

The Corinthians had written to Paul to ask a variety of questions, and in this chapter he answers their questions concerning marriage. The Corinthians lived in a city full of sexual temptations and Paul instructs them to find their sexual fulfillment within the confines of marriage. Christians today are surrounded by similar temptations and it would behoove us to pay attention to God's teaching here.

1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.* 2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me” – After dealing with the issue of the Corinthians committing fornication by satisfying their sexual desires with prostitutes, Paul now segues to answering the Corinthians' questions on several topics, the first of which was concerning marital relations. They had apparently written to him with these questions previously and now he is using this opportunity to answer them.

“It is good for a man not to touch a woman” – Some of the Corinthians may have had the notion that to avoid fornication it would be best to avoid sex altogether and remain single, even to the point of advocating divorce from their current spouse. Here, Paul prefaces his remarks by admitting that there is nothing wrong with a man remaining single and celibate if he is able to do so. An obvious advantage in doing so is that he can prioritize God in his life (1 Cor 7:32-33 *“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife”*).

“Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” – Our sex drive has a powerful influence on our behavior and so Paul advises that every man and woman should be allowed have their own spouse in order to give each other a safe and legitimate means of sexual fulfillment. Otherwise they might succumb to the temptation to use prostitutes or to resort to other forms of fornication.

3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

The Greek word translated “benevolence” means “good will; kindness.” Husbands and wives are not to deprive one another of sexual pleasures. Doing so creates a temptation to commit fornication by going elsewhere for sexual fulfillment.

4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

The wife does not have the right to withhold herself sexually from her husband, and by the same token, the husband also does not have the right to withhold himself sexually from his wife. Both must be willing to meet the sexual needs of their spouse.

5 Defraud ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

“Defraud [rob] ye not one the other, except it be with consent [agreement] for a time” – Withholding sex is a form of robbery. Married couples should not deprive each other of sex except in the case when both have agreed to abstain for a period of time.

“that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” – The only reason that Paul mentions for a couple to abstain from sex for a period of time is for the purpose of seeking God through fasting and prayer. Today, there could be other legitimate reasons, such as abstaining for a period of time for medical reasons.

“and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency [lack of self control]” – Once the agreed upon time period has elapsed, the couple should once again resume their sexual relations so that they don't fall into temptation. Paul understands the power of sexual temptation and knows that most people can only go so long without sex before a lack of self control causes them to succumb to sexual temptation.

Verses 6-9: Paul makes it clear that marriage is not a commandment but that it is permissible when necessary. His preference was that men remained single and devoted to God like he was, but he realized that it was not God's will for every man to do so. Not everyone can resist sexual temptations and so men, women and widows should marry if sexual temptations are too great.

10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband: 11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.

“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord” – After suggesting that people would be more devoted to God if they are single, Paul makes it clear that if they are married then they should remain married. He also makes it clear that this command to the married comes from Jesus Himself (Matt. 5:31-32 *“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery”*).

“Let not the wife depart from her husband” – A wife should obey Jesus' command and not leave or divorce her husband (Matt. 19:5-6 *“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”*).

“But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband” – It's possible that the wife might leave her husband because of extreme circumstances such as verbal, emotional or physical abuse. In such cases she is still not free to marry another man. They are to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to each other. The only exception to this command is if the marriage covenant has been violated by sexual infidelity (Matt. 5:32).

“and let not the husband put away [divorce] his wife” – The same command applies equally to the husband.

12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord” – Jesus’ command (vs. 10-11) assumed that both spouses were believers but Paul now addresses the rest of the marriages in the church where one of the spouses is an unbeliever. Paul acknowledges that Jesus never addressed this circumstance and so he is giving his guidance as an apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away” – A believer should not marry an unbeliever, as Paul says later in his second letter to the Corinthians (**2 Cor. 6:14** “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*”). However, if two people are married and one of them later becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, that does not mean that they need to get divorced. Apparently some of the Corinthian believers had the mistaken impression that they needed to divorce their unbelieving spouses but Paul assures them that divorce is not necessary if both spouses are willing to remain married.

“And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him” – Paul assures us that the inverse is also true. If the wife is the believer and her unbelieving husband is satisfied to remain married to her, then she should not divorce him.

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

The Greek word for “sanctified” can mean “purified” but it can also mean “consecrated to God,” which is likely what Paul intends here. When one of the spouses is a believer, it brings the blessings of God on the marriage. The unbelieving spouse and children will benefit from blessings that they otherwise would not have. The unbelieving spouse and children will also garner the favorable attention of God in a way that they otherwise wouldn’t due to God showing His favor on the believing spouse.

15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart” – Christians should try to preserve their marriage but if the unbelieving spouse insists on a divorce, then God considers this a legitimate reason for a divorce.

“A brother or a sister is not under bondage [to be made a slave] in such cases” – Paul’s earlier command for divorced believers remaining unmarried or else reconciling (vs. 10-11) does not apply here. Ordinarily there is a spiritual bond between a married couple for the rest of their life, but that bond does not exist when a believer and an unbeliever are married. The principle of being unequally yoked comes into play here since the unbeliever has no fellowship with Christ, which limits the depth of the bond with the believing spouse (**2 Cor. 6:14** “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*”). For this reason, a believer is not restrained from remarrying after divorcing an unbelieving spouse.

“but God hath called us to peace” – The believer married to an unbeliever does not have to refuse the divorce or fight to keep the marriage together.

16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save *thy* husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save *thy* wife?

“For what knowest thou” – Paul realizes that the believing spouse may be reluctant to allow their marriage to dissolve because they are hoping that God will use their prayers, example and influence to cause the unbelieving spouse to become a believer. However, there is no guarantee that that will happen, so Paul asks “what knowest thou?” or “How do you know?”

“O wife, whether thou shalt save *thy* husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save *thy* wife?” – The fact is that, while it might be possible for the unbeliever to eventually get saved being married to a believer, if the unbeliever is already wanting a divorce and the believing spouse is refusing, then the resulting strife and friction will likely have the opposite effect.

Verses 17-38: We are to accept the circumstances where God has placed us, whether married or unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised, being a slave or free, etc. Paul’s desire for the Corinthians was that they have no more worldly cares than necessary, and being married brings a set of cares/responsibilities that the unmarried do not have. Thus the unmarried have more freedom to focus on pleasing God. However, if a man finds himself being tempted to act in an inappropriate manner toward his girlfriend, then, if she is old enough, they should get married to avoid the temptation to sin.

39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

This statement apparently assumes that both the wife and husband are believers, and so they do not have the freedom to remarry as long as they are both alive (vs. 10-11). However, if one of them dies, then the other is free to remarry, but only another Christian.

40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

Paul says, however, that the woman whose husband has died would be happier if she remains unmarried. Paul says that this is his opinion (he has no scripture to support it), but he believes that this opinion is guided by the Spirit of God.