

# Chapter 7

## Advice about Sex for those Married and Single

Chapter 7 begins a **new** major division in First Corinthians. Paul now answers questions from the Corinthians in chapters seven through eleven that they had asked him in a letter *now with regard to the issues you wrote about* (verse 1). This first question resulted in advice about being single, sex, and marriage.

### Marriage Requires Sexual Intimacy

**Verse 1**—*It is good for a man not to touch a woman* is probably not handshaking or greeting hugs, but touches which could result in sexual relations.

- Here is a clear distinction between genders:
  - γυναῖκα (a woman, wife, or widow)
  - ἀνὴρ (a male, man)
  - and only two of them

**Verse 2**—The command for man and woman to have sex in marriage is *because of immoralities*.

- This is a basic reason for marriage.
- The word is *pornei* meaning “sex” in general terms.
- Sexual relations in marriage is a preventative against sexual immorality outside of it.
- Sex in marriage is God’s way of controlling our perverted sexual urges.
- The way to do that is *each man is to (sexually) have his own wife, and wife is to (sexually) have her own husband*.

**Verse 3**—Don’t deprive one another of sex beyond your point of self-control. *The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband*.

- Sex is a drive that must be controlled, but there is a limit to that control.
- So, God’s answer for controlling our perverted sexual urges is within a lifelong marriage relationship between a man and woman (Hebrews 13:4).
- Notice, sex is only for marriage. That is, between a male who is a husband, and a female who is his wife.
- Any other sexual practice is sinful and will be judged by God (Proverbs 6:27-29; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Peter 1:13-17).

**Verse 4**—Our bodies sexually belong to our marriage partners in mutual ownership. *The wife does not have authority over her own body... likewise also the husband*.

- In fact, these obligations are so concrete, it could be said that the wife’s body does not even *belong* to herself, but to her husband. The same principle is true of the husband’s body in regard to his wife.
- Paul’s point is that we have a binding obligation to serve our partner with physical affection.

**Verse 5**—So *stop depriving one another* of sexual intimacy.

- The only exception is mutual and temporary *except by agreement for a time* when there are greater needs *so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again* [sexually].
- When these urgent personal, spiritual, or physical needs that required your attention are past, normal marital relations should resume.
- The reason is *so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control*.

- Satan’s great strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can through the world system to encourage sex outside of marriage, and to discourage sex within marriage.
- It is an equal victory for Satan if he accomplishes either plan.
- We should never use sexual abstinence as a tool to manipulate or intimidate our partner.

**Verse 6**—Paul’s concession was allowing temporary abstinence from sex *but this I say by way of concession, not of command.*

- The concession was not having sex.
- He did not command abstinence.
- God will permit (reluctantly, as a concession) a married couple to abstain from sexual relations for a short time, for the sake of fasting and prayer.

**Verse 7**—The preference, though, is celibacy. *Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am.*

- To Paul, the single state had certain advantages for a servant of the Lord such as himself.
- But he did not expect all who were single to stay that way. *However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.*
- The gift of celibacy is a special ability that God gives only some people who feel free from the desire or need of sexual fulfillment in marriage.

## Application

If you choose to get married, then understand you have a sexual obligation to your partner that obligates you in the relationship. Don’t ever weaponize sex in your marriage.

## While Marriage Is Normal, It Requires Diligence

Apparently, Corinthians who had become believers then found themselves in various kinds of marriages and needed instruction as to what they should do about that.

**Verse 8**—**The Unmarried.** *but I say to the unmarried and to widows* referred to all unmarried people.

- Paul said *it is good for them if they remain even as I* as his preference for the unmarried.

**Verse 9**—However, if a single person cannot *have self-control* (sexually), *let them marry.*

- For sure, this one has no gift of celibacy.
- The reason is that *it is better to marry than to burn* (πυροο set on fire, to kindle or ignite) *with sexual passion.*
- It’s not godlier to suppress your sexual urges, if you can legitimately fulfill them.

**Verse 10**—**Married to Believers.** *to the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord* distinguishes between the apostle’s instruction and the teaching of Jesus.

- This seemed to refer to married believers since he gave instruction later about marriage to unbelievers.
- The content of that instruction was *that the wife should not leave her husband* by extricating herself from her marriage.
- So marriage was intended to be a life long arrangement.
- Splitting up has always been an attractive option for many, and some marital situations can become very difficult.

**Verse 11**—Working through them and not giving up on them is the Biblical standard.

- If there is a divorce, then there are two options, *remain unmarried, or else be reconciled.*
- The point is, God’s intent is for partners to stay together, and to share their bodies and lives as the norm.

**Verse 12—Married to unbelievers not wanting out of the marriage.**

- Jesus had not specifically addressed this situation in His teaching, so Paul, inspired of the Holy Spirit, gave instruction *but to the rest I say, not the Lord*.

**Verse 13**—For believers, if an unbelieving spouse does not want a divorce, *he must not divorce her and she must not send her husband away* just because he or she is an unbeliever.

- A believer in this situation is not defiled by marriage to the unbelieving spouse.
- An unequal yoke to a non-believer can be frustrating, but it is not grounds for divorce.
- The believer is not to take the initiative in divorcing the unbeliever.

**Verse 14**—It is the opposite—*the unbelieving husband is sanctified because of the wife, and the unbelieving wife because of her husband*.

- Divorce was to be avoided because the believing spouse was a channel of God's grace in the marriage.
- If both parents were unbelievers, *your children are unclean*, in the sense that this spiritual influence does not exist at all.
- *But now they are holy*, in the sense that they are impacted or influenced by the spiritual heritage in the home because the children share in the spiritual benefits of their believing parent.
- This Christian testimony can clearly contrast with unbelievers and can lead to a child's salvation.

**Verse 15: Married unbelievers wanting out of the marriage.**

- If an unbelieving spouse divorces a believer, *let it take place. In these circumstances the brother or sister is not bound*.
- The marriage is over and there is no longer an obligation to sexual responsibility.
- The reason for this is that *God has called you in* (to a) *peace* (in which He wishes you to live), generally interpreted as a peaceful divorce instead of hostility.
- This is not a statement for remarriage. But notice that the believing spouse does not have the option of departing.

**Verse 16**—The Christian can have hope that God may bring the unsaved spouse *to salvation* while the believer does the Lord's will.

- Possibly, many Corinthians became believers after being married. So now what do they do?
- If the Christian wife stays married to her non-Christian husband, her husband may become a Christian.
- If the unbelieving wife wants to stay in the marriage, the husband should remain married to influence her for Christ.

## **Illustrations of Keeping Stability in Marriage**

**Verse 17—The Example of Circumcision.**

- *As the Lord has assigned to each one*, willingly accept the situation into which God *has called each*, rather than changing your outward circumstances.
- The Corinthian believers evidently wanted to change their marital status from single to married, married to unmarried, from an unbelieving spouse to a believing one.
- The message is to remain in whatever situation you were called as a believer.
- Christians are to be better husbands, wives, friends, slaves, masters, sons, daughters and citizens. *And so I direct in all the churches* given to all believers, not just to the problem ones.
- Paul's ministry was that of an itinerant missionary, meaning that people were coming to Christ from various backgrounds all over the Roman Empire.

- So this issue would most likely be a necessary one to manage for him. Namely, as they bring their background with them, they manage it in a godly way.

**Verse 18**—Further, a Jewish believer should not become like a Gentile one. *He is not to become uncircumcised or vice versa he is not to be circumcised.*

- Circumcision is a sign of being a Jew, but salvation does not change one's physical or ethnic situation.

**Verse 19**—Both are *nothing* in the sense they have no spiritual significance.

- *But what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God*, making the real issue internal rather than external.

**Verse 20**—So *each man must remain in that condition in which he was called* to emphasize staying in the situation where one became a believer.

- Bloom from where you came to Christ.

**Verse 21**—**The Example of Slavery.**

- *Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it.*
- The point is, whatever condition you find yourself, live as a believer, even in a superior to subordinate relationship.
- But if you have the opportunity to improve your situation, *make the most of the opportunity*, similar to Paul being content to minister in jail. But when he was freed, he left jail!

**Verse 22**—Actually, freedom or slavery is not the issue.

- The issue is rather that the Lord owns us and that we belong to Christ.
- *For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman.*
- Our freedom in Christ is not freedom to do our own will, but do His will. *The one who was called as a free person is Christ's slave.*

**Verse 23**—Jesus bought the believers spiritual freedom. *You were bought with a price* by Christ's death and is the believers emancipation from sin's condemnation.

- This is why we must not *become slaves of men* not in physical slavery but spiritual slavery, to the ways of men and the world.

**Verse 24**—So your relational situation when believing *is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

- This is the third time the apostle made the point that a believer should stay in the situation in which he became a Christian.
- The point is to move from there in a godly direction.

## Application

Every believer comes to Christ from different entry points. Some from pagan backgrounds. Others from religious backgrounds. Still others from a hybrid of pagan and religious backgrounds. They come from different ages and experiences. The point is to move within that place and form it to honor God.

## Remaining Single Is Acceptable

**Verse 25**—**Concerning Virgins**

- For those who have never been married, *I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion.*
- The Lord did not discuss this topic on earth, so Paul had no direct revelation from the Lord.

- God revealed the New Testament revelation progressively, not all at once.

**Verse 26**—*I think then that this is good*, so here is an apostolic guideline, that it is good to remain single *in view of the present distress*.

- Singleness is better than marriage when Christians face duress.
- Married believers would suffer more watching their families suffer, too.

**Verse 27**—*Are you bound to a wife?* Don't pursue divorce.

- *Are you released?* Do not seek a wife.
- God can use us right where we are, and we should not be so quick to change our station in life.

**Verse 28**—Although he just said it was good to remain single, it's not a sin to marry. *But if you marry, you have not sinned*.

- Yet, the practical advice is that *such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you*.
- Marriage may cause problems, while it solves others, and compounds the pressures of difficulties, and can intensify them!

**Verse 29—Concerning Contingencies**

- Marriage can encroach on time. *The time has been shortened* (συνεσταλμένος contracted, rolled up like sails on a ship) we have for the Lord.
- Every day we live our allotted time on earth is shortened.
- In times of duress, it is better for husbands to live as if they do not have wives *from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none*.
- In a time of crisis, husbands and wives must focus on the Lord and eternity.
- Marriage can be a distraction in times of trouble.

**Verse 30**—*Those who weep, as though they did not weep*, that is, in times of trouble, believers must put their emotions into perspective.

- *Those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice* means that life situations may require foregoing comforts and pleasures of family life, though not its responsibilities.
- The point is that even legitimate areas may hinder our Christian life under certain circumstances, including even things like necessary purchases *those who buy, as though they did not possess*.

**Verse 31**—The Christian should take advantage of the world and its system, but not let the world take advantage of the believer. *Those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it*.

- We march to a different drum beat.
- *For the form of this world is passing away* meaning the *fashion, manner of life, mode of life*, the outward appearance of the world is passing away.
- The fashion of this world is not permanent but is transient and temporary.
- Marriage is not permanent or eternal.
- There is also more to life than purchasing a beautiful house or retirement.

**Verse 32—Concerning Distractions**

- **First**, *one who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord*.
- Single people are able to give more time to the Lord and exclusively give themselves to the Lord because they have fewer distractions in life.

**Verse 33**—**Second**, *one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife*.

- Paul does not say this to condemn the married person; in fact, Paul is saying this is how it *should* be for the married person.
- There is something wrong if a married man does not care for how he may please his wife.

**Verse 34**—*And his interests are divided.*

- For Paul, being unmarried meant fewer distractions in serving God.
- Marriage necessitates devotion to our mates.
- Married people must meet the daily demands of life.
- **Third**, *the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord... holy both in body and spirit.*
- With less family and marriage demands and obligations, they can be more devoted to the Lord.
- *The one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband* relating to the earthly personal needs of their spouse.

**Verse 35**—*This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you.*

- Marriage offers diversions from complete devotion to the Lord, while singleness has fewer distractions with potential *undistracted devotion to the Lord.*
- Marriage doesn't promote devotion to the Lord nor singleness guarantee it, but there are fewer distractions.

**Verse 36**—**Concerning Classifications**

- The first classification is a father who dedicated his daughter to singleness did not sin by letting her marry if *he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter.... he does not sin; let her marry.*
- Behaving improperly has to do with the father not making arrangement for her marriage.
- The father who maintains his commitment to keep his daughter single is under no constraint by the daughter to change his mind.

**Verse 37**—*But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint (the father is free to make his own choice) ... has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter (from being married), he will do well (to keep her a virgin [unmarried]).*

**Verse 38**—This is not an issue of right and wrong, but between what is good and what is better *he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.*

- For Paul, in light of the present circumstances, he regarded singleness as best.

**Verse 39**—The second classification is remarriage of widows *a wife is bound as long as her husband lives but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married.*

- Marriage is intended to be permanent in the sense of being lifelong and binding.
- Death gives liberty to remarry.
- But a Christian widow, like any Christian, is only free to remarry another *only in the Lord.*

**Verse 40**—Under the present distress, it is better for the widow not to marry *but in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is.*

- At the same time, Paul believes such a widow is happier if she remains as she is – that is, if she remains single.
- He speaks as an apostle, *I think that I also have the Spirit of God*, but since it is in Scripture, it is God's opinion, too.

## Application

Don't try to change your social or marital situation just because you have become a believer but live for God in your situation moving in the direction of His will for you there.

- Sex is always perverted. The perversion should be contained by having regular sex with your spouse, regular being defined by the needs of the other spouse (7:1-5).
- Ideally, single celibacy is the most perfect preference if you are gifted for it. [By the way, no other religion or society has ever suggested this. It's also in contrast to God's command to Adam and Noah to multiply and fill the earth, and the promise to Abraham that he would have descendants like the stars of the sky] (7:6, 25-38).
- If you are divorced, don't remarry. If you are married, don't get divorced (7:10-13, 27-28).
- One believer in the home is better than no believers in the home. A believing spouse sets apart the home for the greater likelihood of the unbelieving spouse and children to become believers (7:14-18).
- Don't try to change your social or marital situation just because you have become a believer. Live for God and build out your life from your situation (7:19-24).
- If your spouse dies, you are free to remarry (without sin), if you marry a believer (7:39).