

Chapter Seven

In Chapter Seven Paul moves on to a variety of topics that were brought up by the Corinthians in a prior correspondence (1st Cor. 7:1). The first such topic was the direct opposite of the fornication problems he had already addressed. In Chapter 7, Paul deals with the matter of celibacy (1st Cor. 7:1). Paul takes one particular question, and launches into a series of subjects including celibacy (1st Cor. 7:1,6,7), marriage (1st Cor. 7:2-5,8,9), divorce (1st Cor. 7:10-16), and eternal/temporal perspectives (1st Cor. 7:17-24). Paul returns to the matter of marriage versus singleness to close the chapter (1st Cor. 7:25-38).

Celibacy

1. The local church had sent a letter to the Apostle Paul (and likely their other favorite teachers as well), requesting his judgment on the matter of celibacy (1st Cor. 7:1).
 - a. Abstinence is good (1st Cor. 7:1).
 - b. Fornication is not good (1st Cor. 7:2).
 - c. Lack of self control is not good (1st Cor. 7:5).
 - d. Being alone is not good (Gen. 2:18a).
 - e. Marriage is good (Gen. 2:18b).
2. Paul expressed a wish for universal celibacy (1st Cor. 7:7), in much the same way that Moses wished for the universal indwelling of God the Holy Spirit (Num. 11:29).
3. Paul's teaching on celibacy is given by way of concession and not command (1st Cor. 7:6). **NO ONE IS EVER COMMANDED TO NOT MARRY.**
 - a. Such forbidding of marriage is a doctrine of demons (1st Tim. 4:2).
 - b. Even those who choose to not marry still have a right to do so (1st Cor. 9:5).
4. Paul declared that celibacy is a gift (χάρισμα #5486) from God and not a normal condition for human beings (1st Cor. 7:7).
 - a. Celibacy is a gift from God (Jms. 1:17; Ps. 34:9,10).
 - b. A spouse is a gift from God (Prov. 18:22; 19:14).
 - c. Celibacy is not a spiritual gift in the sense of the spiritual gifts developed in chapter 12. It is a gift in the sense that it removes distractions and enables a believer's other gift(s) to function with a greater freedom (1st Cor. 7:32-35).

Marriage

1. Fornication temptations are guarded against through a mutually satisfying marital sex life (1st Cor. 7:2a,5; Eph. 4:27; Rom. 13:14).
 - a. Because of. *διά* + the accusative—a marker of something constituting cause.
 - b. Fornications (plural). *πορνείας* fem.pl.acc. *πορνεία* #4202: *fornication*.
2. Each man is to have the wife that belongs to him (1st Cor. 7:2b). *ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐχέτω*.
3. Each wife is to have her own husband (1st Cor. 7:2c). *ἕκαστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἐχέτω*.
4. *ἔχω* #2192 *to have* is used both maritally and sexually (cp. 1st Cor. 5:1; Matt. 22:28). The present active imperative demonstrates the continuous action (regularity) of healthy marital relations.
5. The unmarried *ἄνθρωπος* #444 is to be celibate (1st Cor. 7:1,7,26), but the married *ἀνὴρ* #435 ought not to be (1st Cor. 7:2,3_{x2},4_{x2},10,11_{x2},13_{x2},14,16_{x2},34,39_{x2}).
6. The two imperatives of *ἔχω* “to have” from verse 2 are further defined by the two imperatives *ἀποδίδωμι* “to pay off, discharge what is due” in verse 3.

- a. ἀποδίδωμι #591: to give out, pay off, pay back; to meet a contractual or other obligation (Matt. 18:25ff.,34; 20:8; Rom. 13:7).
 - b. ὀφειλή #3782: an obligation, debt (Used three times: Matt. 18:32; Rom. 13:7; 1st Cor. 7:3).
7. Authority/mastery of the married person’s body is not exercised by that person, but rather by their spouse (1st Cor. 7:4). ἐξουσιάζω #1850: *to have power or authority* (Lk. 22:25; 1st Cor. 6:12; 7:4_{x2}).
8. Paul instructs the Corinthians to “stop” depriving one another. The practice of marital abstinence had already begun and Paul ordered an immediate halt to that harmful practice (1st Cor. 7:5).
- a. μή + pres. imper. to express a command that is generally valid; to bring to an end a condition now existing.
 - b. ἀποστερέω #650: to cause another to suffer loss by taking away through illicit means; *rob steal, despoil, defraud* (1st Cor. 6:7,8; 1st Tim. 6:5; Jms. 5:4).
9. Paul permits—but does not command short-term marital abstinence for specific circumstances.
- a. By agreement.
 - b. For a time. Too long a period of time however will produce *incontinence*.
 - c. Purpose Clause: to establish a prayer devotion and restore soul intimacy.
 - 1) ἵνα σχολάσητε τῇ προσευχῇ. Aor.act.subj. σχολάζω #4980: to be free from labour, be at leisure, be idle; (because one has leisure for a thing) *to give one’s self to a thing*.
 - 2) Heirs together of the grace of life must have a developed prayer ministry (1st Pet. 3:7).
10. Before moving on to the topic of divorce, Paul addresses the unmarried and the widows (1st Cor. 7:8-9).
- a. ἄγαμος #22: *unmarried, single*. α #1 (negative particle) + γάμος #1062: *marriage, wedding*.
 - b. χήρα #5503: *widow*.
 - c. The “unmarried” may by definition refer to a never-been-married single man, a divorced man, or a widower.
 - 1) The linking of “unmarried” to “widow” in verse 8 is similar to the linking of “unmarried” woman and virgin in verse 34, and helps us to establish the parameters for verse 8. The “unmarried” (by death or divorce) and the virgin (never been married) have an application to be gleaned from vv.32-35.
 - 2) The linking of “unmarried” to “widow” and the context of vv.8&9 establishes these instructions to those who have once been married and have “awakened sexual love” (cf. Song. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).
 - d. Abiding content in singleness is good (v.8), but marriage is better than incontinence (v.9).

Divorce

1. Paul's admonishment supporting marital intimacy (1st Cor. 7:1-5) took a brief side-trip to address the unmarried and the widows (1st Cor. 7:8,9).
 - a. The unmarried (ἄγαμος ^{#22}: *unmarried, single*) in context were divorced people.
 - b. The widows were also "unmarried" as a consequence of their spouse's physical death.
2. Paul returns to addressing married people by reviewing the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning divorce (1st Cor. 7:10-11).
 - a. "I am exhorting." παραγγέλλω ^{#3853}: *to transmit a message along from one to another; to command, order, charge*. In contrast with ἐντέλλω ^{#1781} (*to order, command to be done*), παραγγέλλω denotes fixed and abiding obligations rather than specific or occasional instructions; duties arising from the office rather than coming from the personal will of a superior.
 - b. "Not I, but the Lord." Paul rightly cites the authority for these commands. Jesus Christ prohibited divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9 cf. Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18).
 - c. The wife must not be separated from (leave) her husband. Aor.pass.inf. χωρίζω ^{#5563}: *to divide, separate* (Matt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9; Rom. 8:35,39). *To separate by departing from someone* (Pass. freq. in act. sense.) (1st Cor. 7:10,11,15; Acts 1:4; 18:1-2; Phlm. 15; Heb. 7:26).
 - d. The husband must not dismiss his wife. Aor.act.inf. ἀφίημι ^{#863}: *to send away, dismiss, divorce* (Matt. 13:36; 27:50; Mk. 4:36; 8:13; 1st Cor. 7:11,12,13; Rev. 2:4).
 - e. These commands may not be followed, and so a contingency command is given (1st Cor. 7:11).
 - 1) The contingency command is expressed as a two-fold alternative:
 - a) Remain unmarried. OR
 - b) Be reconciled to your husband.
 - 2) The contingency command is expressed via two 3rd person imperatives.
 - a) 3p.sing.pres.act.imper. μένω ^{#3306}: *to remain, abide*. w/ ἄγαμος ^{#22}: *unmarried, single*.
 - b) 3p.sing.aor.pass.imper. καταλλάσσω ^{#2644}: *to reconcile, return to favor with*.
3. It is very unusual for a Biblical command or prohibition to have a contingency command.
 - a. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" does not have a corresponding "but if you do have other gods before Me" then here are some additional commands to follow.
 - b. "Thou shalt not murder" does not have a corresponding "but if you do murder" then here are some additional commands to follow.
 - c. Jesus described divorce as a concession to hardness of heart, but denied that it was ever given as a command (Matt. 19:7-8).
 - d. Paul's "contingency command" (1st Cor. 7:11a) was nothing more than a summation of Moses' permissive will regulations governing divorce (Deut. 24:1-4).
 - e. The "contingency command" does not have a "contingency contingency command." *But if she does not remain unmarried, and if she is not reconciled to her husband, then . . .*
4. Paul has synthesized Moses & Jesus teachings concerning divorce (1st Cor. 7:10-11), and then expands upon them by developing an application of family sanctification (1st Cor. 7:12-16).
 - a. Even if a believer is wrong for the person they marry, the fact still remains that they are now married (1st Cor. 7:12-13).
 - 1) Marrying a divorced person as an act of adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).
 - 2) Marrying an unbeliever (1st Cor. 7:39; 9:5; 2nd Cor. 6:14-18; Ezra 9:1-3).
 - b. Although two believing parents are the ideal, just one believing parent will sanctify a home and supply blessings by association to the children in that home (1st Cor. 7:14 cf. Gen. 30:27; 39:5).
 - c. The sanctification of the husband and children is not a soteriological or ultimate sanctification, but a temporal sanctification for blessing in time (cf. 1st Tim. 4:5).
 - d. Abandonment by a spouse when divorce is not desired, is not a bondage in legalism (1st Cor. 7:15-16).
 - 1) The unbelieving one may in fact be regenerate (cf. Jn. 20:27; Heb. 3:12-13).
 - 2) The saving ministry may be more than evangelism (cf. 1st Tim. 4:16; Jms. 5:19-20).

The believing husband or wife is not at liberty to separate, unless the disbeliever or pagan insists on it. Wilful desertion of the unbeliever sets the other free, a case not contemplated in Christ's words in Matt. 5:32; 19:9. Luther argued that the Christian partner, thus released, may marry again. A.T. ROBERTSON

Eternal/Temporal Perspectives

1. Paul explains and illustrates marriage & divorce with two unrelated conditions (1st Cor. 7:17-24).
2. These explanatory illustrations fix the priority on God's sovereign plan (1st Cor. 7:17).
 - a. The Lord has assigned to each one. Aor.act.ind. μ ^{#3307}: *to divide, distribute* (1st Cor. 1:13; 7:17,34; 2nd Cor. 10:13; Rom. 12:3).
 - b. God has called each one. Perf.act.ind. ^{#2564}: *to call*. See the Believer's Calling (chapter one).
 - c. Let him walk. Pres.act.imper. ^{#4043}: *to walk*. See Spirituality & Carnality (chapter three).
 - d. This perspective is universal for every local church.
3. The structure of the passage.
 - a. Illustration #1: circumcision/uncircumcision (Jew/Gentile) (1st Cor. 7:18-20).
 - b. Illustration #2: slavery/freedom (1st Cor. 7:21-24).
 - c. Each passage begins with a "calling" question (vv.18,21).
 - d. Each passage concludes with a "remaining" assertion (vv.20,24). Pres.act.imper. μ ^{#3306}: *to remain, abide*.
4. God has an eternal purpose for every believer, but God also has a temporal purpose for every believer.
 - a. The temporal purpose should always be exercised for the eternal purpose.
 - b. The great provision of these principles is a relaxed mental attitude.
 - 1) Over matters in which you have no control, in circumstances & details of life that are irrelevant to the Christian way of life.
 - 2) Over matters in which God supplies a change, in circumstances & details of life where a preference may be selected and even necessary.

Marriage Versus Singleness

1. Paul returns back to the narrow focus of temporal-life marriage with a specific exhortation pertaining to virginity (singleness) (1st Cor. 7:25-40).
2. This passage is not to be taken by way of command, but rather that of an application of judgment based upon Bible Doctrine (1st Cor. 7:25). See Judgments & Viewpoints (Chapter Four)
3. The Present Distress.
 - a. μ ^{#1764}: to take place as an event, *be here, be at hand, arrive, come* (Rom. 8:38; 1st Cor. 3:22; 7:26; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 9:9).
 - b. ^{#318}: *distress, calamity, pressure* (Lk. 21:23; 1st Cor. 7:26; 2nd Cor. 6:4; 12:10; 1st Thess. 3:7).
 - c. First Corinthians testifies to no “present distress” being experienced by believers in Corinth as of this date (1st Cor. 4:8). It is better to think of the distress as “impending” rather than “present.”
 - d. The “impending distress” is a Divine viewpoint perspective of the Dispensation of the Church as the intensified stage of the angelic conflict.
4. Dispensational Distinctions
 - a. The Dispensation of Man (Gentiles) featured a “be fruitful and multiply” commandment for both the Age of Innocence (Gen. 1:28) and the Age of Human Government (Gen. 9:1).
 - b. The Dispensation of Israel (Jews) featured promises of “fruitful and multiply” blessing (Gen. 17:6; Lev. 26:9) and anticipated future generations to bear witness for Israel’s ultimate blessing (Gen. 17:7-8; Ps. 78:1-8).
 - c. The Dispensation of the Church features warnings of end-times difficulty (2nd Tim. 3:1-17), and no guarantee of any future generations. The μ of Jesus Christ is imminent (1st Cor. 15:51-52; 1st Thess. 4:16-17).
 - d. The Dispensation of Israel: Age of Tribulation will be reminiscent of the Church in terms of anticipated difficulty (Matt. 24:1-51) and an emphasis on “this generation” (Matt. 24:34).
5. Paul’s judgment was for all believers to remain in their present marital condition and occupy with Jesus Christ on a daily basis (1st Cor. 7:26-27). Others may come to a different opinion and decide to get married (1st Cor. 7:28).
6. “The time has been shortened” μ
 - a. Recognition of the Dispensation of the Church as a day-by-day time-frame places a sense of urgency in the minds of believers (Rom. 13:11).
 - b. The opportune time. ^{#2540} in contrast with ^{#5550}.
 - c. Perf.pass.ptc. ^{#4958}: *draw together, shorten* (shorten sail).
 - d. “From now on” establishes the application of this principle to be valid throughout the Dispensation of the Church.
7. Daily occupation with Christ—mindful of His imminent return—produces a mental attitude suitable for maximum eternal production (1st Cor. 7:29b-31).
 - a. The mental attitude of having a wife as if you didn’t is not a license to neglect your spouse! It means that we are living here and now anticipating there and then (Matt. 22:30).
 - b. The mental attitude of weeping as if you didn’t is not a prohibition against human sorrow! It means that we are living here and now anticipating there and then (Rev. 21:4; Ps. 30:5; 126:5&6).
 - c. The mental attitude of rejoicing as if you didn’t is not a prohibition against human joy! It means that we are living here and now anticipating there and then (1st Pet. 1:6&8).
8. The virgin (never married, single person) has a unique opportunity for service (1st Cor. 7:32-38), but only if they are so gifted (1st Cor. 7:7) and called (1st Cor. 7:17,20,24,26). Likewise the widow has this opportunity (1st Cor. 7:39-40).