

## 1 Corinthians 7

“Who should marry? Who should remain single? How should husbands and wives relate to one another? These practical matters occupied the apostle Paul throughout chapter 7.” (Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians)

*“7:1 Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps 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. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command.”*

Evidently, the group from the Corinthian church asked the question regarding sexual relations between a man and woman. In verse 1, Paul is restating what the Corinthians had asked. *“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with (touch NASB/KJV) a woman?”* It appears that they have been immoral or seen so much immorality that they are confused about what is right and what is wrong.

The Corinthians are asking if Paul agrees with the statement. Paul agrees but he starts verse 2 with the word “But” or the NKJV uses the word “Nevertheless”. He is adding his limitations to their statement.

If Paul were talking to most of the other churches that he planted, he wouldn’t have to add the first part of this verse. The Corinthians have grown up with sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is any sexual relations outside of marriage. In Chapter 5, we learned about the man that was living with his stepmother. Corinth was known to be a city full of prostitution. A city like Las Vegas of its day. The temple of Aphrodite even had temple prostitutes.

In verse 3, the NKJV says that *“husbands are to render to his wife the affection due her,”* each Bible translation has different thoughts on this verse.

ESV – *“The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights”*

KJV – *“the husband render unto the wife due benevolence”*

NASB – *“The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife,”*

NLT – *“The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs,”*

*“The affection due her* is an important phrase. Since Paul meant this to apply to every Christian marriage, it shows that *every* wife has affection due her. Paul doesn’t think only the young or

pretty or submissive wives are due affection; every wife is due affection because she is a wife of a Christian man.” (Guzik)

This idea that Paul is talking about is not new to Jews because they have been teaching it since creation. Genesis 2:24 says, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* It may not have been taught to the Greeks or if it was not to the detail that God gave it.

Paul found the idea of husbands and wives being “one flesh” missing in the cities and towns as he traveled on his missionary journeys. The following verses cover a similar topic.

Colossians 3:18-19 – Wives are to submit and husbands are to love their wives.

Ephesians 5:25 – Husbands are to love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.

1 Timothy 2:11 – Wives are to be submissive.

1 Peter 3:1, 7 – Wives are to be submissive. Husbands are to honor their wives. Both are heirs to God’s grace.

In verse 4, Paul continues with the idea of a married couple being “one flesh”. If a married couple is of “one flesh”, then the husband and wife do not have full control of their own bodies. They are to yield control of their body to the other in a loving way. In verse 5, Paul says they can harm the relationship if they deprive one another. Strife or lack of self-control can enter into the relationship. Along with these problems comes Satan who will lead you to worse problems in the marriage. In verse 6, Paul says clarifies what he said in verse 5 where he said *“except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.”* “God does not command or even recommend abstaining from sex within marriage, but it can be done for a brief time for a specific spiritual reason.” (Guzik)

*“7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.*

*8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*

In verse 7, Paul was unmarried at the time and so includes himself with the single or widowed men. As a single man completely devoted to God there were no downsides to not being married. He considered that marriage carried with it obligations and he believed it would have interfered with his working for Christ.

“Though Paul was unmarried when he wrote this letter, he probably had been married at one time. We can say this because we know Paul was an extremely observant Jew and an example among his people (Philippians 3:4-6). In Paul’s day, Jews considered marriage a duty, to the extent that a man reaching 20 years of age without marrying was considered to be in sin. Unmarried men were often considered excluded from heaven and not real men at all. Also, by Paul’s own words, it is likely that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. In Acts 26:10, Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, speaking of the early Christians, and the logical place he would cast a vote is as a member of that great congress of the Jewish people. An unmarried man could not be a member of the Sanhedrin, so Paul was probably married at one time.” (Guzik)

Paul continues in verse 7 by saying that we all have gifts and depending on your gift, marital status may interfere with you using your gift. The word for gifts used here is ‘*charisma*’ which is also used in Chapter 12 when he is discussing ‘spiritual gifts’. For Paul, being married would have prevented him from freely using his gifts for the Lord.

In verse 8, Paul implies that “When serving the Lord with your gifts” celibacy can be beneficial. He continues in verse 9 with “BUT” if self-control is a problem then you should get married. Just read the current news headlines regarding Catholic priests and you will see what Paul is talking about. Now I doubt that Paul is implying that the only reasons to get married are sexual in nature. He is teaching on this topic because the church in Corinth is surrounded by immoral sexual behaviors. What does God say regarding marriage in Genesis 2:18? It is not good for man to be alone. Paul is not going against God, he is just saying there are times when being alone can be beneficial. If you can do it.

*“10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”*

In verses 10 and 11, Paul speaks to those that are married. The Corinthians were wondering that since Paul was single then maybe it was more spiritual to be single. In these verses, Paul is talking about a marriage between two believers.

Mark 10:11–12 (see also Matt. 19:9) says, “*He (Jesus) answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”*” Paul goes back to Jesus’ word on divorce. The only allowance for divorce given by Jesus was sexual immorality. In all other cases of divorce, there are only two choices, reconcile or stay unmarried.

*“12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

*15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

In verse 12, Paul points out that what he is about to say is from him. What he is going to teach was not taught to him by Jesus but he is still under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

He is now going to explain divorce between a married couple that is made up of a believing husband and a non-believing wife. He says, *“if she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.”* The same thing applies to a believing wife and a non-believing husband. He is saying if there aren't issues then do not divorce and religious differences aren't legitimate grounds for divorce. God can be glorified in these marriages. God may be able to use the believing spouse to bring the non-believing spouse to Jesus Christ. Paul is not saying that the non-believing spouse is saved because of his/her marriage to a believer.

*“Otherwise your children are unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”* “If the children of non-Christian parents are saved, and do go to heaven – even some of them – it is important to understand that it is not because they are *innocent*. As sons and daughters of guilty Adam, we are each born guilty. If such children do go to heaven, it is not because they are deserving innocents, but because the rich mercy of God has been extended to them as well.” (Guzik)

In verses 15 and 16, Paul handles what happens if the non-believing spouse wants out of the marriage. According to Paul, there is not a problem. The believing spouse is not bound by the marriage covenant. The hope was that the non-believing spouse would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus.

Guzik says regarding this divorce whether acceptable or not, “They should know that with faith and patience, they can look for God to work in their present circumstances, difficult as they might be.”

“Tragically, much of the early church did not heed God's word to keep marriages together, as much as possible, when married to unbelievers. One of the great heathen complaints against the early Christians was that Christianity broke up families. One of the first charges brought against Christians was “tampering with domestic relationships.” (Barclay)

*“17 Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. 20 Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.*

*21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. 24 Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.*

Your marital status doesn’t matter, whether you are married, single, divorced, widowed, remarried ..., you are to work to do God’s will for your life. If your marital status changes, you should continue to work for the Lord. In the next few verses, Paul uses the example of circumcision and free versus slave to explain his point. When it comes to serving God, what is important is that you serve. Paul is expanding what we learned in Galatians 3:28, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,[ single or married or divorced] for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Verses 20 and 24 say *“Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.”* He is saying, God can use you, right where you are. We can serve and worship God regardless of our marital status.

*<sup>25</sup> Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. <sup>26</sup> Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. <sup>27</sup> Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. <sup>28</sup> But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.*

In these verses, Paul is teaching that marriage is not bad in God’s eyes but he is making a case for being single has its advantages. In verse 25, Paul continues to develop the idea of staying with your current marital status. Depending on your translation, it may say ‘virgin’ or ‘marriageable woman’ or ‘people who have never been married’. Most translations say ‘virgin’. Paul says that again, he has had no teaching from Jesus regarding men or women that have never been married but he is still being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 26, *“Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.”* Paul is talking to a group of people that are living in difficult times. He is saying because of the current situation in Corinth at that time or because truly Paul believed that Jesus’ second coming was about to happen, then don’t look to change your marital status. Continue as you have been. He is not saying that being single or married is a sin. He is saying that in times of persecution, being married will be more difficult for you.

“What is the advantage of remaining single? We can easily imagine how in a time of persecution or great crisis, how much more of a burden a wife or a family can be for someone committed to standing strong for the Lord. We may say, “Torture me, and I will never renounce Jesus.” But what if we were threatened with the rape of our wife or the torture of our children? These may seem far away to us, but they were not far away to Christians in the first century.”

*29(NLT) “But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. 30 Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. 31 Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.”*

Paul says in verse 29 that *“the time is short”*. Paul is keeping with what Jesus taught in Matthew 24:44, *“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”* Even 2000 years later, we are to be prepared for Jesus’ return. If we knew when He was coming back, we could set up a countdown clock and live the way we want until the final week.

Paul wants the Corinthians to live a life worthy of Jesus every day and not live like the world. What does Psalm 39:4-5 say about how short our lives are? NLT says *“my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;”*

In these verses, Paul is telling them that the world is changing because of Jesus’ work on the cross and you should live that way. He says, *“From now on:”*

- 1. Those with wives should not focus only on their marriage.*
- 2. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions.*
- 3. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them.*

Why does Paul say that we should not focus on the things of this world? Because the world in its present form will soon pass away. In our study of Heaven, we have seen that there will be a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. The old ones will all pass away. Jesus taught about being prepared for His second coming in parables in Matthew 25. He used the parable of the 10



virgins to say that (v. 13) we do not know when He is coming back. We want to hear Jesus say to us (v. 21), “*Well done, good and faithful servant!*” when He does return. In these verses, Paul is saying, “If you are too busy, living your life in the world then you will not be prepared for His return.”

*<sup>32</sup> I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

In these verses, it comes down to focus. If we are married then our focus “may” move from God to your spouse. Paul is saying that, if we are single then we do not have a family, with the responsibilities associated with taking care of a family, then we are more “free” to serve God. This was the main reason Paul considered the unmarried state preferable for himself. But, you need to reread verses 20 and 24 in this chapter. It is not for everyone.

In verse 33, Paul tells us that it is about focus. Are you pleasing God or your wife? Fortunately in a marriage where both are focused on God, the marriage will be blessed by God. This is why Paul spelled out marriages between believers and nonbelievers earlier in this chapter. I would guess these verses are the source of the rules in the Catholic Church against marriage and for the celibacy of priests and nuns. Paul continues to say that it is not a sin to be married or to be single.

In verse 35, Paul gives the purpose of this entire chapter. He is going into great detail on this subject for their “*benefit, not to place restrictions*” on them.

**“I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.”**

*<sup>36</sup> If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. <sup>37</sup> But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. <sup>38</sup> So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.*

Remember the customs at that time in history were different than those today. Arranged marriages were the rule and not the exception. Today, the daughter chooses her husband but at that time the responsibility for choosing a husband for a single woman fell on her parents.

Verse 36 is speaking to the fiancée, if he has good self-control then it is ok to wait but if not then he should get married before he “*gives in to his passion*”. In verse 38, Paul again says what works best for him. It is not for everyone. Paul says being married is good but being single is better when it comes to serving God.

*<sup>39</sup> A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. <sup>40</sup> In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.*

In verse 39 Paul says, “Until death do us part, means until death do us part.” He adds that as a widow, she can get married again if she wishes but only to another Christian (“*only in the Lord*”). In Verse 40, Paul makes another plea for servants of God to remain single. He says, “She will be happier if she remains as she is.”

“Again, Paul will affirm celibacy, but not because sex itself is evil (as some of the Corinthian Christians thought). Instead, the unmarried state can be superior because it offers a person (if they are so gifted) more opportunity to serve God.”