

MARRIAGE AND SERVICE

1 Corinthians 7

Introduction:

I was tempted to skip this chapter or even abandon this series of messages on 1 Corinthians. As I looked through the chapter at the discussion of marriage and Paul's advice to the married, the unmarried and the betrothed, I was unsure if the content of 1 Cor. 7 was really applicable, given the nature of our congregation. But a couple of things convinced me to go ahead and spend a few minutes in this chapter:

1. No matter what our age or marital status, we all deal in various ways with the passions and desires of the flesh, and Paul addresses that issue in a very straightforward way in this chapter.
2. I believe that the key theme of the entire chapter is the issue of how our status in life affects our relationship to God and our devotion to the Lord. And that is an issue we all must deal with.

So, with that in mind we are going to dive into 1 Cor. 7. It is a fairly lengthy chapter – 40 verses, so we will not be going into a lot of detail on most of it, but I do want to kind of outline it for you. Then I would like to focus on that issue of our devotion to the Lord.

Outline of the Chapter

Keep in mind the context of this discussion. Paul has just addressed a serious issue with immorality in the church in Corinth – ch. 5. He followed that with a challenge regarding their propensity toward lawsuits and the desire to come out on top in disputes with one another. He concluded that section by returning to the issue of immorality and how, as believers in Christ, our bodies belong to God because He has bought us with Christ's own blood, and our responsibility then is to honor or glorify God—body, mind and spirit.

Now, in chapter 7, he is turning his attention to some questions that they had asked, probably in a letter. But, in doing so, he is also continuing on the theme of morality and the responsibility of believers when it

comes to marriage and how we conduct ourselves both inside and outside the sphere of marriage. As we look through the chapter I am going to be intentionally brief. Mostly I am going to read each section and just comment on a few key thoughts.

Verses 1-9: Marriage and sexual passion

- The conjugal rights and responsibilities of husband and wife.
- The danger of sexual temptation and the role of marriage in satisfying those passions.
- Paul makes it clear that some of his advice is his own thoughts, not direct commands from God.

Verses 10-16: The sacredness of marriage

- Divorce is not an option for believers.
- In the case of a mixed marriage, the believing partner has a responsibility to remain in the marriage.
- If the unbelieving partner chooses to leave, the believer is to accept that and is free from responsibility or guilt.
- V. 14 – not about salvation. The believing partner brings a certain holiness into the relationship
- V. 16 – never underestimate the power of a believing partner's testimony – you may be the one God uses to bring your partner to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Verses 17-24: Live as you were called

- There is always pressure to conform to a certain standard or pattern.
- Don't try to change yourself to please men.
- Allow God to work out the changes in your life as He wishes.
- Vv. 22-23 – We were bought with a price. As such, we are slaves of Christ, yet free in Christ. Don't be enslaved by men.

Verses 25-35: Marriage and our service for the Lord (*read earlier*)

- Vv. 25-31 – the effect of marriage on the urgency of our ministry.
- Vv. 32-35 – the effect of marriage on our commitment and devotion to the Lord
- **We are going to come back to this section in a moment.

Verses 36-40: Some final thoughts about marriage

- Maintaining godliness and dealing with passions and temptation while betrothed (awaiting marriage) – vv. 36-38
- Dealing with widowhood – vv. 39-40

Well, that is a brief outline of a fairly lengthy discussion on marriage. Now I would like to return to verses 25-35 and look at a couple of things in a bit more detail by way of application.

Service for God and Devotion to the Lord

Read vv. 25-31 again – there are some things in this passage—in fact the whole chapter—which sound like Paul is really opposed to the whole idea of marriage. But I think we need to see the important points he is making in these particular verses. I see three very significant statements that he makes here, that give a context to his whole argument.

v. 26 – “I think that in view of the present (or impending) distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is.”

v. 29 – “This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short.”

v. 31 – “For the present form of this world is passing away.”

Paul was clearly concerned about a couple of things. The first is the situation facing the Corinthian church, and all of the churches of that time. Persecution was increasing; life was becoming more and more difficult for the believers, and in light of the uncertainty about what lay ahead, he was suggesting that they not allow desire for marriage dictate their life – v. 26.

The second concern is expressed in vv. 29 and 31. From the very beginning of the church there has always been the anticipation that the return of Christ could occur at any moment. Paul certainly believed that. He was convinced that the time in which they could carry the gospel to the ends of the earth was very limited, and he was afraid that concerns about marriage would distract the believers from their service to God.

Application – *read vv. 29-31 again*. Do we allow the things of this world to distract us and keep us from actively serving God? If the time

was short when Paul wrote this letter, how much closer is Christ’s return today? The issue is not how close his coming is, but the fact that we need to live our lives and serve God with the anticipation that today may be the last opportunity we have.

Well, there is one more point that we need to see as we wrap this up. *Read vv. 32-35 again*. Paul has just called us to undivided service to God. But in order for that to happen we need to be free from anxiety and concerns that would distract us in our relationship to God.

It is easy to read these verses and just focus on the aspect of marriage that Paul addresses. But I believe that would be missing the real point. That point is in v. 35 – *“I say this ... to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”* The NIV says, *“...that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

Paul’s greatest concern was not whether the people of Corinth were single or married. It was that nothing would distract them and draw them away from God.

Conclusion

From the way Paul began this section of his letter, it is obvious the Corinthian church had asked him some questions – given the state of the world today, should we be seeking marriage...? Paul responded with plenty of opinions regarding the purity of their lives and dealing with temptations of sexual passions and desire.

However, the bottom line in all of this, in Paul’s mind, came down to two things: first, the urgency of the times and how that dictates our service to God; second, and most important, the depth of our commitment and devotion to the Lord. That must always be uppermost in our thoughts, attitudes and actions.

Now, if you are here and you are not a believer, you may not be able to understand this discussion about devotion to the Lord. The very first step is to realize that you, in yourself, are incapable of living to please God. You need to come to God and receive the forgiveness he offers by faith in Jesus who took the punishment for your sin on himself, so that you could go free...