

Introduction

When we began meeting on zoom, one of the things that we started was a Q&A time after the message. It gave people an opportunity to ask questions about the message, and even share comments or illustrations of their own. If something was not clear in the message, then a question and some comments to clarify the point was very helpful to people. When we began to meet in person again, we incorporated the Q&A time. As a church plant that is just getting started, we are still small enough to have small group discussions like this.

Though the Corinthians are not asking Paul questions in a face-to-face meeting, they are asking him questions to clarify and gain a better understanding of the things that he has taught them. Scholars say that Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians, and first Corinthians is not his first letter to them. This letter is a response to the questions they had after his first letter to them. What were there questions about? The questions that Paul answers in 1 Corinthians 7 were about sexual immorality, sex, marriage, and divorce. In chapter eight, Paul answers questions about food.

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

When I used to teach drilling and well control in the oil and gas industry, I used to tell people not to be afraid to ask questions. I said the only bad questions were the ones not asked. I also told them that there were ten other people who would benefit from them asking the question. Today, we are all benefiting from the questions that the Corinthians asked. We can all be thankful that they asked these questions.

As a review, there are a few words that need to be defined that will help us understand the passage. 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.

- Unmarried (1 Cor 7:8): previously married, but now divorced, and single.
- Widows (1 Cor 7:8): previously married, but their spouse has died, and they are single.
- Married (1 Cor 7:10): currently married.
- Virgins (1 Cor 7:25, 7:34): never been married.

In Part 1, we covered the first sixteen verses. Paul said that sexual desires are not to be met by immorality, but by marriage. Within a marriage, husbands and wives are to fulfil the needs of their spouse.

Paul also talked about divorce. He said that believers were not to divorce one another, and if they divorced, they were to remain unmarried or be reconciled to their wife. Then, Paul discussed those who were married to an unbeliever. He said that if the unbeliever consented to live with them, they should not get a divorce. However, if the unbeliever wanted to leave, they were to let them leave because God has called us to peace. If the unbeliever leaves the marriage, the believer

is not under bondage. Two of the benefits of staying in the marriage were: 1) the opportunity to lead your spouse to the Lord, 2) your spouse and children are sanctified by you. (That is not the sanctification of salvation, but a sanctification of the marriage, and through that, the children are considered holy.)

In Part 2, we will be covering 1 Corinthians 7:17-40, and looking at some more questions. The Corinthians wanted to know if they were to divorce their spouses, particularly if their spouses were not believers. They wanted to know if the atonement freed them from slavery, and there were many slaves in the church. They wanted to know if they had to remain in the same condition in which they were called. Paul had spoken to them about being single, and they wanted to now why he was promoting the single lifestyle. Finally, there were questions about virgins getting married. There was probably a father in the church who had a virgin daughter who wanted to get married, and he did not want to give her away in marriage. So, he asked if he should give away his virgin daughter.

Questions About Sex, Marriage, and Divorce

1. How are sexual desires to be met? (1 Cor 7:1-9) (Part 1)
2. Does God allow divorce? (1 Cor 7:10-16) (Part 1)
3. When a person becomes a believer, do they have to remain in the condition in which he was called? (1 Cor 7:17-31) (Part 2)
4. Why does Paul promote being single? (1 Cor 7:32-35) (Part 2)
5. Should a father give away his virgin daughter? (1 Cor 7:36-38) (Part 2)

(1 Cor 7:17–40) “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. {18} Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. {19} Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. {20} Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. {21} Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. {22} For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave. {23} You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. {24} Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called. {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. {26} I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. {27} Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. {28} But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. {29} But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; {30} and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; {31} and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. {32} But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; {33} but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, {34} and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. {35} This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is

appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. {36} But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. {37} But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. {38} So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. {39} A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. {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.”

3. **When a person becomes a believer, do they have to remain in the condition in which he was called?** (1 Cor 7:17-31)

The question asked is what happens to my status when I come to Christ? If I was married before coming to Christ, am I to stay in that marriage? If I got married as an unbeliever, is the marriage valid and should I stay in that marriage. This is a continuation from the preceding verses where Paul said that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer should stay married. He wrote, “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called, in this manner let him walk.” So, if someone was already married when they were called, God honors that marriage and the believer should not leave that marriage. If the unbeliever wants out, the believer should let them out. The fact that a person became a believer does not nullify the marriage. The marriage is sanctified because of the believer.

(1 Cor 7:17) “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches.”

Paul answers the question three times and uses several examples. The answer to this question is that people should remain in the condition in which they were called. In verse seventeen, he wrote, “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.” In verse twenty, he said, “Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.” In verse twenty-four, he wrote, “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.” Paul makes it very clear that when a person comes to Christ, he is to remain in that condition. Paul wrote that he gave these directions to all the churches, so this was a universal principle, not a special application for their particular situation.

(1 Cor 7:20) “Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.”

(1 Cor 7:24) “Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

The first example is about circumcision. To understand the situation in Corinth, it is important to understand why this example is used. There were lots of social divisions in their culture. There were some Jewish believers who thought that Gentiles needed to be circumcised to be saved. Barnabas and Paul dealt with that issue in Acts 15 when they met with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Even after that, there were Jews that thought that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to receive God’s blessings in their life. There were certain Gentile areas where the people of power and affluence were Gentiles. Some Jews felt the need to become like a Gentile in order to find acceptance. Some of them had a surgical procedure done to remove the appearance of their circumcisions so that when they went to the health clubs they appeared as

uncircumcised. Paul tells them that circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. What matters to God is that we keep the commandments of God.

(1 Cor 7:18–20) “Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. {19} Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. {20} Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called”

In Colossians 1:28, Paul said that he proclaimed Christ, admonished every man and taught every man so that he could present every man complete in Christ. Paul gave his life to seeing people come to Christ, and become mature believers. What made someone complete in Christ was not circumcision. The word complete is *teleios* (Strong’s G5046), which means to reach the goal, to become complete or mature. What makes someone complete in Christ is to become a mature believer. A mature believer is a transformed believer who is keeping the commandments of God. The greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. The second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. All the other commandments are summed up in these two commands. What is a mature believer? A mature believer loves God and loves people. Jesus said that those who have His commandments and keep them are the ones that love God. A mature believer keeps God’s commandments. Paul was telling the Corinthians not to worry about circumcision. They needed to be concerned about keeping God’s commandments. They needed to be concerned about their spiritual growth and development. They needed to be focused on loving God and loving one another. They needed to be concerned about internal change, not external changes.

(Col 1:28–29) “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. {29} For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

(Matt 22:37–40) “And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ {38} This is the great and foremost commandment. {39} The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ {40} On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

(John 14:21) “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Paul’s next example is about slaves. He said that if you were called as a slave, don’t worry about it. A slave was to remain in the condition in which he was called. It is not a hard rule, because he said that if they could obtain their freedom, they should do that. However, obtaining their freedom should not be their focus and it was not something they should demand. There were a lot of slaves at that time. One scholar said that in Athens there were 400,000 slaves and only 25,000 freemen. The church had lots of slaves in it, and there were many questions about whether they were to demand freedom when they came to Christ. Again, God is not looking at the external circumstances, but inward transformation.

(1 Cor 7:21–24) “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. {22} For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is

the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. {23} You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. {24} Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called."

Paul is not promoting slavery. God is not promoting slavery. God is not saying that slavery is a good thing. To force people into servitude against their will is not something that God wants for any of us. If a slave can get his freedom, Paul wrote, "Rather do that." What Paul is saying is that the spiritual transformation of a slave is more important than his slave status. In Colossians 3:22-4:1, Paul exhorted slaves to obey their masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. He said that whatever we do, we need to do it with all of our heart, as for the Lord rather than for me. Paul also told the owners of slaves to grant them justice and fairness, knowing that they too have a Master in heaven. God was not promoting slavery, but promoting heart obedience that was a witness to the world of a transformed life.

(Col 3:22–4:1) "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. {23} Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, {24} knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.... {4:1} Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven."

In 1 Timothy 6:1-2, Paul taught slaves to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine would not be spoken against. God was interested in the character of the slave more than their social status of being a slave. Paul went on, speaking about those who had believers as masters. They were not to be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, and they were to serve them all the more, since the ones who benefitted were beloved believers. He did not command the masters to free the slaves, and he did not command the slaves to demand their freedom. God wanted them to do their work as unto the Lord and to live lives that honored God.

(1 Tim 6:1–2) "All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. {2} Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles."

Paul instructed those who were free, i.e., not slaves, to not become slaves of men. They are Christ's slaves, and they were not to become slaves of men. One of the primary ways that men became slaves of others was through debt. Christians need to be good stewards of their wealth. They need to work hard, manage their money well, and not become slaves of men. Everyone was to remain in the condition in which he was called.

(1 Cor 7:21–24) "..., likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. {23} You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. {24} Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called."

There were those that thought that marriage was something that would keep them from properly pursuing God, so it would be good to divorce your wife and be single. There were those who came from a Jewish background, where marriage was held in high regard. You could not be part

of the Sanhedrin Council unless you were married. Some people thought that when they got saved, they needed to get married to receive God's blessings and favor in their lives. Then, there were those who got saved after they were already married, and their spouses did not believe. They felt that they needed to divorce their unbelieving wives in order to serve God. All of these factors led to the question, "Do believers need to remain in the condition in which they were called?" Paul answers the question, and since this question also included applications for those who were married and those who were single, he included it in this section of questions about divorce, sex, and marriage.

Next, Paul addresses virgins, those who had never been married. The question is, "Should virgins get married?" Paul had no command of the Lord, but gave his opinion, which he said is trustworthy. The early church fathers recognized this letter as part of the canon of Scripture, so even though it was not a direct command from Jesus, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is just as valid and scriptural as a command from Jesus would be.

(1 Cor 7:25–26) "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. {26} I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is."

Paul said it would be good for virgins to remain as he is, which was single. Again, this is not a hard, fast rule. In verse twenty-eight, God said that if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Paul was trying to promote an undistracted devotion to the Lord, not eliminate marriage. For those that had been called to be single, they should remain single. For those that had not been given the gift and calling of celibacy, should get married.

(1 Cor 7:28) "But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you."

I had a man in a church that I had pastored, and when he received Christ into his life, he was told that he should not get married; he should remain in the condition he was called. This man had no desire to remain single, but this verse was improperly shared with him. He struggled with it, and eventually left the church for many years. Later on, he returned to the Lord, but he had really struggled with this passage about remaining single. It is a general rule, and for those that God has called and gifted to be single, they should remain single. God's general rule for man is that it is not good for man to be alone, and that is why God instituted marriage. God's plans and purposes would not be carried out if everyone was single.

Paul is after something that is important to recognize. Our salvation is not a social gospel. It was not to break up marriages. It was not to break up a master slave relationship. It was not to have people circumcised or uncircumcised. The gospel message is about a relationship with God where our sins are forgiven, our lives are transformed, and we love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

The next question is whether those who are married should divorce their wives. Paul addresses those who are bound to a wife, i.e., married, telling them not to seek to be released. Marriage is not going to hurt your relationship with Christ. Being single is not going to make you holier. We were not saved to be freed from our marriages. God honors the marriage covenant, and our marriages are pictures of the church's relationship with Christ.

(1 Cor 7:27) “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.”

The next question is whether those who are released from a marriage, i.e., the divorced, should get married. Paul wrote that they were not to seek a wife. Again, they were to remain in the condition that they were in. Pastor and author, John MacArthur had this to say.

“Christians should not be concerned with changing their outward circumstances. Christians should not be preoccupied with changing their outward circumstances. Now, that’s the basic principle. The Christian life is not a social issue. It is not social revolution, it is spiritual regeneration. There is no reason to say, ‘Now you’re a Christian, you have to stop being single;’ ‘Now you’re a Christian, you’ve got to dissolve your marriage and be celibate;’ ‘Now you’re a Christian, dump that unsaved spouse or you’ll defile yourself;’ ‘Now you’re a Christian and a slave, get out of the slavery.... Christianity was never designed to be a disrupter of social relationships.... And what was happening in the Corinthian church was this: they were coming in and using their Christianity as a justification for all kinds of social change. They were dumping husbands and wives, single people were being forced into getting married when they had the gift of celibacy, which God had granted them for unique purposes of ministry.’”

Notice that Paul goes on to say that if those released from a wife and virgins have not sinned if they get married. Everyone agrees that it is okay for virgins to marry. However, there are different thoughts about who the released people are. Certainly, the released are those that have been divorced from an unbeliever; they are no longer under bondage. The released would certainly include those released from a marriage where the partner has been unfaithful. Jesus gave that exception in Matthew 19. Some would say that the released would include all who are divorced for any reason, but this does not line up with verses ten and eleven, where Paul, speaking to believers who are married, and get divorced, must remain unmarried or be reconciled.

(1 Cor 7:28) “But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.”

(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.”

(Matt 19:9) “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

This can be a difficult position. I knew of two people who claimed to be Christians, and they got married. After six months of marriage, the woman wanted out of the marriage. She divorced her husband, who did not want the divorce, and she remarried. The young man, who was still in his early twenties, did not feel called to singleness, and because of his wife’s unwillingness to work things out in their marriage, he was facing an entire life of singleness. His pastor believed that since he was a believer, and was divorced, he could not get married again. These are difficult issues to work through. One possible out for this young man was when his former wife remarried, he could not remarry her, and she would now be considered an adulteress, and he would be released from that first marriage. When God said it is not good for a man to be alone, and this man did not want to spend his life alone, it would seem that God would not give him a

life-long ban from marriage for the sins of another person. I would lean towards the forgiveness and grace of God, and I would have allowed the young man to remarry. (As a side note, the young man did get remarried, and a pastor from another church performed the marriage ceremony, since his pastor would not perform the marriage ceremony.)

Paul said that he was encouraging people to remain single to spare them from trouble in this life. The question is, “Why was Paul promoting singleness?” What were the troubles in this life? He said the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none, and those who weep, as though they did not weep. He said the form of this world is passing away. Was Paul referring to the last days, and was he expecting the tribulation to occur very soon? I believe the early church did have more expectation of the Lord’s return than many people today. God may have been communicating this to all of us today, and it was not meant just for the Corinthians. This was certainly part of why said what he did, but there are probably some other reasons why he wrote about the troubles in this life.

(1 Cor 7:28-31) “But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. {29} But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; {30} and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; {31} and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.”

In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In the world you have tribulation.” There are troubles from natural disasters, like the people in Florida experienced last week. There are troubles from evil governments, like the people in Ukraine, are experiencing because of Russia’s invasion of their land. There are troubles from corruption in the government. There are troubles from dishonest people and companies. Paul said that in the last days there would be difficult times. People would be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, etc. When Jesus said in the world you have tribulation, it was and is certainly true. Were these the troubles that Paul was speaking of?

(John 16:33) “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

(2 Tim 3:1–3) “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. {2} For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, {3} unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, {4} treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,”

Were the troubles particular to what the Corinthians were going to go through? Paul’s letter to the Corinthians was about seventeen years from a great persecution under Domitian, the Emperor of Rome. There was tremendous persecution of Christians, and many Christians were executed. Domitian worshiped Jupiter and Minerva, and was intolerant of Jews and Christians. In the third century, a pastor in Caesarea, by the name of Eusebius, wrote of the tremendous persecution that the church had experienced under Domitian. It is likely that Paul’s writings were prophetic, and

during this great persecution, many would become widows and experience hardship. Paul may have tried to spare the Corinthians from the massacre of Christians that was coming.

4. Why does Paul promote being single? (1 Cor 7:32-35)

Aside from the troubles of this life, Paul was encouraging those who were called to be single to remain single so that they could be free from concern. He said that those who are unmarried are concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. He contrasts that with those who are married, who are concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. Paul wanted people to have undistracted devotion and focus on serving the Lord. He also said that the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, are concerned about the things of the Lord. Paul said these things, not to put a restraint, noose, or snare on them, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

(1 Cor 7:32–35) “But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; {33} but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, {34} and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. {35} This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.”

My experience has been that very few unmarried people and very few virgins have undistracted devotion to the Lord. Most of them are looking for the right person to marry. Most of them are busy with the everyday affairs of life. I believe that singles have more opportunity to have undistracted devotion to the Lord, but it is not guaranteed by their marital status. As a strong proponent of marriage, I think that two are better than one. I thank God for a wife who helps me accomplish the things that God has called me to do. When I led a men’s ministry, Karen was cracking one hundred eggs on Saturday mornings. She was grinding up wheat berries, and making up pancake batter. She was grating cheese for the eggs. As a church planter, Karen has opened up our home for meetings and services. She cleaned bathrooms before meetings, and then after the meetings. Furniture was constantly moved to make room for more seating in the services and luncheons. When I have been discouraged, Karen encouraged me and lifted me up. Karen helped me to have an undistracted devotion to the Lord and fulfill God’s calling. At the same time, I have tried to help Karen fulfill God’s calling on her life. She has a heart for worship and intercession. When she led the Albuquerque House of Prayer, I supported her ministry. I regularly ask her what she needs to get done, and I try to help her. Karen and I seek the Lord together to see what He has for us, and we daily consecrate ourselves to Him. I agree with Paul that singles have the opportunity for more undistracted devotion, but if God has not called you to singleness, then you should get married to a believer and the two of you should passionately pursue God.

5. Should a father give away his virgin daughter? (1 Cor 7:36-38)

The next question Paul answered was whether a man should keep his virgin daughter or give her away in marriage. Paul has made a case for people to stay single, so this question is about how far a father should go in keeping her single. There was a lot of social and peer pressure to get married, that Paul has promoted the merits of remaining single and devoting yourself to the Lord’s work. We have to maintain a balanced perspective, and God’s general plan for people is

to get married and have children. He did not create man and women to live separate lives. The earth would never have been populated and would have died out immediately. He created male and female and told them to be fruitful and fill the earth. So, God’s general plan is for men and women to be married.

In this passage, a virgin daughter does not sense the call to remain single all of her life. She has a desire to be married, and there is a man who is wanting to marry her. If his actions to keep her from marrying are unbecoming (Strong’s G807, *aschemoneo*), unseemly, or shameful, then he should let her marry. If the father is in control of his emotions, words, and actions, and believes that she should remain single, it is okay if he does not give her away. I believe that some additional comments need to be made.

(1 Cor 7:36–38) “But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. {37} But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. {38} So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.”

A father should seek the Lord about the calling on his children’s lives. Then, the mother and father should try to steer the child towards fulfilling that call. If there is a call for celibacy, that should be very clear to both the child and the parents, and only in that case should a father try to keep his daughter. I believe that God’s general plan is for marriage, and to keep a daughter from marriage when she has been called to be married would be wrong. Parents should help their children pursue God’s calling on their lives.

A second clarification is about authority. Notice that the father has authority to keep his daughter or give her away. The teaching and practice in America is that when a son or daughter becomes a legal adult, she he or she can do whatever they want; they are of legal age and can do what they want. The legal age in forty-eight of the states is eighteen. Only in Alabama and Nebraska is the legal age at nineteen. Worldwide, the legal age is also eighteen. Albania has a legal age of fourteen, and there a couple countries with a legal age of twenty-one, but it is eighteen in the majority of countries. The legal age sets the age for when parental consent is needed for surgery and marriage. The legal age also sets the age for voting, drinking, and the judicial system. So, in this country, asking a parent for permission to marry is more a matter of respect than something that is required. I personally struggle with this from a theological perspective. I believe that a father has the Biblical authority to give away or keep his daughter. In the traditional marriage ceremony, the pastor asks, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” The giving away of the daughter places the daughter under the authority of her new husband. I believe this principle is real and should be taught and practiced.

Conclusion and Applications

In the last two verses of the passage, Paul sums up his comments on marriage. He states that a wife is bound as long as her husband lives, but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Earlier, he said those that had been released from a marriage could remarry, and death is one of the releases that the Scriptures give. The other release that was given was from an unequally yoked marriage. Those that are released do not have to get remarried; they have that as an option. Paul, speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that a woman released from her marriage would be happier to remain single. In 1 Timothy 5:14,

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, encouraged younger widows to get married and have children. Therefore, in this passage in Corinthians, it would be safe to say that the woman in this case is probably older, since her husband has now died.

(1 Cor 7:39–40) “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. {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.”

(1 Tim 5:14) “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;”

Paul has answered lots of questions from the Corinthians. He has answered questions about how sex, marriage, divorce, re-marriage, and singleness. Paul did not want to put a restraint on them and cause them to be snared. Paul wanted them to have a proper understanding of sex and marriage so that they would walk in truth. They were living in a very immoral culture, and they needed some boundaries and guidance. One of the things that fathers do is set boundaries, and Paul is a spiritual father, giving them some guidance from God.

He wanted men and women to fulfill the call on their lives. He did not want them being pressured into marriage, divorce, or singleness. He wanted people to remain in the condition they were called. If they were called to marriage, they should remain married. If they were called to be single, they should remain single. People should remain in the condition they were called.

We gain a glimpse of Paul’s desire to see people live and have undistracted devotion to the Lord. Paul was zealous for the Lord, and he wanted to see people passionately serving God. He did not want people to be distracted from serving the Lord. He was not trying to restrain them, but to promote what is appropriate and secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

Prayer

Father God, I thank You for the questions that the Corinthians asked. We all benefit from the understanding that we get on all these different subjects. Father, we pray that we will be a church that does not try to restrain people, but a church that tries to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to You. Help us to give grace to people. At the same time, help us to walk in truth. Help us not to succumb to the cultural and peer pressures that we face, but help us to walk in Your ways. Help us to be a light to the people around us. Bless us and cause Your face to shine upon us, so that Your way may be known on the earth, that all the ends of the earth may fear You. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Introduction (1 Cor 5:9, 7:8, 7:10, 7:25, 7:34, 7:17-40)

- Unmarried (1 Cor 7:8): previously married, but now divorced, and single.
- Widows (1 Cor 7:8): previously married, but their spouse has died, and they are single.
- Married (1 Cor 7:10): currently married.
- Virgins (1 Cor 7:25, 7:34): never been married.

3. **When a person becomes a believer, do they have to remain in the condition in which he was called?** (1 Cor 7:17-31, Col 1:28–29, Matt 22:37-40, John 14:21, Col 3:22–4:1, 1 Tim 6:1-2, 1 Cor 7:10–11, Matt 19:9, John 16:33, 2 Tim 3:1-3)

4. **Why does Paul promote being single? (1 Cor 7:32-35)**

5. **Should a father give away his virgin daughter? (1 Cor 7:36-38)**

Conclusion and Applications (1 Cor 7:39–40, 1 Tim 5:14)