

1 Corinthians 07 - Marriage & Divorce; Singles & Widows; Mixed Marriages; Singleness

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1 Corinthians 7

III. Questions asked of Paul (1 Cor 7:1—16:24)

Most of the remainder of this epistle is Paul's clarifications of issues the Corinthians took exception with in his previous letter (Cf. 5:9). These questions were delivered to Paul by Stephanus, Fortunatas, and Achaicus (16:17). The attitude of the Corinthians was along the lines of "Why can't we...?" or "Yeah, but isn't it true that...?" These are often referred to as "raised issues" since the Corinthians raised them from content in Paul's previous letter.

(1) Marriage (7:1-40)

This is the longest section in the entire Bible on marriage. Paul addresses a number of possible situations. Not every issue raised by the Corinthians were sinful, but they needed correction.

(A) Married or formerly married (7:1-16)

(a) Importance of sex within marriage (7:1-6)

1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, **it is good for a man not to touch a woman.**

1 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

1 Now about what you asked: "Is it advisable for a man not to marry?"

1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

- "Now concerning..." - *peri de*, Paul addresses each question received from the Corinthians with this key phrase. It introduces Paul's answer to each of their questions:

- Marriage (1 Cor 7:1-24,39-40)
- Celibacy (1 Cor 7:25-38)
- Meat offered to idols (8:1—11:1)
- Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12-14)
- Collection for Jerusalem Christians (1 Cor 16:1-4)
- Apollos (1 Cor 16:12)
- Also, Resurrection (1 Cor 15), but the key phrase "now concerning" doesn't appear

— The Corinthians original question was probably something like: "Isn't it preferable for a Christian man to completely abstain from sex with any woman, even his own wife?"

- "...it is good for a man not to touch a woman" - a quotation from their letter to Paul. This saying/slogan was popular with the ascetics at Corinth. The ascetics were the opposite of the hedonists Paul addressed in 1 Cor 5-6.

— "man" - *anthropos*, people (not *aner*, man as distinguished from woman); indicates that the statement pertains to human beings generally

— "touch a woman" - *gyne*, a euphemism for having sexual relations

— A group of believers (ascetics) in Corinth had set themselves against the widespread immorality in the city by going to the opposite extreme and advocating celibacy, even within marriage

— They believed that the body should be denied pleasure in order to enhance one's spirituality. They thought that abstaining from sex *within* marriage would make them more spiritual.

— It's interesting that both licentiousness (license to sin freely) and legalism are common responses to the same philosophy

2 But because of sexual immoralities, **each man is to have his own wife**, and **each woman is to have her own husband.**

2 But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

2 Because sexual immorality is so rampant, every man should have his own wife, and every woman should have her own husband.

2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

- Paul argued that the type of abstinence that they were arguing for—within marriage—was totally wrong

— Paul could not have advocated celibacy for everyone (including married couples) as that would be contradicting God's utterance: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18)

— Paul would thus be against procreation (Gen 1:28), God's covenant blessings from generation to generation (Gen 17:7) and the growth of the church. He emphasized a high view of marriage in Eph 5:22-33, which included sexual intercourse.

— In this verse, Paul urges married couples to have sex with one another; one reason was because of the prevalence of temptations to satisfy sexual desire inappropriately, which were abundant in Corinth (as they are today)

- "...each man is to have his own wife...each woman is to have her own husband" - it must be kept in mind that the moral conditions in Corinth were terrible (almost as bad as ours). Polygamy was a common practice.

— "each" [2x] - forbids polygamy, as well as homosexual unions

— "have" [2x] - to "have" one's spouse was a common euphemism for having sexual relations with them

— Paul is not necessarily advocating for marriage here, as many suppose. Later (7:28-38) he says that he prefers singleness. However, he's also in no way forbidding or denigrating marriage.

— What he is arguing is that those who are married should have regular sexual relations because sexual immorality is so prevalent (in Corinth, as well as today). In other words, the temptation to satisfy sexual desire outside of marriage is extremely high when one spouse refuses to have sex with the other spouse.

— By one spouse abstaining from sex with the other spouse, the ascetic Christians were playing with fire

3 The husband must fulfill **his duty** to his wife, and likewise the wife also to her husband.

3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

3 A husband should fulfill his obligation to his wife, and a wife should do the same for her husband.

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

- "...his duty" - *opheilē*, that which is owed; a debt; specifically, a conjugal duty
 - Each spouse "owes" sex to the other spouse because it is part of the marriage vows. Marriage is a covenant, and the terms of the covenant are vows. Part of the obligation and responsibility of marriage is to meet the various needs of the partner (Gen 2:18), including sexual needs.
 - The word "duty" can be misleading if it is interpreted literally in the sense of a duty. Rather, the word involves pleasing one's spouse as one is pleased when paying off a debt.
 - The proper attitude in sex within marriage is to please one's wife or husband, not to please one's self
 - Scripture places four requirements that must be met in marriage:
 1. Regular sexual relations (1 Cor 7:2-5)
 2. Provision of food (Ex 21:10-11; 1 Cor 7:33-34)
 3. Provision of proper clothing (Ex 21:10-11; Eph 5:28-29)
 4. Sexual faithfulness (Deut 24:1)
 - All four of these were written into Jewish marriage vows and if broken, were considered biblical grounds for divorce. Whenever any of these are broken, there are biblical grounds for divorce, though each partner should forgive the other and strive to live within their vows.
 - The reason these four grounds remain the same through both the OT and NT is because marriage is a divine institution that God created in the very beginning. It never changes, and is the way it is because it is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.
 - Christ has promised the same four things to the church, His bride: He provides adequate spiritual food through His Word; He clothes us in His own righteousness in justification; He exclusively gives Himself to us as our special possession; and, He is faithful by keeping us eternally secure.
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- 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise the husband also does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.
 - 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.
 - 4 A wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but his wife does.
 - 4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.
 - When you get married, each partner relinquishes certain personal rights, including the exclusive authority over his or her body, to which he or she gives the mate a claim. Neither person has complete authority over his or her own body in marriage.

— Paul gives both spouses equal rights in these verses; he does not regard the man as having sexual rights, but not the woman, or vice versa

- In the previous section (Cf. 6:xx-xx), Paul taught that our bodies belong to the Lord. If that is true, how can we give some of the rights of our body to our spouse? Because God's purpose in marriage is to relinquish some of His rights over our body so we can give them to our spouse. These bodily rights are sexual.

— There is nothing that forms a closer connection in human relations than sex. Neither the husband or wife should have the attitude that their body is their own to do whatever they want with it. Your body also belongs to your spouse. Both the husband and the wife have rights over the other's body. This indicates that both wives and husbands have sexual needs and the other is *obligated* to meet those needs.

5 Stop **depriving** one another, **except by agreement for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer**, and **come together again so that Satan will not tempt you** because of your **lack of self-control**.

5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

5 Do not withhold yourselves from each other unless you agree to do so just for a set time, in order to devote yourselves to prayer. Then you should come together again so that Satan does not tempt you through your lack of self-control.

5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

- Paul confronts the ascetics head on...stop denying sex to your spouse!

- "...depriving" - *apostereō*, to steal; to defraud. Paul says that withholding sex from your spouse is theft!

— Paul uses this same word (translated as "defraud") in 6:7,8 when he addressed the lawsuits between believers before unbelieving judges

— When one spouse denies sex to the other, they are stealing from them because their body does not belong solely to them...it also belongs to their spouse. So keeping sex from them is stealing the part of your body that your spouse owns (has rights to).

- "...except" - Paul gives four conditions for pausing regular sexual relations between married couples:

1. "...by agreement" - both spouses must agree to temporarily pause sexual relations
2. "...for a time" - both spouses must agree to pause sexual relations for a specific period of time

3. "...so that you may devote yourselves to prayer" - sexual relations may be paused if there is a situation that requires such intense prayer that normal sexual relations must pause in order to make more time for prayer
 4. "...come together again" - after the agreed-upon time has come (#2 above), the husband and wife must resume regular sexual relations
- "...so that Satan will not tempt you" - the purpose for the four conditions above; "because of sexual immoralities" (v2)
 - "...lack of self-control" - we think of sexual activity as an indication of lack of self-control, but here Paul viewed the failure of a married couple to engage in sex as a lack of self-control.
 - Remember he is addressing the ascetics, who believed that they were more spiritual because they did not indulge their lusts through sex, even with their own spouse
 - A spouse who denies sex to the other spouse has as much culpability as their spouse if their lack of sexual activity results in adultery

What is the "right" amount of sexual intimacy for married couples?

The Bible doesn't give specific guidance, but a clue could be found in Exodus. The people were consecrating themselves to prepare to hear the voice of the Lord directly. They told Moses that rather than he being the only one to hear God, they wanted to hear Him for themselves. In order to consecrate themselves, there would be preparations made for their personal hygiene and appearance. And, they were to fast for three days, but the 3-day feast they were to observe was in the area of sexual intercourse (Ex 19:15).

In other words, it seemed reasonable, apparently, that within a given 3-day period, married couples would engage in sexual intercourse. With a little conservative math, a reasonable, healthy sex life could include intercourse about 2x per week.

- 6 But this I say by way of **concession**, not of command.
 - 6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command.
 - 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a command.
 - 6 But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.
- "...concession" - *syngnōmē*, a temporary pause/abstinence in sexual relations between a married couple was a "concession" not a command
 - Paul never commanded abstinence within marriage; he viewed regular marital relations as the norm. To Paul, abstinence from marital sex "for a time" (v5) was an exception to what was normal.

(b) Option of singleness (7:7-9)

7 Yet I **wish** that all **men** were even as I myself am. However, each has his own **gift** from God, one in this way, and another in that.

7 Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

7 I would like everyone to be unmarried, like I am. However, each person has a special gift from God, one this and another that.

7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

- "...I wish" - Paul's desire (not necessarily God's desire) was that everyone would remain single/unmarried

- He wished everyone could live like he did, but realized most could not

- "...men" - *anthropos*, people in general, not specific to men; includes both male and female

- "...as I myself am" - Paul was not married when he wrote this epistle (v8). We don't have enough information about his personal life to know whether he had never married, had become a widower, or if his wife left him.

- "...gift" - *charisma*, a gift given by God; singleness is a gift from God and marriage is a gift from God. Some have the gift of celibacy and others have the gift of marriage.

- Celibacy and marriage are both spiritual gifts, just as much as those listed in 1 Cor 12-14. The gift of celibacy is a special ability, that God gives only some people, to feel free from the desire or need for sexual fulfillment in marriage. The gift of marriage means the believer is not free from sexual desire.

Singles and Widows

8 But I say to the **unmarried** and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.

8 I say to those who are unmarried, especially to widows: It is good for them to remain like me.

8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I.

- Paul now gives advice to singles...

- He advised this group, as he did to married people, to remain in the state in which they found themselves, but he allowed them an exception too (v9)

- "...unmarried" - *agamoi*, encompasses all categories of unmarried people, including widowers (a man who has lost his wife through death and has not remarried). There was no Koine Greek word for "widower" at the time of Paul's writing.

— Since singleness is not a sinful condition, married people should not look down on single people or pressure them to get married

9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for **it is better to marry than to burn** *with passion*.

9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

9 However, if they cannot control themselves, they should get married, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

- "...it is better to marry than to burn" - if a single person cannot control their sexual passions, it would be better for them to marry rather than burn with sexual desire

— If a person will "burn" with sexual passion, they clearly do not have the gift of celibacy. In this case, they should get married because the temptation toward sexual immorality would be too great.

(c) No divorce in believer's marriages (7:10-11)

10 But to the married I give instructions, **not I, but the Lord**, that the wife is not to **leave** her husband

10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband

10 To married people I give this command (not really I, but the Lord): A wife must not leave her husband.

10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

- Some ascetic Corinthian spouses thought the path to higher spirituality was to do more than just abstain from sex within marriage. They thought that if they got a divorce, this would assure they would never have sex with their spouse because they wouldn't have a spouse, thus attain higher spirituality.

- "...not I, but the Lord" - this instruction did not come from Paul's wisdom (like v8-9), but directly from the Lord

— Paul is repeating the teaching that Jesus gave during His earthly ministry in regards to marriage (Matt 5:27-32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Cf. Deut 24:1-4). He used some of Jesus' teaching while adding more of his own (Cf. v12), but both v10 and v12 are the words of God.

— In Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matt 19:1-12, which Paul is referencing here, Jesus explained to the Pharisees that Deut 24:1-4 did not teach that a person could divorce their spouse "for any reason," but only for the cause of sexual immorality.

- This was an adequate answer to the ascetic Corinthian believers' desire to divorce in order to reach a higher state of spirituality
- This is one of the few times when Paul appealed directly to Jesus' teachings (Cf. 9:14; 11:23; 1 Tim 5:18). He typically taught in harmony with Jesus without citing Him directly.
- It should be noted that God's instructions through Paul are just as inspired and authoritative as the teaching of Christ during His earthly ministry. All Scripture is equally authoritative.
- "...leave" - *chorizo*, synonymous with divorce (*aphiemi*)
- God hates divorce (Mal 2:14-16)

Things are different today than they were in ancient Corinth. Today, the majority of believers who desire to divorce do so in order to marry someone else. This is not a valid reason for getting a divorce. In Rome, it was easy to divorce. All one spouse had to do was leave the house (if your spouse owned it) or dismiss your spouse (if you owned it). Usually the man owned the house so the wife would leave or the husband would dismiss her. This was called "divorce-by-separation." At that point, once one spouse left or was dismissed, the divorce was final. You did not need a certificate of divorce and were free to remarry anyone of your choice. However, this was not a valid biblical divorce.

11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband is not to divorce his wife.

11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

11 But if she does leave him, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. Likewise, a husband must not abandon his wife.

11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

- If divorce occurs, she should remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband
- Paul phrased this as the wife's course of action, because she was the one who left in this case, and she would have to decide what to do
- The same procedure would be required for the husband in the reverse situation
- In Greco-Roman culture, wives could divorce their husbands; the Jews could not. Only the husband could initiate a divorce (Deut 24:1)
- Some of the Corinthian Christians were divorcing to get away from sexual activity. In many cultures today, the reason is the opposite: people divorce to marry someone else.

Evidently in Corinth there was a wife who was thinking of divorcing her husband through "divorce by separation." Paul said that if she did, she must remain unmarried or be

reconciled to her husband. The reason is that there were no biblical grounds for the divorce. If she remarried it would be adultery because in God's eyes she was still married to her former husband. Therefore, her only recourse was to be reconciled to her husband because he was still her husband in God's eyes. Likewise, the husband should not divorce his wife, which usually meant dismissing her from the house. If he dismissed her he must remain unmarried or be reconciled. The ascetics at Corinth should not go to the extreme of divorce as a means of ceasing sexual activity because it was not a valid path to higher spirituality.

Family Values

The most basic form of love is found in the family. Heterosexuals reproduce; homosexuals recruit. The family serves as the seedbed for virtues. This is the first generation in the nation's history to do worse psychologically and socially than its parents. Each divorce is the death of a small civilization. It inflicts wounds that never heal.

(d) No divorce in mixed marriages (7:12-16)

12 But to **the rest I say, not the Lord**, that if any brother **has an unbelieving wife**, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.

12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.

12 I (not the Lord) say to the rest of you: If a brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she is willing to live with him, he must not abandon her.

12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

- "...the rest" - believers who are not married to a fellow believer

- "...I say, not the Lord" - Paul could not cite a teaching of Jesus on the subject of mixed marriages because He had not spoken on the subject. Nevertheless, the risen Lord inspired Paul's instructions on the subject, so they were every bit as authoritative as the teaching Jesus gave during His earthly ministry.

— Jesus' teaching, by necessity, was incomplete during His earthly ministry (Cf. notes on John 16:12-13). But how could Paul, a human being, even think about filling in the gaps Jesus left in His teaching? Because of the authority Jesus gave him as an apostle, filled with the Holy Spirit, in John 16:12-13 (Cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 4:2,8; 5:27).

- "...has an unbelieving wife" - Paul is speaking to "mixed marriages," believers who are married to non-believers. In this case, if a believing husband is married to a non-believing wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her (i.e. dismiss her).

— Some of the believing men in Corinth thought it would make them more spiritual if they dismissed their unbelieving wives...Paul disagreed

13 And if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband.

13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

13 And if a woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he is willing to live with her, she must not abandon him.

13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

- The contra to v12...if a believing wife was married to an unbelieving husband, and he consents to living with her, she must not divorce him (i.e. leave the home)

The point of v12-13 is that the believing spouse should remain with their unbelieving spouse, as long as the unbelieving spouse was willing to stay together. In a mixed marriage, the Christian partner is not to take the initiative in a move towards divorce. Paul wanted to quash the belief that moving from married to unmarried, even if you're married to an unbelieving spouse, would make one more spiritual.

14 For the unbelieving husband is **sanctified** through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is **sanctified** through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but **now they are holy**.

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified because of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

- Even though an unbeliever might affect their believing mate negatively, it is still better to keep the marriage together because the believing spouse will positively affect the unbelieving spouse. Paul viewed it as an opportunity to win the partner for Christ.

— God uses the believer to impart blessing on the unbelieving spouse that otherwise He would not bestow

— Paul's instruction here should not be interpreted as approval to go ahead and date and marry an unbeliever because of some sort of blessing that the God would impart to the unbelieving spouse through that marriage. A believer should only pursue a marital relationship with a fellow believer.

- "...sanctified" [2x] - *hagiazō*, set apart for a special purpose
- God has set aside the unsaved spouse of a believer for a special blessing, some of which comes from their mate (Ex 29:37; Lev 6:18). God will deal with the unsaved spouse of a believer differently than He deals with those not married to Christians.
- "...now they are holy" - the children of a mixed marriage will see God offset the inherent disadvantages of such a situation with special grace

It's likely that Paul would not have disagreed with a couple separating temporarily, if the believer was in physical danger from an unbeliever. What he did not want is for the believer to initiate the divorce, for this reason or any other.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, **let him leave**; the brother or the sister is not **underbondage** in such cases, but God has called us in peace.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

15 But if the unbelieving partner leaves, let him go. In such cases the brother or sister is not under obligation. God has called you to live in peace.

15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

- "...let him leave" - if an unbelieving spouse in a mixed marriage wants to divorce, the believing partner should allow them to do so. They should not try to force the unbelieving spouse to remain in the marriage.

— The reason is that God prioritizes peace in human relationships; it is better to have a peaceful relationship with an unbelieving spouse who has departed than it is to try to hold the marriage together (assuming holding the marriage together will only result in increasing hostility in the home).

— Note that the believing spouse does not have the option to leave, apart from a threatening situation. Only the unbelieving spouse has the option of divorce.

- "...under bondage" - if the unbelieving spouse initiated the divorce, it is a case of neglect, which is grounds for the believer not to fight with the unbeliever in attempts to keep them from leaving

— The believing spouse is not under bondage or compelled by God to hold the marriage together. In this case, the believer is free to remarry.

Since v15 is not clear as to which obligation the believing spouse is not bound to, wise counsel to a Christian whose unsaved spouse has divorced them would be to remain unmarried as long as there is a possibility that the unsaved person may return. However, if

the unsaved spouse who has departed remarries, the Christian would be free to remarry since, by remarrying, the unsaved partner has closed the door on reconciliation.

16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

16 Wife, you might be able to save your husband. Husband, you might be able to save your wife.

16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?

- This is a further explanation of the sanctifying effect of remaining in a mixed marriage (v14)

— If God has set the unbelieving spouse apart for special blessing, then the believing spouse is in a good position to be the vehicle of their salvation. This is the reason Paul encourages mixed marriages to stay together (Cf. 1 Peter 3:1).

(B) Contentment with circumstances (7:17-24)

In every section of this epistle, Paul has dealt with some behavioral issue that he traces back to a theological problem. Verses 17-24 describe the theological basis for remaining in their marriages rather than making a change to the ascetic lifestyle in order to be more spiritual. The two theological examples are circumcision and slavery. Changing either of these situations in life does not make one more spiritual. Believers need to serve in the situation in life in which they find themselves, and only if an opportunity for a better situation arises should they make a change.

(a) Application to circumcision (7:17-20)

17 Only, as the Lord has **assigned to each one**, as God has called each, in this way let him walk. And so I direct **in all the churches**.

17 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.

17 Nevertheless, everyone should live the life that the Lord gave him and to which God called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.

- Believers should view their current lot in life as what the Lord has "assigned" them. In whatever situation in life God has called each believer, he should walk in that manner of life with contentment.

- Whatever the marital situation (single, married to an unbeliever or married to a believer), a Christian should regard their current “condition” (v20, ISV) as what God placed them in for the time being
- Instead of trying to extricate themselves from that “condition” they should concentrate on serving the Lord rather than spending time and energy trying to change it
- “...in all the churches” - Paul taught this priority of serving Christ over trying to change one’s circumstances “in all the churches.” All the churches were to follow the same pattern so that the church had a unified witness to the world.
- He has appealed to what was customary “in all churches” 4x in this epistle (4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33)
- Paul didn’t reference other churches in any other epistle; it’s a stark reminder that the Corinthian church’s theology was off track, not his

18 Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.

18 Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.

18 Was anyone circumcised when he was called? He should not try to change that. Was anyone uncircumcised when he was called? He should not get circumcised.

18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

- Paul now gives two examples to show the importance of remaining in the situation in which each is called. First, circumcision:

- If a Jew or a Gentile proselyte became a Christian when circumcised, he should not try to change by becoming uncircumcised. The Jews had a procedure for undoing circumcisions so that they could compete in the public gymnasiums without looking Jewish.

— Likewise, if a Gentile had become a Christian when uncircumcised, he should not change that by becoming circumcised (Gal 5:2-3)

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but obeying God’s commandments is everything.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

- Paul continues on the principle of remaining in one's present condition applies to be circumcised or uncircumcised, as well as being married or unmarried; both conditions are secondary to following the Lord.

— Neither circumcision or uncircumcision impacts our spiritual life, so changing these things is irrelevant to our spirituality and relationship to the Lord

— Paul stresses that what really matters is not the irrelevant changes that people often want to make, but rather keeping the commandments of God. The Corinthians were focused on incidentals, and Paul says they need to focus on God's commandments.

20 Each *person* is to remain in that **state** in which he was called.

20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

20 Everyone should stay in the same condition in which he was called.

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

- This verse is the principle that controls this entire chapter: the situation you were in when you were "called" to be a Christian is the situation God wants you in right now.

— This doesn't mean that you can't make a change in the future, but you should never make a change for illegitimate reasons. Serving Christ in your current situation takes priority over the circumstances of your situation.

- "...state" - *klēsis*, calling, condition, or situation; our calling (station, position) in life in which a person is at the time God "called" them into His family

— People who complain about their situation in life as if it is a burden or prohibits them from ministering as effectively as they could if their situation was changed are missing opportunities God is giving them to minister effectively in their situation now

— Paul is saying: "Bloom where God has planted you."

— In context, Paul is appealing to those who were compelled to divorce their spouse. The context here is limited to a celibate, mixed marriage, or marriage where both spouses are believers.

(b) Application to slavery (7:21-24)

21 Were you called as a slave? Do not let it concern you. But if you are also able to become free, take advantage of *that*.

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let that bother you. Of course, if you have a chance to become free, take advantage of the opportunity.

21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

- Paul's second example is slavery...

- "Were you called as a slave?" - rhetorically, Paul asks if they were called (by God to be a Christian) while they were a slave. If so, Paul says, you shouldn't worry about it.
- Paul is not commenting on the morality of slavery...he's using it as an example of his point in v17. If any Corinthian was called while a slave, they shouldn't worry about it because being concerned about that situation in life is not as important as serving the Lord in that situation.
- If you were called while a slave, but later have the opportunity to become a free man, they should take advantage of that opportunity. Thus his point is not that we should accept our situation and remaining in it forever, but we should serve in whatever situation we are in, and if an opportunity for a better situation arises, we should pursue it.
- In context, some Corinthians were trying to get out of their marriages to improve their holiness, but were going about it the wrong way. They didn't understand that true holiness is simply "keeping the commandments of God" (v19).

22 **For** the one who was called in the Lord as a slave, is the Lord's freed person; likewise the one who was called as free, is Christ's slave.

22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.

22 For the slave who has been called to belong to the Lord is the Lord's free person. In the same way, the free person who has been called is the Messiah's slave.

22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

- "For" - signals an explanation is coming...

- When a slave believed in the Lord, he became the Lord's freedman. On the other hand, when a free person believed he became Christ's slave. The Corinthian slave was both: a slave to his master (socially), but a freeman of God (spiritually).

— The point is, either way the believer does not belong to himself! Believers belong to the Lord and should use their situation in life, abilities, and spiritual gifts as opportunities to serve the Lord.

— Feeling sorry for ourselves because of a situation in life or not having certain abilities or spiritual gifts that others have is self-pity. It has no place in the Christian life. God has you right where He wants you to be. All that is needed is for you to accept that and serve!

This imagery, of course, must be understood in light of Greco-Roman slavery, not that of American history. Slavery was in fact the bottom rung on the social order, but for the most part it provided generally well for up to one-third of the population in a city like Corinth or Rome. The slave had considerable freedom and very often experienced mutual benefit along with the master. The owner received the benefit of the slave's services and the slave

had steady employment, including having all his or her basic needs met. Indeed, for many to be a slave was preferable to being a freedman, whose securities were often tenuous at best. But the one thing that marked the slave was that in the final analysis, he did not belong to himself but to another. That is Paul's point with this imagery.

23 You were bought for a price; do not become slaves of people.

23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

23 You were bought for a price. Stop becoming slaves of people.

23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

- Paul now repeats the theological point he made about the proper use of our bodies (Cf. 6:20): we were bought for a price. The price was paid by Christ on our behalf, to remove us from the slave market of sin.

— When we believe, we become Christ's slave. Since we are His slave, if we can at all costs avoid it, we should not become slaves of men because that will diminish our ability to serve the Lord.

24 Brothers *and sisters*, each one is to **remain with God** in that *condition* in which he was called.

24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called.

24 Brothers, everyone should stay in the same condition in which he was called by God.

24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

- Paul repeats (for a third time) the main principle in this passage related to marriage (Cf. v17,20,24,26)

- "...remain with God" - each believer is to remain in the condition in which he was called; there is not reason to force a change. Change may come at some point, but in the meantime the goal is to remain content.

— Believers do not need to change their situation in life in order to be more effective in their service to Christ. They simply need to take advantage of the situation they are currently in and use their abilities, gifts, and opportunities to serve the Lord.

(C) Concerning virgins (7:25-38)

(a) Advantage of the single state (7:25-28)

25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I am offering direction as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an **opinion** as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

25 Now concerning virgins, although I do not have any command from the Lord, I will give you my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.

- "Now concerning" - *peri de*, (Cf. v1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) to indicate a change in topic where Paul will address another question from the Corinthians regarding his "former letter"

- "...virgins" - *parthenos*, a group within the "unmarried" (*agamoí*) of v8

- Since Paul uses the feminine gender in five of six uses of this noun in v25-38, it's clear he was speaking of female virgins

- Like the married ascetics, who were practicing abstinence in marriage or initiating divorce because of their desire for higher spirituality, the same was true of this group. One expression would be to remain a virgin because that ensures no sexual contact, and thus a higher level of spirituality.

- "...opinion" [NASB95] - *gnōmē*, judgment, viewpoint, advice; Paul's mind concerning what ought to be done

- On this topic, Paul had "no command from the Lord" as he had previously (Cf. v10-11), but he gives his opinion/viewpoint as a trusted apostle. Thus, the following are admonitions rather than commandments.

26 I think, then, that this is good in view of the present **distress**, that it is good for a **man** to **remain as he is**.

26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

26 In view of the present crisis, I think it is prudent for a man to stay as he is.

26 I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.

- "...distress" - *anagkē*, necessity, imposed by circumstances or by law

- We don't know what "distress" they were facing, but it was temporary. It may have been the famine that was prophesied by Agabus and fulfilled in the days of Emperor Claudius (Acts 11:28).

- Lack of food made it difficult for married couples to provide food for one another, which is one of the requirements of the marital vows (Ex 21:10-11; Eph 5:29), but the admonition would apply to any situation that brings increased pressure in life that would make it difficult to meet the obligations of marital vows.

- "...man" - *anthropos*, person; could be male or female

- "...remain as he is" - Paul again, for the fourth and last time, repeats his theme of this passage (v17,20,24)

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

27 Have you become committed to a wife? Stop trying to get released from your commitment. Have you been freed from your commitment to a wife? Stop looking for one.

27 Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

- Paul applies the theme of this passage, "remain as you are," especially during a time of "distress" (v26)

28 **But if you marry**, you have not sinned; and **if a virgin marries, she has not sinned**. Yet **such people as yourselves will have trouble in this life**, and I *am trying to* spare you.

28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

28 But if you do get married, you have not sinned. And if a virgin gets married, she has not sinned. However, these people will experience trouble in this life, and I want to spare you from that.

28 But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

- "But if you marry" - seems to indicate that a Christian can remarry without sinning if their former spouse died (v39), was an unbeliever who had divorced them (v15), or if a believer had divorced another believer for biblically valid reasons (Cf. Matt 19:9).

- "...if a virgin marries, she has not sinned" - Paul corrects the ascetic belief that remaining an unmarried virgin would make them more spiritual

- "...such people" - refers to married people

- "...will have trouble in this life" - married people have "trouble" in this life due to the difficulty of keeping their marital obligations (especially in a time of famine). It also may complicate their service to the Lord.

— While not denigrating marriage, and offering it as the only valid solution to avoid sexual immorality, Paul was trying to spare believers from "unnecessary" difficulties

(b) Reasons for remaining single (7:29-35)

(i) The reality of wartime (7:29-31)

29 But this I say, brothers, the **time has been shortened**, so that from now on **those who have wives** should be as though they had none;

29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;

29 This is what I mean, brothers: The time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as though they had none,

29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

- "...time has been shortened" - probably means that the Rapture may occur at any moment. Paul is not concerned about the amount of time left, but the fact that believers need to be aware that our time is limited.

— Christians should live with the values of eternity in view rather than the values of this world. We should be ready to make sacrifices now in view of the possibility of greater reward later (3:14; Cf. Matt 6:19-21).

- "...those who have wives" - married men, whom Paul calls to live as soldiers of the Cross, and be willing to forego some of the pleasures and comforts of family life, but not its responsibilities. Prioritize ministry over the comforts, but not responsibilities, of marriage.

30 and **those who weep**, as though they did not weep; and **those who rejoice**, as though they did not rejoice; and **those who buy**, as though they did not possess;

30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;

30 and those who mourn as though they did not mourn, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they did not own a thing,

30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;

- "...those who weep" - should remember that present sorrow will be comparatively short (Cf. Luke 6:21) and cannot compare to the glories to come (Rom 8:18)

- "...those who rejoice" - should remember that we have a serious purpose to fulfill in life (Cf. Luke 6:25) and that they do not belong to themselves (6:19-20)

- "...those who buy" - need to consider that we are only stewards of God and that everything really belongs to Him. We need a proper perspective on the things we buy, realizing that they are only temporal to get through this life and we should not become attached to them.

31 and **those who use the world**, as though they did not make full use of it; for the *present* form of this world is passing away.

31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

31 and those who use the things in the world as though they were not dependent on them. For the world in its present form is passing away.

31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

- "...those who use this world" - we should "use the world" and everything in it to serve the Lord, but not get completely wrapped up in the things of this world so as to be dependent on them (Cf. Gal 6:14)

— The reason we should view life this way is that earthly life ("the world"), as we know it, is temporary and will eventually "pass away"

(ii) Marriage divides one's interests (7:32-35)

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;

32 But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;

32 I want you to be free from concerns. An unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord, that is, about how he can please the Lord.

32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

- "...I want you to be free from concern" - in light of the imminence of the Rapture, Paul wanted believers to be free from unnecessary concern. He felt the easiest way to accomplish this was to remain single (unmarried) because a single person can devote their total concern to the things of the Lord.

— Unfortunately, many single people remain single just to live for themselves rather than devote themselves to the Lord

33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,

33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,

33 But a married man is concerned about things of this world, that is, about how he can please his wife,

33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

- In contrast to a single person, a married person is necessarily concerned about the things of the world, in particular how he can please his wife. This causes his interests and priorities to be divided between his wife and the Lord.

— In light of "time being shortened" (the imminence of the Rapture), this is not optimal. Paul preferred being single because it allows a person to give their full attention and effort to the Lord.

34 and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

34 and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

34 and so his attention is divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that she may be holy in body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world, that is, about how she can please her husband.

34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

- The dual priorities of a married man are now contrasted with the single priority of an unmarried woman (or virgin). An unmarried woman is able to give herself fully to the work of the Lord (Cf. Rom 16:12; Phil 4:2-3), without the need to be concerned how she may please her husband.

35 I say this for your own benefit, **not to put a restraint on you**, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.

35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.

35 I'm saying this for your benefit, not to put a noose around your necks, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.

35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

- "...not to put a restraint on you" - Paul did not want his comments here to be interpreted as building too strong a case for celibacy (as ascetics do). He is trying to outline and make his readers understand the realities of the single and married states, so they could be focused on the Lord.

— Paul recognized that not all men are gifted with celibacy and thus should get married (v7,9), though he preferred celibacy for its advantages in ministry

— Christians have freedom in the Lord to marry or to remain single, as well as how many children to have, when to have them, assuming they are able. There are no NT commands around such, but Paul urges us to consider life in view of the "present distress" as we consider our options.

(c) Legitimacy of marriage (7:36-38)

36 But if **anyone** thinks that **he** is **acting dishonorably** toward his virgin, if she is **past her youth** and it ought to be so, let him do what he wishes, he is not sinning; let them marry.

36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

36 If a man thinks he is not behaving properly toward his virgin, and if his passion is so strong that he feels he ought to marry her, let him do what he wants; he isn't sinning. Let them get married.

36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.

- "...anyone...he" - a man, in this case the father of a daughter

- "...acting dishonorably" - to act contrary to publicly accepted standards

- "...past her youth" - of marriageable age (18?)

- Perhaps a father was thinking of keeping his daughter a virgin (single) because of what Paul just wrote about his preferences for singleness/celebrity, or he was influenced by the asceticism to think that singleness/celebrity would make his daughter more spiritual.

— In either case, if he accepted the standards of marriage weighed more heavily on him, and "if it (the social expectation) must be so," then the father was not sinning by allowing her to marry.

37 But the one who stands firm in his heart, if he is not under constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin, he will do well.

37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well.

37 However, if a man stands firm in his resolve, feels no necessity, and has made up his mind to keep her a virgin, he will be acting appropriately.

37 Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.

- In contrast to v36, a father who was firmly convinced that his daughter should not marry, and not bowing to the pressures of social expectation but instead making the decision based on his own will, to keep her a virgin/unmarried, "he will do well"

— Neither decision in v36-37 is a sinful one; it is a non-moral issue

38 **So then**, both the one who gives his own virgin in marriage does well, and the one who does not give *her* in marriage will do better.

38 So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

38 So then the man who marries the virgin acts appropriately, but the man who refrains from marriage does even better.

38 So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.

- "So then" - the logical conclusion of the passage

- He praises marriage and exalts celibacy (as a special calling; not for everyone). This passage is a likely response to specific cases inquired of in their previous letter.

- Paul paints the decision as a choice between the good and the better rather than right and wrong, or sinning and not sinning. This is a good example of an amoral decision; Paul addressed other amoral situations in 8:1—11:1.

(D) Freedom to remarry after death of spouse (7:39–40)

39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord.

39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

- "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives" - this refers to a believing wife married to a believing husband because Paul's advice for mixed marriages is that if the unbelieving spouse leaves, the believer is not bound (v15)

- This command is especially important to consider for single women ("virgins") who are considering the possibility of marriage

- But as long as the believing wife and husband are meeting their marriage obligations, there are no valid grounds for divorce and the two are "bound." The only thing that can dissolve a marriage where both parties are meeting their marriage obligations is the death of the husband.

- The same would be true for a husband bound to his wife

- "...only in the Lord" - if one spouse dies and the other chooses to remarry, that is OK, but they are limited to only choosing a spouse who is a believer

40 But in my opinion she is **happier** if she remains as she is; and **I think that I also have the Spirit of God.**

40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

40 However, in my opinion she will be happier if she stays as she is. And in saying this, I think that I, too, have God's Spirit.

40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

- Paul's opinion was that it would be better off for a widow to remain unmarried, but this decision (along with all the decisions presented in this chapter) pivots on a delicate balance

— Paul later acknowledged that given certain conditions, some widows would be better off to marry (Cf. 1 Tim 5:9-13). However, all things being equal (which they usually aren't), remaining single seemed better to Paul.

- "...happier" - notice that the concern is the widow's "happiness," not her obedience

- "...I think that I also have the Spirit of God" - on this point (a single woman whose husband had died), Paul thought that he had the Spirit of God directing his words