

Introduction

In the popular TV game show, Jeopardy, the contestants pick their category and the dollar value of the clue. The host then reads the answer, and the first contestant to hit the buzzer gets the opportunity to state what the question to the answer is. If the contestant answers it correctly, he gets the dollar value for that question, and gets to pick another category and dollar amount. If the contestant does not answer correctly, then he loses the amount of money for the question.

What does 1 Corinthians 7 have in common with Jeopardy? In one sense, this chapter is like Jeopardy. Paul gives the answers to the questions, but we are not given the questions. In studying the chapter, I had to figure out what questions were being asked so that we understand the answers that Paul gives. The Corinthians chose the categories of questions that we will be going through. Paul begins this chapter by writing, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote...” They wrote a letter to Paul and asked questions about these various categories. These were real life issues that they were dealing with, and they wanted Paul to instruct them about these things. Paul gives answers to their questions about sex, marriage, divorce, and being single. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul gives the answers to their questions about food. I am not Alex Trebek, but I will be the host today as we go through Part 1 of Questions about Sex, Marriage, and Divorce. We will be covering the first sixteen verses of 1 Corinthians 7.

(1 Cor 7:1) “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

Scholars say that Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul said, “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people.” This is first Corinthians, but it is not his first letter that he had written. After that letter, the Corinthians had some questions about sexual immorality, sex, marriage, and divorce. Chloe’s people came and gave Paul a report about what was going on in Corinth, and they may have brought Paul their questions.

(1 Cor 5:9) “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;”

(1 Cor 1:11) “For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you.”

Some scholars believe that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus brought a letter to Paul with their questions. In chapter sixteen, Paul rejoiced over these men who had come and supplied what was lacking from the Corinthians. No matter how brought the letter to Paul, he received a letter from them with some specific questions. Paul dealt with the division, strife, and sexual immorality in the first six chapters. He waits until the seventh chapter to begin answering their questions. Our passage in 1 Corinthians 7 starts with, “Now concerning the things which you wrote,...” Paul answers a series of questions about sex, marriage, and divorce. The Corinthians were looking to Paul for some answers about issues they were struggling with. The same can be said in 2022. People are still asking questions about sex, marriage, and divorce. The answers that Paul provided are relevant and applicable today. People still struggle with sex, marriage, and divorce.

(1 Cor 16:17) “I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.”

What were the questions that the Corinthians asked? I researched the early church writings to see if there was a copy of the letter from the Corinthians to Paul. I found one letter, but it did not have any of the questions in it that Paul addresses in this letter. Since Paul did not tell us the questions in our text, we have to look at the answers that he provides and work backwards to determine the question that he was asked.

I have often wondered how Paul knew so much about sex and marriage since he was single. We know that Paul was single because in 1 Corinthians 9:5, in defending his apostleship, he asked, “Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles?” Paul was single and was not using that right; he chose to live a dedicated life to the Lord. In verse seven, Paul said that he wished all men were even as himself, and he is referring to being single. But Paul had a lot of practical knowledge and wisdom about sex and marriage.

(1 Cor 9:5) “Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”

(1 Cor 7:7) “Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.”

Before Paul was saved, he was a Pharisee, and he was also a member of the Sanhedrin Council. One of the requirements for being a member of the Sanhedrin Council was marriage. So, most scholars believe that Paul was married at a young age and met that requirement. There is not any mention of his wife in any of his writings or in early church writings, so scholars believe that she probably died at a young age, or divorced him when he became a Christian. All that we know is that Paul was single during his apostolic ministry. This allowed him the freedom to have an undistracted devotion to the Lord. This gave Paul some first-hand knowledge and wisdom about marriage.

In our text, Paul makes a couple of statements that deserve some clarification. In verse ten, Paul said, “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband...” In verse twenty-five, he wrote, “Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.” Then, in verse forty, he wrote, “But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.” Paul had the Old Testament scriptures to go from. The Scriptures are God’s inspired word. Paul also had some encounters with the Lord and was given revelation by the Lord. In Ephesians 3:3, he wrote that he was given revelation about the mystery of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 11:23, he wrote that he was given revelation about the Lord’s Supper. Paul shares some commands and instructions from the Lord in our passage today. He has some life experiences; he has the Old Testament; and he has some direct revelation from the Lord. Fourth, we know that all scripture is inspired by God, and this letter from Paul was recognized as part of the canon of scripture. Paul’s instructions and opinions in this letter are scripture and are part of the inspired word of God. All of this is to be taken with the same weight as the rest of the scriptures.

(1 Cor 7:10) “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband.”

(1 Cor 7:25) “Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.”

(1 Cor 7:40) “But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.”

(Eph 3:3) “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.”

(1 Cor 11:23) “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;”

(2 Tim 3:16) “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;”

Before diving into the text, I would like to define a few words that will be helpful in understanding the chapter. In verse eight, Paul addresses the unmarried and the widows. In verse ten, he addresses the married. In verse twenty-five, he addresses virgins. In verse thirty-four, he addresses the virgin and the unmarried. We can gather from these verses that the unmarried and the virgin are two different groups of people, and that is an important distinction. The married is pretty self-explanatory; it refers to men and women who are currently married. The unmarried are those who were married, but have been divorced from their wife and are no longer married. The widows are those who have been married, but whose spouse has died. The virgins are those who have never been married.

- (1 Cor 7:8) “But I say to the unmarried and to widows....”
- (1 Cor 7:10) “But to the married...”
- (1 Cor 7:25) “Now concerning virgins...”
- (1 Cor 7:34) “...The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin...”

Questions About Sex, Marriage, and Divorce – Part 1

1. How are sexual desires to be met? (1 Cor 7:1-9)
2. Does God allow divorce? (1 Cor 7:10-16)

(1 Cor 7:1–16) “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. {2} But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. {3} The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. {4} The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. {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. {6} But this I say by way of concession, not of command. {7} Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. {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. {10} But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband {11} (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. {12} But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. {13} And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. {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. {15} Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. {16} For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

1. **How are sexual desires to be met?** (1 Cor 7:1-9)

The first question Paul address is about how are sexual desires to be met? In chapter six Paul wrote that our bodies are not for immorality, but for the Lord. We are to flee from immorality, and we are to glorify God with our bodies. Paul instructed them not to be joined together with a prostitute. It was a fair question for the Corinthians to ask, "How are sexual desires to be met?"

(1 Cor 6:13b) "... the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body."

(1 Cor 6:18–20) "Flee immorality....{20} For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

The city of Corinth was sin city. There were over a thousand temple prostitutes, both male and female. Even their worship incorporated sexual encounters. Many men had concubines in addition to a wife. The divorce rate was extremely high. The Corinthians changed partners constantly. Corinth and Athens were considered the two most immoral cities in the world. The term, "corinthianize," was coined, and it meant to be licentious or sexually immoral. They were a very sexually active culture, very similar to today. They had questions about how to fulfill their sexual desires. Paul had told them that God forbid sexual immorality, and they were to use their bodies to glorify God. So, does that mean no sexual activity? How are sexual desires to be met?

They were also a city with many slaves. Some scholars say that a large portion of the church were slaves. In Athens, which was about sixty miles away, historians say that there were about 400,000 slaves and only about 25,000 freemen. In terms of marriage, a master of slaves could put two slaves together in order to bear children, and these children would also become his property. (These were known as contubernium or tent companionship.) The slaves would live together, and have children, but they could be sold, separated, or exchanged at any time by the master. These slaves may have had many different partners in their life. Since the church had a lot of slaves in it, they naturally had a lot of questions about their marriage options.

Paul begins by saying that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. This is an euphemism for having a sexual relationship. Sometimes the Bible speaks of a man knowing a woman. When King David was old, they brought in Abishag to keep him warm. (The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not. In other places, it speaks of uncovering a woman. All of these are euphemisms about having a sexual relationship. Outside of marriage, it is not good for a man to touch a woman. Sexual desires are to be fulfilled in and only in a marriage.

(1 Kings 1:4 KJV) "And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not."

Paul makes it very clear by saying, “But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman was to have her own husband.” Paul’s first point is that sexual needs are to be met through marriage. They are not to be met through prostitutes, concubines, or any other person outside of marriage. Outside of marriage, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. God has designed our bodies, and our sexual desires. He also designed how these needs would be met, and that was through the institution of marriage. They are not to be met through immorality, but through marriage.

(1 Cor 7:1–2) “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. {2} But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.”

When God designed marriage, He said that it was not good for man to be alone, so He gave Adam a helper. He said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. Marriage is between a man and a woman. There are many purposes in marriage, and many can be found in the creation account of Genesis. God did not intend for life to be lived alone. Companionship is one of the purposes of marriage. A second purpose was procreation. He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. That can only happen with a man and woman, and it can only happen when they become one flesh. This is the only command of God men have been able to obey. God put a desire in men and women for sexual relationships, and it was designed to be met in marriage.

(Gen 1:27–2:24) “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. {28} God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.... {2:18} Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.... {24} For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

Within that marriage relationship, a husband is to fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife is to fulfill her duty to her husband. Husbands are to meet the sexual needs of their wives, and wives are to fulfill the sexual needs of their husbands. Paul mentioned that the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the wife has authority over her husband’s body. Our bodies are meant to fulfill the needs of our partner. This was God’s plan and design for how sexual desires are to be met.

(1 Cor 7:3–4) “The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. {4} The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”

Not only are married partners to fulfill their duties to one another, they are not to deprive one another. They are not to withhold sex from one another, except by agreement for a time, so that they can devote themselves to prayer. Then, they are to come together again, so that they are not tempted by a lack of self-control. There may be a special occasion where a man and wife fast and pray about something, but it is not an indefinite time; it is a short period of time, and they are encouraged to get back together immediately afterwards so that neither is tempted to fulfill those sexual needs in a wrong way. God intends for sexual desires to be fulfilled in marriages.

(1 Cor 7:5) “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.”

There were some that thought that sex is bad, or not holy, and that by abstaining from it, you were more holy and righteous. In a marriage, you are not more holy if you abstain; in fact, you will be violating God’s word. God encourages couples to enjoy sex in their marriage. It fulfills the needs that we have that He created in us. In Hebrews, God tells us that marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled.

(Heb 13:4) “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Over the years, I have seen sex used in wrongful ways. When I was living in Florida, I met a man from Chicago whose wife withheld sex from him on a constant basis. This was a huge source of friction, and they stopped speaking to one another. He lived on one side of the house, and she lived on the other side. He took a separate vacation, and lived a separate life. He was on one of these vacations in Florida when we met. He and his wife were raised Catholic and did not get a divorce, but they were divorced physically, mentally, and socially. When husbands do not fulfill their duties to their wives, or wives do not fulfill their duties to their husbands, there will be problems in the marriage.

Many times, there are underlying reasons why one partner does not want any physical involvement. Women need to feel loved and cherished. Women need to have their emotional needs met, not just physical needs. A good marriage is not built just on a sexual relationship; it is just one of the many components, and often it reveals a problem in another area. In good marriages husbands and wives fulfil their duties to one another in all areas, not just in bed. In Gary Chapman’s book, *The Five Love Languages*, he has a chapter called “Keeping the Love Tank Full. He said we have an emotional love tank that must be constantly kept full. When that deepest emotional need to be loved is not being met, the physical relationship suffers.

Paul’s exhortation to come together again was not a command, but a concession. This was not a command that he had been given by the Lord; it was a concession. The Greek word that is translated as concession is *syngnome*, which is a compound word of *sun* (to join) and *ginosko* (to know). It was fellow knowledge or common knowledge.

(1 Cor 7:6) “But this I say by way of concession, not of command.”

Then, Paul said that he wished that all men were even as he was, which was single. Paul valued the freedom and undistracted devotion that he had for the Lord. Even though he wished this, he understood that marriage and celibacy are gifts from the Lord. He said, “However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.” I believe that God’s “norm” is found in Genesis 2:18, where God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” I believe He created us for intimacy and companionship, and He designed marriage to meet those needs. He designed marriage to accomplish His purposes of being fruitful and filling the earth. I believe that a prudent wife is from the Lord, and he who finds a wife finds favor from the Lord. I believe that my wife is a gift from God, and our marriage is a gift. I believe that Paul was given a different gift, that of remaining single. It allowed him to fulfill the calling on his life.

(1 Cor 7:7) “Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.”

Next, Paul addressed the unmarried and widows. Again, the unmarried are those who had been married, but were divorced. The widows are those that had been married, but their spouse had died. These are single people who had at one time been married. Paul encouraged them to remain single like him. Paul was encouraging undistracted devotion to the Lord, and if that was the gift that they had from God, they were to embrace that gift. However, if they had strong sexual desires and were burning with passion, he encouraged them to get married. Marriage was God’s plan to meet the sexual desires that He created in us.

(1 Cor 7:8–9) “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.”

2. Does God allow divorce? (1 Cor 7:10-16)

The next question that Paul answers is whether God allows divorce. Paul addresses those who are married. He breaks up this group into two sub-groups, those who are equally yoked, and those who are unequally yoked.

a. Equally yoked

When two believers are married, we call that an equal yoking. When two believers are married, the wife is not to leave her husband. If the wife leaves her husband, she is to remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband. Likewise, the husband is not to divorce his wife.

(1 Cor 7:10–11) “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband {11} (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

Paul did not elaborate on God’s attitude, or Jesus’ teaching on divorce. God’s attitude is that He hates divorce. God intended for marriage to be for life. When a man and woman enter into marriage, it is a marriage covenant. We used to vow, “till death do us part.” I don’t know that many use or mean that today, but that is God’s design and intent. The Greek word for cleave or join is *proskollao*, which means to glue together. When a man becomes one with a woman, there is a permanent bonding that is not designed to be torn apart. When a divorce happens, it is painful for everyone. It is painful for the husband. It is painful for the wife. It is painful for the children. It is financially painful. Divorce is difficult and God hates divorce. When God said He hates divorce, He also exhorted us to take heed to our spirit, that we do not deal treacherously with our spouse. We are encouraged to take heed and work at making our marriage work.

(Mal 2:16) “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Jesus taught on marriage and divorce on several occasions. In Mark 10:1-12 and Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question about whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. The religious leaders tried to trap Jesus and get Him in trouble with Herod. John the Baptist had been put to death by Herod because he had confronted him about taking his brother’s wife.

When Jesus was across the Jordan, in the district where Herod had one of his two palaces, they asked him about divorce. They were hoping He would say something that would offend Herod, that He would be arrested and put to death, and their goal of getting rid of Jesus would be accomplished. The Pharisees were not interested in hearing what Jesus had to say about divorce, as they divorced their wives over almost anything. Jesus responded to the Pharisees by asking what Moses commanded them. They answered that he permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. That was not what Jesus asked. Moses commanded that if a man divorces his wife and she marries another, he is not allowed to take her back again as a wife, as she has been defiled. The Pharisees did not want that answer, they wanted Him to make a harsh statement about divorce. Jesus then took them back to Genesis 2 and God’s design for marriage. A man was to leave his father and mother and become one flesh with his wife. They are no longer two, but one flesh, and what God has joined together, no man was to separate. God’s intent is for marriage to be until death do us part. Later on, Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus about divorce. This time it was not a trap, but the disciples wanted understanding about divorce. Jesus told them that whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. God saw that marriage was permanent.

(Mark 10:1–12) “Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. {2} Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. {3} And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?” {4} They said, “Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.” {5} But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. {6} But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. {7} FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, {8} AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. {9} What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” {10} In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. {11} And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; {12} and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.”

In the parallel account in Matthew 19, and also in the sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus said that whoever divorces his wife except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. There was an option for divorce when one of them had been involved in adultery. Divorce is not commanded or suggested; it was allowed. God allowed divorce because of the hardness of heart. People were unwilling to repent, or unwilling to forgive, or unwilling to do work hard to make their marriage successful.

(Matt 19:3–9) “Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” {4} And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, {5} and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? {6} So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” {7} They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?” {8} He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. {9} And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

(Matt 5:31–32) “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; {32} but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Paul did not go into the exception that God allowed for immorality, he just said that a man should not divorce his wife and a wife should not leave her husband, and if they do, they should remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse. This is God’s ideal for all marriages. Next week, in Part 2, we will get into some instructions for those who are divorced.

(1 Cor 7:10–11) “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband {11} (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.”

b. Unequally yoked (1 Cor 7:12-16)

After addressing the married folks who were believers, Paul addresses those who were married to an unbeliever. They wanted to know if it was okay for them to divorce their husband or wife, or if they had to stay in that marriage. Most of them in this situation were probably unbelievers and came to Christ after they had already been married. Now, one of them wants to follow and obey God, and the other has no interest. One of them wants to go to church, and the other wants to go golfing or fishing. One of them wants to be involved in church life, and the other has no interest in that. One of them wants to honor God with tithes and offerings, and the other wants to use that money for other needs. They have some different goals and priorities now, and there was probably some friction because of that. God says that if a brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. Likewise, if a woman had an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce him. If the unbelieving spouse consents to live with the spouse, they should not get a divorce.

(1 Cor 7:12–13) “But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. {13} And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.”

In my first church plant there was a woman that started coming to our church services. Her husband did not ever accompany her. He was raised in church, but he had no interest in spiritual things. She wanted to join our church, and I asked her what her husband thought about her joining our church. He told her absolutely not. He told her to join a Baptist church, and he would start attending with her. She was torn, but I counseled her to find a church where her husband would go with her. I told her that we would love to have her, and she was welcome to come, even as a non-member. I was not chasing her away; I was trying to get her husband and her on the same page, as difficult as that can be when you are unequally yoked. She began going to the Baptist church her husband suggested, but he never attended with her. I share this to say that there are definite issues when dealing with unequal marriages.

We learn from this passage that God honors marriage covenants, even among unbelievers. When God instituted marriage, He did it on behalf of all men. When people unite in marriage, God joins them together, and it is His desire for them to stay married for life. His plans and purposes for marriage are still the same.

Next, Paul gave one reason that they should stay together. The unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband. The word sanctify means to make holy, and when we normally think of sanctification, it is being made holy through receiving Christ into our life. The use of the word sanctification here does not imply that the unbelieving spouse is now going to heaven, and is saved by the faith of their spouse. Each person must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and confess Him as Lord. We are not saved on the basis of another person's faith; we must each enter into a relationship with Christ. The use of sanctification here is in regard to the marriage. Marriage is a holy institution. God honors the marriage, and can bless the marriage based on the believing spouse. Notice that Paul said that otherwise their children would be unclean. God's blessing on that home comes through the believing spouse, and the children are also blessed by that holy marriage. The children are not saved by the faith of the believing spouse, but they are now under the blessing and protection of a holy marriage. Because of misunderstanding this passage, many people in the church began baptizing their children and believed they were saved. Parents should dedicate their children to the Lord, but people should only be baptized when they receive Christ as their Lord and Savior.

(1 Cor 7:14) "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."

However, if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave, the believing spouse should let them leave. The believer should not try and force them to stay. The unbeliever is not under bondage in that case. The word bondage simply means to be bound to that marriage. God allows for a divorce in this case. Why does God allow the divorce? It is because God has called us to peace. In the home where a believer and unbeliever are married, there may be lots of strife, and God wants us to live in peace. This is very different than the case for believers. In the case of two believers, they are to work out their differences and should not pursue a divorce. In the case of two believers that get a divorce, they should remain single or be reconciled to their spouse. But, with the unbeliever and believer, the believer is no longer in bondage, and is free to divorce. Most scholars believe that when God says that they are no longer in bondage, that means that they are free to remarry a believers.

(1 Cor 7:15) "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."

Paul gives a good reason for a believer to stay in the marriage. He asked, "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" One reason for staying in that marriage is to try and win your spouse to Christ. When Peter wrote to wives who had disobedient husbands, he said that they may be won by observing your chaste and respectful behavior. The people that will see a transformation in one's life are those that live with the person. Karen can tell you that I am not the same man that she married. I have grown in every area of my life. I can tell you that Karen is not the same woman that I married. She is a wonderful, mature, wise, knowledgeable woman of God. God has been working in both of our lives, and we have both been transformed. When an unbelieving spouse sees the change in attitudes and actions in their believing spouse, it can soften their heart and could possibly bring them into a relationship with Christ.

(1 Cor 7:16) "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

(1 Pet 3:1–2) “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, {2} as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

Conclusion and Applications

The first question was about how sexual desires are to be met. When God created man, He said it was not good for man to be alone. He made a helper that was suitable for him. God created marriage, and it was between a man and a woman. He also created desires in men and women that were to be fulfilled only in a marriage. Those desires are not to be met through immorality; they are only to be met in a marriage. Sexual relations in a marriage are a good thing, and couples are to fulfill the needs of their partners. It is only when those desires are met outside a marriage that they are sinful. Within in a marriage, unless it is by mutual consent for a short period, it would be sinful not to have sex and meet the needs of the other spouse.

Marriage is a gift from God, just as being single is a gift from God. Paul loved the undistracted devotion he had to serve the Lord, and encouraged those who had this gift, to enjoy it. For those who did not have that gift to be single, God encourages them to get married to another believer

The second question is whether divorce is permissible. God’s intent was for marriages to be unto death. God honors the marriage vows of believers and unbelievers. If two believers get a divorce, they are to remain single or be reconciled. The scriptures give an exception in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 for adultery. In those cases, the innocent party is allowed to have a divorce and is free to remarry. They don’t have to divorce; they can work through the offenses and their marriage can be healed and restored.

When a believer and an unbeliever are in a marriage, if the unbeliever wants to leave, the believer should let them leave, and is not under bondage in that case. I believe that not under bondage means they are free to remarry. If the unbeliever consents to stay, the believer should not divorce them. The unbeliever and the children might be saved through the believing spouse. God is a God of peace and our homes need to be refuges of peace, so if there is constant battle in a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, God allows for the divorce.

Prayer

Father God, thank You for marriage. I thank You for the wonderful gift of marriage. I thank You for the excellent wife that You gave to me. Father, thank You for your plan for how all of our needs are to be met. For those who have not been married, give them a great understanding and appreciation for marriage. Help them build their marriages on Your principles. May they meet the physical and emotional needs of their spouses. Father, with so many marriages suffering, help us to encourage and strengthen those marriages. With so many divorces today, help us to be compassionate and sensitive to those who have gone through a divorce. May our love for You and for one another be readily apparent to those around us. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction (1 Cor 7:1, 5:9, 1:11, 16:17, 9:5, 7:7, 7:10, 7:25, 7:40, Eph 3:3, 1 Cor 11:23, 2 Tim 3:16, 1 Cor 7:8, 7:10, 7:25, 7:34)

1. **How are sexual desires to be met?** (1 Cor 7:1-9, 6:13, 6:18-20, 1 Cor 7:1–9, Gen 1:27-2:24, Heb 13:4)

2. **Does God allow divorce?** (1 Cor 7:10-16)
 - a. **Equally yoked** (1 Cor 7:10–11, Mal 2:16, Mark 10:1–12, Matt 19:3-9, Matt 5:31–32)

 - b. **Unequally yoked** (1 Cor 7:12-16, 1 Pet 3:1–2)

Conclusion and Applications