

CHAPTER SEVEN

Analysis

- A. Paul now turns his attention to a matter about which the church had written (7:1-9).
1. Their first question was about the advisability of remaining unmarried. It may have been framed like this: Is it better to remain unmarried than to assume the responsibilities of marriage?
 2. The apostle answers the question, recognizing that there are two sides to the problem (1-6).
 - a) He says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman, that is, the unmarried state is commendable (1). This is not to say that it is superior or to imply that marriage is in any way wrong.
 - b) Low moral standards with which they were perfectly familiar and about which he had written in chapters five and six form a basis for considering the advisability of marriage (2-6).
 - (1) Because of fornication which reflects the generally low state of morals in Corinth, a man is to have his own wife, and a woman is to have her own husband. This in no way overlooks the very high regard with which he viewed marriage, but it does consider the problem as Christians faced it at Corinth.
 - (2) Each man is to have his wife, and each woman her own husband. Thus marriage, in accord with the original plan for the home, was a safeguard against the temptations involved in their society.
 - (3) Husband and wife have mutual obligations.
 - (a) The husband is to give the wife what is due her.
 - (b) The wife is to give the husband what is due him.
 - (4) This involves the principle of the right over the body:
 - (a) The wife does not have the right over her own body; that belongs to the husband.
 - (b) The husband does not have the right over his own body; that belongs to his wife.
 - (5) A possible exception to this principle:
 - (a) The general practice: Do not defraud one another.

CHAPTER SEVEN

- (b) Exception: By mutual consent for a limited time for a holy purpose such as a season of prayer, they may separate and then be together again.
 - (c) The reason for this restriction: That Satan not tempt them because of incontinency.
 - (d) This temporary separation is a matter of permission, not commandment.
3. Returning to the main problem about marriage, the apostle expresses his personal preference, yet recognizes that all are not alike in this matter (6-7).
- a) I wish that all were as myself—unmarried. This must be understood in the light of the peculiar problem at Corinth and his own self-control which he recognizes is a gift from God, but all do not possess it.
 - b) Each one has his own gift from God; Paul's enabled him to withstand temptation in the midst of low moral conditions; another's enabled him to assume the responsibilities of family life in times of distress.
4. He sums up what he has said in answer to their question: Addressing both those who have never married and widows who may be eligible to remarry he says,
- a) It is good for them to abide unmarried just as he is.
 - b) If they lack continency, it is better for them to marry than to suffer uncontrollable desires.
- B. He now turns his attention to those who are already married (10-24).
1. The married state is not to be set aside (10-16).
- a) He gives an order that is in accord with what the Lord had already said (10-11).
 - (1) The wife is not to depart from her husband.
 - (2) What to do if she should depart: Remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband—no suggestion here that God sanctions her being joined to another.
 - (3) The same rule is for the husband: He is not to leave his wife.
 - b) As an inspired apostle, he gives additional instruction to those who are married (12-16).
 - (1) He considers what must have been a very real problem to them—a Christian married to an unbeliever.

I CORINTHIANS

- (a) If a brother has an unbeliever for a wife—this is assumed as a real possibility—and she is willing to live with him, he is not to leave her.
 - (b) If a Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer—this also is assumed as a real possibility—she is not to leave him.
 - (c) The reason for this instruction is seen in the fact that the sacredness of the marriage relation is guaranteed in the one who is a believer; otherwise, the children would also be unclean.
- (2) What if the unbeliever should depart? That is also considered as a real possibility. The answer: Let him depart.
- (a) The brother or sister is not under obligation to maintain a home under such conditions.
 - (b) God intended that there should be peace in the home.
- (3) After discussing these real possibilities, he returns to his original instruction not to set aside the marriage relationship and presents a great challenge to the believer (16).
- (a) How do you know whether or not you may save your husband?
 - (b) How do you know whether or not you may save your wife?
2. He sets forth the rule that he follows in all the churches (17-24).
- a) Whatever one's state may be, as the Lord distributed His gifts and God has extended His call, live in it.
 - b) Its application to circumcision.
 - (1) Status as to circumcision or uncircumcision is not to be changed.
 - (2) The thing that matters is keeping the commandments of God.
 - c) Its application to slavery.
 - (1) Status as to slavery or freedom not to be changed unless freedom should be possible.
 - (2) The principle involved: the slave becomes the Lord's freedman.
 - (3) Don't become slaves of men.

d) Let each man abide with God in the state in which he was called.

C. Paul's judgment as an inspired apostle concerning the unmarried (25-40).

1. It is good—he doesn't say that this is the only thing or that it is required or that it is the superior way—for a man to be as he is (25-28).

a) This is not a commandment; it is the advice of one who has obtained the mercy of the Lord to be an apostle and who is trustworthy.

b) This does not set aside the marriage relationship except in the situation which they were facing—"the distress that is upon us."

c) He advises the married to remain married and the unmarried not to seek a wife.

d) Marriage, however, is not a sin, but it will be accompanied with distress.

2. He would have them free from cares involved in marriage (29-35).

a) The fashion of the world is changing—marriage according to the divine plan is limited to this life (28-31).

b) He would have them free from domestic cares that they might be free to attend to the things of the Lord (32-34).

c) He is not forbidding marriage lest by so doing he might cause them to sin (35).

3. His advice to fathers concerning their daughters of marriageable age (36-38).

a) Marriage is not a sin; if he so determines, let them marry.

b) It may be better, if he does not give her in marriage.

4. His advice as one who has the Spirit of God to direct him as to the remarriage of a widow (39-40).

a) The wife is bound to the husband as long as he lives.

b) If he is dead, she is free to marry, only in the Lord.

c) In his opinion, she is happier if she abides as she is.

d) This he says as one who has the Spirit of God—it is the inspired directive on the subject of marriage.

Text

7:1-9. Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 But, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

3 Let the husband render unto the wife her due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife. 5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency. 6 But this I say by way of concession, not of commandment. 7 Yet I would that all men were even as I myself, Howbeit each man hath his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they have not continency, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

Things About Which They had Written (1-9)

Commentary

Now concerning things whereof ye wrote.—Up to this point Paul had been writing about things that had been reported to him by those of the house of Chloe. These things were division, neglect of duty in relation to moral issues, going to court before pagan judges, and the abuse of the body which the Lord intended to be a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Corinthians, evidently desiring additional information on certain matters, had written to the apostle. Was this in response to what he had taught in the "lost epistle" or was it because they felt a need for more information than they had received when he was present with them? There is no good way for us to answer these thought provoking questions. Interpretation of his answers does not depend on our knowledge of what prompted them to ask for the information.

They were concerned about the problem of marriage. We can not be sure just what other questions were asked, but it may be that the rest of the book is given over to the answer of their questions. It is possible, of course, that their only question was about marriage. The rest of the book, then, is additional help which he knew they needed as they faced the problems of their day. We might also ask if chapters twelve through fifteen come under the heading of things about which they had written? In all probability they do, but we cannot be sure. The expression, "now concerning" is an indication that all this section may have been written in response to their letter. See 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1.

The topics discussed in this section pertain to marriage, idolatry, worship, the Lord's supper, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints.

It is good for a man not to touch a woman.—The question back of this answer was something like this: Is it commendable for a Christian not to marry? Or it may have been framed like this: Is it better to remain unmarried than to assume the responsibilities of marriage in this time of distress. The answer is: It is commendable for a man not to touch a woman. This is to those who had never married. It simply states that the unmarried state is commendable. It does not say that the unmarried state is superior to the married state or that there is anything wrong about marriage, for "marriage is honorable" (Heb. 13:4).

But, because of fornication.—The low state of morals in Corinth was well known. Paul's answer takes this into consideration as well as what he had just written in chapters five and six on the subject. This is not to say that the only reason for getting married is to avoid immoral relationships. Some have taken this as an indication of Paul's low estimate of marriage. On the contrary, we should remember what he wrote to the Ephesians on the subject (Eph. 5:22-23). See also II Cor. 11:1-3. The relation of husband to wife is like that of Christ to the church. The husband is to love his wife, and the wife is to be faithful to her own husband. No one has ever glorified marriage more than the apostle Paul.

Two things were faced by the church at Corinth that led to Paul's answer: (1) the prevalence of the sin of fornication, and (2) the fact that some of them did not have the gift of continence such as he had.

each man his own wife, each woman her own husband.—Paul upholds the original standard for the home as seen in Gen. 2:18-25. He most assuredly forbids immoral conduct. Faithfulness to the marriage vows is required of both husband and wife—nothing one-sided about this. Each one has an obligation to the other. The husband is to give to the wife what he owes her, and the wife is to give to the husband what she owes to him. This regulation points to the cause of so much marital trouble—selfishness on the part of husband or of wife. While Paul is speaking in this context about sex, the problem is far greater than that one issue. It involves every relationship of husband and wife. "In lowliness of mind each counting other better than self" is a principle that would save many a marriage (Phil 2:3). When each partner is

concerned about the other more than self, the problems of married life are greatly reduced.

power over her own body, power over his own body.—How many think about this when they enter into the marriage contract? As to the Christian's body, Paul said, "you are not your own." The body is the Lord's. As to partners in marriage, neither husband nor wife can say, "I have the right over my own body." That right, Paul declares, belongs to the other partner—the wife over the husband's body and the husband over the wife's body. With selfishness excluded and love serving as the guiding principle of married life, this is an ideal arrangement. It cannot be safely ignored except at the peril of the marriage itself. Paul adds, "Defraud not one another." Do some husbands or some wives cheat in this matter? Check the divorce records for the answer.

except it be by consent for a season.—An exception to the principle just announced is granted. This exception, however, is under rigid regulations. It must be by mutual consent and for a holy purpose, and it can be for a limited time only. Selfishness is ruled out. This can't be a whim of either partner; both are to agree to it. Where love for each other and unselfishness govern the actions of husband and wife, such agreement should not be difficult to arrange.

that ye may give yourselves unto prayer.—Just what situation would make it desirable for husband or wife to be relieved of the home responsibilities in order to give one's self to prayer is not stated. It may be entirely personal, for the Lord must come before even the dearest one in the earthly relationship. But the need to be alone in prayer is not to be prolonged indefinitely; it is for a limited time only. It would be quite easy for a selfish person to pretend that his desire to attend to religious duties is adequate reason for avoiding responsibilities that belong to the home life. God ordained both the home and the church relationship, and it is not necessary to neglect one to care for the other except, as Paul indicates, for a brief season.

Prayer in the home by both husband and wife is essential to the best relationship in the home. Children should be reared in the atmosphere of prayer. They should learn that prayer is the holy privilege which God gives to His children to talk to Him at any time about anything anywhere. This puts a grave responsibility on parents to conduct themselves and their families in such a manner that they can really pray together. A quarreling family, a nagging wife, or an abusive husband will make it utterly impossible to maintain an atmosphere of prayer about the home.

There are times when each person needs to be alone with his God. Jesus often withdrew alone to a quiet place to pray. If Our Lord needed this quiet time for meditation and prayer, how much more do we need it? Paul recognized such a need, but he reminded the church that this did not free them from other responsibilities within the family. After the brief time that was mutually agreed upon, husband and wife were to be together again.

that Satan tempt you not.—Satan's power to tempt either husband or wife is an important factor in all that Paul has said on the expediency of marriage. Lack of self-control in sexual matters is Satan's invitation to attack. The wise husband or the wise wife will guard the one he or she loves to prevent this from happening. Sex can become the most degrading thing in the experience of man and woman, but when it is controlled by Christian love and an unselfish spirit, it can become a beautiful relationship which God has granted to husband and wife. *concession, not commandment.*—What Paul has said about agreement as to a time of prayer is not to be taken as a command. It is permissive. It is left to the intelligence of husband and wife. Perhaps no two people are alike in their ability to exercise self-control in these matters. No general command could be given to regulate such periods of devotion to prayer. Therefore the apostle says that this suggestion is a matter of concession, not commandment.

I would that all men were even as I myself.—Paul evidently is referring to his gift of continence which was a gift from God. This in no way condemns another who may not possess such a gift. Each one has his own gift from God; for one it may be the gift of continence; for another it may be the ability to bear patiently and lovingly the responsibilities of the home with Christian consideration for the other partner.

Jesus mentioned those who make "themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. 19:12). This is undoubtedly the same gift that Paul possessed. He was content to give all his time and concern to the preaching of the word of the cross. He in no way, however, leaves room for one to assume that he was not entirely in favor of marriage within the regulations of the Lord.

This passage is sometimes used to raise the question about Paul's marital status. Was Paul a married man when he wrote this? Had he ever been married? We have no good answer to these questions. Some assume that his remark about giving his consent to the death of Stephen (Acts 22:20) meant that he was a member of the Sanhedrin and that would require him to be a married man. There is no real

evidence that he was ever a member of that body. He could have agreed to what was being done without being an official. He mentions his "right to lead about a wife that is a believer" (I Cor 9:5), but this does not indicate that he was or ever had been married. It seems quite certain that he was not accompanied by a wife at the time of his writing to the Corinthians.

Paul's great love for Timothy (I Tim. 1:2) and his beautiful tribute to Timothy's home background show something of the esteem with which he looked upon home ties.

Whether he was married or not makes no difference in what he teaches on the subject for he writes as the apostle of Christ. Hence what he says is Christ's teaching given through His inspired apostle. *to the unmarried and to widows.*—This returns to the question about which they had written: Is it commendable not to marry? The answer, given after explaining regulations for marriage, is "yes." Later in this chapter he discusses the situation which the Corinthians faced that had a bearing on his answer. They were living in times of distress. If, however, they did not possess the God-given gift of continence, he says, "Let them marry." In other words, they are not to assume that there is something superior about refraining from marriage; marriage is commendable and so also is the unmarried state.

better to marry than to burn.—The burning desire of one who does not possess the gift of continence is to be quenched within the God-given regulations for husband and wife, not in the sinful practice of fornication. See notes on 6:16.

Text

7:10-24. But unto the married I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband 11 (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife. 12 But to the rest say I, not the Lord: If any brother hath an unbelieving wife, and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her. 13 And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 15 Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace. 16 For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife? 17 Only, as the Lord hath distributed to each

man, as God hath called each, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches. 18 Was any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. 21 Wast thou called being a bondservant? care not for it: nay, even if thou canst become free, use it rather. 22 For he that was called in the Lord being a bondservant, is the Lord's freedman: likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's bondservant. 23 Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men. 24 Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God.

Directions for the Married (10-24)

Commentary

Unto the married, I give charge.—Paul, speaking as an apostle of Christ, gives direction to those who are already married. It is in complete agreement—how could it be assumed to be otherwise since he is writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit—with what the Lord had said. This is a good answer to those who assume that the “red letter” sections of the New Testament are superior to the words of the apostles. Actually, their words are the words of Christ as He spoke them by His Spirit through the apostles (John 16:14).

but the Lord.—The apostle gives us the inspired interpretation of what Jesus said on this matter as recorded in Matt. 19:3-9. Jesus spoke to men who were under the jurisdiction of the law of Moses. He reminded them that the marriage law that had been in force since the beginning was still in force. Moses had made certain exceptions because of the hardness of their hearts, but this did not annul the original law of marriage. Jesus reminded them that the one who put away his wife except for fornication and married another committed adultery, that is, the wife so put away was stigmatized by his act as an adulteress. See Rom. 7:3. The one who married a wife put away in this manner also committed adultery.

This inevitably raises the question of the right of the “innocent” party to remarry. To refuse the “innocent” one the right to marry again, it is said, is “unfair.” Perhaps this is true, but who is to decide the question of innocence? What did the inspired apostle say as he interpreted the word of Our Lord on this subject? The answer is given in just two places in the New Testament. Paul discusses it in the Roman letter. There he says that a woman is bound to the husband

while he lives (Rom. 7:2). To make the matter clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, he adds, "if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband." The only other reference to the duration of the binding effect of marriage is in First Corinthians chapter seven. The same law is upheld, "A wife is bound so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married (I Cor. 7:39).

Many commentators assume that the innocent one is given the right to marry again. Every one acting on such opinion should for his own sake weigh carefully what Paul has said on the matter. Consider this also: The nineteenth chapter of Matthew which gives Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce also tells what He said to the rich young ruler about eternal life. Because they were living under the law of Moses, Jesus told him to keep that law. When the people on the Day of Pentecost—the beginning of the Christian age—asked what to do to be saved, they were told by the inspired apostles to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 3:28). Now if we do not go to Matthew nineteen for the answer to the important question about what to do to be saved, why should we do so to the neglect of the apostle's inspired interpretation of what Jesus said on the matter of marriage and divorce? This seems to be a valid argument, and it should be considered by those who would interpret Matthew nineteen as permitting remarriage under the gospel covenant.

That the wife depart not from her husband.—No exception allowed by this categorical statement! The same rule applies to husband: "that the husband leave not his wife." I understand this to say clearly that remarriage is not permitted under the regulations of the New Covenant. The law that was ordained in the beginning and upheld by Jesus is in force in the Christian age.

This presents a real problem on which the apostle did not write. What is one to do who may have divorced and remarried without knowing what the New Testament teaches on the subject? What I say here can only be expressed as an opinion based on what the Bible says in general about forgiveness of sin. Suppose that divorce and remarriage is a violation of the law of God. It then become a sin to do so. And if this is true, there is only one thing to do about it: "repent and pray God if perchance the thought of the heart may be forgiven" (Acts 8:22). This would, of course, require baptism in the case of those who have not been baptized (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16).

John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Since there is a question about the matter, the conscientious Christian couple who may be involved, it would seem, should determine not to repeat the mistake and ask God to forgive if they have violated His law.

Should such couples separate? This is another problem on which we do not have Scriptural teaching. In so many cases, it would be impossible to do so. The sin—if it is a sin—is in the divorcing and remarrying. Perhaps it would be better not to try to return to the former partners, since in so many cases it could not be done anyway.

The alarming problem of divorce with its effects on the children of the nation should cause Christian people to avoid the appearance of approving it. The church should hold before its young people, by teaching and by the example of elders and deacons, the ideal marriage relations as ordained by God in the beginning.

if she should depart.—This directive is clear enough. She is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. This is in accord with the above interpretation of remarriage. It is not permitted by the inspired teaching of the New Testament. The wife who leaves her husband is not free to marry another man while her husband lives, only if he is dead. The same rule applies to the husband; he is not to leave his wife.

But to the rest say I, not the Lord.—Some have assumed that Paul is giving his private opinion which is not substantiated by the Lord. On the contrary, he is speaking as the Lord's inspired apostle. The Lord through His inspired apostle is giving additional information to guide those who find themselves in a situation which did not exist during His personal ministry. The church was not established until the day of Pentecost. Now a situation arises that calls for inspired instruction. What is the Christian to do who finds himself married to an unbeliever? If the unbelieving partner—husband or wife—is willing to maintain the home, the Christian is not to leave husband or wife. This answers the contention of some who say that marriage is not valid before the Lord unless both parties are Christians. The facts are that the law of marriage was given in the beginning and was upheld by the Lord in His teaching to the Jews and is, undoubtedly, to be looked upon as valid for all—Christian and non-Christian.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife.—The rule applies to either party, husband or wife. Marriage is holy, and the unbelieving partner in this holy relationship is sanctified in the believer,

that is, the marriage relationship is sacred because of the one partner that belongs to the Lord. If this were not so, the children of such marriages would be unclean, but now they are holy. That is to say, the marriage is in accord with the holy regulations of the Lord; the children of such marriages are not to be considered as being born out of wedlock.

A word of caution must be given here: This matter of sanctification has to do with the sanctity of the marriage relationship. It does not say that an unbeliever who is married to a Christian is saved from his sins just because he is married to a believer. Salvation and sanctification in respect to sin are, after all, personal issues. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," said Jesus (Mark 16:15-16). When we remember that Paul was speaking about the sacredness of the marriage relationship and not personal salvation, there is no problem.

Yet if the unbelieving departeth.—This action is on the part of the one who has not submitted to the law of Christ. The Christian is not to initiate the action and—although it is not so stated in this context—is surely not to be the cause of the unbeliever departing. Who but the Lord can really know whether or not the believer may be guilty of such conduct or attitude as to actually cause the unbeliever to depart? The Christian is under obligation to conduct himself in accord with the obligations involved in the marriage contract even if he is married to an unbeliever (vs. 3-5). This may often present a very difficult problem to the Christian; but, if he really wants to honor his Lord, he can find grace to cope with the situation.

not under bondage in such.—Some assume that this frees the believer to remarry. However, the rule is plainly stated without exceptions in verse 39: "A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married." In verse eleven, Paul had said that the one who departs is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. Some, of course, will argue that these rules do not apply to the case in hand. But when the whole body of instruction for marriage is considered, it is difficult to find a valid reason for assuming that remarriage is permitted except when one partner is dead.

What, then, is meant by "not under bondage"? No one is bound to maintain an impossible situation. An unbeliever who will not submit to the law of Christ will do as he pleases. Even the most loving Christian wife or husband may not be able to maintain the home if the unbeliever decides to leave. Let him depart; that may well be all one can do.

but God hath called us in peace.—This is a difficult passage. Does it mean that the believer is not under obligation to live with an unbelieving husband or wife unless there can be peace in the home? Surely it is hard to have a home without peace. Or does it mean that the believer is under obligation to maintain peace in the home if at all possible? Probably the latter, because of the reason suggested in the next sentence.

For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband.—This, of course, applies also to a husband who is a believer. The whole issue is just this: Are you really interested in the salvation of the unbeliever? Too often the interest is in getting rid of the other partner, using his unbelief as a pretext. Taken with the statement about peace, this would seem to say that the Christian is to maintain peace in the home with a view to winning his unbelieving partner to the Lord. Unless one can live as a real Christian under such trying conditions, there is little reason to expect the unbeliever to change.

And so I ordain in all the churches.—The rule applies to all the churches, Corinth included. Each was to live in the state in which he was called, that is, in whatever state one found himself on becoming a Christian, let him be content with it and live as a Christian without disrupting such things as marriage, bondage, status as Jew or gentile. This rule is given to those who may have assumed that they were freed from the marriage vows by becoming Christians.

Circumcision.—The meaning of circumcision is to be taken from its use in the case of Abraham who was found righteous because of his faith in God before he was commanded to be circumcised (Romans 4:9-12). Circumcision became a mark that indicated that God acknowledged his righteousness. To many, this became a mark of acceptance by the Lord regardless of their actual status before Him. In itself, then, circumcision counted for nothing. The real question was the attitude of the heart (Rom. 2:28-29). Since this was true, the Christian was not to be concerned about such outward marks.

Wast thou called being a bondservant?—One did not need to change even slavery in order to become a Christian. But see the beautiful story of Onesimus, the runaway slave who became a Christian (Philemon 1-11). What does Paul mean by saying, "use it rather"? Some suggest that he is saying that a slave is to use his slavery to the credit of the cause of Christ (Eph. 6:5-6). On the other hand, it is more likely that he is saying if the opportunity to become free presents itself, use it. Human bondage cannot long endure where there is an

atmosphere of Christian freedom. If the truth as Christ taught it were actually accepted by men everywhere, freedom would spread to all human relationships. The only true freedom is found in being "Christ's bondservant."

Ye were bought with a price.—This is the second time that Paul has reminded his readers of this. See 6:20. Actually they belonged to the Lord, for He bought them with His precious blood. They were not to be slaves to the sin of immorality. Even if they were in human bondage, they were the Lord's freedmen.

become not bondservants of men.—The Christian is not to have his conduct regulated by human masters. Christ has given him direction through the inspired apostle whether he is a slave or a free man. No human bondage is to supersede this divine relationship.

therein abide with God.—Heaven is the Christian's home. He should learn to live with that thought in mind. On earth he has a work to do, glorifying God in the body. The thought of abiding with God in this life helps to bear the trials and hardships that come to His children.

Text

7:25-40. Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy. 26 I think therefore that this is good by reason of the distress that is upon us, namely, that it is good for a man to be as he is. 27 Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. 28 But shouldest thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Yet such shall have tribulation in the flesh: and I would spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time is shortened, that henceforth both those that have wives may be as though they had none; 30 and those that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 and those that use the world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion of this world passeth away. 32 But I would have you to be free from cares. He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33 but he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and is divided. So also the woman that is unmarried and the virgin is careful for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married is careful for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is seemly, and that ye may at-

tend upon the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man thinketh that he behaveth himself unseemly toward his virgin daughter, if she be past the flower of her age, and if need so requireth, let him do what he will; he sinneth not; let them marry. 37 But he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power as touching his own will, and hath determined this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, shall do well. 38 So then both he that giveth his own virgin daughter in marriage doeth well; and he that giveth her not in marriage shall do better. 39 A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she abide as she is, after my judgment: and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

Concerning the Unmarried (25-40)

Commentary

Now concerning virgins.—Up to this point Paul has answered the questions about the expediency of marriage and has given direction to those who are already married. His third topic deals with unmarried daughters who are still under the direction of their fathers. A closing statement on marriage gives his inspired advice to widows whose husbands are dead and who might want to remarry.

The term "virgin" is both masculine and feminine in Greek. It is used with reference to men in Rev. 14:4. The consensus of commentators is that the term in this context refers to unmarried daughters.

no command of the Lord.—Once again he must remind his readers that the Lord had not spoken on this matter but that He is now doing so through His inspired apostle.

I give my judgment.—The apostle expresses his inspired opinion based on accurate knowledge. He certainly does not set up his "opinion" as a mere man against the command of God. He is speaking as one "who has obtained mercy of the Lord." It was by the mercy of the Lord that he received his apostleship (I Rim. 1:12-14). The expressed opinion or judgment of the apostle is therefore equal in authority to the "command" of the Lord, since it is delivered by the Lord through His trustworthy servant.

by reason of the distress that is upon us.—Many assume that Paul was thinking of the end of the world and the second coming of Christ when he wrote these verses, but there is no good reason to do so. It is a fact that the apostles along with the other disciples of Jesus thought that He was to set up a temporal kingdom while He was

on earth. Some came to take Him by force and make Him their King after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:15). Even James and John who may have been cousins of Jesus sent their mother to ask that one of them might sit on the right hand and the other on the left in His kingdom (Matt. 20:20-28). They undoubtedly thought of the kingdom as an earthly one that would restore the glory to Israel which had been known in the days of David and Solomon. Jesus could not grant such a request for the position of honor in the kingdom—the spiritual one—was for those for whom it had been prepared by the Father, that is, the humble who like Jesus were great because they were servants. The Emmaus disciples had hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel from Roman bondage (Lk. 24:21). The apostles persisted in this concept of the kingdom until Jesus, after the resurrection, corrected their views (Acts 1:6). After Pentecost, when the kingdom had come in truth and Jesus had been declared to be at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), no apostle is on record as assuming that Christ was to come in his life time. Despite this fact, commentators persist in saying that the apostles expected Him to return in their day. It is true that some of the church people had misunderstood Paul on the matter and that he had written to the Thesalonians to correct their misunderstanding (II Thes. 2:1-5). To say that he wrote what was not true is to question his inspiration.

What then did Paul mean by the distress that was upon the Corinthians? The distress was not impending, but present. We know for one thing that Christian people were being subjected to persecution of various sorts. See the history of persecution in the book of Acts. Paul had met Priscilla and Aquila when he was at Corinth. They had recently come from Rome because Caludius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18:1-3). Wars, depressions, responsibilities of caring for a home—all these might have been in the apostle's mind when he mentioned the distress that they faced. Our own history during times of war and depression proves the correctness of the point Paul was making, for many marriages failed that were entered into in those times of distress. Good sound advice is offered in these circumstances: If one is married, he is not to be loosed from the marriage bond; if one does not have a wife, he is not to seek one.

But shouldst thou marry.—This is to men and unmarried women. If in face of distress they should marry, they have not sinned. The apostle is writing to spare them inevitable pressures that attend the establishment and maintenance of a home.

the time is short.—Some read into this expression the assumption that

Paul was speaking of the end of the world and second coming of Christ. I disagree. He is stating a fact that all of us should be aware of at all times—life in this world is transitory. The time that anyone may have at any period is indeed brief. The whole concept of time as it relates to man's existence on this earth is limited. Peter reminds us that one day as the Lord looks upon it is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (II Pet. 3:8).

those that have wives may be as though they had none.—Marriage is for this life, not for eternity. Jesus said, "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). The point is that the length of time that one is married is short at best, for it is temporal, limited to this life. The time in which we are to serve the Lord is also short, and one must not, in this brief time of service, love father or mother or wife or children more than the Lord (Lk. 14:26).

those that weep, as though they wept not.—The apostle moves from the subject of marriage to other transitory situations of this life. Weeping and rejoicing will not go on forever for the child of God. In heaven there is no mourning nor crying nor pain any more (Rev. 22:4). One cannot use to the fullest the things he possesses in this life—food, shelter, and things for bodily comfort are used on a day to day basis. See Jesus' remarks about such things in Matt. 5:25-34.

the fashion of this world passeth away.—Commentators in general assume that Paul is speaking about the second coming of our Lord. Not necessarily so. He is pointing to a well known fact that this world with its customs is transitory. Marriage is for this life. Why then be overly concerned about getting married? Not that marriage is wrong, but that Paul is concerned that the brethren who face some unusual distress be spared the added burden of family cares. Note what Jesus said about those with families at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (24:19). All who know anything of the pressures of war or economic depression know how hard these situations are on those with families. The very young and the very old often suffer beyond measure in such times of distress. Paul's concern was that they be free from added cares.

unmarried, married.—All that has been said on this subject is now applied to the two classes, whether the unmarried be unmarried men or unmarried women. The simple facts are that married people must give some time to family cares; the unmarried may have no such problems. They are free to give their time to the Lord's work without distraction.

not that I may cast a snare upon you.—Once again, the apostle is careful to remind the reader that marriage is not wrong even in times of distress. He is not setting it aside and thereby setting a snare to catch some in sin because of incontinency. This he had already explained (7:2-5).

unseemly toward his virgin.—The marriage of daughters was in that culture under the control of the father. This is, therefore, advice to fathers about letting their daughters marry. Any other construction of the meaning of the passage is open to serious question. Plummer reminds us that it is wholly improbable that this refers to the prospective bridegroom or to some kind of spiritual betrothal between unmarried persons (I. C. C., *First Corinthians*, p. 159).

the flower of her age.—That is, if she is a mature young woman of marriageable age.

if need so requireth.—There may have been many reasons why it might have been advisable for the father to grant his consent to the marriage of a grown daughter. It might well be that he was unable to support her and that she would, therefore, be happier if she were permitted to establish her own home. Under such circumstances it was not a sin for the father to let the young couple marry.

On the other hand, the father who did not find it necessary to give such consent and who was able to exercise his will in the matter did well to keep his virgin daughter at home. This is in accord with what has been said about the advisability of remaining unmarried during times of great distress. It also assumes that the father had the right to exercise his will in the matter. Perhaps some were slaves and couldn't do so. We must read these instructions in the light of the culture under which they were given, not of our own. Paul put his approval on the one who gives his daughter in marriage, and adds that the one who does not give his daughter in marriage—under the circumstances he has just described—shall do better.

A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth.—Paul has discussed the unmarried man and the unmarried woman. He has also discussed the duties and responsibilities of the father of the unmarried daughter. There remains one more class, the woman whose husband had died and who might want to marry again. He now gives instruction to those in this situation. He reminds the reader that this applies to the one whose husband is dead since the marriage vow is in force while the husband lives. "Dead" means physically dead, not spiritually dead. Some have imagined that if the husband is not a Christian and

therefore spiritually dead, the wife is freed from the marriage vow. This seems absurd in the light of verse 14.

only in the Lord.—This may mean that she is free to marry one who is in the Lord, that is, a baptized believer. "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (II Cor. 6:14) does not necessarily refer to marriage. Christian people will be far better off in their desire to serve the Lord if they do have Christian partners, but Paul has indicated that the believer who is married to the unbeliever may use that situation to win the unbeliever to Christ (7:16).

A second possible meaning, though less likely, is that she is to remember that marriage is to be in accord with the regulations of the Lord for this sacred institution.

she is happier.—Remarriage, even though one may have a Scriptural right, does not always solve the problems of loneliness or other issues that may cause one to seek remarriage. This seems to be particularly true of those who are older. The apostle's advice is that greater happiness will accompany the unmarried state. The case of younger widows is different. "When they have waxed wanton against Christ, they desire to marry" (I Tim. 5:11). Some of these become not only idle but tattlers and busybodies. Paul adds, "I desire therefore that younger widows marry, bear children, rule the household, give no occasion to the adversary for reviling: for already some are turned aside after Satan" (I Tim. 5:13-15).

I think I also have the Spirit of God.—This does not imply any doubt in the apostle's mind as to his inspiration. On the contrary, he is sure that he has the Spirit of God directing him. Others might have been claiming it, but the apostle of Christ could say, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God."

Summary

In this chapter Paul begins to answer the questions which the Corinthians raised in their letter to him. The questions were about (1) marriage, (2) things sacrificed to idols, (3) matters of public worship, and perhaps (4) the other topics discussed in the rest of the letter: spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints.

Paul approaches the problem of marriage from the background of the loose moral condition that prevailed in Corinth and from his discussion of the sins of fornication and abuse of the body in the preceding chapters. The unmarried state is excellent, or honorable. Nevertheless, because it may present temptation to those who do not have the gift of continence, he recommends the married state also. The mutual obligations of husbands and wife are not to be set aside

I CORINTHIANS

except by mutual consent, and that only for a time, that Satan tempt them not. Paul wished that all had this gift, but he recognized that all are not alike in this respect. His instruction about marriage is to be considered in relation to the individual case. It applies equally to the unmarried and to widows. It does not set aside the law of marriage, although the unmarried state is recommended for those who are able to accept this advice because of the peculiar distress which the people of Corinth were facing.

Married couples are given specific instructions: They are to remember the command of the Lord that the wife is not to depart from her husband. In accord with the instruction which the Lord had given, she is reminded that if she should depart she is to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

With the general statement about marriage, Paul turns to the case of a believer being married to an unbeliever. Is separation permitted in this case? The answer is clear: the believer is not to leave the unbeliever. The marriage is made holy in the believer, and there is no reason for dissolving it. If, however, the unbeliever should depart, he is to be allowed to do so. The law of marriage does not imply that the brother or sister is placed under obligation to go along with the one who leaves. Neither does it say that the believer is free to remarry. Such freedom is brought about by the death of husband or wife. But God called them in peace. Every effort should be made to preserve the home, but if the unbeliever insists he is to be allowed to leave. The believer must consider, however, the possibility of saving his unbelieving partner by refusing to take the initiative in breaking up the home. This may call for great Christian grace, but it is worth it if one soul can be saved.

Becoming a Christian is no reason for seeking separation from an unbelieving husband or wife. For example, the one who is called in circumcision or even in slavery is advised not to let his status as Jew or even slave matter. It is his relation to Christ that counts. Of course, if a slave can obtain freedom, it is well to do so, but it is not essential to his becoming a Christian.

The purpose of Paul's advice was to spare them unnecessary anxiety under the peculiar circumstances of their day. This should not be regarded as a great hardship since the fashion of the world is changing and will some day give place to the permanent state in eternity where they neither marry nor are given in marriage. This instruction was not intended to prevent marriage, but to make it possible for them to serve the Lord without distraction.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Two possible attitudes of a father toward his unmarried daughter are given. If the daughter is old enough to be married and he is disposed to consent to her marriage, let him so do; it is no sin. On the other hand, if he is in position to exercise his will in the matter—something denied to many who were slaves—and he is disposed to keep his daughter at home, let him do so. So the one who gives his daughter in marriage does well, but the one who does not give his daughter in marriage does better, for he spares her the anxiety of homemaking in troublous times.

Concluding the discussion, Paul says that a wife is bound to her husband as long as the husband lives, but if he should die she is free to marry, only in the Lord. The law of the Lord regulating marriage applies at all times. Some assume that this means she is free only to marry one who is in the Lord.

This instruction is so important that Paul closes it with the reminder to his readers that he has been directed by the Spirit of God in writing it.

Questions

1. How did Paul happen to write on the subject of marriage?
2. What expression does Paul repeatedly use to show possible connection between topics in this part of the letter?
3. What are the topics which he discusses?
4. What may have been the question of the Corinthians that called forth Paul's answer?
5. What was Paul's answer to their question?
6. Simply stated, what is meant by the answers?
7. Is there anything in his answer that could possibly be construed to say that the unmarried state is superior to the married?
8. What is the background against which Paul advised them to marry?
9. What can be said of Paul's high regard for marriage?
10. What are the obligations of each partner in marriage?
11. What principle given by Paul in the Philippian letter is there that would save many marriages?
12. To whom does the right over the body of wife or husband belong?
13. What guiding principle must be observed here?
14. On what condition and for what purpose does Paul say that there may be separation of husband and wife?
15. How does the example of Jesus show that there may be times when one needs to be entirely alone with God?

I CORINTHIANS

16. What danger do some people face from Satan?
17. Why does Paul say, "by concession, not commandment"?
18. Why did Paul wish all men were as himself?
19. What can we safely conclude about Paul's marital status?
20. What about his love for the family? How does he show it?
21. Under what circumstances is it better to marry?
22. What is the relation of Paul's instruction to what had been said by the Lord?
23. What did Jesus teach about marriage?
24. How long is the marriage contract in force?
25. Why did Moses permit the Jews to divorce their wives?
26. What can be said about the "innocent" party in divorce cases?
27. What principle of interpretation is violated in going to Matthew nineteen rather than First Corinthians seven for instruction about marriage for Christians?
28. What should Christian people do who find themselves divorced and remarried without knowing what the Word of God said about it?
29. Should such couples separate?
30. How does the divorce rate in this country affect the problem of juvenile delinquency?
31. What rule is given for the one who is married to an unbeliever?
32. How are we to understand Paul's statement, "to the rest say I, not the Lord"?
33. How are we to understand the remark, "the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife"?
34. Does this have anything to do with the personal salvation of the unbelieving husband?
35. What should be the hope of the believer who is married to an unbeliever?

CHAPTER SEVEN

36. What is meant by "not under bondage in such cases"?
37. What rule did Paul give for all the churches to follow?
38. What bearing does the fact that God called us in peace have on our obligation to preserve the marriage?
39. What was the Christian slave to do about his situation?
40. Why did Paul remind them that they had been bought with a price?
41. Why did Paul say he had no command of the Lord about virgins?
42. How are we to regard his opinion?
43. To what distress did Paul refer when he advised the Corinthians to put off getting married?
44. What had the disciples thought about the kingdom before Pentecost?
45. What about the view of some that the apostles expected the return of Christ in their lifetime?
46. What distress did the Corinthians face?
47. Is it wrong for young people to marry during times of war or depression?
48. How does Paul's teaching help those who remain unmarried?
49. What did he mean by "fashion of this world"?
50. What was the duty of fathers toward unmarried daughters?
51. For how long is a wife bound to her husband?
52. Under what conditions did the inspired apostle indicate that she was free to remarry?

For Discussion

1. How can prayer and Bible study be used to keep the home together?
2. How can the Christian ideal for the home be best presented to the young people of the church?