

Fighting Immorality In Marriage 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

The seventh chapter of 1 Corinthians opens with the apostle Paul answering a question concerning marriage. These married Corinthian Christians were saying, "It is good for a man not have sexual relations with a woman." If you have a NASB or NKJV you will see the statement, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." "Touching a woman" was a euphemism in Greek for sexual relations. We see in the Old Testament that "touching a woman" was also a Jewish euphemism for sexual relations (cf. Proverbs 6:29; Ruth 2:9; Genesis 20:6). We can further confirm that this is the right understanding because the following verses are going to give directions concerning sexual relations. So this is why most translations take the literal wording of this euphemism and makes it clear to our ears.

So what we are seeing are two extremes in the thinking of these Christians in Corinth. As we saw in chapter 6, some are saying that all things are lawful for them and the body is meant for sexual relations. Paul has condemned this thinking, teaching any sexual conduct or contact before marriage or outside of marriage is sin. Now we see the other extreme is that some are saying that all sexual relations are evil. Is it good to have no sexual relations at all? This seems to be where some of these Christians are coming from in this statement that Paul quotes.

Now, some translations do not have the quotations (which are added by the translation) which make the meaning that Paul is teaching that it is good to abstain from sexual relations with a woman. Notice the NLT in particular. "Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations" (1 Corinthians 7:1 NLT). I do not believe this can be Paul's teaching at all because of Genesis 1-2. God made them male and female, commanded them to leave father and mother and be joined together, to become one flesh, and to be fruitful and multiply. God made our bodies and declared that he is for our bodies (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13). Intimacy in marriage cannot be portrayed as a necessary evil. In fact, Paul will argue the opposite in this paragraph. Intimacy is a necessary good.

Intimacy of Marriage (7:2)

Paul must respond against this idea that it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But the way Paul responds is worthy of deeper consideration. He could have said that sexual relations in marriage are not sinful, but commanded in Genesis 1:28 when God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." Paul could have used Genesis to remind his readers that God made our bodies this way. God gave us these desires and gave us these bodies for intimacy in marriage.

But there is more that must be considered in this answer and Paul uses this as an opportunity to deal with the problem of sexual immorality that he discussed in the last paragraph. Notice that Paul says that marriage is the solution to all the sexual immorality that is occurring. Satan is using the strong weapon of sexual immorality to tempt people to sin. It is important to recognize that verse 2 is not merely saying that because of sexual immorality, get married. God has a very high view of marriage and gives many reasons for it. We see the scripture declare that marriage is how we have the blessing of children (Genesis 1:28), the place for physical intimacy (Proverbs 5:18-19; Song of Solomon), and is a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:23-32). Marriage also has a value benefit for maintaining sexual purity and protecting against sexual immorality. Verse 2 does not say that because of sexual immorality, get married. Rather, this is another euphemism. Most Greek scholars note that a man "having his own wife" and a woman "having her own husband" is an idiom for sexual intimacy. "Have" is

a reference to sexual union. Recall earlier in this letter in 1 Corinthians 5:1 that “a man has his father’s wife” speaks of a sexual union. Some translations render this idiom more clearly so that we can see this meaning.

But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. (1 Corinthians 7:2 NIV; cf. NET)

Sexual desires are supposed to be fulfilled in marriage. God gave marriage as the proper place to fulfill our desires. Intimacy is not merely for bearing children. Nor is intimacy some necessary evil. Notice that both the man and the woman in the marriage are to enjoy the pleasure of intimacy so that temptation will be warded off.

Before we move on, we need to make two more observations. First, polygamy is prohibited in this command. Each man is to have his own wife, not wives. Each woman is to have her own husband, not husbands. Second, homosexuality is prohibited. Paul does not say that each man is to have his own man or woman. Paul does not say that each woman is to have her own man or woman. A man has a wife and a woman has a husband. Marriage is only between a man and a woman and sexual intimacy in marriage is only between a husband and a wife.

Giving in Marriage (7:3-4)

The apostle Paul continues in verse 3 that the husband has the obligation to give to his wife what she desires in intimacy. Likewise, the wife is to give to the husband what he desires in intimacy. Notice again that Paul uses his words carefully to not be so overt as to be inappropriate, but to be straightforward enough so as to be clear in what he means. The language of verse 3 speaks literally of “giving what is due” or “to give back that which is owed.” We have a God-given responsibility to give ourselves to the sexual needs of our spouse to fight against temptation and because it is the right of marriage. It is part of our proper marital expectations (which he will discuss further in a moment). Intimacy is not a necessary evil and must not be perceived this way.

Verse 4 presses this thought even further. The wife has authority over the husband’s body and the husband has authority over the wife’s body. We need to understand this when we are getting married. When we marry we are giving the right over our body to our spouse. This was a liberating teaching in a Roman world where men dominated women. In both Greek and Jewish cultures, the husband was in charge of his wife in all ways, including sexually. But the husband had few, if any, obligations to his wife, unless it was to give her children. Notice how Paul breaks this male dominated idea. Both husband and wife are to give to each other. Please notice carefully, and I must stress, that this does not say that a man takes from his wife or that the woman takes from her husband. There is no taking in marriage. There is no demanding in marriage. There is no demeaning in marriage. Paul teaches us that there is supposed to be no selfishness in the physical aspects of marriage. Selfishness in marriage will destroy the marriage. This should not be a shocking idea for Christians — you are giving yourself completely in marriage.

This is an appropriate moment to answer a question that was submitted. It is an important question. The question is if there are acceptable or unacceptable sexual practices between husbands and wives. I hope this text shows the general answer is there is nothing that is unacceptable in marriage. Paul’s concern is that we are not giving ourselves enough in marriage to each other. We must understand that intimacy is critical in marriage because of temptation, because we have a right to each other, and we are to give

ourselves to each other. But let me explain just a little bit more so that we make sure that we are clear. First, there can be no third party when marriage intimacy. Bringing in another person or pornography or something like that, even if agreed upon by both spouses, is sin. This is breaking the exclusive marriage covenant of one man and one woman. Second, all intimacy is allowed in marriage. The spouse should want to fulfill the other spouse's needs and desires. But, in the same way, love means that a spouse will not demand the other to do something that is not desired or uncomfortable. Let me give an illustration that you can extrapolate to all areas of intimacy in marriage. She says that she has a headache that night. But in Paul's picture, she will want to give herself to her husband anyway. And, just as important, in Paul's picture, he will not want to ask her because she is not feeling well.

This is what the marriage should look like. Both spouses want to fulfill each other while at the same time not forcing each other into things that one does not desire. We are seeking mainly to please the other. She wants to please him, and desires to give what he desires. He wants to please her, and therefore desires to not demand of her what she finds unpleasant to give. In the same way, he wants to please her, and desires to give her what she desires. She wants to please him, and therefore desires to not demand of him what he finds unpleasant to give. I hope that helps and I don't know how else to say that without getting more graphic, which I do not want to do.

Stop Depriving Each Other (7:5-6)

Therefore, Paul commands that spouses not deprive each other. This word "depriving" is the same word used earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:7-8 that is translated "defrauding" or "cheating." You are cheating the other spouse or defrauding the other spouse when you withhold intimacy in marriage. You are robbing your spouse. Please notice that the apostle Paul can only conjure upon one reason why there might be a stopping of intimacy in marriage. He says "perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer." He says that he can think of one reason why intimacy would be allowed to stop and that is to be devoted to prayer. But even this, he says, must be (1) by agreement of both spouses, (2) for a limited time, (3) only for a spiritual need (not punishment or something like that), and (4) must result in coming back together again in intimacy so that Satan does not seize this as an opportunity for temptation. I hate that the number 6 is in the way of the next sentence but the beginning of verse 6 has a connecting word to the last sentence, either "but" or "now," depending on the translation. Some translations unfortunately drop this connecting word out. It is important to see that Paul says that this is given to them as a concession and not a command. The point is that sexual intimacy must be constantly maintained in marriage. We do not deprive each other out of anger or spite or a fight.

There is an important application we need to make from this section. Separation in marriage is a sin. I have heard and seen Christians, who know that divorce is condemned, decide that they will just separate, but remain legally married. They no longer live together and pretty much do nothing together. They act divorced, but they remain legally married. They are separated. I want you to see that this is not an option. This is also a sin. Paul condemns anyone who thinks that separation is acceptable. You have not done something better by not divorcing. You are just committing a different sin. Do not deprive each other. Give yourself to each other. Recognize the problem of sexual immorality and the fight that both husbands and wives have to maintain purity.

Paul's Gift (7:7)

This is why Paul ends this question with the words of verse 7. Paul wishes that all were like him. Some scholars suggest that Paul is saying that he wishes that all people were single like him. The NLT even reads this way. "But I wish everyone were single, just as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:7 NLT). But Paul says that everyone has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. Is Paul saying that he wishes that no one was married? I do not believe so. First, if this were the case it would be the end of human existence since children are to only come through marriage. Second, God is the one who institute marriage. It was not an afterthought or a concession. Third, when the creation was completed there was only one thing that was not good. It was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Fourth, how can Paul say that he wishes everyone were single when in this paragraph he has been praising the blessings of marriage. He has proclaimed all the benefits of marriage. He has not denigrated marriage.

What makes more sense is that Paul is saying that he wishes everyone was free from the need for sexual fulfillment like him. This would be a gift from God to not be tempted to sexual sin. Some people have that gift. Some people do not want to be married and do not have strong sexual desires that need to be fulfilled. But that is not everyone and Paul recognizes that this is a gift, not a requirement.

Conclusion

Marriage is given by God and must not be considered as some sort of lesser spirituality. Marriage is not bad. Marriage is not a necessary evil. Marriage is good and intimacy in marriage is good.

Marital intimacy fights against sexual immorality (7:2)

Marital intimacy is a right to be given to each other (7:3)

Marital intimacy is what we desire to give to our spouse (7:3)

Marital intimacy is where desires are fulfilled (7:4)

Marital intimacy must never be deprived (7:5)

Let us enjoy the blessing and gift of marriage that he has given to the world.

Is Divorce Okay?
1 Corinthians 7:8-11

One of the big questions regarding marriage is if it is okay to divorce. In our society it is simply assumed that divorce is acceptable for any reason. People declare “irreconcilable differences” and file divorce at an alarming rate. Is this what God had in mind for marriage? While the laws of our country may allow divorce for any reason, what does God say about it? In 1 Corinthians 7:8-11 the apostle Paul addresses the unmarried and the married and gives directions for how they must live.

To The Unmarried and Widows (7:8-9)

Paul begins by addressing the unmarried and the widows. Immediately there are frequent questions and controversy about who is being addressed. Who belongs in the “unmarried” category? Paul’s addition of “widows” to this group helps us understand who is in view. If the apostle Paul had only said, “To the unmarried,” we would be compelled to understand Paul referring to any person who is single. But because the apostle Paul says “and the widows” we are compelled to reconsider who “the unmarried” are. The unmarried must refer to people who have never been married. If Paul meant all people who are single, then saying “widows” is redundant. Rather, Paul has in mind those who have never been married and also those who have lost their spouse because of death. To say this another way, the apostle Paul is referring to people who have a right to marriage. In Genesis 2:24 God gives every person the right and privilege to one marriage. Many want to include the divorced in this category of “unmarried,” but as we will see in verses 10-11, Paul does not have them in mind at all in verses 8-9 (which we will examine in greater detail in a moment). Thiselton agrees that this Greek word translated “unmarried” can be used to denote those who are have not yet married (Thiselton, 104).

Paul instructs the unmarried and the widows to remain as he is. The ESV, NRSV, NIV, and NLT add “remain single” which is the likely meaning. Is Paul saying that it is better to live a single life over getting married? As we noted in the last lesson, I will strongly contend against this interpretation. God declared that the one thing that was not good in his creation was that man was alone. God is the giver of the institution of marriage. Paul cannot be arguing that there is a higher spirituality or morality in being single over being married. This would contradict how the rest of scriptures describe the blessings and benefits of marriage. We must remember that the apostle Paul is dealing with issues and questions that are coming from the Corinthians church. Unfortunately we do not have their questions before us. But we are able to assume some of the questions and issues the Corinthians had by examining how Paul responds. Verse 8 gives us a sense that there is a question about living a single life. There is a question about living single being acceptable before God. We must remember that we are not dealing with societies that lived the single life, but were encouraged and recommended to marry. This was even stronger in the Jewish culture where rabbis were expected to be married. Again, we are reading counter cultural teachings to the first century. Paul declares that it is good to be single as he is. It is acceptable before God. It is morally good before God. There is nothing wrong with living the single life.

We should emphasis this point because our culture has had a long track record of this kind of thinking, especially in the church. There is nothing wrong with someone who is not married. Single people, particularly single Christians, do not need to be asked repeatedly when they are going to get married. They do not have to be married. It is good that they are not married. They can live a full, acceptable, God-pleasing life being single. I believe this is the point Paul is communicating to the Christians at Corinth who are under similar pressures and therefore have questions about remaining single.

However, Paul makes something very clear. Being single means exercising self-control over your physical desires. This verse is a very important verse to show that sexual relations before marriage and outside of marriage is utterly condemned by God. The single life means the celibate life, according to the Lord. If you do not want to accept that life, then marriage is the only place where those desires are to be fulfilled. "To burn" was a familiar and common metaphor for lust with widespread use in Jewish and pagan sources. This is why all the translations add "to burn with passion" or "sexual desires." Therefore, the apostle Paul reminds them that marriage is the answer for those desires and one must not be overcome with their lusts and passions while trying to live the single life and lose their soul over it. As we noted in the last lesson, Paul is not saying that the purpose of marriage is to fulfill your desires. So if you can't control yourself, get married. That is not his point. His point is to remind what is at stake in living as a single. Being single you must maintain sexual purity and exercise self-control. Marriage is the only lawful place for physical desires to be satisfied.

To The Married (7:10-11)

Now Paul turns his attention to the married and gives directions for them. Notice that what Paul says he is teaching is the very same thing that Jesus taught when he walked the earth. The charge that he is giving in these two verses is nothing new. Recall what Jesus taught:

3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:3–6 ESV)

Notice that this is exactly what Paul declares in verse 10. "The wife should not separate from her husband." Notice also verse 11: "The husband should not divorce his wife." When we read Paul's command not to separate, please do not think of our legal separation status today. In those societies there was no such thing as a separation. Once you left, you were divorced. You could not be separated but still married like you can today. Divorce and separate are the same meaning in the New Testament, as seen in Jesus' words in Matthew 19:6. "What God has joined together, let not man separate." The word "separate" also was a word used in the secular writings in that time for divorce also. Don't divorce!

God does not follow the culture or the laws of the land. God does not care what our laws say about marriage, divorce, or remarriage. The world needs to hear this teaching. Marriage is to be for life. Do not divorce. Enter into marriage as a covenant that will not be broken as long as you live. You actually say those words in your vows to your spouse and before God when you get married. You said in your vows, "Till death do us part." This is a serious vow and it is God's intention for marriage. Do not divorce. One man and one woman for life is what God created in marriage in Genesis 2. Jesus confirmed that teaching in Matthew 19. Paul confirmed that teaching here in 1 Corinthians 7.

Notice again the equality Paul has regarding husbands and wives. The rules are exactly the same. Thiselton notes, "Divorce was frequent and very easily executed in Roman society of the day, especially when a man wanted to divorce a woman" (Thiselton, 105). In Jewish society, women divorcing men was rare, but was more common by comparison in the Greek and Roman society. But with God, men and women are equal regarding the rights for marriage. The rule of our Lord is do not divorce.

What we learn is that we are not in a contract. A contract is like our cell phone service. They provide you a service and if you are happy with your service you stay with them. But if you do not like what they are doing, then you move to another carrier and stay with them as long as we are happy. This is a contract and today many treat marriage as a contract. It is a sinful attitude. Your marriage vows were not that you would love each other as long as the other person did certain things for you. You did not say that you will take out the trash as long as she does the dishes. She did not say that she would make dinner as long as you make a lot of money. You did not enter into a contract. You entered into a covenant. You said you were staying in the marriage regardless of what the other person does. You said that you in for richer or poorer, for health or sickness, or for any other circumstance. If you are living in a cardboard box, we are in it together. That is a marriage covenant. This is what God modeled for us in covenant. God loves us and is in this for our good, even when we are complete sinners. We are in covenant in marriage also.

What To Do If Divorced

Paul continues in his directions recognizing that divorce will occur. This does not mean that divorce is lawful before God. If divorce was lawful, then he would not have said in this paragraph: do not divorce. Wives don't divorce your husbands and husbands don't divorce your wives. Verse 11 is not granting permission for divorce but instructing what one is supposed to do if divorce occurs. Divorce is a sin, but a person is not free and clear if one gets a divorce. God has governed what must be done.

If a person gets a divorce, the person must remain unmarried or be reconciled to the spouse. That is God's law. Notice that a person does not get to marry again. In our world we just assume remarriage for all reasons. But that is not what God commanded. God said that if you do divorce, you have only two options. You must either stay single or you must reconcile to the spouse you married.

What About Unbelievers?

Now we need to deal with a common response to this teaching. It is often quickly pointed out that the apostle Paul wrote this to Christians, which he did. Therefore, they will say that this teaching does not apply to unbelievers. Therefore, if you are divorced and remarried a bunch of times before coming to Christ, it does not matter. But once you come to Christ, you must remain in that marriage. Let me show you why this is completely wrong. Yes, this teaching was given to Christians. But Paul says that what he is teaching what the Lord taught and is nothing new, which we read in Matthew 19:6. When Jesus gave his command, he was speaking to the Jews. Did Jesus' teaching only apply to the Jews? No. This teaching was for all people, as Paul uses it also for these Corinthian Christians. But we must press this further. When Jesus gives his teaching in Matthew 19, was he only giving the law for Israel or those under the Law of Moses? No, because look at the basis of his teaching. Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, which goes all the way back to creation. Who was God giving marriage to in Genesis? These marriage laws were not given to Christians, because Christians did not exist yet. Nor were these marriage laws given to Israel because Israel did not exist either. God gave these laws to Adam and Eve, and therefore to all of humanity. It does not matter if you are a believer or unbeliever. God's marriage laws are universal and apply to all people at all times. This is what Jesus is saying. This is what God's law was from the beginning: one man and one woman for life. Therefore, what God joins together, people are not to separate.

What Happens If The Divorced Remarry?

Now we need to answer a question that Paul does not deal with but is commonly asked. What does it mean if I am divorced and I did remarry? God commanded to not divorce. But you did. God commanded if you did divorce, then you are not to get married again or be reconciled to your divorce spouse. But you did not follow that either. You got married to someone else. What does God say this means? Turn again to the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:9

And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9 ESV)

Jesus says that if you divorce your spouse and marry someone else you have committed adultery. The only occasion where you have not committed adultery is if your divorce was for the cause of sexual immorality. Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32 ESV)

Notice if you were married, got a divorce, and marry another person you have committed the sin of adultery. Also, notice that if your spouse divorced you and the divorce was not for sexual immorality, then if you get married you are also committing adultery. Both the person who caused the divorce and the person who was divorced are committing adultery if they remain. This explains why Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 7:11 that if you are divorced, you must remain unmarried or be reconciled. To get remarried means you are committing adultery if the divorce was not for sexual immorality.

Our Lord teaches us something very important. Remarriage is not a right. Remarriage is not granted to all people. Being single does not mean you have the right to get married. This is why we must understand 1 Corinthians 7:8 when Paul speaks of the "unmarried" as those who have the right to be married, not just people who are single. Not all single people have the right to be married.

Is My Marriage Still Sinful?

There is one more issue we must address at this point. Some will say agree that the divorce was wrong and the remarriage was wrong. They will agree that adultery was committed when they remarried, just as Jesus said. But now we are married. Can we stay in our marriage relationship? Is this marriage sinful or can we repent and remain in the marriage? Paul's teaching to the Romans is instructive at this point.

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. (Romans 7:2-3 ESV)

Notice that the person who was married who leaves for another is considered an adulteress as long as the spouse lives. Notice that she is not called an adulteress until she repents. The picture is that she is still bound to her husband while he lives. Again, this is why Paul said if you divorce, you must remain unmarried or be reconciled. This is why Jesus said that if you marry again you are committing adultery. You are still bound to another person. Repentance and sorrow is a very good start but you are still in an

unlawful marriage. You are still an adulterer or adulteress as long as the spouse lives. Therefore, the law given by Jesus and Paul must remain. You need to return to an unmarried state or reconcile with your former spouse to no longer be an adulterer or adulteress.

I recognize the complications that this can create. I am happy to speak in private with any person about their marital condition to help know how to apply these marriage laws. I recognize that we can make some pretty complicated situations and it can be hard to know what to do to be right before the Lord. We want to help you with this. Please meet with us so that we can help you understand how to apply the word of the Lord to your life situation.

Please consider that we must never reject the teaching of our Lord, no matter how difficult the command may be. The Lord is the master who has saved us from our sins. We must submit to his marriage laws. He created marriage for us and we are governed by those laws. Please do not resist the Lord but serve him and submit to him.

When You Are Married To An Unbeliever 1 Corinthians 7:12-24

The apostle Paul continues to answer questions the Corinthian church has regarding marriage and sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 7. Verse 12 the apostle Paul says that he is addressing, "the rest." Who are "the rest?" Paul has already addressed the unmarried (7:8-9), the married (7:10-11), the divorced (7:11), and widows (7:8). So who can "the rest" be? Verse 12 explains to us that we are dealing with a believer who is married to an unbeliever.

Now we need to ask why this would be a question for the Corinthians? Why wouldn't these Christians just assume that the marriage laws applied to them the same way? We need to understand their background and culture to help us understand why they are having a problem. In Greek homes, wives were expected to worship the gods of their husbands (Baker, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, 104). One can immediately see the problem that would arise. We have a married couple and if the wife became a Christian, she would be expected to worship the gods of her husband, which she could not do as a follower of Jesus. In the same way, if the husband became a Christian, the wife would be expected to worship the Lord which she may not be willing to do. Not only was this an issue in the Greek culture, but it also was an issue in the Jewish culture. In Judaism, marriage to a non-Jew was not considered a valid marriage (Baker, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, 104). We see this played out in a practical way in Ezra 10 where we see the Jewish husbands putting away the foreign wives they had married. So in Corinth we have this mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and they do not know what to do now they have come to Christ but the spouse remains an unbeliever. What should they do? This is what Paul must address. This is why Paul begins in verse 12 by saying, "I, not the Lord." Paul is not teaching his opinion. This is the authoritative, God-breathed teaching of the Lord. What Paul is saying is that Jesus did not address this issue when he was on the earth. One cannot turn to Matthew 19 to get the answer to this question like one could regarding verses 10-11.

Do Not Divorce (7:12-14)

Paul's direction concerning this situation is not surprising. Do not divorce. Paul tells both the wife and the husband that they are not to divorce their unbelieving spouse (7:12-13). Once again we are able to see the practical truth that God's marriage laws apply to all people for all time under all covenants. The two have become one flesh (Genesis 2:24), even though they were both unbelievers and one has now come to Christ. God has joined them together and they are not to separate (Matthew 19:6). Now Paul must explain why this is the case in their circumstance. Isn't this wrong that they are married to an unbeliever? Isn't this a sin because they do not have a Christian spouse? Paul explains in verse 14.

In verse 14 Paul states that the unbelieving spouse is made holy because of the Christian spouse. We understand that the apostle Paul cannot be saying that the unbelieving spouse is saved because he or she is married to a Christian. Paul does not say the spouse is saved. In fact, in verse 16 Paul is offering the possibility that the unbelieving spouse may eventually be saved. But the unbelieving spouse is not saved because of the marriage. Holiness did not mean salvation in the Old Testament. The point Paul is making is that the purity of the marriage is not contaminated by the unbelieving spouse. The spouse is not defiled. The spouse is not to be considered contaminated or unclean. The relationship is not impure. Paul proves his point by saying that this kind of thinking would mean that your children were unclean also. But they are not unclean. They are not defiled. The simple point is that there is nothing sinful about this relationship. Stay in the marriage. Do not divorce, even if your spouse is not a Christian.

What If They Divorce? (7:15-16)

But the apostle Paul recognizes that not all of these unbelieving spouses will consent to remain in the marriage. Some will want nothing to do with Christianity. There will be wives who will refuse to worship the true God. There will be husbands who will be unwilling to see their wives not worshipping their family gods. If the unbelieving spouse is unwilling to stay but divorces, Paul says "let it be so." There was nothing the Christian could do about it. The situation then is the same today. If a spouse is going to divorce you, you do not have some way to stop that. But Paul explains further in verse 15.

"In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace." What does this mean? If you have a NIV, HCSB, NET, NLT, or NRSV I am going to ask you to make some notes in your Bible regarding this verse. Those translations read that "the brother or sister is not bound." This is not an incorrect translation but can easily communicate the wrong thing. Here is the problem with using the word "bound." Paul is not using the Greek word that he uses elsewhere to describe the marriage bond. This Greek word *douloo* is never used in the New Testament to refer to the marriage bond (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:27, 39; Romans 7:2). This is for good reason because this Greek word means, "to enslave, oppress by retaining in servitude." Marriage is not called slavery. We might call it that but God never calls marriage slavery or being enslaved. Thus, the NASB and NKJV rightly use the word "bondage." I believe the ESV is the best by reading, "The brother or sister is not enslaved." Paul is not referring to the marriage bond.

Some have explained this text to mean that the Christian is not bound or enslaved to maintain their marital obligations to the one who has departed. But this answer really does not make sense. The spouse has left. It is impossible to maintain your marital obligations. I do not believe that these Christians were thinking that they were to still try to perform their obligations of marriage even when the spouse has moved out and moved on.

So we are left with asking an important question if we are going to understand this text. What is Paul saying that the Christian is not enslaved to such that if the unbeliever leaves, let him or her leave? Our context has helped us that we have a situation where the spouse will not stay with you because of your faith. What are you supposed to do? What you are supposed to do is let the spouse leave. We are not called upon for forfeit our faith in Jesus to preserve the marriage.

The Greek tense of *douloo* reflects this understanding. Paul used the perfect tense of the word. The English does not bear out the perfect tense in verbs very well. In the Greek, the perfect tense of the word means "the action was completed at some time in the past, and the results continue up to the present." To use our sentence in 1 Corinthians 7:15 in the perfect tense we would say that a person was enslaved in the past and continue to be enslaved in the present. Notice that Paul says that the brother or sister is "not enslaved." Therefore, Paul is saying to let the unbeliever leave because the brother or sister was not enslaved in the past and continues to not be enslaved.

This confirms that Paul cannot be talking about the marriage bond. He cannot be saying that you let the unbeliever depart because you were not married and you are still not married. What could Paul say about this relationship that the believer was not enslaved in the past to the unbeliever and continues to not be enslaved? Our answer earlier works for the perfect tense. The Christian was not enslaved to forfeit the faith in the past and continues to not be enslaved to forfeit their faith. Just like the laws of the land,

we are commanded to obey them. But we are not enslaved to obey them when they cause us to disobey God. We continue to not be enslaved in that way. In the same way, these Christians have unbelieving spouses who are leaving because they are Christians. Paul says to let them leave because you are not enslaved to disobey God in order to remain in the marriage.

“But God has called you to peace.” This returns to his initial teaching in verses 12-13. Do not cause unnecessary strife by divorcing on religious grounds when an unbelieving spouse has agreed to remain in the marriage. God has called you to peace is yet another reason to keep the marriage together. Christians must not be initiating divorces from unbelievers. In verse 16 Paul continues to explain why the Christian should remain in the marriage. You do not know whether you will save your husband or wife. You do not know if they may come to the faith. So have peace in the marriage relationship. To use 1 Peter 3:1, win your spouse over without a word but by your godly conduct.

Please notice that Paul does not authorize remarriage in this scenario. Now that we have established that Paul is not speaking about the marriage bond in verse 15, we must see that there is no authorization for remarriage. As we noted in the last lesson, no one can assume the right to remarriage. Jesus clearly taught that if there is a divorce and remarriage for any reason except sexual immorality, then the remarriage is adultery. The principles of God’s universal marriage laws are not set aside or altered. We will see that Paul will specify when one does have the right to marry when he speaks to the widows in verse 39. He grants their remarriage right there as well as back in verse 8.

Remain In The Condition You Were Called (7:17-24)

Now most people stop right here in the study as if Paul was done speaking to the Christian who is married to the unbeliever. But please notice in verse 17 that Paul did not change his audience. Paul is very clear in the paragraph when he changes the group he is speaking to. In verse 8, “to the unmarried and widows.” In verse 10, “to the married.” In verse 12, “to the rest.” Notice that verse 17 does not offer a new teaching or new group. The next group does not appear until verse 25, “Now concerning the betrothed.”

Therefore, when Paul writes for these Christians to remain in the condition they were called, he speaking to these Christians who are married to unbelievers. They were not to change their marriage condition because they have come to Christ and are married to unbelievers. The apostle Paul uses two illustrations to prove the need to stay in that marriage to an unbeliever.

First, Paul uses circumcision (7:18-20). If you were circumcised when you came to Christ, then you were to remain circumcised and not try to remove those marks. If you were uncircumcised, you were not to seek circumcision. Being circumcised or uncircumcised does not matter (7:19). In the same way, a Christian married to an unbeliever is not an issue and a Christian was not to change that condition (7:20).

The second illustration is to use slavery (7:21-24). If you were a slave when you came to Christ, do not be concerned about it. You can be a slave and be a Christian. If you were free when you came to Christ, you can be free and be a Christian. Paul says that these things do not matter for the earthly slave is free in Christ (cf. Galatians 5:1) and the free person on earth is a slave to the Lord. We belong to the Lord, regardless of our physical condition or situation. Therefore, remain with God in the condition you were in when you came to Christ (7:24). The point, again, is that the Christian is not to divorce the unbeliever but

remain in the marriage. This is the context of this paragraph. To insert any other marital situation is to insert something that Paul did not have in mind.

Many try to use these verses to teach that you can remain in whatever marriage you are in when you came to Christ. So whatever your marriage situation, you stay in that marriage you were in when you came to Christ. We have already studied why this cannot be possible in our previous study, "Is Divorce Okay?" There is nowhere that we can turn to in the scriptures to teach that something that is a sinful situation while an unbeliever now becomes acceptable when one becomes a believer! How can a situation that is sinful before coming to Christ now be acceptable after coming to Christ? It does not work. Coming to Christ does not make everything we are doing acceptable. We are forgiven of our sins when we come to Christ, but we are repeatedly called in the New Testament to change our lives, put on the new self, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. God never says that your sinful ways are now acceptable because you are now a Christian! We cannot continue in sin thinking that grace will abound (Romans 6:1). Being a Christian means that we are dead to the life of sin, not continuing in sinful circumstances (Romans 6:1-8). Paul is not speaking about sinful marriages in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and telling them to stay in those marriages. Paul is telling Christians married to unbelievers to stay in those marriages because (1) the spouse is not defiled (7:14), (2) you were called to peace (7:15), (3) you may save your spouse (7:16), and (4) being married to unbeliever has no bearing on your salvation (7:19,21).

Conclusion

We must be careful students of the scriptures. Just because we have numbers or headers in our Bibles does not mean that the thought or argument of the author has stopped. Be careful students. In this paragraph we see a continuation of what Paul started in verse 10. God's law is that people do not divorce. We are granted one marriage for life. There are rare exceptions to this rule in the New Testament, but being married to an unbeliever is not one of them. You are to stay married to the unbeliever. But if the unbeliever leaves you because of your faith in Christ, then let it be so. It is not what God wants, but you are not called and have never been called to sacrifice your faith in Christ for your marriage.

Let me end by saying that it is important that we see more of this attitude. Christians cannot cave into the wishes of the spouse when it comes to our faith and our service to the Lord. If your spouse does not want to come to worship, you go anyway. If he or she does not want to pray, you pray anyway. If your spouse does not want to go to a Bible study, you go anyway. If your spouse does not want to teach or serve in the kingdom, you serve anyway. You have never been enslaved to forfeiting your work in God's kingdom for the maintaining of the marriage. If anything, you need to show that your faith in the Lord trumps all things so that they can be won over without a word. Please be encouraged to continue to serve the Lord faithfully, even when your spouse is not being faithful to the Lord.

Marriage During Times of Suffering 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

In 1 Corinthians 7:25 Paul addresses another question that these Corinthian Christians have asked him. As we have noted throughout this study, we have to infer by the answer Paul gives as to what the issue was that the Corinthians had. Verse 25 begins, "Now concerning the virgins," according to most translations (NASB, NRSV, NKJV, NIV, HCSB). So we might think that Paul is speaking to those who are not married. However, we remember that the apostle Paul has addressed the unmarried back in verses 8-9. There is another problem with understanding this text to simply refer to those who have never been married. In verse 27 we read, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free?" If this is a person who has never been married, then how would this Christian be bound to a wife? It is for this reason that we cannot understand this text to be simply referring to people who have never been married.

To solve our issue, we need to ask this question: who are people that are never married (literally "virgins") but would be bound to a man or a woman? The answer would be those who are engaged to be married. In our world, being engaged usually means the couple is going to be married. But there are some instances where an engagement is broken off. However, in the ancient world, an engagement (betrothal) meant that you were in covenant to be married and to separate from that engagement required divorce. A betrothal was legally binding. We see this illustrated in the lives of Joseph and Mary. Remember that Mary is pregnant miraculously with Jesus. But Joseph believes that Mary has been unfaithful. Even though they were betrothed, the scripture says that Joseph was going to divorce Mary. (Matthew 1:19).

As we return to 1 Corinthians 7, the situation that makes sense is that this is a question concerning a man and a woman who are betrothed. They are legally bound to marriage, though not married yet. This is why the ESV even translates verse 25, "Now concerning the betrothed." They are legally bound to be married but are not married yet. To no longer be betrothed would require a legal divorce.

There are two other aspects that must be considered carefully before we begin an in-depth study of Paul's instructions. First, in verse 25 Paul says that he is not giving a command from the Lord, but is giving his judgment about the scenario they have asked about. We see Paul reiterate this at the end of this paragraph, where we read in verse 40, "Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God." As we read this paragraph we will see that Paul is not binding the commands of God, but advising these Corinthians regarding these betrothal situations.

The other aspect we must notice is found in verse 26. The counsel Paul gives is due to the "present distress" (ESV, NASB, NKJV) or "impending crisis" (NRSV, NET). The Greek word can be understood as either "present" or to be "close up; at hand; impending" (Mounce's Greek Dictionary). The way Paul speaks in the paragraph, there is a crisis and distress that is just about to come upon. Because of this coming distress, Paul's directions must be understood in light of that circumstances. Therefore, the title of today's lesson is Marriage During Times of Suffering, for this is the occasion for Paul to write this paragraph.

Remain As You Are (7:26-28)

The general rule Paul gives for this circumstance of this impending crisis is that everyone is to remain as they are. If you are bound, that is, betrothed to be married, then do not seek to be free from that engagement. If you are not betrothed for marriage, then do not become engaged to be married. However, Paul notes in verse 28 that it is not a sin if people do get betrothed and the betrothed do get married. But Paul wants to explain why it is not a good time for these Christians to get married.

Remaining Devoted To The Lord During Crisis (7:28-35)

The reason why Paul is concerned about them getting married with the coming crisis is because he desires to spare them of worldly troubles (7:28). Now this could be confusing for them to hear Paul say that marrying would cause worldly problems. Therefore Paul explains what he means in verse 29. The time of distress is coming and they need to be ready for upheaval. Verses 29-31 picture that life as you know it will be completely turned upside down. Everything is going to change. Whatever situation you presently have, be ready for it to change. Your attention and focus will need to be placed completely on the Lord because the present form of this world is passing away. One can safely assume that a serious persecution is going to arise against these Christians. Paul is preparing them to know that what they are able to enjoy now is not going to be the case soon when this crisis arrives. Be ready to lose it all, even spouse and wealth! Be ready for life to change dramatically.

This leads into what Paul's concern is for them getting married. The unmarried man, during this time of crisis, will only need to worry about one thing: pleasing the Lord. When this persecution and distress hit the Christians, the only thing they need to worry about is doing as the Lord commanded them to do. However, when it comes to the married, there are many more things that would be distressing during a persecution and crisis. The married are going to be concerned about their spouses. In a time of persecution, it is much more difficult when you have to be the welfare of the one you love. For example, before I was married, I really did not care about what I ate. I just needed enough money to steam some 59 cent noodles from the store. Hot water and styrofoam noodles for dinner and I am set. But when I got married, that thinking changed. Now I need to protect her. That is my role and that is my God given duty. Now I need to care for her. Now I need to provide for her better than I provided for myself. It is different. The apostle Paul is simply observing this truth. This impending crisis would be much more difficult to endure physically and spiritually if one was married rather than single. Paul's concern is stated in verse 35. Paul wants to secure their undivided devotion to the Lord. The impending crisis will tempt them to no longer have that undivided devotion to the Lord. Notice that Paul says in verse 35 that he is not trying to restrain them. He just is point out the fact of this temptation to have your loyalties divided under such circumstances.

Before we leave this paragraph, we should let the impact of what Paul said hit our hearts. Paul wants to ensure the Christian's undivided devotion to the Lord, whether you are single or whether you are married. I have mentioned before my concern about a teaching that has been widely accepted by Christians and upheld as faithfulness to the Lord: focus on the family. Now, we understand that we are not to neglect our family. We are commanded by God to be husbands, wives, parents, and children properly before our God. We are given responsibilities in these various roles God has given us. But please notice that the apostle Paul's concern is that these Christians, when the time of crisis comes, will make the mistake of focusing on the family! He is attempting to secure their undivided devotion to the Lord. Even more, consider that what could potentially divide their devotion is the marriage.

Too often we use family as the spiritual trump card for not doing something God has called us to do. We will use our family as an excuse to not maintain our full faith and undivided devotion to the Lord. We will openly say that we had family obligations that kept us from worship, helping others, teaching Bible classes, using our homes for Bible studies, or some other way that we can help and serve in the kingdom of God. As if we think that this is a good, valid excuse. Yet Jesus repeatedly taught the need to forsake family to be his disciple. The sad thing is that Paul is concerned that they will lose their undivided loyalty during the time of crisis and distress. We lose our undivided loyalty without that kind of pressure. We willingly forfeit our devotion to the Lord and think we have done well in doing so. We fail to understand that our Lord has called us to love him above all else, not along side other things and other people also. Nothing can ever come before our Lord. It is the very first commandment God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai. This is where following our Lord begins: forsaking all others.

Do Not Succumb To Sexual Immorality (7:36-38)

But Paul now offers a word of caution. While it would be better that they choose not to get married at this time because of the impending crisis, he does not want them to succumb to sexual immorality because they are waiting. Paul addressed this in the first seven verses of this chapter. Paul desires that they exercise self-control and keep each other only as betrothed, not getting married yet (7:37). But, it is not a sin if they do get married. It is certainly a sin if they are engaging in sexual relations before marriage. Consider that this couple is legally bound to each other to be married. Yet they were still not to have sexual relations until they were married. So it is not even acceptable to God to have sexual activity when you are engaged. It is easy to justify such behavior once you are engaged. But God still commands sexual purity until the couple is officially married.

Bound In Marriage For Life (7:39-40)

Paul's final words concerning marriage are a great summary of God's marriage law. "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives." Marriage is for life. Do not get divorced. When you marry, you are staying together for life. You are entering into a covenant. In the marriage covenant you are saying what you will do for your spouse, not what you will get out of the relationship. You are not committing to stay as long as you get what you want. You are in a covenant to your spouse and to God to stay until death. Death is to be the only thing that will sever the bond of marriage. The bond of marriage is to be permanent and death is to be the only thing that will end the marriage. This reminds us that there are far too many divorces going on in our land and even among those who claim to be followers of Christ. One man and one woman married for life is God's marriage law.

When your spouse dies, you are free to marry whoever you wish, only in the Lord. We see Paul authorizing remarriage after a spouse dies because the bond of marriage dissolves in death. Paul made the same point in Romans 7:2-3. Now as we consider what Paul is instructing, we must remember our context. First, these directions in this paragraph are given in light of the impending crisis that is coming. Second, these directions are not from the Lord, but are his judgment that would be best for them during this crisis. Verse 40 reminds us that this is exactly what Paul is doing, as he says that what he is advising is the wisdom of God.

But is Paul instructing for all Christian widows to only marry Christian men? I do not believe we can make that leap with this text for a number of reasons. First, if you turn back to verse 8 in this chapter you will see the directions given to "the unmarried and widows" were that they could marry. There was no prohibition given that they could only marry another Christian. Second, when Paul gave detailed

directions in 1 Timothy 5, instructing widows who were under 60 to remarry, he did not instruct them to only marry a Christian.

Therefore, "Only in the Lord" means to marry another Christian but because of the impending crisis. Just like the rest of the paragraph, these directions were Paul's wisdom of God to be applied only to that present distress situation. However, notice in verse 40 that she would be better off not marrying again because of the impending crisis. Remember that the crisis must color this text because in 1 Timothy 5 the apostle Paul commanded that widows who are under 60 years old to remarry. So this suggestion to not marry must be held in the context of the present distress coming upon them.

Conclusion

With this being the conclusion of Paul's instructions for marriage, our conclusion will be to summarize the message of the scriptures regarding God's marriage laws.

(1) You can live a single life and be pleasing to the Lord. But understand this means you will exercise self-control and remain sexually pure.

(2) Sexual relations is a right and blessing of marriage that is to not be withheld.

(3) Marriage is for life. A person is not to divorce your spouse. Divorce is a sin. Marriage is a covenant that is not to be broken.

(4) If you do divorce, you must remain unmarried or be reconciled to your former spouse. The exception to this, according to Jesus in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, is if your spouse has committed sexual immorality. Only then can you remarry.

(5) If you remarry and the cause of the divorce was not sexual immorality, you are now committing adultery. For the adultery to stop, one must sever the sinful marriage and apply Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7: remain unmarried or be reconciled to your first spouse.

(6) If you are married to an unbeliever you are to remain in the marriage.

(7) If an unbeliever divorces the Christian for being a Christian, you must remain unmarried or be reconciled. There is no authorization for remarriage.

(8) If your spouse dies, you have the right to remarry but you are still required to follow all of God's marriage laws.

THE MARRIAGE RULES



What Do The Scriptures Teach About
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