

1 CORINTHIANS 7

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Be Intentional

Philippians 2:12-13

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THIS CHAPTER DEALS WITH PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE AND THE HOME. BEGINNING WITH THIS CHAPTER, PAUL IS ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS THE CORINTHIANS ASKED IN THE LETTER THEY WROTE HIM (SEE 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). SOME MODERN LIBERAL CRITICS ACCUSE PAUL OF BEING CRUEL TO WOMEN IN HIS TEACHING, BUT NOTHING COULD BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH! PAUL'S MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL DID MORE TO RAISE THE POSITION OF WOMEN THAN PEOPLE REALIZE. WHEREVER CHRISTIANITY HAS GONE, IT HAS IMPROVED THE LOT OF WORKERS, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN. PAUL HIMSELF MUST HAVE BEEN MARRIED, OTHERWISE HE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE JEWISH SANHEDRIN. (HE MAY HAVE BEEN A WIDOWER.)

AS YOU READ THIS CHAPTER, KEEP IN MIND: (1) THAT CORINTH WAS NOTED FOR ITS IMMORALITY AND LACK OF STANDARDS FOR THE HOME; (2) THAT PAUL WAS DEALING WITH LOCAL PROBLEMS THAT WE MAY NOT FACE IN THE SAME WAY TODAY; (3) THAT IT WAS A TIME OF PERSECUTION FOR THE CHRISTIANS (V. 26). IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL DISCUSSES THE PROBLEMS OF THREE GROUPS OF BELIEVERS.

I. THE UNMARRIED CHRISTIANS (7:1–9)

NOTE V. 8, "I SAY THEREFORE TO THE UNMARRIED AND WIDOWS." PAUL IS GIVING COUNSEL TO THOSE WITHOUT MATES, AND HE BEGINS BY SAYING THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT THINK THEMSELVES UNSPIRITUAL BECAUSE THEY ARE SINGLE, OR THAT THEY ARE ESPECIALLY SPIRITUAL BECAUSE THEY ARE MARRIED. ONE VERSION TRANSLATES V. 1, "IT IS PERFECTLY PROPER, HONORABLE, MORALLY BEFITTING FOR A MAN TO LIVE IN STRICT CELIBACY" (WUEST). THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES THAT CELIBACY IS A MORE DEVOTED FORM OF LIFE THAN MARRIAGE, BUT PAUL TEACHES OTHERWISE. CELIBACY IS HONORABLE, BUT SO IS MARRIAGE (SEE HEB. 13:4). IN V. 7 HE SAYS THAT GOD GIVES DIFFERENT GIFTS TO PEOPLE WHEN IT COMES TO THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP, AND THIS IDEA RESEMBLES OUR LORD'S TEACHINGS IN MATT. 19:10–12. KEEP IN MIND THAT THE GREEKS LOOKED DOWN ON THE BODY AND WERE PRONE TO SEPARATE "BODY" AND "SOUL" IN A MANNER NOT TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE. PAUL STATES THAT GOD HAD GIVEN HIM THE ABILITY TO LIVE WITHOUT MARRIAGE, AND HE WOULD THAT THEY HAD THE SAME SELF-CONTROL. BUT HE DOES NOT SAY THAT CELIBACY IS MORE SPIRITUAL THAN MARRIAGE.

THERE ARE, HOWEVER, REASONS FOR MARRIAGE, AND THE MAIN ONE IS TO AVOID SEXUAL SIN. "IT IS BETTER TO MARRY THAN TO BURN WITH LUST" SAYS V. 9. IN V. 2, PAUL UNMISTAKABLY TEACHES MONOGAMY: EVERY MAN IS TO HAVE HIS OWN WIFE, EVERY WOMAN HER OWN HUSBAND. HUSBAND AND WIFE MUST BE CONSIDERATE OF ONE ANOTHER WHEN IT COMES TO THE PRIVILEGES OF MARRIAGE. LACK OF CONSIDERATION CAN GIVE SATAN AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEMPT ONE OF THE PARTNERS, AND THE RESULT MIGHT BE TRAGIC. "INCONTINENCY" (THE DELIBERATE REFUSAL OF THE MARRIAGE BED) IS NOT NECESSARILY A MARK OF SPIRITUALITY. IT CAN BE A CAUSE OF CONFLICT AND SIN. IF A CHRISTIAN CANNOT CONTROL ONESELF, THEN HE OR SHE OUGHT TO MARRY. OF COURSE, PAUL IS NOT SUGGESTING THAT THE ONLY—OR MAIN—REASON FOR MARRIAGE IS PHYSICAL; FOR A MARRIAGE BUILT ON PHYSICAL BONDS WILL FALL APART IN ONLY A SHORT TIME. PAUL TREATS

MARRIAGE IN THIS CHAPTER AS A PRIVILEGE, A BLESSING FROM GOD THAT CAN ENRICH THE LIVES OF BOTH PARTNERS.

II. CHRISTIANS MARRIED TO UNSAVED PARTNERS (7:10–24)

CHRISTIANS ARE TO MARRY OTHER CHRISTIANS (NOTE V. 39—“MARRIED ... IN THE LORD”—AND SEE 2 COR. 6:14–18). BUT SOME OF THE CORINTHIANS WERE SAVED AFTER THEY HAD MARRIED. WHAT SHOULD THEY DO? SHOULD THEY LEAVE THEIR UNSAVED MATES? SHOULD THEY REFUSE THE MARRIAGE BED? WHAT IF THE UNSAVED MATE WANTS TO END THE MARRIAGE? PAUL’S COUNSEL IS CLEAR: STAY WHERE YOU ARE AND USE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO WIN THE LOST MATE. IF THE UNSAVED MATE IS WILLING TO LIVE WITH YOU, REMAIN IN THE HOME AND BE A GOOD WITNESS. THE CHRISTIAN MIGHT WIN THE UNSAVED MATE. THE CHILDREN FROM SUCH A MARRIAGE ARE NOT “UNCLEAN” (ILLEGITIMATE), AS WOULD BE THE CASE IF AN OT JEW MARRIED A GENTILE; THEIR CHILDREN WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTED INTO THE COVENANT. (VERSE 14 DOES NOT MEAN THAT CHILDREN BORN IN A CHRISTIAN HOME ARE SAVED; ONLY THAT THE CHRISTIAN MATE “SETS APART” FOR GOD’S BLESSING THE UNSAVED IN THE HOME. GOD BLESSES THE LOST BECAUSE OF THE SAVED.) HOWEVER, IF AN UNSAVED MATE REFUSES TO CONTINUE IN THE HOME, THEN THE BELIEVER CAN DO NOTHING BUT LET THE MATE DEPART. “GOD HAS CALLED US TO PEACE.” DOES THE ABANDONED WIFE OR HUSBAND HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMARRY? VERSES 10–11 WOULD INDICATE THAT THE IDEAL IS TO WORK TOWARD RECONCILIATION, BUT V. 15 SEEMS TO TEACH THAT ABANDONMENT DOES BREAK THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP AND THUS GIVES THE FAITHFUL PARTNER RIGHT TO DIVORCE AND REMARRY. CHRIST TAUGHT THAT UNFAITHFULNESS BREAKS THE MARRIAGE BOND AND IS GROUNDS FOR THE INNOCENT PARTY TO REMARRY. KEEP IN MIND THAT PAUL IS NOT COMMANDING SEPARATION; HE IS PERMITTING IT IN CERTAIN CASES. IDEALLY THE CHRISTIAN IS TO PATIENTLY BEAR THE BURDENS AND SEEK TO WIN THE LOST MATE. (SEE 1 PETER 3 FOR FURTHER COUNSEL.)

THE FACT THAT A PERSON BECOMES A CHRISTIAN DOES NOT CHANGE HIS OR HER STATUS IN SOCIETY. IN VV. 17–24, PAUL TELLS THE CORINTHIANS NOT TO TRY TO “UNDO” THEIR SITUATION, BUT TO ABIDE IN THEIR CALLING AND ALLOW CHRIST TO MAKE THE CHANGES IN HIS WAY AND HIS TIME.

III. PARENTS OF MARRIAGEABLE GIRLS (7:25–40)

“NO COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD” IN V. 25 SIMPLY MEANS THAT CHRIST GAVE NO TEACHING ON THIS SUBJECT AS HE DID ABOUT DIVORCE (AS NOTED IN V. 10, WHERE PAUL REFERS TO HIS TEACHING). KEEP IN MIND THAT IN THOSE DAYS, THE PARENTS ARRANGED MARRIAGES FOR THEIR CHILDREN; IT IS DIFFERENT TODAY. PAUL PRESENTS SEVERAL FACTS FOR THESE PARENTS TO CONSIDER.

A. IT IS A TIME TO DISTRESS (VV. 25–31).

MARRIAGE IS A SERIOUS MATTER, AND CHRISTIANS WERE FACING DIFFICULT TIMES. THESE TESTINGS WERE NOT TO CAUSE THE MARRIED TO DIVORCE OR THE UNMARRIED TO BE FRIGHTENED OUT OF MARRIAGE (V. 27); BUT DUE CONSIDERATION HAD TO BE GIVEN TO THE SITUATION AT HAND. LIVING A DEDICATED CHRISTIAN LIFE MEANS SOMETIMES FORSAKING EVEN THE GOOD THINGS OF THE WORLD.

B. MARRIAGE BRINGS RESPONSIBILITIES (VV. 32–35).

ONE REASON WHY PAUL REMAINED UNMARRIED WAS SO THAT HE MIGHT DEVOTE HIMSELF COMPLETELY TO THE SERVICE OF CHRIST. HIS CALLING WAS SUCH THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO FORCE A WIFE AND FAMILY TO SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S DEMANDS ON HIM. WHILE THIS IS NOT THE NORMAL STANDARD FOR CHRISTIAN SERVANTS, WE MUST ADMIRE MEN LIKE PAUL, DAVID BRAINERD, ROBERT MURRAY MCCHEYNE, AND OTHERS WHO GAVE THEIR ALL TO CHRIST IN THIS SACRIFICIAL WAY. IF THESE PARENTS WANTED THEIR DAUGHTERS TO SERVE GOD, THEN THEY HAD TO FACE THE FACT THAT MARRIAGE INVOLVES MANY CARES AND DEMANDS.

C. EACH CASE IS INDIVIDUAL (vv. 36–38).

IT IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TO LAY DOWN RULES THAT FIT EACH CASE WHEN IT COMES TO MARRIAGE. PAUL WARNS THEM THAT THEY MUST BE CONVINCED IN THEIR OWN HEARTS, AND NOT MERELY FOLLOW THE CROWD OR TRY TO APPEAR SUPERSPIRITUAL.

D. DO NOT BE IN A HURRY, FOR MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE (vv. 39–40).

THE MARRIAGE CANNOT BE BROKEN BECAUSE OF SOME WHIM OR FANCY. TOO MANY PEOPLE (INCLUDING SOME CHRISTIANS) HAVE THE IDEA, "IF OUR MARRIAGE DOESN'T WORK OUT, WE CAN ALWAYS GET A DIVORCE." NOT SO, SAYS PAUL! WHEN YOU MARRY, BE SURE IT IS "IN THE LORD"—THAT IS, BE SURE YOU MARRY A CHRISTIAN AND THAT YOUR MATE IS THE ONE GOD HAS CHOSEN FOR YOU. HOW TRAGIC TO SEE YOUNG LIVES RUINED BY HASTY MARRIAGES.