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Volume 22
Issue 536

Sacrificing Marriage on the Altar of I Corinthians 7

As Seen in the Tragic Example of the Life of John Wesley

Part 1 of 2

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Life is hard enough in this age without the added burden of the misapplication of Scripture. One must be careful in reading the early epistles of Paul, and always read them in light of his latter “perfection epistles.” No greater example can be found than I Corinthians chapter 7.



her unborn baby in Sydney, Australia, who died because she refused a blood transfusion while clinging to her twisted understanding of Acts 15:19-21, 28-29 (and Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10; Deuteronomy 12:23).

Without a doubt, the twisting of Scripture can have destructive effects on life. Examples are numerous, and while most are not so newsworthy, they are nonetheless destructive.

THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF MISAPPLYING SCRIPTURE

As also in all the epistles, speaking in them concerning these things, in which are some things hard to apprehend, which the unlearned and unstable are twisting, as the rest of the Scriptures also, to their own destruction (II Peter 3:16, CV).

A correct understanding and application of Scriptures is crucial. The twisting of Scriptures beyond their context can have quite destructive effects.

Consider for example Jamie Coots, “snake handling” pastor of the *Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name* of Middlesboro, KY, who died after being bitten by a rattlesnake during a church service. He was attempting to apply and follow Mark 16:18; Luke 10:19; Acts 28:5.

Or, consider the death of a 28-year-old mother and

We will consider the dangerous twisting of Paul’s words in I Corinthians 7. This chapter was, and still remains, foundational for Gnostic propaganda. From the wresting of this single chapter was born the doctrines of the celibate priesthood and the “necessary evil of sexuality.”

One of the great blemishes which stands shamefully in the life of John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Wesleyan and Methodist denominations, is his notorious relationships with women. It has occupied many biographical and church history pages, and not by the enemies of Wesley, but objectively by his sympathetic friends, many of them Methodist scholars themselves.

I grew up in Evangelical Christendom and as a very

(see *MARRIAGE*, page 469)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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ABBREVIATION KEY

<i>Scripture Version</i>	Concordance (Knoch)
(Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the <i>Bible Student's Version</i>).	CL: A Critical Lexicon and Concordance (Bullinger)
CV: Concordant Literal Version	CWS: Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates)
DAR: Darby Translation	FoS: Figures of Speech (Bullinger)
DT: Dabhar Translation	SEC: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible	TGL: Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon
KJV: King James Version	UR: Unsearchable Riches
RE: Rotterdam's Emphasized Bible	VED: Vine's Expository Dictionary
WT: Weymouth Translation	YAC: Young's Analytical Concordance
YLT: Young's Literal Translation	
<i>Reference Sources</i>	<i>Reference Notations</i>
AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)	cf. – compare
BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon	e.g. – for example
CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)	et al. – and others
CC: Concordant Commentary (Knoch)	etc. – et cetera (and so on)
CKC: Concordant Keyword	ff. – and the following
	i.e., – that is

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MARRIAGE (continued from front page)

young person began to devour the biographies of prominent Christians. At first they were works written for juveniles, but as I grew older I began to appreciate the more serious, balanced, thorough works that would dare to present the flawed side of their subjects. No better example of a flawed side was found than in the many biographies of Wesley.

In the first part of his adult life, Paul's words "I would that all men were even as I myself" (:7) sadly dominated Wesley's life; while in the later part of his life he lived under the edict of Paul's "they that have wives be as though they had none" (:29).

These two very sad abuses of I Corinthians 7 on Wesley continue to find their destructive effects upon believers of our day.

Using Wesley's life as a backdrop to see the dangers of misapplying I Corinthians 7 is not meant to be disparaging of Wesley himself. After all, he was merely a man – blemished, as we all are – but one that had inherited, from the Christianity that had influenced him, destructive Gnostic error that would wreak substantial and scarring havoc not only on himself but the many women in his life. So, in reality, Wesley was a victim himself of the bondage of the Gnostic error.

One of the advantages in studying history is to learn from the painful mistakes of others.

Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.¹

THE GNOSTIC ERROR

Most of what Christendom understands as "right and wrong" (*i.e.*, moral) stems, not from the teaching of Scripture, but from the teachings of the Gnostics.

Gnosticism was a syncretistic religious system made up of Oriental theosophy and Greek philosophy. Its chief tenet was that "matter" is evil and that "spirit" is good ... Gnosticism reached the peak of its power around A.D. 150.²

1. Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Irish statesman.
2. Roy Gingrich, *The History of the Church*, Riverside Press, 1980, p. 16.

Simply put, the destructive teaching of the Gnostics classified everything under the banners of "good or evil," which they associated respectively with "spiritual or physical." To them, the spiritual sphere was good, while the physical sphere was evil. Thus, the Gnostics mastered and propagated the concept that all that related to the earth and "the flesh" (sexuality and marriage especially³) were "evil." The doctrine of the Gnostics was adopted by early Christendom (Roman Catholicism) and led to horrendous religious abuse.

The Greek Gnostics established a "new sexual morality," a view eventually embraced by Christendom. Early Christian Theologian, Clement of Alexandria (150-215) wrote that,

Our ideal is not to experience desire at all.

Lifelong virginity became considered a holy state. "Christian marriage" – marriage *without* sexual intercourse – was highly valued. Classical civilization and Judaism had long taught that most sexual pleasure is harmless or good. The clergy's new sexual code of "*singleness of heart*" was met with uncertainty and confusion.⁴ ►

3. For a closer look at the influence of the Gnostics on Christendom and its view of sexuality see the author's work *Due Benevolence: A Study of Biblical Sexuality*.

One striking example of Gnostic influence remaining in modern religion culture is the Roman Catholic celibate priesthood. Those who are of the highest spirituality and serving the church must deny their sexual natures.

The principle of creation is that "*it is not good that man should be alone*" (Genesis 2:18) and Paul later reveals that the forbidding of sexuality ("*forbidding to marry*," I Timothy 4:3) is actually the "*teaching of demons*" (:1).

The Roman Catholic Church has historically had a disproportionate number of sexual problems among its clergy. This remains a serious issue even in our day.

Our local newspaper ran an article highlighting the continued problem, even in rural Pennsylvania:

"The Rev. Martin Cingle is the eighth local cleric in the Altoona-Johnstown region over the past decade to be accused of sex crimes.

[In the past decade] at least six priests and two Franciscan friars who were serving – or previously served – parishes in the Altoona-Johnstown Roman Catholic Diocese have been accused in civil suits, suspended or charged with crimes alleging the abused others, in nearly every case young boys. — *The Tribune-Democrat*; October 8, 2015

These sexual problems are not a peculiar defect in the men who have served the Roman institution. Rather, the root culprit lies squarely with the doctrinal error of the Vatican itself. These men are additionally cruel victims themselves.

4. *Sins of the Body, Passions of the Mind* (chapter 5, When Jesus Became God), Richard E. Rubenstein, Harcourt (1999).

GNOSTIC INTERPRETATION OF I CORINTHIANS 7 AND ITS SAD INFLUENCE ON CHRISTENDOM

The Gnostics had a field-day when it came to I Corinthians 7. They mistranslated, misinterpreted and misapplied (twisted) this chapter to champion their religious moral causes. Among their principal passages were:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman (:1);

I would that all men were even as I myself (:7);

I say that ... they who have wives be as though they had none (:29).

Their interpretation went like this:

We all know that the body is evil and sinful. The height of such wickedness is sexuality. Therefore, “*it is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (:1). Thus the most spiritual men are celibate (:7). However, if a man is not spiritual and can’t manage to control himself (:9) the least evil choice would be found in a state of marriage (:2). Yet, the ultimate goal, even in marriage, would be to achieve marital celibacy,⁵ discontinuing all sexual aspects of the husband-wife relationship (:29).

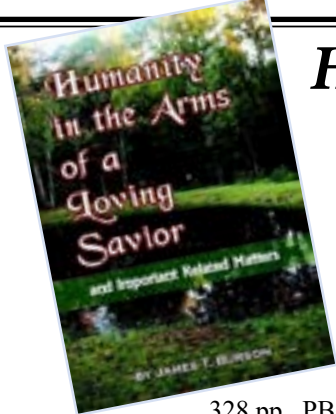
5. Marital-celibacy was also known as “chaste-marriage” and was a feature of the period from the second to the tenth Christian centuries. An Anglo-Saxon queen was actually canonized for refusing intercourse with her husband (James Cleugh, *Love Locked Out*, Tandem Books, 1967, p. 10).

This is what Gnosticism looks like. This is why, for example, under Gnostic influence:

- The Roman Catholic church father Origen (185-254) castrated himself so as to be a eunuch for the kingdom of God, and actively discouraged sexual intercourse even between husbands and wives; and campaigned to have the Song of Solomon removed from Scripture.⁶
- Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) decreed that married couples could not receive communion after intercourse unless they had first done penance,⁷ and also forbade sex while a mother was nursing her baby lest the milk be spoiled or contaminated.⁸
- Roman Catholicism prohibited marital sex on Sundays, fourteen days before Christmas, and forty days before Easter.⁹

However, the influence of Gnosticism is not limited to Catholicism. To imagine that Protestantism is exempt from its strong influence is simply to be ignorant of history. Even to this day there are teachers within Christendom who champion the Gnostics’ 3-fold creed interpreted from I Corinthians 7:

- 6. P.R. Dawson, *Marriage: A Taste of Heaven*, Gospel Themes Press, 1995.
- 7. Peter Gardelia, *Innocent Ecstasy*, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 11, citing Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, 2.53-54, 59; also, *The City of God*, Book XIV, chapters 16-24, and John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 57ff.
- 8. *Ibid.*
- 9. James Cleugh, *Love Locked Out*, Tandem Books, 1967, pp. 255, 257, 258, 259, 260.



Humanity in the Arms of a Loving Savior and Important Related Matters

by — James T. Burson

The chapters of this book are connected in this singular manner: always, there is the attempt to display the grandeur of God’s purpose in creation. Never is it proposed that God had a good idea which went awry, and thereafter He supposedly has been picking up the pieces. Our confidence, as believers, may always be premised on an overriding assurance that God does not behave like a mortal, being hesitant, exasperated, indecisive or hoping for the best outcome. This volume expresses the author’s confidence in a far greater outcome of the entire human epoch than that which is generally proposed to the world. The flow of human history will not end in a groan, but rather a crescendo of praise by all to a true God of love and mercy. God will not only win, but He will radiate His victory over absolutely all that He has made; no other truth can settle the heart like this.

328 pp., PB
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- (1) male-female physical contact is not good;¹⁰
- (2) singleness is spiritually superior;¹¹
- (3) it is godly for those already married to live as though they weren't.¹²

JOHN WESLEY AND WOMEN¹³

Anyone familiar with the story of Wesley knows of the trail of complicated female relationships throughout his life. They were abundant and often quite tragic, as a result of his conflicting need for what he called “unholy desires and inordinate affections.” He flirtatiously toyed with their affections, using his relation-

- 10. For example, those who grew up in some Fundamentalist churches, or attended their Christian schools and colleges are quite familiar with the “6-Inch Rule,” referring to the minimum distance between the unmarried sexes.
- 11. For many centuries, the church has basically taught that singleness is better than marriage. — *Reformed Answers*, Third Millennium Ministries
- 12. This Gnostic teaching became prominently propagated in early Roman Catholicism. This lingering influence can even be seen in certain movements of the Protestant Reformation viewing the sole purpose of martial sex being procreation, with enjoyment being forbidden. (For more information on such history, see *The History of Sex and Religion*, chapter 13 of the author’s work *Due Benevolence: A Study of Biblical Sexuality*.)
- 13. In addition to specifically cited quotations, this historical section is adapted from the following sources:
 - *John Wesley and His Wife* (Lex Loizides)
 - *Examining John Wesley’s Train Wreck of a Marriage* (Ian Brinkman)
 - *John Wesley: A Biography* (John Singleton)
 - *John Wesley’s Failed Marriage* (Nathan Busenitz)

ships with them as a substitute for the emotional and physical companionship that was designed to be fulfilled in marriage.

In many ways he spent his life testing and breaking the limits of the Gnostic “boundaries” of I Corinthians 7, as they had been imposed on him. He had a lifelong struggle rooted in, or exasperated by, his misunderstanding of Scripture.

While Wesley was naturally attracted to and fell for many women, all the while he greatly struggled with intense conflicts as to whether or not he should continue relationships with them. Even after finally getting married He would eventually destroy his own marriage with these continued relationships.

He was, by some estimations, quite the “lady’s man” in his own religious subculture. As one author put it, “Many of the sisters did flutter around him, needlessly, flirtatiously.”¹⁴

Not having married until the age of 48, the travels and the circle of notoriety of much of his life aided in the availability and attraction of women. Intentionally or unintentionally, he led many women on, and in the end left a line of women in the wake of his own

14. *A Tale of Two Brothers: John & Charles Wesley*, Mabel R. Brailsford, 1954.

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struggles with his large ego¹⁵ on the one hand, and his misguided “spiritual” and “scriptural” view of the lowness of marriage on the other.

Though he pursued single women, his interest was certainly not limited to them. He was also attracted to women of experience: those divorced, engaged, estranged from their husbands, and even those actively attached to their husbands. His wisdom and discretion were often called into question regarding married women who were his companions and his intimately emotional correspondents.

His on-again-off-again relationships would prove exasperating and unbearable for many women. He would constantly pull women close to himself and then push them away. He continually rekindled old flames. After he finally did get married, the constant array of female friendships was a constant vexation to his wife, which

15. Such an issue was Wesley’s ego, that it is a common discussion among his biographers, one even referring to it as an “overpowering superego” (*Unholy Desires, Inordinate Affections: A Psychodynamic Inquiry into John Wesley’s Relationship with Women*, John Briggs, Connecticut Review).



Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices

by — Frank Viola & George Barna
293 pp, PB
(See order form.)

Have you ever wondered why Christians do what they do for “church” every Sunday morning? Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions: Why do folks “dress up” for “church”? Why does the “pastor” preach a sermon every Sunday? Why are there pulpits and pews? Why “church” buildings, steeples, choirs and seminaries? Where did all of these things come from?

This book proposes that what Christians do in “churches” has no root in the Scriptures! It rather has its origin in pagan culture. As shocking as that sounds, the authors prove their points by documenting every claim they make.

Fully footnoted, *Pagan Christianity* documents the story of modern church practices. If you are content with status quo “churchianity,” then you will not want to read this book. It is reserved for those who are ready to embark on an eye-opening venture that challenges every aspect of their church experience.

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eventually led her to the conclusion that he was an “adulterer.” She was very public about what she viewed as his neglect and betrayal of her.

He repeatedly wrote in his journals of his struggles with women. He attempted to minister to their spiritual needs, but these encounters often invariably ended up having emotional and romantic overtones. Struggling with what he himself called a “mixture in my intentions,” he went through endless cycles:

- (a) never allowing himself to be alone with women;
- (b) rarely allowing himself to be alone with women;
- (c) and being physically intimate with women.

True to Gnostic behavior, he would also try to avoid women who were “merry.” He confused happiness with carnality and seriousness with spirituality. He believed that women who were “merry” were innately “worldly.” As a result, he was often attracted to, and attracted to himself, women who were emotionally dark and complicated. Thus, he continually exasperated his own conflicts.

THE HOLY CLUB

John and his brother Charles formed what would be referred to by many as the “Holy Club” at Christ College, Oxford. John became its leader. Its purpose was the study and the pursuit of a “devout” life. The club met three hours daily for prayer, singing and Scripture reading.

The Oxford Holy Club required that each member pledge to stay a “eunuch for God.” For several decades, John Wesley insisted on the celibacy of dedicated Methodist leaders, believing marriage and family would only be a burden on their intense call to transform the world with social holiness. Yet, in spite of this insistence on being set apart for God’s special work, John’s desire for a normal life and the affection of another human occasionally caused great conflict in his soul. Even as he was designing the “eunuchs for Jesus” movement, he was romantically flirting with different women.¹⁶

16. *The Wesley Brothers*, Charlie Baber.

EXAMPLES OF WESLEY’S EXPERIMENT WITH THE SUPPOSED “SUPERIORITY OF SINGLENESS”

Wesley began his young adult life believing that singleness was the superior, spiritual choice. This would lead him on a path of frustration, leaving a trail of women in its wake.

Kitty Hargreaves

John had a romantic tumult with Kitty Hargreaves ... but his hawk-eyed father, Samuel, soon picked up on this and had her sent away. John’s conscience bothered him and he agreed with his father as he struggled with his desire. He writes in his diary,

As we would willingly suffer a little pain, or forgo some pleasure for others we really love, so if we sincerely love God we should readily do this for him. Begin in small things first, “never touch Kitty’s hand again.”

However, his “flesh was weak” and a month later he resolved to “never touch a woman’s breasts again.”¹⁷

17. *John Wesley: A Personal Portrait*, Ralph Waller (Continuum, 2003); *John Wesley’s Women*, Rev. Dan Hanson, 2012.

Wesley led several women to believe he was courting them. At Oxford he flirted extravagantly with young Sally Kirkham, then later with the widow Mrs. Pendarves. In America he was enamored with Sophy Hopkey. Later he was infatuated with Grace Murray. In each case he dallied and stalled and deliberated until the woman finally gave up on him in exasperation.¹⁸

Sophy Hopkey¹⁹

In 1736, according to Wesley, he came to America having made a pact with God “to have not intimacy with any woman.” After he held his first service he wrote to his brother, Charles, telling him about two young, single women who attended. He asked Charles to pray for him that he would not know them “after the flesh.” He did, however, begin and slowly develop a relationship with one of the two women, Sophy Hopkey.²⁰

(to be continued)

18. *A Tale of Two Brothers: John & Charles Wesley*, Mabel R. Brailsford, 1954

19. Entire books have been devoted to his affair with Sophy Hopkey, such as *Strange Fire: The True Story of John Wesley’s Love Affair in Georgia*, Willie Snow Ethridge (Vanguard, 1971).

20. *John Wesley and Women*, Christianity Today/Christian History magazine, 1983.



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