Text: I Corinthians 7:1-7
Title: "Marriage Matters … Is Sex a Four-Letter Word?"

INTRODUCTION

This morning I want to begin a new series of messages on Marriage Matters, as a follow up to our Marriage Matters conference last Sunday. So many of you commented on how great it was to invest that afternoon and evening in your marriage. I can tell that it got some of you to really thinking.

For instance, Bob Reccord talked about the fact that women use more words in a day than men do. One lady sent me this humorous exchange between a husband and a wife about that very matter:

ILLUSTRATION - A husband read an article to his wife about how many words women use a day... 30,000 to a man's 15,000. "You women just talk too much." The wife replied, "The reason has to be because we have to repeat everything to men..." To which the husband replied, "What?"

ILLUSTRATION – Another story someone sent was about a man who said to his wife one day, "I don ' t know how you can be so stupid and so beautiful all at the same time." The wife responded, "Allow me to explain.
God made me beautiful so you would be attracted to me;
God made me stupid so I would be attracted to you!"

ILLUSTRATION - A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning.
The wife said, "You should do it, because you get up first,
and then we don't have to wait as long to get our coffee."
The husband said, "You are in charge of cooking around here and you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee." Wife replies, "No, you should do it, and besides, it is in the Bible that the man should do the coffee." Husband replies, "I can't believe that, show me." So she fetched the Bible, and opened the New Testament and showed him at the top of several pages, that it indeed says....."HEBREWS"

Well, it's good we can laugh about marriage. Sometimes it's not a laughing matter. Open your Bibles with me to I Corinthians 7. That's right, we're back to the book of I Corinthians. It's been some time since we left off our study, and I thought this would be a good time to return to it, because I Corinthians 7 is all about "Marriage Matters." We'll spend several weeks here in this chapter because their so much counsel.

Now I have to be honest with you that I Corinthians 7 is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to study and apply. But in an unmistakable way, it addresses some of the major matters when it comes to marriage. In fact, it's not just about marriage, it's also about singleness.

Here in this chapter there is teaching for singles about the gift of singleness and sexual purity in the single lifestyle. There's teaching in this chapter for married people about fidelity and

> duty meet one another's needs physically. There's a word in this chapter about divorce and remarriage, and what God thinks about both. There's teaching here about how to be happily married and happily unmarried.

Now let's just get started with v.1.

1 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV) - Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.

This marks a clear break in the letter this letter to the Corinthians. Apparently three men from the church came to Paul in Ephesus with a series of questions about various matters. These are clearly marked with the words "now about." You'll find those words through the rest of the book signaling that Paul was getting around to answering another question they had raised when these men came to Ephesus to speak with Paul.

Interestingly, the first question Paul answers has to do with marriage, and specifically how husbands and wives should behave toward one another, and even more specifically about physical intimacy in the marriage relationship.

Let me just stop here and let you know that I approach this series of messages with as great a sense of urgency as I have of any series I've done in a long time. We need to be reminded of God's blueprint for marriage. How are married people who believers supposed to act? How are singles supposed to act?

> Church, we are taking our lead too much from our culture. We have watched enough television and movies to be subtly influenced by our world … not to take marriage vows seriously, not to give our best to our mates, not to remain sexually pure as a single.

Let God speak on the matter. We must listen, learn and lead our lives in accordance with God's Word.

Someone might say, "Well, times are different now. God's Word didn't anticipate the pressure that we are under today."

> Actually, when it comes to the matters we'll be discussing over the next few weeks, the situation in the Roman world may just exceed the depravity in our own culture, as bad as it is in our world. The sexual promiscuity that went on in Corinth was, in many respects, beyond our imagination. So we can't say, "God's Word just doesn't fit our world today."

Still others will say, "Well, you don't know my situation. I'm living with a creep, and surely God doesn't mean for me to be miserable. I want you to see today that God has established marriage. It is His invention, not ours. We don't get to make up the rules; He does. And we find them here in His Word.

As believers we must allow God's word to guide us in all matters, including the matter of physical intimacy in marriage. This is where Paul begins. Think of it as …

1. A <u>SAFEGUARD</u> AGAINST <u>IMMORALITY</u> (vv.1-2)

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 - Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

Sexual immorality was so rampant in Corinth that the very name of Corinth was slang for sexual immorality. Someone who just threw off all restraint and lived such a promiscuous lifestyle was said to "Corinthianize."

Keep that in mind. Because there were some very sincere believers who were beginning to wonder, should sex have any place in a Christian's life, even in marriage? As a matter of fact, the words in v.1, "It is good for a man not to marry," may have been the words of some Corinthian teacher advocating celibacy for all Christians.

What Paul will say is, "That's OK if you have the gift of singleness, if God calls you to that lifestyle." But not everyone has that calling and thus v.2.

1 Corinthians 7:2 - But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

Now there are many beautiful benefits and purposes of marriage that Paul could mention here: meaningful companionship, bearing children, sharing life's burdens together, and more. But here Paul focuses on one important reason for marriage … it is a safeguard against sexual immorality.

Now some people have the gift of singleness. They don't have a problem with living their life abstaining from physical relations. We'll see later that that is a gift God has given them. But for most of us, that's pretty tough. So Paul says, "If you can life single and celibate, fine. But if not, get married. For God has provided for your sexual needs within a marriage relationship."

So that's one way of looking at physical intimacy in marriage … a safeguard against immorality. But we also see it as …

2. AN <u>OBLIGATION</u> OF <u>SUBMISSION</u> (vv.3-4)

Now the Bible spells out the responsibilities of the husband and the wife in the marriage relationship.

ILLUSTRATION – By the way, here is another way that our culture muddies the waters when it comes to what men and women bring to a marriage relationship. Someone sent me a copy of an article that first appeared in the May 13, 1955 issue of Housekeeping Monthly. It is entitled "The Good Wife's Guide." Read quotes.

> I thought you ladies would get a kick out of that.

Well, the Bible tells us about the obligation husbands and wives have toward one another.

1 Corinthians 7:3 - The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

What is Paul saying? He's saying that the place for celibacy, for abstinence from physical intimacy is the single life. There's no place for celibacy in marriage.

He speaks of it as an obligation that mates have toward one another. The word for duty is a word that literally means "a debt that is owed to another."

He speaks of it in terms of submission … mutual submission. See v.4 again.

Note: The Bible clearly teaches that authority and submission exists within the family structure. God has ordained that men should take responsibility for leading their homes. Wives should allow their husbands to lead.

But in this matter of physical intimacy it is a matter of mutual submission.

Sex is not to be used as a weapon to manipulate your mate. Rather it is an obligation of mutual submission.

But there's another way of looking at physical intimacy. It is …

3. A SYMPHONY OF SATISFACTION (v.5)

There may be times when the spiritual needs of the marriage are such that a couple agrees to abstain for the purpose of prayer and fasting. Paul addresses that:

1 Corinthians 7:5 - Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent (the word is the word from which we get our word symphony) **and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**

So we come back to the point we made earlier. God intends for sexual satisfaction to happen within the marriage relationship. It is not a battle, but a symphony of satisfaction.

And so, the Word is answering the question. Is sex unspiritual? Of course not, God invented it. God designed it. And God intended for it to be the fulfillment of humans. There is no fulfillment in life that can even match it. And we are not told in the Bible to abstain from it; we're called upon in the Bible to enjoy it to the absolute fullest extent so that we can build together a tremendous and profound intimacy that will last a lifetime. So, not to do it is to give Satan an advantage.

But there's another way to look at this matter of physical intimacy:

4. A GIFT TO BE CHERISHED (vv.6-7)

1 Corinthians 7:6-7 - I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

What does he mean? Paul is saying, "I'm not commanding people to be married. I'm just aware of the fact that most people need that." By the way, Paul was probably unmarried at this point in his life … divorced? widowed? Not sure. But he was more than likely previously married. A man of his stature in the Jewish community and a member of the Sanhedrin would have most likely been married. But now he's single.

And we have the wonderful truth that singleness is a gift. And marriage is a gift … a gift from God. In fact, the word here is charisma … a grace gift.

Hebrews 13:4 (NIV) - Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is a gift … a precious gift. But so many people go into marriage, and stay in marriage, thinking that it's like a wedding gift inside a box. We rip it open, and the first thing we do is to look inside and see if we can take out of that gift box something that we need, something that will bring pleasure to us. But the fact is that marriage comes to us as a gift in an empty box. We can only take out of it what we put into it.

Think of your marriage, your family, in those terms, and it will be a little bit of heaven on earth. Think of it as something to take from to meet your own needs, and it will be a taste of hell on earth. We make the choice.