

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 8

Marriage and Sex in the Gospel Community

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

“1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”

1. How does Paul define conjugal rights in a Christian marriage?

- The wife does not have authority over her own body, her husband does
- Neither does the husband have authority over his own body, his wife does
- There is a mutuality in conjugal rights and authority over the body

2. What happens when a spouse deprives another of his/her conjugal rights? Discuss.

3. Is the Bible primarily telling us that we owe conjugal rights to our spouse? Or is it primarily telling us that our spouse owes conjugal rights to us? Discuss.

4. Contextually, a Roman couple in the time of the Corinthians was superior to the wife in that the husbands had privileges and the wives had obligations, but not vice versa. How is that different from how marriage is seen in the Bible?

- Two belong to one another in total mutuality

5. What is the only reasonable purpose for abstaining from sex in marriage?

- By mutual agreement for a period
- For fasting and prayer
- This is a concession, not a command

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

“10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”

6. Is divorce allowed in the context of a Christian marriage? Discuss.

- Mark 10:11-12

7. If a divorce does happen, under what circumstances can either of the partners remarry?

- Only when the spouse dies

- 1 Cor. 7:39-40

8. If a divorce does happen, what are the only two acceptable outcomes for the couple?

- 1 Cor. 7:11

- Remain unmarried

- Be reconciled to the spouse (husband/wife)

9. The Gordon Fee New International Commentary says “If the Christian husband and wife cannot be reconciled to one another, then how can they expect to become models of reconciliation before a fractured and broken world?”

Where should a Christian draw strength from for reconciliation?

1 Corinthians 7:12-16

“12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”

10. a) If Abigail was married to Gabriel for 1 year and then she becomes a Christian, should she divorce Gabriel since he is not a believer? Why or why not?

- Maintain your position at conversion
- 1 Cor. 7:12-13

b) What is the rationale for remaining with the spouse?

- The grace of God at work through the believer towards members of his/her own household
- The spouse/family members will be “made holy” - that is, there is a potential for realising their salvation
- They will have an opportunity to experience the grace of God at work and become believers as well

c) If Gabriel decides that he wants a divorce with Abigail, what can she do?

- In such a case, she is not enslaved
- She no longer is obligated to maintain the marriage

d) Is Abigail free to remarry if that is the case?

- No
- Refer to 1 Cor. 7:10-11

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

“17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. 18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. 22 For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become

slaves of men. 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.”

11. How has the Gospel rearranged our priorities in terms of social status?

- Ambition should no longer be our overwhelming concern
- We are not to be overly preoccupied with social change
- If we are free, we are bondservants of Christ
- If we are slaves, we have been made free in Christ
- Our position in Christ should override our social status

Takeaway

- A. Importance and centrality of sex in a Christian marriage**
- B. Protection of each other from the dangers of immorality in a godless culture**
- C. The spouse cannot meet all your needs but there is one need that only the spouse can uniquely meet**
- D. Only sex within a marriage is acceptable**
- E. Divorce was not in God’s mind when He designed marriage**
- F. A divorced couple can either stay unmarried or be reconciled one to another**
- G. Remarriage is only allowed after the death of the spouse**
- H. Marriage is only in the Lord**

Case Study

Case 1 – Desperate

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 below 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 realised 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 materialise. 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 6:33 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 realised 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 materialise. Meanwhile she also committed more time 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 – Commitment

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 below 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 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.

Case 2 (continued) – Commitment

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 counselling with a Christian marriage counsellor 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