



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 7:1-7

“Marriage Counsel, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, let's open our class with a word of prayer. We're a few minutes late.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the word of God, and we thank Thee for the greatness of his teaching, the way it ministers to us. We know that even when we do not sense the importance of it, it is important. When we do not sense the need of it, it is something that we need. And we especially thank Thee for the privilege of reading it and pondering it. There are so many people today over the face of this globe who do not have the privilege that we have. We think of the individuals in some of the countries of Africa, for example, who do not have the opportunity that we have. We are grateful, Lord.

We profess that we find it remarkable that Thou wouldst give us the opportunity to listen to the word of God, to come to know the gospel, and that Thou hadst in the perfection of Thy will passed by others and evidently have not given them the same privilege that we have. And we recognize, Lord, that we, therefore, have great responsibilities to respond to Scripture, to seek by the help of the provision of God, the Holy Spirit, to be obedient and submissive to that truth that is in the word of God.

We pray that in our day, when there are so many practices in our society that are contrary to the teaching of the word of God, that Thou wilt deliver us from them, keep us

harmonious with Thy truth, insofar as we in our fallen state are able to respond to Thee. We thank Thee for the ministry of the Spirit in our hearts. We could never thank Thee, Lord, for the amazing, efficacious grace that has moved our hearts from the state of unwillingness and rebellion to willingness and responsiveness to the truth. O God, give us more responsiveness and more obedience and a listening ear to the truth.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] We’re turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 in our study of this unusual epistle. And of course this is the great chapter on Christian marriage and problems with reference to it. And so the subject for tonight is the first of our studies in the seventh chapter which I just called “Marriage Counsel.” I’d like to begin by reading verse 1 through verse 7. The apostle writes:

“Now concerning the things which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality (You’ll remember that we’ve made the point several times in the preceding two chapters that the word translated “sexual immorality” here is the word that means fornication, specifically. So, nevertheless, because of fornication.), let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her (now that again is a rendering we object to a bit. Actually, all that is stated is ‘let the husband render that which is owed to her’): and likewise also the wife to her husband. (The affection is the affection of which he is speaking. It’s the affection of sexual relationships, so that is the point.) 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. Do not deprive one another (The Authorized Version renders that ‘defraud.’ Do not defraud one another.), except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer (The word fasting is found in some of our manuscripts and is found in the Authorized Version because that version has translated a text related to that textual family.

It’s likely, however, that the fasting is not genuine, although the idea is certainly a biblical idea. And we would have no objection to it if we should find out when we get to heaven that it really did read ‘fasting and prayer.’ So, now verse – let me read the end of that verse. I’m not sure I finished it.); and come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God (This incidentally is the same word that is translated later on in this epistle spiritual gift; the *charisma*; so each one has his own spiritual gift from God.), one in this manner, and another in that.”

Marriage, the Bible tells us from the beginning of the Book of Genesis, is a divine institution. That is, it is something established by God. It is a covenant that is given by God and for that reason it is traceable to him. It has also been consecrated by him, for he has blessed the marriage relationship. And, of course, it’s the means of the preservation of the human race.

John Calvin said, “Marriage is a covenant consecrated by God.” He also said, “Marriage is the fountain of mankind because all of us are the products of the relations between men and women in marriage.” Calvin said, “When the bond of marriage is broken, than which none among men is more sacred, the whole of human society sinks in to decay.” That is what we have today. We have our society sinking into decay because the biblical relationships set forth in the word of God between a man and a woman, between a husband and a wife are neglected; not only neglected, forgotten; and even, as a matter of fact, protested in our society. You know as well as I.

The lasting effects of this are transforming our society. I read not long ago, I have a copy of the article here. It appeared in *Time Magazine*; it was -- it appeared in 1989, and it was entitled “The Lasting Wounds of Divorce” and one of the striking things about it is that it represented, so the author said, some new ideas that apparently present-day

psychologists and students of marriage and things related to it have come to understand relatively recently.

We all know, of course, that divorce is traumatic and is a traumatic event for children. But what has been coming so -- what I’ve read in the article -- is that not only are the effects -- effects that are traumatic for children -- they are effects that are still effects when the individuals reach their maturity. And so divorce is not something that upsets a family for a while but is something that continues. And even when these little children grow to manhood and womanhood, they still are affected by what happened in their early days. The same kinds of things that their parents demonstrated in getting a divorce, fighting with one another, refusing to continue the marriage, are things that reappear in the children later on when they’ve reached what we would think would be maturity.

So the things that Scripture has to say are things that we should and must, if we are Christians, listen to very carefully. Now, I know that there is no chapter in the Bible on how to understand a wife; maybe that’s one thing that the apostles overlooked. But I presume that there is a reason for that, too. Perhaps it’s rather easy to understand a wife if we follow the teaching of the word of God in our relationship to them; then we’ll understand them, and they surely will understand us a whole lot better.

Now, you’ll notice, if you’ve been following along at all in 1 Corinthians with me, that Paul’s theme has been sexual irregularities since chapter 5. In Chapter 5, he talked about a notorious case of sexual irregularity in the first verse of Chapter 5. We read:

“It is actually reported that there *is* sexual immorality (fornication) among you, and such fornication as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife!”

And then again in Chapter 6; the same kind of thing is found. So it’s not surprising then when we turn to Chapter 7 that the apostle makes a transition to marriage because the move from sexual irregularity to marriage is something that’s very natural. And one of the reasons that he says marriage is something that we should pay attention to and follow is perhaps the simplest of all and not the only thing. It’s the remedy for avoiding fornication. I know many people might say: “Well my, if that’s the only -- is that the only reason for marriage?” No. There are other things, but that’s one important thing and the apostle makes that point.

Now, he has dealt with the libertines in chapters 5 and 6; that is, those who felt that they had freedom in sexual things that were not taught in the word of God. Now, evidently, ascetics are in view because he is, evidently, dealing, as we go through the chapter, with those who think that it might be possible for us to avoid the relationship of husband and wife. And so these two aspects of the subject, the apostle will deal with. Those who have violated the principles and think they have the freedom to do it and then those who want to avoid the marriage relationship, thinking it would be holier for individuals not to marry at all and not to have sexual relations with one another. You can see evidences for this, of course, in our society in the immorality, but you can also see evidence of the ascetic tendency in, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and some other churches, too, in which the priests are those who have given themselves to a vow of purity so far as relationships with women are concerned.

So the apostle now is going to deal with the subject. Now, we have been pointing out, too, that in 1 Corinthians, Paul has been dealing with individuals who have been fighting among themselves in there. It’s evident that many of them were not very close to the apostle because there were those who said, “I am of Peter,” or, “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Christ.” And then a company who said, “I am of Paul.” That’s rather interesting to me, because it’s clear that the Apostle Paul was still held in high regard for they write

him with reference to the problems. And that is one of the first of the problems that they wrote him about; this one that we’re talking about right now.

Now, you will notice that chapter 7 begins with, “now concerning the things of which you wrote to me.” So he’s responding to things that they wrote him. They wrote him evidently and asked him specific questions. In verse 25: “now concerning virgins;” so they wrote him concerning virgins. In chapter 8 in verse 1: “now concerning things offered to idols;” they wrote him about response to that problem. And then in chapter 12 in verse 1, I believe the apostle writes similarly because he says: “now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren;” so they had questions about spiritual gifts. And we’ll deal with that when we get to it if I live long enough to reach it.

So that’s one of our important subjects, but that’s not all. They wrote him evidently in -- according to chapter 16 in verse 1 concerning the collection for the saints, “Now concerning the collection for the saints.” And, in fact, it is thought by some that verse 12 in which he says “now concerning our brother Apollos,” is also an answer to a question concerning Apollos. The Greek expression is the same in each of these instances that I’ve given. It’s the little expression *peri de*; “now concerning.” And almost all commentators believe that these represent specific questions that were asked the apostle.

Now, we have no way of knowing they were the only questions. But the way they are given with this little formula suggests that these at least are questions that Paul is answering from the Corinthians. There may be other things they have written to him about in the earlier chapters, but we know, at least these, that they wrote him about him. Chapter 7, verse 1 says, “now concerning the things of which you wrote me;” not one thing but things. So they wrote him about a number of things, and they wanted his advice, which indicates that they still held in high regard.

Now, looking at our passage in first again, we going to look at verse 1 and 2 in which he talks about the advantages and limitations of celibacy. We don’t hear much

information about that today. Celibacy is the kind of thing that most of us are unacquainted with, except insofar as we are acquainted with some priests in perhaps the Roman Catholic Church. But let me read the words again:

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”

It’s possible, as we mentioned with reference to a previous statement -- all things are possible for me -- that this little expression, it’s good for a man not to touch a woman, is an expression that was in the letter that was written to the Apostle Paul by the Corinthians and perhaps they ask him about that. And he says, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Now, when he says it is good for a man not to touch a woman, he’s not talking about moral good. He’s not suggesting that it’s good morally for a man not to touch a woman. As is evident from the chapter, what he means it’s advantageous; there are some advantages in the celibate life. And he will talk about them later on.

So it’s pragmatic good, not moral good, that he’s talking about. Perhaps you could say expedient -- it’s expedient. And he will go on to explain why it’s expedient; because of the distress of the present time, and because of the coming of the Lord, and things like that because the time, as he understood it, may have been very limited for them to preach the gospel. And so one can understand why he should take this particular viewpoint and, in a sense, approve it. He’ll later on give some restrictions but, nevertheless, it’s good for a man not to touch a woman. The Lord Jesus, as we shall see later on, said some things that were in harmony with that, also: it’s good not to touch a woman.

I think also we need to point out that the apostle does not mean for us to take this absolutely. Now, let me give you the reasons why it’s not right, I think, for us to take this absolutely. If we took it absolutely and just said: this is law; a man is not to touch a

woman, then it would conflict with Genesis chapter 2 in verse 18: it’s not good for a man to be alone. Not only that, but it would contradict the immediate context which says nevertheless, because of fornication let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband. That, itself, would indicate that it is perfectly alright for marriage to come to pass. And thirdly, requiring celibacy; now he’s not talking about requiring celibacy when he says it’s good, it’s advantageous. Requiring celibacy in 1 Timothy chapter 4, the apostle seems to say, as far as I can tell, that that would be a demonic type of doctrine to have: to require celibacy. So we’re not to take this in an absolute way.

John Calvin, in some comments with reference to this, says some things I think you’d -- I think would be good for me to read to you. He says, “That (when he talks about the marriage bond is bad) that is what happened in the case of Jerome not so much because...”

I should say, Jerome is one of the greatest of the Roman Catholic scholars down through the centuries. He is the one who is responsible for the Latin Bible, which is still regarded as the inspired text by the Roman Catholic Church. He was a great scholar in his day; lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. And so he mentions, now *that* is what happened in the case of Jerome, not so much because of ignorance, but in my view, more through the heat of controversy. For although that famous man was endowed with outstanding virtues, yet he was handicapped by one serious defect: for in debate he was swept off his feet by excessive zeal and so he was not always concerned about sticking to the truth.

Well, we all have know people like that, and I’m not talking about spiritual things but you have in your arguments with people; you know about people who get so excited that they say things that afterwards they say, “I wish I hadn’t said that” because it really is not what they believed. And then Calvin accuses him of not sticking to the truth. Thus his inference here is as follows. It’s good not to touch a woman; therefore, it’s wrong to touch her, so Jerome said. Paul certainly does not use *good* in that sense here. So that it is said over against what is evil or full of vice. He only shows what is to one’s advantage

in view of all the troubles, annoyances, and responsibilities which those who are married are to have. So it’s good for a man not to touch a woman.

Now, *to touch* is a euphemism. To touch does not mean touch in this sense, but it is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. We have it in the Bible itself used in that sense as far back as Genesis chapter 20 in verse 1 through verse 6 -- my recollection is, it’s found there. In verse 1 through verse 6, Moses writes:

“And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She *is* my sister.’ And Abimelech the king sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, ‘Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman which you have taken, for she *is* a man’s wife.’ And Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, ‘Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, ‘She *is* my sister’? And she even herself -- she herself said, ‘He *is* my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.” 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.’”

So *to touch* here is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Now come the restrictions: nevertheless, Paul says, because of fornications let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband, because of fornications. Incidentally, that word is used in the plural, which makes it even clearer that he’s talking about acts of sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, because of *fornications* let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband. “Cases of fornication” one might translate it: disreputable behavior at Corinth.

Perhaps the least significant advantage of celibacy is as a prophylactic against fornication. This is incidentally an incidental prohibition of polygamy. Monogamy is obviously the position of the Apostle Paul, and that is what he states here when he says: let each man have his *own* wife and each woman have her *own* husband.

Gordon Clark, who’s now with the Lord, was a Christian philosopher, a remarkable thinker, a remarkable man. Those of us who got to know him a little bit and have read his works have known him as a remarkable Christian man. And he was a professor at Wheaton College but was too Calvinistic for them, and then later on was Professor of Philosophy and Chairman of the Department at Butler University for many years. So he was philosopher and he was a Christian philosopher; and not only that, he was one of those rare philosophers who also was a student of the Greek New Testament. Not surprisingly, his father was a theologian. His father wrote a systematic theology, so he grew up in the environment that I would have loved to have grown up. If my father had been a teacher of systematic theology and had instructed me in what to study in order to be the kind of preacher that I would have liked to have been, that would have been a great blessing.

Well, Gordon Clark was just such an individual. He also had the kind of personality that was a bit prickly to some people, but I have always appreciated it and have tried to read a lot of his things. They are -- he still has many books that he has written. He wrote some of them very quickly and so they don’t appear to be quite as scholarly as others’ books, but they are well worth reading. He says with reference to this statement. “When, nevertheless, because of fornication, let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband,” he says, “This may not be the most excellent reason for marrying.” And he’s absolutely right about it. That’s not the only reason for marrying; that is, to escape fornication. But in Corinthian societies where a *Playboy* and *Playgirl* dominate so many minds, “It is,” he said “a sufficient reason.” So if we have a society that is like that, that’s one sufficient reason. It’s not the only reason. It’s not the

most important reason. But it is something for us to think about. He also has some other things to say, but I think our time is such we’re not going to have time to look at them.

Now, in verse 3 through verse 5 the apostle talks about sexual regulations in the married life. And incidentally, in Jewish thought, it was very important that a young man and a young lady were married. Marriage was extremely important in Jewish life. Now, those things that Paul says in verses 1 and 2 are not altogether in harmony with Jewish life because it’s obvious when he says: “it’s good for a man not to touch a woman,” that’s hardly known at all in Jewish thought because marriage was expected and this kind of attitude was not. But when Paul comes to the regulations in verses 3, 4, and 5, he’s in total harmony with Jewish opinion. These verses could be called: Rules for Married Life. He says in verse 3:

“Let the husband render to his wife the due (that which is due her), and likewise also the wife to her husband.”

This *due*, what is owed, is a reference to conjugal rights; the rights of marriage; the rights of sexual relationship, which a man has and which a woman has, in the marriage relationship. That word could be called obligation; it could be translated obligations and duty; the obligations, the marriage obligations that one person in a marriage have to the other. What is interesting about this to us, of course, is that he is saying, in effect, that equality exists between the man and the woman in the marriage bed.

Now, we’ve had a lot of talk in our day about feminism, and it’s still going on and it has been introduced into evangelicalism. And so today we have evangelicals who -- or we have individuals who claim to be evangelicals -- and I’m not denying that some of them are; maybe many of them are -- who insist that what we think of as the biblical teaching of the relationship between man and wife has been patriarchal and contrary both

to the Bible and to what it ought to be in society. They have insisted that when we say that a woman is to be submissive to her husband and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, we forget that, let’s just talk about the submission. When the -- it says that the woman is to be in submission to her husband; that’s contrary to equality. In other words, you cannot have equality if you have submission.

Now, evangelicals have tried to -- other evangelicals who are not feminist evangelicals -- have tried to point out that in the Bible there is a recognition of equality and submission as being in harmony. For example, they’ve often pointed to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 where the apostle says: “Now I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman *is* the man and the head of Christ *is* God.”

Well, now we know that our Lord and the Father are equal. And yet there is a submission of the Son to the Father. We do not have any problem with that because if we felt that the Son was not equal to the Father in his being, then we wouldn’t have a divine Trinity; we wouldn’t have Christianity because Christianity must have the doctrine of the Trinity or else there’s no Christianity. That’s why it’s always a test of faith to ask if an individual receives the Orthodox teaching concerning the Trinity, because only then do you have Christianity. Those who suggest they are three people in the Godhead but they are not equal in power and authority and so forth are not Trinitarians. But Christian theology is built around the Trinity. But in the Trinity, in the time of our Lord’s mediation specifically, there is submission on the part of the Son of God but there is equality all the time.

So it’s not true to say that equality and submission cannot serve -- go together. And here the apostle when he says “let the husband render to his wife that which is due her and likewise also the wife to her husband,” we say, as we have said, that there are obligations and duties that they have to each other that make them equal in the marriage bed, we’re not suggesting that we thereby cancel the other parts of the word of God -- and this very epistle sets forth those things -- which have to do with submissive

relationship in other functions. There is equality in the marriage bed; there is difference in family functions; difference also in the church; and so, the two may go together.

Again, John Calvin has some words on this. I’ve been telling you I’ve been reading through Calvin on 1 Corinthians, and I’ve been -- I must say that I certainly appreciate those who have pointed out -- many of them on the somewhat liberal side of the Christian scholarly world -- who acknowledge that he’s one of the greatest of the interpreters of the word of God and is *still* worthy of reading by the finest of our New Testament scholars. “Now it may be asked,” Calvin says “why the apostle places them on an equal footing and does not demand obedience and subjection from the wife. My answer is that he did not intend to discuss *all* their duties but only the mutual obligation which is concerned with intercourse. Husband and wife, therefore, have different rights and duties in other things but in the preservation of married faithfulness, they are on an equal footing.” Those are the apostle’s words.

So when he says, “Let the husband render to his wife that which is due her and likewise also the wife to her husband,” he’s talking about the fact that in the marriage bed, the man owes the relationship of sexual intercourse to his wife for her needs sexually and likewise the wife to the husband. They are equal in the bed, in the marriage bed.

I know that many of the -- those who are called women’s lib who would not necessarily understand that, but I think that this is very plainly what the apostle is talking about. Clark has some very sharp words, which I am going to read for you. He says, “In view of contemporary demands for abortion” -- it’s interesting to note that the New Testament disallows one of the woman libbers -- let me see where I found -- frequent arguments. Should not a woman have control over her own body? The answer is No, very plainly, right here. No. The husband has control over her body. She has control over his body. They are equal in the marriage bed.

Now, Clark who had a sharp tongue, was a – I would have not enjoyed an argument with Dr. Clark because he spent 40 years or so in the classroom with students asking him questions about philosophy, and he was extremely capable at answering questions. So he has a little footnote there in his book at this point. And down in the footnote, he had mentioned women libbers, and then he has this in the footnote: Woman’s lib as the present time -- at the present time -- and incidentally he defined it. He said that in case someone should read this in antiquity, I’m defining what a woman’s libber is. He’s thinking about maybe in 200 years someone will run across his book on 1 Corinthians and say, “What in the world is a woman’s libber? So he is defining it in one of his notes at the bottom of the page as “Women’s lib at the present time is a movement who members demand the civil right to promiscuity with the subsequent murder of the child conceived.” What a statement! A woman’s libber is one who demands the civil right to promiscuity with the subsequent murder of the child conceived. Pretty sharp. I mean pretty sharp in the sense of a sharp statement.

Now, further we read in verse 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 incontinency” -- because of your lack of self control.

Don’t deprive one another. I think that perhaps this does say something about the right of abortion in married life because it indicates that if a child is being -- has been conceived and is to be born, it’s the father’s right as well as the woman’s right to determine the future of that conceived infant. But at any rate, he says: don’t deprive one another. Incidentally, the marriage -- if it’s a real marriage -- is a marriage in which there is sexual intercourse. A marriage is not a real marriage if it’s only a, quote, “spiritual,”

unquote, marriage. There is no such thing in the Bible as a spiritual marriage. And so here he is talking about that.

One interesting thing that John Calvin said, too, that I thought was very interesting, he said, “The man is only the half of his body, and it is same with the woman.” They do not have freedom of choice, therefore, but on the contrary, they must keep themselves in check with these thoughts since one needed to support -- the support of the other. The Lord has joined us together so that we may help each other. Let each one help the other in his need and let neither act as if he could do what he likes.” I don’t think I’ve ever seen that statement made by anyone: the man is only half of his body; it’s the same with the woman. After all, they, too, have been joined together and they’ve become one flesh; and that’s the point he’s trying to make. We have been bound together in marriage in a union that is so unified that I am just half of this union and my wife is just half of that union, also. Therefore, do not deprive one another.

Paul has made a careful provision in this connection for tempting by Satan; however, there are many who reject the teaching of the apostle and what we have then is unlawful, unscriptural divorce by means of the improper desire for an unmarried life. I think one of the greatest of the evils in our society by Christians is found right here. They do not realize, it would seem from the way they treat the marriage bond, that this is a bond that is to be a permanent bond until death takes place. It’s a permanent bond. It’s something that when we break, we are breaking a bond that has been established by the Lord, God.

In history in the past there were people who sought to break it in other ways, not in the way of divorce. They sought to break it by saying that they feel that God had called them to live a life of solitude; and therefore, they went off to live as monks and left their wives which they had. And against their husband’s will, the wives took the veil which was the badge of celibacy and they did not for a moment, it would appear, seem to realize that by violating the faithfulness pledged to their partners, they were breaking the

covenant of the Lord. It’s no wonder that our children are affected by our divorces because if they see the husband or the wife breaking the bond of marriage, which is a covenant created by God for men, you can see what a tremendous psychological joke that is for a child, and particularly later on in life when they remember the things that they as members of the family have been a part of. You are in effect shaking off, not simply the yoke of your wife or your husband, you’re shaking off the Lord’s yoke ultimately.

That incidentally is why, in my mind, character means a whole lot in politics. Because if our politicians do not keep the most important covenant that they have ever faced, we cannot expect them to keep anything. And I think that experience will indicate that that is true, not speaking simply about the present President but others down the line as well.

Anyway, “do not deprive one another,” the apostle says, but he adds a proviso: except with consent for a time. In other words, it may be that the husband and the wife have certain reasons for saying -- one or the other or even both -- I would like to have the opportunity to be without sexual intercourse for a particular period of time. You’ll notice abstinence is permitted then, but it is permitted for a time. Do not deprive one another except with consent; there must be agreement in the two -- the word is the word from which we get, symphony, incidentally. In other words, there should be a symphony of agreement and then for a time to engage in prayer and fasting if that’s the genuine reading there.

Now, I’d like to read you some things that have been said about this particular thing in the Old Testament, because the apostle is writing things that the Old Testament scholars of the Jews had said things about. In Lightfoot’s work, *Hebrew and Talmudic Hours* he writes, “He that” -- he’s referring to a Jewish work, part of the Mishnah -- “He that by a vow constrains his wife from his bed, according to the school of Shammai, let him do it for two weeks; according to the school of Hillel, for one only.” That was one of

the things within the interpretations of the Hebrew Old Testament law. This book is a book that the Mishnah is instruction.

Now, here is some more instruction that is in more detail; written -- these instructions were compiled around 220 A.D., so we’re not sure that they were absolutely precisely what was said centuries earlier. That’s the problem with the Mishnah.

But anyway, this is what is said: If a man vowed to have no intercourse with his wife, the school of Shammai says she may consent for two weeks -- or she must agree -- and the school of Hillel say for one week only. Disciples of the sages may continue absent for 30 days against the will of their wives; so if you’re one of the sages, you may remove yourself from the family bed for 30 days in that respect. Then, let’s see, he says while they occupy themselves in the study of the law, and laborers for one week. Now why the sages have 30 days and the laborers have only one week, this particular paragraph does not explain. The duty of marriage and joined in the law is every day for them who are unoccupied; twice a week for laborers; once a week for the drivers of donkeys; once every 30 days for camel drivers; and once every six months for sailors. This is all spelled out in the Mishnah. But you can see that it’s founded on the idea that the husband and the wife are to have constant relationships with one another; it’s part of what it is to be truly married.

Now, he also mentions the fact that Satan may tempt us and you because of your lack of self-control, incontinence. That is, irrepressible desire. In fact, that is presupposed, that when two people marry they do have desire, one for another. If you don’t have desire, then you have a serious question about your relationship with the young lady you want to marry or the young man that you want to marry because there should be a sexual responsiveness, an attractiveness, and a sexual urge. It’s one of the things that one must have if one is talking about marriage; unless you intend, as he says, to be the individual who’s going to be a celibate for certain, specific reasons. We’ll talk about that when we get down further in the chapter.

Unsatisfied partners are tempted to fornication, and that is what -- or adultery -- and that is what we see so widely in our society. And I’m not saying that’s the specific reason because I don’t know the reasons in many of the cases. It may be just simply something that I’m utterly unacquainted with, but I’m sure that part of it is that, in many cases, unsatisfied partners are tempted to fornication.

Now, finally, the apostle in verses 6 and 7 talks about his con -- the concession and preference -- his own preference -- and explains it a little bit. He clarifies his own position in saying in verse 6 and verse 7: “But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.”

Now, probably there is a little bit of possibility of misunderstanding here, and I’m not sure that I can say to you this is what the *that* means or in my text, the *this*: *but I say this*. Probably it refers to the whole of verse 5; others take the *this* as a reference to verse 2 through 5, but I think it makes a little better sense -- and you understand the other equally devoted interpreters of the word who think a little bit differently. But it seems to me that this is what he’s talking about: verse 5, the whole of verse 5. Don’t deprive yourself -- don’t deprive one another except with consent for a time that you can give yourselves to fasting and prayer and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this; that is, you may deprive -- agree to deprive one another of the sexual relationship for a time to come together again. So temporary abstinence is what the apostle is talking about.

And then in verse 7 and he says this, incidentally, “I say this as a concession not as a commandment.” In other words, he feels that probably the best thing is to have no time out, so to speak; no time in which there is agreed upon abstinence but that the relationship between husband and wife is a relationship in which the sexual relationship is an integral part of it at all times. Of course, apart from the kinds of things that would hinder any kind of activity.

Now, in verse 7 he says, "For I wish that all men were even as myself." And the question that I ask, "Well, what are you Paul? You want all men to be as you are? But what are you? Are you a widower? Are you a divorcee; that is, one who has been divorced by a wife? Have you ever been married?" We're not sure about the apostle. The only thing we know is he clearly is single at the present time. And so that is what he's talking about and that's about as far as we can go.

So he says, "I wish that all men were single as I am." Now, later on he'll explain why. And we'll talk about that when we go further in the chapter. But you'll notice that he refuses to impose this preference on others. Now, Rome would like to impose this preference on all of those who minister the word of God. He refuses to do that. It's an option which he prefers, but he does not impose it upon anyone. As a matter of fact, in the light of the whole teaching of the word of God, I'm sure the apostle would say that the normal relationship is the relationship of marriage.

Now, the Lord Jesus -- I think I should turn to this passage. It's in Matthew chapter 19, says something that is very much, it seems to me, in harmony with what Paul is talking about. Matthew chapter 19. And I must take out my glasses in order to read it because I'm not exactly sure the precise place. He says in verse 10:

"His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*."

And so our Lord evidently recognizes that in society there is just what Paul is talking about. There are individuals who want to give themselves wholly to the Lord who

do not want to -- do not feel led of the Lord to enter into the marriage relationship. And Paul says of that: It’s good for a man not to touch a woman. As far as the ideal, well, it would appear that marriage is the normal thing and obedience within and without the marriage is the ideal; individuals being obedient to the Lord.

John Calvin has an interesting section in which he talks about the evils of the priests of his day; speaking of the various ways in which they had erred just in these things. They spoke of virginity as the greatest of all the virtues, which it is not. They spoke of the tendency to go on and make rash vows of perpetual continency, which is contrary to the word of God, when scarcely, Calvin says, one percent of them had the ability and gift for it; and then forbidding of ministers to marry which God punished with secret fires of lust; then with horrible and filthy practices; and finally with the maintaining of mistresses, otherwise prostitutes, with impunity. And so the things that we read in the papers today about just some such types of people were things that were happening in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when John Calvin lived.

Now, notice the last word. “But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and one in another.” If one has a gift, the spiritual gift of abstinence, he should take advantage of it and use his life for the glory of God in that state -- man or woman. But if it is his gift to marry, then marry.

So Paul’s response to the Corinthian proposition of verse 1 is a very sharply qualified approval. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Marriage, however, is no sin; verse 28, verse 36 make that point later on. But if a person is married, the marriage must be fully consummated and the two partners in the marriage who are equal in the marriage bed should each render to the other partner the sexual relationships that are due one to the other.

Well, the chapter is a rather lengthy chapter, and we’ll talk about other things that have to do with this, including divorce. It’s not easy -- actually this section was rather

easy, but we have some more difficult sections coming up. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the instruction that Thou hast given us in the Word of God. And we know Lord if by Thy grace we are enabled to follow the teaching of Thy Word, we shall have happy relationships with one another; fruitful relationships with wives, with husbands, with children; edifying relationships with others who are outside of our families with whom we may come in contact.

And we also ask, Lord, that Thou sustain us all. We pray for Believers Chapel. We pray that the individuals who meet here in the name of our Lord may, by the grace of God, be enabled to honor the bond that exists between so many of them, and to refuse the breaking of the vows that have been expressed one to another in holy matrimony.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.