

1Co12 – That Crazy Marriage Chapter– 1 Corinthians 7:1-16
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Open your Bibles. What a crazy title for a crazy message. Title of the message, “That Crazy Marriage Chapter.” We’re in our verse by verse study of 1 Corinthians in Chapter 7.

1 Corinthians 7 is basically split into *two* subjects – being married and being single. But the way this chapter is written has a tendency to make some people crazy. So today we’re going to look at the “crazy marriage half” and next message we’ll look at the “crazy singles half” of this chapter.

But why the word “crazy?” It’s not because God’s Word is crazy, it’s because reading this chapter incorrectly makes us crazy. Paul is using a “Yes, but...” style of pastoral counsel in this chapter (and following chapters) and this “Yes, but...” style of pastoral counsel makes it extremely easy to pull out of context just one half of Paul’s comments and use “that half” to justify our actions or to attack someone else with a half-truth from God’s Word and that approach to God’s Word is often what makes us “crazy Christians.”

So before we read verse 1 today can we make a commitment to try hard to *not* be *crazy* Christians and can we make a commitment (please) to *not* take Paul’s counsel here *out of context* especially in order to justify our own purposes.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, please, take your living Word and apply it to our lives correctly. Help us to understand what’s going on in the Book of 1 Corinthians. What was going on in Corinth, where Paul was, why he was writing and how this pastoral counseling section can give us such insight into our own marriages? We pray Lord that you would reveal these truths to us. We pray that you would reveal specific truths to us about our marriage, Lord. And Lord, for those who are single, we pray you would inspire us to return next week to hear Paul’s encouragement to singles. We pray you would do all that now, by the power of your Word and your Spirit and in your name, Jesus, amen.*

In order for this chapter to *not* make us crazy we need to understand that different sections of scriptures are written for different purposes. For example, the Book of Psalms is not written in the same way (or for the same purpose) as the Book of Revelation. We don’t read Psalms and Revelation the same.

Leviticus is not written in the same way (or for the same purpose) as the Book of Romans and so we don’t read Leviticus and Romans the same way.

And so we must first understand why Paul is writing what he's writing, where he's at, where the Church is at. This is all context and then when we apply it that way we say, "Okay, this is a pastor giving a church pastoral counseling in response to specific questions they asked."

And so it is very important to understand all of this because a large part of the remainder of 1 Corinthians (chapters 8-14) is written in this same manner. It is written as pastoral counsel dealing with specific issues in the Church at Corinth and so we must approach these chapters in the context they were written in and for the purpose they were written for and apply it correctly.

Chapter 7 begins the section of the Corinthians receiving the pastoral counsel they've requested on the specific issues they are dealing with. In the first six chapters Paul has been addressing the sin and the division that was tearing down the church. But now he switches to *responding* to some specific questions the Corinthians has *written* him about and so Paul is writing his "pastoral counsel" back to them.

And Paul *knows* the factions and groups that he addressed in the previous chapters are still alive and well in the Church, and Paul knows some of the motivations behind their questions is either to *support* their *own* position on a matter or *attack someone else's* position, which we see all the time in counseling.

As a pastor, when I know someone wants to use *my words* to justify their actions or position on a matter, it causes me to be *very careful* with how I respond to them. And we definitely see Paul responding (to some extent) knowing all that is still going on. Does that give you some idea of *how* these chapters were written and why? This is all *context* and we can only correctly understand and apply the Bible if we approach it in the *context* it was written in.

Okay, let's get started in 1 Corinthians 7:1.

1 Corinthians 7:1(A) (NLT)

I Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. . .

Now after dealing with your division and discord for six chapters

Now I'll address the questions you wrote me about.

And the first response is in the second half of 1 Corinthians 7:1.

1 Corinthians 7:1(B)-2 (NLT)

1 . . . Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations.

2But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.

Do you see the “Yes, but...” approach?

Yes – it’s good (verse 1)

But – because there is... (verse 2) (Paul’s being careful).

So the first question has to do with sex. The Corinthians were immersed in a sexually immoral culture –just as we are today and apparently the first question had something to do with *Should we ABSTAIN from sexual relations – in order to follow Jesus?*

And Paul says *Yes* it could be good – *if you’re single* – and as he’ll go on to say... *But* – because you live in such a sexually immoral culture... (*verse 2*) ***each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.***–(“have” used in the sexual sense here).

So Paul begins his response to those who are married.

He simply says – FIRST – sex must be between a husband and a wife *only*. Nothing *outside* of marriage and nothing in *addition* to the marriage. Remember the use of prostitutes in Corinth was a normal and accepted way of life even used as worship to the gods.

So, first, sex is for husbands and wives only.

And then continuing *in light* of their *sexually charged* culture (just like ours) Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:3,

1 Corinthians 7:3 (NLT)

3 The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs.

For those who are married – it’s not about abstaining – it’s about *fulfilling* each other’s needs. God created us *for* sexual intimacy in marriage. The devil (with the help of our flesh) has perverted that into all kinds of sexual immorality. And so Paul is saying, don’t abstain from sex in marriage. Instead, fulfill one another’s needs *inside the marriage and inside the marriage only*.

Now, the specific context here is *sexual needs*. But the Greek word used is maybe best translated “CONJUGAL” which simply means “relating to marriage.”

So Paul's referring to meeting sexual needs within the framework of *marriage* (conjugal). But – Paul is *not* teaching the framework for marriage here. He teaches the framework for marriage in Ephesians Chapter 5 and Colossians Chapter 3.

And there – God makes it clear – husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, which prevents husbands from using these verses unlovingly in regard to their own sexual desires.

And God calls wives to support and respect their husbands, which also provides a framework for meeting their husband's sexual needs.

BUT – do you understand that this is *not* the complete teaching on sex inside a Christian marriage?

And so then within the correct (and complete) framework of *God's Design for Marriage* we read in 1 Corinthians 7:4,

1 Corinthians 7:4 (NLT)

4 The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.

I like the way the NLT puts this – we “give” ourselves to our spouse guided by the framework of God's Design for Marriage given in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 and when that is done, this verse cannot be used in an *unloving* or *demanding* or *controlling* way.

Bible scholar **Eugene Peterson** puts it this way in his paraphrase of these verses.

Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband . . . (well put)

But then Paul provides one *possible* option.

1 Corinthians 7:5-6 (NLT)

5 Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

6 I say this as a concession, not as a command.

That is the “pastoral counsel” approach in verse 6 ***“I say this as a concession, not as a command.”***

Paul is saying “If you agree to abstain for a time – for prayer – it’s okay. But afterward come back together – at *this level* of intimacy.”

I know these verses bring up all kinds of “what if” questions – “What if we have *this* going on or that going on?”

We must understand Paul is *not* addressing *every* sex related question here. So we cannot push every sex related answer into these verses, as some people try to do.

This is us – looking over Paul’s shoulder as he gives pastoral counsel to the Corinthians and we can learn some very big lessons here. But that doesn’t mean we can get *every answer to every question* in these verses.

If you’re looking for the complete framework for God’s Design for Marriage, ask us for our twelve week study by that same name.

And so continuing then in verse 7 Paul says,

1 Corinthians 7:7 (NLT)

7 But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift(Charisma)from God, of one kind or another.

Still in regard to sexual issues, Paul says ***“I wish everyone were SINGLE, like me (meaning celibate, thereby avoiding all sexual dangers)”*** but then he says ***Yet each person has a special gift Charisma) from God.*** This is the word we get CHARASMATIC from – it means “gift.”

And Paul is saying

SOME have the GIFT from God - to Be MARRIED- and

SOME have the GIFT from God - to Be SINGLE

And married or single they are BOTH gifts from God (and Paul will develop that more next message).

The funny thing is, there are people in this room today that are both married and single and neither of them thinks their current status is a *gift* from God. One person is saying “Oh God *WHY* do I have to be SINGLE” and another person is saying “Oh God *WHY* do I have to be MARRIED” and God says to BOTH of you – your current marital status is a *gift from him*.

And then we say, “Yeah God, but it’s not the gift I want!” Some single people want to be married and some married people want to be single and God says “You’re looking at your current state in life all wrong.”

If you could *see* your current marital status as a gift then you could possibly begin to see what God wants to do in you and through you *right where you are at*. (But more on that next message).

So, continuing the thought from verse 7 and still answering the sexual relations question, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9,

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 (NLT)

8 So I say to those who aren’t married and to widows - it’s better to stay unmarried, just as I am.

9 But if they can’t control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It’s better to marry than to burn with lust.

Paul says there are some real benefits to being single. But if you can’t control yourself sexually – get married. And by the way, we know Paul was single here, but we’re almost certain Paul was married at one time, and scholars assume that either Paul’s wife had died or she abandoned him when he committed his life to Jesus Christ which can still happen in Orthodox Jewish families today.

But all of that is a sneak peek into the singles section next message. To finish today Paul returns to his counsel for those who are married.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NLT)

10 But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.

First we have to deal with the words **not from me, but from the Lord** (verse 10) because Paul refers to this (in one way or another) four times in this chapter. Paul is saying this command doesn’t come from my own inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This was a command taught by the Lord Jesus while he was here on earth and I’m just repeating it to you.

10 . . . A wife must not leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.

Half the room right now is saying yeah but – yeah but – yeah but...

Yeah, But what about this and what about that and what if this happens and what if that happens?

And I understand there are “what about this’s” but here is what I have found.

Christians are often much quicker to grasp onto the “What about this’s” than they grasp onto the foundational command. Often, even before the foundational command is even finished being read, people are already raising their “what about this’s” usually to justify their own opinion or their own actions.

Again, there *are* “what about this’s.” Jesus gave us the big “what about this,” right... (adultery) and Paul is going to address another “what about this” right here.

But can we hold our “what about this’s” for one minute and really grasp and really accept and really receive this foundational command from the Lord. Jesus says in Matthew 19:5-6,

Matthew 19:5–6 (NLT)

5 . . . a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ 6 Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split (tear) apart what God has joined together.”

And I know some of you are already saying in your mind “Yeah but, what about this?”

But have we really first fully embraced the heavenly reason for this foundational command before we start to grasp for the “what about this’s?”

Remember this chapter (Chapter 7) is *not* the full counsel of God on marriage and divorce. This is Paul’s pastoral counsel to the Corinthian church in response to their *specific questions* and we can learn a lot from it – if we will not jump immediately to our “what about this’s.”

But in our final verses today Paul does deal with *one* of the “what about this’s” in marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (NLT)

12 Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a fellow believer has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her.

13 And if a believing woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him.

Paul is now addressing “unequally yoked” marriages and first he says this is a subject that Jesus never really addressed while he was on the earth. Does this mean this is *less* than fully inspired scripture? No. It just means Jesus never directly addressed this specific situation.

So Paul says if an *unbelieving wife* is willing to stay with her *believing husband* the husband must not leave her and if an *unbelieving husband* is willing to stay with a *believing wife* the wife must not leave him.

And then within Paul’s explanation of *why* he gives this command is a *great* answer to why God says (in general) ***Do not get divorced.***

1 Corinthians 7:14 (NLT)

14 For the believing wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the believing husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy.

So first, don’t confuse *holy* here with salvation. Paul’s not saying one believing family member automatically gets salvation for the entire family. The word HOLY means “set apart” for God’s use and *one* believing spouse causes the marriage and the family to be set apart for God’s use, which means God is now working in that family which “sets the stage” for salvation for the spouse and for the children.

HOWEVER (and here is the “what about this),

1 Corinthians 7:15 (NLT)

15 (But if the husband or wife who isn’t a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.)

Okay... but then Paul closes the thought with the *eternal reason* to stay if your unbelieving spouse is willing to *stay*.

1 Corinthians 7:16 (NLT)

16 Don’t you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don’t you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

Don’t you realize that there is an *eternal work* of God going on in your marriage? And God’s eternal work in our lives is for *our* eternal good.

Here is my last question for you today...

Do you see your marriage as an ongoing, eternal work of God that involves *salvation and holiness* and the miracle of *God's presence* in your marriage? OR do you see your marriage as designed by God for your personal happiness?

Maybe you would say today, "My marriage is *not* what I *want* it to be." But what if God is *at work* in your hard marriage *for good*? What if he's at work *on you* IN your hard marriage? What if God is doing something *miraculous* and *eternal* right in the midst of your hard marriage?

If you have given your life to Jesus Christ today, then God is *at work* – *for good* in the midst of your hard marriage.

Yes, there are "what about this's."

But first, before you can go there...

Do you believe God is *at work* – *for good* IN your marriage? And are you willing to allow God to *conform you* to his design for your marriage?

If you *truly are* – then he *truly will*.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, we just lift our marriages up to you right now. And God, if nothing else, if nothing else, Lord, would you just drive home to us that our marriages are an environment of an eternal miraculous work, that you have set us apart for your good and your glory, and so you're at work in our marriages. And Lord, we thank you for our marriages. We thank you for the good in them. And we thank you for the hard in them. We thank you that you use our marriages to refine us and conform us to your will more than anything else in our lives. And we pray that we would desire to receive your full counsel on our marriages, that we would be conformed to your design in every area of our marriage. But Lord, we pray right now that we would believe – that you would give us the gift of faith, the revelation knowledge that where there is no life in our marriage you can pour out life. That where there's a desert you can bring a river of life. Lord that you are faithful even when we are faithless, that you are at work no matter what we see and that your work is good and your plan is perfect. God would you inspire us today that you would actively, presently at work in our marriages. And Lord, your grace and your mercy and your power to transform never runs dry. It never runs dry, Lord. We praise you and love you and pray this in your name, amen.*