

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

1 Corinthians 7: The Big Fix

Paul identifies the reason for him writing this section of scripture to the *Corinthians in 7:35 This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.* What he is about to say was not written as a means to restrain the Corinthian Christians, but to promote undistracted devotion to the Lord among the members of the Christian community. This is important to remember as we work through this text.

1 Corinthians 7:1–2 Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.

- The Greeks reasoned that the body and soul were separate, which to some degree they are. They also reasoned that the body and soul functioned independently from each other. This led to two major problems concerning sexual sin in the church. Both of them were based in early agnosticism
 1. The first problem was with immorality. It was rampant in the Corinthian church. This is because one of the agnostic views was that a person could do what they want with their bodies since it was separate from the body. We must remember that Paul was writing to a culture that in large part felt the body was a prison for the soul.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:32 LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.
 2. On the other side of the spectrum was asceticism. They also hated the body over the soul. As a response, they sought to starve the body of any earthly pleasure, believing it would purify them. The ascetic would go to the extremes by limiting specific foods, indulgences and even sex relations over all.
 - 1 Timothy 4:3 “men who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.”
 - Colossians 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.
- It is in this second category that Paul would address a problem. They had used the fact that their apostle Paul was a celibate (1 Cor 9:5) and combined it with their Greek-based emotions against the flesh. They were teaching that it was best to not marry at all in an effort to avoid worldly lusts.
- It was good for them to decide to suppress their earthly lusts, but because it often led into fornication. For this reason the church members were to seek the only option permitted as an acceptable solution by God...MARRIAGE.
- God said in Genesis 2:18 “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” God designed us, including the physiology of sexuality. It was all declared good by the same God. It is in the bonds of marriage that ONE man and ONE woman that sexuality finds sanctity from God. It is true on two levels:
 1. It is to be a reciprocal. Verses 3-4 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over

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her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

2. It is to be interrupted only by mutual agreement for devotion to prayer. Verse 5-6 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this I say by way of concession, not of command.
- Paul said that he wished all men could be single and referred to it as a gift. There are those whom persist that there is a gift of celibacy, but that is not what the text says. There are actually two gifts that are being discussed here: the gift of singleness and the gift of marriage, one in this manner, and the other in that. Each man whether single or married has a gift. Zondervan's states it this way.
 - "Paul recognizes that singleness can be a gift from God...The church needs to recognize the gift of singleness even if the social norm is for individuals to marry." Arnold, C. E. (2002). Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3: Romans to Philemon. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

With this in mind, Paul expands his discussion to cover some of the other marriage issues in an effort to further address the ongoing immorality issue. There are five types of marital scenarios with four of them being directly referred to in this chapter. It is in the analysis of these that we can glean quite a bit of information.

A) Widowers and Widows

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹ But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

- This section deals with a group of formerly married converts. They are as follows:
 - Unmarried: There is a temptation to use this title to mean "never been married" or divorced, but I am not convinced of this.
 - Clinton Arnold writes "It has been suggested that the Greek word for "the unmarried" (*agamo*) may refer to (male) widowers..."
 - Adam Clarke states "It is supposed that the apostle speaks here of men who had been married, in the word *αγαμοι*, but were now widowers..."
 - This appears to be the consensus of scholars. The word that Paul uses for unmarried is *agamos*. The word is found only four times in the all the NT. All four of them are in this chapter; therefore it should not be too difficult to contextually identify the meaning. The usages of this word lend to "unmarried" as "widowers".
 - 7:8 lumps *agamos* together with the female widows.
 - 7:10, actually identifies *agamos* as the act of having departed a marriage.
 - 7:32-33 confirms that *agamos* is not married.
 - 7:34 associates *agamos* in the singleness of the virgin (never been married).

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- *Agamos* is the simple combination of the word *a* (negate) + *gamos* (married). In the same way that we “un” lock a locked door, “un” arm an armed man, one can only “un” marry from them to whom they were already married. In this case the “unming” process was through death.
- It appears obvious that *unmarried* refers to widower.
- Widow: A widow is the female version of the “unmarried”, she who has lost their husband through death. Paul recommends them not to remarry. If however they cannot control their lust, they need to remarry again. There is much in the scripture concerning this situation.
 - 1 Cor 7:39-40 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.⁴⁰ But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.
 - Romans 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.
 - 1 Timothy 5:11–12 But refuse *to put* younger widows *on the list*, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married,¹² *thus* incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.

Concerning widows and widowers, it would be good to remain single. If however they cannot contain their lusts, it is better that they find a Christian mate (only in the Lord) in which to share their lives.

B) Christian Couples

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- For the Christian couple, the union of a man and a woman in the same covenant of God, they are held to the highest standard of the group. They have mutually taken a vow to remain together for a life of fidelity to God. Since it takes two to make a marriage and both of them are under the standards of God, their union shall also be.
- Is it true that Paul is telling the Christian couple that they do not have the right to a free upgrade on a new spouse? Notice that this is a command from the Lord and not Paul. It appears the apostle was reaching back to the words of Jesus to demonstrate the commitment of a man and woman together in the bonds of holy matrimony. Both are under the covenant and that marriage is subjected to the terms and conditions of the covenant. Where did Jesus teach such a concept? One such location is found in Matthew 19.
 - Matthew 19:6 Jesus stated in response to a divorce question “*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*”
 - When further pressed on the issue concerning the divorce decree of Moses, He responded in verses 8-9 “*Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you*

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*to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.*⁹ “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” Jesus was emphasizing that when a man divorces his wife for reasons other than for immorality and marries another, then that new relationship is not sanctified in God’s eyes. The account in Mark 10:9 and Luke 16:18 actually do not contain the immorality clause, leaving the appeal to Matthew’s account. Paul forbade it even as Jesus forbade it. In the Old Testament it was a perversion of covenant and in the New Testament it is the same.

- The only time that a Christian has the right to divorce his or her Christian spouse is under the provision of infidelity. That is why they call it that, for it is the action of an infidel, i.e. unbeliever. Lack of repentance in this state automatically defaults the relationship into the “mixed-marriage” category, which we will cover in a moment.
- Marriage is a very serious thing for the Christian couple. It not only shields the church community from the ways of the world, but is also a model of Christ and His church. To treat this lightly is to discount the very essence of Christianity, the Christ/church relationship. If you want a strong church community, then focus on strong Christian marriages.

C) Mixed Marriages

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

- This is the union of a Christian and an unbelieving spouse. This was likely the most common union in the Corinthian church. There were many young Christians that were already married prior to conversion. They might have converted, but their spouse did not. There might have even been some Christians that violated the principle of *2 Corinthians 6:14* “*Do not be bound together with unbelievers*”, leaving them in a mixed marriage. What should they do in such a case? Do they dump their spouse and upgrade to another?
- According to Paul, the unbelieving spouse is sanctified in some way through the Christian spouse (7:14), but in what way? Is he saying that the faith of the one covers the sins of the other? Of course not!
 - The sanctification-connection is in the sexual relations of the mixed couples. Even though one is saved and other is not, their relations are not immoral because they are in a marital covenant. God views their relations as sanctified and the children holy, not illegitimate.
- If that unbelieving spouse is content to keep the relations within that union, not going out to the prostitutes, courtesans or some other extra-marital affairs, then the Christian is to continue on in that marriage. Who knows, perhaps they might be influential in leading their unbelieving spouse to Christ.
- In relation to the previous category, the Christian couple. If a Christian decides to enter a life of infidelity against his fellow saintly spouse, then he or she is living a mixed-marriage state. Moral fidelity versus immoral infidelity is the defining terms. Whenever there is infidelity in a Christian marriage, it has defaulted to a mixed relationship by default until repentance or dissolution takes place.

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D) Never Been Married

1 Corinthians 7:25-28 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

- The fourth and final category of individuals mentioned in the passage is the virgins. Notice that both the male and females are labeled as such, for they have been living the life of celibacy, having never been in a marital relationship.
- As mentioned before, there is nor shall there be any shame in the state of singleness or marriage, for both are gifts from the Lord. If a Christian is content to remain single, then great. If they cannot control their lusts, then find a Christian spouse to marry and hopefully bring forth future Christian children. The key thought is to not engage in fornication when God has provided the way out. The choice is single celibate or committed to a Christian marriage,

The Bottom Line: Seek Contentment Within the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. ²⁰ Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. ²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called.

- People in general want a contented relationship with God. In order to have this, we must be following the word of God. If we don't, then there will never be happiness in our relationship with God. That leads us to the

E) Divorcees

- 1 Corinthians 7 really does not answer it too much unless you follow Paul's lead back to the words of Jesus from the gospels. I believe there is a big difference between being in covenant and not being in covenant under God. Anyone can marry.
 - Polygamists can marry many.
 - Fornicators marry other fornicators.
 - Gays marry other gays.
 - Some people marry simply to obtain a green card.
 - ANYONE CAN MARRY!

As we observe the marriage covenant being redefined by this world, it would be wise to remind ourselves of these important facts. Marriage in and of itself is simply an agreement no greater

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than the people whom enter it. It is when our marriages are placed under the covenant of Christ that the standards are raised to higher levels. With that in mind, let us discuss divorcees.

1) The Divorced who are Converted

- If we applied the same standard to any divorcee prior to conversion, then it would appear that the same standard would also apply after. In that case the convert with a past may attempt to stay single. If the lust cannot be contained, then seek out and find a Christian spouse. Other than that we do not know from the scriptures specifically what is authorized and what it not. For me or anyone to invent authority

2) The Converted who Divorce.

- As already established there is not one case in the Bible when the discussion has been made that justifies people under the covenant of God being able to put away a spouse apart from fornication and remarrying. If a brother or a sister in Christ, claiming to represent the higher standards of God, violates those standards of fidelity and on the same hand rename adultery as acceptable,

3) The Christian Couple who Divorce

- As the scripture said from the earlier in the lesson, if you and your spouse are divorcing and it is not for a reason of immorality, then stay single or remarry. It was as simple as that.

In summary:

- **THERE IS ROOM FOR ALL PEOPLE OF ALL MARITAL STATUSES IN THE KINGDOM. WE ALL MAKE UP THE FAMILY OF GOD!**
 - **WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS ARE WELCOME!** Losing a spouse does not mean an end, but an adjustment that may or may not include a spouse.
 - **THE CHRISTIAN COUPLES ARE WELCOME!** Live a godly life that models the love of Christ and the submission of the church to her husband.
 - **WE LOVE OUR SINGLE BROTHERS AND SISTERS!** Whether you are waiting for a spouse in the faith or not even looking, God says its fine. If he says it is fine, then it is more than fine. Don't sweat it.
 - **MIXED-MARRIAGES ARE WELCOME!** Let's work together to lead that unbelieving spouse into the arms of Christ.
 - **DIVORCEES ARE WELCOME!** We know you have been through quite a lot in your life and there is light at the end of the tunnel. God has great plans for you.

COME AS YOU ARE! Jesus will clean you up and present faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.