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Sexuality in Marriage: A Case Study of 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

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Abstract

The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian congregation one of the churches he established about A.D 55. The Corinthian church had some challenges, one of which had to do with the morality of sexuality to both the unmarried and married. To the unmarried, whether men or women the counsel he gave them was not to have sexual contact with anyone since sexual intercourse is allowed only in a marriage setting. The unmarried should control their sexual passions, but if they cannot continue to control themselves, then it is better for them to get married. The married husbands and wives are allowed to have sexual intercourse with their spouses. They should, by all means, try to avail themselves to their partners sexually because are obligated to satisfy each other. If for some reason would like to refrain themselves from sex, it should be something agreed between the two of them for whatever reason are advancing, but it should be for a short time. It could be for day or so, and thereafter they resume having sex together because for not having sex would be an abnormal practice. Unfortunately, some married couples do not have free access sexually to their partners, and as a result, these unhealthy relationships lead to immoral practices. If married couples would take Paul's counsel seriously, they would prevent many immoral sexual practices happening in our society today. Sometimes, husbands and wives though do not feel interested to have sexual intercourse with their partners when they are not sick, they should oblige for their spouses' sake to have sexual intercourse with them so that there is no room to encourage their husbands or wives to consider having sex with other men or women who are not their married couples.

Keywords: Sexuality, Marriage

BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 is 1 Corinthians 5 & 6 and its fourfold. The first context is the practices of sexual immorality in the Corinthian congregation, which the Apostle Paul found taking place. There was a member who outrightly transgressed God's law which forbids having sex with a woman married to his father. The law is found in Leviticus 20:11 which states: "And the man that lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be on them." Paul condemned the church because it never disciplined the sexually immoral church member. As a result of this behavior by the church, he condemned the whole church as involved in sexual immorality. The second context has to do with the counsel the Apostle Paul gave to the Corinthian church prohibiting them from taking each other to court like the unbelievers used to do at the time to resolve issues. Apparently, this counsel was given for the purposes of preventing the wrong practices that were happening in Corinth of rushing to the court of law over cases or disagreement that used to happen between and among believers. The believers were supposed to be wiser because their behaviors were guided and shaped by the word of God. John, the author of the book of

Revelation, discusses the high level the righteous will be involved of judging the unrighteous that will be dead at the time the righteous will be spending one thousand years in heaven. Seventh-day Adventists Believe (1988) elucidates: "John saw that during the millennium the saints would be involved in judgment; he 'thrones and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them' (Rev. 20:4). This is the time of the judgment of Satan and his angels that Scripture notes (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). It's the time when Paul's declaration that the saints would judge the world and even the angels (1 Cor. 6:2, 3) will come to pass." What is the purpose of the righteous' involvement in judgment? Ibid (1988) explains: "The judgment in which the righteous participate serves the purpose of answering any questions the righteous may have as to why the wicked are lost. God wants those to whom He has given eternal life to have full confidence in His leadership, so He will reveal to them the operation of His mercy and justice" P. 367. Thirdly, Paul reveals the context to them the evil practices of the unbelievers and what God will do to them at the time of judgment. The evil practices he outlines are fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revelry; extortion will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Fourthly, Paul unfolds the context in which he warns the church members to flee from sexual immorality because this is the only sin not done outside the body, but inside the body, which unites the culprits regardless of whether they like it or not when they are in a sexual relationship. It is the same reason that sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV AIDS are passed on from one sexual partner to the other. This is why it is important that sexual intercourse must always take place in the context of marriage because sex unites a man and a woman as "one flesh" according to how God has commanded at the time he originated marriage in Genesis 1, 2 & 3.

I. "Do not touch a woman."

Having rebuked the Corinthian Christians about sexual immoral practices that were happening in the church and how they condoned them, Paul clearly gives them some moral guidelines on how sex could be experienced. He wanted them to know that sex was originated by God and was given to humans to practice only in marriage setting. Sex outside marriage is wrong and should be avoided at all cost because doing so is transgressing the law of God which states: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20: 14, NKJV), "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8, NKJV).

In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul wrote as follows: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman." In this verse, he articulated clearly that it is morally right for a man who is not married not to have any sexual intercourse with any woman. The woman, too, who is not married is morally right not to have sexual intercourse with any man. It is not sin for man or woman who is not married to live without sexual intercourse. The sexual immoral are those men and women who engage into sexual intercourse outside the married setting.

Spence & Excell (1962) explains verse 1 the last part as follows: "The word used is not agathon, good, but kalon, fair; "an excellent thing" (p. 223). What are they saying? They are saying that the Greek word used is not agathon, which is translated well. But the Greek word used is kalon, which means fair. Fair means an excellent thing. In other words, it is an excellent thing for a man, not touch a woman. What kind of touch was Paul talking about? Paul was not refuting or condemning mere touch or normal touch of a man to a woman without sexual intentions. He was condemning a man's touch of a woman such as greeting, hugging, etc. with intent to advance towards sexual involvement.

Heading, J (1995) explains what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 7:1 as follows: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman," similar to Matthew 19:10. He continues: "They could not discern the proper course for a Christian in a scene of abounding evil, so they confused complete abstention with a form of spirituality. Let us not confuse spirituality with abstention from legitimate things today" (p.102). In other words, a husband and wife are allowed by God to engage into sexual intercourse because are upholding the guidelines set by Him. Married couples should not feel that they are committing sin whenever they are engaged into sexual intercourse.

Jesus also in Matthew 19:1-10 explained why God created human beings comprised of males and females. The purpose was to unite them into marriage whereby they became one flesh signifying that they were not to be ashamed to one another naked. He condemned divorce, which the Pharisees were advancing using the example of Moses when he permitted divorce in his time. Jesus' answered unhesitatingly to this query by informing that it was due to the hardness of heart of the people in Moses time. Their hardness of heart made them to disregard the counsels God had held from the time of creation to his time and beyond.

Is it true that sin has perverted the beauty of sex which God created at the very beginning of human beings in Genesis 1-3? He did not create man alone; he made a woman for him by the name of Eve. He told both of them "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). These words were commands to allow Adam and Eve to have sexual intercourse. The Bible goes on to tell us that Adam knew his wife Eve (Genesis 4:1) and she conceived and bore him Cain. Therefore, again he knew his wife (Genesis 4:2) and she conceived Abel. God is the one who originated sex. It should not be regarded as evil. Sexual intercourse was not created as a result of sin. It was given to Adam and Eve before sin entered the world.

In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul was solving the problem of those who advocated that it was wrong to have sexual intercourse with couples in a married setting. It was wrong to practice abstinence from sexual intercourse in marriage. He made it clear that sexual intercourse to married couples was allowed and is allowed even today. God originated marriage and sex so that human being would increase in this world. Human beings, whether they like it or not, are the products of sexual intercourse. Those who are married should not feel that they are committing sin whenever they are having sex with their rightful spouses. Sexual intercourse is sinful or immoral outside the marriage context only.

II. Sexual Immorality

What is sexual immorality? Before, this question is answered, in 1 Corinthians 7:2, Paul writes as follows: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (NKJV). According to this context, sexual immorality is sexual intercourse between a man and woman who are not married. They are transgression the law of God that states: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14, NKJV). How can they avoid sexual immorality? They can avoid sexual immorality first by recognizing that a man and a woman have sexual feelings and desires that can only be fulfilled in sexual relationship with each other. Secondly, they should get married. As soon as they are married, declared husband and wife, are allowed to have sexual intercourse any time they want, without them feeling guilty that they are committing sin. Biologically, a man and woman are not the same, and this makes sexual union-compatible. This is why it is not right for man to marry a fellow man and a woman to marry a fellow woman. It should always be a man with a woman and a woman with a man.

Heading J (1995) explains the sin of immorality in detail as follows: "The sin of fornication was one of the prevalent sins of nature. This term is used for immorality in general and would embrace, among other things, the common trend today of pre-marital relationships. It is wider than the term adultery, which is usually restricted to the breaking of the marriage bond" (p. 102). In other words, sexual immorality encompasses sexual sins that take place before and after marriage. For example, the young men and women are deceived even during dating experiences that they turn to sexual intercourse before marriage. Those also who are married, leave their spouses, and engage in sexual intercourse with spouses who are not their own. Jesus in the New Testament expanded the sin of sexual immorality to even lusting. He taught that men who look at women lustfully are already committing sexual intercourse in their hearts with them (Matthew 5:28).

Sexual immorality is prevalent everywhere among men and women. How can it be solved? Heading J (1995) echoes Paul's solutions as follows: "Paul's argument is that, because of these, it is not best to abstain from marriage particularly if the grounds for abstention are that it is more spiritual. Some would say that this is a very low philosophical view of marriage, treating it as a mere safeguard against sin. But Paul is not dealing with a positive spiritual philosophy here, that may be found elsewhere, Eph. 5:22-33. He is only dealing with certain practical implications." In other words, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. This is a personal to holder relationship that cannot be shared. They should display faithfulness

to each other, especially sexually. Paul writing to the Hebrews wrote as follows: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4 NKJV).

III. Husband and Wife renderings.

In defending sexuality in the context of marriage, the apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian Christian husbands and wives as follows: "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3, NKJV). The affection is needed by the wife from the husband and husband needs the same from the wife. None should think that it is immoral for husbands and wives to engage into sexual intercourse in marriage.

Heading (1995) points out a unique connection between rendering affection to husband and wife found in Paul's writings 1 Corinthians 7:3 and to the phrase revealed in Ephesians 5:29 that states "nourishing and cherishing." The context in Ephesians 5 is an analogue Paul gives between Christ the bridegroom's love for the church, which is the bride and the love of a husband to the wife. Christ loves the church so much that he nourishes and cherishes her like his own body. The husband and wife must love each other like they nourish and cherish their bodies. He says that no one hurts his/her body because everyone nourishes and cherishes his/her body. In the same way, the husband must nourish and cherish the wife's body and vice versa like they do to their bodies (Ephesians 5:33). Therefore, unselfishly, the husband must meet the needs of affection to his wife, and the wife must meet the affection for her husbands. Need for affection is important for each person and is met to be fulfilled in a marriage relationship between husband and wife. The husband must render the services of affection to his wife unselfishly, and the wife should do the same to the husband. It is God who gives affection to human beings and must use it according to the manner He stipulated in the scriptures. It is a command God gave to the husband and wife to share affection to each other and must be neglected.

The other connection Heading (Ibid, 1995) gives of rendering for affection between husband and wife is found in 1 Corinthians 7:1-11 and in 1 Peter 3: 7 which has to do with husband and wife "being heirs together of the grace of life ..." What is heading's (Ibid, 1995)'s point? His point is that "it embraces the mutual care that one partner should have for the other" since both of them are "heirs together of the grace of life." Husbands and wives must provide affection to each other because doing so is a sign that both of them care for each mutually. It is not good for husbands and wives to act selfishly when it comes to meeting each other's affection. Just like a husband needs affection, he should remember that the wife also needs the same affection she should receive from the husband. It means that even during sexual intercourse, the husband should not release his sperms quickly so that he gives his wife time to reach orgasm. Unfortunately, many women hurt sex because they rarely reach orgasm. Most times, men are selfish and should avoid this state of affairs of denying wives mutual love and affection.

No Authority over their Bodies

What did the apostle Paul mean with these words in this verse 4: "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" (1 Corinthians 7:4, NKJV). Obviously, Paul is dealing with sexual relationship in a marriage setting, which he believed and taught that God sanctions it. In terms of sexuality and in avoiding sexual tension and difficulties to married couples, the counsel given by him applied can solve many challenges they face today. Paul is saying that a married woman ceases to have authority over her own body at the time she gets married. She should avail her body to the husband so that he can enjoy it sexually. A husband should not struggle to access his wife sexually at the time of marriage because her body has been handed over to the husband. She ceases to have authority over her body, and as a result, the husband has free access to her. The man also at the time of marriage ceases authority over his body because he hands it over to his wife. His wife is the one who has authority over his body. She should have free access to his body even to enjoy it sexually. Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994) add: "So that no abnormal situations in the Christian marital status might develop, leading to sexual immorality." It is not good for husband and wife to suffer for lack of sexual intimacy when they are married. They should strive to satisfy each other sexually even when at times they face sexual challenges. Sexual challenges will always be there due to the sinful world human beings have found themselves. God knowing that human beings would face challenges including sexual gave this counsel: "Ask, and it will be

given you; seek, and you will find, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7&8, NKJV). The Bible in Luke 1:37 says: "For with God nothing will be impossible."

Barker & Kohlenberger III (1994) continue to explain verse 4 as follows: "Christians should have normal sexual relations, and Paul strengthens his argument by stating that the bodies of the marriage partners belong to each other" (p. 625). The meaning is that married couples should have normal sexual relationship that is satisfying so that temptations to have sexual relations with other people who are not their spouses can be avoided completely. It important to point out that this guideline Paul gives to husbands and wives that at marriage, they hand over their authority to their spouses, strengths the idea of writing wills. A will is a written document by any person still alive so that when he or she dies, the property will be shared according to the stipulation written. A husband must write a will indicating that whatever they own together in case of death belongs to the wife, children, or relatives. He can write a will that his wife is the owner of everything they have and give her authority in that will to share with their children or others. The wife also should write a will in case she dies earlier than the husband that property remains in the charge of the husband and the children. It is difficult for African husbands to write a will because they fear that death can come sooner than normal. They should not be afraid because, at the time of death, their relatives minus will grab the property. His relatives, when grabbing property, will not remember the wife and children. The wife and children will become homeless as a result of not writing a will during the time he was alive.

1. Do not deprive each other.

The complete thought of verse 5 renders like this: "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give your selves to fasting and prayer, and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (NKJV). This verse is within the same context of principles of marriage. Paul is teaching the Corinthian church. The first idea is, "do not deprive each other." What is he talking about? He is talking about the married couple that they should not deprive each other sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse cannot be done by the husband and wife alone. It always takes place in the context of husband and wife. It does not matter who initiates, and as soon as that happens, the other should respond and give the body to the other so that they engage into sexual intercourse. Sometimes the other may not be interested but forsake of the other person they should both agree and enjoy the sexual intercourse. Spence & Excell (1962) add to this line of thought as follows: "St. Paul purposely leaves the expression general. Primarily he is thinking of 'the due' or 'the power' which each has over the other, as is shown by verse 6; but he does not confine the expression to this" (p. 224).

After Paul commanding them "not to deprive each other," he points out an exception. The exception states: "except with consent for a time." The consent is not an individual matter; it has to be agreed by both the wife and the husband. It does not matter who brings the idea of refraining from sexual intercourse. The idea should be discussed and then agreed by both the husband and wife, thereafter, it can be implemented. The implementation means that the husband and wife will not be having sexual intercourse for a period of time. The time also is not indefinite; it could be for three or five days. It should not be for a long time like two weeks or one month. The time for refraining from sexual intercourse is not for many days, weeks, or months, but a shorter time. Spence & Excell (Ibid) expressed it this way: "The exception he regards as something possible but not normal" (p. 224). The decision to refrain from sexual intercourse is possible. The couple can discuss this possibility and refrain from sexual intercourse. However, this way of refraining from having sexual intercourse is not a normal practice. It is done for special purpose like fasting and praying, which Paul mentions further in the verse.

It is interesting that the idea of a couple to refrain from sexual intercourse was practiced in the Old Testament for special purposes or occasion. Spence & Excell (Ibid) do point out as follows: "Temporary separation for special reasons had been recognized from the earliest times (Exod. xix.15; 1 Sam. xxi.4)" (p. 224). The first example they are giving is found in Exodus 19: 15. The context had to do with the children of Israel, led by Moses. They had been travelling for the last three months since they left Egypt. This time they had arrived at Mount Sinai, and a special consecration service had to be done by God to his people. Moses was given instructions by God to

his people whom he was to communicate to them. Among other things, God instructed married couples were to consecrate themselves to the Lord. Exodus 19: 15 reveals as follows: "And he said to the people, 'be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives'" (NKJV). What did he mean? He meant that married men during the consecration period, which was the third day only were advised not have sexual intercourse. The periods of refraining were not for a long time, but just for the third day of the event, God had prepared the people, which was the preparation for the people to receive the moral law. The day was so special that men were advised not to have sex on the third day. God would come down to give them the law. This service did not mean that the law was holier than marriage, but that it meant total consecration and devotion to God on the third day He revealed himself to them since they had left Egypt.

The second Bible passage related to temporal refraining from sexual intercourse by married couples is found in 1 Samuel 21:4, that states: "And the priest answered David and said, 'There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women'" (NKJV). The context here is that David approached the priest Ahimelech and asked from him bread, which he was carrying in his hands. The priest answered David and told him that there was no common bread in his hands except holy bread, which was kept in the temple. The holy bread could not be given to men who had recently engaged into sexual intercourse with their wives. What did this mean in those days? Barker & Kohlenberger III (1994) elucidate as follows: "No 'ordinary' bread is available, but 'there is' some 'consecrated' (lit., 'holy') bread that David and his men may eat. There was a condition, however: The men must not recently have had sexual relations with women, which would have rendered them ceremonially unclean (Ex 19:14-15; Lev 15:18) and therefore temporarily unfit to partake of the holy food. David assured Ahimelech that women had indeed been "kept" from himself and his men, and they are thus clean" (p. 417).

David's actual words are recorded in 1Samuel 21:5 as follows: "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day." After what David said, what did the priest do? 1 Samuel 21: 6 tells us what the priest did as follows: "So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away." Is sexual intercourse in a marriage setting sinful? It sounds evil in the above Bible passage we have dealt with. It is not evil, but according to the Jewish custom, a man who had sexual intercourse recently could not partake of such services as sacrificial offerings. Those men who had sexual intercourse with their wives recently (a day or two), would be regarded as ceremonially unclean according to the Jewish ceremony. This type of teaching was not in harmony with the scriptures because, in Genesis 1, 2 &3, God is the one who inverted sex. He created Adam and Eve and therefore after he united them into holy marriage and commanded them to be "fruitful," which can only be arrived through sexual intercourse between them.

2. Fasting and prayer.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:5 gives the reason why a married couple can once a while refrain from sexual intercourse for the purposes of "fasting and prayer." The reason for genuine refraining from sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is important in their Christian lives. Omartian & Hayford (2003) define fasting: "as an instrument that cripples the power of spiritual and evil forces in the realm of the darkness so they cannot sustain their grip on human life, minds, and circumstances" (p. 60). If fasting has the capacity to cripple the power of evil forces, all couples are urged once a while whenever it is convenient to stay away from food and sexual intercourse to experience higher spiritual growth in their lives. Sometimes couples experience challenges that cannot be solved by human intelligence. They can just fast and pray for a day or so by not having sexual intercourse for a meaningful spiritual experience.

(Ibid) wrote an interesting statement about fasting, "Fasting is a way of saying, 'I'm a spirit being before 'I'm a physical being. 'I'm physical, so I need to eat, but 'I'm spiritual too, so 'I'll sometimes assert the supremacy of spiritual allegiance beyond and before my allegiance to my body and its cry." It is important to fast because according to Omartian & Hayford, it helps those fasting to "assert the supremacy of spiritual allegiance." In other words, fasting can enable the participants bring their bodies to where there will show allegiance to God. Obedience to God and his commandments is not easy because the evil powers are also pulling from the opposite

directions. The devil and his angels are working hard to ensure that human beings do not obey God. When Christians fast, they place themselves where God can use and transform them to obedience to him.

Towns (1996) wrote two important statements about fasting: "If every Christian fasted, the results could shake our society like a windstorm bending a sapling. Christians would demonstrate that they live differently, that their faith is imperative, that the Almighty works in their daily lives"(p. 15). The second one is: "If all our churches fasted, they would move forward in evangelism and reach out in feeding and helping others. God would then pour His presence upon His people" (Ibid).

3. *Come together Again*

Having given the reason why married couples should refrain from sexual intercourse for a time, Paul informed them the next thing they were supposed to do as follows: "and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." What did he mean in this phrase? Spence & Excell (1962) explain: "The true reading is, 'be together again,'" not "come together" (p. 224). There is a difference between be together again and come together. To come together again means that you did not separate; you are simply resuming the usual activities or practices you do. However, to "come together" means that you were never together, therefore this phrase does not refer to people who had separated, but who did not know each other. Therefore it is wrong to use the phrase come together. The correct is "to be together again," you continue the usual practices you are always doing. Spence & Excell adds: "For your incontinency; rather, because of. Their past lives and their present temptations were a warning that they could not lay on themselves burdens which God did not require. They should not strive '...to wind themselves too high for sinful man beneath the sky'" (Ibid). In other words, God is encouraging couples to refrain from sexual intercourse during spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayer. It is not an immoral issue. Couples can either refrain or not refrain from sexual intercourse during spiritual discipline; they are not sinning either way. No Biblical command prohibits them to have sex during spiritual discipline, but it them to decide to do what they want.

Fasting and prayer is something good for the couple to practice. Heading (1995) supports this line of thought as follows: "In verses 3 and 4, we have the truth of togetherness, but in verse 5, we find legitimate untogetherness" (p. 103). In other words, the reason advanced for a husband and wife to refrain from sexual intercourse is legitimate one. The reason is to fast at times, which could include refraining from sexual intercourse by the couples. Sexual intercourse is not the only thing they can refrain from; there other things like refraining from meals, talking, and so on for specified time chosen by the participants. After fasting, they come to begin together again to engage into sexual intercourse.

Why is Paul telling the couple to begin again living and experiencing normal marriage life? The last part of verse 5 gives the reason, and it says: "so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." Satan is there, and he looks for areas of weakness among Christians so that he can tempt them. In this context, if married couples are refraining from sexual intercourse for a long time because of religious purposes, he will step in and deceive them. They will start rationalizing using the excuse that they have not been having sexual intercourse for long time, therefore they can fall into sin. This is why Paul does not want couples to refrain from sexual intercourse for religious purposes for a long time. In line with this counsel, Paul is admonishing the couple to watch out because, in the process of fasting unusually from sexual intercourse, they can lose self-control. Self-control is strengthened when the couple is living a normal married life including experiencing sexual intercourse. On the other hand, if couples are refraining from sexual intercourse for a long time, they can lose self-control even when they seem to be strong. Paul does not want to create a situation whereby the devil can find space to tempt the couple to have other sexual experiences other than the ones in normal marriage experience.

4. *Concession versus commandment.*

What did Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 7:6 that states: "But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment"? There are two key words in this sentence. The first one is concession. What does it mean? Merriam dictionary defines concession as: "Something done or agreed to usually grudgingly in order to reach an agreement or improve a situation." Therefore Paul is not establishing a rule for married couples but each couple in their own volition they can decide to refrain from sexual intercourse for whatever reason being advanced. It is neither evil nor bad to refrain; the decision rests on the purpose for fasting. The second key word is "commandment?" What does it mean? Merriam dictionary defines: "an important rule given by God that tells people how to behave." A commandment does not change because it was originated by God. Once God utters it, it remains binding and never to change forever. This is why the apostle Paul does not make a rule on couples when and how long they can refrain from sexual intercourse, but that it is a concession between the two of them. Seventh-day Adventist commentary (1957) adds to this line of thought as follows: "In Gr. Suggnome- 'agreement' mutual opinion or judgment,' 'concession.' He does not intend to give the impression that married persons are under obligation to abstain from sexual intercourse during spiritual discipline. He simply explains that if they so desire, they are perfectly free to enter into such an arrangement; they are not commanded to do so" (p. 707).

Another view of interpreting 1Corinthians 7:6 is given by Keener (2014) as follows: "Jewish law permitted concessions for human weakness; here Paul permits but does not require periods of abstinence, implying that it is those who wish to abstain (rather than those who do not) who are weak. Abstinence within marriage is their idea (7:1), not his" (p. 474). In other words, Jewish laws allowed couples to decide themselves when to abstain from sexual intercourse for the purpose of devoting time for God. On the other hand, those couples who decided to abstain from sexual intercourse should do so on their own and not for long periods of time; otherwise, they would open floodgates for sexual temptations. Paul makes it very clear that the decision is theirs; it is not imposed by anyone. Since the decision is the couples', they should not be condemned but encouraged.

Heading (1995) adds: "but I speak this by permission and not of commandment'. In the previous four verses, there is no commandment either for or against marriage, either for or against special service. Paul is writing by way of 'permission,' namely making 'allowance for circumstances,' the only time this word appears in the New Testament. There is no legislation in Christian liberty. There must be a harmonious working of one's own exercise with the call of God to service" (p. 104). In other words, 1 Corinthians 7, which Paul wrote does not give commandment for or against marriage. A man or a woman is free to either get married or not to get married. Marrying and not marrying is not morally wrong. And those who are married, can have sexual intercourse daily or can skip some does, it is up to them what they decide to do. They are free to have sexual intercourse any time as long as they do not break God's commandment of engaging into sexual intercourse outside the marriage setting.

Another thought by Barker & Kohlenberger III (1994) state: "In Paul's comment that 'this' comes not by direct command (i.e., from the Lord) but by permission or concession, it is not clear what the 'this' refers to. Perhaps it is best to understand it as referring to v.2, indicating that though marriage is desirable and is according to God's creation, it is not mandatory" (p.626). In other words, God does not force or require any man or woman to get married. What God does not like is a man or a woman who experiences sexual intercourse outside the marriage covenant. Those men and women who get married are allowed to have sexual intercourse within the marriage setting. Those who not have the urge to marry should remain unmarried, and this means that they should not have any sexual relationship with anyone because it would be committing adultery or fornication.

5. *Gift from God*

What does the phrase "gift from God" mean in 1 Corinthians 7:7? This verse reads: "For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that" (NKJV). In the context of the passage Paul is talking about his gift from God, which he received, which does not allow him to get married. He does not have urge for sexual feeling towards women, thus why he did not get married. He seems to have a gift of celibacy which hinders him from getting married. He wished that everyone was gifted with the gift of celibacy; then there would no struggle for men to get married. He does agree that other men are different, they do have the gift of celibacy; therefore, and they have the urge to marry. Getting married is not sin, and not getting married is not sin as well.

Barker & Kehlenberger III (Ibid) express this idea of verse 7 as follows: "That this is Paul's meaning is evident from v.7, where he says he really wishes everyone was single like him" (p. 626). The gift he is talking about is the one of not getting married. He was single meaning that he was not married. He had a gift of single life, therefore, sexual temptation was not an issue with him. He did not have a weakness in sexual temptation. This is why he wished everybody else to have the gift of celibacy, and as a result, issues of sexual immorality would not be prevalent in his time. Those who do not have the gift of single life should not remain single but should get married. If they are single and indulge in sexual intercourse out marriage setting, then they are committing sin against God. Hence Paul's admonition that those who do not have a gift of celibacy should not continue being single but should get married to avoid sexual immorality.

Heading (Ibid) broadens Paul's idea of wishing Christians of his day to be like him. He writes: "This is the secret of Paul's whole argument; his desire was that others should be as he was. That is to say, not just to be saved, not just to be called, not just to be unmarried, but that these blessings and positions should be used in special devoted service—a service that could not be accomplished effectively if there were legitimate home and family ties" (p.104). In other words, Paul's gift of celibacy was not just for his own pleasure or for showing off that he did not like women, it was for providing service to God. This gift of single life was better placed in him so that he could devote more time and increase effectiveness in the Lord's work without inferences of family matters. There is one married couple that I came across who did not bear any children by choice so that they could serve the Lord as missionaries in different places of the world without interferences of children. They used wholly their time and money to serve the Lord.

Keener (Ibid) elucidates: "Paul recognizes that not all are called to singleness and equipped for it" (p. 475). There are some Christians today who have the gift of celibacy like the one Paul had. It is clear in this verse that some do have while some do not have the gift of celibacy. He does not condemn them for not having the gift of celibacy. It should also be pointed out that it is God who decides which gift a Christian should have, according to Ephesians 4. It is not right to be envious of gifts of other Christians. Each Christian should accept his or her gift and use it for the benefit of the Lord's work. These gifts, too, can be increased or sharpened by learning more about them and also by using them.

6. *The unmarried and widows.*

In 1 Corinthians 7:8, the apostle Paul focuses on those Corinthian Christians who were not married and ladies whose husbands had died and as a result became widows. What counsel is he giving them? He declares this in verse 8: "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am" (NKJV). He could be referring to himself on the issue that he is not married. Since he is not married and he knows the benefits it renders him in working for the Lord, he wishes that the unmarried and the widows can decide not to marry so that they can devote their time and gifts to the spreading of the word of God to those who have not yet been reached. He wishes the unmarried and widows to be involved in planting churches in cities and villages close to where they reside. They can begin in those areas near to where they stay before they travel or drive to long distant places. Paul's gift of celibacy is not for his own pleasure, but it is for enhancing the preaching of the gospel in his generation. Paul did his part when he was alive, he worked hard planting churches and nurturing those he had planted. As age caught upon him, he used the methods of writing letters to his churches so that they could read them and put into practice the counsels and principles he communicated to them. He had an advantage of doing what he did because he did not have a family to take care of, thus why he wishes the unmarried and widows to do the same.

Barker & Kohlenberger III (Ibid) explain Paul's idea in these words: "Paul now gives advice to those who are single, who he classifies as the unmarried and the widows. It is good or advisable for them to remain in their single state for the reasons spelled out in vv. 26, 32-35" (p. 626). One of the reasons for encouraging the unmarried or widows to remain single is in 1 Corinthians 7:26, it reads: "I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is:" (NKJV). Here the reason he is advancing for single life is distress which existence at the time of writing the first letter to the Corinthians. It was good to stay single because of the present distress that was going on at the time. The problem is not spelled

out, but whatever it was, it was better for the single to remain single than to inflict pain on other people who came together as a result of marriage.

The next reason is in verse 32, reads: "But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord and verse 33 says: "But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife" (NKJV). Paul is pointing out the major focus of the unmarried person versus the one who is married. The one who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord. He is determined to please God, especially in rendering service to the Lord. For example, he can run evangelistic efforts in different places and times without being bothered about shelter, food, health, etc., of the family that he does not have. He can devote more time and can be more effective in carrying out the work of God. However, the married one is faced with a number of distractions to do with supplying needs such as shelter, food, health for the family. He cannot live in a one bedroomed house because it will not be enough for his family. He needs to buy more food for his family; otherwise, the wife especially will not understand what he is doing. He needs to balance his time between the family and the Lord's work. If he does not do that he will end up failing as a family man and also as a worker for the Lord.

7. *Self-Control and Marriage.*

The last verse of the study is 1 Corinthians 7:9, reads: "But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (NKJV). Paul is clear in his discourses because he builds from one counsel to another progressively. He encourages the unmarried and the widow not to marry, and he gives advantages for this type of life, especially in enhancing the Lord's work. However, if they cannot control themselves against sexual pressure or desire, Paul says they should get married. It is better to marry than to keep burning with sexual passions. The reason is because it is moral to experience sex in the context of marriage. On the other hand, if sex is done outside marriage setting, it is immoral and must not be condoned at all cost.

Keener (Ibid) gives both the historical context and the meaning of the term "burn" as follows: "'Burn' (NIV, NRSV, and GNT interpret correctly by adding 'with passion') was used throughout ancient romances and other sources to describe the arousal of passion, often (metaphorically) through Cupid's fiery darts. Whereas Greco-Roman literature, in general, saw nothing wrong with sexual passion, Paul knew that sexual passion was solely permitted in marriage, and he advocates two alternatives, either self-control or marriage" (p. 474). It is true that there are two alternatives Paul provides in this issue of single life and married life. Those who are not married should stay on exercising self-control to avoid sexual intercourse with anyone and any time. However, if they fail to exercise self-control, then they can use the second alternative of getting married because, in marriage, they are allowed to have sexual intercourse.

Barker & Kohlenberger III (Ibid) explain also the two alternatives in this way as follows: "If the situation is such that these persons cannot control their sexual desires, they should marry. It is, after all, better to get married than be inflamed with sexual desire, which is hard to control outside of marriage" (p. 626). The emphasis here is to get married than for one to keep burning or inflamed with sexual desires unattended to. Sometimes in marriage, the husband and wife forget their obligation of providing sexual pleasure to each other. There should not be difficult in matters of availing themselves to their spouses for sexual intimacy. However, if they do, they will create problems that in long run very difficult to solve. Sometimes couples use the justification that because their spouses are not responding to their sexual needs, thus why they go to other people for sexual fulfillment. Doing so is breaking God's commandment, which says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

Richards (1995) adds his understanding of the meaning of the word "burn" as follows: "But, and this is an important 'but,' if a church member realizes that sexual desire is a controlling factor in his life, he should marry. Marriage is obviously better than burning with passion (vs. 9)—which could lead to the very immorality Paul is opposing" (p. 127). In other words, if the sexual desire in a man is so tense, then it is better for him to get married than to keep burning with unfulfilled sexual passions. If he does not marry the likely thing to happen is commit Sexual immorality, which the apostle Paul is opposing. He is admonishing that before sexual desire is out of hand, a man or woman must quickly get married. Getting married is not sin; therefore, Paul is encouraging those without self-control to get married.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The journal of research 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 has been long and rewarding. In brief, this passage means that sexual intercourse in marriage was invented by God, and as such, it should be treated that way throughout human existence. There are some like the apostle Paul himself who has the gift of celibacy. Those with the gift of celibacy should stay unmarried as long as they can control themselves from sexual temptation. However, if they fail to control themselves, they should get married because sexual intercourse is allowed only in the context of marriage. Paul also points out that those who can practice self-control over sexual temptation will provide more effective service for the Lord than one who is married. According to Paul, the gift of celibacy is not to use for selfish purposes but for enhancing the spread of the gospel to masses that have been reached. Therefore Christians, in general, should not mock those who have the gift of celibacy because their aim to hasten the coming of Jesus through giving themselves more to the Lord doing effective service for him.

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