

1 Corinthians 7A (2013)

- To this point in Paul's letter, we've followed him as he admonished the church for various mistakes they've been making in arrogance and immaturity
 - That was part 1 of Paul's letter comprising Chapters 1–6 of the book
 - The rest of the letter is reserved for another set of issues
 - These are issues the church itself posed to Paul through Chloe
 - The church asked Paul six questions on a variety of church life issues
 - Paul will use the rest of his letter to address these questions
 - He'll also venture off into a few tangents along the way, because answering their questions often requires covering background issues
 - Since the issues in this section are issues the church itself raised, Paul's tone will soften considerably from the first part of the letter
 - He isn't admonishing as much as he is teaching
 - Remember, admonishing is teaching while correcting
 - But now Paul backs off the admonishing and moves to just teaching on the questions they pose to him
 - It's difficult to teach while at the same time demonstrating dissatisfaction with someone
 - You may insult them to the point they won't listen to the teaching
 - We can all appreciate the danger of writing words that impede our ability to get our point across to someone

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment for day after day.

After a week, the man realized that he would need his wife to wake him at 5.00 am for an early morning business flight to Chicago, since his alarm clock had stopped working. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5.00 am" and left it taped to the bedroom door and went to bed early. The next morning the man woke up at 9.00am, and realized he had missed his flight.

Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn't woken him when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed...it said..."It is 5.00am; wake up."

- So we'll notice Paul making an effort to speak with compassion throughout this section, softening the blow of his earlier critique
- My joke also serves to introduce the topic of this chapter which is marital relationships
 - We don't know the exact questions Paul received, but because Paul will introduce each new topic or answer with the phrase "Now concerning...", we can infer what the question may have been
 - In this case, we know Paul was asked to elaborate in various ways on the nature of Christian marriage

1Cor. 7:1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

1Cor. 7:2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

1Cor. 7:3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

1Cor. 7:4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

1Cor. 7:5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1Cor. 7:6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command.

1Cor. 7:7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

1Cor. 7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

1Cor. 7:9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

- From Paul's opening statement, we can tell the original question revolved around the proper boundaries of marital relationships
 - As you would expect given the sensitive nature of this topic, Paul's approach is uncharacteristically soft and deferential
 - He uses phrases like "by concession, not command" and "I say, not the Lord", to suggest a soft approach to his counsel

- Secondly, Paul moves back and forth between man and woman a total of 12 times, creating a perfect balance or harmony in his teaching
 - So there is no hint of inequality on this issue
- That in itself was very revolutionary in a culture where male dominance was never more evident than in marriage
- Finally, Paul leaves plenty of room for personal preferences and different styles within marriage
- Paul begins with the statement it is good for a man not to touch a woman
 - To the young ladies in the room, this is a good verse to pull out when dealing with annoying brothers or unwanted advances
 - The Greek word for good is *kalos*, which means beautiful or commendable
 - And the Greek word for touch literally means to cling to, which is a reference back to Genesis 2:24

Gen. 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

- In reality, Paul is saying it is commendable for a man to forgo marriage
 - Singleness can be a preferred Christian lifestyle, but it won't be the right thing for everyone
 - Throughout this discussion, Paul is going to speak in terms of tradeoffs and concessions
 - There are few absolutes in this chapter
 - So different Christian couples and individuals will land in different places on these questions
 - While in a few cases, the rules are the same for everyone
 - Nevertheless, for all Christians, the goal in marriage is always godliness and serving Christ with our lives
 - So we should seek whatever relationship advances those goals best

- And as Paul will explain later in this chapter, singleness can have significant advantages
- But meanwhile, in v.2 Paul says if living a life of singleness leaves us tempted to immoralities like fornication, then by all means it's better to seek for marriage instead
 - Marriage is the one and only way we may enjoy sexual relationships
 - And every marriage must itself confirm to the Biblical pattern for marriage
 - A man may have one wife
 - A wife may have one husband
 - We cannot use our lack of self-control as an excuse to justify entering into illegitimate marriage relationships of one kind or another
 - One sin does not excuse another
 - But in general, we should marry if we cannot demonstrate self-control outside marriage
- Furthermore, our behavior in our marriages must be consistent with the purpose of marriage
 - And as Genesis 2:24 says, the core purpose in marriage is for two to become one flesh
 - Therefore, Paul says in v.3 that both the husband and wife incur an obligation or duty to their spouse of showing sexual intimacy
 - That duty to our spouse is not optional but neither is it absolute
- In v.4, Paul begins by explaining that neither the wife nor husband have sole authority over their own bodies
 - The right to sole authority over our own body is something we voluntarily give up when we enter into marriage
 - We agree to share our body with our spouse, in keeping with the one-flesh principle of marriage
 - In a spiritual sense, our flesh becomes their flesh too, and vice versa

- So we must consider their interests and desires when making decisions about our body
 - We are expected to make ourselves available to our spouse regularly, so that the benefits of marriage might be enjoyed as expected
- That's why in v.5, Paul commands that married partners not deprive one another of intimacy
 - The Greek word for deprive is the same word for defraud or cheat
 - That's a good way to understand the effect of one person denying sexual intimacy to the other
 - It's cheating or defrauding a spouse of something they have right to expect in a marriage as God intended
- Furthermore, when we deprive our spouse, we are creating the conditions where they may be tempted to act on immoral desires
 - Paul isn't suggesting that we would share blame if our spouse makes a decision to sin outside the marriage
 - But our sin of depriving our spouse can become opportunity for Satan to tempt our spouse into unfaithfulness
 - So naturally, why would we want to do anything to make that outcome more likely?
- Sexual temptations are the chief concern behind Paul's comments in vs.7-9
 - He repeats his wishes that all men could be like him in serving God in singleness
 - He addresses these comments to those who are eligible for marriage
 - To the unmarried and those who were married but their spouse has died
 - He says for these groups, it is beneficial or commendable to seek for a single life
 - Once again, we'll learn the benefits of singleness later in the chapter

- But then Paul acknowledges that singleness isn't for everyone
 - In fact, it's a gift Paul says
 - We must be gifted by the Spirit before we will be content in singleness
 - Without that gift, we should expect to experience a natural desire for intimacy
- But if we deny ourselves marriage, we need to judge our own hearts honestly before taking that route
 - If we know we have desire for sexual intimacy in marriage, then by all means marry
 - Otherwise, Paul says our passions will remain a distraction and possibly a source of sin
 - And in that case, our singleness will be of no value in serving God
 - There is nothing noble or pious in remaining single
 - The value of singleness is a simple a matter of greater time and opportunity to serve
 - But if our passions get in the way, we won't be any good to God even in our singleness
- If we do marry, we share our body with our spouse, though we don't forfeit all authority over our own bodies
 - Even as we grant our spouse authority over our body, we still retain a degree of authority ourselves
 - Each member of the marriage has a right to express desires, preferences and limitations for intimacy
 - And spouses should respect these things
 - Furthermore, physical limitations, illnesses, emotional stress and the like will come along from time to time to preclude intimacy
 - We also know that sexual desires naturally diminish with age
 - Even just the occasional marital conflict will impact fellowship in the marriage

- Whatever the reason for the interruption in intimacy, Paul says the interruption should be by mutual agreement and temporary
 - In v.6 Paul says ceasing intimacy is a matter of concession, not command
 - The right of couples to put sexual activity on hold for whatever reason is a concession to the needs of the situation, but it's not a command
 - Meaning, it's not a requirement that one partner can unilaterally impose on the other
 - One partner should never require the other partner to go without intimacy beyond what's absolutely necessary or desired
- To put it simply, Christian couples are expected to participate in normal, periodic sexual intimacy by mutual consent
 - The goal isn't to achieve some idealistic pattern of intimacy, for everyone will be different to a degree
 - Rather our concern should be to accommodate our spouse's desires in the interest of maintaining a healthy, loving marriage
 - Because our body is not our own
- This principle of our spouse having authority over our body extends into other areas of married life, not just to one context
 - How a husband or wife cares for his or her body is a matter of common interest in the marriage
 - The decisions of what we eat, how we maintain our health, how much sleep we get, how we respond to illness, even the risks we are willing to take are decisions our spouse has a vested interest in
 - When we dismiss our marriage partner's concerns for our body's wellbeing, we're not only dismissing potentially good advice, we're acting selfishly
 - In fact, abusing our body or neglecting our health to the detriment of our spouse's interests is a sin
 - We sin in the same way we would if we were denying anyone the rightful use and enjoyment of their property

- In fact, this is one exception to a husband's authority in the home
 - A wife has an equal interest in the husband's body
 - And male headship doesn't trump a wife's rights to her husband's body
- Next, Paul turns to general guidelines for the sanctity of marriage:

1Cor. 7:10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband

1Cor. 7:11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- Paul prefaces his teaching in this chapter on marriage by reminding us of the biblical standard for every marriage
 - The Lord teaches the church that a wife is not to leave her husband, and a husband is not to divorce his wife
 - Notice Paul uses the word "leave" for a wife and "divorce" for a husband
 - In Greek society, the wife had no legal standing and therefore could not legally initiate divorce proceedings
 - But if she was determined to leave the marriage, she might leave her husband by running away
 - She might hope to start her life again somewhere else
 - A man, on the other hand, could divorce his wife according to Roman law if he found some dissatisfaction with her
 - But in either case, the Lord has said that it is wrong for us to end a marriage
 - Paul adds that these instructions are from the Lord
 - He isn't suggesting that this particular teaching is more authoritative than other things he has taught
 - Paul is pointing out that we have no latitude in applying these instructions

- In contrast to his teaching from a moment earlier when he was giving options and concessions
 - These expectations are unbendable and apply equally to all Christians
 - We are not permitted to bend the rules to suit our desires
- Even Paul's comment in v.11 is noteworthy because it says something about the strength of a marriage bond from God's point of view
 - Even if a woman should leave her husband, perhaps because he abuses her or the children, still she must remain unmarried
 - This tells us that though we may encounter extreme circumstances where separation is preferable to remaining together
 - Nevertheless no matter the reason for the separation, a marriage cannot be dissolved
 - Marriage is until death do you part
- Paul referred to Jesus' teaching on the matter, so let's consult the teaching Paul was referencing

[Matt. 5:32](#) but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[Matt. 19:9](#) "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

- Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage inevitably involves an act of adultery
 - He isn't saying a second marriage is illegitimate; it is a true marriage
 - But that marriage is established through an act of adultery, because it is a betrayal of the one-flesh relationship formed in the original marriage
 - Therefore we should not seek to remarry so long as our first spouse is alive
- But what about Jesus' inclusion of the exception for immorality?

- To understand the passage properly, we must take special note of the Greek word used for the word "immorality" or unchastity
 - Matthew recorded Jesus' words using the Greek word *porneia*, which is the Greek word for fornication, sex before marriage
 - Matthew did not use the Greek word for adultery (*moichao*), which is infidelity after a marriage has been formed
- In Jesus' day a marriage officially began when a couple was betrothed or engaged
 - During the engagement period, a couple was considered legally married even though they had not yet conducted a wedding ceremony nor had they consummated the marriage
 - The engagement period often lasted a year or longer
 - The only way to end the engagement was through a legal divorce
 - If during this time one of the engaged partners committed fornication, it was considered an act of unfaithfulness and the engagement would end in divorce
 - This was the exception Jesus was speaking about
 - We have an example of this situation given to us in the Gospels
 - Joseph was prepared to "send away" Mary when she was found to be with Child

[Matt. 1:18](#) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

[Matt. 1:19](#) And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

[Matt. 1:20](#) But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

- The Greek word for "send" is *apoluo* which is the word for divorce
 - Because Joseph believed Mary had been unfaithful during their engagement period, he was prepared to divorce her

- Her unfaithfulness was one of *porneia*, fornication, not *moichao*, which is adultery
 - This is the one and only time that a divorce is permitted by Jesus
 - This interpretation is consistent with the Bible's teaching concerning a married couple becoming "one flesh"
 - During the engagement period, "one flesh" has not yet been established through sexual relations
 - Therefore, divorce is permissible because the one-flesh relationship isn't being broken
 - But after a marriage has consummated, this exception no longer applies
 - The one-flesh relationship of the marriage is to remain intact forever
- Today you may hear a common interpretation of Jesus' words that proposes adultery in any form justifies divorce and remarriage
 - This interpretation fails to appreciate the special Jewish marriage ritual
 - It sees Jesus teaching that the marriage covenant is dissolved by infidelity after consummation
 - By this interpretation, an act of infidelity by one partner nullifies the marriage vows and frees the other partner to remarry without committing adultery as well
 - Not only does this interpretation misuses Jesus' words concerning unfaithfulness, it is contrary to the entire counsel of Scripture concerning marriage and to the one-flesh principle of Genesis 2:24
 - Even worse, it leads to a slippery slope of contradictory interpretation and application concerning marriage
 - For example, every other scriptural reference to marriage – whether by Jesus or by the Epistle writers – consistently teaches that the marriage bond is unbreakable
 - For as long as both partners are living, a one-flesh relationship exists
 - Jesus' own words are this:

[Matt. 19:6](#) “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

- If Jesus says that no man can separate a marriage once the one-flesh relationship has been established, then not even a philandering husband or cheating wife can dissolve that bond
- Thirdly, such an interpretation introduces new problems
 - For example, if adultery by one partner dissolves the marriage bond, then it must (by logical necessity) permit both partners to remarry
 - I find this conclusion troubling, since it seems to give biblical license to an unfaithful spouse to remarry as a result of their own sinful behavior
 - According to this interpretive logic, Jesus would permit a husband who cheats to divorce and remarry yet He requires a faithful spouse abandoned by their partner to remain single
 - How can one sin of adultery make the sin of divorce and remarriage permissible?
 - It's not even a logical conclusion
- So if we believe that unfaithfulness in marriage invalidates a marriage covenant and permits remarriage, then what should we conclude about spiritual unfaithfulness to Christ?
 - We are implying that our salvation in Christ is only secure so long as we remain faithful to our "Husband"
 - Fortunately, Scripture teaches the opposite:

[2Tim. 2:13](#) If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

- The marriage bond is just as secure as our bond with Christ, and therefore we must approach our entrance into marriage with the same understanding
 - If you have yet to marry, consider whether you have the gift to remain single without temptation to sin
 - If marriage is for you, then remain chaste while waiting for your husband or wife to come along

- When you think you have found the right man or woman, be sure you enter the covenant of marriage understanding Christ's expectations
 - Marriage is for life, so choose wisely
- We only get one marriage relationship at a time, so if your marriage doesn't last for any reason, you are to remain single thereafter until death do you part
- If a member of the marriage is unfaithful, that act of unfaithfulness is a sin
 - Nevertheless, that sin doesn't end the first marriage
 - The Bible asks for us to forgive, reconcile if possible
- Lastly, if a Christian divorces and remarries, that new marriage is formed through an act of adultery
 - Of course, the sin of adultery is forgiven by the blood of Christ, as is every sin
 - We do not hold some sins in special categories or above others
 - No one is perfect, and therefore no one can stand in judgment over any other Christian
 - That second marriage may have been formed in adultery, but it is no less legitimate and must be honored like any marriage
- Throughout the rest of the chapter, Paul teaches on other difficult situations related to marriage, including explaining why singleness has such advantages to the believer
 - We'll cover this when we get to it