

## OVERVIEW

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- Read 1 Corinthians 7.
- Broad Structure of 1 Corinthians 7:

V1-16	<i>Sex, Singles, Married, Divorce</i>
V17-24	<i>Underlying Theological Principle</i>
V25-40	<i>Virgins (and widows)</i>

- **Controlling motif:** *Do not seek a change; stay as you are.*

*This occurs in every subsection of this chapter (vv 2, 8, 10, 11, 12-16, 26-27, 37, 40). It is the singular theme of the middle section (v17-24). While Paul answers many of the queries of the Corinthians guided by this motif, yet at certain points, he does allow exceptions.*

*From 7:1, we know that Paul is responding to the various issues raised by the Corinthian Christians concerning marriage. A careful reading of the chapter will reveal that there was considerable pressure exerted on the believers in Corinth to either dissolve their marriage or abstain from marriage. So Paul isn't just answering the questions they raise, but also addressing the underlying belief systems that was driving their conduct.*

*At some points, Paul had to tell them straight-faced that they are wrong and they must do what is right. At other junctions, Paul finds himself in agreement with them on what they have done/intend to do, but disagree with them as to the reasons/motivations behind. In such situations, he had to carefully state his agreement while categorically state his disagreement.*

- **Corinthian position:** *Verse 1b - "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." This is a good summary of their position. There appears to be those in the church at Corinth who believed that they are more acceptable to God, closer to Him, more holy, if they are celibate, if sex is totally absent from their life. Hence, they advocate that the married should dissolve their marriage and the singles should abstain from marriage.*

## 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16

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- The Corinthian slogan: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman (v1b).*

*What is 'touch a woman' and what is this slogan saying? 'Touch a woman' is a euphemistic term for sexual relations. Hence, the slogan is not saying that it is good for a man not to marry a woman, but it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*

*The next few verses (v2-5) confirms that 'touch' means sexual relations as the subject being discussed is exactly that == sexual relations between husband and wife.*

- Not applicable here! (V2-7)

*<sup>2</sup>Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality,*

*let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

*<sup>3</sup>Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*

*<sup>4</sup>The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

*<sup>5</sup>Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

*<sup>6</sup>But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.*

*<sup>7</sup>For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.*

*Paul does not totally dismiss the Corinthian slogan. At certain point, in certain circumstance, he does subscribe to it. He will explain and elaborate further later, in verse 7. However, he is very definite that this slogan has no place in the married life!*

**Correct understanding of verse 2:****\*\* Nevertheless**

*This word sets up a contrast to the slogan cited in v1b. In other words, what Paul is going to say from verse 2-7 is a refutation of that slogan. In the circumstances described in these 6 verses, the slogan is not applicable!*

**\*\* Because of sexual immorality**

*This is the reason why the slogan is not applicable for the circumstance being discussed here. If you go by the slogan, then the result is sexual immorality! Sexual immorality is sin. Hence, this slogan must be rejected in this circumstance.*

*What is the circumstance?*

**\*\* Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband**  
*Is this phrase a call for people to be married? Is Paul saying that because of sexual immorality, maybe because of the prevalence of sexual immorality among the Corinthians, hence it is better if every one of you be married. If this is what Paul is saying, then he appears to contradict what he says later in verse 37 that if a single person decides not to get marry, he does well. Clearly in the later part of this chapter, Paul says that a Christian can decide to marry or not marry. If this be so, how could Paul be calling every one to be married here (in verse 2)?*

*The word 'have' is not to be understood as 'marry' but 'have sexually', 'to be in continuing sexual relations with his wife/her husband.'" In other words, Paul has in view those who are married. And he is saying that married couples should continue to have sexual relations with one another!*

**Elaboration of verse 2c: Verses 3 & 4.**

*The subject of these 2 verses is sexual relations between husband and wife. This further confirms the understanding of the meaning of 'have' in verse 2.*

*Verse 3 discusses sexual relations between married couples as a debt one owes to the spouse! The word 'due' carries this idea of indebtedness. The message is that the husband owes his wife this debt and the wife has this obligation*

*towards her husband. The focus is on what one owes to one's spouse, not one's rights and hence the right to demand from one's spouse, nor one's weapon of manipulation.*

*Verse 4 states that in marriages, one gives oneself totally over to the other person. This includes one's body as well. Hence the husband's body belongs to the wife and the wife's body belongs to the husband.*

*While Paul does not speak in explicit terms, it nevertheless is clear that in verses 2c-4, the apostle is teaching married couples to live a full mutual sexual life. Linking this to verse 2b, we see that the reason is to avoid sexual immorality.*

*In other words, Paul is not saying that to avoid sexual immorality, people should get married. Rather, he is saying that if married people do not live a full mutual sexual life, sexual immorality will result!*

#### **Exceptions allowed, warning stated: Verses 5**

##### **\*\* Do not deprive one another**

*The word 'deprive' is a very strong word. It can be translated as 'defraud', and is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 6:7,8. To withhold sexual relations with your spouse is equivalent to robbing him/her of what rightfully belongs to him/her.*

##### **\*\* Except with consent for a time, that you may give yourself to fasting and prayer**

##### **Three conditions laid down:**

**(i) Mutual consent must be present**

**(ii) Only for a time, not permanently**

**(iii) Purpose is prayer and fasting; though good and spiritual, yet even that is not allowed to push out sexual relations within a marriage permanently**

##### **\*\* So that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control**

*To withhold sexual relations will only push your spouse into the hands of the devil and making it much easier for him/her to fall into sin.*

**Concession: Verses 6**

*The concession is a reference to verse 5. Paul is careful to state that the exception he grants for temporary, mutually agreed sexual abstinence between husband and wife is not a commandment, only a concession.*

**What about you, Paul? (Verse 7)**

*Here Paul reflects on his own status and his own preference. Yes, I am single and I wish all people to be as I am. But I didn't choose my status for spiritual advancement. Nor would I impose it on others.*

*It is a matter of gift (charisma, same word used in 1 Corinthians 12). In God's sovereignty and grace, He has given to me (and to some) the "gift" of singlehood, and He has given to others the "gift" of marriage. Which "gift" one has does not determine how spiritual/holy one is.*

*For those of you who are now married, clearly God has not given you this "gift" of being single now. Hence, don't live as a single! Live as married people. And as married people, sexual relation with your spouse is part and parcel of your married life.*

**▪ "Unmarried" believers: How? (V8-9)**

**Who is being addressed here?** *But I say to the unmarried and to the widows . . . The "unmarried" is "agamois" in Greek. It is a masculine plural that could refer to males or females who are not in the state of marriage (cf. 7:11, 32, 34). Is this 'agamois' a reference to all who are unmarried, all in the state of singlehood?*

*Note that it is put together with 'widows', ladies whose husbands have died and hence are now in the state of singlehood. They are unmarried, but they would not be viewed as those the never-before-married. Later in the chapter, Paul calls those who were never-before-married 'parthenos' (virgins). Why would Paul not use 'parthenos' here but 'agamois'?*

*It would appear that it is not wrong to translate 'agamois' here as widowers. In fact, it would be probably correct to view those being addressed here as those who were previously married but now no longer married.*

**Message for them:** *It is good for them to remain in their current state. This is the main message. But if they are not exercising self-control (which is a better translation of the text) – have the desire to be married, for sexual intimacy, then the better path is to marry. Let them marry, says Paul, amounting to a command (third person plural imperative)! Why? It is better to marry than to burn with passion. It is better to marry than to keep battling the strong desire for marriage again, or expressing that desire in committing sin.*

Note: *The overall message then is “Remain where you are.” However, if you marry, that is no sin. Both state acceptable to God, neither superior nor inferior. But what is not acceptable is to commit sexual immorality.*

▪ **Married believers: May we separate? (V10-11)**

**\*\* Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. (V10)**

*For those mentioned in verses 8-9, Paul is ambivalent whether they marry or remain single. But when it comes to those who are now married, he states it categorically that divorce is not an option! Not at all! And he underlines the fact that this is the clear command and teaching of Jesus Christ.*

*What Jesus commanded and taught concerning divorce can be found in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-9.*

**\*\* But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.**

*If however the divorce has taken place (in disobedience to Christ's command), then you must not contract a new marriage. Better still, reconcile!*

**\*\* And a husband is not to divorce his wife.**

*The same command applies if it was the husband who was doing the separation. Why does Paul speak of this matter in this way? It appears that it was the women who were agitating for the separation, perhaps for spiritual reasons!*

*The overall message is clear: Remain as you are. No exception allowed here. If you have already breached this, remain as you are. Better still, work at going back to the original state!*

▪ **Mixed marriages: How? (V12-16).**

**\*\* How come mixed?** *The situation is not a believer marrying an unbeliever. This is clearly frowned upon by Scripture (2 Corinthians 6:14). Rather, it is the situation where two married unbelievers heard the gospel and one of them believed while the other remained in unbelief.*

**\*\* "I, not the Lord, say" - what does it mean?** *The situation painted above was not dealt with by the Lord while He was here on earth. Hence, as Christ's apostle, Paul now deals with this matter.*

**\*\* What's the message?** *Overall message is remain as you are. Your marriage is valid and proper in the eyes of God. If your unbelieving spouse is happy to continue the marriage, then you must not/never initiate a separation. If your unbelieving spouse chooses to separate instead, then you must accept the situation.*

*Another motivating factor for remaining where you are is the consideration that God could be using you as His instrument in saving your spouse!*