

**1 Corinthians #10**  
**The Secret of a Happy Marriage**  
1 Corinthians 7: 1-6

Here Paul begins to answer the questions the people at Corinth had written him. He has devoted six chapters to dealing with the carnal conditions of the church there. He has laid down principles of action by which to settle these things, and in every instance he has pointed them back again to the cross of Calvary.

They asked him four specific questions. Certain problems of marriage are dwelt with in this chapter, and the following three chapters concern the meat sacrificed to idols. Then Paul has something to say about the place of women in the church, and finally in chapter 11, he discusses the observance of the Lord's Supper. At the conclusion of that he says, "Now concerning spiritual things..." as if to deal with these matters had been a troublesome necessity. All the time he had been anxious to get to "spiritual things."

In this passage on marriage we must keep two facts firmly in our minds. (1) Paul is writing to Corinth and Corinth was the most immoral city in the world. Living in a situation and an environment like that, it was far better to be too strict than to be too lax. (2) The thing that dominates and dictates every answer that Paul gives is the conviction that the Second Coming of Christ was about to happen almost immediately. This expectation was not realized. But Paul was convinced that he was giving advice for a purely temporary situation. We can be quite certain that in many cases his advice would have been different if he had visualized a permanent, instead of a temporary, situation.

There is language here that is found nowhere else in all the New Testament. For instance, in verse 6 Paul says, "I speak this by permission and not of commandment." And in verse 10 he says, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord." In verse 12 he says, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord." In verse 25 he says, "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment." And in verse 40 he says, "She is happier if she so abides, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God."

Paul is clearly drawing a distinction between specific instructions that he has received from the Lord by the Holy Spirit and his own judgment in cases where he has received no such instructions. In other words, he is using his own judgment supported by what he believes to be the authority of the Holy Spirit. That does not invalidate this teaching in any way. It does, however, recognize that in matters concerning marriage there is no law so inclusive as to apply to every situation. Each case will call for the careful exercise of human judgment under the direction and authority of the Holy Spirit.

**Remember, please, that he is writing in the context of the situation at Corinth.** For instance, the Gentiles of that time saw no evil whatever in multiplied wives; polygamy was the practice. And the Jews saw no evil in putting away their wives in certain circumstances. **After they had returned from captivity in Babylon, many of them took wives of the people of the land, and Ezra commanded that they should put away their foreign wives.** Some of the Jews who were converted to the Christian faith thought perhaps they should follow the same principle. Should they put away their unbelieving partner in marriage?

**There is much local background, but there are also tremendous principles laid down here for the most sacred relationship in life.** Let me ask you to notice, therefore, that Paul speaks first of marriage in its purity. He makes no attempt here to state the Christian doctrine of marriage in all its wonderful fullness; he does that in Ephesians and Colossians, comparing marriage to the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His church.

**At first sight, you would almost think Paul is advocating celibacy and undervaluing marriage.** But in the context of the Corinthian church he is saying no such thing: their question was, in essence: "In view of all the immorality, impurity and unhappiness that is rampant in these days, isn't it safer to stay outside the marriage relationship altogether?"

**Paul replies that it is good for a man not to be married, but he does not say that it is better.** The Corinthians, or at least some of them, had suggested that, if a man was going to be a Christian in the fullest sense of the term, he must have nothing to do with physical pleasure, and must refuse to marry altogether.

**Paul's answer was simply this - no man should attempt a way of life for which he is naturally unfitted; no man should live where he has deliberately surrounded himself with temptations.** Paul knew very well that all men are made in the same way. So he says, "Examine yourself, and choose that way of life in which you can best live the Christian life, and don't attempt an unnatural standard which is impossible and even wrong, for you being such as you are."

Look carefully at verses 2-5, "But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband also gives authority over his body to his wife. So do not deprive each other of sexual relations. The only exception to this rule would be the agreement of both husband and wife to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time, so they can give themselves more

completely to prayer. Afterward they should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt them because of their lack of self-control."

**Paul here is dealing with a line of thinking that said, if married people are to be really Christian they must abstain from all sexual activity with each other.** That was simply another manifestation of that line of thought that looked on the body and all its instincts and desires as essentially evil.

**Out of this Paul strikes a supremely great principle.** Marriage is a partnership. **The husband cannot act independently of the wife, or the wife independently of the husband.** **They must act together.** The husband must never regard the wife simply as a means of self-gratification; he must regard the whole marriage relationship, both in its physical and spiritual sides, as something in which both find their gratification and both find the highest satisfaction of all their desires. In a time of special discipline, in a time of long and earnest prayer, it might be right to set aside all bodily things; but it must be by mutual agreement and it must be only for a time, or it simply begets a situation which gives temptation an easy chance.

In verse 4 when Paul says, "A wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband also gives authority over his body to his wife," he is simply saying what we have already heard from the lips of Jesus in Matthew 19:5-6, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore, they are no more two, but one flesh." **Where did this kind of thinking originate?** Look with me at Genesis 2:21-25, "And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he (God) took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

**There are some truths in Genesis 2 that we must not by-pass if we are going to understand what Paul is telling us here in 1 Corinthians.** The Hebrew word translated "naked" means "laid bare" or "nothing hidden" or "the absence of self-consciousness." In other words, the original couple had maximum freedom with each other. They were unhindered emotionally, allowing them to be uninhibited physically. That is why the Lord reports that they were "not ashamed." **The intimate joys of the marriage bed were continually fulfilling to both Adam and Eve.** They were without restraint and without shame.

**That is exactly as God would have it.** There is no word here (or later) where things began to deteriorate between Adam and Eve. Their intimacy apparently did not cool off nor did their love life wane. When God struck the original match, there was a blessed, enjoyable warmth that continued throughout their lifetime.

**There are reasons their "honeymoon" never ended.** The same reasons can lead to a similar experience today, all things being equal. It is wrong to assume that original design was unique, a one-time-only relationship God created. **No, it was a pattern for others to follow.** Actually, there are certain biblical principles regarding marital intimacy that remain constant to this very day.

**I find a total of five principles in Scripture that will help counteract sexual deterioration between husband and wife.** All five are supported in the Scriptures. And all five have to do with a more meaningful, intimate relationship between married partners, *not* just two people living together.

Intimacy in marriage was created in innocence and declared "very good" as seen in Genesis 1:27-31, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Then God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food; and it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." Take careful note of those last two words: "very good." **Including what?** Everything. And that includes, of course, the sexual delights of marriage. God personally and caringly created the human body so that it might be stimulated, aroused, and able to enjoy to the fullest, in marriage, the complete expression of sexual delight.

**I begin here because this is basic.** Thinking correctly about marital intimacy lays the groundwork for enjoying it fully. A fulfilling experience in bed begins with right thinking in the head, quite frankly. God says it is "very good" and so should we.

**Years ago I was confronted by a member of the church where I was pastoring, and he was just certain that sex was part of the original curse.** Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Let's learn a lesson from Peter's experience in Acts 10.** The lesson is that what God has cleansed we should no longer consider unholy. Now, I realize that

sinful mankind has certainly twisted and polluted sex. There is every conceivable sexual perversion one can imagine, all of which are disgusting. But these are not to be confused with God's creation. Marital intimacy was, by His original design, to be enjoyed by married partners without guilt or without restraint. Notice the way the Bible puts it in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." This assures us that God views the marriage bed (another way of referring to marital intimacy) as "undefiled" - something He holds "in honor." You will rekindle and preserve your marriage fire if you keep in mind that God created marital intimacy *prior* to the fall...and that He sees it as an undefiled, honorable part of your relationship with your mate.

There is a second biblical principle that will help keep your "honeymoon" from ending, and that is that intimacy in marriage was created for personal pleasure, not just for procreation. The 5th chapter of Proverbs is a picturesque chapter of warning. It shoots straight. Beginning on a negative note, Proverbs 5 talks first about defilement of the marriage relationship before it closes with a positive word about harmony and pleasure between husband and wife.

In verses 15 and following Solomon has these positive and encouraging words to married couples. These words describe the refreshing harmony and physical pleasure God has designed for married partners to experience. The Hebrew reads this way, "Drink from your own well, my son - be faithful and true to your wife. Why should you beget children with women of the street? Why share your children with those outside your home? Let your manhood be a blessing; rejoice in (your) wife...Let her charms and tender embrace satisfy you. Let her love alone fill you with delight."

If you ever had the mistaken notion that God was some sort of puritanical prude, this will certainly help dispel that idea. No, He desires that our marriages provide us with ecstatic sexual delights, exhilarating and pleasurable to the maximum.

A third principle is seen in our text, and that is this - intimacy in marriage is planned for the husband-wife relationship only. Throughout Scripture, God makes it clear that intimacy is to be enjoyed by married partners. In our world of coed dorms, wife-swapping, swingers' clubs, and unisex, this principle sounds both irrelevant and stupid. But it is true. God designed us emotionally so that sex outside of marriage is not nearly as fulfilling or enjoyable as within that secure bond. I do not have to stand here and tell you that adultery is wrong, because in your heart you know that it is.

**The fourth principle, also in our text, is that intimacy in marriage is an expression of unselfish affection, not selfish desire.** What a tremendous difference it made in our marriage when I realized that intimacy was not simply for my own satisfaction, but for my wife's satisfaction. **And from her point of view, it wasn't for her satisfaction, it was for mine.** **As Paul describes the "duty," he points out in verse 4 that he wife does not have authority over her own body.** Clearly, he is referring back to selfishness. **She does not live with the selfish desire that she is going to be satisfied.** **She lives with that unselfish desire that her husband is going to be satisfied.** Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his body, but the wife does. **Both parties have a dual role.** **They are to know pleasure and delight in fulfilling the desire of the other.** It works both ways. **It is a beautiful way to live.**

**The fifth principle is right here in verse 5: intimacy in marriage is not to be interrupted except on very rare occasions.** Verse 5 simply tells us that the healthy life and the healthy drive of a healthy husband and wife, however long they have been married, is not to be restrained or squelched, except for three basic guidelines. **First of all, by mutual agreement.** **Second,** by a reason serious enough to call for prayer. **Third,** it should be temporary so that they might come together again.

**Folks, many a marriage have failed because there has been such a gross failure in this area.** And the biblical point is that if you are married and do not experience the delights of intimate love, you are missing the greatest privilege - intimately - that God provides on earth. **And if you are missing it regularly, the honeymoon is over, and that is not God's plan for your life.**

Let me be quick to say, I understand about physical problems that cause sexual problems, but that is not what Paul is discussing in this passage.