

Marriage and Sexual Obligations according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

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ABSTRACT: For a church, like Corinth, where a group of members advocated sexual abstinence, even within marriage, Paul must address the issue. Immediate post-apostolic church, as the Shepherd of Hermas attests, was not spared from considering sex, even within marriage, as evil, thus relegating it only for the purpose of procreation. This study investigates Paul's writing about sexual obligations and abstinences within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. It closely looks at the purpose of marriage and the nature and extent of sexual activities within marriage to see Paul's inspired contribution for the preservation, success, and happiness of Christian marriages. It is argued in this paper that unlike non-Christian writings and practices in his time, Paul considers sexual activities within marriage as a marital duty that is characterized by equality, mutuality, and the sense of sacredness. Sex within marriage is not primarily for procreation but to signify its place in the union of two persons who become one flesh, thus, both avoiding porneia and expressing intimacy in a loving relationship between husbands and wives.

Keywords: Celibacy, Marriage, Sacred, Sexual Obligations, Sexual Abstinence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his book *Marriage Covenant*, Samuele Bacchiocchi notes, "the attitude of society toward sex has truly swung from one extreme to another. From the Puritan view of sex as a necessary evil for *procreation*, we have come to the popular *Playboy* view of sex as a necessary thing for *recreation*."¹ Christians are not left indifferent. In view of the fact that God had created male and female and instituted marriage with its physical union component (Gen 1:27; 2:18,21-24; Matt 19:4-6), it is startling to see early Christians forbidding fellow Christians to marry (1 Tim 4:3; cf 1 Cor 7:1). The postapostolic (early) document *The Shepherd of Hermas* talks with great deal of "spiritual marriage,"² or "celibate marriage,"³ branding sex (even as a desire) as evil (1.1.8; 2.2.4), therefore to be avoided even within marriage.⁴ The husband will sleep with his wife, not as a husband, but as a brother; the wife will sleep with her husband, not a wife, but as a sister (88.11.3; cf 1.1.1-2). The subsequent attitude to have love without sex,⁵ is not surprising.⁶

Paul had to deal with the same issue in the Corinthian church where a group of members advocated sexual abstinence within marriage (1 Cor 7).⁷ As Poirier and Frankovic note, "some of the Corinthians had

¹Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study On Marriage, Divorce, And Remarriage* (Ann Arbor, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2010), 64.

²The expression "spiritual marriage" is used by Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Cor 7* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 40-42.

³William A. Heth, "'Unmarried for the Sake of the Kingdom' (Matthew 19:12) in the Early Church," *Grace Theological Journal* 8/1 (1987), 64.

⁴The Apostolic Fathers's writings used in this study is Michael W. Holmes: *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). For a detailed study on the ascetic attitude in the early Christian Church, see Roland H. A. Seboldt, "Spiritual Marriage in the Early Church: A Suggested Interpretation of 1 Cor. 7:36-38," part 2, *Concordia Theological Monthly* (1959): 176-189.

⁵Bacchiocchi, 64.

⁶See "I'm A Mom, A Pastor's Wife, and I'm Asexual," *Spectrum* 23 October 2015, accessed 29 October 2015, <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2015/10/23/first-person-im-mom-pastors-wife-and-im-asexual>.

⁷So Heth, 69, who also points out that the "Corinthians to whom Paul responds in chap. 7 are sexual ascetics who consider their practice mandatory for the Christian life."

apparently become celibate at their spouses' expense."⁸ But even here, what Paul says is puzzling. He seems to be in an apparent dilemma between sexual obligations and abstinences (even celibacy) within marriage. Hence, one may rightly ask the question how we should understand his view on sexual intercourse within marriage. Concomitantly, what does Paul advance as reasons both for sexual intercourse and for abstinence within marriage? What can we learn from Paul and apply for a successful Christian marriage relationship today?

This study investigates Paul's writing about sexual obligations and abstinences within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. It closely looks at the purpose of marriage and the nature and extent of sexual activities within marriage to see Paul's inspired contribution for the preservation, success, and happiness of Christian marriages.

The study is set against its Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds, but it takes into consideration also the relevant OT and NT texts from which Paul's understanding and instruction cannot be dissociated. Information from primary sources, such as Papyri, Plutarch and Musonius Rufus, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran writings, Josephus, Philo, and early rabbinic literature is gathered and analyzed, which may contrast, clarify or bear upon the understanding of Paul's teaching on the subject. The final section of the study deals with Paul's teaching, putting it in line with the overall biblical perspective on the intimate relationship between husbands and wives.

II. GRECO-ROMAN WORLD ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

When Christianity emerged, it was surrounded by diverse Greco-Roman ethos and practices which Christians were familiar with. In this regard, Deming rightly states that Paul's discussion on the topics is best understood against these backgrounds.⁹ It is therefore of importance for this study to know these factors, ranging from the purpose of marriage, sexual relationships and abstinences within marriage.

Musonius Rufus

Musonius Rufus (AD 30-62) was a renowned great philosopher.¹⁰ Musonius holds a striking egalitarian view between men and women as far as study of philosophy and marriage are concerned. Women may study philosophy as well as men, noting women's qualities, virtues and gifts of reason they had received from gods, so that they may lead a good life too (Lectures III.1-5). Musonius Rufus condemned both sexual activity outside marriage (adultery and sexual relationship with slaves) and pleasure-seeking within marriage. It should be done exclusively for procreation (Lectures XII.1-6). He states, Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure-seeking, even in marriage. (Lectures XII.2).

Thus, he militates against excess in sex and calls for self-control. A master who does not give in sexual relationship with his slaves, albeit legal and accepted societal norm, proves his self-control and superiority to women (Lectures XII.11-15).

Musonius' praise for marriage as a means to procreate lots of children,¹¹ is justified for the preservation and perpetuation of the city (Lectures XIII.A.1-2). And even though he condemned mere sexual pleasure seeking in marriage, nevertheless, he equally states that the chief end of marriage is mutual loving companionship where one looks, not his/her own interest, but the interest of the other (Lectures XIII.A.4-6). Musonius' inference that "spouses should consider all things as common possessions and nothing as private, not even the body itself [Lectures XIV.16],"¹² is a striking parallel with Paul's statement in 1 Cor 7:4. With such a view of marriage, Musonius does not perceive that it is a handicap for the study of philosophy (again both for men and women) (Lectures XIV.1-21).

Plutarch

Mestrius Plutarch (ca. AD 50-125) "tried to promote the traditional moral values of the Greco-Roman culture."¹³ In *Conjugal Precepts*, Plutarch gives practical advice and instruction for a successful conjugal life

⁸John Poirier and Joseph Frankovic, "Celibacy and Charism in 1 Cor 7:5-7," *Harvard Theological Review* 89/1 (1996), 1.

⁹Deming, 43.

¹⁰Text is from Cora Lutz, "Musonius Rufus 'The Roman Socrates,'" *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947), available from https://sites.google.com/site/thestoiclif/the_teachers/musonius-rufus/lectures/03.

¹¹William O. Stephens, "Musonius Rufus," <http://www.iep.utm.edu/musonius/#H6> (accessed 01 sept 2015).

¹²Ibid.

¹³Michael Marlow, "Plutarch's Conjugal Precepts," <http://www.bible-researcher.com/plutarch1.html> (accessed 16 March 2015). The text is from Marlow's translation, unless otherwise indicated.

between the newly married Pollianus and Eurydice. The essay is of great significance for its parallels with the Pauline instruction on marriage in his epistles.¹⁴

Plutarch's instruction presents common features and "double standard."¹⁵ He calls for relational ethic, i.e. "mutual interchange of kindness and affection" (*Precepts* 20). Public expression of love should be shunned (*Precepts* 13). Excess and overindulgence from both parties are condemned (*Precepts* 10); in other words, there must be continence in bed (*Precepts* 47). When at variance (i.e. angry), husband and wife should sleep on separate beds and let god bring remedy (*Precepts* 38).

As is commonly accepted as norm for the period, the unique purpose of sexual activity is to procreate. However, it is noteworthy that Plutarch insists that, though for procreation, it be done in pure affection and mutual love (*Precepts* 34).

Plutarch's double standard in his treatment is expressed in what is expected from the wife. Foremost is her submission, first seen in the expectation that she worship her husband's gods (*Precepts* 19). Husband is to control her and she must comply with a loving submission (32).

Wife must be passive in sexual relationship.¹⁶ She is not to initiate sexual desires, lest she be considered a harlot (*Precepts* 18). Plutarch adds that her inclinations must be controlled to ensure the quality of children (*Precepts* 48).

Sexual fidelity is required from her (*Precepts* 41). This is also reflected from the expectation of her decency (such as not showing her naked arms) to prevent other men from temptations (*Precepts* 31). That the husband can have extramarital relationship is implied in his statement that the wife should not grow very jealous that she would think of divorcing her husband (*Precepts* 41).

P.Tebt. 1.104

P. Tebt. 1.104 is a marriage contract, written in 92 BC, between Philiskos and Apollonia, in which Apollonia (the wife) pledges obedience and passivity to Philiskos (the husband).¹⁷ The contract states the obligations of each party. The husband is the provider of the material needs of his wife: "Philiskos shall supply to Apollonia all necessities and clothing and whatever is proper for a wedded wife, whether he is at home or abroad, so far as their property shall admit." (line 16).

But what is expected from the wife clearly reveals double standard. First, in the submission of the wife toward her husband: "Apollonia shall remain with Philiskos, obeying him as a wife should her husband (line 14)." Second, in the expectation of sexual fidelity:

It shall not be lawful for Philiskos to bring in any other wife but Apollonia, nor to keep a concubine or lover, nor to beget children by another woman in Apollonia's lifetime, nor to live in another house over which Apollonia is not mistress, nor to eject or insult or ill-treat her, nor to alienate any of their property to Apollonia's disadvantage. If he is shown to be doing any of these things, or does not supply her with necessities and clothing and the rest as has been said, Philiskos shall forfeit forthwith to Apollonia the dowry of 2 talents 4000 drachmas of copper. In the same way it shall not be lawful for Apollonia to spend the night or day away from the house of Philiskos without Philiskos' consent or to have intercourse with another man or to ruin the common household or to bring shame upon Philiskos in anything that causes a husband shame (lines 18-31).

The double standard in the treatment can be seen in the fact that she is forbidden to be away from home, for fear of engaging in extramarital relationship with another man. While the wife's extramarital relationship is expressly forbidden, to keep the honor of the husband intact,¹⁸ the husband can have a concubine or a boy. He is only restrained from bringing these in their common home, and from having children from other women. Extramarital relationships of the husband were in line with accepted societal norms, therefore, they "do not constitute insulting treatment toward his wife."¹⁹

¹⁴Marlow (ibid.) remarks "students who make themselves familiar with this essay, and others like it from ancient times, will be kept from the error of thinking that the apostles introduced new principles of Christian morality in their writings about the marriage relationship."

¹⁵G. W. Peterman, "Marriage and Sexual Fidelity in the Papyri, Plutarch and Paul," *Tyndale Bulletin* 50/2 (1999), 165.

¹⁶Peterman, 168.

¹⁷The text is from <http://www.papyri.info/ddbdp/p.tebt;1;104#to-app-choice07>

¹⁸Peterman, 165.

¹⁹Ibid.

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This papyrus is another contract of marriage, written in 13 BC, between Apollonius and Thermion, in which the wife's marital duties toward her husband is explicitly spelled out:²⁰

And from now on Apollonius son of Ptolemaeus shall furnish to Thermion as his wedded wife all necessaries and clothing in proportion to his means and shall not ill-treat her nor cast her out nor bring in another wife, . . . and Thermion shall fulfill her duties towards her husband and their common life and shall not absent herself from the house for a night or a day without the consent of Apollonius son of Ptolemaeus nor dishonor nor injure their common home nor consort with another man.

Again, the honor of the husband is at stake, which requires fidelity from the wife. The double standard in treatment is readily seen: (1) the wife is the only one explicitly told to satisfy her husband's sexual desires (there is nothing said about the husband's marital duties toward her); (2) the wife cannot "consort" with another man, clearly implying, the husband can. The husband is only restricted from bringing in their common home other women.

Summary

Greco-Roman literature praised the passion between husband and wife in the realm of marital obligations.²¹ But sexual excess even within marriage is condemned. Although some philosophers like Musonius Rufus and Valerius advocated that sexual relations take place exclusively within the bonds of marriage,²² it appears that there was double standard for the treatment of sexual fidelity in the Greco-Roman world. Society accepted men's extramarital relationship, which women were forbidden to engage in. Wives were generally expected to be submissive and passive in marital intimacy. The contrary was considered as indecent on their part and may affect the quality of the children. Moreover, although some philosophers advocate loving companionship as the purpose of marriage, sexual relations within marriage was primarily for procreation, to preserve and perpetuate the city.

III. JEWISH MARRIAGE, SEXUAL OBLIGATIONS AND ABSTINENCES

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Siracides reflects a high view of marriage.²³ It underscores man's need of a wife through the statement, "where there is no hedge, a piece of property will be plundered, and where there is no wife, a man will wander about and groan." Interestingly, Ben Sira seems to oppose the practice of sexual access to slaves (41:22).²⁴ He also expresses expectation: modesty on the part of the wife (26:14);²⁵ and strikingly, sexual fidelity on the part of both the husband and wife.

A man who goes astray from his own bed,
A who says to himself, "who can see me?
Darkness is around me, and the walls hide me;
So no one can see me; what risk do I run?
The Most High will not remember my sins." (23:18)
It is also with a wife who leaves her husband,
And provides an heir by a stranger. . . (23:22-27)

The book of *Jubilees*²⁶ casts its view of marital intimacy and abstinence against the law of ritual purity of Leviticus 12, owing to the fact that it rewrites the book of Genesis as a legal book.²⁷ The author seems to merge the two accounts in Genesis 1 and 2.²⁸ During six days of the second week of creation, Adam was naming

²⁰The text is from C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 40.

²¹"Family in the Greco-Roman and New Testament World," http://web.campbell.edu/faculty/vandergriffk/foundations_new_testament.html (accessed May 22, 2015).

²²Hans-Friedrich Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 122, footnote 22.

²³The text is from Edgard J. Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha: An American Translation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938).

²⁴At least in the Hebrew original, as William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 47-48, notes.

²⁵"A modest wife is blessing after blessing" (26:14).

²⁶Pseudepigraphic texts, unless otherwise indicated, are from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

²⁷Liora Ravid, "Purity and Impurity in the Book of Jubilees," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 13/1 (2002), 61.

²⁸Loader, 13.

all the beasts. Through that process, he realized they were all “male and female according to every kind which was on earth, but he was alone and there was none whom he found for himself.” (3:3). So the Lord created Eve from his rib. “He brought her to him and *he knew her*” (3:6; emphasis supplied). Then the statements in Genesis 2:23-24 follow (3:6-7), reflecting *Jubilees*’s high view of physical intimacy between husband and wife. In Loader’s opinion, the “overall effect of the retelling is to make sexual union between man and woman something very positive and special.”²⁹

But their initial sexual encounter occurred outside the garden.³⁰ *Jubilees* makes it clear that Adam and Eve were not given immediate access to the Garden of Eden after their creation. “Adam was brought to the garden on the fortieth day after being created, while Eve was brought there 80 days after her creation (3.9).³¹ The reason for that delay is due to the hierarchical perception of purification and sanctification in the *Jubilees*:³² “Eden is conceived of as a holy site - indeed, it is more holy than any other spot - and those who enter its environs must be pure.”³³ Adam and Eve needed the prescribed time to purify themselves since they “were thought to have been rendered impure as a result of their creation.”³⁴ At the same time, the delay allowed them to consummate their sexual relationship,³⁵ outside the sacred place. Their stay in the holy garden lasted seven years only because of the fall (3:15). It’s only at their eviction he realized he was naked and was ashamed of his nakedness (3:16,31).

Aside from prohibition of sexual intercourse in the sacred space, *Jubilees* makes it clear that the Sabbath is a sacred time during which it is not allowed. “Every man who will profane this day, who will lie with his wife,” let him die (50:8). In other words, Sabbath must be observed in a state of purity.³⁶

The *Testament of Nephtali* prescribes abstinence when one is to engage in prayer. *Testament of Nephtali* 8:8 states, “there is a time for having intercourse with one’s wife, and a time to abstain for the purpose of prayer.” These appear to be two commandments but they must be put in order (8:9-10). Thus, Loader understands “Naphhtali both affirms sexual union as an expression of the second great commandment of love of neighbor and cautions that it must always take second place to the first for times of prayer.”³⁷

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Whether the Essenes got married or not is still a matter of debate among scholars.³⁸ Josephus argues that there were two types of Essenes: (1) those who led a celibate lifestyle (likely the Qumran dwellers),³⁹ and (2) those who lived in small communities and married for the sole purpose of procreation (so Pliny the Elder).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the Dead Sea Scrolls deal with marital intimacy and abstinences, obviously in reference to sacred space and time.

Qumran’s obsessive concern for holiness and purity was so strict that the *Temple Scroll* makes ordinary Jews more like priests.⁴¹ It is explicitly said that they “are approaching the purity of the temple.”⁴² In this respect, “anyone who lies with his wife and has an ejaculation, for three days shall not enter anywhere in the city of the temple in which I shall install my name.”⁴³ *Damascus Document* sternly warns against approaching

²⁹Ibid., 14.

³⁰Gary Anderson, “Celibacy or Consummation in the Garden? Reflections on Early Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the Garden of Eden,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82/2 (1989), 128.

³¹Ibid., 76.

³²Ravid, 80.

³³Anderson, 128.

³⁴Ian C. Werret, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 243.

³⁵Contra Ravid, 80.

³⁶Loader, 91.

³⁷Ibid.94.

³⁸For a discussion on this subject, see Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21-24.

³⁹*Jewish Wars* 2.119-161; *Ant.* 18.18-22. Philo *Probus* 75-91. In *Hypothetica* 11.14, Philo says, “they repudiate marriage. . . no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife, because woman is a selfish creature and one addicted to jealousy in an immoderate degree.” (Philo’s texts are from C. D. Young, *Works of Philo* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993]).

⁴⁰*Jewish Wars* 2.160; Pliny *Natural History* 5.17.

⁴¹Robert R. Duke, *The Social Location of the Vision of Amram (4Q543-547)* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 54.

⁴²4QMMT 57.

⁴³11Q19 XLV.11-12; also CD XII.2.

wife “for lust (i.e. to act immorally), not according with the regulation.”⁴⁴ Sexual relation on Sabbaths and festivals even within marriage is strictly forbidden.⁴⁵

Philo and Josephus

The Essenes Philo evoked in his writings were celibates (*Probus* 75-91; *Hypothetica* 11.14). In addition, what Philo says about the conjugal life of Moses is of particular interest to our study. Indeed, Philo talks about the celibacy of Moses within his marriage, presumably after the encounter with God on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 (cf. *Shab.* 87a; *Pes.* 87b).

But in the first place, before assuming that office, it was necessary for him to purify not only his soul but also his body, so that it should be connected with and defiled by no passion, but should be pure from everything which is of a mortal nature, from all meat and drink, and from all connection with women (*De Vita Moses* II.14.68).

Aside from his remark on Essenes’ celibacy, Josephus clearly states that sexual intercourse must be for procreation: “But then, what are our laws about marriage? That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature has appointed, of a man with his wife, and that this be used only for the procreation of children.” (*Against Apion* 2:199).

Like in the Greco-Roman world, Josephus reflects also a double standard in his treatment of sexual activities within marriage. First, she is inferior to man and must be submissive to him. She is to fulfill her marital duties toward her husband. Josephus appeals to the “Scripture” to drive his point home: “for, says the Scripture, ‘A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.’ Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so, that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God has given the authority to the husband.” (*Against Apion* 2:201). Second, Josephus’ statement “a husband, therefore, is to lie only with his wife whom he has married; but to have to do with another man’s wife is a wicked thing.” (*Against Apion* 2:201), may be construed as advocating that husband’s sexual activities be confined only within his household. In other words, husband’s sexual activities with slaves are not excluded (cf. Lev 19:20-22; Deut 21:10-14).⁴⁶

Rabbinic Writings

There is an abundance of materials on marriage and related issues in this body of literature. Marriage (even early marriage) was so important that even though study of Torah takes precedence over it, the Rabbis concede that the need to marry should be met first. “If one has to study Torah and to marry a wife, he should first study and then marry. But if he cannot [live] without a wife, he should first marry and then study.” (*Kiddushin* 29b). While the reason why he cannot live without wife is not given, “there is evidence also of a realistic awareness that the role of sex within marriage was to prevent immorality and thoughts of immorality.”⁴⁷

But there is a stress for procreation as indispensable for marriage. This is made clear from the famous statement in *Yebamoth* 5.6,⁴⁸ which is expanding on Genesis 1:28:

No man may abstain from keeping the law *Be fruitful and multiply*, unless he already has children: according to the School of Shammai, two sons; according to the School of Hillel, a son and a daughter, for it is written, *Male and female created he them*. If he married a woman and lived with her ten years and she bare no child, it is not permitted him to abstain. If he divorced her she may be married to another and the second husband may live with her for ten years.

From this, we may highlight the following:

- (1) Marriage is a religious duty for men. This sense of duty led to disdain, or even condemn celibacy.⁴⁹

⁴⁴4Q269.12.4.

⁴⁵4Q270.9.1.18. The text reads, “He should not approach his wife on the day of [...],” which is understood to be a prohibition of sexual intimacy on the Sabbath (so Loader, 92).

⁴⁶Loader, 47-48. In this respect, Jewish practice was no different from that of Greco-Roman world where masters’ use of slaves of both sexes was common (so Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* [Oxford UP, 1999], 30-31). This is in line with the famous saying of Chariton *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 2.6.2 “for you are the master, and you have power over her, so she must do your will whether she likes it or not.” See also Seneca (*Controversies* 4) who states that unchastity was a “necessity for a slave.”

⁴⁷Harvey McArthur, “Celibacy in Judaism at the Time of Christian Beginnings,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25/2 (1987), 166. *Qiddushin* 29b-30a and *Sanhedrin* 76a-b are given as references.

⁴⁸The text used in this paper is that of Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1933).

⁴⁹At the end of the first cent. AD., “Rabbi R. Eliezer stated, He who does not engage in propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood.” (*Yebamoth* 63b). “R. Tanhum stated in the name of R. Hanilai: Any man who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, and without goodness.” (*Yebamoth* 62b). Only Simeon ben

- (2) However, as the law to have children has been or is being fulfilled, sexual activity within marriage may take the form of pleasure.⁵⁰
- (3) Either divorce and remarriage or polygamy is mandatory for barrenness of the wife (after ten years of marriage). A man is not permitted to abstain for the purpose of procreation.

Aside from the dissenting opinion of R. Johanan b. Baroka (i.e. duty or procreation of both man and woman), the commandment to procreate rests upon man.⁵¹ As *Yebamoth* 5.6 states, “The duty to be fruitful and multiply falls on the man but not on the woman.”

In spite of the fact that the principal Rabbis did not agree on the duration of abstinence from intercourse, some sort of regulation on account of marital obligations was present, as is the case in *Ketuboth* 5.6-7 (the divergent opinion of the Shammaites and Hillelites being repeated in *Eduyot* 4.10):

If a man vowed to have no intercourse with his wife, the School of Shammai say: She may consent for two weeks. And the School of Hillel say: For one week only. Disciples of the Sages may continue absent for thirty days against the will of their wives while they occupy themselves in the study of the Law; and labourers for one week. The *duty of marriage* enjoined in the Law [Ex 21:10] is: every day for them that are unoccupied; twice a week for labourers; once a week for ass-drivers; once every thirty days for camel-drivers; and once every six months for sailors. So R. Eliezer.

If a woman will not consent to her husband he may reduce her *Ketubah* by seven *denars* for every week. . . . So too, if a husband will not consent to his wife, her *Ketubah* may be increased by three *denars* a week.

With regard to marital rights, we see these expectations:

- (1) Though the man is expected to fulfill his marital obligations toward his wife, he can make a vow of abstinence (though limited in number of days), which the wife cannot do.
- (2) The consequence for wife’s refusal to conjugal rights is divorce with gradual reduction of *Ketubah*. In the same manner, husband’s refusal results in the gradual increase of *Ketubah*.

As for the sexual intercourse regulations, Pors writes,

Regardless of the intention of having sex – pleasure or pregnancy - strict regulations for sexual behavior were made by the Rabbis. For instance; the woman on top of the man, anal sex, talk during sex or looking at ‘that place’ during sex, could all result in injured babies. Defected children were a punishment for not following the regulations.⁵²

Another feature of this body of literature is the connection between marital obligations and the sacred (space and time). Simkovich notes the shift from condemnation of intimacy on Sabbath in the Second Temple period to indulgence in the experiential joy of the Sabbath in rabbinic literature.⁵³ We have already mentioned the strict view of Jubilees and Damascus Documents, both found in Qumran, i.e. prohibition of sexual intercourse during Sabbath on penalty of death. But this has changed in the rabbinic literature, as *Ketuboth* 62b reads:

How often are scholars to perform their marital duties? — Rab Judah in the name of Samuel replied: Every Friday night. That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Rab Judah, and some say R. Huna, or again, as others say, R. Nahman, stated: This [refers to the man] who performs his marital duty every Friday night. Judah the son of R. Hiyya and son-in-law of R. Jannai was always spending his time in the school house but every Sabbath eve he came home. Whenever he arrived the people saw a pillar of light moving before him. Once he was so attracted by his subject of study [that he forgot to return home]. Not Seeing that Sign, R. Jannai said to those [around him], ‘Lower his bed, for had Judah been alive he would not have neglected the performance of his marital duties’.

As stated here, the time for scholars to engage in physical intimacy is Friday night, giving a praised reason to rush home for that intimacy.⁵⁴ So, how do we account for that shift from condemnation to encouragement of marital intimacy on Sabbath? Simovich attempts to explain:

’Azzai (early 2nd cent. AD), though considered as an outstanding scholar (*Sotah* 9.15), is reported as unmarried from Tannaitic or Amoraic rabbis (McArthur, 168). For a longer treatment on celibacy in first century rabbinical world, see Heth, 58-68.

⁵⁰This is clearly reflected in the rabbinic permission of sexual intercourse during pregnancy (*Nidd.* 31a); see Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

⁵¹So Ilan, 107; David S. Shapiro, “Be Fruitful and Multiply,” *A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 13/4 (1973), 48-49.

⁵²Ann Hamer Pors, “Sexuality and Gender Roles in First Century Greco-Roman,” Aarhus University (2013), p. 33; available from <http://nobelspec.au.dk-20062218.pdf> (accessed 17 March, 2015), 33.

⁵³Malka Z. Simkovich, “Intimacy on Shabbat: Was it always a Mitzvah? A Surprising Look at Shabbat in the Second Temple Period,” <http://thetorah.com/intimacy-on-shabbat/> (accessed March 11, 2015).

⁵⁴Simkovich, “Intimacy on Shabbat.”

Second Temple Jewish texts may have been responding to a Greek culture that embraced physical pleasure, whereas Rabbinic Jewish texts may have been responding to a Christian culture that embraced asceticism. Nevertheless, we can analyze these sources not only in terms of the broader Hellenist and early Christian cultures that influenced them, but also in terms of their different intended audiences. The Second Temple texts that have survived are sectarian documents written by Jews who most likely represented a *very small percentage* of the Jewish population, whereas the Rabbinic texts regarding the Sabbath may have been regarded as authoritative to a broad lay community who looked to the Rabbis for Rabbinic guidance.⁵⁵

Corollary to the issue of abstinence is celibacy within marriage. Abstentions from sexual intercourse within marriage (temporary or permanent) are reported in the Rabbinic writings. McArthur cites Adam's abstinence in the case of Seth who was begotten only 130 years after the conception of Cain and Abel ('*Erub.* 18b), couples' abstinence in the ark during the flood (*Sanh.* 108b; y. *Ta'an.* 1.6), and abstinence during time of want or famine (*Gen. Rab.* 31:12; 34:7).⁵⁶ But of particular interest for our study is the concept of spiritual marriage which intends to resolve the tension between sex and the sacred.⁵⁷ In this respect, on the day of Atonement, marital intercourse is forbidden (*Yoma* 8.1). We have already mentioned Philo's writing on Moses' celibacy within marriage. But the idea is also present in the rabbinic writing.⁵⁸ As an application of Exodus 19:15, sexual intercourse will be forbidden in the time to come (Midrash on Ps 146).⁵⁹

Summary

There is a diversity of materials and opinions in the Jewish writings concerning marriage, sexual obligations and abstentions. The purpose of marriage varies from sexual enjoyment to prevention of sexual immorality, but chiefly for procreation. Regulations on sexual activities within marriage are given, mostly expecting decency from the wife. Though husband and wife have mutual marital obligations, sexual fidelity on the part of the wife is enjoined. Finally, one notes the connection between marital obligations and the sacred, leading to abstinence or ascetism in marriage for some.

With the foregoing background in mind, we may now deal with Paul's teaching. Paul (as well as first century Christians) was at home with both the Greco-Roman and Jewish thought-patterns and practices with respect to sexual relationships and related issues. Paul evokes some similar aspects of these concepts and practices. But as Peterman points it out, Paul had to instruct Christians that "conversion to Christianity entail significant changes for the sexual relationship within marriage."⁶⁰

IV. PAUL, MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

It is no exaggeration to state that Paul's view has been significantly shaped by the biblical perspective on marriage, sexual relationships and abstentions. A study on his view cannot proceed without his understanding of the Old Testament, particularly the Pentateuch, and Jesus' teaching that touch on the subject.

The OT Backgrounds

God had created male and female. In the first account of creation, the purpose of marriage appears to be for procreation (Gen 1:26-28); in the second account, for companionship, with an explicit statement that physical union between the two is good for humans (2:18-24). But beyond that, this male and female fellowship, as Richard M. Davidson argues, is a mutual communion, which expresses both the "full meaning of human existence," and more importantly "*the essence of Imago Dei.*"⁶¹ With this in view, procreation in marriage is a "special added blessing,"⁶² not its primary purpose.

⁵⁵Ibid. (emphasis supplied).

⁵⁶McArthur, 172.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 171, notes, "apparently Moses' wife, Zipporah, was most unhappy with this new development [Moses' abstinence]. According to the tradition in '*Abot R. Nat.*9:2, Zipporah shared her complaint with Miriam, who in turn passed it on to Aaron, and thus it became a factor in Aaron's and Miriam's speaking against Moses-though Num 12 provides no basis for this gossip. In *Sifre*, the early Tannaitic commentary on Numbers, it is reported that when Eldad and Medad began to prophesy because the Spirit was on them (Num 11:26-30), Zipporah exclaimed, 'Woe to their wives'- presumably because she believed they would now experience her frustrations."

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Peterman, 164.

⁶¹Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26/1 (1988), 8.

⁶²Ibid., 10.

The connection between sexual relations and the sacred is found in Exodus 19:10-13. God's instruction is that people consecrate themselves to maintain a state of purity acceptable for the manifestation and presence of the Lord (19:10). For Moses, that means "do not come near your wives." (19:15). This is obvious on account of the fact that sexual relations incur ritual defilement (Lev 15:18),⁶³ which is not compatible with the presence of the holy God.

Forbidden sexual relations are elaborated in Leviticus 18-20. But the issue of conjugal rights is also a concern in the Pentateuch. Exodus 21:10-11 presents the case through the betrothal of a master with his slave: "If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights."⁶⁴ And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money." The text implies that even in a polygamous situation, the wife should claim her conjugal rights and the husband is bound to perform that moral obligation toward her.⁶⁵ Failure to do so may result in the severance of the relation.

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus affirms marriage and marital intimacy as God had designed it in the beginning. He affirms the male and female fellowship and mutual communion, with an explicit statement that it is God Himself who joins the two in their physical union (Matt 19:4-6). That being the case, marriage is indissoluble and there should be no divorce. Remarriage, which involves extra-marital sexual relations, is adultery (19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:16). Jesus' statement implies also that married persons should flee from sexual immorality (*porneia*). Committing *porneia* is valid ground for divorce and remarriage (19:6; cf. Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8).

But Jesus equally highlights the value of celibacy. Like marriage, celibacy is also a gift from God (Matt 19:11-12).⁶⁶ Taking into consideration the context of discussion on marriage, marital celibacy (ascetic marriage) is not in the mind of Jesus.⁶⁷ In other words, sexual intercourses are to be enjoyed within marriage for those who are married.

Paul on Marriage and Sexuality

Facing Asceticism and Sexual Immorality. Paul's treatment on marriage and sexuality is set within his correspondence with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7. At the outset, it is clear that Paul was waging war on two fronts: asceticism and rampant sexual immorality in the Church. As Carolyn Osiek and David Balch concur "within the Church some males continued their – for them unremarkable – behavior of using prostitutes to take care of their sexual tensions; others, male and female, were rejecting all sexual activity even within marriage."⁶⁸

In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul begins with the statement "it is not good for man to touch a woman (*kalon anthrōpō gunaikos mē haptesthai*). The expression "to touch a woman" is an euphemism for having sexual relations (with a woman).⁶⁹ In his article "1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV," in 1980, Gordon D. Fee criticizes the NIV translation which renders it "It is good for a man not to marry,"⁷⁰ without adding an explanatory footnote.⁷¹

⁶³For an opposite view, see René Gerhing, "Is Sexuality Impure? An Alternative Interpretation of Leviticus 15:18," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 24/2 (2013), 75-115.

⁶⁴Étan Levine, "Biblical Women's Marital Rights," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 63 (1997 - 2001), 94, notes, "although the first two elements of the triad, *se'erah* and *kesutah*, are universally recognized as signifying "her food" and "her clothing," there has never been unanimity as to the meaning of *'onatah*." Then she quotes N. Sarna, saying, "the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Targums all understood it to refer to the woman's conjugal rights. If correct, it would reflect a singular recognition in the laws of the ancient Near East that a wife is entitled to sexual gratification."

⁶⁵Levine, 93; Jeffrey A. White, "Divorce and a Deafening Silence: Exegesis of Exodus 21:10-11 in the Twentieth Century," Senior Thesis, Liberty University (2011), 14-15.

⁶⁶Shaji George Kochuthara, *The Concept of Sexual Pleasure in Catholic Moral Tradition* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 2007), 111.

⁶⁷See *ibid.*, 112-113.

⁶⁸Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 113.

⁶⁹Josephus talks of Pharaoh who was preparing himself to enjoy (*hapsasthai*, to have sexual relations with) Sarah (*Ant.* 1.163).

⁷⁰Gordon D. Fee, "1 Corinthians 7:1 in NIV," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 23/4 (1980), 307-314.

⁷¹Subsequent NIV version seems to have heard Fee's strong remark by providing footnote, "or 'It is not good for a man to touch a woman.'"

Fee cites several occurrences to the effect that *hapsesthai* should not be translated “to marry” but “to touch a woman.”⁷²

J. Carl Laney summarizes the different positions so far put forward for the statement “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” in 1 Corinthians 7:1b:

It is debated whether the apostle was (1) asserting his position in his own words,⁷³ (2) quoting a Corinthian slogan that he accepted, or (3) quoting a Corinthian slogan that he rejected. A more likely possibility is that Paul was quoting a Corinthian slogan, but one he wanted to modify.⁷⁴

While Fee concurs with the prevalent opinion that it was a Corinthian slogan,⁷⁵ he further adds, “in principle he [Paul] agrees with their [Corinthian] premise: it is good, from his own point of view, for a man not to have relations with a woman. But he altogether rejects their applying it to the marriage relationship.”⁷⁶ Paul is saying, “this is true only for the single, not for the married.”⁷⁷

The Corinthians’ inquiry on the subject is clearly tainted with ascetism,⁷⁸ which was clearly in the air during that period.⁷⁹ A diversity of views was held in the time of Paul regarding the morality and healthfulness of intercourse.⁸⁰ Ascetics at Corinth advocated celibacy; no wonder, they wanted Paul to make it obligatory.⁸¹ They wanted celibate marriages.⁸² Such ascetism seems to be the result of their false theology, i.e. new eschatological existence which requires abstinence from sex within marriage and denial of marriage for the virgins.⁸³

⁷²Ibid., 308. These are: Plato *Leges* 8.840a; Aristotle *Politica* 7.14.12; Gen 20:6 and Ruth 2:9 LXX; Prov 6:29 LXX; Plutarch *Alex. M.* 21.4; Josephus *Ant.* 1.163; Marcus Aurelius *Ant.* 1.17.6. Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 308-309, recognizes that the reason why NIV translators translated the text into “to marry” lies in their understanding of the context. The context “sees the whole chapter as addressing the question of ‘to marry or not to marry’ and vv. 1-7 as an introduction to the whole. Thus it is suggested that on this question Paul prefers celibacy (v 1) but that because of sexual passions (v 2 interpreted in light of vv 9, 36) he concedes marriages (vv 2, 6). If there is a marriage, then there should be full sexual relations (vv 3-4) except for occasional periods of abstinence for prayer (v 5).”

⁷³J. Carl Laney, “Paul and the Permanence of Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 25/3 (1982), 283. Note that the phrase *kalon* + dative (“it is good for . . .”) is Pauline in two other times in the same chapter (vv. 8, 26b). In addition, 7:26a has *kalon* (“this is good [because of the present distress]).

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 307-314. So also Peterman, 169, “Paul cites one of their own beliefs that avoiding sexual intimacy with women is good.” Also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in 1 Cor 7:10-11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100/4 (1981), 603. To bring out the full force of *kalon*, Mursphy-O’Connor paraphrases the Corinthian slogan, “abstinence from sexual intercourse is a moral good.” (Ibid.).

⁷⁶Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 313; so Loader, 101. Some Bible translations (for examples Moffat and NEB) do not agree with Fee. Their translation of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 reflects the spiritual/celibate marriage view.

⁷⁷Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 312. It is important to emphasize that “Paul speaks to Christian married couples who apparently have chosen to deny the validity of any sexual relations in their marriages.” (Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011], 200).

⁷⁸In this regard, Loader (100), writes, “belief in a future without sex may explain why some believers saw it as their lot to live already now as they would then, and others, that they should seek to persuade all to so live.”

⁷⁹Raymond F. Collins, *Fist Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 253.

⁸⁰Peterman (170) notes that Epicurus considered it as harmful and his opinion influenced medical practice, prompting many upper class men to adopt ascetism.

⁸¹J. C. Laney, “Paul and the Permanence of Marriage,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/3 (1982), 283; Heth, 69.

⁸²Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 312, advocates for the difference between celibacy and singleness, where celibacy is abstinence from sexual relations within marriage; see also David Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 52/2 (2001), 233.

⁸³Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1,” 313. Had not Jesus taught that there would be no marriage in the life to come (Matt 22:3)? Fee, 313, ensures to explain that some form of Hellenistic dualism entered their concept of being “spiritual.” We should remember that there were factions in the church of Corinth. One of these may have been of those who advocates “libertinism,” indulging in sexual immorality (6:18). Likely, these used to say “all

Purpose of Sexual Intercourse in Marriage. While Paul was aware of both the Stoics' teaching that to marry and have children was a moral duty for a man,⁸⁴ and his Jewish heritage on the procreational purpose of marriage, he directs his response toward resolving the actual problems the Corinthian Church was facing: ascetism and sexual immorality, as we have mentioned. One cannot overlook his three times use of the imperative in present tense which underscore habitual and continuous action: *echetō* ("let him/her have") in 7:2; *apodidotō* ("let him/her give), in 7:3; and *mē apostereite* ("stop depriving"), in 7:5. These are commands, not permissions.⁸⁵ This does not mean that Paul rules out procreation as a reason for the act and that to avoid sexual immoralities is the only reason for marriage.⁸⁶ Moreover, Paul does not lower the value of marriage,⁸⁷ a theme he expounds elsewhere (Eph 5:28ff).

In the two preceding chapters, he has just dealt with the incestuous problem in the Church, "such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles." (1 Cor 5:1). Then Paul was aware of the Corinthians' frequentation and sexual intercourses with prostitutes (6:12-19). Therefore, even though Paul's preference is singleness,⁸⁸ he exhorts Christians to marry to avoid the trap of *porneia* ("sexual immorality," 7:2). It is significant to note that the word is in plural which likely denotes several forms of sexual immoralities. Extramarital sexual relations were readily available in the Greco-Roman world.⁸⁹

Conjugal Rights and Duties. Moreover, it is obvious that Paul considers conjugal rights as a moral obligation within marriage (1 Cor 7:3-5). The phrase "let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband," refers to "sexual relations within marriage."⁹⁰ Conjugal activity, according to 7:3, is a debt (*opheilē*) and not doing it is to defraud (*apostereō*, to cheat, to steal, to withhold something that is rightfully owed) the spouse (cf. 1 Cor 6:7,8 which uses the same verb: "why not rather be cheated [*apostereisthe*]).⁹¹ Just as Greco-Roman and Jewish marriage certificates indicate,⁹² the indispensability of the act in marriage is also a mark of Pauline instruction.

things are lawful to me," "Food for the stomach and the stomach for the food," (6:12,13), thus attracting the ire of Paul to say that our body is the temple of the Lord (6:15-20).

⁸⁴Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 53.

⁸⁵Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 105-106.

⁸⁶Ibid., 106.

⁸⁷As David E. Garland opines: the fact that he does not say anything about love between husband and wife cannot be used as lowering marriage, since that discussion was not at issue (*1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7a [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 256).

⁸⁸Paul gives three reasons for his preference: (1) the present distress or troubles in marriage (7:26,28), (2) the shortness of time (7:29), and (3) the occupation/care of the things of the Lord instead of those of the spouse (7:32,33). Cf the celibate view of Qumran for those who are living in the holy place (Pliny *Natural History* 5.17; Philo *Hypothetica* 11; Josephus *War* 2.120-122;

⁸⁹Musonius Rufus (AD 30-101) said, "man who has relations with a courtesan or a woman who has no husband wrongs no one for he does not destroy anyone's hope of children." (*Musonius Rufus: "The Roman Socrates,"* trans. Cora Lutz, *Yale Classical Studies* 10 [1947], 42. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-20 where Paul refers to union with prostitutes. Prostitution was institutionalized. One thousands "sacred prostitutes" were serving at the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth (Ferguson, 70). The famous statement of the orator Demosthenes (4th cent. BC) is revealing: "We have courtesans [*hetairai*] for pleasure, concubines to attend to our needs, and wives to give us legitimate children." (*Oration* 59.122). The *hetairai* were not simply prostitutes but provided companionship and sexual entertainment (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 70).

⁹⁰Garland, 256.

⁹¹See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthian*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 279-280.

⁹²See the marriage contract between Apollonius and Thermion in Barrett, 40. A Jewish marriage contract reads: "[Date][Place & names missing]... that you will be my wife according to the law of Moses and the Judeans and I will feed you and clothe you and I will bring you (into my house) by means of your *ketubah* and I owe you the sum of 400 denarii ... together with the due amount of your food and your clothes." *Marriage Contract, AD 126, Palestine (AM126 i.e. P.Yad. 10)*, quoted in Brewer, 231. Brewer goes on: "The phrase 'feed and clothe' is also very common in Jewish marriage contracts (as detailed above), and is often accompanied, as here, by some kind of euphemistic reference to conjugal rights. Here we find two references to food and clothing with each followed by a different euphemistic phrase: 'I will bring you into my house' and 'your bed'. This threefold group is based on the threefold marriage obligations in Exodus 21:10-11, to provide food, clothing, and love." (Ibid., 232.).

Absolute Equality and Mutuality in Sexual Obligations. But for Paul, it is not merely a matter of moral obligation. It is an equal mutual moral obligation between husband and wife. For the Greco-Romans as well as the Jews, for whom sexuality within marriage was the husband's privilege and the wife's obligation,⁹³ Paul's position on egalitarian treatment was surprising, if not astonishing.⁹⁴ But his egalitarian treatment is all the more extraordinary as he implies in his teaching that both husband and wife can be accountable for marital (in)fidelity. James A. Brundage reminds us that in the first century Greco-Roman world, "as was common throughout the ancient Near East, although fidelity was demanded of wives, it was not required of husbands."⁹⁵ Here is another element of Pauline contribution to Christian principles: "what happens outside of heterosexual marriage is sexually immoral and to be guarded against."⁹⁶

There is no trace of double standard in Paul. The gist of his egalitarian treatment is found in his instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:2-4 (NASB):

because of [sexual] immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Moreover, the notion of absolute equality in marital relations should be further demonstrated in mutuality. Paul expresses this mutuality in the use of the words: *homoiōs* ("likewise," 7:2), *allēlous* ("one another," 7:5), and *symphonon* ("mutual consent," "agreement," 7:5).

Sexual Abstinences within Marriage and the Sacred. It is significant to note the verbal construction of his command before giving any reason for abstinence from the act. *Mē* + present imperative of *apostereō* + *allēlous*, clearly signifies "stop depriving one another" (as in NASB), "stop defrauding" (cf. KJV), to underscore its importance in marriage. While it is recognized that there was a tension between sex and the sacred in Judaism (as it was in other ancient religions), and the notion of sacred required temporal or permanent abstinence from sexual intercourses, Paul on his part states it can be interrupted only for prayer. But Paul instructs that only a brief period of abstinence is allowed (7:5), and such deprivation and its duration must be made through mutual consent between husband and wife (7:6).

Poirier and Frankovic's opinion that abstinence for prayer is "best understood in ritual purity concerns,"⁹⁷ deserves attention.⁹⁸ In other words, Paul does not think merely of a time devoted to prayer. Just like the adherents of ancient religions, Paul was also holding to the thought system of ritual impurity, in this case, through sexual intercourse in marriage.⁹⁹ The statement in *Testament of Nephtali* 8:8 that there should be a time to abstain for prayer is brought up as a support, with the understanding that the Testament is concerned with the notion of ritual (im)purity. Based on some examples such as Judith 12:7-8 and Epistle of Aristeeus 305-306 for further support, it is claimed that "whether routine or special, prayer is an encounter with the sacred and must be undertaken in a state of purity."¹⁰⁰

But the idea of ritual impurity as reason for abstinence for Christians has not received much support, and it seems to be untenable. First Paul is silent about the notion of purity in conjugal relations. Second, if it was a rule to be enjoined, then there would be no need at all for Paul to instruct them to withdraw by mutual consent.¹⁰¹ Third, Paul's position on ritual observances as revealed in his epistles cannot be overlooked. Even though, first century Christians, including Paul, as the book of Acts reports (3:1; 10:14; 15:1; 20:16; 21:26), continued to observe ritual laws, practice of ritual purities was not imposed to the Church. Rather, it was set aside, if not denigrated in the NT. Cumulative evidences¹⁰² unmistakably point to the direction that the notion and observances of ritual purity were done away.

⁹³Fee, *First Corinthians*, 280.

⁹⁴Peterman, 170,171.

⁹⁵James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 13.

⁹⁶Peterman, 170.

⁹⁷Poirier and Frankovich, 1.

⁹⁸The idea of ritual purity as a requisite for the sacred is also found in McArthur, 171-173, but McArthur does not make any connection between it and 1 Corinthians 7:5.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁰¹So Fee, *First Epistle to Corinthian*, 281.

¹⁰²This being the case was clear from Peter's interaction with Cornelius in Acts 10, when the Gospel crossed beyond the confines of Judaism. No person was to be called common (*koinon*) or unclean (*akatharton*) (10:28), firstly referring to Gentiles, but by extension, to all who were until then considered common or unclean. Peter's behavior at Antioch to withdraw from table fellowship and association with Gentile Christians because of the fear of Pharisaic Jewish Christians who came from Jerusalem provoked the indignation of Paul (Gal 2:11-

In light of the foregoing discussion, it would be incongruous to see Paul imposing practice of ritual purity to the members in Corinth. Paul does not see sex as defiling.¹⁰³ The plain reading of his instruction appears to be time devoted to prayer.¹⁰⁴

Other Pauline Evidences. Paul's high view of marriage and conjugal relations is found elsewhere in his epistles. It is clear from these writings that Paul does not consider marriage as exclusively to remedy passionate desire, as Stowers argues.¹⁰⁵ While the idea of avoiding immorality is still present (Eph 5:3), and the thought of procreation as purpose of marriage left out, his concern for loving relationship between husband and wife is pervasive (Eph 5:25,28,33). It is in that loving relationship that the wife is told to submit herself to the husband, just as the Church submits herself to Christ (5:22,24,33). There should not be prohibition of marriage and conjugal relations. It is part of God's creation, therefore it is good (1 Tim 4:3-4). Conjugal relations should be undertaken according to godly regulations, though. "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled." (Heb 13:4).

V. CONCLUSION

While Paul's view shares some similarities with that of his contemporaries, Paul's difference outweighs these similarities. Sexual activities within marriage should not be considered as a sexual outlet for sexual urges, and no excess is allowed. But couples are instructed to mutually attend to the conjugal needs of the spouses. Absolute equality and mutuality in Paul's directive "defies convention."¹⁰⁶ In sum, for Paul, "marriage provides the place for legitimate expression of sexuality. Sexual relations are a good activity in their own right and not simply the means of maintaining the marriage fellowship or producing children."¹⁰⁷ It is only then that marriage can be preserved and couples will find fulfillment and happiness in their marriage.

Davidson Razafiarivony. "Marriage and Sexual Obligations according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* , vol. 22, no. 8, 2017, pp. 58–70.

21). In Colossians 2:20-23, Christians are told to not subject themselves to the prohibitions "do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which clearly have something to do with ritual purity laws. In Romans 14:14, Paul makes it clear that "there is nothing unclean (*koinon*) of itself." Similar idea is found in 1 Tim 4:3, where some who held ritualistic view forbade members to marry and commanded them to abstain from foods. But Paul sternly warned the church against these people.

¹⁰³Morris, 106.

¹⁰⁴"Prayer must be unhurried. In the rush of life it may be necessary sometimes to take exceptional measures to secure a quiet, leisurely intercourse with God." (Ibid., 106).

¹⁰⁵Stanley K. Stowers, "Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy," in *Rediscribing Paul and the Corinthians*, ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 226.

¹⁰⁶Garland, 247.

¹⁰⁷Peterman, 172.