

1 Corinthians 7:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

Analysis

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence—the term *opheilēn* (ὄφειλήν, "what is due") indicates conjugal rights as a marital obligation, not optional affection. Paul uses reciprocal language: **and likewise also the wife unto the husband**, establishing complete mutuality in sexual relations—revolutionary in a patriarchal culture.

The phrase *tēn opheilēn* refers specifically to sexual intimacy, which Paul frames as a duty of love rather than selfish demand. This "due benevolence" (eunoia in some manuscripts, meaning "goodwill") emphasizes that marital sexuality involves generous giving, not mere obligation. Both spouses are to actively pursue the other's satisfaction.

Paul's teaching radically elevates the wife's rights, countering cultural assumptions of male dominance in sexual matters. Neither spouse may unilaterally withhold sexual intimacy, which would defraud the other (v. 5). This mutuality reflects the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24 and anticipates Ephesians 5's picture of marriage mirroring Christ and the church.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman marriage, wives were expected to submit to husbands' sexual demands, while men frequently sought gratification elsewhere with concubines, prostitutes, or slaves. Jewish teaching emphasized the husband's obligation to

provide intimacy, but Paul's insistence on complete reciprocity was groundbreaking.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's emphasis on mutual obligation challenge selfish or one-sided views of marital intimacy?
2. What does it mean to approach conjugal relations with "benevolence" and generosity rather than mere duty?
3. How does this verse's reciprocity reflect the equality and mutual submission inherent in Christian marriage?

Interlinear Text

τὴ	γυνὴ	ό	ἀνδρί	τὴν	όφειλομένην	εὔνοιαν
G3588	the wife	G3588	the husband	G3588	due	benevolence
G1135		G435		G3784		G2133
ἀποδιδότω	όμοίως	δὲ	καὶ	ἡ	γυνὴ	τῷ
Let	likewise	and	also	G3588	the wife	G3588
G591	G3668	G1161	G2532	G1135		G435
ἀνδρί						

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 3:7 (Parallel theme): Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

Exodus 21:10 (Parallel theme): If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

