

Marriage Is God's Gift For Sexual Blessing, and Spouses Are to Respond Accordingly

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

This portion comes at the following point in the outline.

- II. Paul's response to reports of division (1:10-6:20).
- III. Paul's response to the Corinthian letter (7:1-11:1).
 - A. Marriage and related matters (7:1-40).
 - 1. God's design for those who are married or formerly married (7:1-16).
 - a. No abstinence within marriage (7:1-7).
 - b. Singleness, marriage, and the "unmarried" and widows (7:8-9).
 - c. Divorce and Christian partners (7:10-11).
 - d. Divorce and mixed marriages (7:12-16).

Introduction

Beginning in chapter 7, and going all the way to chapter 11, Paul responds to a letter the Corinthians sent him (Vs. 1). Interestingly, immediately after he has dealt with sexual immorality, while using marriage realities as a part of his argument (6:16), he begins his response by talking about different aspects related to marriage (7:1-40).

As you can see in the outline, verses 1-16 are about God's design for those who are married, or "formerly" married (Though the Greek word translated "unmarried" in verse 8 can mean "never married," there is compelling argument that Paul is using it to refer to both males and females who have had a spouse die, so he's including widows/widowers [Vs. 8-9] and divorcees/separated [Vs. 12-16], along with the married [Vs. 2-5].).

In verses 1-5, for this study, we will focus on Paul's admonition for those who are married. He primarily deals with the proper and positive elements of sexual design within a marriage, both to emphasize the goodness and benefit of it in mutual love and giving, and also the practicality of it in its relation to guarding against temptation.

Verses

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Questions

- 1. General.
 - a. What are your initial observations, thoughts, or questions about the passage?
 - b. How would you briefly describe the passage?
 - For blessing in God's design, and as a means to not be sexually immoral, spouses are to mutually and lovingly give themselves to each other.
- 2. Specific Verses.

- a. After referring to this being a response to the Corinthians writing him, Paul mentions in verse 1 that “it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” What does this mean?
- There are two possible interpretations of the phrase. The first is that Paul is saying this as his own opinion, and that he is affirming celibacy and an “ascetic” position toward marriage (The practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal.), and then only conceding sexual “rights” within marriage in the next verses, though that is not the “ideal.” The other interpretation, and more likely one, given his Jewish heritage (Ge. 2:18), and lack of asceticism when it came to food and drink (Ro. 14), is that, as he did in 6:12-13, he’s quoting something the Corinthians were saying, as an overreaction to the dangers of sexual immorality. That then would fit well with the positives he emphasizes in the next verses that demonstrate God’s design in marriage. Many Bible versions have the phrase in quotes. If it is indeed the first option, possibly Paul is simply saying that outside of marriage this is true.
- b. How does what Paul says in verse 2 relates to the issue in the previous section (6:9-20), and what is his answer to it?
- In 6:9-20, Paul condemned the practice of sexual immorality. So his phrase here seems to indicate that it was a prevalent issue, possibly even among married people who were seeking sex outside of marriage. Because of this, Paul asserts that marriage, and the exclusivity of it in every way, is better and right.
 - Note that the “But” with which Paul starts the verse still fits within the preferred interpretation above. He is saying, “You say, in an overreaction, that asceticism is the best option. But that will not take away sexual temptation, so marriage, what God has provided anyway for sexual expression, is appropriate.”
- c. What is Paul’s main point in verses 3-4? What is his reason? What are some implications of this?
- Husbands and wives are to mutually, lovingly, freely, and regularly give themselves to each other physically.
 - The reason Paul gives is that each spouse does not have “authority” over their own body, but rather, their spouse does. This obviously includes all of the parameters of love, respect, etc. within marriage (Ep. 5:22-23). Interestingly, now, Paul has said our bodies belong to God (6:19), and to our spouse.
 - This is the way God has designed marriage to be the setting of sexual blessing. It is a gift because God loves us. It reflects the original design of marriage (Ge. 2:24-25; He. 13:4). This is applicable to those who are not yet married. It doesn’t discount those who will never marry. It may be against our nature to believe this and apply it, but it is from the Lord, for our good, and relevant for blessing and opposing temptation.
- d. How does Paul add to this in verse 5?
- He again affirms that spouses are not to “deprive” each other. He adds that they can have a mutually agreed upon limited time to specifically devote themselves to prayer, but are to soon return to the normal way he has described. This specifically relates to guarding against Satan’s attempts at sexual temptation.

3. Final thoughts and application

- a. Do you have any final observations, comments, or questions?
- b. How do you think you can apply the truths of this passage to your life?