

Chapter 7

Advice about whether to marry 7:1-2

v1 But now I will deal with the matters that you wrote about. It is good for a man not to marry. v2 But there is so much wrong sexual behaviour. So, each man should have his own wife. Each woman should have her own husband.

Verse 1 Some Christians believed that their body was sinful. So they thought that their natural desires were wrong. They believed that they should not marry at all.

Verse 2 Paul was honest and practical. He knew that there was much temptation in Corinth. It would be better for a man to marry than to give in to his natural desires in wrong ways.

Advice about sexual relations between husbands and wives 7:3-7

v3 The husband must give his wife the sexual pleasure that she needs. The wife must give her husband his sexual rights. v4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone. It also belongs to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone. It also belongs to his wife. v5 Do not stop having sex with each other except when you both agree to do so. Do so for a time in order to be free for prayer. Then come together again. In that way Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of control. v6 I say all this as my advice. But it is not a command from God. v7 I should like you all not to marry, but to remain single like me. But each person has his own gift from God. One person has this gift; another person has a different gift.

Verses 3-4 Some Christians in Corinth thought that it was more 'spiritual to live as married people without sex. Paul said that

sex was a duty of both man and wife to each other. In a Christian marriage, the husband and wife belong to each other. The sexual act is a special part of their life together.

Verses 5-6 Both husband and wife may agree to stop their sexual relations. But this must be for a short time only so that they can spend more time in prayer. Then they should come together again. Then Satan cannot tempt either husband or wife to look for sexual satisfaction outside marriage. Paul was not giving an order from God; he was offering his advice.

Verse 7 Paul wished that Christians would remain single, like him. But he recognised that people are different from each other. God gave some the gift to remain single. He gave other people the gift to be married.

Single people and widows 7:8-9

v8 I say this to widows or those who have not married. It would be good if they remained single, like me. v9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. It is better to marry than to let strong sexual desires destroy them.

Verses 8-9 Paul thought that there was only a short time left before Jesus returned. So, it would be sensible to remain single. But Paul warns them not to stay in a situation where they would find it easy to sin. It all depended on the character of the person. If they had very strong desires, they should marry.

Questions about divorce 7:10-16

v10 I give this command to married people. (It is not my order, but a command from the Lord.) A wife must not leave her

husband. **v11** *But if she does, she must remain single. Or she must be willing to live with her husband again. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

v12 *For the other matters, I say this. (It is my advice; it is not the Lord's command.) Suppose that a Christian has a pagan wife. If she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. v13 And suppose that a woman has a pagan husband. If he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. v14 This is because the pagan husband has become holy by his Christian wife. And the pagan wife has become holy by her Christian husband. If that were not true, your children would not be included in God's purposes. But as it is, they are holy. v15 But if the pagan leaves, let him or her do so. In such circumstances, a man or woman does not have to stay married. God wants us to live in peace. v16 Wife, it is not clear whether you will save your husband. Husband, it is not clear whether you can save your wife.*

Verses 10-11 Paul said that it was wrong to divorce. This was not his opinion. It was the Lord's command. Jesus said, 'A man must not separate what God has joined together.' (See Mark 10:9.) If a wife did leave her husband, she must not marry again. Or she must be willing to go back to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

Verses 12-14 Some people believed that a Christian should not continue to live with a pagan husband or wife. Paul had to give his judgement about mixed marriages. There was no direct command from Jesus to which he could refer. Mixed marriages could cause problems. (They still do cause problems.) Christians like to go to church meetings. They like to serve other people. But this would mean that a husband and wife would spend less time together. The kiss of peace with which Christians greeted each other (1 Corinthians 16:20) could easily have caused a quarrel. The pagan husband or wife might

feel jealous and worried. They might not be sure whether they could trust their partner.

Paul's advice was practical. When the non-Christian partner wanted to stay in the marriage, there should be no divorce. Because the Christian was 'holy', the partner and the children would be 'holy'. The blessings that come from God do not only affect Christians. A Christian's belief would also benefit the partner who is not a Christian. And it would also benefit their children.

Verse 15 The pagan might be so much against the Christian faith that there would be quarrels all the time. If he or she wanted to leave, the Christian should allow the pagan to go. Paul thought that it was reasonable for a marriage like this to end. God wanted peace in a family, not constant war.

Verse 16 The non-Christian might stay. Then there was the opportunity to persuade him or her to become a Christian. Peter also believed that this was possible. 'Wives, obey your husbands. There may be some husbands who do not believe God's message. But if their wives obey them, those husbands may believe. They may decide to believe God, even if their wives have said nothing to them about God's message' (1 Peter 3:1).

Changes that are not necessary 7:17-24

v17 *But each of you should remain in the place in the world that the Lord has given to you. Stay as you were when God chose you. This is the rule that I order in all churches. v18 A man might have been circumcised when God called him. He should not try to undo his circumcision. A man might have been uncircumcised when God called him. He should not want circumcision. v19 Circumcision is nothing. To be uncircumcised is nothing. To do what*

God commands is what matters. v20 Each one should remain in his situation when God called him. v21 You might have been a slave when God called you. Do not let it worry you. But if you can persuade your master to set you free, do so. v22 Someone may have been a slave when God called him. Now he is the Lord's free man. Someone may have been a free man when God called him. Now he is Christ's slave. v23 Christ paid the price for you. So do not become slaves of people. v24 Brothers and sisters, you are responsible to God. So, each person should remain in the situation to which God called him.

Verse 17 Paul believed that a Christian should practise his faith wherever he was. He did not need to change his place in society. God had called him, whoever he was.

Verses 18-20 Paul chose as his first example Jews and Gentiles. Some men were Jews when they became Christians. Some were Gentiles. A Jew should not try to change his circumcision. A Gentile need not think that circumcision was important for him. It did not matter whether a man had the mark of circumcision or not. What was important was to obey God's commands.

Verses 21-23 Some people thought that slaves were 'things' rather than people. But when God called a slave, he became the Lord's free man. Instead, he had become the slave of Christ, but with the freedom to serve him. A slave could save enough money to buy his own freedom. Christ had bought human freedom by his death on the cross. Paul encouraged slaves to gain their freedom from their masters on earth. But some people thought that slaves had no value. Slaves should take no notice of those people. Whether someone is a slave or free person, they are 'all one family in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

Verse 24 It is God's opinion about a person that matters. So there was no need to change a person's situation after he became a Christian. The important thing is to obey God.

The problem of two people who have agreed to marry 7:25-28

v25 Now I will write about virgins. I have no command from the Lord. But because of the Lord's mercy, you can trust my opinion. v26 The present times are difficult. So, this is what I think: It is good for you to remain as you are. v27 If you are married, do not divorce. If you are single, do not look for a wife. v28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will have many troubles in this life. And I do not want you to have those troubles.

Verse 25 Paul was probably writing about young women who were engaged. Some Christians at Corinth were trying to persuade engaged people to remain unmarried. They believed that sex was wrong. Paul says that the Christians can trust his opinion on the matter. He does not say 'because I am an apostle with Christ's authority'. They can trust him because the Lord has shown mercy to him. Paul is thinking about what is good for them.

Verse 26 The Christians were already having difficulties because people were opposing them. Paul believed that Jesus would return soon. Before that happened, there would be a time of even greater danger and trouble. So, it was not the time to make important changes in their lives.

Verses 27-28 Married people should not divorce. Single people should not want to get married. But it is not a sin to marry. It is not wrong for a young engaged woman to marry. But marriage would bring extra problems. Paul did not say what these

‘troubles’ were. But it is not always easy for even a loving husband and wife to share each other’s needs and emotions. Children take up a lot of time and they are not easy to train.

The time is short 7:29-31

v29 Brothers and sisters, I mean that the time is short. From now on, those with a husband or wife should live as if they did not have one. v30 Those who are sad should live as if they were not sad. Those who are happy should live as if they were not happy. Those who buy something should live as if it were not theirs to keep. v31 Those who use the things of the world should not become too interested in them. Because this world as it now exists is passing away.

Verses 29-31 Paul believed that Jesus would return soon. There was not much time left to do God’s work. Paul wanted them to stop and think. So he wrote in such a powerful way because he wanted them to be serious about God’s work. He did not expect them to understand his examples in their exact meaning. But he expected husbands to continue to love their wives. People would continue to be sad or happy. Trade would go on. But these things should not control their lives. Because of their faith they already belonged to the world of eternity. So, their relationship to the present world was not the most important one. The present world is in the process of passing away. God has already decided the course of future events. Therefore, their hope for the future should free them from too many worries about the affairs of this life.

Freedom from worry 7:32-35

v32 I want you to have nothing to worry about. A single man thinks about the Lord’s affairs. He wants to know how he can please

the Lord. v33 But a married man is involved in the affairs of this world. He wants to know how he can please his wife. He finds it difficult to serve the Lord completely and to think about his wife’s needs. v34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. A single woman worries about the Lord’s affairs. She wants to serve the Lord with both body and spirit. But a married woman is anxious about the affairs of this world. She wants to know how she can please her husband. v35 I am saying these things to help you. I am not trying to limit you. I want you to give yourselves completely to the Lord.

Verses 32-35 Paul wanted married men and women to think about the demands of the Lord’s work. This could be difficult when they also had their wife’s or husband’s needs to think about. Those who were single were free to concentrate on the Lord’s work. For the woman to ‘serve the Lord with body and spirit’ means ‘to serve him in every way’. Body and spirit are not separate. Together they mean the whole person. Paul used similar language to describe the whole person in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Paul pointed out this problem because he did not want anyone to be anxious in their Christian lives. He thought that to remain single would avoid the difficulty of divided responsibility. But he did not want his words to be like a thick piece of string round people’s necks to control them. They had the freedom to choose marriage. He wanted them to do whatever would help them to serve the Lord best.

Advice to men about virgins 7:36-38

v36 Suppose that a man has promised to marry a girl. And he thinks that he is not acting in the right way towards her. Suppose that she is getting older. And he feels that he ought to marry her. He should do as he

wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. **v37** But perhaps the man has decided not to marry the virgin. And perhaps he has no urgent need to get married and he can control his own desire. If he has made up his mind not to marry, he also does the right thing. **v38** So the man who marries the virgin does right. But he who does not marry her does even better.

Paul began to talk about engaged people in 7:25-28. Here he continues his thoughts about the subject.

Verse 36 Some Christians in Corinth were making this man anxious. He had promised to marry a girl. But they said that he should not marry her. She had passed the age when she could easily find a husband. So, he would be failing in his promise, if he did not marry her. The man should follow his own desires and marry her. He would not be sinning.

Verse 37 But a man with a strong control of his sexual desires need not marry. The man and woman can live their Christian lives as single people.

Verse 38 The man who marries is doing the right thing. The one who decides not to marry will do better. That is not because marriage is wrong. Paul's opinion is in verse 26. It is better because of the difficulties that he has spoken about.

Marrying again 7:39-40

v39 A woman must stay married to her husband as long as he lives. But her husband may die. Then she is free to marry anyone else that she wants to. But the man that she marries must belong to the Lord. **v40** In my opinion she is happier if she stays single. And I think that God's Spirit has led me to say this.

Verse 39 The strict Jews called the Essenes allowed only one marriage. They thought that the unity of husband and wife continued after death. Paul believed what Jesus taught. He taught that marriage was for life. But a widow could marry again after her husband died. Women usually lived longer than men, so Paul speaks about widows. But this same advice would be true for men whose wives had died. In some ways, a second marriage is a way to praise the first one. The first one had been so happy that one is not afraid to begin a second one. The only limit to the choice to marry again was that the new partner should be a Christian. This is a wise command. A marriage between a non-Christian and a Christian could create great difficulties.

Verse 40 Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that he has the Holy Spirit. He has the Holy Spirit as well as they do. The Holy Spirit helped him when he gave his opinion about the widow. The widow would be happier if she remained single. That is Paul's opinion.

Chapters 8-10 deal with the problem of meat that someone had offered to a pagan god.

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This publication is written in EasyEnglish Level B (2800 words).

December 2004

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