



Focus Points...*For I Corinthians 7*

Stop And Consider...

- * Paul's respect for marriage and celibacy;

Look...

- * At Paul's concern to curb rampant immorality while encouraging the appropriate use of God's gift of celibacy or marriage;

Listen...

- * To how Paul avoided any legalistic mandates regarding celibacy or marriage.

Prayer:

Lord God, You made each of us and gifted us according to Your will. Whatever our gifts and passions, enable us to use our gifts and channel our passions in God-pleasing ways. Male or female, single or married, divorced or widowed, empower us to give powerful testimony to the grace given in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Commentary:

"Now for matter you wrote about..." (7:1). Paul's beginning words in chapter seven indicate a shift in his letter to other pressing Corinthian concerns.



Prior to 7:1, Paul addressed sexual immorality, divisions, etc. Having dealt with them, Paul moved on to other matters for which the Corinthian church requested guidance.

A.T. Robertson correctly identified that primary question addressed in 7:1ff.

"The first [question the Corinthians asked] is whether a single life is wrong. Paul pointedly says that it is not wrong, but good...One of the marks of certain heretics [Paul wrote] will be forbidding to marry. (1Ti 4:3)...Paul is here not opposing marriage. He is only arguing that celibacy may be good in certain limitations."

Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures In The New Testament: I Corinthians 7:1*

The Corinthian's were confused. They need to know God's will on the important questions relating to marriage. Some of the questions they had included:

- 1) Should Christians divorce their unbelieving spouse?
- 2) If it meant they could serve God better, should Christians marry at all?
- 3) If one was so inclined, was it wrong to be single?

4) Should widows remarry?

In 7:1ff. Paul addressed these questions. His response can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Christians should marry since marriage is a curb to rampant sexual immorality (v. 2).
- 2) Each married man and woman ought to be exclusively committed to each other sexually and otherwise (v. 2).
- 3) Married couples ought to fulfill their “marital duty” (i.e. have sexual relations with each other) regularly in order to reduce the temptation to adultery (v. 3).
- 4) By virtue of the marriage covenant, couples own each others’ bodies. Spouses should not “deprive” each other of sexual relations except by *mutual* consent over a specific, limited time...for a specific spiritual purpose (e.g. prayer) (v. 5).
- 6) Spouses ought to “come together” immediately after the mutually-agreed abstention is completed “so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (v. 5).

Paul’s discussion was frank and to the point. Though some might balk at Paul’s candor, Paul knew the candor was necessary. The Corinthian’s needed to know God’s will regarding His marital plan.

In 7:7ff, Paul addressed the issue of celibacy.

“I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.” (7:7 [NIV]).

At the time of this writing Paul was not married. Many believed he never was married for two reasons. *First*, it was an issue of faith. Paul felt he could serve the Lord more effectively single than married. Like those who “marry their work,” Paul married his work: God’s calling to spread the Gospel. (Cf. also 7:32ff). *Second*, and more importantly, Paul had God’s “gift” of celibacy.

Paul *never* mandated celibacy for anyone. If one had the gift of celibacy, one ought to honor and “celi-brate” the gift by giving themselves fully to the Lord. If the unmarried ones were unable to “control themselves” (v. 8), they should marry and serve the Lord, even though marriage might distract them from fully and freely serving the Lord.

Paul told married couples not to divorce. Instead, they should be reconciled and live in the blessing of God, even if the spouse is not a Christian (7:10-13). Instead, the believing spouse should stay in the marriage in order to “sanctify” the whole household. Perhaps, Paul reminded them, the unbelieving spouse might be won over by the believer’s loving humility and faith-witness.

Remaining in a marriage to an unbeliever was not just a good thing. It was an important opportunity for witness. When the believing parent stays in the marriage, the children may become believers and, by God's grace, made "clean." Though unequally yoked, the believing spouse has an extremely important calling: to bring children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and thus make them "clean" (7:14).

"How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" (7:15-16)

Having encouraged believers to stay with their unbelieving spouse, Paul then directs his attention to the case in which the unbelieving spouse leaves the marriage. In such cases, the believing spouse was free to remarry.

Should one marry or remain single? Paul's advice was simple.

"Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches." (v. 17)

7:25ff. marks a shift in Paul's attention toward the "virgins" or never married. Considering the "present crisis" Paul wrote, he hoped they could remain single and unencumbered by the responsibilities of marriage. In fact, he noted, this was even more important now than ever (v. 26).

If any couples were engaged to be married, they would not sin by choosing to marry. Neither would they sin if they decided to break off their engagement and give their lives to serve the Lord. Ultimately, however, the decision was theirs.

Whatever they decided, Paul laid out the following considerations (cf. 7:38ff.):

First, neither person should feel compelled to marry or not to marry;
Second, each person should have the matter "settled" in their own mind, that is, feel "at peace" with their decision; and
Third, each should have "control over their own will," that is, the decision should be their own (not forced) and they should be able to control their passions so as to help curb rampant immorality (cf. 7:8).

Paul's advice in the closing verse of chapter 7 was directed to mature, married women. He reminded them that they were bound to their husbands "till death do us part." If their husband died—and they *needed* to marry—Paul instructed them to find a husband that "belongs to the Lord." (7:39)

If widows could remain single and celibate, Paul said the widow would be "happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God." (7:40 [NIV])

Prayer:

Lord, whether married, divorced, single or widowed, You have given us each gifts. Where You have given celibacy, enable those gifted to passionately focus on building Your Kingdom. To those who are married, use their place in life as an opportunity to “cleanse” their households and world by their Christian influence. Lord, whether married or single, use me to witness for You that all may believe. Amen.

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