

## I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

### **VI. The Believer's Duty Of Sexuality Within Marriage**

(1 Corinthians 7:1-9)

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 on the believer's duty of sexuality within marriage (as follows):

#### **II. The Believer's Duty Of Sexuality Within Marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:1-9.**

- A. After Paul addressed the dangers of sexuality outside of marriage in 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, he then discussed the believer's duty of sexuality within marriage, for "(p)robably abandonment of marital duties on the part of some in Corinth had contributed to the immorality he had just described," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 517.
- B. Paul's 1 Corinthians 7:1b comment that it was good for a man not to "touch" (KJV) a woman translates the present **middle** infinitive *haptesthai* (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 591; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 49), a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 102). This comment responded to a question some had raised at Corinth (1 Corinthians 7:1a) who were seeking to avoid immorality that was so prevalent in Corinth by practicing abstinence, *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T.
- C. However, total abstinence in adulthood **generally** opens the door for temptation to immorality since only a minority of believers have the gift of celibacy, so Paul directed that each man should have his own wife and each woman her own man, namely, that believers **generally** should get married, 1 Corinthians 7:2.
- D. 1 Corinthians 7:3 then teaches that the married man is obligated to meet his wife's sexual needs, and the married woman is obligated to meet her husband's sexual needs. Before God, the wife does not have the "right, authority" (*exousiazō*, *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 278) over her own body as to sexual expression, "but rather" (*alla*, *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T.) her husband does, and the man in marriage does not have the "right, authority" (*exousiazō* again) over his own body as to sexual expression, "but rather" (*alla* again) his wife does, 1 Corinthians 7:4. [Note: A modifying circumstance that Paul as a conservative Hebrew would certainly observe is the Leviticus 18:19 command that a man not have sex with his wife during her menstrual period.]
- E. Married couples were to "stop depriving" (the negative particle *me* with the **present** imperative *apostereite*, *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; *Ibid.*, The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 47) each other of meeting their sexual needs except it be with mutual consent to give themselves to fasting [a Jewish practice in the Early Church] and prayer, but then come together that Satan not tempt them to commit immorality for their lack of self-control, 1 Cor. 7:5.
- F. Paul then shifted his discussion away from what Christ had commanded him to write to what the Lord permitted him to write in adding that he could wish that all believers were celibate like himself, 1 Corinthians 7:6-7a. However, Paul acknowledged that not all believers had the gift of celibacy, 1 Corinthians 7:7b.
- G. Nevertheless, Paul recommended that those who had never married and widows (and widowers by application) that it would be good for them to remain unmarried like him, 1 Corinthians 7:8. On the other hand, if they did not have the gift of celibacy, it would be better for the unmarried and widows and widowers to marry, for it is better to marry than to abstain from marriage and "burn with sexual desire" (*purōō*, *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 738) lest it increase one's temptation to commit immorality, 1 Corinthians 7:9.

***Lesson:*** (1) *The believer's duty within marriage first involves his recognizing whether he has the gift of celibacy or not: If he HAS the gift of celibacy, it is better that he remain unmarried and not commit immorality, what applies not only to the unmarried, but also to widows and to widowers; however, if he does NOT have the gift of celibacy, he should marry.* (2) *In marriage, each spouse must meet the sexual needs of the other spouse as one's duty before God, but obviously in alignment with the modifying directive of Leviticus 18:19.* (3) *For spiritual devotion, spouses may abstain from mutually meeting each other's sexual needs for a mutually agreed time, but they must resume addressing their mutual needs to avoid temptations to commit immorality.*

***Application:*** *May we heed the teaching of 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 on the believer's duty of sexuality within marriage.*