

Chapter Seven

THE PROBLEMS OF SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE (7:1-40)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why should we accept the advice of a bachelor (Paul) on the subject of marriage?
2. Are the “unmarried” of 7:8, 25, 32, 34, those who have *never* been married?
3. What does the word “separate” mean in 7:10, 15?
4. Since Paul had no *command* from the Lord concerning the unmarried, are we still bound to obey his “opinion”? 7:25
5. Since God saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and created a woman to be his wife, why does Paul say he who refrains from marriage will “do better”? 7:38

SECTION 1

The Purity of Marriage (7:1-9)

7 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. ²But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control. ⁶I say this by way of concession, not of command. ⁷I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. ⁹But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

7:1a Provocation for This Discussion: Paul was not married when he wrote this epistle to the Corinthians (see 7:7-8). Many people have

difficulty accepting advice on marriage from a bachelor. It is possible that Paul had previously been married. Some scholars think Paul implies a former marriage by his question in I Corinthians 9:5 about his right to be accompanied by a wife as other apostles did. It is doubtful that he could have been a member of the Sanhedrin (if he was) had he been unmarried. This chapter does seem to be written by someone who knew by *experience* the intimacies and problems of married life. He may have been a widower. And no one has ever glorified marriage more than the apostle Paul (cf. Eph. 5:22-23). His great tribute to Timothy's mother and grandmother shows something of the esteem with which he looked upon marriage and the home. But whether he was married or not makes no difference. He was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore what he teaches, even about marriage, is to be believed, trusted and obeyed.

The Christians of Corinth had previously written to Paul asking questions about sexuality and marriage. These questions would have been provoked by their constant exposure to three conflicting ideologies in respect to sexuality and marriage: (1) Jewish Christians in the Corinthian church would consider celibacy inimical to godliness. The idea of not marrying was so foreign to the Jewish mentality that the Old Testament does not even have a word for "bachelor." The godly life for the Jew meant not only marriage, but children; (2) Apparently there was already some kind of Christian asceticism or monasticism among some Christians at Corinth. They believed that the most "spiritual" people were those who were celibates. Some were teaching that those who abstained from physical marriage were the holiest of people, and if men and women insisted on marriage they should unite only in a "spiritual" marriage, a sort of Christian "brother-sister" platonic relationship. Such a marriage would not permit sexual intercourse. Paul warned Timothy that such a teaching was a "denial of the faith" and "demonic" in origin (I Tim. 4:1-5). The same apostle wrote, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled . . ." (Heb. 13:4), and, ". . . each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor . . ." (I Thess. 4:4). This has been an ever recurring departure from scriptural truth. One large segment of Christendom today teaches that celibacy is the holiest state of all and that those who minister must be unmarried; (3) and finally, these Christians of Corinth were trying to practice the holiness of the gospel surrounded by the loose and wicked morals of Greco-Roman culture. Rape,

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fornication, homosexuality and other perversions were glorified in the theatre and in the cultic religions of that world. From the context of this chapter, it appears these three cultural factors provoked the Christians at Corinth to “write” to the apostle for his inspired guidance.

7:1b-2 Pressure of Desire: Paul’s statement, “It is well for a man not to touch a woman . . .” uses the Greek present middle infinitive, *haptesthai*, for the word *touch*. This word, in the middle voice, would be more accurately translated, “cling to, fasten oneself to, assimilate to oneself.” In other words, Paul is not stating that men should never touch a woman at all—he was revealing (because of stressful circumstances at the time he wrote) that the wisest thing for a man to do was not “fasten” himself to a woman in marriage. Paul’s command, as is clear later in the context, hinges entirely on the circumstances Christians were about to face in the Roman persecutions (7:26).

But there is an even stronger stress that might override the dreadful separation of husband and wife by martyrdom. That stress would be the drive to fulfill the human sexual urge (7:2, 5, 9, 36). God created the sexual drive in mankind, and it is good so long as it is fulfilled within biblically sanctioned marriage. So Paul writes, “But because of fornication (the word for *temptation* is not in the Greek text), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” Sexual immorality (fornication) was not only practiced almost universally in first century Greco-Roman society, it was glorified in art and religion. Paul plainly states that one, (if not *the* one) primary reason for marriage is to guard against succumbing to the temptation for illicit sexual intercourse! He reemphasizes this in verses 8-9. The Greek verb *echeto*, translated “have,” is in the imperative mood, and means Paul is giving a *command* here—not simply making a suggestion. Now, of course, Paul did not think relaxation from the temptation to illicit sexual intercourse was the *only* basis upon which Christian marriage is founded. He certainly emphasizes *agape* (God-like love) (see Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19) in marriage. The Bible also indicates that human marriage is to serve the even higher spiritual goal of exemplifying to the world the commitment and intimate relationship of believers to Christ (cf. Eph. 5:22-33; Isa. 54:4-8; 62:1-5; Ezek. 16:1-34; Hosea, chapters 1-3). On the other hand, it may surprise even Christians to know that the Bible says little about a man and a woman “loving” *one another* as a *prerequisite* to marriage. The Bible says a great deal about love *within* a marriage. In the Old Testament marriages were most often *arranged* by godly parents. The

young couple then married and *learned* to love one another *during* the marriage. Most of them never went through the alleged experience of “falling in love” before marriage. Love is not an accident. No one “falls” into love. True love is from the *will*—not from the emotions. True love is caring and doing good for another even when one does not *feel* like caring. A man or woman must know what love is and how to love *before* marrying or the marriage will fail. Love doesn’t happen—it is not something one waits to experience—it is something done, something practiced.

The apostle’s statement that “each” should have his “own” wife or husband incidentally *eliminates* polygamy as a Christian option. Paul did *not* mean that every man and woman *must* marry since he cites celibacy as the most viable choice in light of first century circumstances (7:26).

7:3-7 Practical Direction: Paul here reinforces his teaching that the pressure of sexual desire is the main reason to seek marriage. The Greek words Paul used to give directions about sexual needs in marriage are interesting. Literally, he would say, “To the wife let the husband pay the good affection due her, and likewise also the wife to the husband.” The Greek word *apodidoto* (“pay”) is an imperative verb and is therefore a command. The use of the word “pay” implies obligation. The word *eunoian* is a Greek word literally meaning, “well-minded” but is here used to connote (as v. 4 indicates) the conjugal duties involved in marriage. God instituted marriage as the state in which man and woman are *privileged* to fulfill sexual desires. But within that state there are also certain *duties*! When God created man he saw that it was not good for man to be alone so he created woman (see Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18-25). It is clear from Paul’s instruction here that sexual intercourse within marriage is not sinful, and is not restricted to procreative purposes. Sexual intercourse, as befits a happy, godly and uninhibited marriage, is the God-ordained right of each partner in a marriage. Less than this (especially for a Christian) is to miss the mark of God’s will. Marriage is God’s practical way for men and women to enjoy their sexual desire in wisdom, health (both physical and psychological) and social order. Any other application of the human sexual drive results (as history verifies) in mental and physical sickness and social chaos.

In verse 4 Paul states a principle which is at variance with modern “self-assertion” hucksters. J. B. Phillips translates, “The wife has no longer full rights over her own person, but shares them with her

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husband. In the same way the husband shares his personal rights with his wife." In the Greek text the word used is *exousiazai*, and is literally, *authority*. That is stronger than the English translation, "full rights." It could be translated *rule*. In marriage *each* partner surrenders to be *ruled* by the other. Paul specifies this in regard to their *bodies* (Gr. *somatos*), but in other epistles he applies it to the whole realm of married life (cf. Eph. 5:21ff.; Col. 3:18-19). In marriage, both husband and wife give up exclusive rights to their own bodies (and lives), agreeing to share them fully and freely with their partner. The happiest marriages are those characterized by complete liberty, few inhibitions, and absence of any guilt complex about sexuality within the will of God. The cause of much marital trouble today is *selfishness*, not only, but certainly foremost, in the area of sexuality. The Greek word *exousiazai* is in the present tense indicating that this reciprocal surrendering of husband and wife to one another is a *continuing* and permanent relationship. The New Testament teaches that marriage was intended by God to be a permanent relationship between one man and one woman in which the two, by surrendering all personal rights to one another, become one.

Paul's teaching here should convince anyone that he was not a "Woman-hating" antagonist of marriage nor "victorian" in his attitude toward sexuality in marriage. He may have been a bachelor all his life; he definitely believed he was led by God to advise celibacy, because of the exigencies of the times, for those who could endure the single life. But he does not enjoin bachelorhood or celibacy as an absolute commandment of God.

In verse 5 Paul states one exception to the sexual responsibilities of Christian husbands and wives. But even in this one exception Paul is quick to limit sexual abstinence lest Satan tempt a man or a woman through *lack of self-control!* Once again, emphasis is placed on marriage as God's primary provision for the controlled practice of the human sexual drive. The apostle's one exception is in case one of the partners in a marriage wants to devote himself completely to prayer. But Paul warns against any lengthy abstinence even for prayer! The RSV translates the Greek word *apostereite*, "Do not *refuse* one another. . . ." The KJV translates it, "*Defraud* ye not one the other. . . ." Actually the Greek word is more emphatic than *refuse*—it is often translated, *rob, despoil, defraud, leave destitute*. The idea is that lengthy abstinence by one married partner in sexual intimacy will leave the other partner robbed, defrauded and destitute, and

clearly vulnerable to Satan's temptation to illicit sexual gratification. This, too, is an apostolic command, for the Greek verb *apostereite* is in the imperative mood. There may come times when a personal time for seeking the Lord comes before the one dearest on earth (one's spouse), *but only for a limited time*. Church work cannot be used as an excuse for neglecting one's marriage. What is accomplished for the kingdom of God if one's marriage partner is tempted and lost?

The English word *concession* (RSV) in verse 6 is not a good translation of the Greek word *sungnomen*. The Greek literally means, "to think the same as." In II Maccabees 14:31 it is translated "aware." It could be translated, "with understanding." To translate the word "concession" or "permission" (KJV) implies that the rigid apostolic standard in human sexuality was celibacy but that Paul would *concede* to the less holy relationship of marriage by bending the revelation of the Holy Spirit slightly. But that cannot be correct. To Paul marriage was God-ordained. What Paul is saying here is precisely the same thing the Lord said to the Twelve in Perea (see Matt. 19:1-12). Paul was "aware" that the majority of humanity would never have the "gift" to remain celibate without being tempted to fornication. He was writing "with understanding" of that fact and so, he declared, "I wish that all were as I myself (celibate) am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another—and I do not say that celibacy is an absolute command of God."

Jesus made plain the high ideal for human marriage (Matt. 19:3-9) and his disciples jumped to the hasty conclusion that every man should be celibate (Matt. 19:10-12). Jesus replied, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given." He said there were a few men who had to be celibate because of circumstances beyond their control; and there were a few men who were able to remain celibate by their own choice, for the sake of the kingdom of God. But Jesus recognized that most men are not able to "receive" the condition of celibacy. Jesus made it plain that celibacy is not a matter of divine commandment but a matter of capability. Here (1:6-7) Paul says celibacy is a matter of being "gifted" (Gr. *charisma*). ". . . *But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. . .*" *Some people have charisma* to remain celibate and some people have *charisma* to marry. The word "special" as in the RSV, or the word "proper" as in KJV, is not in the Greek text. Celibacy is *not* a "special" gift like speaking in a foreign language, prophesying, interpreting, healing, etc. (see I Cor. ch. 12-14). It is apparently an innate ability. Regarding the matter of celibacy (Matt. 19:10-12) Matthew reports Jesus as saying, *ho dunamenos chorein choreito*, "the one with the

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ability to have this, let him have it!" There are some "with" the ability and some who do not have it. When God made man, he saw "that it was not good for man to dwell alone" so he made a helper "fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). Some people may be able to find completion and fulfillment without a marriage partner—but not many. Applebury states the meaning of verses 6-7 clearly: "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." Those who have innate ability to remain celibate in life apparently do not have the ability to deal with the responsibilities of married life. This text, incidentally, proves that the word *charisma* does not always refer to "special," miraculous gifts. There are some gifts from God (Gr. *charisma*) with which individuals are born (see Rom. 12:4-13). God gives every human being *some* charisma! In "special," miraculous gifts men exercised no decisions; these gifts came by divine intervention of the natural order; they were exercised by the operation of the Holy Spirit. But in the matter of marriage or celibacy, it is clear men are called upon to make their own choice, based upon the teachings of the apostles and their own evaluations of their innate capabilities.

7:8-9 Passion Disciplined: Paul addresses the remarks in these verses to the "unmarried males" (Greek, *agamois*, masculine, dative, plural, noun) and to the "widows" (Greek, *cherais*, feminine, dative plural, noun). It is addressed to "unmarried males" because in ancient times only men were allowed to take the initiative in choosing marriage partners. "Unmarried males" could mean either bachelors or widowers. Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit (see 7:40), states it would be well (Gr. *kalon*) for anyone unmarried at that time (for reasons of "the impending distress" 7:26) to remain even as he was. Paul does not say in the text that he was unmarried. The Greek text is, *kalon autois estin ean meinosin hos kago*, or "well for them it is if they remain as I also am being." We assume he was single from the context. Some think Paul had been previously married and was a widower at the writing of I Corinthians. In stating that celibacy would be *good*, Paul is not saying that marriage would be *bad*. There seem to be only two reasons Paul has for celibacy being good—because of the "impending distress" and because the celibate is able to concentrate more fully on the things of the kingdom of God than the married person is (7:25-35).

Paul is quick, however, to *qualify* his statement that celibacy is good. Celibacy is good only if a person is able to exercise sexual self-control. The Greek phrase is: *ei de ouk enkrateuontai, gamesatosan*, or, "However, if they have no self-control, let them marry." The Greek verb *enkrateuontai* means literally, "continuing power within" since it is in the present tense. There can be no doubt that the "power within" is self-control over sexual impulses. The context demands that interpretation. The apostolic wisdom in the matter is: "It is better (Gr. *kreisson*, more profitable) to marry than to be inflamed." There is no word for "passion" in the Greek text as in the RSV translation. There is only the word *purousthai* in the Greek text which literally means, "to burn." Again, the context demands we interpret Paul to mean "burn with sexual passion." For those able to live a *constant* life of sexual sublimation, the unmarried state is good. But for those who cannot, it is more profitable to marry.

Paul wrote to the young evangelist (we presume Timothy was unmarried) that the theology which forbade marriage was a theology "departing from the faith"—in other words, *apostasy* (I Tim. 4:3). In a later section of this chapter we will be asking whether Paul's statement to Timothy means no one has the right to forbid marriage to those never *previously* married, or does it mean that no one has the right to forbid marriage to any one in an unmarried state regardless of past circumstances. But one thing is certain, Paul agrees with the rest of Biblical teaching that marriage is a godly estate.

Marriage is the only human relationship in which sexual intercourse is approved by God! The person who cannot sublimate sexual urges, fulfilling them in something higher, should get married. It should be noted that Paul advises marriage when it is first apparent that a person is not able to control sexual urges—not *after* sexual experimentation has occurred. This may seem to some that Paul is taking a rather crude view of marriage. But Paul enunciates some of the highest ideals and purposes for marriage in all the Bible (cf. Eph. 5:21ff.). What Paul says in our text here shows that God is aware of the significance and power of human sexuality. The sexual urge in mankind, if not the strongest, is certainly *one* of the *most* powerful. And that is undoubtedly God's will in order to motivate man to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1, etc.). The Greek word *gamesatosan* is in the imperative mood in this text. That is more than a suggestion; "they should marry" is an apostolic command! It is crucial to later comments on remarriage that this

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command be remembered. Certainly, those who have once been married and later widowed or divorced would be as apt to “burn with passion” as those who have never been married. If those who once were married now burn with passion in an unmarried state, it would be better for them, too, to get married. It does not seem in keeping with God’s grace to forbid divorced persons to remarry, placing them in the position of burning with passion until they engage in illicit sexual intercourse.

SECTION 2

The Permanence of Marriage (7:10-16)

10 To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband.¹¹ (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

12 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 should not divorce her.¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace.¹⁶ Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?

7:10-14 Command: God’s commandment has always been that each human marriage is to be permanent—until death separates one member of the marriage. That has been God’s will from the beginning of creation (cf. Matt. 19:8). Paul reinforces that by stating, “To the married I give *charge*, not I but the Lord. . . .” Paul uses the Greek word *parangello* which means, “a proclamation, a command or commandment . . . strictly used of commands received from a superior and transmitted to others” (see Acts 5:28; 16:24; I Thess. 4:2; I Tim. 1:5, 18; Luke 5:14; 8:56; I Tim. 6:13, 17 for usage of the word *parangello*). Paul “charges” that the wife should not divorce her husband. The RSV translates the Greek word *choristhenai* as “separate,” but it is

the same Greek word used by Matthew in reporting (Matt. 19:6) Jesus' statement about "divorce." Paul is not talking here about separation without divorce. All through this context he is talking about *divorce*, the dissolution of a marriage.

Apparently in Corinth, new converts to Christ were leaving their believing partners, or unbelieving partners were leaving their believing partners, and completely dissolving the marriages by divorce. When Christians marry non-Christians, or when one unbeliever in a marriage becomes a believer and the other partner does not, there will always be difficulties. But, according to the apostle Paul, they are not insurmountable difficulties. The difficulties of such an "unequally yoked" marriage are not necessarily such as should call for divorce. The ideal situation, of course, is that both partners in a marriage be Christians. People who are contemplating marriage *can* and should choose Christian partners before. Love is *not* blind! Infatuation and emotionalism is blind. Love is not something one "falls into" but is something one wills, decides and does, and does constantly in spite of emotions or circumstances!

Marriage as an institution predates all other institutions. It was sanctioned by God before the Law of Moses or the Christian dispensation. God's will is that marriage should be permanent, no matter who is involved. When it comes right down to it, there is no essential difference between a "Christian" marriage in a church and a pagan marriage in the living room of a justice of the peace. There is no differentiate in God's will that every marriage be permanent until death. Marriage is not "a sacrament of the church" performed exclusively by and for the church. Marriage is for the maintenance of human social structure. It is an institution established by God to be practiced by the entire human race. When a man and woman sincerely agree to become husband and wife, and obey the social and civil laws for marriage in their community, they are husband and wife regardless of their religion! Marriage can only be made permanent through unreserved faith in Jesus Christ by both partners. It can never be made permanent by civil law or force. Jesus made that plain in Matthew 19:3-12. When men have "hard hearts" they will rebel against all that God has sanctified, including the permanence of marriage. The "law" is "laid down" for the lawless and disobedient (I Tim. 1:8-9) and the civil state must legislate and enforce laws which will keep sinful and wicked people from perverting marriage until they destroy social order.

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In a world where the majority of human beings are not Christians, God's ideals for marriage are seldom considered. Sometimes a Christian will compromise principle and marry a non-Christian. Sometimes, after two non-Christians are married one becomes a Christian. What is the Lord's will in such circumstances? God's will is always for the permanence of marriage. In any circumstance that would threaten to dissolve a marriage, God's will is for *reconciliation* (reunion, coming back together). While it is possible that a marriage might have to be dissolved for continued sexual unfaithfulness (see Matt. 5:32; 19:9) or because of unsolicited desertion (I Cor. 7:15) it is certainly not what God desires. He wants repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Nor does the Lord desire that the conversion of one marriage partner precipitate the dissolution of a marriage. Paul says, "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him." The Greek verb translated "consents" is *suneudokei* and means "willingly resolves" to *dwell* (Gr. *oikein*) with her without coercion.

There are several reasons the Lord demands permanence in marriage. We have already stated one—the need of stability in the social structure. Another reason is discussed in 7:14—the power marriage has to sanctify unbelievers. Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Christian married to an unbeliever is that the believer should "sanctify" the unbeliever through the permanence of the marriage. The unbeliever is in a "set apart" circumstance (at least that much set apart from the world) by being married to a believer. So, the marriage of an unbeliever to a believer can become a powerful tool. When a man is converted, as head of the house he should lead his family to the Lord (e.g. the Philippian jailer and Cornelius). When a wife is the Christian and the husband an unbeliever, she has to be content with a slower process. Peter says that wives should submit themselves to their husbands; the husbands will more readily be won to Christ this way than through nagging, complaining or arguing (I Peter 3:1-2). Children who have even one Christian parent are at a great advantage over children reared in non-Christian homes. So, children are "set apart" from total worldliness by just one Christian parent. God's will is that marriage with just one Christian partner be permanent wherever and whenever human beings are agreeable. Of course, Paul does not mean that any unbelieving spouse or child is "saved by association." Being married to a Christian or being born by a Christian parent does not guarantee salvation. But it does mean,

where one marriage partner is a Christian, the unbelievers in the home will undoubtedly hear the gospel or see it being lived out there more clearly and often than anywhere else!

7:15-16 Concession: "But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate (divorce) let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound." The Greek words *chorizetai* and *chorizestho* in verse 15 should be translated, "But if the unbelieving partner divorces, let him (or her) be *divorced*." There is no word in the Greek text for "desires"—that is supplied by the translators. And, as we have pointed out above, Matthew used the word *chorizetai* to describe the Lord's discussion of *divorce* (not separation). There may be cases where one partner, not at all seeking to do God's will, may dissolve the marriage (for any number of so-called "reasons") while the other partner may not be able to stop the dissolution. When the unbelieving partner in a marriage has a heart so hardened by sin he or she "puts asunder" (the meaning of the Greek word *chorizetai*) or divorces the believing partner, then the believing partner ("brother" or "sister") is not "bound." What does Paul mean by, "not bound"? At least he means the Christian brother or sister is not bound to the divorcing-unbeliever as a spouse. Most civil societies (some with more latitude than others) have laws permitting divorce. When an unbeliever sues in civil court for dissolution of a marriage from a believer, and it is granted, there is nothing legal a believer can do to maintain the bonds of that marriage. Therefore, the believer is not bound to that marriage. But the big question is: Since a believer is not bound to a marriage he or she was forced by civil law to dissolve (when the believer was unwilling to have it dissolved), may the divorced believer remarry?

Paul has already admitted the *reality* that there is a possibility of the dissolution of marriages even where one party does not want it to be so. The unbeliever who has caused divorce has sinned. He or she must become a believer, repent and be immersed in water in order to be forgiven. The question remains, however, does the New Testament absolutely and unequivocally forbid remarriage with a different partner after divorce? (see Matt. 5:31-32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; I Cor. 7:15, 39; Rom. 7:3-4). Actually, there are no absolute or unequivocal directions in this matter of remarriage. What each Christian believes or practices he does so by his inference or deductions from certain principles. It is the opinion of this writer that remarriage is not only possible for those who have violated the will of God and dissolved marriages by divorce, but that God desires

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remarriage in such a case for both believer and unbeliever—for both the “guilty party” and the “innocent party.” The following deductions have brought this writer to his opinion:

- a. God made marriage for the whole human race.
- b. Divorce is a sin; marriage is *not* a sin.
- c. Very few men or women have the “gift” to remain sexually celibate.
- d. Paul emphatically states, more than once, that enforced sexual continence (celibacy) when a person does not have self-control is dangerous to one’s salvation (I Cor. 7:2, 5, 9, 36; I Thess. 4:3-8; I Tim. 5:14, etc.).
- e. It is illogical to reason that a person who is divorced, when he or she is unwilling to be divorced, may be considered an adulterer or adulteress should they marry another partner. People cannot be *made* to be adulterers against their will! Society may gossip and stigmatize an innocent person in a divorce situation, but he cannot be an adulterer unless he has an *attitude* of promiscuity—a *heart* that is against permanence in marriage.
- f. When there is a divorce there is no longer a marriage, neither in God’s eyes nor in man’s eyes—**THERE IS A SIN IN GOD’S EYES FOR WHICH SOMEONE MUST REPENT** (preferably a repentance resulting in remarriage to the same partner). But unless there is a reconciliation of the divorced persons, the marriage is over. They are no longer married to one another.
- g. There are two circumstances preceding a divorce in which, I believe, God considers one party in the divorce innocent—sexual unfaithfulness and desertion. In both circumstances one party has to be unwilling to the dissolution of the marriage. It is, therefore, this writer’s opinion that the innocent party is most certainly free to remarry—guided by his knowledge of the revealed will of God about marriage and his own conscience.

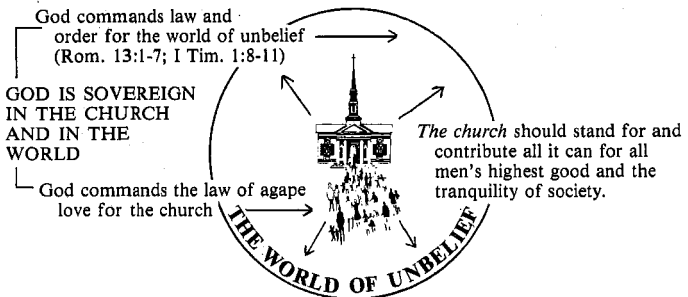
It is, further, the opinion of this writer that God desires remarriage even for the “guilty” party in divorce rather than trying to force him or her to a life of celibacy which he may not be able to endure without “burning with passion.” I believe God and Christ are interested in producing the highest good in every person’s life and in society in general. That is the spirit behind any Old Testament legislation or

New Testament principle (for example, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath").

- a. For the maintenance of social order, if an unbeliever cannot be controlled from promiscuous sexual intercourse by self-control, he or she should be married according to the laws of human responsibility and to keep society from degenerating to the level of animals.
- b. Paul points out in several places that while Christians are controlled by the highest principle, divine love, the non-Christian must be controlled by civil law, enforced by civil authorities (cf. I Tim. 1:8-11; Rom. 13:1-7).
- c. What practical or ultimate good is going to be served by forcing those once divorced to remain celibate the rest of their lives? There really is no legislation to that effect anywhere in the Bible. There is certainly no civil law to that effect. If all Christians lived by the law of divine love, Christian husbands and wives would never divorce one another. But some "Christians" do not live on that plane—they fall—they divorce one another. Are they to be banned to a life of celibacy for the rest of their natural lives? Is that seeking their highest good? What if they do not have the "gift" of sexual self-control? Should a minister of the gospel not also seek the highest good in every *fallen* person's life?
- d. Would enforced celibacy really heal the problems faced by children when divorce occurs? What if a husband is left with small children to rear? What if a wife is? Who shall support them financially? Are they better served to be reared without a father or without a mother?
- e. Would enforced celibacy heal the results of divorce? Will the church be able to support both materially and psychologically, all broken homes? Should Christians leave the healing of divorce in Christian homes to the civil state?
- f. Would enforced celibacy heal the problems of temptation and incontinence? (I Cor. 7:2, 5, 9, 36). Suppose we paraphrase Jesus thus, "Is it lawful to do good through the institution of marriage or to tempt to do good through enforced celibacy? Marriage was made for man, not man for marriage!" *Enforced celibacy in prisons merely intensifies sexual crimes!* Christians who say those once delivered should never remarry need to look at what happens in prison among men and women separated from heterosexual marriage!

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- g. In no sense of the word do I condone divorce for any cause. I do not even condone loveless marriages whether the partners remain legally and outwardly married until they die. Both of these situations are certainly less than God's ideal.
- h. But, neither do I think a minister of the gospel is "partaking" of the sin of divorce by performing marriage vows (since he is authorized by the civil authorities to do so) for couples who are unbelievers; for couples where one is a believer and another an unbeliever; for couples where either one or both parties have previously been divorced. God does not approve of divorce; I do not approve of divorce. God knows that all people do not have the gift of sexual self-control without "burning"; that is revealed truth and experiential truth. God *does* approve of marriage; I approve of marriage. As a minister, I have had nothing to do with their divorce; but I can have something to do with their remarriage, and, perhaps, repentance.
- i. And, of some significance, in every marriage I perform I may, in a positive way, be able to instruct and exemplify the Christian gospel—and in a negative sense I may not give anyone an opportunity to criticize the church for lack of compassion and understanding.
- j. When I stand *for* marriage and the responsibilities that go with it, I am standing for law and order in the lives of unbelievers who will not be controlled by divine love but must be controlled by civil legislation.
- k. Is divorce a sin for which there can be no repentance (and no forgiveness) and no restoration? If a person embezzles, is imprisoned, released and states that he is of a different attitude, is he never to be allowed to handle an employer's money again? Should a divorced person never be allowed to "handle" marriage again?



SECTION 3

The Pressures of Marriage (7:17-40)

17 Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 20 Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God.

25 Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it; for the form of this world is passing away.

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. 35 I

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say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

36 If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes; let them marry—it is no sin. ³⁷But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. ³⁸So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.

7:17-24 Discomfiture: Some, after having become Christians, were discomfited about their circumstances. Some were apparently convinced that becoming a Christian meant circumstances should change along with changes in behavior. Paul has just discussed the matter that a marriage should not be broken up just because one spouse has become a Christian and the other has not. Wanting to reinforce this principle, Paul states: "Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches." Paul does not forbid improving one's circumstances, but he does make it a rule for the church-universal that a Christian is supposed to make the most of his circumstances, whatever they are (unless they are sinful). No violent changes in one's day-by-day circumstances are to be made just because he has become a Christian. The Christian can glorify God in most every circumstance of life. This applies to one's job, marital status, social status, or nationality. These circumstances are said by Paul to be "assigned" (Gr. *emerisen*, divided, apportioned) by the Lord. Indeed, the circumstances of our lives are regulated by the providence of God. We are citizens of a particular nation by the providence of God. We are surrounded by opportunities or lack of opportunities by the providence of God. But in whatever circumstance we find ourselves, we are to be content (cf. Phil. 4:11ff.). We are not responsible for our circumstances—but we are responsible for our attitudes and actions within those circumstances. It is often a temptation for the new Christian

to make violent changes in his circumstances or surroundings. He may want to quit his job, move from his neighborhood, break away from his social circle, and try to make a whole new set of circumstances—a whole new life for himself. But God wants the believer to be a believer in spite of and surrounded by his “assigned” circumstances. Paul states a number of analogies in order to illustrate his principle.

Strange as it may seem, some of the Jews in Corinth who had become Christians thought they should have the mark of circumcision removed. Jews who wanted to copy Greek ways in the Maccabean era instituted a process for removing the appearance of circumcision (see I Macc. 1:15; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12:5:1). Others in Corinth, Christian Gentiles, thought they should submit to the rite of circumcision. The Judaizers in the earliest days of the church tried to make circumcision a dogma to be obeyed by everyone wishing to become a Christian (cf. Phil. 3:2; Acts 15:1ff.). “Circumcision” and “uncircumcision” are used frequently to symbolize Jewish and Gentile cultural habits. That may even be the case here. Paul certainly practiced many Jewish morés himself as a Christian. He did not violently renounce his Jewishness when he became a Christian. One should not divest himself of his nationality, his culture, or his physical circumstances (so long as they are not sinful) when he becomes a Christian. In whatever circumstance one is when called by the gospel to become a Christian—let him remain.

Again, if man finds himself in the circumstances of slavery when he responds to the gospel and becomes a Christian, he is not to take any violent or socially-destructive means to change his circumstances. Christianity stands for civil order. It does not condone anarchy in any form or for any reason. Jesus, under Roman rule, said: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.” Peter wrote, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong . . .” (I Peter 2:13-14). Read what Paul said in Romans 13:1-7; remember the examples of Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther; see what God said to the Jewish prisoners of war in Jeremiah 29:1-8. Of course the Bible teaches by precept that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. God never intended that any man should be exploited or enslaved by another. But then God never intended that any man should live in a society that worships sacred cows and monkeys while millions of people starve to death.

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Yet, in slavery or freedom, in poverty or plenty, every man's first responsibility is to obey the gospel. Circumstances are irrelevant to faith and love for God. Paul says "never mind" about circumstances. The Greek phrase could be translated, "It must not matter to you" what your circumstances are.

Some commentators hold that the Greek sentence (7:21b) *all' ei kai dunassai eleutheros genesthai, mallon chresai*, should be translated: "And even if you become able to be free, rather remain as you are and use it." Others hold the translation should be: "But if you become able to be free, use the opportunity and become free." Since either translation might fit the grammatical construction, we must beware of being dogmatic as to its interpretation. On the one hand, the immediate context seems to demand the meaning: "Even if a Christian slave has an opportunity to become a free man he should remain a slave and make use of that lot in life to serve God." On the other hand, the *overall context of Christian morality* would seem to demand the meaning: "And every Christian slave who has an opportunity to become a free man should avail himself of this opportunity to use in the service of Christ." Paul certainly would not advocate any Christian slave running away from his master or using violent means to obtain freedom. Paul personally sent a runaway slave (Onesimus) back to his master (Philemon). But in this case both the master and the slave were Christians and Paul exhorted such brotherhood as would practically erase the distinction between slave and master. Paul did not usurp Philemon's right to have his bond-servant returned to his service. Wilbur Fields says in his commentary on *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, (College Press), "As Christians, we have come so far in our revulsion against slavery that Paul's attention to Philemon's legal rights as master seems to us more a violation of Onesimus' greater right to be free than a necessary preservation of Philemon's rights." The Christian should read the following on slavery (Deut. 23:15-16; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:22—4:1; Titus 2:9-10; I Tim. 6:1-2; Eph. 6:5-9; and the entire book of Philemon). We should attempt to keep our subjective feelings about slavery at a minimum in trying to decide what Paul meant here. Paul is emphatic about the principle, "Every one should remain in the state in which he was called." He repeats it three times (7:17, 20, 24)! Verse 22 seems to reinforce this principle. But our interpretation of verse 22 will depend on our interpretation of verse 21. What Paul seems to be saying in all this is what we have said at the outset: God wants the

believer to be a believer in spite of and surrounded by his “assigned” circumstances. Whether a Christian is a bondservant or a freeman makes no difference—let him remain there with God (7:24).

Any person who becomes a Christian while a slave is set free from the bondage of sin by Christ. This is the only freedom that really matters for eternity. And any person who becomes a Christian while a freeman is in bondage to the Lord Jesus Christ and has no spiritual rights of his own. Christians belong to Jesus as purchased slaves. He is their Master. They are to do what Christ commands; they are to serve Christ. Christians are not to surrender control of their minds or actions to anyone but Jesus. Christ is the Christian’s only Master (see I Cor. 6:20). Paul is referring to the Christian’s need to keep from letting some external circumstance or some threat of a fellow man usurp the right of Christ to absolute ownership.

Biblical history documents a number of examples of men and women who served God in spite of difficult circumstances. Joseph, sold in slavery, unjustly imprisoned, became second ruler in Egypt; Daniel, taken to Babylon as a prisoner of war, became third ruler in Babylon and, later, in Persia; Esther, a maiden among the exiled Jews, became queen of Persia; Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, became a minister of the Persian government; Nehemiah, also of the Jewish exiles, became the king’s cupbearer. It is also significant that neither John the Baptist nor Jesus insisted that people change their occupations (soldiers and tax-collectors), residences or cultural traditions (so long as they were not sinful) as a requirement for discipleship. Peter did not require Cornelius to resign his commission as an officer (centurion) in the Roman army to become a Christian; Paul did not require Sergius Paulus (Acts 13) nor the Philippian jailor (Acts 16) to change their circumstances when they became Christians.

We must not miss the fact that the main subject being discussed by Paul in this context is *marriage*. He is stating a general principle and citing various areas of application—but the main application is to marriage. If a person becomes a Christian while married to an unbeliever, the new Christian is not to seek dissolution of the marriage. The Christian is free from such a marriage *only* if the unbeliever divorces the Christian. Paul suggests that by keeping the marriage intact, the believer is able to have such sanctified influence on both unbelieving spouse and any children to the marriage there exists the best possibility of turning the whole family to Christ. Biblical examples might be cited for this principle: Joseph married an Egyptian priest’s

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daughter (Gen. 41:45), retaining his strong faith and bringing up his children in the faith: Boaz married Ruth who was a Moabitess, and she became an ancestress of Christ; Rahab, a Canaanite harlot, married an Israelite (Salmon, Matt. 1:5), and became an ancestress of Christ; Esther, a Jewess, married a heathen emperor, and saved her people. Believers do not seek to reform individuals by social upheaval; they seek to reform society by converting individuals to Christ!

7:25-31 Distress: This paragraph plainly states Paul's primary purpose for advocating that it is well for the unmarried and the widows to "remain single" as he did (7:8). His primary purpose is *not* that celibacy is spiritually superior to marriage. Celibacy was enjoined in this apostolic reply to the Christians at Corinth in 56-57 A.D. *because of the stress-laden circumstances* coming upon Christians in the latter half of the first century. Persecution of Christians under Nero had already begun in 54 A.D. These persecutions continued for forty more years until they reached an intensity in 81-96 A.D. under Domitian that saw hundreds of thousands of Christians die. Simply because they were Christians, and would not worship the Roman emperor, people from all across the Roman empire were hunted down as conspirators and seditionists, enslaved and worked to death in mines and on galley-ships, starved to death by social ostracization, and slain by the thousands in gladiatorial games in Roman arenas. Practically all the writers of the New Testament predicted the "fiery ordeal" that was about to come (indeed, had already begun) upon first and second century Christians. Paul predicted the Jewish persecution, the destruction of Judaism, and the consequent distress upon Christians in Hebrews chapter 10, in II Thessalonians chapter 2, and in I Tim. 4:1-5; II Tim. 4:1-8. Peter predicted it in I Peter 4:12-19. John predicted and described it in Revelation chapters 1 through 20:6 (see *Twenty-Six Lessons on Revelation*, by Paul T. Butler, pub. College Press).

Paul addresses those who had never been married in verse 25. He uses the Greek word *parthenon* (almost always translated "virgin") translated "unmarried" in the RSV. Paul says there is no specific commandment of the Lord for his emphasis on celibacy. He gives his *judgment* (Gr. *gnomen*, understanding, mind) as one by the Lord's mercy appointed as trustworthy. *Judgment* is a better translation than *opinion* (RSV), and Paul is giving a judgment which should be heeded because the *Lord* has declared him trustworthy. It is apostolic

advice—not apostolic commandment—which his Corinthian audience, especially, would well have practiced. He had wisdom and revelation about their coming “fiery ordeal” which they did not have.

The phrase “impending distress” (Gr. *enestosan anagken*) might well be translated “present distress” (as in KJV). The Greek word *enestosan* is a perfect participle—a combination of *en* and *histemi*. It could be translated “imminent,” “right here,” or “at hand.” Paul was not talking of the end of the world. He had already cautioned the Thessalonians *not* to think of the Second Coming of Christ in connection with the impending distress coming upon first and second century Christians (II Thess. 2:1-12). Paul is suggesting unusual life-styles in view of imminently unusual circumstances much in the same way Jesus warned his disciples about their reactions to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Matt. 24:1-34; Luke 21:1-33; Mark 13:1-31; see *The Gospel of Luke*, by Paul T. Butler, pub. College Press). Paul’s understanding in the matter of marriage was that *in view of the imminent stresses or pressures* (Gr. *anagke*) a first century Christian should remain in whatever marital state he was. If the Christian was married, he should not seek to be free; if the Christian was not married, he should not seek to be married. That was wise advice for the exigencies of those times (or any similar times afterward), but only if the Christian is able to exercise sexual self-control (7:2, 9, 36).

In verse 28 Paul reassures the Corinthians that marriage is not a sin—not even if it is done against his wise advice about the imminent distress to come upon Christians. He goes on to point out that the distress to come will, of necessity, intensify the focus of married people on things of the world and perhaps divert their priorities away from pleasing the Lord. Those who went against Paul’s wisdom and married were going to have worldly (Gr. *sarki*, fleshly, physical) troubles. They would have to worry about another mouth to feed when as Christians they would be forced to starve; they would worry about seeing a beloved mate or child tortured to death in the arena. These anxieties and many others would constantly plague Christians during the great tribulation period of Roman persecution. Paul was trying to keep Christians from having to bear such burdens. The apostle reiterates that the “imminent distress” has “grown very near.” The Greek participle *sunestalmenous* is a perfect tense verb combined of two words, *sun* (together) and *sustello* (draw, contract, compact, tighten). The time of distress of which he had spoken earlier was almost there.

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Paul now gives admonitions directing attitudes and behavior in anticipation of the stressful times coming upon the Corinthian Christians. First, those who were married were to make certain their first priority was serving the Lord. The married Christians would have to prepare themselves to deny the very strong temptation to compromise their faith in Christ should harm be threatened toward a spouse or child. Paul is *not* saying that in times of persecution married people should neglect domestic duties or the responsibilities of marriage. He has just admonished married Christians not to neglect conjugal responsibilities (7:3-5). He wrote to Timothy (I Tim. 5:8) that anyone who does not provide for his own family has denied the faith and is worse than a heathen. Second, Christians must have the attitude that they will not mourn the loss of earthly things. They are not even to grieve the loss of loved ones as others do who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13). Paul reported that some Christians "joyfully accepted the plundering" of their property (Heb. 10:32-34). The apostle John predicted how the pagan world would mourn the loss of material wealth at the destruction of the Roman empire (Rev. 18:9-19). Third, Christians who might have occasion to rejoice in earthly circumstances should not do so, but should remember that worldly pleasures are transitory (see II Cor. 4:16-18; I Tim. 6:6-19). Fourth, those who make purchases should not do so merely to accumulate things. Whatever is purchased is only acquired in order to be used up in serving the Lord. Only that which is done to serve Christ will last for eternity. The Greek word *katechontes* would make the phrase read, let "those who buy be as those who do not consider their purchases as their possessions." Such earthly goods as a man has are not his—they are a trust, a stewardship from the real Owner of all things. Fifth, let those who use this world, use it sparingly. So long as Christians are residing in this world they must necessarily "use" certain parts of this world. They must eat to maintain the physical body, they must clothe that body, and there are certain earthly institutions with which they must be associated, but Christians are not to use this world any more than they have to while they serve God. The Greek word *katachromenoi* means, "much use, over use, using to the utmost." Christians are to consider themselves just pilgrims or temporary residents of this world. The Christian's permanent dwelling place is not here. He is not to settle down here—not to find security here. J. B. Phillips paraphrases, ". . . indeed their every contact with the world must be as light as possible . . ."

The reason for these five admonitions is this world is programmed for destruction. The word *form* (RSV) in the Greek text is *schema*; it is the word from which we get the English word *schematic*. It means, "a plan, an outline, a blueprint, a design." Everything in this present existence is designed to pass away. Even the institution of marriage is designed for this world only (Matt. 22:30). Men and women should not get so attached to anything in this *cosmic* (Gr. *kosmos*, world-order) scheme of things, not even to marriage, that they cannot serve God without compromise. Not only is this world programmed to pass away—it is presently doing so. The Greek verb *paragei* ("passing away") is present tense meaning action is presently going on. This agrees with Paul's statement in II Corinthians 4:16-18 that the "outer nature" (the physical) is wasting away while the "inner nature" (spiritual) of the Christian is being renewed every day. It is the invisible, spiritual nature that is permanent—the physical is transitory.

7:32-35 Deviation: The pressures of marriage, especially in distressing times of social upheaval, might make some Christians deviate from giving first priority to the Lord's will in their lives. Paul's desire in setting forth his wisdom about celibacy is that the Corinthian Christians not yet married may keep themselves free from divided loyalties. The word translated "anxieties" is *amerimnous* in Greek and means literally, *not divided in mind*.

The unmarried man separates his mind from other things and gives it to the things of the Lord. He is under no obligation to provide sustenance, safety and security for a wife. The unmarried man may concentrate all his faculties on being acceptable to the Lord. But the married man separates his mind from the Lord's service in order to concentrate on physical things that he may acceptably fulfill his obligations to his wife—and divided he is. The Greek phrase *kai memeristai* is translated by the RSV as connected to verse 33, "and his interests are divided." The best and most ancient Greek manuscripts indicate this translation is to be preferred over the KJV which translates it, "There is difference also between a wife and a virgin" making it the beginning sentence of verse 34.

The same attitudes may be found in the unmarried woman and the virgin (note: Paul distinguishes between *the unmarried* and *the virgin*; the unmarried probably referring to widows and women whose unbelieving husbands have divorced them; the *virgin* referring to those who had not yet been married). Unmarried women separate themselves unto the Lord, dedicating both body and spirit to Christ; but

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the married woman has to concentrate on many physical things in order to fulfill her marital obligations. There is nothing necessarily sinful in fulfilling one's marital commitments. Paul even exhorted husbands and wives to do so (7:3-7). But, he warned, stressful circumstances will always tend to intensify the temptation for a Christian married person to let priorities be diverted from the spiritual and focused on the physical. Martha (probably the wife of Simon the leper, see Matt. 26:6-12; Mark 14:3) was "distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40), while Mary, the unmarried sister, sat at the feet of Jesus and chose the "best part," (see Luke 10:38-42).

So Paul's advice to these Corinthians, is, if they were presently unmarried (whether widowed, divorced or virginal), do not seek to be married. Paul's advice was for their own benefit. He had nothing to gain from thus advising them. Neither did he intend to restrict their freedom to make their own choice by claiming any personal authority over these Corinthian Christians. The English word *restraint* is from the Greek word *brochon* which literally describes "a noose, a slip-knot, a halter, by which animals were caught and tethered." They are not to think they are *tied* to Paul's advice. But if they are wise and if they want what is well-planned or in good form (Gr. *euschemon*), and if they want to be in a position to give *unencumbered* (Gr. *aperispastows*, undistracted, undivided) devotion to the Lord, they will do as Paul advises.

Consider how dangerous it would be to marry, just for the sake of appearances, someone whose idea of loyalty to Christ is not your own! God did not create us for marriage *at any price!* Paul gives three advantages of celibacy: (a) Freedom from troubles due to distressing times; (b) relief from anxiety about the things of the world on which a "bread-winner" must necessarily concentrate; (c) freedom from distractions in order to serve the Lord more fully and intently. These three attitudes may be achieved whether married or unmarried, of course, but with much less difficulty and with more time for the Lord when not married—especially if there are times of social distress like war, persecution, economic depression, etc. Remember, God forbade the prophet Jeremiah to marry (Jer. 16:1-4) because of the distressing times in which he lived.

7:36-40 Postscript: In these verses, the apostles make a brief summary of this whole dissertation on marriage in view of imminent distress.

The RSV has done an injustice to verse 36 in its translation. First, the Greek word *parthenon* should be translated *virgin*, and *not*

betrothed. The Greek word used specifically for *betrothed* is *mnesteuo* and is found in Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5. Second, the Greek phrase, *ean e juperakmos*, should be translated, "if she is past the apex of her puberty" or as the KJV translates it, "if she pass the flower of her age." The Greek word *huperakmos* is a combined word; from *huper*, meaning, *beyond*, and *akme* (English, *acme*), meaning, *apex*, highest point of anything, full bloom of the flower.

While the RSV translation makes it appear Paul is directing this last advice toward a *young man* acting in an *unseemly manner* (Gr. *aschemonein*, again the word is a derivative of *schema*, meaning, "not according to design or plan") toward the young lady to whom he is betrothed, the better translation would have Paul advising fathers in their attitudes toward virgin daughters well past the age of puberty. Young ladies of that age might be placed in great danger of succumbing to temptation to fulfill strong sexual urges illicitly should their fathers not permit them to marry.

Marriage customs of that century forbade the young maiden to make any arrangements for marrying a man. She could not even agree to marry a man without her father's approval. It was understood in that culture that the father made all the choices of a marriage partner for his daughter and all the arrangements. If the father said she could not marry—she could not marry! Paul is directing his trustworthy advice toward Christian fathers with daughters of marriageable age, who have reached sexual maturity and, perhaps, have shown signs of sexual desire about to get out of control (see verse 37).

The RSV translates the latter half of verse 36, ". . . if *his* passions are strong . . ." but the Greek text does not have a pronoun in this phrase—it has a 3rd person, singular, present subjunctive form of the verb, "is, or, to be." The pronoun is merely *understood*. It could just as well be understood to be *her* as it could be *his*. We believe verse 36 should read, in its entirety, thus: "If any father thinks he is behaving in any unseemly manner toward his virgin daughter, if *she is in* (present tense verb) the age of sexual desire, and the man (father) thinks she ought to marry, let the father do as he wishes; the father does not sin if he gives her to marry (Gr. *gameitosan*, give in marriage) a man." This certainly fits the following verses more accurately.

The father who is firmly established in his *mind* (Gr. *kardia*, heart), is under no necessity, for his wishes in this matter are under his own authority. If the father decides in his own mind to keep his virgin daughter from marrying, he will do well. The Greek words *thelematos*

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(will) and *exousian* (authority) should not be translated, as the RSV does, as *desire* and *control*. The RSV implies in its translation that Paul is talking about sexual desires under control, but Paul is really talking about a father's will or choice about his marriageable daughter being within his own authority and not someone else's.

Verse 38 should be translated, "So the man (father) who *gives* his virgin daughter *in marriage* (Gr. *gamizon*) does well, and the man (father) who does *not give in marriage* (Gr. *ho me gamizon*) will do better."

The apostle's final word on marriage is that Christians are to strive for God's highest ideal. That ideal is one man and one woman married until death separates them (see Matt. 19:1-9). This was God's ideal from the beginning of creation. But because man rebels against God and God's ideals, a lesser ethic must be enforced upon rebels. Laws of divorcement may be written to protect those who are divorced against their will. However, for Christians, God expects his ideal to be lovingly chosen, and practiced.

A wife is *bound* to her husband as long as he lives. The Greek verb *dedetai* (bound) is in the perfect tense and means that once bound, that binding is to continue. If the husband *dies* (Gr. *koimethe*, "sleeps"), the Christian woman is free to be married to whom she wishes, *only* (Gr. *monon*) in the Lord. Paul has already (7:10-16) discussed the hardships in a marriage where one person is a believer and the other an unbeliever. Now he insists that when a Christian woman (and it would also apply to a man) loses her spouse in death, she ought to limit her freedom to remarry to spiritual considerations. She should marry only a Christian. For a Christian to step into any relationship outside the will of God is not only to involve oneself in tragedy, and to jeopardize one's soul, but perhaps to bring sorrow into the whole Christian community and into the lives of a generation yet to be born. Christians are not to be mismatched with unbelievers in any venture in life (II Cor. 6:14—7:1). In Paul's instructions to Timothy about the conduct of Christian widows (I Tim. 5:9-16) he urged the "younger widows" to marry. But Paul qualifies even that instruction with this answer to the Corinthians. It is better to remain single if marriage outside the will of God is contemplated.

To sum up, Paul answers the questions of the Corinthian Christians, who are facing "imminent distress," that it would be better for those spiritually strong who, by the grace of God, have their sexual drive under control to remain unmarried. All others should marry. They should marry "in the Lord." If a Christian's unbelieving

spouse divorces her she is "free" (to remarry) and if a Christian's spouse dies, she is "free." The married life is the norm. Celibacy is the exception, and in no way superior to marriage.

In all he wrote here to the Corinthians, Paul claims to have the approval of the Holy Spirit. The following comment on verse 40 is good:

He wanted to assure the Corinthians that he was not speaking from human bias and prejudice. That this danger existed is proved by the number of modern Christians who have accused him of just this vice. *I think* is probably to be taken as meiosis, a figure of speech which emphasizes something by saying less than is meant. Paul believed that his advice had been given under the guidance of the Spirit of God. This does not mean that it was advice for all people in all times. Under other circumstances wise and spiritual men have differed radically from the advice given in this chapter. It does mean that his advice was best under the circumstances then existing. The one point of permanent validity must not be overlooked. The decisions of Christians in all spheres of life should be made in the light of their primary devotion to God in Christ Jesus. If Christians in all ages would make their decisions in view of that which would be most helpful for them in serving the Lord, there would be fewer mistakes to regret.

Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians, pg. 126, by Fred Fisher, pub. Word Books, 1975

APPLICATIONS:

1. Biblical principles enunciated on the subject of marriage have the authority of God whether spoken by the married or the unmarried counselor.
2. Marriage is the only God-ordained relationship in which human sexual drives are to find expression and satisfaction.
3. If you want a happy marriage; do not neglect to afford your spouse all the physical satisfaction desired, along with love and the spiritual aspects of marriage.
4. The Holy Spirit of God not only approves of, but insists on, proper and regular sexual expression in marriage.
5. God's word warns that the human sexual drive is exceedingly strong.

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6. God's word warns against remaining unmarried too long.
7. Anyone married to an unbeliever should go to great extremes to preserve the marriage.
8. Christians married to non-Christians will at least afford the unbelievers in that household more godliness than they would get where there are no Christians in the family at all.
9. If divorce comes in the marriages of believers or unbelievers, Christians must be involved in finding and guiding the fallen to the highest possible good for the persons and the society. This will most likely involve remarriage of divorced individuals, both believers and unbelievers.
10. In "imminently distressful" times the advice of the Holy Spirit of God, through the wisdom of the apostle Paul, is, do not marry.
11. Christians may, and must, serve God in whatever circumstances they may find themselves.
12. Christians are *not* to insist on changed circumstances in order to serve the Lord.

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What provoked Paul to write this dissertation on Christian marriage?
2. Was Paul saying in verse 1 that men should never touch women?
3. Is relaxation from the temptation to illicit sexual expression the only reason men and women should marry?
4. What spiritual symbolism is to be found in human marriage?
5. Does the Holy Spirit, through Paul, *command* sexual regularity within marriage? Why?
6. Is celibacy a miraculous gift from God? What kind of gift is it? How does one know if he has this gift or not?
7. Could the "unmarried" of verse 8 be applied to those who had been previously married and then divorced?
8. Paul emphasizes that the human sexual drive is very strong—how strong?
9. What should Christians do who are married to unbelievers? What if the unbeliever divorces the believer? May a believer ever divorce a spouse? When? Why?
10. May a believer, having divorced, or having been divorced, remarry? Under what conditions?
11. Would a minister of the gospel *sin* if he solemnized the marriage

where one spouse has been previously divorced? Both spouses divorced? One prospective spouse is an unbeliever? Both are unbelievers?

12. Is divorce an unforgivable sin?
13. Would *enforced* celibacy produce the highest spiritual good in lives of individuals or society as a whole?
14. Should Christians really not try to change their circumstances in order to serve the Lord? What about Christian slaves?
15. Is the unmarried life preferable for anyone who wants to devote full attention to serving the Lord? For whom is it preferable?
16. Who should marry "in the Lord"?