

I Corinthians

Chapter 7:1-16

Utley ...

A. This is Paul's most extensive discussion of domestic relationships. He deals with

1. sexual immorality, 6:9-20; 7:2
2. marriage, vv. 2-5, 10-16, 28
3. singles, vv. 6-9, 25-26, 29-35
4. virgins, vv. 36-38
5. remarriage of widows and widowers, vv. 39-40
6. the recurrent theme is, "stay as you are," vv. 1, 6-7, 8, 10, 17-24, 26-35, 37, 40; because of the current crisis and the expected *parousia*, although he allows for exceptions

B. Chapter 7 is a very good example of how the local and temporal situation must be taken into account before one can accurately interpret the Bible or draw universal principles for application. It is very difficult in the book of I Corinthians to know the historical setting because

1. we do not know exactly what the current crisis was in Corinth (possibly famine)
2. we do not know which factious group Paul is addressing and in which verses (i.e., ascetics or libertines)
3. we do not have the letter that the church wrote to Paul asking these questions (cf. 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12)

C. There seem to be two inappropriate attitudes/factions in Corinth that were causing great strife. The first were those people who tended toward asceticism (cf. 7:1). The other group were those who tended toward moral looseness or antinomianism (cf. 6:12; 10:23). All truth is attacked by the extremes. In I Corinthians 7, Paul is trying to walk a practical and theological tightrope between these excesses, while still speaking to both groups.

D. There is a recurrent theme running through chapter 7. It is characterized by verses 17, 20, 24, 26, 40 and made allusion to in verse 8. That theme is "stay as you are" because the time is short. This cannot be a universal principle because

1. this is related to a period of persecution
2. marriage is God's will for mankind (cf. Gen. 1:28)
3. this church faced internal problems with false teachers

One wonders which category (i.e., never married, once married, or married to an unbeliever) Paul himself experienced. Maybe he existentially knew them all. Most Jews married out of rabbinical interpretation of Gen.1:28 as well as tradition. Paul's wife either died (i.e., he was a widower) or she left him because of his new faith (i.e., he was a divorcee). At the point of his call to salvation and ministry (i.e., the Damascus road) he personally chose celibacy, as did Barnabas, but he never condemned Peter's marriage (cf. 9:5).

E. Marriage in the Bible is the expected norm (cf. Gen. 1:28; 2:18). Paul was probably married at one time (i.e., the implication of Acts 26:10, if Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, then he had to be married). He asserts that marriage is an honorable state for the believer (cf. I Cor. 6:16; 7:14; II Cor. 11:2 and Eph. 5:22-31). We must remember that Paul is addressing a local first century, Gentile, factious, cosmopolitan situation.

¹Now concerning the things about which you wrote, ***it is good for a man not to touch a woman.*** ²***But because of sexual immoralities, each man is to have his own_(1x) wife, and each woman is to have her own_(2x) husband.***

It is good for a man not to touch a woman > (Wuest Translation) *It is perfectly proper, honorable, morally befitting for a man to live in strict celibacy.*

But because of > (Strong's) A primary preposition denoting the channel of an act > through, on account of, because of (not the *alla* that we saw last week)

Sexual immoralities > (Strong's) *porneia* > fornication

***Own*_(1x)** > (Strong's) alone, herself, himself, itself, own

***Own*_(2x)** > (Strong's) one's own, distinct, pertaining to self, i.e. one's own; by implication, private or separate

(Helps) properly, *uniquely one's own, peculiar* to the *individual*.

(Thayer's) pertaining to oneself, one's own; used a. universally, of what is one's own as opposed to belonging to another

Constable > This verse probably begins Paul's extended correction of the Corinthians' view of marriage. He proceeded to urge them strongly that the type of abstinence that they were arguing for within marriage was totally wrong.

Clarke > In the Jewish constitutions there are some things not only curious, but useful, respecting marriage. "There are four causes which induce men to marry:

1. Impure desire
2. To get riches
3. To become honorable
4. For the glory of God

Those who marry through the first motive beget wicked and rebellious children. Those who marry for the sake of riches have the curse of leaving them to others. Those who marry for the sake of aggrandizing their family, their families shall be diminished. Those who marry to promote the glory of God, their children shall be holy, and by them shall the true Church be increased."

Wuest Translation > *But because of the fornications, let each man be having his own wife, and let each woman be having her own husband.*

³ *The husband **must fulfill** his **duty** to his wife, and likewise the wife also to her husband.*

Must ... duty > (Strong's) a debt, indebtedness, i.e. (concretely) a sum owed; figuratively, obligation, i.e. (conjugal) duty

The KJV uses the term *benevolence* of which Barnes writes > "The word which he uses denotes kindness, good-will, affection of mind.

Fulfill > (Strong's) to give up, give back, return, restore

Swindoll > The term translated "duty" (7:3) refers to a "debt" to be paid ... Jesus uses the term "fulfill" in Matthew 22:21 when He says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Applying this imagery to marriage, Paul is saying that husbands and wives must faithfully render to each other what they had promised in their marriage covenants.

Wuest Translation > *Let the husband be rendering to his wife that which is due her, and also let the wife render to her husband that which is due him.*

⁴ *The wife does not have **authority** over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise the husband also does not have **authority** over his own body, but the wife does.*

Authority > (Strong's) exercise authority upon, bring under the power of.

Barnes > The equal rights of husband and wife, in the Scriptures, are everywhere maintained. They are to regard themselves as united in most intimate union, and in most tender ties.

Constable > Neither person has *complete* authority over his or her own body in marriage. Note that Paul was careful to give both husband and wife equal rights in these verses. He did not regard the man as having sexual rights or needs that the woman does not have or vice versa.

⁵ *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.*

Depriving > (Strong's) defraud, deprive

Stop depriving one another > (Uteley) This is a present active imperative with the negative particle, which usually implies "stop an act in process."

Except > (Strong's) if not somewhat

Agreement > (Strong's) *sumphonos* > calling out together

Uteley > Notice Paul is expressing an egalitarian model. The husband does not have the right to choose alone! Biblical male headship is tragically misunderstood. The husband must act in self-giving ways for the maturity of the family (cf. Eph. 5:25-29), not for personal interest or in personal preference, but in spiritual stewardship.

That Satan will not tempt you > (Robertson) > (The Greek grammar translates this as) that Satan may not keep on tempting you.

⁶ *But this I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another in that.*

Concession > (Constable) Paul's concession was allowing temporary abstinence from sex. The concession was not having sex. He did not command abstinence. He viewed regular marital relations as the norm. Paul was no ascetic who favored as little sex as possible. Abstinence was the exception to what was normal in his view.

Swindoll > Paul notes that this principle of temporary abstinence as a spiritual discipline is a "concession" (7:6). The Greek word *syngnōmē* means "permission to do something." Paul clarifies that regular sexual intimacy in marriage is to be regarded as the norm, the command. On the other hand, abstaining from sexual relations is only an exception for rare occasions of special seasons of prayer.

Wish > (Strong's) desire, be disposed toward, intend

However > (Strong's) otherwise, on the other hand, but

Gift > (Strong's) a (divine) gratuity

⁸ *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.*

Unmarried > (Constable) Who are the "unmarried" (*agamos*) that Paul had in view? Most interpreters have taken this word in its broadest possible meaning, namely, all categories of unmarried people. Others, however, take it to refer to widowers since Paul also specified widows in this verse and since he dealt with males and females in balance in this chapter. There is a Greek word for "widowers," but it does not appear in the *koine* Greek period. *Agamos* served in its place.

If > (Strong's) *ei*

To marry ... to burn > (Constable) Notice the contrast between "to marry" and "to burn". The marriage brings the continuing passion under control. This is also not a disparaging comment on marriage, but a practical observation. Marriage is the normal way to fulfill a strong and recurrent, God-given desire.

Wuest Translation > *I say then to the unmarried men and to the widows that it is a right procedure for them if they remain as I also am. But assuming that they are not able to exercise self-control in the realm of the continent life, let them marry, for it is more advantageous to marry than to continue to burn*

¹⁰ *But to the married I give **instructions**, not I, but the Lord, that the wife is not to leave her husband* ¹¹ *(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband is not to divorce his wife.*

Instructions > (Strong's) to transmit a message, i.e. (by implication) to enjoin

Of all family households in 2017,

- Female householders with no husband present represented 12.7 percent of all occupied housing units,
- Married couples made up 48.4 percent
- Male householders with no wife present comprised 4.8 percent.

In 1949, 78.8% of all households contained married couples.

In 2019, 48.2% of households had married couples

¹² *But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.* ¹³ *And if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband.*

Divorce > (Strong's) *aphiemi* > to send away, leave alone, permit

¹⁴ *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.*

Sanctified > (Strong's) to make holy, i.e. (ceremonially) purify or consecrate; (mentally) to venerate

- (Thayer's)
1. to render or acknowledge to be venerable, to hallow
 2. to separate from things profane and dedicate to God, to Consecrate
 3. to purify

Vincent > Not, made morally holy, but affiliated to the Christian community - the family of the ἅγιοι (*holy*) saints - in virtue of his being "one flesh" with his Christian wife.

Utley > This relates to the concern of some in Corinth that being married to an unbeliever might equal their participation in sin.

Through his wife ... through her believing husband > (Robertson) If either husband or wife is a believer and the other agrees to remain, the marriage is holy and need not be set aside.

Unclean > (Strong's) *akathartos*

(Helps) properly, *not pure* (because *mixed*), i.e. adulterated with "a wrong mix" and hence "*unclean*" (because tainted by sin).

Otherwise your children are unclean > (Robertson) If the relations of the parents be holy, the child's birth must be holy also (not illegitimate).

Wuest Translation > *for the husband who is an unbeliever has been sanctified by virtue of his association with his wife in her position as a saved individual. And the unbelieving wife has been sanctified by virtue of her association with her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean. But now they are holy.*

¹⁵ *Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us in peace.* ¹⁶ *For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

If > (Strong's) *ei*

Bondage > (Strong's) *douloo* > to enslave, bring under subjection

The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases > (Wuest Translation) *A brother or sister is not in the position of a slave, namely, bound to the unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife in an indissoluble union in cases such as these;*

But God has called us in peace > (Utley) This is often impossible with an aggressive, unbelieving spouse and sometimes impossible with an immature, selfish, sinful Christian spouse!

For how do you know > (Benson) As if he had said, It is of great importance that you should conduct yourselves properly toward those who thus make, as it were, a part of yourselves, and that you should adorn the gospel by the most amiable and engaging behaviour possible, that thereby the unbeliever may be gained over to Christianity. And surely the everlasting happiness of the person, now the companion of your life, will be more than an equivalent for all the self-denial to which you may be required at present to submit.