

Holy Wedlock & Unholy Deadlock

1 Cor 7:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In Coventry, England, a man called at the Citizen's Advice Bureau and asked to have his wife traced.
1. It transpired that he and his wife had parted three days after their wedding nearly 25 years before, and hadn't seen each other since.
 2. Asked whether he was thinking of a divorce, the man responded, "Oh, no. I was just thinking it would be nice to get together to celebrate our silver wedding anniversary."
- B. Is that not a perfect description of many marriages within this world?
1. People get married, thinking everything is going to be absolutely wonderful.
 - a. They stand before the preacher, promising to love and honor one another regardless of what comes their way, until death separates them.
 - b. They go on their honeymoon and everything is wonderful. Then, they get home and reality sets in: there are bills to pay, long hours to work, and a house to keep. It often doesn't take too long until a child comes into the picture and then there is even less time to spend with one another.
 - c. All of that can easily tear marriages apart, and all too often that it precisely what happens.
 2. There are other people who were married, with that expectation that everything was going to be wonderful, but when they quickly discover that's a utopia not possible in the real world, sought to honor their spouses in the best way possible, for they understand that's what God expects.
- C. In the text before us this morning, Paul speaks of one way that we can honor our spouses: through what I shall—because of the number of children here with us this morning—euphemistically call "marital relations."
1. The way Paul has structured this epistle is truly amazing.
 - a. There are two main circumstances that brought about this epistle: a) the report from Chloe's household which detailed several of the problems in the Corinthian congregation, and b) a letter the Corinthians had sent to Paul.
 - b. In that report from Chloe's household, Paul heard about much fornication prevalent in Corinth, and he wrote in detail about it.
 - In the letter from the Corinthians, they had written that it was good for men not to have marital relations with their wives.
 - Paul has structured this epistle, obviously with the Holy Spirit's guidance, where he deals with the fornication problems at Corinth and moves immediately into their idea of abstaining from one's spouse.
 2. As we think about Holy Wedlock & Unholy Deadlock, Paul tells us about MARITAL RELATIONS & MARITAL RESPONSIBILITY.

II. MARITAL RELATIONS, vv. 1-2.

- A. "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry," v. 1.
1. It is absolutely impossible for any translation to provide a word-for-word translation from the Greek; therefore, the translators of the NIV sought what is called a "dynamic equivalent" translation.
 - a. In a "dynamic equivalent," the aim is not to translate the words into English, but to translate the ideas into English. The idea is to allow modern readers to read the text with the same understanding that the first readers would have read that same text.
 - b. There are many times the NIV does an excellent job at that and is clearer than many other translations because of it.
 - c. Here, however, they don't quite get the idea of the Greek.

- The Greek is literally, as the KJV has it: "Now, concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman."
 - The problem with the NIV translation is that Paul makes it obvious in this paragraph that the people to whom he is writing were already married: thus, "touch" refers not to marriage but to marital relations.
2. From what the Corinthians wrote, they apparently thought it was a good thing, even if a man was married, not to engage in marital relations with his wife.
- a. Why would the Corinthians think it was good for married people not to have relations with one another?
- Jewish rabbis in this time period debated how long men should abstain from relations in order to devote themselves to a study of the Law: some said one week, others said two weeks, and there were still others who said that if you were really going to devote yourself to the Law, you should abstain for one month.
 - There are also a couple statements from Jesus which may have led the Corinthians to few marital relations as a concession to the flesh:
 - For example, when the disciples said that Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage were too difficult, he said, "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" (Mt 19:12).
 - "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26).
 - Granted, you would have to divorce these statements of Jesus from their context to make them apply to celibacy within marriage, but because the Corinthians had many problems understanding much of what God desires, it may not at all be a stretch to see their misconstruing what Jesus taught in regard to celibacy.
- b. For whatever reasons they believed celibacy within marriage was good, the Corinthians believed it was good and acceptable to withhold marital relations from their spouses.
- B. Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband, v. 2.
1. Paul advises against celibacy in marriage because of immorality.
- a. As we have discussed previously, the people of God cannot have a lax attitude when it comes to immorality.
- "Flee from sexual immorality. All sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18).
 - "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable" (1 Thess 4:3-4).
- b. Regardless of what status in which we find ourselves in this life, we need to learn to control our bodies honorably rather than in lust. However, there can be no doubt but that having a spouse provides an appropriate way to harness our God-given appetites.
- c. This is another place where the NIV translators have attempted to give the modern reader a glimpse into the first-century world; the Greek simply reads, "But on account of fornication" (as does the KJV), while the NIV reads, "Since there is so much immorality."
- While the Greek simply reads "because of fornication," the idea could very well be: "Since there is so much immorality."
 - We know that the Corinthians faced much immorality:
 - There was much immorality in the church: a man was living with his step-mother and the previous paragraphs certainly imply there was other immorality in the congregation.
 - As the Corinthians walked down the street, they saw numerous brothels and temples where ritual prostitution regularly took place.
 - We also face much immorality in our own culture:

- Flip on the television, and you're going to see immorality paraded in front of our eyes.
 - Talk with your co-workers, and you're likely to hear off-colored jokes.
 - Do a simple search on the Google, mistype the word, and you're going to find all sorts of improper sites.
2. Because of immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.
- a. Just reading this text, it certainly sounds as though Paul is saying, "Each of you needs to get married to avoid immorality." I've read it that way most of my life, and I'm certain most of you have, as well.
 - b. That view, however, totally ignores how the Greeks used the phrase "should have."
 - "He should have his own wife" or "She should have her own husband" was an idiom in the Greek which meant the same thing our idiom "have marital relations" means.
 - Paul is saying, "Here's the best way to avoid fornication: Have relations with your spouse."
 - c. What do we do when we are faced with sexual temptation? Do we turn to our spouses, or do we turn to whatever means we can find?

III. MARITAL RESPONSIBILITY, vv. 3-7.

- A. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband, v. 3.
1. Paul's statement that both husband and wife are to fulfill their marital duties is extremely intriguing.
 2. Jewish marriage contracts stipulated that the husband fulfill his marital duty to the wife, but there was nothing said about the wife's doing likewise.
 - a. I'm surmising that it had to do with the idea that the husband was envisioned as being strong and responsible for conceiving children. You recall that under the OT, if a man died without children, his brother was to marry his widow and conceive children and raise them as his own.
 - b. However, Paul doesn't say that only men have an obligation to fulfill marital duties, but he includes the women as well.
 - It seems to me that Paul elevates women to the same status as men. Men and women have differing responsibilities in the home and in the church, but women are not inferior to men. Paul here makes both sexes equally responsible for keeping their spouses satisfied sexually.
 - Inherent in the idea of keeping our spouses satisfied is the idea that marital relations are good, holy, and can rightfully be enjoyed.
 - That only makes sense, for God made us male and female, including everything which goes with being male or female.
 - We find in Scripture the idea that sexual relations within marriage are important, holy, and good.
 - "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov 5:18-18).
 - Are we striving to satisfy our spouses?
 - Husbands, are we showing that love and honor to our wives in every aspect of our lives?
 - ✓ Guys, do we understand that keeping our wives satisfied starts when we get up in the morning and has to do with the way we honor them all day long?
 - ✓ Not only does that accord with psychological research, but that's Bible: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Pt 3:7).
 - Wives, I don't think I need to tell you that when it comes to this subject, while you're thinking romance and respect, we guys are thinking in physical terms.
 - ✓ Again, that is a very biblical idea: Song of Solomon 4:1-7.
 - ✓ Granted, that imagery seems odd to our way of thinking—I don't suggest you husbands go home and tell your wife that her hair looks like a flock of goats—but, Solomon, in his own time and culture, is describing his beloved's physical attributes.

- B. 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, v. 4.
1. Throughout this book and its discussions of human sexuality, Paul emphasizes our bodies to not belong to us.
 - a. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own" (6:19).
 - b. Is this not vastly different from the way most people think in this modern world:
 - How many men think, "Look, no one's going to get hurt by this affair; my wife's not going to find out. It's my body, anyway"? No, it's not, it's his wife's body as well.
 - When it comes to government regulation of same sex marriage, how many times do we hear people say, "Stay out of the bedroom. It's my body"? If you're in Christ, it's not your body; it's his body.
 2. We need to remember that our bodies do not belong to ourselves but to Christ and our spouses.
- C. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent 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, v. 5.
1. When it comes to marital relations, we cannot deprive our spouses.
 - a. The Greek for "deprive" is a present imperative, referring to habitual action.
 - b. Quite honestly, that means that we cannot ignore our spouse's physical needs.
 - God created us male and female, and he intends us to express ourselves as male and female.
 - God has placed sexuality squarely and solely inside of marriage, and he expects those physical desires to be fulfilled in marriage.
 2. The only exception is that both partners agree for a set time so that they might devote themselves to prayer.
 - a. I am aware that the KJV adds "fasting" to this verse, however, the Greek only has the word "prayer."
 - b. Notice that Paul speaks of "mutual consent."
 - It's not that I can decide all by myself that I'm going to give myself to prayer rather than my wife, nor can she do the same.
 - It's mutual consent; both partners must agree to abandon marital relations for spiritual pursuits.
 - c. The only reason to abandon sexuality for a while is for prayer.
 - Paul here makes clear that while we are sexual creatures, we are not *only* sexual creatures; we are spiritual creatures, as well.
 - As important as sex is in marriage, spiritual matters are even more important.
 - d. After a period of abstinence, both partners need to come together again so that Satan may not tempt them through a lack of self-control.
 - Sexual appetites are powerful. God created them to be powerful; therefore, he knows they are powerful.
 - Therefore, he wants those appetites fulfilled in marriage so that husbands and wives don't find themselves entangled in sin because of a lack of self-control.
- D. 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, vv. 6-7.
1. Paul declares that what he has just written is not a command, but a concession to the flesh.
 2. Some of you might be thinking, "Good, I'm off the hook. I don't have to give myself to my wife or my husband."
 3. However, what Paul writes immediately after this negates any such idea: "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."
 - a. Paul was a single man, at least at the time he wrote this Epistle. It likely that Paul was either a widower or his wife left him when he converted to Christ; if he were a member of the Sanhedrin when Stephen was killed, he would have had to have been married at that point.

- b. Paul says that he wishes men were unmarried and celibate so that they could give themselves to spiritual matters: “An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—he he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—hoe she can please her husband” (7:32-34).
4. However, Paul is cognizant that that not everyone can live that way: “each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”
 - a. If it’s not your spouse’s gift to go without marital relations, you need to give yourself.
 - b. We know that Peter, contrary to Catholic claims, was not only married, but took his wife with him on his missionary endeavors.
 - “Don’t we have a right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5).
 - Peter wasn’t less of a man of God simply because he took his wife along with him, but he was just as much an apostle as was Paul and the others.
5. Will we honor God in our bodies—abstaining for improper sexual relations and giving ourselves to our spouses? How are we honoring the Lord Jesus in our bodies?