Each has His Own Gift From God

1 Corinthians 7:1–7

Key Verse: 7:7

“I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”

Because there was an unusual amount of immoral behavior among the Corinthian Christians. Paul writes about some things in this chapter to help them resolve the problem of rampant immorality which seems to have plagued the church. The three things that stand out in this chapter as solutions to the problem of immorality are as follows: (1) Marriage. Paul encourages them to marry. (2) Remain in the situation God had called them to. In other words, accept God’s sovereignty in their lives. And (3) Devotion to the Lord. In fact he encourages undivided devotion to the Lord.

We need to understand the city of Corinth. The temple of Aphrodite stood on a mountain overlooking the city. The temple was inhabited by more than a 1000 “so called” virgins who were the priestesses of the temple. But in truth they were no more than a 1000 prostitutes who catered to the gentry of the region in the name of religion. The religion, by the way, was rooted in physical pleasures the most popular of which was “sex”. Men, both the married and the unmarried, visited the city as frequently as they deemed necessary to satisfy their desires; and without recrimination from their wives. It was after all, the normal thing to do; it was what everyone did. The decadence and immorality of that Greco-Roman culture was inconceivable. Such degradation of God’s gift of “sex” must have deeply corrupted the meaning of marriage and family; and must have equally undermined the purpose and meaning of a woman’s life. No wonder Paul was having so much trouble with the Corinthian Christians. Even after becoming Christians, we can only imagine the raging floods of temptations that assaulted those Christian men every time Aphrodite’s temple came into view from anywhere in the city. That temple must have presented as much of a problem for Christian men as internet pornography of our generation does. But as easy and “normal” as it may have seemed to the general public, Christian men had to fight it with every ounce of their being, as they continuously sought the help of the Lord.

The problem of immorality however, was not only limited to the Greek Roman culture. The Arab culture and religion makes provision for more than one wife. Which is to say “legal immorality” or “legal adultery”. Although it is not a common practice today among most Arabs, it is legal for any Moslem man in the Moslem world to have four wives— if they can afford it. Especially the royals who often are above the law may also have up to 40 concubines beyond their limit of four wives. These women have one purpose and one purpose only in this amalgam of wives and concubines— to satisfy every sordid craving of the man. In Corinth also, as is anywhere where women are debased and sex is regarded lightly as a male necessity, we can only imagine how they may have viewed marriage and the family. We have similar views today. Even though women are respected more than before in western cultures, immorality is prized and deemed normal in the course of finding the right relationship. Marriage seems to have taken a back step with a generation that values extensive dating, and a variety of physical relationships, as well as living together outside of marriage. In this kind of culture, even if women are respected, when marriage is not, immorality can only become worse.

[Look at verses 1-7. “Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”] In these verses Paul encourages marriage for those who are not gifted with the gift of celibacy. In these verses Paul also gives specific instructions to married people. His purpose is clear: “If you cannot live like me, as unmarried, then marry and remain faithful to your spouse.

The Corinthian culture was, as we said, decadent. So in these verses we see how Paul elevates marriage and the family from its degraded place in the hearts of the Corinthians to wondrous and glorious heights— to marriage as originally intended by God in the Bible. Paul lifted the women of the time from places of property and of objects of pleasure to the holy and divine place God intended for them. The Bible teaches us that God created the women to be a “helper suitable” for man. A woman is to help her husband in the purpose of his creation. And Paul also lifted up the men of time from places of ignorance and moral depravity to the where they too should be. The Bible teaches us that God created man to serve God’s purpose in his life. When God created man and woman, and brought them together in a marriage, he had a great purpose for them to serve him together. Marriage was created by God to serve God’s holy mission or purpose. As from the beginning of time, till this very day, God gives Christian married people the whole world and commissions them to bring the world to submission to God— to obedience to the gospel. Paul figured that if the Corinthians would understand the seriousness of marriage, and engage in God’s holy purpose for their lives, they would overcome the immorality of their culture. There were many Christian families in Paul’s day who truly fulfilled their purpose well. Among them there was Priscilla and Aquila who had not time to stray into immorality because they were forever engaged in teaching the Bible to those God sent them.

Marriage is also a holy institution established by God. Marriage is a holy institution and a dwelling place for God. Marriage is also an institution where children can learn the love of God, and how to grow in the image of Lord as well as to learn what God has in store for their lives. If the marriage, regardless of how long it lasts, is not founded in God from beginning to end, the institution will not function properly, and the children will not grow properly. Abraham and Sarah’s family was an institution of the Lord— a place where anyone could come and learn the life of faith in God and God’s holy purpose for the family and for the world. As long as Abraham and Sarah’s institution had God and God’s purpose at its forefront, they were an institution unlike any other in the world. One time, Abraham and Sarah ignored God’s purpose and corruption came into their hearts. Sarah convinced Abraham to sleep with her maid in order to produce an heir. It was not God’s will and it broke fellowship with God. Later, Ishmael grew up to be a thorn in this family’s flesh— ever giving them trouble. They made a huge mistake. But when God rebuked him and Abraham repented, he also surrendered his marriage institution once again to God. God gave him Isaac, through whom God worked to bring salvation to the world. How was Isaac educated in this holy institution? His education began when Abraham accepted God’s command to surrender Isaac to the Lord. It was most painful and Abraham had no idea why God would ask such a terrible thing of him. But he obeyed God and took his son to surrender him to the Lord on the Mount Moriah. On the way, Isaac asked his father where the sacrifice was, and Abraham had the privilege and opportunity to teach Isaac the very fundamentals of the family’s holy institution. He taught him that God would provide in his own time. And he also taught him that regardless of how much he loved Isaac, that he loved God more. No parent wants to tell this to their children especially demonstrate their greater love for God, because children are often insecure as it is in their parent’s love. But Abraham believed that his son should learn this lesson. And he did. And Isaac grew up to carry the torch of faith to his own generation. Marriage of this kind can certainly overcome the struggles of immorality in any culture. When we view our marriage and family as a holy institution of God, and set out to make this institution the best school and educator of our children, not only can we defeat immorality, but we also guarantee that our children have the same tools to defeat it themselves as well.

Marriage also binds a man and a woman in a way far more than only physical or for physical purposes. When God said that the two shall become one flesh, he meant that they would be intertwined emotionally, physically and spiritually before God. But these Corinthian Christians were not honoring marriage as it should be honored before the eyes of the Lord. They were allowing the lure of immorality to infiltrate their community, and their very lives and it was wreaking havoc in their marriages and families. Look at these words in verses 1-7. “his own wife”, “her own husband”, “her body does not belong to her alone”, “his body does not belong to him alone”, “Do not deprive”, and words such as “mutual consent”. All these terms reveal a relationship between husband and wife that go far beyond just the physical. As God once said in the beginning of time, at the time he created and established the family, “the two shall become one flesh.” Therefore, they are one emotionally, physically and spiritually, and they are deeply intertwined in a oneness that is beyond our human comprehension. If the man and woman have no such relationship, if they have not allowed God to combine their two into one, they remain apart and the partnership is so much out sync that it leaves room for nothing less than immorality. Paul saw the trouble among them. Those who were un-married, easily justified their immoral behavior, as easily as Christian men today who find internet pornography a private and safe release for their own lustful desires. But it is neither private nor safe. It becomes an addiction and a trap. The guilt and shame alone that they have to carry in their own hearts— even if no one else knows about it— weighs so heavy upon them that they cannot fully achieve the great and wondrous heights God had called them to climb. On the other hand, Paul saw another trouble for those who were married as well. To these, as soon as there were problems among them, if they were not in sync with one another emotionally, physically and spiritually in the sight of God, they too would contemplate immoral behavior as a way of solving problems. There must have been a lot of adultery in that culture, which also filtered into the Christian church.

But marriage in the sight of God is a oneness that nothing in this world can either dissolve nor wear out! When God blessed Adam and Eve to become one, he intended for their marriage to last a lifetime, and their relationship to grow and intertwine in a way that would make them absolutely inseparable. Paul explained this phenomenon of oneness and inseparability in the new testament more deeply. Later, as Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians about marriage, he said to the wives: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord”. And to the husbands he said: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Eph5:22-25) This is not just a nice verse to contemplate with a touch of unbelief in it— as if it was an incredulous command. There is wisdom and power in God’s words especially directed to the married. God does not command the wife to obey her husband but to submit. “Submit” is the same as “co-work with your husband” or “respond to your husband”. As the leader of the family, when the husband performs his duty before God, the wife would respond equally. As he would initiate relationship the wife would respond equally. Therefore, the wife submits as much as the husband initiates. When the husband does his duty before God, and “loves his wife”, the wife would “submit to her husband”. It is a beautiful union of love and response to love; Working and co-working out of love for the Lord and for each other; And responding in harmony to one another, especially for the wife responding to everything the husband initiates in the Lord. But he must love her as the Lord commands. And she must submit to him in response to his love. When he says: “I love you” she answers back “I love you.” Not necessarily in words, but often in deep and in respect and in love for one another. When a man claims that his wife is no good; or that she is cold and unresponsive; or that she does not respect him; when a man excuses his immoral behavior or his un-oneness because of his wife, he is in fact admitting his own failure as a husband and that he is to blame for the condition of his wife, and his marriage and his family.

In these gracious words, Paul offered up a solution to the problem of immorality in the church of Corinth. Marriage is not only an institution that is holy and impregnable by outside influences, especially the influence of the world’s barrage of immorality, but marriage is an exemplary Godly institution as well. When married people live in the harmony God has intended; when they live for mission in serving God’s holy purpose; when they are one heart mind and soul as they should be; then they cast a glorious shadow of grace on unmarried people. They live to honor God. And so, they teach by example. And in that way, the unmarried look towards them with anticipation and hope that God would some day bless them equally. And the unmarried man or woman whose hope is in God, has such things in their hearts that are too great to allow unseemly things to enter in.

In verse 7, Paul said: “I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.” Paul was talking about this situation of being unmarried. He wishes that all men would be like him, unmarried. This is not Paul’s own idea, but Paul is responding to Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:11-12. “’Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” In his own life, Paul accepted that God had called him to live a single’s life, but for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. But this is not for everyone as Paul himself said in verse 7. To live a single life for the sake of the kingdom is a gift from God, as marriage is a gift from God as well. Whatever the case may be, whatever God has gifted us with, we must honor that and serve his good purpose in our lives.