

Sunday, October 30, 2016—I Corinthians 7:6-9: Good and Proper Gift

I Corinthians 7:6

- **But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.**
- After having issued four sets of reciprocating instructions to both husbands and wives in verses 2 through 5, Paul utters this statement in verse 6. Please recall that these statements in verses 1-5 were strong imperatives.
- First notice that the verse starts with a contrast “but.” So Paul is going to begin to contrast what he just said in verses 1 through 5 with what he going to say in this section i.e., verse 6 through the end of the paragraph in verse 9.
- Paul says that he speaks this “by permission” and “not of commandment.” The Greek word translated “permission” occurs only this one time in New Testament. Per *Strong’s Concordance* the word means, “pardon, indulgence.”
- Noah Webster in *The American Dictionary of the English Language* defines the English word “permission” as follows:
 - The act of permitting or allowing.
 - Allowance; license or liberty granted.
- I think we all know what a commandment is. Paul says that he did speak by commandment. This seems a bit confusing given his use of the imperative mood in verses 2 through 5. What does Paul mean?
- Some think it means that Paul was granted liberty i.e., “permission” by the Holy Spirit to pen verses 1 through 5 and therefore did not do so out of a divine command or directive to so write. According to this view, Paul was granted this liberty in verses 1 through 5 because he knew the carnal state of both the city of Corinth and the Corinthians themselves.
- After studying the matter, I believe that the verse makes that most sense when it is viewed as a contrast with what Paul said in verses 1 through 5 and is coupled with verse 7.

I Corinthians 7:7

- **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.**
- Note the use of the personal pronoun “I” in verse 7 as well as in verse 6. This helps establish that the key to understanding verse 6 is found in verse 7 and following.

- *For I would that all men were even as I myself*—Paul’s personal preference was that “all men” be in the same condition that he was in i.e., single or not married. The indication from the context is that Paul was not married at the time in his life.
 - I Corinthians 7:8
 - I Corinthians 9:5—the indication is that Paul did not exercise this power and would therefore indicate that he was not married when he ministered in Corinth.
- Imagine how bad things would have been for Paul’s wife as he travelled around on these apostolic journeys?
- *But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*—this part of verse 7 has bugged me for a long time. When I was coming through Bible College there was much discussion about the “gift of singleness” or the notion that God supernaturally empowers certain people to live free of the temptations of the flesh that necessary marriage in this passage.
- The Greek word translated “gift” in verse 7 is the word *charisma*. This is the same word used by Paul in chapter 12 when he begins his discussion of spiritual gifts.
 - I Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30-31—all these verses contain the Greek word *charisma* when referring to spiritual gifts.
 - Romans 12:6
 - I Corinthians 1:7—there was no other assembly in the ancient came behind the Corinthians in terms of the functioning of the gifts in their midst.
- An honest exposition of verse 7 would seem to indicate that Paul acknowledged that some believers possessed a supernatural ability to remain single and not be tempted by fornication as a gift from God. The question is does God continue to give this gift today?
- Without getting into a long dissertation on spiritual gifts, I would simply point out that this was not simply a contentment to live the single life, but to do so without any fleshly temptation to involve oneself in fornication. In other words, it was not just that one remained single or unmarried but could do so in a state of complete celibacy.
- For the clear majority of people, a life of singleness and celibacy is not an option. Hence Paul’s instructions to get married and avoid fornication.

I Corinthians 7:8

- **I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.**
- Again, note the use of the personal pronoun “I” in this verse. Paul says that “it is good” for them to be in an unmarried state like Paul.
 - I Corinthians 7:1—“it is good”
- There has been much discussion as to whether Paul had ever married. Given Paul’s history as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin some maintain that Paul must have been married or else he would not have been granted membership in that exclusive group.
 - Acts 7:58
 - Galatians 1:14
- Others have noted the fact that Paul speaks of marriage as though he were familiar with the institution.
 - I Corinthians 7:32-34
- Personally, I think that Paul may have been married at one point and lost his wife. Regardless of the Paul’s history there is no doubt that he was not married at the time he wrote I Corinthians.
- There is nothing wrong with remaining in an unmarried state like Paul provided one can do it and avoid fornication. I think this speaks to Paul’s point in verse 6. Verses 1 through 5 are not to be taken as a blanket statement that every believer must get married. Rather, Paul provides liberty i.e., permission for those who can avoid fornication to remain unmarried.

I Corinthians 7:9

- **But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.**
- If one cannot contain their desire for sexual intimacy it is better for that person to get married than to burn with physical lust and sin against one’s own body by committing fornication.
- However, if one can contain there is nothing wrong with remaining unmarried. In fact, there may be advantages to remaining unmarried in terms of service for the Lord provide one can do so without sinning.
 - I Corinthians 7:32-34

Conclusion

- I Corinthians 7:6—Paul’s statement here is indicative of the liberty provided by grace. The scriptures outline what is conduct becoming and unbecoming for a saint. Then within those circumscribed boundaries there is liberty for each believer to choose how they walk by faith in what God has said.
- I Corinthians 6:12