

1. Singleness is Good

- a. Some had taken Paul’s teachings on the *preference* of celibate singleness and turned it into making marriage an evil
  - i. Some thought it best not to touch a woman *ever*, to completely to abstain from physical affection between the sexes *as the only way of obedience*.
    1. “to touch a woman” is a euphemism for sexual affection
    2. It does not mean to hug your sister, or shake hands with a business partner, etc.
  - ii. So, it appears that Paul, too, thought it was “good” not to have a sexual relationship, for he advocates singleness, if possible, as something *practically* “better”
    1. v32-34 – “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.  
  
“Should any one speak in this way: ‘It were good for a man not to eat, or to drink, or to sleep’ – he would not thereby condemn eating, or drinking, or sleeping, as things that were wrong – but as the time that is devoted to these things is just much taken from the soul, his meaning would be, that we would be happier if we could be free from these hindrances, and devote ourselves wholly to meditation on heavenly things. Hence, as there are in married life many impediments which keep a man entangled, it were on that account good not to be connected in marriage.” (Jean Calvin)
  2. Singleness is only preferable *as a concern for the Kingdom*, not for any reason at all, and is only to be chosen if self-control is present
    - a. “do we not have right to take along a believing wife...yet we have made use of this right, but endure everything so as not to put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.” (1 Cor 9)
    - b. Singleness is not the gift to which Paul refers, but self-control for the sake of the Kingdom (singleness is endured by him in ch9)
  - iii. In this way, some were advocating divorce from current marriages, abstinence within marriage where there was not self-control to do so
    1. They eliminated any good sexual expression as “evil” and only celibacy as “good”
    2. Yet they had not considered that some are gifted with self-control, and some are not (yet)
- b. Thus, this expression which the Corinthians were using may have originated with Paul, but was then unreasonably extended to mean “thus marriage is *evil*”, which the statement does not require, nor does God intend
  - i. Because of God’s command in Genesis 2 that it is “not good for the man to be alone”, most Jews considered marriage a command and singleness a matter of disobedience or curse
  - ii. Some Gentiles, in the sexual chaos of the culture, regarded celibacy as the only truly walk of obedience
  - iii. The gospel says that both ways are missing the point: the point is “helping” for the purpose of the Kingdom of God, whether single celibate or married sexual
- c. So, the context of this admonition about belonging and *porneia* is limited to the philosophical system that says *all* sexual expression is *evil, including within marriage*

- i. Because of this, even the married Corinthians were considering lifelong celibacy within the marriage bond, some were divorcing each other, etc. due to a false understanding of their “realized eschatology”
- ii. As a result, due to the presence of “not yet” presence of sin, *the lack of self-control*, some were struggling to remain sexually faithful

## 2. Marriage is Good, too

- a. Now, we must be clear that this is not the only words which God has given regarding marriage
  - i. If this were the only teaching on the NT marriage, then it would appear that marriage is belittled
  - ii. However, in Ephesians 5, it is clear that the marriage relationship itself can powerfully and uniquely proclaim the relationship Christ has with His church
    - 1. So, this teaching to the Corinthians is not a substantive teaching on the nature or purpose of marriage, nor giving the reason why marriage exists
    - 2. He is giving a correction to a false understanding of the gospel and giving a necessary course correction for certain people who *need* it.
  - iii. Marriage has a far greater meaning and significance than merely avoiding sexual immorality, but that is not what Paul is dealing with here
    - 1. He is being practical
    - 2. Stop trying to live like Jesus in regards to celibacy since you have another way to proclaim the gospel powerfully within a sexual relationship!
    - 3. You *ought* to be married if you lack self-control, not *ought* to be single
- b. In marriage you belong to the other *as well*
  - i. Each man having his own woman and each woman having her own man
    - 1. Note the definition of marriage and sexuality (one man + one woman)
  - ii. Note the "belonging" word: “having”
    - 1. Note also that it is “his own” – that is that a husband’s body belongs to him AND to his wife, not only to his wife, and vice versa
  - iii. By the marriage vow, we did something irrevocably dramatic and life-changing for all time: we gave up the *exclusive* right to our own selves – this is Christ and the Church stuff here
    - 1. This means that we have responsibilities over our own bodies, AND we also have responsibilities for our spouses’ bodies
- c. This aspect of oneness is one in which we are so united to Christ Jesus in spirit that we can submit authority of our bodies to another person in marriage
  - i. Thus, in the *oneness* of marriage, we belong to one another, she has rights over my body
    - 1. Now, we must be careful that we do not disconnect this truth from the rest of God’s teachings on relationships.
  - ii. We are *caring* for the bodies of the other, just as we *care* for the spirit of the one to whom we are united, as Christ Jesus does for the Church (Eph 5:25-32)
    - 1. "nourishes and cherishes it" - "just as Christ does the Church" - "for we are members of His body" – oneness
    - 2. Again, this 50% ownership of our spouse’s bodies does not somehow subvert nor dominate the clear teaching of Christian love and edification and purity taught so voluminously in the Scriptures or exemplified so potently in the person and works of Jesus Christ, the Word of God
- d. So, Paul creates a paradox here, a tension which cannot be resolved but by Christian love:
  - i. If the man has authority over the woman's body and desires her in a way that makes her uncomfortable...
  - ii. The woman also has authority over the man's body and desires that he not use it to do something that makes her uncomfortable...

1. Impasse.
  - iii. The only solution is to "outdo one another in honoring each other" (Romans 12:10)
    1. It is to love the other *for the sake of the joy of the other rather than my own joy* which makes this entire concept of oneness work.
  - e. Also, it is apparent that it is the godly design of husbands to lay down their rights for the sake of their beloveds. (Eph 5)
    - i. It is God's design, men, that you take joy in the joy of your wife, not in what she can give to you. That is like God. That is what you were made for. That's why Eve was created. That's why you are married: to learn to love and rejoice in self-giving, like God.
  - f. Part of the "already, but not yet" aspect of the reality of our lives
    - i. Most of us don't love well, yet, and marriage is God's ordination for learning oneness of loving well, of honoring the other in the most difficult of relationships
    - ii. It is not, however, the only way of learning such things and being sanctified
      1. We must not idolize marriage, just as we must not idolize celibacy
      2. Marriage, while many other things, is the God-ordained pressure-valve for sexual expression, while singleness is a controlled burn which can propel the gospel further out into the world
3. Therefore, Help One Another in Marriage, Since We Still Live in the Fallen World
- a. Each spouse, within the union of marriage, and belonging to one another, ought to *help* the other with our sexual purity properly
    - i. Marriage is, in one (and not only) sense, a *remedy* for over-desires, as a mercy of God
    - ii. Again, this is not a substantive argument on the reason marriage exists, but it is an aspect of marriage which suits well the reality of our current condition of sexual desire and lack of self-control in the "not yet"
    - iii. Sexual fidelity in marriage can help us fight against sexual immorality by giving us the proper, God-ordained, expression of sexual desire
      1. It is not an end-all to sexual immorality, but a help (lack of sex is not the *cause* of sexual immorality)
      2. This word is also not for the receiver of sexual duty, but the giver (Husbands, don't quote this so that she should sleep with you)
    - iv. Can you love your spouse fight against sexual immorality by building relational intimacy and sexual intimacy?
  - b. These commands are not meant to be *mere* duty or obligation, as if by stoic granting of our body, but not our love, were meant by the apostle
    - i. No! The granting of our body for the sexual fulfillment of the other is to be an *obligation of love* and *honor* consistent with belonging to God and one another.
    - ii. In the same way, as the paradox shows, the *receiving* of sexual fulfillment from one's spouse is also to be an *act of love* and not consumption or seizure
      1. On a related note: Forcing oneself on your spouse using this Scripture as reason is condemnable, for it misses the mutuality of love and honor, and as such not only harms your spouse, but reimages God Himself, making you out to be an enemy of God!
        - a. Christ loves and cherishes and nurtures the Church, never forces Himself on her for His own pleasure and her destruction.
      2. Don't abuse your power, men! It is evil, heinous, and completely unlike God.
  - c. Let us also recognize that we are still living in the "not yet" aspect of the Kingdom of God, and we still may struggle with sexual desire
    - i. Think about what forced celibacy has brought about throughout history
  - d. Do not DEFRAUD one another

- i. The inhibition of sexual expression, as the context precludes is functionally permanent, is considered robbery
  - 1. The same word used in chapter 6 regarding lawsuits among the church, “Should you not rather be defrauded? Yet you defraud one another!”
  - 2. It is considered theft (Mark 10:19; James 5:4) of what is owed
- ii. There are times for celibacy within marriage, and they are limited by the practicality of the presence of sin:
  - 1. “by agreement”
    - a. There ought to be mutual consent for an agreed upon purpose
  - 2. “for an appointed time”
    - a. This agreement ought to be for an agreed upon time by mutual understanding, for an “appointed” and, most likely, limited time
    - b. Refraining from sexual relations with no end in sight can be very disheartening for the one who is struggling with self-control
    - c. It is loving to set a boundary that is clear, agreed upon, and gives hope ☺
  - 3. “so that you may devote yourselves to prayer”
    - a. The reason for such restrictions are to be Kingdom oriented, God-ordained, and so that focus and effort can be made toward these ends
    - b. This type of prayer is not your everyday time with the Lord in daily bread type of asking
    - c. This is prayer for those huge moments, those calamities or moments of great risk-taking (think Esther) which require devoted, intense affections of the mind and soul to cry out to God.
  - 4. “then come together again”
    - a. Make it a point to unite physically again after such prayer and wrestling with the Lord - This is holy, not profane
- iii. By serving one another, in mutual love and honor, in this way, you will fight against the enemy’s temptations because he knows your sexual weaknesses

#### 4. In All of This, Remember Christ Jesus Who Loves You Perfectly

- a. When it is hard to love your spouse because you feel unloved, unappreciated, and you don’t feel intimate with them, remember Christ Jesus
  - i. Sexual intimacy is rooted in relational intimacy
    - 1. The more we feel desired, delighted in, safe, and completely accepted in our relationship, the better our sexual intimacy will be
    - 2. Does your spouse feel safe and completely accepted by you? Ask her/him.
  - ii. Jesus loves you better than your spouse, and you can trust Him with this, too
- b. When your heart is hard towards your spouse, remember His great mercy towards you
  - i. Go to Him to ask Him to show you the depths of your own sins, lack of appreciation of Him, unmerciful spirits, etc. (whatever your spouse has done against you, I think you have done to Christ)
  - ii. In finding His mercy towards you, by His death, may your heart be warmed I mercy and love for your spouse, so that you may give yourself joyfully for the sake of one another, and in so doing honor God in such holy display
- c. Finally, the giving up of the exclusive right to one’s own self is precisely what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.
  - i. When you tempted to demand your rights or to deny your spouse theirs, remember the love of God in Christ Jesus, “who, though existing in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be held onto, but poured Himself out...”(Ph 2)