

GAMMA 2017

STUDY 8

1 Corinthians 7

Sex, Marriage and Singleness

Roman Marriages

In order to help us understand the issues regarding divorce and marriage it is essential for us to understand something of the character of marriages at the time.

Roman marriages occurred way before Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and they were usually arranged by parents with very little choice given to the couple. Marriage was often a means to enhance one's social standing. The most important characteristic of a good marriage was "concordia " i.e. a state of peace or harmony between the spouses rather than amorous love. Part of the reason was because the marriages were arranged there was always the strong likelihood for conflict.

Men held a disproportionately dominant position and it was not uncommonly for them to buy their wives. The husband was usually much older and the relationship was often likened to that between a father and daughter.

The marriages were often not solemnized with a ceremony nor was there a public legal act to dissolve a marriage. All the husband would have to do in a divorce would be to utter the words "take your things and go". Someone akin to our Malaysian propensity to SMS divorces.

Gnostics

The term is derived from the Greek word for knowledge "gnosis". It came about the same time as Christianity and was widely seen in the Greek world. The Gnostics believed in a dualistic world where there is God the source of all good lived above the material universe which is inherently bad and evil.

Human beings are like sparks from God but trapped within a material body sometimes referred to as the "tomb". This spark is called the spirit or soul of a person. A person can be spiritual or fleshy or unspiritual.

The key to salvation is knowledge which will ultimately release the spark or soul to return to its origin God.

The knowledge required is about the spheres of earth and heaven and the various powers that control these dominions. There are also a lot of passwords and procedures

to learn which will aid in the ascent of the soul to heaven once released by death of the body.

The Savior in gnostic thought is the one who brings this knowledge to the humans. Ethically Gnostics behave in two completely opposite ways. They either view this world as inherently evil and it does not matter what one does in it so a libertine manner of life follows as there are not moral consequences to whatever actions one takes in the body. They could rob and kill and maim it would all be done in the flesh and not matter. The other view is to withdraw from the inherently evil world and all its influences. Even all the base desires of the body, hunger, the need for love, the sexual desires are all regarded as inherently evil and are to be rejected for a purer higher spiritual plane.

1. Some folk in Corinth possibly the Gnostics were trying to advocate celibacy in marriage as a higher spiritual plane. That's why Paul refers to the matter as something they wrote to him about in verse 1. It was they that proposed that it is not good for a "man to touch a woman" as rendered in some of your older bibles. This phrase in the original language usually means sex (hence TNIV translation notes). How does Paul counter such notion? What is the place of sexual intimacy in the context of marriage? What is the reason for this necessity for sex? (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

- a. Paul immediately disputes their ideas by stating the opposite in verse 2. Every man should have sexual relations with his wife and every woman with her husband. A full conjugal life is meant for every marriage. The reason for this is the prevalence of immorality in society. It has been noted that there were possibly 1000 prostitutes in the Temple at the AcroCorinth itself.
- b. The second reason is in marriage each partner's body does not belong to himself alone it is now corporate jointly owned and each partner has obligations to satisfy each other's sexual needs vv 3-4. In ancient times this is a very significant departure as it might be believed that the man owns his wife's body but not versa that was unthinkable. Paul states God's view of each one in the marital bond owning their partners bodies hence mutual satisfaction of their sexual needs is based on this. This is very important as even within a marriage sex can be used as a tool for leverage to manipulate each other. Paul's view takes this all away each of us do not have the individual rights to deprive our spouse out of our own selfishness or to manipulate them towards our own ends.
- c. He places the priority of sex in marriage only second to prayer and fasting vv 5. Each couple must have a full conjugal life and can only abstain from sex by mutual agreement and only for short time for prayer. Vv5

- d. Even this break in having sex in order to pray is done as a concession which means he is not ordering them to stop sex in order to pray. He is saying that only in this situation can the couple mutually agree to stop for a while. Vv 6

The alternative interpretation is to take the NIV rendering of the verse as "It is good for a man not to marry". This would then be taken as Paul's statement. The problem with this interpretation is that Paul would be then contradicting himself in the very next verse when he says that every man should have his own wife and vice versa. The rest of vv 1-5 all talk about a very high view of sex in marriage again contradicting Paul's initial statement if indeed it was his. In fact, when in verse 1 when Paul writes concerning the matters you wrote about he was referring to the things they had brought up to Paul not Paul's own dictums. Additionally, Paul has a very high view of marriage and regards it as God's gift. Gen 2 also states that it is not good for man to be alone and it is unlikely Paul would want to contradict that.

2. **Examine the newspaper article on the Malay Mail 3/10/03 entitled "Sex on Demand a wife's obligation". Do you agree with Laura Schlessinger? Or do you agree with the feminists that it is an equal partnership? Does 1 Corinthians 7 advocate such a view of conjugal obligations?**

SEX ON DEMAND A WIFE'S OBLIGATION

WOMEN are duty-bound to provide their husbands with sex on demand, claims a controversial book on achieving wedded bliss.

Wives have a 'loving obligation' to have sex whenever they are asked for it - even if they are not in the mood, says American author Dr Laura Schlessinger. The 56-year-old sex therapist and radio host says marriages 'will survive and improve if men are viewed as a 'gift from God'. -

And she urges women to stop nagging and whining, saying: 'Be honest girls, that's what we do.'

Her book - *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* - will not be published until January, but it has already been labelled 'outrageous' by feminists, marriage experts and psychologists. Dr Schlessinger, who has a PhD in psychology, has written 60 books on marriage and attracts 100 million listeners every week to her radio show.

Her moralistic views have often clashed head-on with those who view marriage as an equal partnership. In her latest book, she writes: 'If husbands are expected to go to work and earn money and visit relatives they don't like, why can't wives put out on demand?'. - But Frederick Woolverton, clinical psychologist and director of the

Village Institute of Psychotherapy in New York, said: 'in most marriages, it's the wife who wants sex and the husband who doesn't.

'Marriage is all about intimacy. Men have affairs because they are afraid of Intimacy.' Marriage counsellor Jennie Bergat condemned Dr Schlesslinger's remarks. 'It is outrageous. Women have a right to be tired and If a woman is not in the mood, a man should respect that,' she said. 'When you sign a marriage 'certificate you don't surrender privacy and rights. She is declaring that women are chattels to be used at the man's whim.'

- DM

The Schlesslinger comment was to advocate that women must accede to men's demand for sex on all occasions irrespective of their own needs and moods. If women did this then marriage would be more likely to survive and even improve. Her other reason for this privilege is the rightful reciprocation for a man's toil to support her and their family.

Feminists take offense to this because they believe such a view denigrates women as if they are just property of men to be used for sex whenever he fancies. They believe in the equal partnership.

The Corinthians approach by Paul is not one that agrees with Dr Schlesslinger's comments wholesale. Yes, there are conjugal obligations but they are mutual and not reflective of one gender's control over another. Paul says they both should fulfil their marital duties to each other and this is meeting the sexual needs of each other. There lies the crux of the obligation ...meeting the sexual need but how they do so must necessarily be based upon how they are to live out their marriage. In Ephesians he is to love his wife and his wife is to submit to him. When this occurs there will not be a situation where he will demand sex when she is so disinclined and unready and likewise there would not be a situation where she would deny him sex to suit her own whims and fancies. She would strive to meet that need and he would strive to love her.

Both feminists and Dr Schlesslinger approach the topic from opposite directions but with the same character. Their arguments are based on inherent rights based on their individual worth. He has worked hard for the family and is entitled to sex and that makes her merely a sex object. She as the feminist would argue is her own person with her own rights and does as she pleases.

3. **Paul's view of marriage in 1 Cor 7: 26-34 seems to be at odds with his view in Ephesians 5 it is an exalted institution for humans and in Genesis 2 how Moses wrote "It is not good for man to be alone" Can you shed light and discuss how his thinking in 1 Cor 7 is consistent with the view of marriage in Ephesians 5 and Genesis 2 ? How do we do**

such a thing practically in our relationships can you discuss and share how this affects you?

God's design for man is the marriage ideal which is stated in Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5 however Paul balances that view with reality in 1 Cor 7. We live in a time where there is much suffering due to the fall of man. The kingdom of God has begun been inaugurated with the coming of Christ but is not yet fully consummated where all its beauty will be brought to fullness. We are living in the overlap of ages where old world is still going on and the new world has actually begun; the spirit of God is in the world to renew people's lives, but the fact is it still a place where we still have the suffering and brokenness." So how does that relate to whether or not a person should marry?

What this means is we do marry. We do buy and sell. We do have jobs. We do grieve and mourn. We do rejoice. But we always do it, right now, in light of the future In light of the future, God is going to give you the ultimate wealth so whether you have money or not isn't the biggest deal. If you have it great, but don't get too attached to it. If you don't have it, don't get to upset, hence marriage should be considered in the same light.

Western cultures make an idol out of your individual rights and individual happiness. This type of perspective painted marriage as one where marriage must meet "your individual needs."

"Never get married before you've gotten you've career going. Why not? Because absolutely and ultimately marriage must fulfill you. It must be an asset in your portfolio Whereas in traditional and non-Western cultures, society is more likely to make "an idol out of the family. You're nobody until you're in a family."

Christians however, could find themselves free from both worldviews because Christianity and its approach to marriage and singleness is absolutely astonishingly different."

On the one hand, what this means, is this exalted view of marriage where I give myself...to my marriage partner to help my marriage partner be everything that Christ wants him or her to be. It's supposed to be a way of service and not just self-fulfillment. On the other hand, marriage can never give you all the things that you are really looking for. It's only in Jesus' arms that you can ever really find what you are looking for in a spouse and it's only in the family of God and the church."

Paul's main concern is that marriage and almost every other form of human activity has a significant potential to take center stage in a Christians life and thus he advocates we hold loosely our concerns with our daily human activities to give preference to service to the Lord

In practical terms, the marriage must be geared toward Christian service. The focus must not be toward bringing up the happy family with the sole aim of getting the best education for the kids, maintaining the best level of comfort for the family or even spending the most time with the family. The family unit must see itself in the light of the mission of the gospel out of its unreserved devotion to our Lord. If one of the spouse serves outside the family in spiritual work or evangelism, sacrifices may have to be made in order to enable that spouse to be effective. This would mean he would not be able to spend the amount of time that he would have liked to have with his family but even this is under the submission to Christ. This is not a blatant excuse for the Christian spouse to neglect the family especially in the bringing up of the children in the Lord which will necessarily involve modeling Christian values and sharing your life with them. However, there are many other pursuits in our leisure lives that would be more appropriate to squeeze out to make room for Christian service.

CASE 1

Lucy Liu was a believer who is single and believing that she did not have the gift of singleness and wanted to get married. She is now 35 years of age and the window of maternal fertility is fast closing on her. She had a successful pharmaceutical career and actually owns a small chain of pharmacies about 3 shops. She has average looks but is shy and a little awkward socially. She complains that all the eligible (at least in her mind) men in her church are either married or had girlfriends. All that was left were a motley crew of quiet uninteresting men with what was in her mind below average looks. Her dream mate was to be tall, witty, kind, clever, successful, sensitive, totally understanding her and adventurous.

Can you discuss her options and state the pros and cons of each option please?

- A. Commit the situation to God believing that He will bring her soulmate to her within the next 5 years (as she definitely wants kids) and meanwhile continue to expand her business. She will visit other churches to perhaps find her husband. She believes with all her heart that God has prepared before the dawn of time a fella who is just right for her and it will be just a matter of time and faith that He will provide one.
- B. Commit the situation to God in prayer expressing her honest desire to get married yet willing to submit to His will in the matter. She will be proactive and get to know the few eligible men in her church over coffee or group dates she will not be afraid to initiate them. She figured that it was their character which was more important than their looks. She had a wish list of ideal partner but realized in the real world marriage was always a compromise and the focus was on commitment and deciding to love a person rather than waiting for the “magical soul mate” to materialize. Meanwhile she concentrated on building her pharmacy chain.

- C. Commit the situation to God and trust He will definitely bring a husband to her. Meanwhile she gets immersed into serving the Lord as she is a bible study leader in a life group. She takes part time theological studies and goes on missions trips. All this keeps her busy and she caps the number of pharmacies to only 3 and no more as she has her priorities and she does not want to be distracted. She makes no attempt to get to know the men in her church as they just don't peak her interest. She just trusts God will bring the right one. She quotes Matt 6:23 seek first the Kingdom and all these will be added to you.
- D. Commit the situation to God in prayer expressing her honest desire to get married yet willing to submit to His will in the matter. She will be proactive and get to know the few eligible men in her church over coffee or group dates she will not be afraid to initiate them. She figured that it was their character which was more important than their looks. She had a wish list of ideal partner but realized in the real world marriage was always a compromise and the focus was on commitment and deciding to love a person rather than waiting for the "magical soul mate" to materialize. Meanwhile she also committed more time in to serving Him rather than sitting and pining over the lack of a husband. The church work kept her busy and brought her a new joy that gradually supplanted the loneliness in her heart.

CASE 2

Part 1

Gopal Adlani was a young up and coming church leader in the 3rd Baptist church. He was single and struggled with sexual desire which was not uncommon in his age group. In fact at one stage he had an addiction to porn which he had overcome with prayer and help of an accountability partner. He really wanted to get married and did not believe that he had a gift of singleness. His parents have made arrangements for him to be match made with a young Christian woman from Andhra Pradesh in India. She comes from a Methodist church there, wanted to have kids but is not a graduate. He sighted her picture and noticed she was a little bit on the plump side but had a sweet face.

Can you discuss his options and state the pros and cons of each option please?

- A. Commit the issue to God in prayer and accept his parents offer and have her brought over from India for a short courtship and then if there are no outstanding unacceptable issues just marry her believing that marriage is about commitment. He believed that love can grow and love is a decision
- B. Commit the issue to God in prayer and accept his parents offer and have her brought over from India for a short courtship and if he falls in love with her then

he will marry her. The important thing for him is chemistry he must be feel attracted to her and she to him. He believes if it is Gods will then the short courtship will do the trick.

- C. Commit the issue to God in prayer and reject his parents offer and meanwhile continue to serve God in church believing that He will bring someone suitable in the future. He believes that God will bring this about naturally and that match making is ungodly and a thing of the past.

Part 2

Gopal Adlani chose option A and after 2 years of marriage he finds out that the wife has an awesome temper, totally untidy and now refuses to have children nor have sex frequently with him (he wanted it every night). They have fights all the time and there is a lot of bitterness built up due to cultural differences. He also suspects she is not a Christian after all from the way she behaves. He believes she is a legalist who grew up in church believing in working for salvation and that the gospel has not really gripped her heart.

Which option should he choose and why?

- A. Divorce the horrible wife as he was tricked into marrying her because her parents had fraudulently passed her off as a Christian which was the reason he married her and now she was giving him so much trouble because they are unequally yoked. He quotes 1 Cor 7 as justification as well for divorcing her.
- B. Divorce the horrible wife on the grounds that she refuses to have children nor sex and 1 Cor 7 has stated that her body belongs to him and he has rights and privileges which were denied to him in this case.
- C. Go for counseling with a Christian marriage counselor in church to work out the issues affecting them. His duty in marriage is to love his wife as his way of glorifying God and his love for her cannot be contingent on her responses. We all marry the “wrong person” we just need to be right person for marriage. The process will mature his own faith. His Christian witness and influence on her will make it possible for her to really understand the gospel and come to faith