

Celibacy in Corinth

(1 Corinthians 7)

Corinth wrote Paul with questions, 1 Co.7:1

- 7:25-27
 - 8:1
 - 12:1
 - [16:17]
- Paul had already written about sexually immoral people, 5:1-9
 - Libertine position, 6:15...
 - Ascetic tendencies, Ch.7
 - What about celibacy? 7:1-7

I. Celibacy is 'good' but
not for everyone (1-2)

Is v.1 a quote from Corinthians to Paul?

- “It is better not to marry”?
- 26: present distress: “good” to be single.
 - Cf. verses 8, 28, 35, 38, 40

Paul did not advocate celibacy for everyone

- 2: each man should have...
- Gn.2:18, *not good*...
- Mk.6:17-18 . . . Jn.4:17-18
 - Paul held marriage in highest esteem:
Ep.5:22-33
 - 1 Tim.5:14 – Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Paul did not advocate celibacy for everyone

- 2: each man should have...
- Gn.2:18, *not good*...
- Mk.6:17-18 . . . Jn.4:17-18
 - Paul held marriage in highest esteem:
Ep.5:22-33
 - Apostates forbade marriage: 1 Tim.4:3 –
forbidding to marry, and commanding to
abstain from foods which God created to
be received with thanksgiving by those
who believe and know the truth.

“Touch” (7:1)

- Gen.20:...6, And God said to him in a dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you **touch** her.
- Prov.6:...29, So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever **touches** her shall not be innocent.

“Because of temptation, let each man / woman have... (imper.) own...” (7:2)

- Reason: threat of sexual immorality (ch.5-6)
- Jews: a man who had not married by age 20 has transgressed the law of God.
- Early marriages were encouraged
 - Girls: 12-13
 - Boys: 18
 - Spartan men: marry by 30

Jerome (1 Co.7:1)

'If it's good not to touch, it must be bad to touch'

- Many in Paul's day favored asceticism.
- Apparently some at Corinth shared view.
- Paul does NOT say celibacy is better than marriage. Marriage is good

RYR: sell all is good; is ownership evil?

Fasting is good; is eating evil?

Lk.9:59-60, is burial evil?

- Hb.13:4

I. Celibacy is 'good' but not for everyone (1-2)

II. Celibacy causes
temptations (2)

Fornication was (is) a real threat

1 Co.6:9-11, 12-20

- Not every Christian at Corinth was immoral
- Paul warns about danger of fornication for singles
- Marriage without fornication always beats celibacy with fornication

All passages stress value of marriage –

- Continuation of human race, Gn.1:26-28
- Companionship, Gn.2:18
- Closeness, Gn.2:24
 - No other relation is so close
 - Adam / Noah and sons each had one wife
 - Gn.4:19, Lamech
 - Gn.16, Abraham
 - Gn.29-30, Jacob

All passages stress value of marriage –

- Continuation of human race, Gn.1:26-28
- Companionship, Gn.2:18
- Closeness, Gn.2:24
- Cheerfulness, Pr.5:18; Ec.9:9
- Comparison, Ep.5
- Chastity, 1 Co.7:2

I. Celibacy is 'good' but not for everyone (1-2)

II. Celibacy causes temptations (2)

III. Celibacy is wrong for
married persons (3-5)

Coming to terms –

1. Render (imperative): fulfill duty to someone...
2. Due: debt, what is due. IOU
3. Have authority over (present; imperative) – throughout marriage. 6:12. Paradox
4. Deprive: rob, steal. Refuse to pay... 6:7-8; Ja.5⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Apparently some devoted themselves wholly to God, but neglected spouse

1. Normal sense: Christian's body is his own, 7:4.
2. Spiritual sense: body belongs to God, 6:19-20.
3. Marital sense: body belongs to spouse, 7:3-5.

One exception: deprivation is acceptable when . . .

1. By consent (mutual)
2. For limited time (temporary)
3. To devote time to prayer
4. When this time ends, normal desires and temptations return: come together again
 - 6:12-20, intimacy outside marriage is sin
 - 7:1-5, neglect within also sinful

As important as prayer is, it's no excuse to neglect a mate.

I. Celibacy is 'good' but not for everyone (1-2)

II. Celibacy causes temptations (2)

III. Celibacy is wrong for married persons (3-5)

IV. Celibacy is a gift (6-7)

Concession (allowance) – v.6

- Paul has allowed some things without commanding them.
- He urges marriage (2); he allows short abstinence; he does not command either (5).

A gift – v.7

- An expression of divine grace – given the grace to practice self-control.
- Celibacy is for the celibate.
- It's wrong to force it on those who do not have this gift.
 - Mt.19:11-12
 - 1 Co.9:5

False estimate of celibacy led to errors

1. Pronouncing celibacy as the most excellent of virtues
 - 1 Tim.5:14 . . . Tit.2:4-5
2. Adoption of it by those who did not have the gift
 - Therapeutai
 - Latin church in middle ages...
3. Enforcing it on 'clergy' ... causing immorality