal abuse to that easily as well. These are very difficult questions. They are very sensitive questions, and people feel very passionately about them, and for good reason, because abuse in marriage is a plague on our society. And as a pastor for 40 years, I have seen my share of abuse going on within the home, and it is always heartbreaking. Let me just say a couple of things before we look at a passage here.

First of all, if a woman or even a man is experiencing abuse of any kind in the home, that, I believe, is immediate reasons to get them into a safe place. In my own pastoral ministry over the years, that is exactly what I have done. If any woman or man, in fact, I did have one man over those years who was being verbally abused by his wife, but in most cases it is women who are the victims. Whenever a woman came to me and expressed that there was abuse happening in the home, we would immediately get that person into a safe place, and that was just something that happened without question. We would then deal with the issue after that as far as all of the details, and obviously law enforcement would be brought in at that point as well.

But I just want to say that I would never say to a woman or frankly even a man who is being abused in the home in any way that they should stay there and just bear it. I would never say that. I have always

believed and always practiced that if a person is being abused, they should be removed from the home immediately and they should be found a safe place. As for the issue of divorce, probably one of the most asked questions I get is, is abuse grounds for divorce in the Bible? Now that last part of the question is critical in the Bible.

Does the Bible say anywhere specifically that if a person is being abused that they have grounds for divorce? As a Bible teacher, I have to go back to the Scripture and I have to read what the Scripture says, and I have to answer that question not as I would want to answer it, but as the Bible speaks of it. And when we are consulting the Scriptures concerning grounds for divorce that are clearly articulated in the Word of God, we see that those grounds, and these are the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, have to do with marital infidelity or, if you will, sexual immorality. And that passage is found in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 32, where our Lord said, But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman or a woman so divorced commits adultery. The word that is translated sexual immorality there is the Greek word pornea.

It is where we get our word pornography, and it covers a broad definition of potential sexually immoral acts. So that can be a little challenging, but it does involve a sexual connotation to it. So when people ask me, Pastor, does the Bible say that abuse is biblical grounds for divorce? I cannot, in good conscience, say yes from a biblical standpoint. Now, if a woman comes to me and she says, my husband is abusing me, and after we get her to that place of safety, she says, my plan is to divorce him, I'm not going to try to talk her out of it, nor am I going to condemn her for her actions.

It is between her and the Lord. If she were to ask me if that abuse is grounds for divorce, I would say not as I see it in the Bible. It is, however, a good reason to get into a safe place, and if you cannot and choose not to live with this person, the Bible says, and we just looked at this in 1 Corinthians 7, that a woman is to remain unmarried. That's all I can tell you, because it is very important to me as a Bible teacher not to go beyond what is written, as much as I may want to. And you see, that's the problem that we run into when we begin to deal with these sorts of sensitive issues.

People want answers to follow their own desires. They want the Bible to say that abuse is biblical grounds for divorce. And if someone chooses to reach that conclusion, I'm not going to argue with them. And as I said earlier, if a woman or a man who is being abused chooses the avenue of divorce because of that reason, I'm not going to condemn them. We're not going to break fellowship with them.

We're going to love them and support them through it. I am responding to this matter, however, right now as a Bible teacher who is here to tell you not what you want to hear, not even what I want to say, but what the Bible says. The only revealed grounds for divorce given here in Matthew chapter five is marital unfaithfulness of a sexual nature. Now, I will say, and we dealt with this in 1 Corinthians 7 in the study that you just watched, that Paul went on to speak of when an unbeliever abandons the marriage because the other person has come to Christ. Paul said in that sort of a situation, the married person is not bound.

And that gives us the impression that they are free then to divorce and perhaps even to remarry. These are challenging questions and I appreciate you taking the time to watch this special addendum to our study. God bless you.