

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–40, “TO THE CHURCH OF GOD”

¹Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. ²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

⁸Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. ⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

¹⁰To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

¹²To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

¹⁵But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

¹⁷Nevertheless, 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. ¹⁸Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. ¹⁹Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. ²⁰Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. ²¹Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. ²²For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. ²³You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

²⁴Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

²⁵Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. ²⁷Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

²⁹What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

³²I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this

world—how he can please his wife—³⁴and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

³⁶If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. ³⁷But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. ³⁸So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.

³⁹A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. ⁴⁰In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

Discussion Questions (Choose a manageable number to discuss)

1. Pastor Josh Moody observed that marriage is difficult by definition. Why is that so? He also noted that marriage is beautiful by definition. Why is that the case?
2. This chapter constitutes Paul’s response to two of several questions the Corinthians had asked him. What must have been the thrust of the question Paul answers in verses 1–24? To what parallel question was he responding in verses 25–39?
3. Was the sexual morality climate the Corinthians faced more like that of our grandparents or to that of our own generation?
4. Our secular culture perceives the Christian stance on sex as ascetic opposition to any enjoyment of it. How do Paul’s instructions in vv. 3–5 clash with this perception?
5. Paul clearly saw singleness as “his own gift from God” (v. 7). Do we think of marriage and singleness as spiritual gifts to either of which we may be called?
6. Paul spells out (vv. 32–35) advantages in gospel service for the single person. What examples can you give of such “undivided devotion to the Lord”? (See also vv. 37 and 40.)
7. What are ways that couples can use their marriage as a platform for gospel advance?
8. What do verses 17–24 tell us about the “place in life” to which the Lord has assigned us?
9. To what extent did Paul’s advice to the Corinthians during the “present crisis” they were undergoing (v. 26) apply to other believers or other times? (See Eph. 5:33; 1 Tim. 5:14.)
10. How should our eternal perspective as disciples (vv. 29–31) shape our approach to marriage and/or singleness?
11. To what teaching of Jesus was Paul referring in verse 10’s parenthetical note? (See Matt. 19:3–12.)
How do we know that the parenthetical note to verse 12 doesn’t signal reduced authoritativeness? (See v. 40.)