

### CHAPTER VIII 1 CORINTHIANS 7—SEX AND THE MARRIED CHRISTIAN

Many good Christians argue from 1 Timothy 2:12<sup>76</sup> that women can have no authority over a man and no wife may have authority over her husband. But Paul explains the relationship of a husband and wife very differently in 1 Corinthians 7:

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

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

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Notice first how carefully Paul treats husbands and wives exactly the same.<sup>77</sup> There is no distinction in this passage. And notice the application of the Genesis 2 principle. While Paul does not mention Genesis or the Law, what better example is there of the ideal of a husband and wife being one flesh? The wife's body does not belong to her alone, and neither does the husband's body belong to him alone. Each has given up so much of themselves that even their bodies belong to the other!

Does this mean that the wife has authority over the husband? Absolutely! He may not deny her his marital obligation, and she has authority over his body! In the most intimate of biblical passages, there is not a hint of subordination or submission, other than *mutual* submission. This is what "one flesh" means, but we understand rightly that one flesh involves much more than sex. Rather, a mutually submissive sexual relationship must be the product of a mutually submissive relationship at all other levels.

The critical points are these. First, Paul goes to great lengths to point out that wives and husbands have an identical duty to the other. The one flesh principle is

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Tim. 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

<sup>77</sup> We will not consider the rest of chapter 7 in detail, but the remainder of the chapter continues Paul's precise language treating men and women equally.

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perfectly symmetrical. The duty owed by one is necessarily owed by the other—a concept dramatically contrary to both Jewish and Greek culture of the day. Second, there is no reference to the curse of Eve still being in effect. Men aren't allowed to dominate their wives. Rather, each has the same rights—but without being the same.