



1. Welcome
2. Worship w/Prayer Board
3. Annc

Homework: HANDOUTS ON TABLE

RECAP

Timeline:

We do not have access to the full story nor the full correspondence, so we study looking for clues and connections to fill in what is not said nor provided.

THE CITY OF CORINTH:

Timeline:

146BC Archaean League of Greek Cities-States, with Corinth as its lead, was defying Roman expansion and was leveled to the ground. ALL citizens were killed or sold into slavery. It laid fallow for 100 years until Julius Caesar rebuilt it.

From 46BC on:

250,000 people. Large portion being slaves. Engaged in the non-ending movement of goods. Slaves or Free, the citizens were all transplants (rootless), cut off from their country background. A cosmopolitan mixture of race & background.

Defining Characteristics:

Romans officers were given land in Corinth as a way to populate the city.

Wealthy – A port city.

Populated.

Commercial-minded.

Sex-obsessed

Worship – Temple for Aphrodite on Acrocorinth(hill) (1,000 priestesses/sacred prostitutes) & Temple for Apollo (god's beautiful boys) & Melicertes (the sea/navigation)

“A colony without aristocracy, without tradition, without well-established citizens”. W. Barclay, *“The Letters To The Corinthians”*

How would this make up set the stage for in the development of a community?

Paul stayed 18 months. (only stayed longer in Ephesus)

He arrived, worked as a tent maker as he became known and respected. The churches of Macedonia and Philippi gave \$ to help with this church plant so Paul would not have to work at tent making.

1 Corinthians 2:3 (ESV)

³ And ^(A)I was with you ^(B)in weakness and in fear and much trembling,

1 Corinthians 2:3 (NLT)

³ I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.

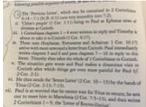
- Pauls' methodology was to preach in the Synagogue.
- Crispus (who was responsible for running the synagogue) was converted.
- Then, Sosthenes, who replaced Crispus at the synagogue, was also converted.
- Sosthenes co-authored with Paul 1 Corinthians.



We do not have access to the full story nor the full correspondence, so we study looking for clues and connections to fill in what is not said nor provided.

This we know:

There was a letter sent previous to 1 Corinthians reply (Could it be 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?).
 At the end of 2nd Corinthians, Paul mentions wanting to pay the Corinthians a THIRD visit...when did the 2nd visit happen? (1st = Acts 18).
 Another very stern letter that Paul wishes he never sent (could it be 2 Corinthians 10-13?).
 If it is, we can operate by this time frame:



FIRST VISIT IS IN ACTS 18

Power Point: Slide #1

- i. The ‘Previous Letter’, which *may* be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7::1 (N.B. 6:13 runs very smoothly into 7:2).
 - ii. ‘Chloe’s people’ (1 Cor. 1:11_ bring Paul at Ephesus news of divisions at Corinth.
 - iii. 1 Corinthians chapters 1-4 were written in reply and Timothy is about to take it to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17).
 - iv. Three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus: 1 Cor. 16:17) arrive with more news and a letter from Corinth: Paul immediately writes chapters 5 and 6 and pens chapters 7-16 in reply to this letter. Timothy then takes the whole of 1 Corinthians to Corinth.
 - v. The situation gets worse and Paul makes a disastrous visit to Corinth after which things get even more painful for Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1).
 - vi. He then sends the ‘Severe Letter’ (2 Cor. 10-13) by the hands of Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13).
 - vii. Paul is so worried that he cannot wait for Titus to return; he sets out to meet him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-13), and then writes 2 Corinthians 1-9, the ‘Letter of Reconciliation’.
- (“Message of 1 Corinthians”, David Prior, pg. 18. The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 1985)

Begins to answer the letter that was written to him (Chloe):

Chpt 7 – Marriage

Chpt 8 – Idols (your freedom causing another to stumble)

Chpt 9 – Give Up your rights, run the race

Chpt 10 – ²³ You say, “I am allowed to do anything”^[d]—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial. ²⁴ Don’t be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.

Chpt 11 – Public Worship/Lord’s Supper

Chpt 12 – Spiritual Gifts

Chpt 13 – Love

Chpt 14 – Tongues, Prophecy, Worship

Chpt 15 – Resurrection of Christ, The Dead, The Body [Teach on Last Things?]

Chpt 16 – Final Greetings



The List from the Letter:

- Marriage and Divorce 7:1
 - Virginity 7:25
 - Food offered to Idols 8:1
 - Spiritual Gifts 12:1
 - Collection for the church@Jerusalem 16:1
 - Apollos 16:12
- (other questions that are not given specific heading are also included)

1 Corinthians 7 (ESV)

Principles for Marriage

7 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote:

[WHAT WOULD WE WRITE TODAY TO PAUL?]

MARRIAGE:

^(A)“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ ^(B)The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ ^(C)Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, **that you may devote yourselves to prayer**; but then come together again, ^(D)so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Marriage is an earthly institution.

Marriage is not part of our eternal existence.

Healthy sexuality within marriage is not only a privilege but a duty.

Sex is designed by God, it is a gift from Him:

- The Bible calls it a privileged “mystery” by which two people, a man and a woman, become one (Eph. 5:32; see Gen. 2:24).
- It is a powerful symbol of the love between Christ and the church.
- Symbol of the sacred.
- When used in a manner it was not designed for, it becomes destructive.
[Can you list the destruction you see as a result of our disobedience in this area]
[What questions would we be asking from today’s culture?]

License – Legalism

Libertine – Asceticism

Marriage – Divorce – Singleness –

Benefits of each

Process of Divorce (Why does God hate divorce...act of violence)

S/G Healthy Christian Marriage according to Paul means:

Take the verses penned by Paul and write answers from his own words.

1. No polygamy
2. It is a mutual giving of sexual fulfillment (for both husband and wife)
[Paul is operating as an apostle here. Giving direction in places it has never existed before.]



3. TALK about your sexual relationship – taking time to abstain for **that you may devote yourselves** [give yourself – hina scholasete] **to prayer** [Kairos-time set apart].
 (Prayer = to ? [spiritual/health purposes] what do you think the Corinthian culture thought of this one?)
4. TALK about your sexual relationship – Resume a physical relationship
 (Do not leave yourself open to temptation of the enemy)
(How does the enemy operate in this area?)

Happily married = A guard against sexual immorality.

RELATIONSHIP/SINGLENESS/MARRIAGE. [VS 25-40]

⁶ Now as a concession, ^(E)not a command, I say this. ^[a] ⁷ ^(E)I wish that all were ^(G)as I myself am. But ^(H)each has his own gift from God, ^(I)one of one kind and one of another.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that ^(I)it is good for them to remain single, ^(K)as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, ^(L)they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

¹⁰ To the married ^(M)I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): ^(N)the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, ^(O)she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and ^(P)the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. ^(Q)Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you ^(b) ^(R)to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, ^(S)whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

DIVORCE: Malachi 2 ¹³ *Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. ¹⁴ You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.*

¹⁵ *Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. ^(b)And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ "For I hate divorce!" ^(c)says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty, ^(d)" says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."*

Cruelty = Hebrew to cover one's garment with violence.

LIVE AS YOU ARE CALLED

Live as You Are Called

¹⁷ **Only let each person lead the life ^(e) ^(f)that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.** [1 Corinthians 7:17 (NLT) ¹⁷ Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches.]

Romans 12:3 (ESV)

Gifts of Grace

³For ^(g)by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you ^(h)not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, ⁽ⁱ⁾each according to ^(j)the measure of faith that God has assigned.



^(W)This is my rule in ^(V)all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone at the time of his call already **circumcised**? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? ^(W)Let him not seek circumcision. ¹⁹ ^(X)For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but ^(Y)keeping the commandments of God. ²⁰ ^(Z)Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you a **bondservant**^[a] when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) ²² For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is ^(AA)a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is ^(AB)a bondservant of Christ. ²³ ^(AC)You were bought with a price; ^(AD)do not become bondservants of men. ²⁴ So, brothers,^[e] ^(AE)in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

The Unmarried and the Widowed

²⁵ Now concerning^[f] the betrothed,^[g] ^(AF)I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as ^(AG)one who by the Lord's mercy is ^(AH)trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that in view of the present^[h] distress ^(AI)it is good for a person to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman^[i] marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers: ^(AJ)the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy ^(AK)as though they had no goods, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For ^(AL)the present form of this world is passing away. ³² **I want you to be ^(AM)free from anxieties.** ^(AN)The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ **and his interests are divided.** And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, ^(AO)not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. ³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed,^[j] if his^[k] passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. ³⁷ But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. ³⁸ So then he who marries his betrothed ^(AP)does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. ³⁹ ^(AQ)A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only ^(AR)in the Lord. ⁴⁰ Yet ^(AS)in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think ^(AT)that I too have the Spirit of God.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Corinthians 7:6](#) Or *I say this*;
- b. [1 Corinthians 7:15](#) Some manuscripts *us*
- c. [1 Corinthians 7:17](#) Or *each person walk in the way*
- d. [1 Corinthians 7:21](#) For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; also verses [22](#) (twice), [23](#)
- e. [1 Corinthians 7:24](#) Or *brothers and sisters*; also verse [29](#)
- f. [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) The expression *Now concerning* introduces a reply to a question in the Corinthians' letter; see [7:1](#)
- g. [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) Greek *virgins*
- h. [1 Corinthians 7:26](#) Or *impending*
- i. [1 Corinthians 7:28](#) Greek *virgin*; also verse [34](#)
- j. [1 Corinthians 7:36](#) Greek *virgin*; also verses [37](#), [38](#)
- k. [1 Corinthians 7:36](#) Or *her*

Cross references:

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. 1 Corinthians 7:1 : ver. 8, 26 | F. 1 Corinthians 7:7 : [Acts 26:29] |
| B. 1 Corinthians 7:3 : Ex. 21:10 | G. 1 Corinthians 7:7 : ver. 8 ; [ch. 9:5] |
| C. 1 Corinthians 7:5 : [Ex. 19:15 ; 1 Sam. 21:4 ; Eccles. 3:5 ; Zech. 12:12-14] | H. 1 Corinthians 7:7 : ch. 12:4, 11 ; 1 Pet. 4:10 ; [Rom. 12:6] |
| D. 1 Corinthians 7:5 : 1 Thess. 3:5 | I. 1 Corinthians 7:7 : Matt. 19:11, 12 |
| E. 1 Corinthians 7:6 : ver. 12, 25 ; 2 Cor. 8:8 ; [ver. 10, 40] | J. 1 Corinthians 7:8 : ver. 1, 26 |
| | K. 1 Corinthians 7:8 : ver. 7 |



- L. [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) : [[1 Tim. 5:14](#)]
- M. [1 Corinthians 7:10](#) : [See ver. 6](#)
- N. [1 Corinthians 7:10](#) : [Mal. 2:16](#); [See Matt. 5:32](#)
- O. [1 Corinthians 7:11](#) : [Mark 10:12](#)
- P. [1 Corinthians 7:11](#) : [[See ver. 10 above](#)]; [Mal. 2:16](#); [See Matt. 5:32](#)
- Q. [1 Corinthians 7:14](#) : [Ezra 9:2](#); [Mal. 2:15](#)
- R. [1 Corinthians 7:15](#) : [Col. 3:15](#); [See Rom. 14:19](#)
- S. [1 Corinthians 7:16](#) : [1 Pet. 3:1](#); [See Rom. 11:14](#)
- T. [1 Corinthians 7:17](#) : [See Rom. 12:3](#)
- U. [1 Corinthians 7:17](#) : [ch. 4:17](#)
- V. [1 Corinthians 7:17](#) : [2 Cor. 8:18](#); [11:28](#)
- W. [1 Corinthians 7:18](#) : [Acts 15:1, 5, 19, 24, 28](#); [Gal. 5:2](#)
- X. [1 Corinthians 7:19](#) : [Gal. 3:28](#); [5:6](#); [6:15](#); [Col. 3:11](#)
- Y. [1 Corinthians 7:19](#) : [See 1 John 2:3](#)
- Z. [1 Corinthians 7:20](#) : [ver. 24](#)
- AA. [1 Corinthians 7:22](#) : [[Col. 3:24](#); [Philem. 16](#)]; [See John 8:36](#)
- BB. [1 Corinthians 7:22](#) : [[ch. 9:21](#); [1 Pet. 2:16](#)]
- CC. [1 Corinthians 7:23](#) : [See ch. 6:20](#)
- DD. [1 Corinthians 7:23](#) : [Lev. 25:42, 55](#)
- EE. [1 Corinthians 7:24](#) : [ver. 20](#)
- FF. [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) : [See ver. 6](#)
- GG. [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) : [2 Cor. 4:1](#); [1 Tim. 1:13, 16](#)
- HH. [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) : [ch. 4:2](#)
- II. [1 Corinthians 7:26](#) : [ver. 1, 8](#)
- JJ. [1 Corinthians 7:29](#) : [See Rom. 13:11](#)
- KK. [1 Corinthians 7:30](#) : [2 Cor. 6:10](#)
- LL. [1 Corinthians 7:31](#) : [Ps. 39:6](#); [James 1:10](#); [1 Pet. 1:24](#); [4:7](#); [1 John 2:17](#)
- MM. [1 Corinthians 7:32](#) : [See Matt. 6:25](#); [Luke 10:41](#)
- NN. [1 Corinthians 7:32](#) : [[1 Tim. 5:5](#)]
- OO. [1 Corinthians 7:35](#) : [[Prov. 22:25](#)]
- PP. [1 Corinthians 7:38](#) : [Heb. 13:4](#)
- QQ. [1 Corinthians 7:39](#) : [Rom. 7:2](#)
- RR. [1 Corinthians 7:39](#) : [[2 Cor. 6:14](#)]
- SS. [1 Corinthians 7:40](#) : [See ver. 6](#)
- TT. [1 Corinthians 7:40](#) : [[Acts 15:28](#)]

NOTES:

7:1 Paul had received a letter from the Corinthians inquiring about various problems. Among them were questions pertaining to marriage, to which he responds in this section.

7:1 Not to touch a woman is a euphemism for sexual intercourse and represents the spiritual challenge of this chapter. Regardless of how important sex may be, it is still a temporal arrangement and not a part of our eternal existence. Marriage itself is an earthly institution (Matt. 22:30).

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

7:3 **Three Sides of Sex: Unity, Symbol of Love, Reserved for Marriage**, FAMILY ORDER. Sexual intercourse is an intimate expression of affection between a husband and wife. The apostle underscores its importance in marriage by declaring that it is in fact a duty: a husband is to be available for his wife at her request, and a wife for her husband at his request.

It is more than an act of biological mating. ~~The Bible calls it a privileged “mystery” by which two people, a man and a woman, become one (Eph. 5:32; see Gen. 2:24).~~ The privilege is abused when people not married to each other have intercourse (see 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:16); then that which God meant for blessing becomes a cause of judgment (see Eph. 5:5).

Marriage is the one and the only place that God has provided for sexual union to take place. In that setting it **becomes a powerful symbol of the love between Christ and the church**, a pure sharing of joy and delight in one another that is a gift from the hand of God. Outside those boundaries, it eventually becomes destructive.

7:5 Christian couples should overcome sexual selfishness and should **not deprive one another**. If sexual activity is interrupted in marriage, three conditions are necessary: mutual consent; a limited time; spiritual, not selfish, reasons.

7:6 Paul clearly states that he is speaking from personal preference when he challenges the unmarried to remain celibate (v. 35). Matrimony or celibacy is an individual and a relative matter depending, in part, on one’s ability to control sexual passion. The sexual drive is not sinful, and remaining unmarried instead of marrying embodies no superior moral virtue.

7:10 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.



7:10 Not I but the Lord: Jesus did not address every possible marriage detail. He did, however, ask His disciples to follow God’s original creation design and never to sever the oneness of their marriage bond (Matt. 19:3-9). A Christian couple is to bear witness to the world by keeping marriage indissoluble. They represent the truth of covenant love and should live and grow in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Having dealt with the ideal of marriage, Paul, realizing the reality of stresses and human failure, mentions the permissibility of divorce (**but even if she does depart** (v. 11)). This permitted divorce has a strict regulation—no adultery, meaning there can most likely be no remarriage in this case except to the one from whom she was previously divorced (**let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband** (v. 11)). It is not clear why Paul addresses this from the woman’s perspective, but the principle applies to both genders.

Whereas this section forms the major Pauline statement on the issues of divorce and remarriage among Christians, it does not exhaust all the Bible has to say about the issues. See the text and notes on Matt. 5:31, 32.

F. Jesus Censures Divorce (5:31, 32)

5:31 Under OT law, divorce was permitted according to Deuteronomy 24:1–4. This passage was not concerned with the case of an adulterous wife (the penalty for adultery was death, see Deut. 22:22). Rather, it deals with divorce because of dislike or “incompatibility.”

5:32 However, in the kingdom of Christ, **whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery**. This does not mean that she automatically becomes an adulteress; it presupposes that, having no means of support, she is forced to live with another man. In so doing she becomes an adulteress. Not only is the former wife living in adultery, **whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery**.

The subject of divorce and remarriage is one of the most complicated topics in the Bible. It is virtually impossible to answer all the questions that arise, but it may be helpful to survey and summarize what we believe the Scriptures teach.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Divorce was never God’s intention for man. His ideal is that one man and one woman remain married until their union is broken by death (Rom. 7:2, 3). Jesus made this clear to the Pharisees by appealing to the divine order at creation (Matt. 19:4–6).

God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), that is, unscriptural divorce. He does not hate all divorce because He speaks of Himself as having divorced Israel (Jer. 3:8). This was because the nation forsook Him to worship idols. Israel was unfaithful.

In Matthew 5:31, 32 and 19:9, Jesus taught that divorce was forbidden except when one of the partners had been guilty of sexual immorality. In Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18, the exception clause is omitted.

The discrepancy is probably best explained as that neither Mark nor Luke record the entire saying. Therefore, even though divorce is not the ideal, it is permitted in the case where one’s partner has been unfaithful. Jesus *allows* divorce in this case, but He does not *command* it.

Some scholars see 1 Corinthians 7:12–16 as teaching that divorce is acceptable when a believer is deserted by an unbeliever. Paul says that the remaining person is “not under bondage in such cases,” i.e., he or she is free to obtain a divorce (for desertion). The present writer’s opinion is that this case is the same exception granted in Matthew 5 and 19; namely, the unbeliever departs to live with someone else. Therefore, the believer can be granted a divorce on the scriptural grounds only if the other party commits adultery.

It is often contended that, although divorce is permitted in the NT, remarriage is never contemplated. However, this argument begs the question. Remarriage is not condemned for the innocent party in the NT only for the offending person. Also, one of the main purposes of a scriptural divorce is to permit remarriage; otherwise, separation would serve the purpose just as well.

In any discussion of this topic, the question inevitably arises, “What about people who were divorced before they were saved?” There should be no question that unlawful divorces and remarriages contracted before conversion are sins which have been fully forgiven (see, for example, 1 Cor. 6:11 where Paul includes adultery in the list of sins in which the Corinthian believers had formerly participated). Pre-conversion sins do not bar believers from full participation in the local church.

A more difficult question concerns Christians who have divorced for unscriptural reasons and then remarry. Can they be received back into the fellowship of the local church? The answer depends on whether adultery is the initial act of physical union or a continued state. If these people are living in a state of adultery, then they would not only have to confess their sin but also forsake their present partner. But God’s solution for a problem is never one that creates worse problems. If, in order to untangle a marital snarl, men or women are driven into sin, or women and children are left homeless and penniless, the cure is worse than the disease.

In the writer’s opinion, Christians who have been divorced unscripturally and then remarried can truly repent of their sin and be restored to the Lord and to the fellowship of the church. In the matter of divorce, it seems that almost every case is



different. Therefore, the elders of a local church must investigate each case individually and judge it according to the Word of God. If, at times, disciplinary action has to be taken, all concerned should submit to the decision of the elders.¹

WORD WEALTH

7:11 reconciled, *katallasso* (kat-al-las-so); Strong's #2644: To change, exchange, reestablish, restore relationships, make things right, remove an enmity. Five times the word refers to God's reconciling us to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18). Whether speaking of God and man or husband and wife, *katallasso* describes the reestablishing of a proper, loving, interpersonal relationship, which has been broken or disrupted.

7:12 To the rest: This section deals with the marriage between a believer and a nonbeliever. Jesus did not rule on this, **so Paul must respond in his apostolic authority**. Marriages in which one partner later becomes a Christian are valid and must remain intact. Any separation must be initiated by the unbelieving partner.

7:14 The ultimate reason for keeping a mixed marriage together is the holy influence of the believer's life on the unbelieving partner, resulting in the possible salvation of the entire household.

7:15 When an unbeliever initiates divorce beyond a believer's control, the believer is free from the relationship, and **is not under bondage** to keep it intact. Paul is silent concerning remarriage in such a situation.

7:17 The connection between the secular and the spiritual sphere is evident in this passage. In light of our eternal calling and destiny, the political and social distinctions of temporal life are not the most important. What matters is obedience to God. Even such a tragic state as slavery, from a social viewpoint, does not dictate the terms of a life in Christ. **The paramount thing is for a believer's spiritual life to remain constant and intact in an unredeemed, changing world.**

7:25 Paul does not exalt the single state above the marriage state, but he does have a personal preference and urges all groups of the unmarried to consider the wisdom and spiritual benefits of a celibate life. Among these various groups are divorcees (vv. 27, 28); unmarrieds who are free to make their own matrimonial choices (vv. 28-35); unmarrieds whose choices depend on others, most likely fathers (vv. 36-38); and widows (vv. 39, 40).

7:25 Christ Himself gave no teaching on the subject under discussion; but Paul, while not disclaiming inspiration, stresses he is giving sound advice.

7:26 Paul presents his teaching in light of the tension between the temporal, unredeemed secular order and the believer's spiritual life and calling. The present distress applies to the whole of this age, and does not refer to some special persecution in the first century. This entire age is stressful (vv. 26-28), temporal (vv. 29, 30), and distracting (vv. 32-35).

7:29 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

7:29 **Because of the nature of this age and the reality of the Coming of Jesus Christ, believers are to adopt the attitude of finding the source of their life in Christ, rather than in earthly institutions, whether marriage, the social sphere, or the economic world. A Christian is to live intently and responsibly and yet see these realities as ultimately temporal.**

7:36 Behaving improperly probably means a father's unfair treatment of a virgin daughter by refusing permission to marry, but other interpretations are possible.²

CHAPTER 7

1 Co 7:1–40. REPLY TO THEIR INQUIRIES AS TO MARRIAGE; THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE IN OTHER THINGS IS, ABIDE IN YOUR STATION, FOR THE TIME IS SHORT.

1. The Corinthians in their letter had probably asked questions which tended to disparage marriage, and had implied that it was better to break it off when contracted with an unbeliever.

good—that is, “expedient,” because of “the present distress”; that is, the unsettled state of the world, and the likelihood of persecutions tearing rudely asunder those bound by marriage ties. Heb 13:4, in opposition to ascetic

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1221–1222). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Co 7:1–36). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



and Romish notions of superior *sanctity* in celibacy, declares, “Marriage is HONORABLE IN ALL.” Another reason why in some cases celibacy may be a matter of Christian *expediency* is stated in 1 Co 7:34, 35, “that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.” But these are exceptional cases, and in exceptional times, such as those of Paul.

2. Here the general rule is given

to avoid fornication—More literally, “*on account of fornications*,” to which as being very prevalent at Corinth, and not even counted sins among the heathen, unmarried persons might be tempted. The *plural*, “fornications,” marks irregular lusts, as contrasted with the *unity* of the marriage relation [BENGEL].

let every man have—a positive command to all who have not the gift of continency, in fact to the great majority of the world (1 Co 7:5). The dignity of marriage is set forth by Paul (Eph 5:25–32), in the fact that it signifies the mystical union between Christ and the Church.

3, 4. *The duty of cohabitation on the part of the married.*

due benevolence—The oldest manuscripts read simply, “her due”; that is, the conjugal cohabitation *due* by the marriage contract (compare 1 Co 7:4).

4. A paradox. She *hath not power over* her body, and yet it is *her own*. The *oneness of body* in which marriage places husband and wife explains this. The one complements the other. Neither without the other realizes the perfect ideal of man.

5. **Defraud ... not**—namely, of the conjugal duty “due” (1 Co 7:3; compare the *Septuagint*, Ex 21:10).

except it be—“unless perchance” [ALFORD].

give yourselves to—literally, “be at leisure for”; be *free from interruptions for*; namely, on some *special “season,”* as the *Greek* for “time” means (compare Ex 19:15; Joe 2:16; Zec 7:3).

fasting and prayer—The oldest manuscripts omit “fasting and”; an interpolation, evidently, of ascetics.

come together—The oldest manuscripts read, “be together,” namely, in the regular state of the married.

Satan—who often thrusts in his temptations to unholy thoughts amidst the holiest exercises.

for your incontinency—*because of your inability to “contain”* (1 Co 7:9) your natural propensities, which Satan would take advantage of.

6. **by permission ... not of commandment**—not *by God’s permission to me to say it*: but, “by way of permission to you, not as a commandment.” “This” refers to the directions, 1 Co 7:2–5.

7. **even as I**—having the gift of continence (Mt 19:11, 12). This wish does not hold good absolutely, else the extension of mankind and of the Church would cease; but relatively to “the present distress” (1 Co 7:26).

8. **to the unmarried**—in general, of both sexes (1 Co 7:10, 11).

and widows—in particular.

even as I—unmarried (1 Co 9:5).

9. **if they cannot contain**—that is, “have not continency.”

burn—with the secret flame of lust, which lays waste the whole inner man. (Compare AUGUSTINE [*Holy Virginit*]). The dew of God’s grace is needed to stifle the flame, which otherwise would thrust men at last into hell-fire.



10. not I, but the Lord—(Compare 1 Co 7:12, 25, 40). In ordinary cases he writes on *inspired apostolic authority* (1 Co 14:37); but here on the *direct* authority of the *Lord Himself* (Mk 10:11, 12). In both cases alike the things written are inspired by the Spirit of God “but not all for all time, nor all on the primary truths of the faith” [ALFORD].

Let not the wife depart—literally, “be separated from.” Probably the separation on either side, whether owing to the husband or to the wife, is forbidden.

11. But and if she depart—or “be separated.” If the sin of separation has been committed, that of a new marriage is not to be added (Mt 5:32).

be reconciled—by appeasing her husband’s displeasure, and recovering his good will.

let not ... husband put away ... wife—In Mt 5:32 the only exception allowed is, “saving for the cause of fornication.”

12. to the rest—the other classes (besides “the married,” 1 Co 7:10, where both husband and wife are believers) about whom the Corinthians had inquired, namely, those involved in mixed marriages with unbelievers.

not the Lord—by any direct command spoken by Him.

she be pleased—*Greek*, “consents”: implying his wish in the first instance, with which hers *concur*s.

13. the woman—a believer.

let her not leave him—“her husband,” instead of “him,” is the reading of the oldest manuscripts. The *Greek* for “leave” is the same as in 1 Co 7:12, “put away”; translate, “Let her not *put away* [that is, part with] her husband.” The wife had the power of effecting a divorce by Greek and Roman law.

14. sanctified—Those inseparably connected with the people of God are *hallowed* thereby, so that the latter may retain the connection without impairing their own sanctity (compare 1 Ti 4:5); nay, rather imparting to the former externally some degree of their own hallowed character, and so preparing the way for the unbeliever becoming at last sanctified inwardly by faith.

by ... by—rather, “in ... in”; that is, in virtue of the marriage tie between them.

by the husband—The oldest manuscripts read, “by the brother.” It is the fact of the husband being a “brother,” that is, a *Christian*, though the wife is not so, that sanctifies or hallows the union.

else ... children unclean—that is, beyond the hallowed pale of God’s people: in contrast to “holy,” that is, all that is within the consecrated limits [CONYBEARE and HOWSON]. The phraseology accords with that of the Jews, who regarded the heathen as “unclean,” and all of the elect nation as “holy,” that is, partakers of the holy covenant. Children were included in the covenant, as God made it not only with Abraham, but with his “seed after” him (Ge 17:7). So the faith of one Christian parent gives to the children a near relationship to the Church, just as if both parents were Christians (compare Ro 11:16). Timothy, the bearer of this Epistle, is an instance in point (Ac 16:1). Paul appeals to the Corinthians as recognizing the principle, that the infants of heathen parents would not be admissible to Christian baptism, because there is no faith on the part of the parents; but where one parent is a believer, the children are regarded as not aliens from, but admissible even in infancy as sharers in, the Christian covenant: for the Church presumes that the believing parent will rear the child in the Christian faith. Infant baptism tacitly superseded infant circumcision, just as the Christian Lord’s day gradually superseded the Jewish sabbath, without our having any express command for, or record of, transference. The setting aside of circumcision and of sabbaths in the case of the Gentiles was indeed expressly commanded by the apostles and Paul, but the substitution of infant baptism and of the Lord’s day were tacitly adopted, not expressly enacted. No explicit mention of it occurs till IRENAEUS in the third century; but no society of Christians that we read of disputed its propriety till fifteen hundred years after Christ. Anabaptists would have us defer baptism till maturity as the



child cannot understand the nature of it. But a child may be made heir of an estate: it is his, though incapable at the time of using or comprehending its advantage; he is not hereafter *to acquire the title and claim* to it. he will hereafter understand his claim, and be capable of employing his wealth: he will then, moreover, become responsible for the use he makes of it [ARCHBISHOP WHATELY].

15. if ... depart—that is, wishes for separation. Translate, “separateth himself”: offended with her Christianity, and refusing to live with her unless she renounce it.

brother or a sister is not under bondage—is not bound to renounce the faith for the sake of retaining her unbelieving husband [HAMMOND]. So De 13:6; Mt 10:35–37; Lu 14:26. The believer does not lie under the same obligation in the case of a union with an unbeliever, as in the case of one with a believer. In the former case he is not bound not to separate, if the unbeliever separate or “depart,” in the latter nothing but “fornication” justifies separation [PHOTIUS in *AEcumenius*].

but God hath called us to peace—Our Christian calling is one that tends to “peace” (Ro 12:18), not quarrelling; therefore the believer should not ordinarily depart from the unbelieving consort (1 Co 7:12–14), on the one hand; and on the other, in the exceptional case of the unbeliever desiring to depart, the believer is not bound to force the other party to stay in a state of continual discord (Mt 5:32). Better still it would be not to enter into such unequal alliances at all (1 Co 7:40; 2 Co 6:14).

16. What knowest thou but that by staying with thy unbelieving partner thou mayest save him or her? Enforcing the precept to stay with the unbelieving consort (1 Co 7:12–14). So Ruth the Moabitess became a convert to her husband’s faith: and Joseph and Moses probably gained over their wives. So conversely the unbelieving husband may be won by the believing wife (1 Pe 3:1) [CALVIN]. Or else (1 Co 7:15), if thy unbelieving consort wishes to depart, let him go, so that thou mayest live “in peace”: for *thou canst not be sure of converting him*, so as to make it obligatory on thee at all costs to stay with him against his will [MENOCHIUS and ALFORD].

save—be the instrument of salvation to (Jam 5:20).

17. But—*Greek*, “If not.” “Only.” Caution that believers should not make this direction (1 Co 7:16; as ALFORD explains it) a ground for separating “of themselves” (1 Co 7:12–14). Or, *But if* there be *no* hope of gaining over the unbeliever, still let the general principle be maintained, “As *the Lord* hath allotted to each, as *God* hath called each, so let him walk” (so the *Greek* in the oldest reading); let him walk in the path allotted to him and wherein he was called. The heavenly calling does not set aside our earthly callings.

so ordain I in all churches—Ye also therefore should obey.

18. not become uncircumcised—by surgical operation (1 Maccabees 1:15; JOSEPHUS [*Antiquities*, 12.5.1]). Some Christians in excess of anti-Jewish feeling might be tempted to this.

let him not be circumcised—as the Judaizing Christians would have him (Ac 15:1, 5, 24; Ga 5:2).

19. Circumcision ... nothing, but ... keeping of ... commandments of God—namely, is all in all. In Ga 5:6 this “keeping of the commandments of God” is defined to be “faith which worketh by love”; and in Ga 6:15, “a new creature.” Circumcision was a commandment of God: but not for ever, as “love.”

20. the same calling—that is, the *condition* from which he is called a Jew, a Greek, a slave, or a freeman.

21. care not for it—Let it not be a trouble to thee that thou art a servant or slave.

use it rather—Continue rather in thy state as a servant (1 Co 7:20; Ga 3:28; 1 Ti 6:2). The *Greek*, “But if *even* thou mayest be made free, *use* it,” and the context (1 Co 7:20, 22) favors this view [CHRYSOSTOM, BENGEL, and ALFORD]. This advice (if this translation be right) is not absolute, as the spirit of the Gospel is against slavery. What is advised here is, contentment under one’s existing condition (1 Co 7:24), though an undesirable one, since in our union with Christ all outward disparities of condition are compensated (1 Co 7:22). Be not unduly impatient to cast



off “*even*” thy condition as a servant *by unlawful means* (1 Pe 2:13–18); as, for example, Onesimus did by fleeing (Phm 1:10–18). The precept (1 Co 7:23), “Become not (so the *Greek*) the servants of men,” implies plainly that slavery is abnormal (compare Le 25:42). “Men stealers,” or slave dealers, are classed in 1 Ti 1:10, with “murderers” and “perjurers.” NEANDER, GROTIUS, &c., explain, “If called, being a slave, to Christianity, be content—but yet, if *also* thou canst be free (as a still *additional* good, which if thou canst not attain, be satisfied without it; but which, if offered to thee, is not to be despised), *make use of the opportunity of becoming free, rather than* by neglecting it to remain a slave.” I prefer this latter view, as more according to the tenor of the Gospel, and fully justified by the *Greek*.

22. the Lord’s freeman—(Phm 1:16)—rather, “freedman.” Though a slave externally, spiritually *made free* by the Lord: from sin, Jn 8:36; from the law, Ro 8:2; from “circumcision,” 1 Co 7:19; Ga 5:1.

Christ’s servant—(1 Co 9:21). Love makes Christ’s service perfect freedom (Mt 11:29, 30; Ga 5:13; 1 Pe 2:16).

23. be not ye—*Greek*, “become not ye.” Paul here changes from “thou” (1 Co 7:21) to “ye.” YE ALL are “bought” with the blood of Christ, whatever be your earthly state (1 Co 6:20). “Become not servants to men,” either externally, or spiritually; the former sense applying to the free alone: the latter to Christian freemen and slaves alike, that they should not be servile adherents to their party leaders at Corinth (1 Co 3:21, 22; Mt 23:8–10; 2 Co 11:20); nor indeed slaves to men generally, so far as their condition admits. The external and internal conditions, so far as is attainable, should correspond, and the former be subservient to the latter (compare 1 Co 7:21, 32–35).

24. abide with God—being chiefly careful of the footing on which he stands towards God rather than that towards men. This clause, “with God,” limits the similar precept in 1 Co 7:20. A man may cease to “abide in the calling wherein he was called,” and yet not violate the precept here. If a man’s calling be not favorable to his “abiding with God” (retaining holy fellowship with Him), he may use lawful means to change from it (compare *Note*, see on 1 Co 7:21).

25. no commandment of the Lord: yet ... my judgment—I have no *express revelation* from the Lord *commanding* it, but I give my *judgment* (opinion); namely, under the ordinary inspiration which accompanied the apostles in all their canonical writings (compare 1 Co 7:40; 1 Co 14:37; 1 Th 4:15). The Lord inspires me in this case to give you only a *recommendation*, which you are free to adopt or reject—not a positive *command*. In the second case (1 Co 7:10, 11) it was a positive command; for the Lord had already made known His will (Mal 2:14, 15; Mal 2:14, 15, Mt 5:31, 32). In the third case (1 Co 7:12), the Old Testament commandment of God to put away strange wives (Ezr 10:3), Paul by the Spirit revokes.

mercy of the Lord—(1 Ti 1:13). He attributes his apostleship and the gifts accompanying it (including inspiration) to God’s grace alone.

faithful—in dispensing to you the inspired directions received by me from the Lord.

26. I suppose—“I consider.”

this—namely, “for a man so to be,” that is, in the same state in which he is (1 Co 7:27).

for—by reason of.

the present distress—the distresses to which believers were then beginning to be subjected, making the married state less desirable than the single; and which would prevail throughout the world before the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Christ’s prophecy (Mt 24:8–21; compare Ac 11:28).

27. Illustrating the meaning of “so to be,” 1 Co 7:26. Neither the married (those “bound to a wife”) nor the unmarried (those “loosed from a wife”) are to “seek” a change of state (compare 1 Co 7:20, 24).



28. trouble in the flesh—Those who marry, he says, shall incur “trouble in the flesh” (that is, in their outward state, by reason of the present distress), not *sin*, which is the trouble of the *spirit*.

but I spare you—The emphasis in the *Greek* is on “I.” My motive in advising you so is, to “spare you” such trouble in the flesh. So ALFORD after CALVIN, BENDEL, and others. ESTIUS from AUGUSTINE explains it, “I spare you further details of the inconveniences of matrimony, lest even the incontinent may at the peril of lust be deterred from matrimony: thus I have regard for your infirmity.” The antithesis in the *Greek* of “I ... you” and “such” favors the former.

29. this I say—A summing up of the whole, wherein he draws the practical inference from what precedes (1 Co 15:50).

the time—the *season* (so the *Greek*) of this present dispensation up to the coming of the Lord (Ro 13:11). He uses the *Greek* expression which the Lord used in Lu 21:8; Mk 13:33.

short—literally, “contracted.”

it remaineth—The oldest manuscripts read, “The time (season) is shortened *as to what remains*, in order that both they,” &c.; that is, the effect which the shortening of the time ought to have is, “that for the remaining time (henceforth), both they,” &c. The clause, “as to what remains,” though in *construction* belonging to the previous clause, in *sense* belongs to the following. However, CYPRIAN and *Vulgate* support *English Version*.

as though they had none—We ought to consider nothing as our own in real or permanent possession.

30. they that weep ... wept not—(Compare 2 Co 6:10).

they that buy ... possessed not—(Compare Is 24:1, 2). Christ specifies as the condemning sin of the men of Sodom not merely their open profligacy, but that “they bought, they sold,” &c., as men whose all was in this world (Lu 17:28). “Possessed” in the *Greek* implies a *holding fast of a possession*; this the Christian will not do, for his “enduring substance” is elsewhere (Heb 10:34).

31. not abusing it—not abusing it by an *overmuch using* of it. The meaning of “abusing” here is, not so much *perverting*, as *using it to the full* [BENDEL]. We are to use it, “not to *take our fill*” of its pursuits as our chief aim (compare Lu 10:40–42). As the planets while turning on their own axis, yet revolve round the sun; so while we do our part in our own worldly sphere, God is to be the center of all our desires.

fashion—the present fleeting *form*. Compare Ps 39:6, “vain show”; Ps 73:20, “a dream”; Jam 4:14, “a vapor.”

passeth away—not merely *shall pass away*, but *is now actually passing away*. The image is drawn from a *shifting scene* in a play represented on the stage (1 Jn 2:17). Paul inculcates not so much the outward denial of earthly things, as the inward spirit whereby the married and the rich, as well as the unmarried and the poor, would be ready to sacrifice all for Christ’s sake.

32. without carefulness—I would have you to be not merely “without trouble,” but “without distracting cares” (so the *Greek*).

careth—if he uses aright the advantages of his condition.

34. difference also—Not merely the unmarried and the married *man* differ in their respective duties, but *also* the *wife* and the *virgin*. Indeed a woman undergoes a greater change of condition than a man in contracting marriage.

35. for your own profit—not to display *my* apostolic authority.



not ... cast a snare upon you—image from *throwing a noose* over an animal in hunting. Not that by hard injunctions I may entangle you with the fear of committing sin where there is no sin.

comely—*befitting* under present circumstances.

attend upon—literally, “assiduously wait on”; *sitting down* to the duty. Compare Lu 10:39, Mary; Lu 2:37, “Anna ... a widow, who departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (1 Ti 5:5).

distraction—the same *Greek* as “cumbered” (Lu 10:40, Martha).

36. behaveth ... uncomely—is not treating his daughter well in leaving her unmarried beyond the flower of her age, and thus debarring her from the lawful gratification of her natural feeling as a marriageable woman.

need so require—if the exigencies of the case require it; namely, regard to the feelings and welfare of his daughter. Opposed to “having no necessity” (1 Co 7:37).

let them marry—the daughter and her suitor.

37. steadfast—not to be turned from his purpose by the obloquy of the world.

having no necessity—arising from the natural inclinations of the daughter.

power over his ... will—when, owing to his daughter’s will not opposing his will, he has power to carry into effect his will or wish.

decreed—determined.

38. her—The oldest manuscripts have “his own virgin daughter.”

but—The oldest manuscripts have “and.”

39. bound by the law—The oldest manuscripts omit “by the law.”

only in the Lord—Let her marry *only a Christian* (2 Co 6:14).

40. happier—(1 Co 7:1, 28, 34, 35).

I think also—“I also think”; just as you Corinthians and your teachers *think* much of your opinions, *so I also give my opinion* by inspiration; so in 1 Co 7:25, “my judgment” or opinion. *Think* does not imply doubt, but often a matter of well-grounded assurance (Jn 5:39)³

7:1–24 In 1 Corinthians 5–6, Paul addressed issues related to reports he received about the Corinthians. Paul now turns to answer questions from the Corinthian church. The Corinthian believers wrote to him about several issues in the church community, including marriage (v. 1), virgins (v. 25), food sacrificed to idols (8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), and the money he was collecting for Jerusalem Christians (16:1). Paul spends a majority of the rest of the letter responding to these inquiries.

7:1 the things about which you wrote The precise nature of the Corinthians’ first question is unknown. Paul’s response suggests that the inquiry was broadly related to matters of marriage and sexual relations.

touch a woman The Greek text here uses an idiom to refer to having sexual intercourse with a woman; it may not imply marriage.

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 274–277). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



7:2 because of sexual immorality Although the Greek word *porneia* can refer to any illicit sexual behavior, Paul may refer to prostitution here (see 6:9, 12 and note; 6:15–16). Some female believers may have deprived their husbands of sexual relations. In response, these men sought out prostitutes.

7:4 The wife does not have authority Paul discusses this because of the problem of unsatisfied husbands seeking fulfillment from local prostitutes. In Paul's view, married men and women have pledged their bodies to their spouses and thus do not have authority to deny their spouses sexual relations.

7:5 not defraud one another Paul advises married Corinthian believers not to deprive each other of sexual relations (see note on 1 Cor 7:1); doing so could lead them into temptation.

Building Hedges against Adultery *Devotional*

devote yourselves to prayer Paul advises the Corinthians to practice abstinence within marriage only for the express purpose of a limited season of focused prayer.

Prayers in Paul's Letters *Table*

Satan This type of sexual deprivation within marriage provides an easy means for Satan to tempt people.

your lack of self control See note on 1 Tim 2:15.

7:6 concession Paul is advising, not commanding, the Corinthians.

7:7 could be like myself Paul evidently was unmarried. He considered his ability to remain celibate a gift from God. For Paul, singleness allowed him the freedom to do God's will without consideration for his own well-being—he didn't have a spouse or family to care for. Even when one of the spouses is a nonbeliever, Paul never encourages seeking this type of freedom once people are married (see 1 Cor 7:12–16).

his own gift from God Paul implies that married believers should remain married and continue to fulfill their marital obligations (see v. 4), but those unmarried believers who don't have trouble with sexual desires should remain single.

7:8 unmarried The Greek word used here, *agamos*, occurs only four times in the NT, all in this passage (compare vv. 11, 32, 34). The word refers to someone who has no spouse, a state that may result from various circumstances: death of one's spouse, desertion by a spouse (see v. 15), divorce, or remaining single.

good for them Paul describes the advantages of remaining single in vv. 32–34, but he recognizes that not everyone has this "gift" (v. 7); some people should get married (v. 9; compare v. 39).

if they remain as I am The circumstances of Paul's unmarried state are unclear, and he does not reveal them in any of his autobiographical comments found elsewhere.

7:9 they should marry The solution for those without the gift of celibacy (v. 7). Those with this gift appear to be the exception, not the rule.

to burn with sexual desire Refers to intense sexual desire. Some believers could not refrain from illicitly satisfying their sexual desire. He advises such people to marry and enjoy sexual relations within an exclusive relationship.

7:10 not I, but the Lord Refers to Jesus, who provided His own commands about divorce (e.g., Matt 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18). While Roman law and some Jewish teachers permitted divorce, Jesus did not permit divorce except in cases of marital unfaithfulness.

wife Paul addresses wives first, probably because women brought up this issue. Women in Graeco-Roman society could separate from their husbands, but this was not the custom in Jewish tradition.



7:11 remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband Not an ordinary command; rather, this refers back to seeking the gift of celibacy in 1 Cor 7:6–9. Paul is not categorically prohibiting all remarriage after divorce; instead, he is encouraging people to be free in Christ just as he is, rather than seeking another spouse.

7:12 has an unbelieving wife Some married people converted to Christianity but their spouses did not. The Corinthians sought Paul’s counsel on this issue.

consents to live with him A euphemism for marriage.

he must not divorce her Paul applies the same instruction from vv. 10–11 to believers who are married to unbelievers. In this instance, if an unbeliever chooses to remain married to a believer, the couple should not seek divorce.

7:14 is sanctified Some believing spouses in Corinth may have been concerned that sexual relations with their unbelieving spouse would cause defilement. Paul explains to these believers that they are not defiled; instead, it is their unbelieving spouses who are sanctified through the process of knowing a believer (compare v. 16). This does not mean that such spouses receive salvation.

unclean Describes unbelievers.

holy Just as it is acceptable for a believing wife to have sexual relations with an unbelieving husband, it is also acceptable for her to have children by her husband. Paul also reasons that since the marriage relationship leads to “holiness” instead of defilement, there is no need for divorce.

7:15 brother or the sister is not bound The believing spouse is under no obligation to maintain a marriage with an unbelieving spouse who decides to leave the relationship.

7:16 you will save The believing spouse may have the opportunity to participate in the conversion of the unbelieving spouse. In this way, the believer becomes an instrument that helps the unbeliever turn toward God (9:20–22).

7:17 God has called each one Refers to those whom God called to be saved (1:26), not the call to ministry service (compare Acts 13:2). Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to maintain whatever marital situation they were in when they first heard God’s call.

in all the churches Emphasizes that the Corinthian believers have deviated from the standard practices in other churches founded by Paul.

7:18 must not undo his circumcision Refers to an epispasm—a surgical procedure intended to disguise the marks of circumcision. Many Gentiles despised circumcision and considered it mutilation. This may have caused some Christian Jews in Corinth to feel ashamed about their circumcision and to seek surgery. Paul advises such people to remain circumcised.

7:19 Circumcision A sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen 17:11). Jews valued circumcision as a sign that they were part of God’s covenant people. But Paul suggests the Spirit replaced circumcision as that sign; therefore, it no longer has any value (Rom 2:29; compare Gal 6:15).

commandments of God Refers to the moral commandments that apply to believers (see Gal 6:2; Rom 13:8), not the works of the law (such as circumcision). Paul emphasizes that believers should seek to obey these commandments over circumcision.

7:21 not let it be a concern Some believing slaves in Corinth may have been concerned that their social status inhibited them from living for God. Paul argues that if their status did not inhibit God’s call to salvation, it will not inhibit them now that they have the Spirit.



make use of it Refers to the opportunity to have freedom in Christ.

7:22 freedperson A legally free person who continued to perform duties for his or her former master. Paul uses this metaphor to suggest that while believers are free, they still obey the Lord and belong to His “household.” See Col 4:1 and note.

slave of Christ Paul asserts that those who were not slaves should regard Christ as their spiritual master. Since they no longer belong to themselves, they must seek to obey Jesus Christ.

7:23 You were bought at a price See note on 1 Cor 6:20.

slaves of men Paul urges the believers not to become enslaved to human wisdom or troubled by the traditions of marriage, slavery, and circumcision; Paul wants them to focus on Christ and what He has done for them.

7:25–40 Paul addresses the unmarried believers in the Corinthian congregation.

7:25 virgins The Greek word used here, *parthenos*, can refer to a young woman who is engaged to be married. Based on a misguided notion of spirituality, some Corinthian believers may have advised the “virgins” within the church community not to marry.

The Virgin Shall Conceive: The Vocabulary of Virginity

do not have a command from the Lord Jesus did not teach on this topic during His earthly ministry nor did He provide Paul with any specific revelation about it.

7:26 impending distress May refer to food shortages in Corinth. Alternatively, the phrase may refer to a period of intense difficulties prior to the return of Christ.

7:27 Do not seek a wife Paul notes that for some believers it is preferable that they remain unmarried (1 Cor 7:6–8, 26), but he tells them in the next verse that if they do marry, it is not a sin. The type of person Paul describes here has no spouse, and the reader is not informed as to how that status came to be (v. 8).

7:28 if the virgin marries, she has not sinned The Corinthians may have assumed that marriage was somehow sinful, possibly based upon Paul’s example or suggestion that they remain celibate when possible. Paul corrects them—the virgin who marries has not sinned.

The Virgin Shall Conceive: The Vocabulary of Virginity

have affliction in the flesh Paul does not consider marriage sinful, but he does acknowledge that married couples will face difficulties (v. 26).

7:29 should be as if they do not have Paul urges the Corinthians not to become consumed by temporal matters or worldly concerns. They must not allow such things to control their lives.

7:30 those who weep as if they do not weep Paul alludes to Eccl 3:1–8.

7:31 present form of this world Refers to the world’s system rather than the physical appearance of the world. This system, just like people’s wisdom, is temporal and limited; thus, the Corinthian believers must not order their lives based on either one.

7:34 unmarried woman or the virgin Refers to two different groups of women in the church community (see note on 1 Cor 7:25). The state of being unmarried (see v. 8) is not synonymous with having never been married or sexually active.

holy See Col 1:22 and note.



both in body and in spirit May refer to the entire person. Such a woman offers herself in service to God.

7:35 not that I may put a restriction Paul recognized the tension of attempting to please both a spouse and the Lord. Paul hoped that his instruction would free the Corinthians from anxiety—not cause them more of it.

7:36 his virgin Paul is most likely addressing the men engaged to young women. See note on 1 Cor 7:25.

7:37 keep his own virgin The man who is engaged to the young woman will not marry her—she will remain a virgin.

The Virgin Shall Conceive: The Vocabulary of Virginity

7:38 who does not marry her will do better Paul suggests that the decision not to marry is better because of the “impending distress” (see note on v. 26), not because marriage is sinful. See note on v. 7.

7:39 free to marry whomever she wishes Paul addresses the widows within the church community: they may remarry, but only to another believer. In principle, this may apply to virgins (vv. 8–9, 25–28).

7:40 I think I have the Spirit of God Some Corinthian believers claimed to be spiritual (2:15–16) yet offered troubling counsel to other believers in the church community. Paul describes himself as filled with the Spirit and therefore able to provide authoritative and wise instruction.⁴

7. Marriage, divorce, and singleness (7:1–40)

This leads to wider questions of marriage, divorce, and singleness. Paul here offers careful pastoral wisdom in clear-cut cases (marriage is good, and for life, but singleness for men or women is good too—all of which was counter-cultural in Corinth) and sensitive guidance in ‘grey areas’, including the permission to divorce (and hence presumably remarry) if a non-Christian spouse wishes to leave a Christian. (We remind ourselves that being a Christian in pagan Corinth would mean a total change of lifestyle, including removing idols large and small from the house, and not taking part in the local cults and idolatrous festivities. An unbelieving spouse might well balk at even some of this renunciation.)

Paul was aware, writing the letter, that times were hard. He speaks of ‘the present crisis’ (7:26, 29) when he is writing; a famine was on the way (as we know historically), perhaps already making life difficult. His judgment was therefore to keep things as they were and not make life harder by big changes of status. What matters is learning to navigate the ‘freedom’ that is the Christian’s birthright and to distinguish it from the licence that is merely a return to paganism.⁵

CALL, CALLING—an important theological idea with several different meanings in the Bible:

1. God’s call of individuals to *salvation, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross (Rom. 8:28–30; 1 Thess. 2:12).

2. God’s call to salvation also involves the believer in the high calling of living his life in service to others (1 Cor. 7:20). This is to say, one’s vocation or profession or life enterprise is a “calling” to be also lived under Christ’s lordship.

3. To call on God for help, or to pray. The Bible contains numerous examples of people who, in their distress, called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). God is portrayed as a compassionate, concerned, and personal Deliverer who hears the prayers of His people.

4. To name or to call by name (Gen. 17:5; Luke 1:13). Man has been given the right to name because he is created in the image of God. His role as namer is one of the ways in which he exercises his dominion over the world (Gen. 1:26; 2:19, 23).⁶

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Co 7:1–40). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁵ Wright, N. T., & Bird, M. F. (2019). *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (pp. 488–489). London; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic; SPCK.

⁶ Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



7:1 PRACTICAL LESSONS ON MARRIAGE

Have you ever listened in on half of a telephone conversation, trying to figure out what the whole conversation is about? That’s what we have in 1 Cor. 7—half of a very important conversation on marriage between Paul and the Corinthian believers. But we can glean many practical lessons from this passage, for marriage was undergoing profound changes then just as it is today.

Some of the believers in the early church had married before they became Christians. They wondered whether they should divorce their unbelieving spouses in order to remarry Christians and live more wholeheartedly for Christ.

An argument could be made for that. After all, if people’s primary loyalty were now to Jesus, shouldn’t that invalidate their pre-conversion marriage vows? (Of course, it would also provide them with a convenient excuse to escape bad marriages.)

But Paul didn’t recommend that. He viewed the abandonment of one’s family as a very serious matter (1 Cor. 7:10–11), arguing that the believer should stay in the marriage as long as possible (7:12–13). However, God desires peace in relationships (7:15), and that may not be possible in a family where Christian values are not shared. If the unbeliever wants to leave, he or she should be allowed to do so (7:15).

Many churches in different cultures around the world today are faced with very similar circumstances. For example:

- the new believer who wonders what to do, since her husband isn’t interested in church or religion.
- the inner-city congregation that has members who live in common-law marriages. What should the church tell them?
- the recent immigrant who tells his pastor that he has two families, one in each of two countries. “Should I get rid of one or both of those families?” he wonders.
- a tribal chief who wants to join the church—along with his five wives. What should he do with the wives? Divorce them all? Keep one? If so, which one?

Paul offers no simple solutions for any of these situations, but he does share one piece of very good news: it is possible for one believer to “sanctify” a family, that is, to be an agent of God’s love and grace, and perhaps to eventually bring other family members into the faith. No matter how unconventional the situation might be, Scripture doesn’t counsel sudden changes. God may have work left to do in that family, and He may use the believer to do it—if he or she stays. ♦

God considers marriage sacred. Yet in a fallen world, some couples will break that bond. How should believers today regard divorce? Is it prohibited by the Bible? For help concerning this complex issue, see “The Bible and Divorce” at Deut. 24:1–4.

A NEW VIEW OF SEXUALITY

7:3–6 In an era when Greek women were often deprived both emotionally and sexually, Paul insisted that the Christian husband should recognize and fulfill the needs of his wife (1 Cor. 7:3–6). He declared that marriage partners have authority over each other. That means that both husband and wife were forbidden from using sex as a means of control, but were to enjoy mutuality in that aspect of their marriage.

The gospel required a different understanding of sex and marriage than the surrounding culture’s. Two thousand years later, it still does.

7:17–24 CAREER CHANGES

Modern workers place a high value on mobility and freedom of choice. So how should Christians in our culture deal with Paul’s admonition to remain in the situation where God has called us (1 Cor. 7:17–24)? That sounds terribly antiquated in a society where the average person changes careers at least four times in life. In the ancient world, people normally worked for a lifetime at the same job.



Paul wrote that becoming a believer doesn't necessarily mean a career change. Wherever God has assigned us, that is our calling and we should pursue it to God's glory. On the other hand, there is nothing in the faith that locks a person into a work situation, any more than an unmarried woman must remain single all her life (7:8-9).

Paul's teaching about vocation parallels what he wrote about pre-conversion marriage (7:10-16). A believer is not compelled to leave his or her unbelieving spouse. On the other hand, the marriage may be dissolved if necessary to maintain peace. In the same way, believers should not use conversion as an excuse to leave their jobs.

This is an important point because Christianity introduces new values into our lives that may make us anxious to escape our work environment. The atmosphere of language and jokes, competition and politics, quotas and numbers may begin to feel uncomfortable. Wouldn't it be easier to quit one's job and go to work for a Christian employer—or better yet, pursue a career in a church or ministry? But Paul didn't encourage that choice as the normal path. A job change may be a possibility, as Jesus' disciples found out. But it is not necessarily virtuous to leave our "nets," especially if our only reason is to escape the realities of the work world. ♦

Most people are not given a sign from heaven as to what God want them to do in life. Instead, they must make decisions about how best to use their God-given skills and abilities in whatever opportunities the Lord brings their way. To help you consider career changes in your own life, see "A Dramatic Career Change" at Gen. 50:24; "You are Unique" at Ps. 33:15; and "A Dramatic Career Change" at Is. 6:8-9.

it's actually an advantage for us to work alongside unbelievers so that we can communicate the message of Christ by how we do our jobs. See "Your 'Workstyle' " at Titus 2:9-10.

7:32-35 WOMEN AND WORK IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Paul's observation that a married woman must care about "the things of the world" (1 Cor. 7:34) hints at the busy lives that first century women lived, especially in the large cities of the Roman Empire.

The New Testament shows that women carried out a wide range of tasks: for example, drawing water, grinding grain, manufacturing tents, hosting guests, governing and influencing civic affairs, making clothes, teaching, prophesying and filling other spiritual functions, burying the dead, and doing the work of slaves, to name but a few. Additional evidence from the period reveals that women also served as wool workers, midwives, hairdressers, nurses, vendors, entertainers, political leaders, and even construction workers, among many other occupations.

If a woman was among the upper classes, she enjoyed relative economic security and social privileges. According to the Roman ideal, her role in society was to marry a citizen, produce legitimate heirs for him, and manage the household according to his orders. However, by the first century few families attained that ideal.

Wealthy women used slaves to perform such household tasks as cooking, making clothes, washing laundry, and caring for children (see "Children and Childcare" at Matt. 19:14). Slaves also functioned as nurses, midwives, hairdressers, stenographers, and secretaries, and it was common for a high-ranking slave to be designated the household manager.

Female slaves were not only considered to be household property, but sexual property as well. The master of the house could legally force a slave to have sex with him, or with anyone he chose. Any children that she bore became his property. In this way a citizen could increase his number of slaves.

Women who were former slaves, or freeborn, lacked the economic security of either the citizen or the slave. Nevertheless, many women sought to buy their way out of slavery. Some of these working-class women earned their living as vendors, selling fish, grain, vegetables, clothing, or



perfume. Others became wet nurses, and some chose to become entertainers or prostitutes, occupations that were considered beneath the dignity of respectable women. ♦

In Jewish homes, women were responsible not only for carrying out household tasks, but also for preparing the home for the Sabbath. See “Jewish Homemaking” at Mark 1:29–31.

Not all first-century women centered their lives around domestic responsibilities totally. Lydia was a successful businesswoman in the purple trade (see her profile at Acts 16:14–15) and Priscilla manufactured tents with her husband (see her profile at Rom. 16:3–5). To gain further insight into Christ’s work of rescuing us from sin, see “Salvation—Past, Present, and Future” at Rom. 5:6–11, and “A Month-Long Journey with Jesus” in the front matter.⁷

Sexual Practice in Harmony with the Gospel

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–40

BY WAY OF REVIEW, the bare bones of this second essay are:

- 2.1. Immorality and the Church (4:17–5:6a)
- 2.2. (Three Roadblocks: Leaven, Immorality and the Law Courts) (5:6b–6:8)
- 2.3. Theology of Sexual Practice: Kingdom Ethics (6:9–12)
- 2.4. Theology of Sexual Practice: Joining the Body (6:13–20)
- 2.5. *Sexual Practice in Harmony with the Gospel (7:1–40)*

This final section of the second essay (2.5) covers a series of topics. These can be divided into seven subsections, which are:

- a. Equality in Conjugal Rights (7:1–5)
- b. Widows/Widowers (7:6–9)
- c. Believers and Unbelievers: Marriage, Separation and Divorce (7:10–16)
- d. Jew and Greek, Slave and Free: Remain in Your Calling (7:17–24)
- e. The Unmarried and the Impending Distress (7:25–31)
- f. *Marriage and Anxieties (7:32–35)*
- g. A Man and “His Virgin” (7:36–38)
- h. In Case of Death (7:39–40)
- i. Paul’s Concluding Personal Appeal (7:40)

Each of these subsections merits examination. Paul opens with a discussion of equality and conjugal rights.

A. EQUALITY IN CONJUGAL RIGHTS (7:1–5)

1. ¹And concerning the matters about which you wrote.

“Is it well for a man not to touch a woman?”

2. ²Now because of *immorality*, MARITAL RELATIONS
 each *man* should *have* Important (temptation)
 [relations with] *his own wife*

⁷ [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., 1 Co 7:1–32). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



and each *woman* should have
 [relations with] *her own*
husband.

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 3. | ³ The <i>husband</i> should
give to his <i>wife</i> her
[conjugal] <i>rights</i> ,

and likewise the <i>wife</i> to
her <i>husband</i> . | GIVE

Rights |
| 4. | ⁴ For the <i>wife</i> does
<i>not rule over her own</i>
<i>body</i> ,

but the husband
does; | HUSBAND

Rules Wife |
| 5. | likewise the <i>husband</i>
<i>does not rule over his</i>
<i>own body</i> ,

but the <i>wife</i> does. | WIFE

Rules Husband |
| 6. | ⁵ Do <i>not refuse</i> one
another

except by <i>agreement</i> for
a season,

that you may <i>devote</i>
yourselves to prayer; | GIVE

Rights |
| 7. | but then <i>come together</i>
again,

<i>lest Satan tempt</i> you through
<i>lack of self-control</i> . | MARITAL RELATIONS

Important (self-control) |

Figure 2.5(1). Equality in conjugal rights (1 Cor 7:1–5)

THE RHETORIC

Paul again uses the high jump format observed in 1 Corinthians 6:13–20. There are seven cameos. The first stands alone and is followed by six inverted cameos with which it forms a single unit. As in the previous homily, the opening cameo determines the direction for the six that follow. The climactic center balances the rights of each partner in Christian marriage.

COMMENTARY

Thiselton begins his extensive reflections on this chapter by writing, “Modern literature on these verses is vast in range and quantity.” Our focus is on biblical rhetoric and Eastern culture when it illuminates the text. The first of seven cameos says:



1. ¹ And concerning the matters about which you wrote:
“Is it well for a man not to touch a woman?”

Many commentators, too numerous to note, have long assumed that this cameo is a hinge or turning point in Paul’s letter. Up to this point in the epistle, goes the argument, Paul was answering questions that came to him orally. From this point on he deals with problems sent to him in writing. But there is another option. It is possible to understand that when Paul mentions “the matters about which you wrote,” he means “the matters [regarding sexual practice and food offered to idols] about which you wrote.” His reference to a letter received from Corinth appears in the center of his carefully constructed, intense essay regarding sexual practice. The Corinthians *wrote to him* about things such as:

- Is it well for a man not to touch a woman?
- What about widowers and widows?
- What about divorce?
- What should a believer do who is married to an unbeliever?
- What about single people?
- Can we remarry after a spouse dies?
- Can we eat food offered to idols?

They *did not* write to him saying:

- We have broken up along ethnic lines (Greeks with Apollos, Jews with Cephas, etc.).
- We have a case of incest in the congregation. Some insist this is a private matter. Others say leave it to the courts. What do you think?
- Some trivialize casual sex with prostitutes. They argue that we are now under grace, not under law.

The Corinthians probably hoped that Paul would not find out about this latter list of deeply divisive (and embarrassing) problems related to sexual practice. We can almost hear the buzz of private conversations, behind closed doors in Corinth. They were likely saying things such as,

We *can’t* write to Paul about incest and sleeping with prostitutes. Besides, if we do commit such problems to writing, and send them as a letter—the letter could circulate across the church. If that happens, what would the other churches think of us? No self-respecting community hangs its dirty laundry in the front garden. No, no—we will ask him about things like divorce, remarriage and marriage to unbelievers—you know—the kinds of topics that can be discussed comfortably in public meetings. We must preserve our personal and community honor. We all know the proverb, “The olive oil merchant never says, ‘My oil is rancid!’ ” Besides, if we remain silent, perhaps these “unfortunate incidents” will fade and the problems connected to them will go away. There are court cases threatening. It is better to claim ignorance. We must not make mistakes!

The Corinthian attempt to hide embarrassing topics and go public on carefully selected “safe” aspects of sexual practice did not succeed. Paul found out anyway. He seems to know that there was a cover-up in process and therefore (as noted) he introduces his discussion of incest by saying, “Everyone has reported ...” That is, I am hearing about these hidden matters from everyone. Most likely this is why Paul chose to discuss the problems of incest and sleeping with prostitutes *before* he turned to “the things about which you wrote.” By publicly affirming that he had received their sanitized list of questions, he is subtly and very politely saying, “Don’t try this stunt again. As you can see from what I have just written—I find out everything anyway!”

In this connection a key aside appears at the end of 11:34, where Paul writes, “About the other things I will give directions when I come.” Some of the problems that the Corinthians presented to Paul were not significant for the wider church. It was Paul who decided to discuss those questions in person with the Corinthians. In this epistle he will give guidance on the issues that are critical for the *entire church*. In short, their letter included the topics he discusses from 7:1–11:34.

Most probably they did not tell him about drunkenness at the celebration of the Eucharist. But, other than that, the rest of the issues discussed in chapters 7–11 are much less embarrassing and were no doubt reported to Paul in writing. He incorporated that letter into *his* five-essay outline. The letter did *not create* that outline.



Turning to the opening of Paul’s first cameo on the topic of sexual practice in harmony with the gospel, the text can be read as *a statement of Paul’s views*, or as *a question put to Paul by the church in Corinth*. Perhaps not recognizing that there is an alternative, for centuries the church (East and West) has seen it as Paul’s statement. This understanding of the text hears Paul affirming, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Or, simply put, even for married couples, Paul seems to prefer celibacy. Is this what he means?

Nothing in the construction of the Greek sentence in question determines whether what Paul wrote is a question or a statement. In good Semitic fashion, the sentence does not have a verb “to be.” The twenty-three Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew versions assembled for this study offer two options. The majority of them present a statement. At the same time, two ninth-century Arabic versions list this sentence as a question.⁴ One of them, Sinai 155, was translated from Greek. Awareness of the possibility of this sentence being a question goes back for more than a thousand years.

Returning to the West, Thiselton reads it as a *statement*, but sees it as a *quotation from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul*, not an affirmation of Paul’s views. Orr and Walther prefer to see it as a *question* put to Paul by the Corinthians. They translate these two lines as

With reference to the matters about which you wrote:

is it good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman?

After reviewing the options, Orr and Walther write, “It seems best to understand that the Corinthians have raised the question of the ascetic life.” Having dealt with the *libertines*, Paul turns to address the *ascetics*. The libertines are insisting “anything goes.” The ascetics reply, “The body is evil. Thus, true spirituality means: Even if you are married, marital relations should be avoided.” Paul speaks to Christian married couples who apparently have chosen to deny the validity of any sexual relations in their marriages. His reply is a luminous affirmation of mutuality in married sexual practice.

Paul presents his views in the six-cameo ring-composition homily set out above in figure 2.5(1). Each pair of cameos in that homily deserves attention. The opening and the closing of the homily (cameos 2 and 7) appear in figure 2.5(2).

2.	² Now [<i>de</i>] because of <i>immorality,</i>	MARITAL RELATIONS
	each <i>man</i> should <i>have</i> [relations with] <i>his own wife</i>	Important (temptation)
	and each <i>woman</i> should have [relations with] <i>her own husband.</i>	
7.	^{5b} but then <i>come together</i> again,	MARITAL RELATIONS
	<i>lest Satan tempt</i> you through <i>lack of self-control.</i>	Important (self-control)

Figure 2.5(2). Cameos 2 and 7 (1 Cor 7:2, 5b)

If cameo 1 is a question, then cameo 2 is *not* a sharp contrast to cameo 1. Paul is not saying, “Sexual relations are to be avoided (cameo 1) *but*—in the light of temptation—I can make allowances” (cameo 2). Rather he is saying, “You have asked a question (1), let us discuss the matter.” The verb “to have” both here and in 1 Corinthians 5:1 means “to have sexual relations with.” In cameo 2 the reason Paul gives for mandating physical relations in marriage is “because of *porneias* [immorality].” In the parallel cameo (7) Paul urges the couple to come together lest Satan tempt them through *lack of self control*. In these two outer cameos sex in marriage is therefore seen as acceptable because of potential sin or lack of self-control.



The second pair of cameos (3 and 6) is set out in figure 2.5(3):

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 3. | ³ The <i>husband</i> should give to his <i>wife</i> her (conjugal) <i>rights</i> , | GIVE |
| | and likewise the <i>wife</i> to her <i>husband</i> . | Rights |
| 6. | ⁵ Do <i>not refuse</i> one another | GIVE |
| | except by <i>agreement</i> for a season, | Rights |
| | that you may <i>devote</i> yourselves to <i>prayer</i> ; | |

Figure 2.5(3). Cameos 3 and 6 (1 Cor 7:3, 5a)

In the outer pair of cameos, marital relations were presented as a stopgap for immorality (2) and as a crutch for those without adequate self-control (7). There, the subject of sex in marriage is colored with a negative brush. But in cameos 3 and 6 a positive attitude toward sex in marriage emerges. The marital relationship is now presented as a positive “right” that each partner is expected to *give as a gift* to the other. The husband and the wife are equal in this regard. Neither partner is to demand those rights, rather each is to *give gifts* to the other. Gifts given in love are always seen by the giver as valuable, otherwise they would not be given. Furthermore, by definition, a gift is always offered as a result of free choice. If it is coerced, it is not a gift.

Yes, grants Paul, it is appropriate for the couple to withdraw from one another for special times of prayer— as long as that spiritual discipline does not lead to a permanent separation. This affirms that a life of deep spirituality accompanied by times for solitude and prayer is possible for the married, not only for the unmarried.

The climax, as usually occurs with ring composition, appears in the center with the two stunning parallel cameos in figure 2.5(4).

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------|
| 4. | ⁴ For the <i>wife does not rule over her own body</i> , | HUSBAND |
| | but the husband does; | Rules Wife |
| 5. | likewise the <i>husband does not rule over his own body</i> , | WIFE |
| | but the <i>wife does</i> . | Rules Husband |

Figure 2.5(4) Cameos 4–5 (1 Cor 7:4)

Equality between the wife and the husband in Christian marriage is here presented in unforgettable terms. Each partner in a marriage has authority over the body of the other. No sexual games are possible in this kind of marriage. There can be no power plays such as, “Give me what I want, and I will sleep with you.” No form of abuse is even thinkable. *Each* partner can say to the other, “I give gifts, and I have rights, and I have authority over your body.” The granting of these gifts, rights and powers to each partner (on an equal basis) is truly amazing to discover in a first-century document!



The ten-volume *Midrash Rabbah* is a collection of interpretations of the Torah from the known sayings of the great rabbis of the first to the third centuries and beyond. Volume 1 on Genesis, while interpreting Genesis 20:8–18, discusses what to do when either spouse in a marriage refuses conjugal rights to the other. The text (with its notes) reads,

If a woman revolts against her husband [Note: by refusing conjugal rights] *seven denarii* are deducted from her settlement [Note: at death or in case of divorce] weekly. And why *seven denarii*? Because of the seven labors which a woman owes to her husband: grinding corn, baking, laundering, cooking, suckling her child, preparing his bed, and working in wool: hence seven. Conversely, if a man revolts against his wife [Note: By refusing conjugal rights], her settlement is increased by three *denarii* per week. Why three? Because he owes her food, raiment, and marital privileges: hence three.

The text goes on to explain why the penalty for withholding conjugal rights is higher for women than for men. A reason is found in Delilah’s deception of Samson in Judges 16:16 which is quoted as saying, “That his soul was vexed unto death, but her soul was not vexed.” The notes explain that the man suffers more than the woman from sexual privations, and so the woman’s fine is greater. The logic of this text is revealing. The woman “owes” her husband more services and because of that she is penalized more if she walks out. She works harder so she must be penalized more! He also suffers more when intimacies are withheld than she does. Of course, men wrote the text. In a patriarchal society, it is not surprising to find this kind of bias in favor of the male. Paul could have reflected such views. He did not do so.

With knowledge of the common cultural attitudes exhibited in the above Midrash, Paul’s affirmation of equality between male and female in regard to the intimacies of marriage is nothing less than amazing. In the light of Paul’s directives in this text, it is easy to understand why Greek women of high standing were attracted to his preaching (Acts 17:4, 12).

To conclude, in this homily Paul deals with the ascetics who were convinced that spirituality and sexual practice were incompatible. He denies that division, and in the process establishes a timeless charter for sexual mutuality in Christian marriage. Sexual relations are not just a stopgap to prevent sin but are a positive right and gift that each freely gives to the other, and each has authority over the body of the other. Paul now turns to a discussion of various aspects of sexual practice that are in harmony with the gospel.

B. WIDOWS/WIDOWERS (7:6–9)

First there is the question of widows and widowers. Including an introduction, Paul presents the following four cameos:

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| 1. | ⁶ I say this by way of concession, not of command, | I WISH ALL |
| | ⁷ and I wish that all were as I myself am. | Remain as I Am |
| 2. | But each has his own special spiritual gift from God, | GIFT OF CELIBACY |
| | one of one kind and one of another. | A Charismata |
| 3. | ⁸ To the widowers [<i>agamois</i> (de-married)] and widows I say | I WISH THE DE-MARRIED |
| | that it is well for them to remain as I am. | Remain as I Am |



- | | | |
|----|--|--------------|
| 4. | ⁹ But if they cannot exercise control, they should marry. | NO SUCH GIFT |
| | For it is better to marry than to burn. | Get Married |

Figure 2.5(5). Widows and widowers (1 Cor 7:6–9)

THE RHETORIC

These four cameos on widows and widowers appear in a simple A-B-A-B format.

COMMENTARY

Paul starts with the familiar phrase “I say this.” As in 4:17, he looks forward, not backwards. Cameo 1 is clear. Unlike the case of incest and the topic of sleeping with prostitutes, the question of the remarriage of widowers and widows has no definitive answer. Paul recommends his pattern of life, but does not insist on it. This raises the question: What pattern is he talking about?

Orr and Walther make a strong case that Paul was a widower. They write, “Jewish leaders holding the position attributed to Paul in the New Testament ordinarily were married.”¹³ But Paul is clearly traveling without a wife (9:5). Apparently his wife had died. Greek has a word for “widowers” (*kheros*), but that word does not appear in the New Testament time period when Koine Greek was in use. Later in this passage when Paul discusses the “unmarried,” (7:25) he uses the traditional Greek word for “virgin” (*parthenos*). In the present text he discusses “*a-gamois* and widows.” The natural way to read the text is to see these two words as a pair and understand that Paul is writing about “widowers and widows.” Orr and Walther translate *a-gamois* literally as “de-married” and explain that in this passage it means “widowers.” Paul uses this word three times in this chapter. All of them can best be understood as meaning, “once married, now not married.”

As Paul will affirm a few verses later, at this point in his ministry he is convinced that the end of all things is near. Widows and widowers are urged to think twice before getting remarried. This text affirms that one of the spiritual gifts (*kharisma*) is the ability to live a moral life and remain single (7:7). Paul’s advice is that anyone who does not have that spiritual gift, and whose urges are strong, should marry.

After this brief discussion of widows and widowers, Paul turns to more complicated problems.

C. BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS: MARRIAGE, SEPARATION AND DIVORCE (7:10–16)

For these connected concerns he composes yet another seven-cameo homily that is figure 2.5(6).

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------|
| 1. | ¹⁰ To the [believing] married I give charge, not I but the Lord, | |
| | that the wife should not separate from her husband | SEPARATION (?) |
| | ¹¹ but if she does, let her remain single [<i>a-gamos</i>] | Reconciliation |
| | or else be reconciled to her husband, | Divorce |
| | and that the husband should not divorce his wife. | |
| 2. | ¹² To the rest I say, not the Lord, | |



- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| | that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, | UNBELIEVING WIFE |
| | and she consents to live with him, | If Congenial |
| | he should not divorce her. | Stay Together |
| 3. | ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, | UNBELIEVING HUSBAND |
| | and he consents to live with her, | If Congenial |
| | she should not divorce him. | Stay Together |
| 4. | ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband | |
| | is made holy through/in the wife, | UNBELIEVER |
| | and the unbelieving wife | Made Holy |
| | is made holy through/in her husband. | |
| 5. | Otherwise, your children would be unclean, | CHILDREN |
| | but as it is they are holy. | Holy |
| 6. | ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner | |
| | desires to separate, let it be, | UNBELIEVING SPOUSE |
| | in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. | Desires It—Then Separate |
| | For God has called us to peace. | The Goal—Peace |
| 7. | ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, | |
| | if you will keep your husband? | CAN YOU |



For how do you know, Keep Your Spouse?
 husband,

if you will keep your wife?

Figure 2.5(6). Believers and unbelievers: Marriage, separation and divorce (1 Cor 7:10–16)

THE RHETORIC

Again Paul composes a seven-cameo apostolic homily. As in three of the previous homilies, the passage opens with a freestanding cameo. The six cameos that follow are formatted into three pairs. But in this case Paul opts for “variation on a theme.” Rather than A-B-C-C-B-A such as appeared in 7:1–5, here the three pairs are presented on the page with an A-A, B-B, C-C structure. The perfect number seven surfaces, but each of the pairs is side by side with a climax in the center. A point of turning appears in the first line of cameo 6.

COMMENTARY

The homily opens:

1. ¹⁰ *To the [believing] married* I give charge, not I
but the Lord,

SEPARATION (?)
 that the wife should not
separate from her husband

Reconciliation
 but if she does, let her remain
single [*a-gamos*]

Divorce
 or else be reconciled to her
husband,

 and that the husband should
not divorce his wife.

Paul is discussing the marriage of two Christians. He clearly has access to the teachings of Jesus on this subject (Mt 5:31–32; Mk 10:11–12; Lk 16:18). This cameo presents an ideal toward which every married couple should strive. This is a directive, not a law. The soldier in training on the firing range asks the sergeant, “Where am I to fire?” The sergeant replies, “Shoot at the bull’s-eye!” The sergeant’s answer is a command, and the soldier will do his best, but will not be court-martialed if he fails.

The new element in this apostolic homily is the important phrase, “God has called us to peace.” It is possible to see the component of “peace” as applying to the entire homily. The text of the first pair of cameos in the set of six is seen in figure 2.5(7).

2. ¹² *To the rest* I say, not the
Lord,

UNBELIEVING WIFE
 that if any brother has a wife
who is an unbeliever,

If Congenial
 and she consents to live with
him,

Stay Together
 he should not divorce her.



3. ¹³If any woman has a UNBELIEVING HUSBAND
 husband who is an
 unbeliever,

 and he consents to live with If Congenial
 her,

 she should not divorce him. Stay Together

Figure 2.5(7). Cameos 2–3 (1 Cor 7:12–13)

Some members of the church were arguing that the unbelieving spouse must be shut out of the social fellowship of the church through divorce to protect the purity of the “body.” Paul does not agree. He affirms a mutuality between husband and wife. His views on this topic apply equally to the wife as to the husband. The reason for his insistence that such couples can and should stay married is presented in figure 2.5(8).

4. ¹⁴For the unbelieving
 husband

 is made holy through/in the UNBELIEVER
 wife,

 and the unbelieving wife Made Holy

 is made holy through/in her
 husband.
5. Otherwise, your children CHILDREN
 would be unclean,

 but as it is they are holy. Holy

Figure 2.5(8). Cameos 4–5 (1 Cor 7:14)

THE RHETORIC

Cameo 4 demonstrates a “counterpoint” in its construction, where two rhetorical styles are woven together in the same four lines. These are:

(1) If the reader focuses on the three themes of *holiness*, *unbelieving* and *believing*, following the word order of the Greek text, two cameos of step parallelism emerge.

Made holy
 Unbelieving
 Believing
 Made holy
 Unbelieving
 Believing

(2) If the focus is on *husband* and *wife*, we can see ring composition:

Husband
 Wife
 Wife
 Husband

This sophisticated use of Hebrew poetic devices indicates the care with which this cameo (along with the entire homily) is composed.

**COMMENTARY**

Throughout the Old Testament discussion of “clean and unclean” there is the assumption that the unclean defiles the clean. In the temple Isaiah finds himself near to the *holy* and declares that he is *unclean* (Is 6:1–5) and thereby should not approach the holy. The Mishnah tractate *Tohoroth* (Cleanness) is conclusive evidence for this attitude among the rabbis. In the ministry of Jesus this is reversed. Mark 5:21–43 tells the double story of Jesus and the woman with a flow of blood, and his raising of Jairus’s daughter. In both cases Jesus touches or is touched by the “unclean.” But he is not defiled. Rather he brings health to the sick and resurrection to the dead. Furthermore, to be made “clean” and to be made “holy” overlap on a very deep level. To discuss one is to invoke the other. In cameo 5 the children are not unclean but are holy. This is because (cameo 4) the unbeliever does *not defile the believer*. Indeed the opposite is true. The *believer* makes the unbeliever *clean/holy*, as did Jesus in the two Gospel stories noted above.

This startling text raises a significant question. Paul has just discussed the fact that in marriage the two “become one flesh.” If this is true, then what happens to one partner in the union will influence the other partner. If an antibiotic is injected into one arm, the medicine enters the entire body. Thus if the two become “one flesh” and one member believes and is baptized, the Holy Spirit enters into that person and through him or her to the other and the two of them, *in some sense*, become “holy.”

What then does “holiness” in this context mean? Orr and Walther offer one option. They refer to this as “a kind of ‘uxorial sanctification’ ” (sanctification through the wife) and write: “The close contact [of marriage] produces a corporal unity between the two so that the unbelieving member actually is made holy by the faith of the believer. This is an astounding doctrine!” Now for the third time an “astounding doctrine” has appeared in the epistle. The metaphor of Jesus as the Passover lamb occurs only here in all the writings of Paul (5:7–8). The second is the amazing equality between the wife and husband in marital intimacy that we just examined (7:1–5). Now comes a third startling affirmation.

Put bluntly, Paul appears to be saying, “There are two ways to be saved. One is to believe and be baptized. The other is to marry a Christian!” Is this what he intends? Orr and Walther say “yes,” while admitting that this view of justification is counter to everything else that Paul has to say on the subject. There is another alternative.

A helpful discussion of this text is presented by Gordon Fee, who argues for a parallel between the use of the word “made holy” in this text and in Romans 11:16 where Paul writes,

If the dough offered as first fruits is holy,
so is the whole lump;
and if the root is holy,
so are the branches

Paul is discussing his fellow Jews, whom he describes as “rejected” and “broken off.” They have “stumbled,” but not “fallen.” He wants to “save some of them,” and *at the same time* all of them are “holy.” Those few who believe are the “first fruits” that sanctify, make holy, the “whole lump.” Fee writes, “The ‘consecration’ of the part, in the sense of ‘setting it apart’ for God, ‘sanctifies’ the whole.” Although in unbelief, the Israel of Paul’s day belonged “to God in this special sense.” Fee argues that this special understanding of *holy* is the key to the text in cameo 4.

This interpretation is supported by Paul’s reference to the children, who are presumably too young to make decisions of faith. Yet they are in a special relationship with God because the believing parent is “holy” and has made the other parent “holy.” Together the two “holy” parents have “holy” children. In *this special sense* these children are like “unbelieving” Israel in Paul’s day. For Paul, Israel was both “broken off” and “sanctified” by the first fruits. In like manner the unbelieving spouse, and the children, are in a special relationship with God through the believing spouse. Fee writes, “from Paul’s perspective, as long as the marriage is maintained the potential for their realizing salvation remains.” Referring to both the unbelieving spouse and the children, Fee concludes, “Thus in both cases Paul is setting forth a high view of the grace of God at work through the believer towards members of his/her own household (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1), and for him that constitutes grounds enough for maintaining the marriage.” Thiselton comments on the ethos of the home



created by the believing partner. He writes, “The spouse’s example, witness, prayer, and living out of the gospel make the spouse and the children *in this sense* **holy.**” The final pair of cameos in this homily reads:

6. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner
 desires to separate, let it be, UNBELIEVING SPOUSE
 in such a case the brother or Desires It—Then Separate
 sister is not bound.
 For God has called us to The Goal—Peace
 peace.
7. ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife,
 if you will keep your CAN YOU
 husband?
 For how do you know, Keep Your Spouse?
 husband,
 if you will keep your wife?

Figure 2.5(9). Cameos 6–7 (1 Cor 7:15–16)

Jesus never faced the problem of a pagan married couple, where one member becomes a Christian. Paul’s directive necessarily moves beyond what Jesus had to say on the subject of marriage. If the unbelieving partner does not want to live with the believing wife or husband, they can separate and the believer can remarry: he or she is not bound. *The goal is peace.*

The final cameo (7) turns on the understanding of the many-sided Greek word *sozo*. Is Paul talking about “saving the husband/wife” (that is: bringing him or her to faith) or about “keeping the marriage”? Paul’s language is ambiguous. He could mean one or the other or both. However, *God in Christ* brings salvation to those who believe. *The wife* cannot save her husband nor does she make him *holy*. God is the actor in these great mysteries. Thus, I prefer to read it as referring to the *keeping (saving) of the marriage*. In his extended reflections on this entire passage Thiselton notes that the text is “a notorious crux of interpretation.”

Whatever conclusions one draws from a study of this extremely complicated passage, it is my hope that noting the carefully composed rhetoric of the homily will prove helpful. This brings us to the missional asides in the fourth section of the discussion.

D. JEW AND GREEK, SLAVE AND FREE: REMAIN IN YOUR CALLING (7:17–24)

The text of this section is displayed in figure 2.5(10).

1. ¹⁷ To each as the Lord
 assigned,
 and to each as God has FOLLOW
 called—let him walk.
 This is my directive in all the Your Calling
 churches.



2. ¹⁸ Was any one at the time of his call circumcised?
- Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.
3. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? JEW (is nothing)
- Let him not seek circumcision. Greek (is nothing)
4. ¹⁹ For circumcision is nothing
- and uncircumcision is nothing,
- but keeping the commandments of God.
5. ²⁰ Every one in the calling REMAIN IN
- in/to which he was called should remain. Your Calling
6. ²¹ Were you called [while] a slave?
- Do not be disturbed over it. CALLED—SLAVE
- But if you can gain your freedom,
- avail yourself of the opportunity. Gain Freedom
7. ²² For the person in the Lord called a slave CALLED SLAVE
- is a freedman of the Lord. Free in the Lord
- Likewise he who was called free CALLED FREE



	is a slave of Christ.	Slave of Christ
8.	²³ You were bought with a price;	SET FREE
	do not become slaves of men.	Stay Free
9.	²⁴ Every one, in that which he <i>was called</i> , brethren,	REMAIN IN
	let him remain with God.	Your Calling—with God

Figure 2.5(10). Jew and Greek, slave and free: Remain in your calling (1 Cor 7:17–24)

THE RHETORIC

Paul constructs yet another double-decker sandwich homily. In this case cameos 1, 5 and 9 are the bread and 2–4 and 6–8 are the “meat, cheese and tomatoes” that complete the sandwich. This double-decker homily style is of great antiquity, in that it appears in Isaiah 50:5b–11. A second case of Isaiah’s use of this rhetorical style appears in 51:1–3, seen in figure 2.5(11).

1.	¹ “Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance,	YOU WHO SEEK
	you who seek the LORD;	The Lord
2.	look to the rock from which you were hewn,	ABRAHAM THE ROCK
	and to the cistern from which you were taken out.	Sarah the Cistern
3.	² Look to Abraham your father	LOOK TO
	and to Sarah who bore you;	Abraham and Sarah
4.	for when he was but one I called him,	ABRAHAM IS CALLED
	and I blessed him and made him many.	Abraham Is Blessed
5.	³ For the LORD will comfort Zion;	THE LORD
	he will comfort all her waste places,	Comforts Zion



- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 6. | and will make her wilderness like Eden, | PARABLE OF |
| | her desert like the garden of the LORD; | Eden |
| 7. | joy and gladness will be found in her, | ZION |
| | thanksgiving and the voice of song. | Rejoices |

Figure 2.5(11). Isaiah 51:1–3

This Isaiah text contains seven cameos and exhibits the double-decker sandwich style. The outer frame is composed of 1, 5 and 7. Those three cameos standing alone make perfect sense. Figure 2.5(12) displays them together.

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------|
| 1. | ¹ “Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, | YOU WHO SEEK |
| | you who <i>seek the LORD</i> ; | The Lord |
| 5. | ^{3a} <i>For the Lord will comfort Zion</i> ; | THE LORD |
| | he will <i>comfort</i> all her waste places, | Comforts Zion |
| 7. | ^{3c} <i>joy and gladness</i> will be found in her, | ZION |
| | thanksgiving and the voice of song. | Rejoices |

Figure 2.5(12). Isaiah 51:1, 3

If this were the entire homily, no reader would sense anything missing. There is even a chain-link connection between the three cameos. Cameo 1 ends with “seek the LORD,” which is matched with “For the LORD will comfort Zion” in the opening line of cameo 5. Likewise, “comfort” in the second line of 5 matches “joy and gladness” that opens cameo 7. One could even suggest that Isaiah may have first composed these three interlocking cameos and then decided to strengthen his case by introducing specific references to God’s past actions in history to save. For the top half of the sandwich he added references to Abraham and Sarah (God’s care for his covenant people), and for the bottom half he reached back to Eden in order to recall God’s past grace for all humankind. The precision with which such a simple yet profound homily was composed is striking. This double-decker sandwich style appears no less than eight times in 1 Corinthians.

COMMENTARY

Initially the placing of the discussion of Jew-Gentile and slave-free in the middle of this chapter on Christian patterns of sexuality appears puzzling. Why is this particular discussion placed in *this text*? The answer to this question may lie in Galatians 3:28, where Paul writes, “In Christ ... there is neither *Jew nor Greek*, there is neither *slave nor free*, there is no *male and female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In 7:1–16 Paul discusses



male and female. This may have triggered his mind to continue and finish the above trilogy by adding the other two topics.

At the same time, in verses 10–16 he discusses “Christians married to non-Christians.” He was probably referring to Greek Christians and their unbelieving fellow Greeks. But there was also a social-theological divide between *Christian* and *Jew*, and the social-economic separation between *slave* and *free*. From this point of view it is perfectly natural to expect Paul (while discussing points of friction in marriages) to include a few brief remarks on these two latter types of divisions.

Turning to the details of this homily we will look first at the three cameos (the three slices of bread) that provide structure for the homily. Second, the subject of “circumcised and uncircumcised” presented in cameos 2–4 will need examination. Finally we will reflect on “slave and free” in cameos 6–8.

First is the outer frame of the homily.

As in Isaiah 51:1–3 so here in 7:17–24, the three slices of bread that hold the double-decker sandwich together are closely related and seen together are as follows:

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | ¹⁷ To each as the Lord assigned [<i>merizo</i>],

and to each <i>as God has called</i> [<i>kaleo</i>] <i>—let him walk.</i> | FOLLOW

Your Calling |
| 5. | ²⁰ Every one in the <i>calling</i> [<i>klesis</i>]

<i>in/to which he was called</i> [<i>kaleo</i>] <i>should remain.</i> | REMAIN IN

Your Calling |
| 9. | ²⁴ Every one, in <i>that which</i> [<i>o</i>] he was <i>called</i> [<i>eklethe</i>], brethren,

<i>let him remain with God.</i> | REMAIN IN

Your Calling—with God |

Figure 2.5(13). 1 Cor 7:17, 20, 24

The themes of “walking in” the *calling* and “remaining in” the *calling* unite the three cameos. Like Isaiah, Paul adds illustrative material in between these cameos in order to complete the sandwich. The filler in the top has to do with Jew and Greek while the filler in the bottom relates to slave and free.

Finally, the central slice of bread for the sandwich is a single cameo (5) that has a double function. It forms the bottom of the top half of the sandwich. At the same time it creates the top of the lower half of the sandwich. That is, it looks both ways. Sometimes Paul repeats this center (see 1:1–9; 7:25–31; 14:1–12). Five times (as here) the center is a single cameo that closes the first half and opens the second half (see 1:17–2:2; 7:17–25; 9:12b–18; 14:26–36; 15:35–50). Allowing for the double use of the center, each half has five cameos.

The Greek verb *kaleo* (to call) is prominent in this epistle. Paul uses words with this root seven times in the first chapter alone. The feminine noun *klesis* (calling) appears in the New Testament eleven times. Leaving aside the current text, the other ten uses of this word unambiguously refer to the call of God in Jesus Christ. As used by non-Christian writers this word *can mean* “station in life.” Some English language translators have chosen this latter option and read the first line in cameo 5 (v. 20) as “Every one should remain in the *state* in which he was called” (RSV). The RSV then translated the relative pronoun “in which” (*o*) in cameo 9 (v. 24) as



meaning “whatever *state*” and thus cameo 9 reads, “So, brethren, in *whatever state* each was called, there let him remain with God.” This leads the reader to understand that Paul is urging slaves to remain in slavery. This possibility needs to be examined on a number of levels, some of which we will discuss later. Here it is important to clarify the word “calling.”

1. Beginning with the Peshitta Syriac (4th century) and moving on through twelve of the early Arabic versions from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries and concluding with the 1817 Hebrew, the two texts in 1 Corinthians 7:20, 24, translate some form of “in the *calling* to which you were *called*, remain with God.” These versions all refer to “the call of God” and not to a socioeconomic position in life.

Starting with Erpenius (1616) and moving on to the Propagandist (1671) and including four twentieth-century Arabic versions, the translation *fe al-hal* (in the condition) is introduced. These six versions read some form of “in *the condition* in which you were called, there remain with God.” Thus, in the Oriental versions this reference to “the condition” is a latecomer that I have not found anywhere before the seventeenth century. For more than a thousand years, Middle Eastern Semitic-speaking Christians read this text as a discussion of a “calling before God,” not of a pre-conversion socioeconomic status.

2. If all other occurrences of the feminine noun *call* in the New Testament refer to “the call of God” and not to a person’s state or condition in life, then surely the clear preference is to read verses 20 and 24 as also referring to *God’s call*.

3. In this homily Paul affirms, “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.” How, in the same text, can he on one hand tell his readers to avoid slavery like the plague, and on the other hand urge slaves to remain in slavery?

4. In cameo 6 Paul states, “If you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.” Granted, the language is ambiguous and can be read as “even though you have the possibility of becoming free, remain a slave.” But in the light of Paul’s unambiguous directive “Do not become slaves to men,” the first of these options is to be preferred.

5. In this homily *called* is attached to *assigned* (cameo 1). In 3:5 Paul declares that God “assigned” special tasks to him and to Apollos. In Romans 11:29 the “gifts and the call of God” are connected. Furthermore, for Paul, faith and obedience are so intimately connected that he can write about “the obedience of faith” (a genitive of apposition; see Rom 1:5; 16:26). Faith is something you do. The call of God is not merely a new state of being in Christ but carries with it the necessity of a lifestyle of obedience.

6. The relative pronoun “in which” in cameo 9 is attached to “calling,” and there is no mention of any state or condition. There is a similar relative pronoun in the parallel cameo (5) that is also attached to the word *called*.

7. If Paul wanted all believers to remain in their pre-Christian socioeconomic state or condition, then he should have remained a rabbinic teacher in Jerusalem. In his parable of the farmer Paul defined himself and Apollos as “Servants through whom you believed, as *the Lord assigned to each*.” Paul was *assigned* the task of “planter” and Apollos was *assigned* the responsibility of watering the new plants (3:5–9). For both of them these were new tasks that did not represent their pre-conversion social positions. In like manner Paul certainly knew that Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee before he was called by Jesus. Is Paul here telling Peter, Andrew, James and John that when Jesus called them to follow him, Jesus should have added, “Stay in your boats, and continue fishing the lake”? Before his vision on the road to Damascus, Paul was a Jerusalem-based rising star in the rabbinic world, with the confidence of the high-priestly class. He left that social setting and became a Christian theologian and traveling evangelist. Is Paul telling his readers, “This change in direction was fine *for me*—but don’t imitate me—it is not an acceptable pattern *for you*.” Three chapters earlier Paul wrote, “I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16). Is he now reversing himself and telling them to ignore his pattern of discipleship and remain in their pre-conversion socioeconomic position in the community?

A new trend in many American seminaries is the second-career student. Such students launch careers and after some years sense a call to full-time ministry. To respond to such a call, these individuals set aside “the state in which they were called” in order to fulfill their obedience. Are all of these students/pastors violating Paul’s mandate? Certainly not. Like Peter they heard the call “follow me,” and that call led them to change



from one profession to another. Had Peter been told by Jesus to “stay in your boat” he could have worked out his new commitments to Jesus as Messiah while remaining a fisherman, but he was never asked to do so.

Jewish Christian, Gentile Christian, free disciple, slave believer—the special circumstances in life of each of Paul’s readers created unique opportunities for discipleship. All were *called* and all received gifts and assignments from the Lord.

Second is the question of Jew and Gentile. Having examined three cameos that make up the outer frame of the homily (cameos 1, 5, 9) we must now consider the inner content of the top half of the sandwich, which has to do with *circumcised and uncircumcised* [see fig. 2.5(14)].

1. ¹⁷To each as the Lord assigned,

and to each as *God has FOLLOWED called—let him walk.*

This is my directive in all the *Your Calling* churches.

2. ¹⁸Was any one at the time of his call circumcised?

Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.

3. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? JEW (is nothing)

Let him not seek circumcision. Greek (is nothing)

4. ¹⁹For circumcision is nothing

and uncircumcision is nothing,

but keeping the commandments of God.

5. ²⁰Every one in the calling REMAIN IN

to which he was called should *Your Calling* remain.

Figure 2.5(14). The circumcised and the uncircumcised (1 Cor 7:17–20)

It is utterly astounding to read these words from a first-century Jewish scholar. The sign of the covenant was circumcision. Here that commandment of God is set aside (having been replaced by baptism).



Paul is talking about *the calling/assignment of God* and telling the entire church that there is no special cultural identity required for discipleship in the kingdom of God. The Jew does not have to become a pig-eating Gentile. The Gentile does not have to be circumcised and join the Jewish-Christian branch of the church. There is no sacred culture and no sacred language. Paul is writing in Greek, not in Hebrew. He tells his readers that regardless of their ethnic origins (Jewish or Greek) there is an “assignment,” a “calling” from the Lord tailored to who they are that does not require becoming someone else. From Constantine onward, the times and places where this vision of Paul has not been honored are legion.

At the same time, everyone has an ethnic heritage that is relevant. Paul is saying, “God has a calling for you that will be shaped by your own unique cultural identity—be it Jewish or Gentile, slave or free.” Paul himself was a prime example of what he was talking about.

Paul urges his readers to set aside the law (by ignoring circumcision), and in the next breath tells them that what matters is “keeping the commandments of God.” What commandments? At least he is referring to the commandment to love one another, which he will expound fully in chapter 13. Surely he also is referring to the assignment (commandment?) that the Lord gives to each disciple. As the Corinthians will read later, the hand (an honorable part of the body) cannot say to the foot (an unclean part of the body), “We have no need of you.” Neither part of the church (Jewish or Gentile) could be denigrated as inferior, and neither could assert superiority. Both Jew and Greek could participate fully in their new missional life. The leopard did not have to change its spots. A new age had dawned.

Third is the question of *slave and free*.

Cameo 5 closes the first half of the homily while at the same time it opens the second half. The inner content of the second half of the sandwich focuses on the topic of slavery and the predicament faced by the Christian slave. The full text of that second half is displayed in figure 2.5(15).

- | | | |
|----|---|--------------|
| 5. | ²⁰ Every one in the calling
[klesis] | REMAIN IN |
| | in/to which he was called
[eklethe] should remain. | Your Calling |
| 6. | ²¹ Were you called (while)
a slave? | |
| | Do not be disturbed over it. | |
| | But if you can gain your
freedom, | GAIN FREEDOM |
| | avail yourself of the
opportunity. | |
| 7. | ²² For the person in
the Lord called a
slave | SLAVE |
| | is a freedman of
the Lord. | Free |
| | Likewise he who
was called free | Free |



- | | | |
|----|--|-----------------------|
| | is a slave of Christ. | SLAVE |
| 8. | ²³ You were bought with a price; | |
| | do not become slaves of men. | STAY FREE |
| 9. | ²⁴ Every one, in that to which he was <i>called</i> , brethren, | REMAIN IN |
| | in that let him remain with God. | Your Calling—with God |

Figure 2.5(15). Cameos 5–9 (1 Cor 7:20–24)

RHETORIC

The ring composition of the five cameos in figure 2.5(15) is clear and the parallels strong. The climax in the center affirms that they are all “slaves” and all “freed men” in the Lord.

COMMENTARY

In the opening of this chapter we reflected on Paul’s use of the word “call.” Before proceeding we need to pause to briefly examine Paul’s attitude toward slavery. Four times in the New Testament slaves/servants are told to obey their masters (Eph 6:5; 1 Tim 6:1–2; Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18). Paul’s dealing with slavery can be easily misunderstood. The church under Stalin in Russia had very few *public* options. Having lived most of my adult life as a part of the Arabic-speaking Christian community in the Middle East, I know that they also have a limited number of *public* options. For more than a millennium they have lived out their faithfulness in the midst of a sea of Islam. Public criticism of the Islamic social, political and economic foundations of the state has never been a possibility for them.

In the first century, preaching in the catacombs by the light of an oil lamp was one thing. There they could speak freely. Circulating a *written document* was something else; into whose hands might it fall? Russian Christians under Stalin had one *public* option—obey the state. Any other option was suicide. Any book or paper written and published by Christians in Russia during that period carried with it special risks. Paul could not, *in writing*, attack the institution of slavery and survive. The best option for a slave in that society was to obey the master. Failure to do so would have brought on crucifixion. In this critical passage Paul pushes the envelope as far as he can. In effect he says:

If you are caught in slavery, try to get free. If you are free—do not become a slave. Yet, if you are caught in this (horrible) institution you can yet find and carry out an *assignment*. You can exercise your *gifts* and respond to your *call*. If you are a slave do not look wistfully at me with my freedom and the privileges of Roman citizenship and say, “Of course the Lord can use *him*. But I am a slave—I *can do nothing!*” Don’t forget *your calling*, and *never imagine that there is no calling for you because you are a slave*.

My family and I lived through ten years of the Lebanese civil war that raged from 1975 to 1991 and during that war many things were not possible. Many plans failed, many dreams died, and many friends were killed. Yet, every step downward into the abyss created new possibilities for faithfulness and ministry. The army had collapsed, the police were gone from the streets, the electricity was off and there was little water in the water mains. Phones did not work, traffic lights were dark, garbage was not collected and 150 private armies controlled the broken fragments of the city.

During those perilous days anonymous bombers detonated a sack of dynamite at the main entrance of the Greek Catholic cathedral down the street from the seminary in Beirut where I was teaching. The morning after the bombing we contacted the resident priest. At his invitation we shut down the seminary for a day and *en masse* walked over to the cathedral. With a cumulative total of about five hundred hours of hard work, we



managed to sweep and shovel the debris out of the sanctuary, seal up the doors and windows with plywood, dispose of the wreckage and move the unbroken pews into the basement so that the congregation had a place to assemble for worship. As we carried out these tasks, we were watched intently by a silent crowd of thousands. There were no classes at the seminary. That is, we did not teach any theology that day—or did we?

As noted, the focus of these five cameos is a valiant attempt to convince the reader that the believer’s civil status (be it slave or free) is an arena within which God can call a believer to ministry. God’s gifts and call are not limited to any single culture or social status. Paul tells the Corinthians that for each of them *there is a calling/assignment*. Paul does not endorse slavery or tell people to remain slaves. It is an evil system, yet the call of God can be heard and obeyed within it.

Cameo 6 tells the slave to strive to gain freedom if possible. Cameo 7 (the climax of the five cameos) affirms, We are all slaves and all free. How is this possible? Cameo 8 provides the answer: “You were bought with a price.” In chapter 6, Paul saw the cross as a light shining in the darkness to guide confused Corinthians through the swamp of sexual confusion (6:20). In cameo 8 he finds the cross (cameo 8) central to the formation of a new identity that frees the slave and enthralls the free.

Having dealt with *Jew and Greek*, and *slave and free* in Christ, Paul is ready to return to *male and female* in Christ. He opens with the “not yet married” [see fig. 2.5(16)].

E. THE UNMARRIED AND THE IMPENDING DISTRESS (7:25–31)

1. THE VIRGINS
²⁵ Now concerning the *virgins* [*parthenoi*],

 I have no command of the Lord,

An Introduction

but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.

2. TROUBLE IS
²⁶ I think that in view of the *impending distress*

 it is well for a person to remain as he is. Threatening

3. REMAIN AS
²⁷ Are you *bound* to a wife?

 Do not seek to be *free*.

You Are
 Are you *free* from a wife?

 Do not seek *marriage*.

²⁸ But if you *marry*,

 you do *not sin*.

 And if a girl [virgin] marries



	she does not sin.	
4.	Yet those who marry will have <i>worldly troubles,</i>	TROUBLE IS
	and I would spare you that.	Threatening
5.	²⁹ I mean, brethren, the <i>appointed time</i>	TIME IS
	has <i>grown very short</i> ; from now on,	Short
6.	let those who have <i>wives</i>	
	live as though they had <i>none,</i>	
	³⁰ and those who <i>mourn</i>	FAMILY
	as though they were <i>not mourning,</i>	Social Occasions
	and those who rejoice	Economic Activity
	as though they were <i>not rejoicing,</i>	All Impermanent
	and those who buy	
	as though they did <i>not enjoy</i> <i>possessions,</i>	
	³¹ and those who <i>deal</i> <i>with the world</i>	
	as though they had <i>no dealings with it.</i>	
7.	For the <i>form of this world</i>	FORM OF WORLD
	is <i>passing away.</i>	Passing Away

Figure 2.5(16). The unmarried and the impending distress (1 Cor 7:25–31)

THE RHETORIC

Paul fashions a unified homily composed of seven cameos. A single cameo introduces the subject of the homily. While the following six cameos present the details. Those six in turn form another double-decker sandwich.



The second half of the sandwich relates closely to the first and yet moves beyond it. The first says, “Things are tough.” The second echoes, “The time is short.” The outer frames of the two halves could stand alone with little change. The homily is so exquisitely composed that it moves beyond rhetoric to poetry. Moffat calls the passage “a lyrical outburst.”

COMMENTARY

The structure of the six cameos mirrors the style of the introduction to the epistle (1:1–9). With very slight change the four cameos that form the framework of the homily, when seen alone, are displayed in figure 2.5(17).

2.	²⁶ I think that in view of the <i>impending distress</i>	TROUBLE IS
	it is well for a person to remain as he is.	Threatening
4.	^{28c} Yet who marry will have <i>worldly troubles,</i>	TROUBLE IS
	and I would spare you that.	Threatening
5.	²⁹ I mean, brethren, the <i>appointed time</i>	TIME IS
	has <i>grown very short</i> ; from now on [know that],	Short
7.	^{31b} The <i>form of this world</i>	THIS WORLD
	is <i>passing away.</i>	Passing Away

Figure 2.5(17). Cameos 2, 4–5 and 7 (1 Cor 7:26, 28c, 29, 31b)

Cameos 2 and 4 tell of the distress/troubles that are “impending.” Cameos 5 and 7 affirm “the time is short.” The four cameos interlock smoothly. They present the reality of life in the world (as Paul sees it). In cameos 3 and 6 Paul presents his directives on how they should live in the light of the exterior world. He has eight lines in the external frames and nine sets of Hebrew parallelisms in the two centers. The first half of this poem (cameos 2–4) focuses exclusively on the subject of marriage. The second half of the sandwich (cameos 5–7) broadens to include five topics. These are

- marriage
- mourning (a death?)
- rejoicing (a wedding? a birth?)
- buying and enjoying possessions
- dealing with the world (commerce)

The first three in this list are life-changing, unforgettable moments in the life of any family or community. The last two would have had special meaning in Corinth. The city was a crossroads for commercial traffic north and south as well as east and west. There were more goods available in Corinth than anywhere else in Greece. The opportunities for shopping were the best available, and Corinth was a wealthy city. Paul speaks of “those who buy” as not *katekho*. This word had to do with “holding fast to something.” When used in connection with property it carried the nuance of “enjoying possessions ... especially of property.”³⁸ Robertson and Plummer note, “Earthly goods are a trust, not a possession.” Paul’s referring here to the attachments that form between people and the things they buy. The fifth category Paul mentions is on the subject of relations with the outside



world. To “do business” in Corinth merchants needed to “deal with the world,” and that world stretched from Brittany to Syria and from the northern tribes to the limits of habitation in North Africa.

Paul expected the imminent end of all things. We now look back over almost two thousand years since he recorded those perceptions. Yet his advice regarding the de-absolutizing of this wide-ranging list of human experiences and endeavors is as timely as ever. Marriage, death, birth, possessions and livelihood are all transitory. Remembering this reality can add a priceless component to our outlook on all of life. Borrowing from 1 Corinthians 15, the words of the African American spiritual “Steal Away to Jesus” affirm,

The trumpet sounds within-a my soul
 I ain’t got long to stay here.

The *last* “trumpet will sound” at the end of history (15:52), but should it not also sound today “within-a my soul”?

F. MARRIAGE AND ANXIETIES (7:32–35)

Paul is not finished with the topic of Christian marriage. He concludes section 2.5 with three final questions (7:32–40). The first of these is displayed in figure 2.5(18).

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | ³² I want you to be free from anxieties. | FREE FROM ANXIETIES |
| 2. | Now the de-married [<i>agamos</i>] man

is anxious about the affairs of the Lord,

how to please the Lord; | DEMARRIED MAN

Free for the Lord |
| 3. | ³³ but the married man

is anxious about worldly affairs,

how to please his wife, ³⁴ and he is divided. | MARRIED MAN

Busy with Wife |
| 4. | The de-married [<i>agamos</i>] woman and the virgin [<i>parthenos</i>]

are anxious about the affairs of the Lord,

how to be consecrated in body and spirit; | DEMARRIED WOMAN

Free for the Lord |
| 5. | but the married woman

is anxious about worldly affairs, | MARRIED WOMAN |



6.	<p>how to please her husband.</p> <p>³⁵I say this for your own benefit,</p> <p>not to throw a noose upon you,</p> <p>but to promote good order [<i>euskenon</i>]</p> <p>and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.</p>	<p>Busy with Husband</p> <p>SECURING LOYALTY</p> <p>UNDIVIDED</p>
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Figure 2.5(18). Marriage and anxieties (1 Cor 7:32–35)

RHETORIC

In between an introduction and a conclusion, Paul presents four cameos that exhibit an A-B-A-B structure found also in 7:6–9.

COMMENTARY

Regarding these verses (and the verses that follow), Jerome Murphy-O’Connor writes, “This is probably the most difficult and controverted section of the Letter. There are many different interpretations, and none of them is immune to objections.” The problem is that Paul knew and worked with Priscilla and Aquila who hosted a church in their home. Together they taught Apollos (Acts 18:26). From what we know, their marriage did not hamper their effectiveness in ministry. Demas began well (Col 4:14; Philem 24) but then went “the way of the world” (2 Tim 4:10). The assumption is that he was single. Being single did not prevent him from failing. If the spouse is not committed to the things of God, then the marriage *can* be a huge hindrance to “devotion to the Lord.” Paul’s thoughts on this subject can perhaps be best read as a warning, not as a ruling. The root of the term *good order* reappears in the definition of love in chapter 13.

G. A MAN AND “HIS VIRGIN” (7:36–38)

Paul concludes with two brief sections having to do with “his virgin” and “in case of death.” The first has to do with a person and “his virgin” [see fig. 2.5(19)].

1. ³⁶If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his virgin,
 - if his passions are strong,
 - and if it has to be, let him do what he wants;
 - he does not sin, let them marry.
2. ³⁷ But whoever is firmly established in his heart,
 - being under no necessity but having his desire under control,
 - and has determined this in his heart,
 - to keep her as his virgin, he will do well.
3. ³⁸ So that he who marries [gives in marriage?] his virgin does well;
 - and he who refrains from marrying [giving in marriage?] will do better.

Figure 2.5(19). A man and “his virgin” (1 Cor 7:36–38)

Using ten lines, Paul composed three cameos. Orr and Walther offer a succinct summary of the options for understanding this puzzling passage. The text can be discussing

1. a young man and his fiancée
2. a father and his virgin daughter
3. some kind of a “spiritual marriage”
4. a levirate marriage



Because we do not know the precise situation to which Paul was writing, it is difficult to choose among these four alternatives. As T. W. Manson somewhere said about the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1–8), “The literature is voluminous and unrewarding.”

H. IN CASE OF DEATH (7:39–40A)

Paul’s final admonition has to do with the death of one partner in a marriage. He composes seven lines that form three cameos [see fig. 2.5(20)].

10. ³⁹ A wife is bound [*dedetai*] to her husband
as long as he lives.
11. If the husband dies,
she is free to be married to
whom she wishes,
only in the Lord.
12. ⁴⁰ But in my judgment she is happier
if she remains as she is.

Figure 2.5(20). In case of death (1 Cor 7:39–40a)

Paul ends this subsection where he began. It is good to stay single, but marriage “in the Lord” is approved.

I. PAUL’S CONCLUDING PERSONAL APPEAL (7:40B)

13. ^{40b} I think that I have the Spirit of God.

Paul concludes his first essay by saying, “I urge you, then, be imitators of me.” That personal appeal does not fit this discussion of sexual practice. He therefore reshapes his appeal by telling his readers that he senses the Spirit of the Lord guiding him in what he is writing. The admonition is still personal, but now fits the nature of the topics discussed in the essay. With this “signature conclusion” the second essay comes to an end.

The third essay poses a new question, which is: *How should a Christian live in a non-Christian world?* To this new topic we now turn.⁸

⁸ Bailey, K. E. (2011). [Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 196–227). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.