

# Aspects of Marriage

*Corinthians Explained*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 7:1-15  
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## **Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation**

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Congregation, I would like to continue preaching a series on 1 Corinthians so this morning hour we hope to speak on 1 Corinthians 1, the verses 1 through 15. Let me only read verse 5. 1 Corinthians 7:5,

5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

So far.

Aspects of marriage with the help of the Lord, three thoughts. In the first place, a healthy marriage, what is a healthy marriage? That's especially the verses 1 through 7. Then secondly, remaining unmarried in the verses 8 through 11. And in the third place, a sanctifying marriage, a marriage can be sanctifying for the children, the children are holy and also husbands and wives can benefit from it. So aspects of marriage: a healthy marriage, remaining unmarried, and a sanctifying marriage.

Congregation, you know the Apostle Paul, he often begins his epistles with deep theology about grace and sin and conversion and sanctification and justification, to set things straight and to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then usually at the end of his epistles, he becomes more practical and he is just mentioning details. And in this morning hour, we deal with the details regarding marriage and sexuality outside and inside marriage, and about remaining unmarried, in certain circumstances it might be better, and also in the blessing of staying together in a sanctifying marriage. And the bridge between the first part of 1 Corinthians and this part is chapter 6. Remember that, how often the Apostle Paul spoke on the body? The body, love thy body, because we often have that feeling kind of it's all about the soul and the spirit and heaven, and earth and body, that's not so important and the Apostle Paul says it is because the body has also been paid for, the bodies of God's people, and those bodies are also temples of the Holy Ghost. And I think he mentions, how many times was it, eight times about the body in the previous chapter? So you may think that this is kind of a superficial chapter all about marriage and how to deal with each other's physical needs and how your desires are met, you may think it is so worldly and bodily and earthy, and yet it's the Holy Spirit, right,

directing the Apostle Paul, holding his pencil, causing him to write those things from the heart, and it must be on paper and that's why we deal with it today. Marriage.

You know, the Apostle Paul has written quite a few epistles, remember? Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Timothy, how many, 14 or so depending on if Hebrews is also viewed as an epistle of the Apostle Paul? He has written many of those epistles. Did he ever receive letters from the congregations? Do you know an example that the Apostle Paul received a letter and just opened it and read it and thought, "This is their opinion. They're asking me advice? Oh, sure I can do that with the help of the Lord." Yes, the Apostle Paul also received sometimes letters. How do we know that? Well, what is the first verse saying in 1 Corinthians 7? What's the first verse, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me." So they wrote to him, "Dear Apostle Paul, this is the situation. This is what we have a problem with. Please answer this letter. We don't know what to do." And he answers them. I had to think about that, that apparently the Apostle Paul had to open a relationship with the congregations and encourage them to write him and he was approachable and people were willing to convey their questions. So it's completely fine to write to the consistory. It's completely fine to write me personally to ask questions. In fact, I would be honored by it.

So "concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me." What were they writing then? Well, let us look at verse 1 again, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me:" colon, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Is that what they wrote? Is that the content of their epistle? Did the apostle open that letter and did he see, "Dear Apostle Paul, in our opinion it is good for a man not to touch a woman." Is that what they said or is this his answer? But they're writing something about, "What do you think about that?" And he's answering, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Is it the summary of their letter or is it his answer or both? I would say both. You know, in the congregation of Corinth, there was the feeling that sexuality is vile, sexuality is dirty, sexuality is something you don't talk about, sexuality is something unholy, sexuality is something so private don't talk about it. And don't touch a woman, even some were against marriage and they said, "Well, why would you even marry in the difficult dark times we live in? Is there not something better to do than marrying?" He said, "It's not bad to not touch a woman?" By the way, "touch" does not mean that you may not shake hands, does not mean there is absolutely no physical contact at all, but the word "touch" here in Greek means "to intimately connect," it means intercourse.

So they said it is good for a man to have no physical intimacy at all and the Apostle Paul answered, "Right. Right. Absolutely right. Don't ever touch a woman in that sense. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." So the Apostle Paul says, "Abstain, refuse, have no sexuality whatsoever at all your entire life except with your own wife, except with your own husband because you have received that husband from the Lord. The Lord with his hand has given you this husband and the Lord with his hand has given you this wife." That's the only only only one.

So it is good for a man to not touch a woman, nevertheless. You see, there's nothing unholy per se about sexuality in marriage, it's not unholy, it's not vile, it is something that belongs to life, something the Lord has given and created, and it's the same with we need to eat and we need to drink and we need to sleep, and sexuality is also part of it. Why? Well, it is important to avoid fornication and avoiding fornication is one of the reasons why the Lord has given us marriage. You know, when I do an hour of mercy counseling with young couples, I often ask the question, "Why? Why do you want to marry?" And they giggle a little bit and say, "I don't know." Yeah, you know. What is the most important reason why you marry? And then the right order as well. Three reasons in the right sequence, and then we come to the conclusion that our form for the consummation of marriage is so right on because they first say to assist each other in all things of this life and a better. I'll come back to that. And the second reason, to raise the children the Lord will give them in the fear of the Lord. That's not reason one, reason one is to assist each other in all things, and the second reason is only the second, it's not essential, and the third reason is kind of negative, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and every man have his own woman.

So a gift. I was reading Proverbs 5 and I'm not going to read you all the verses here, you may want to do that at home, but I see here in Proverbs 5, "Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice," rejoice, "with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?" You see?

So that's the basics, that's the basics and then the apostle continues and we see that, for example, in verse 5, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." So he is singling out two aspects of being married. One of them is sexuality, "Defraud not one the other. Do not abstain. Do not sexually refuse." And the other one is benevolence, warmth, romance, love, affection. So the Apostle Paul says two things that are important for you to have a healthy marriage: to have intimacy is important and to have warmth and being comrades together and friends and bound, that's the second part.

So do not defraud one another. Why not? "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer." So the Apostle Paul says you are married and the one or the other has a desire, don't refuse all the time. Be careful in refusing because Satan is alive and Satan wants to tempt you. So "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time."

So three reasons why it might be good in theory in which it is good to abstain for a while. The first reason: consent. You know, if someone is drinking alcohol too much, he can say, "I'll stop it right now. I decide to defraud that. I decide to stop that. I decide to refuse that. I am not drinking a drop of alcohol anymore. It's over." You can make the decision completely by yourself but regarding sexual intimacy, you cannot decide by yourself.

You may not, you're married, you're together so there needs to be consent. You need to sit around the table. You need to sit on the couch together and talk it over. There needs to be consent, so if you abstain for a while, it needs to be agreed upon from both sides. You cannot enforce it and make it work. You can't have it always your way. You need to be in agreement.

But secondly, for a time. For a time. So for the whole week, for the entire two weeks you decide not to be intimate. From both sides and both sides agree with that but only for a time, not for a year, not indefinitely. We will come back to that, why it is not a year. So of course, you're not talking now about he or she being really sick so that it's not possible and not wise to be close. We are talking about healthy people. I'm not saying that I'm warning against misusing this chapter and saying to her, "No, the minister said, the Bible said, the Apostle Paul said that you should not defraud." You know, don't force things. Don't use this information to abuse or to even rape in marriage.

"Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time," and the third reason is for a purpose, there must be a purpose. The purpose of refraining, the purpose of saying not for a while must have a purpose. You cannot do that just for no reason. If you do it for no reason, it's wrong. The reason is "that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

So I see that couple sitting there around the table again and it's a sensitive subject, right? But let me say he begins to talk about it and he says, "You know, dear, you know the situation. I know you, you know me, we know each other's needs, also physical needs, also those needs. What about for two weeks abstaining and instead have a prayer together, have a fast together and just eat less and have no snacks in the evening and have simple meals, or just skip a few of them, and together dedicate because there are some problems in our lives? Maybe with the children or with this or that or work or finances, or your own soul," you say, "let us abstain for a reason and for that reason storm the throne of grace and set priorities. Let us wait with that for a couple of weeks. Let us just focus on a few more important things than that." And what a wonder if she would say, "I agree. Let's do that." But you see that, that whole year doesn't make any sense, but a few weeks I can see that because a few weeks that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer. That's not the rule. That's an exception.

"But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." So I allow this. I allow this. I do not put this down as the law, "You must have those times on a regular basis that you refrain from one another. You should." No. No, he doesn't say that. He said, "I allow, I speak this by permission in the sense that it is permitted, but that's not a must."

Do you see that, how careful he approaches this because the Apostle Paul knows that there are dangers out there, and some state that the Apostle Paul was married before. I doubt it, but at least he knows the dangers, "that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency," verse 5. Satan. You know, Satan, Satan is reality. There is a devil and the devil likes to ruin things, he likes to ruin marriages and the church and spiritual life. He likes to kill. He's a murderer. He's a liar. He likes it when people fall into sins like this of

looking for satisfaction outside of marriage. He knows that and Satan likes that. He likes to ruin things. But you have to keep in mind that two things are connected. Satan loves it when people look at a different woman than their own, and that ladies look at different men. He loves when people are unfaithful and break their marriage bonds. He loves that. That's one of his goals. He laughs about it, "Good, we got another one on the hook! Another one could not stay clean!" He loves it when people jump the fence because he loves extramarital relationships, therefore he likes to ruin your marriage. So he loves it when people are unhappy in their own marriage. He loves that because he knows the unhappier they are, the more desirous to look for someone else and that is Satan, he laughs, he laughs about that and he tries to ruin things.

"That Satan tempt you not for your incontinency," and Satan likes it when there is no room for that in your marriage and when your desires are not met. He likes that. "Good. Good." He also likes it if there is no benevolence. Benevolence is the romance, the warmth and the love and the camaraderie, the bonding. He loves it when it's not there. He tries to take it out. He likes to create tension in marriage and disagreement. He wants you to [unintelligible]. He doesn't want you to apologize. He wants you to be self-centered. He wants you to be selfish. He wants you to be hard on the other. He loves that. He just creates a horrible atmosphere at home. He likes that in marriages because he knows that's reason to look for someone else.

So "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." Be nice. Be loving unconditionally. Don't retaliate ever. Don't retaliate with refusing. Don't retaliate that way because Satan is tempting you. Satan wants to make a mess of it. Satan is hard. He is a murderer.

So that was the first thought, a little longer than the other two. Second thought: remaining unmarried. What does the Apostle Paul say in verse 7, "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I." So the Apostle Paul is stating here in general, as a starting point, don't marry. Don't marry. Why would you? And are you a widow or a widower? Why would you marry again? Why would you? Don't do it. That's his starting point. Why is that? Well, the Apostle Paul knows for himself, of course, that there were difficult times. He knows for himself that when you're married you have less time for the service of God. When you have children, you have less opportunity to serve in the vineyard. He knows that, but he knows also personally it doesn't always make people happier either. But he says remain unmarried because that's better. Remain unmarried because there's only one reason to marry for, what I mean is if I ask young friends why do you want to marry and they give me an answer, and if I would say has sexuality anything to do with it, is there any reason that you'd like to marry because of your sexual needs, and if they would say, "No, no, I don't care for that," do you know what I would say? I don't think I will officiate at your wedding. I won't because it's a part of it, to regulate it, to enjoy it, it's part of the glue in the relationship, so if it has no part of it, remain unmarried. That's better. The Apostle Paul says so. Remain unmarried.

But if you can't, "But if they cannot contain," verse 9, "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." So in general as a starting point he says, "Remain unmarried, but if you can't, if you have that healthy desire for your physical needs to be met, then marry." Marriage is to regulate it, to make it safe, "for it is better to marry than to burn." To burn, what does that mean? You know, in English we say sometimes burn, that means something like you are caught, right? You've seen it, you're busted. That's not what it means. Burn in hell? Burn in hell? For it is better to marry than to go to hell? I don't think so although I want to say this, if you continue in a sin, whatever sin it is, if you don't resist that sin, do not hate that sin, do not fight that sin, whatever sin it is, the sin against the seventh commandment, any other, if you don't hate that sin, you will burn. Anyone here holding onto a sin against the seventh commandment or something else? Having a secret life? Having a relationship with someone nobody knows about? If you continue, if you don't repent and seek forgiveness, you go to hell, right? I don't think it's what it means here but it is true.

What does it mean then here, "for it is better to marry than to burn"? It is better to marry than to have those burning passions all the time and you don't know what to do with yourself. So if that's the case, if you cannot contain, then marry. Fine. Widows, widowers, single ones, if you don't have to, don't do it. Stay unmarried. You'll be happy as well. But if you feel kind of, "I kind of have to," do it. No problem.

It's better to marry than to burn, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband." So what happened in the congregation of Corinth is that sometimes wives were converted. You know, there was a Gentile population and the Apostle Paul was preaching there and sometimes ladies or men came by themselves to church and you never saw him, you never saw her. And for example, in this case she is a believer and he is not and she says, "Can I not leave him because, you know, he goes to the temple of the idols and his whole lifestyle isn't a match and we are different and we are not on the same page anymore and you name it. So can't I just leave? It's so unbearable. I can't do it any longer." The Apostle Paul says, "No. Stay right where you are, and unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband," even not if he is from a completely different background and religion.

But look at verse 11, "But and if she depart." What? He just said that she shouldn't and now he says in verse 11, "But and if she depart." So she's not supposed to leave him but if she does wrongfully, she should not have but if she yet does it, if she yet leaves him, or if she needs to leave him. What do you mean? Well, if he is so abusive and so dangerous and so difficult to live with and ruins the whole family and the kids with them, and if she departs, you know, there's no other involved, there's no other relationship involved. No, it is just that it might be better to leave him, so and if she departs wrongfully and maybe because she needs to, "let her remain unmarried." But she can't help it, she can't help it that he is so difficult, then she remains unmarried. Because he was abusive. I know, it's hard, huh?

"But and if she depart," although she has been warned not to, if she departs, "let her remain unmarried." Why? Because he is still her husband. But they have legally

divorced. I don't care. From God's perspective they still belong to one another whatever the government says, whatever the government decides that they have officially been divorced. I don't care what they say about that. They don't decide what a marriage is. They belong to one another so remain unmarried, "or," verse 11, "or be reconciled to her husband." Or be reconciled. You see, or be reconciled because that is possible. "Well, not in my case," someone says. With God all things are possible. With God, it is possible that reconciliation is made. There is an Almighty God. He can draw sins out of the darkness. He can give people a new heart. He can make unwilling people willing. He can give regeneration. He can save people. He can save the people in the deepest pits of sin, from sin, from the power of sin. He can do that, can't he? So pray for that and wait for that and don't marry someone else as long as the first marriage is, in a sense, in a biblical sense, intact yet. If he goes with another lady, you're free but as long as he has just left or you have left, you still are married.

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away." So the Apostle Paul has spoken about a healthy marriage with sexuality and especially connecting with benevolence and warmth and love, and be wise together, and have family worship together, and abstain for a while, and he has talked about remaining unmarried. You know, young friends, you may have the desire to marry and maybe you're single so far and maybe you are single and you have no desire to marry so that's completely fine, that's biblical, but suppose you don't have the gift of continency? Be careful that your needs are not so great that you make the wrong decision because it's quite something to marry someone and to promise to be faithful unto death. It's quite something. You need to be compatible because we see the reality here in this chapter, that sometimes people depart and must depart and there can be tension. So ask what is wisdom, ask for advice also from friends and parents.

And then the last thought about the sanctifying marriage. It sounds kind of strange, sanctifying marriage. I hope to explain that. So again think of the Apostle Paul in Corinth. He has been preaching the word of the living God and the Lord has richly blessed it and given repentance and true faith to many. The Lord has much people in that city but, you know, that is not always easy when you are compatible at first, both ungodly, both worldly, both unbelievers, and then the one receives conversion and the other one not. Not always but sometimes that creates immense tension. Immense tension. You know, he may say or she may say, "You're not number one anymore in my life because the Lord is." So that creates a problem sometimes.

"But if any brother hath a wife that believeth not," so he does not, "and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away." You know, if she's fine with that, just don't divorce. "And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." So although they're not compatible and on different pages, stay together if possible.

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified," you see, that's the word, sanctified, marriage, is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband." I think

this is so special. You know, when children have a God-fearing father or mother or both, what a blessing for those children. They're holy, right? They are wholly sanctified. Is that not what we answer also when we have our children for baptism? Do you believe that although they are born in sin and subject to all misery, yet they are sanctified in Christ and therefore as members of the church ought to be baptized? And the parents say, "Yes. Sanctified, yes." So the children are sanctified by God-fearing parents and so husbands are sanctified by a God-fearing wife and female members are sanctified by their God-fearing husbands. It's quite something to have a God-fearing father, quite something to have a mother that knows the Lord, it's something to have a husband who knows him, a wife that knows him, that adds responsibility and it's a real privilege for you if your husband, if your wife knows the Lord. That's really an asset. That's really a blessing. Don't minimize that. Don't just be jealous, just don't resist it. It may be a blessing for you as well because you see it now, right? You see it so close by. You see it so close by that he/she now loves the word. You just notice it. You see it. He is in the Bible all the time. He loves that book. Things have changed dramatically. He doesn't care if I go to church and listening. He didn't listen at all and now he does and now you are sanctified because you're his wife.

So now you notice him praying, maybe he prays out loud at the table and you just heard, things are changing. His prayer is different, because the Lord gives him a new heart, his prayer becomes alive and there is emotion in there, not all the time but some emotion there, and there's something genuine and serious in there. Have you see that in your wife? Do you see that she is seeking the Lord in her chamber? You are so blessed having such a wife. You're sanctified by her. Do you know when the Lord gives a new heart, one of those things is meekness. Meekness. And have you noticed that in him and her, meekness? You're sanctified. Have you see it that she has a comfort sometimes, a comfort in the midst of all difficulties in this life? And you just see it and she never talked about those things before, he never had a comfort like that and now he has a comfort for life and death, a hope. He's just a different person, not all the time but you know what I mean. You're sanctified in him.

"But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart," verse 14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." That's also a text used to defend children's infant baptism. "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart." Hm. 15, "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" So we call this the causa, the cause, right, causa, cause, really the religious reason. So some people see here that there are two reasons to legally divorce. One is fornication and the other one is religion. I do not agree. What does it say here? It says not that the believing partner may leave because he shouldn't, she shouldn't and she won't, I hope, but if the unbeliever departs, that's wrong. When the unbelieving depart, then she is free to marry someone else. So she may not leave but if he leaves and you have to see that against the background of those times because if he left, he left and you would not know where he would be. So he has deserted. He's a renegade. He has broken the marriage and you know in those times in that culture, you know that he

is seeing someone else and if you know that in that culture, then you have a reason to remarry someone else if you have to.

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. So let him not leave, just stay and make peace. Make peace. Show something of that life. Do you have something of that life? Do you have something of that new work of the Spirit in your heart? That's so crucial in this whole chapter. You know, I don't want to discourage you but this chapter is not written for unbelievers. This chapter is written for God's people, to value their body, to live a holy life, not to be civil and an example to others but as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, right? That's the whole letter is about God's people so wherever you are at, you need in the first place to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The most important thing is not if you're married, the most important thing is to know the Lord because a marriage is temporary. In heaven there is no marriage anymore and the real marriage is the marriage between God and his people, or the Lord Jesus and his church, and our marriages should reflect something of that, our marriages should just mirror something of that most perfect marriage. As the Apostle Paul also writes in other places that the husband needs to resemble the Lord Jesus and the church needs to resemble the wife in submission.

You know, think of "Pilgrim's Progress," John Bunyan wrote it, right? And Christian leaves the City of Destruction and his wife and children are calling him back, "Stay, dad! Stay, dad! Don't leave, dad!" He puts his fingers in his ears and he goes anyway. That's what you need, that new life, "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" That's so essential. May that be your real concern, the salvation of your wife, of yourself, of your wife, the salvation of your children, of your husband. Salvation.

And it would not be the first time that he is first and that his wife follows after, or that she is first and that becomes a blessing for him. That happens. It happens. Do you know, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband, or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? You know, you don't know. The Lord is the Almighty One. The Lord can also give reconciliation. I'm off my time, just one example is kind of surfacing in my mind from the time that I was in Holland. There was a couple that divorced. Divorced. There was no other man or woman involved. They just hated each other and they departed. Some children involved and then one of the children died in an accident and that brought them together. You see, why do I tell this? I don't know but, you know, the Lord has means, right, to do whatever he plans, to bring people together. He's a wonder-doing God. Keep that in mind, a wonder-doing God.

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." Do you see that? That's the context. So

1 Corinthians 7 when you study it, it looks kind of shallow. It isn't. It's so deep. It's rooted in that the Lord doesn't only care for the soul, also the body, and that he wants the new life to be practiced so that it will be seen by husbands, by wives, by children and others that so his kingdom might come. Amen.