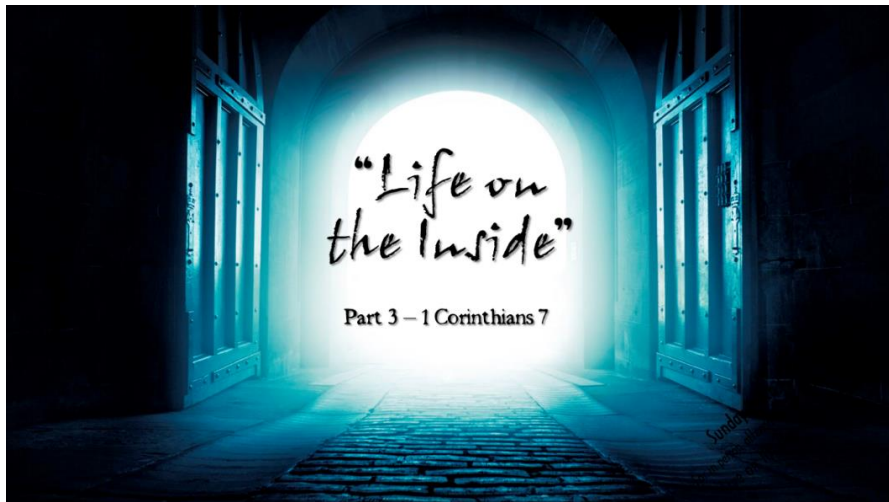


“Life on the Inside” – Part 3

1 Corinthians 7

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
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Chapter 7 *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each

man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. 8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? 17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. 18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. 21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. 22 For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. 25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is: 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. 32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. 37 Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. 38 So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better. 39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

For the past couple of times we have gathered over this letter, we have entitled the sub-series as “Life on the Inside.” I dubbed this section thus, as Paul began to instruct this young church...this, in many ways, **carnal**

church, in what was to be the practical lifestyle and living of both an individual Christian inside a local community, as well as the dynamic that is to issue forth from that corporate community as a group. Such a premise on the surface seems to be a logical endeavor, and yet today we have a renewed and even urgent need to spell out what is actually expected of someone who claims the position of “born again child of the King” as well as a member of a local assembly. For such understanding is often starkly absent in a greater church that generally is fearful to venture into the scriptural “thou shalt’s” and “thou shalt not’s”, for fear of potentially alienating the seeker, and honestly, even the regular church attender that is looking more and more for the Christian easy path and the faith practice that has no demands and even no real expectations. One in which one can embrace the world of idolatry and the flesh, and still be a recipient of church blessings and still be counted as one “bound for heaven...”

The church in Corinth...as well as to a vast degree the greater Christian church especially here in the West, had become confused and entrenched in a doctrinal quagmire. They had lost their way and either forgotten the basics of the faith, or they never came to know them in the first place. Paul was not scolding or condescending, but would lovingly take their hands and begin to re-establish the practical foundation of faith beneath them.

Here in chapter 7, Paul starts upon a journey that would begin with the issues of marriage and the single-life. This is something in which many of us deal with, struggle with, even find to be life debilitating. And if we are *not* there yet, we likely will cross that bridge at some point.

A little background here is needed before we begin, if we are to understand the angle that Paul is playing out. While historical at its most basic, it seems that “all things come ‘round” as the thinking of that day is as modern as can be in 21st century. There was a thinking...a principle if you will, that was known as “Gnosticism.” To muddle this pool even more, there was effectively two opposing viewpoints which made up this group. There was the Epicurean camp, which believed that the body was evil and therefore was not a part of the spiritual dynamic whatsoever. So these folks conveniently felt they could indulge and feed the flesh as much as they desired and it didn’t matter to their spirituality. The pews of America are today filled with Epicurean Gnostic’s. Then there was the “Stoics.” While the Stoics believed also that the flesh was evil, their solution was different in that they denied the flesh everything possible, even necessities. Not too many of these folks around today.

In their confusion and immaturity, these believers thankfully still had the sense and humility to seek counsel on troubling issues. For it appears that they had written to Paul about a few of these matters and Paul took the time to carefully and lovingly reply in detail. This is the letter we are reading.

Paul takes an interesting position here in this chapter. Obviously, he is not coming from a “family first” position or the opinion that being married is a God-given right or a necessity. Paul is presenting this issue from the position that God and *servng* God is the foundation, the baseline from which to begin all other peripheral issues which include, amongst other things, marriage and family. Both here and in the last chapter, we are reminded that as believers, our body is not our own. It ultimately belongs to God, despite our repeated and constant attempts to draw lines and find some sort of elusive balance.

Let me remind everyone at this point that this is the Holy Word of God. It is not a book of suggestions or opinions or fluid cultural ideals. You cannot pick and choose what issues out of this book you “believe in” or would choose to abide by. This book is the directives of the living God. You can pick and choose all you want, and receive it all as some sort of deified “self-help” guide, but unless this book is where the buck stops, you truly can’t call yourself a Christian. You may be somewhat religious or moralistic, but it matters little for your end and your eternity will be the same as those who reject it *and God* in totality. Jesus himself says in Luke 6:46 “*So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?*” If you desire to be a Christian and want to be right in His sight, this book must be received as truth and fact in its whole.

That may irritate us, but only because we don’t like it when scripture takes an opposing view from our own. We don’t want to adhere to principles that are not culturally correct, and we certainly don’t want to live in ways that

do not bring us fleshly gratification, social acceptance, and personal satisfaction. We can bristle when confronted with the honest and clear scripture, and often we will choose to hold onto our opposing views and still call ourselves Christians! Like Exodus 20:11 which says “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.” That doesn’t fit into our faith in the world, man, and science. So we choose to reject that premise for the sake of evolutionary thought. We want to embrace new standards of sexuality and identity because after all the world is screaming pretty loud and we don’t want to be viewed as intolerant. So we chuck the scriptural principles on that issue also. Then the list goes on and on as it is all such a “slippery slope” until what we are holding to is anything but Christianity, and we are placing our faith and our eternal standing upon something that is merely the ever changing invention of man, not upon a God who says in more than one location, “I never change” and “my Word stands forever.” We must get over the idea that Christianity is to be innately pleasing to my flesh and personal tastes, and that Christianity is not to be hard and that God would never ask me to do something that runs contrary to my own wants and designs. For such thinking is so far from the reality that we aren’t even dealing remotely with the same premise.

Paul begins by saying “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Now please note that from his other writings we know that Paul is not anti-marriage. Paul himself would have had to have been married in the past to have been a part of the Sanhedrin, although from the text it seems he is no longer married and we don’t know why. The Sanhedrin was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews headed by a High Priest and had religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction. We know that Paul was a member of this council, and one had to be married to positionally participate.

In this passage, Paul is no doubt speaking concerning entering into a relationship with a woman, especially one that is physical. Not necessarily an illicit relationship, but even a proper one. He approaches this subject honestly, simply, and even some would say *bluntly*. He is aware that having such a relationship will transfer many of our passions and time commitments to our spouse, which will therefore take away from the love, time, and service of God. This speaks clearly as to just where God places our service unto Him, and does not consider our personal priorities. Again we are reminded that Christianity is not a democracy, no matter how hard we try to make it such. It’s a monarchy and He’s the King.

Note the careful language Paul uses here. The word “touch” in the original can mean literally touching in the classic sense, but it also means...*and more likely his intended meaning*, sexual intercourse and cohabitation. Once again it is clear that Paul is very pragmatic about such issues. He realized that sexual immorality was rampant there in Corinth, just as it is today throughout the world. Sex was the goddess of Corinth, just as it is today in America. That’s not saying sex is bad, for it was designed by God. It is, like many other issues, not the act but the context that gets us into trouble. Therefore, Paul advises that if this is an issue for any of us, it would be better for us to marry and have a spouse and sexual partner blessed by God.

However, let us remember that scripture elsewhere does give very clear parameters concerning marriage, and what is an appropriate spouse for a believer. Not just anyone will do. We don’t “buy off the shelf” as a Christian. The wrong partner will bring anything but fulfillment and happiness! Marriage and sexual union is a gift from God, and when maintained in a godly manner, it can help keep us pure on the fleshly and mental level, not to mention bring great joy.

(7:3-5) When we become a Christian, we are essentially making a vow and commitment that will include the surrender of many of our individual rights, aspirations, and pursuits. Because marriage is, *according to scripture*, to be a picture of Christ’s relationship with the church. When we become husband and wife, we are also herein, by design, giving up many of those same individual rights, aspirations and pursuits. Part of the compact of marriage is the promise to seek the fulfillment of physical and sexual intimacy for the other. Please note: while that means sexual intimacy, we must realize that there’s more to intimacy and affection than just sex. (Men, if you don’t come to that realization, you will always have trouble in your marriage.)

Paul's further teaching on this matter tends to irritate the worldly and modern age in which we live. Such irritation comes from the "me" dynamic that permeates our society. Sex is often used as a weapon in marriage, but that should never happen as children of God. In Christian marriage, the spouse has equal authority over the other's body. When love is present, this is never a problem. Only when selfishness enters the union does this become an issue.

Paul goes on to clearly say that marriage is indeed to be sexual. Unless there are medical or physical issues to consider, a godly couple should be having sex. He allows for a time of abstinence for "fasting and prayer," but that is to be a limited and mutually agreed upon period of time. So let's call it for what it is: to sexually hold out on our marital partner is *sin*. To use sexual denial as a weapon is *sin*.

The Corinthian believers had evidently allowed the world to taint the beautiful gift of sex, even in marriage. It had become dirty in their minds. I understand how that happens, as they were, *as we are today*, inundated with sex seemingly everywhere, and it was not nice stuff. We are not to let that happen! God made it, and He made it for us. We are not to let the world steal God's gifts away from us, and that includes sex.

(7:6) It's interesting to note...*and actually reassuring as to scriptural mandates*, that as Paul moves through this passage and the next few chapters he notes that some of what he speaks of is his own opinion. He is careful to do here in verse 6 what we do not find elsewhere in his writings: he states this is not a commandment from God, but I would hardly see Paul as inept and without spiritual wisdom. We are left to receive or reject his counsel, accepting it as godly and wise wisdom or refusing it. But I would think that before you marry an individual that you have an honest and blunt discussion about the other person's positions on this matter. I don't think a surprise in this area later on would be a good thing! It's interesting that Jesus didn't teach this issue specifically, so we can only figure that it is apparently not a critical aspect of the faith, even if it is to our flesh. Yet it is clear here that the *flexible* issue is whether one gets married or not. It is not whether one can abstain from sex within marriage. If you want to do that, do not get married in the first place.

(7:7-9) Paul goes on here to elaborate further on the issue of possibly abstaining from marriage altogether. If there is still any misunderstanding when it comes to the level of commitment and service God seeks from us, this passage should put that to rest. For that level is set extremely high here. Paul is saying it is good, *meaning profitable and expedient*, to remain unmarried so as to be able to give all of one's time and passions to kingdom pursuits. Again, he is not mandating this. He is only saying that in being single, without the trappings of marriage and parenting, one will find a simpler and easier life in many ways especially when it comes to serving God. That premise not only flies in the face of conventional wisdom, but is rarely even considered as part of the Christian lifestyle!

This illuminates a simple biblical truth, albeit not a popular position even within the greater church today. Many have adopted...and further most often promoted as biblical, the extra-biblical position that the "Christian" way...even its very design, is to get married and have lots of babies. We do this by taking certain scriptures out of context and ignoring those that present an opposing position. If you are called to marriage and babies, great! (note: I did not say *want* such a life, but are genuinely called to it by the Spirit of God.) But you need to know it is okay to be called to another life. Paul says both marriage and celibacy are gifts, and we all know we have different gifts.

Yet if there is a constant struggle with lust and sexual desire, it is obvious you are not one to remain unmarried. However, if you are seeking marriage simply so you can have regular sex, I promise you will not find that path a rewarding one. You still have to look across the table at that individual for a lot of breakfasts and someday the body isn't going to perform for you sexually any longer so you better like that person a whole lot outside of sex. Seek God on this and His plan for you, and move to fulfill that plan.

(7:10-11) Now this passage is *not* a suggestion, but a *command*. Put quite simply, "A wife is not to depart from her husband." If there is constant war in the house and peace does not reign, Paul gives further instruction that if

she does have to leave, she is not to divorce her husband. She must remain single in lifestyle, celibate and pure, or eventually be reconciled with her husband.

He says further, with absolute clarity, a “husband is not to divorce his wife.” There are few exceptions here. Christ offers only one in Matthew 19, which is in the case of adultery, though scripture seems to give latitude also when it comes to violence against one’s spouse, especially when the violent and dangerous one refuses to address the issue and is unwilling to move to correct it. The husband is to be the head of the house as Christ is the head of the church. And Christ isn’t violent...

(7:12-13) Again, Paul gives his experiential and faithful *opinion*. This does not mean God is not behind what he is saying. He is simply stating that Christ did not teach explicitly on this matter, and he could not and *would* not mandate this. Having addressed the issue of Christian marriage, he now deals with the issue of unequal marriages, where one spouse is a born-again believer and the other is not. Paul instructs the believer to stay in the marriage in such situations. However, marrying a non-christian...*if you are still on the outside of the union...*is not a suggestion but a prohibition. You are not to marry a non-christian. Do not be “unequally yoked with an unbeliever.” (2 Cor 6:14)

(7:14-16) Paul says the unbelieving member of the marriage is “sanctified”...or “set apart” by the believer. This does not mean the unbeliever is somehow swept into the redeeming graces of God vicariously by the other’s stand in Christ. All of us individually must be born again in order to be part of the family of God. But it reflects the setting apart before God of the life of that believer, as well as the spiritual osmosis effect of having the Holy Spirit in the house.

Those who are unsaved around us often catch the second-hand blessings of God to His children. That’s why many unredeemed people want to hang around the church and Christians, even though they have no desire or intent to become Christians themselves. (there are those of that stripe who are here amongst us today) Therefore an unbeliever often receives benefits of being married to a believer: godly attributes, faithfulness, fidelity, and joy which emanates from the believer’s life. God will care for that believer, and in so doing, will, on some level, care for the unredeemed member of the marriage for the sake of believer. However, if the unbeliever leaves, then the believer is released from the bonds and ties of that union, and is free to move on.

God has called us to peace. Again, such a statement gives room to depart if the relationship is abusive, but be forewarned! This passage is not a license to get out of dysfunctional relationship with claims of abuse if there is truly not any. To do so would be to misuse God's grace and care. So very often, with patient godliness, faith, and prayer, a believer has drawn an unbelieving spouse into the fold. Remember, God is “*able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...*” (Eph 3:20)