

1 Corinthians 7

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Tape #8142
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Let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians, chapter seven, as we continue our study through the Bible.

Now what Paul is going to be saying here in chapter seven, we need sort of a cultural insight into the background into what is written here in chapter seven.

First of all, Paul is responding to a letter that he received with questions concerning different issues with regard to marriage. Corinth was a very sensual city. It was a city that was given over to debauchery. If a person lived a very wild, proliferate life, the saying was, he lived like a Corinthian, because it was a seaport town and thus filled with all kinds of immorality and vice. There was there at Corinth on the acropolis above the city a great temple that was built to Aphrodite. There were over a thousand priestesses. They were called holy or sacred slaves, devoted to Aphrodite. They would come down into the city of Corinth at night. They were prostitutes. Thus, there was that constant invitation and availability for sexual immorality, impurity. It was rampant in the city of Corinth.

Also about this time there were the beginnings of the persecution of the church by Rome. Things were uncertain for the future of the church because of this persecution. People were beginning to be put to death because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

So with that as a background, Paul seeks to answer their questions concerning marriage and whether it is proper to be married or better to be unmarried. This is the kind of a background that you have for chapter seven as Paul writes to them on the subject that they were questioning in their letter to him. *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.* Celibacy.

²*Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality (to avoid fornication), let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.* ³*Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.* Or, do not withhold conjugal rights from each other.

⁴*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.* Don't withhold the sexual privileges from each other.

⁵*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.* Of course you are not to give yourself during this time, if you agree together (if there is mutual consent) we want to spend some time in fasting and in prayer. That is fine, but then come together so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

⁶*But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment (by permission and not as a commandment).* ⁷*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.* So Paul is saying, I wish you were celibate, like I am, but this is a gift. If you don't have the gift of celibacy then don't try it! Every man has his own gift. Some people as Jesus said (Matthew 19:12), are eunuchs by birth and others are eunuchs for the cause of Christ. Paul, in going through the arduous journeys that he did, could never have accomplished what he accomplished had he been married. For Paul's particular calling in ministry, it was much better that he not be married. So Paul, though is recognizing that not everybody has the gift of celibacy.

Thus he declares, ⁸*But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;* ⁹*but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.* If you don't have the gift, go ahead and marry. It is better to marry than to go around with a burning passion or lust. Unto the married and so dealing with those widows and unmarried, it's fine to stay that way if that's your gift, but better to marry than to have continual sexual desires.

¹⁰*Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord:* Now it is interesting that much of this is Paul's own advice, but at the end of the chapter, he sort of affirms the fact that although it is his opinion. He said, it's my judgment and I think also that I have the Spirit of God. I believe that what I am expressing to you is wisdom and judgment that is coming from God.

I think that it is good when we are speaking on issues, that if we have strong Scriptural support and foundation, that we speak with authority. But where we are getting into areas that are our opinions, then I think that it is wise to express this as "my opinion" and not, you know, come off as "this is Gospel truth." But where we have our opinions, and we are expressing our opinions, it is good to express it as such, as Paul does here.

Now this I speak, but really these are the commandments of the Lord. *A wife is not to depart from her husband* (let her not divorce her husband). ¹¹*But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.* God has intended marriage to be monogamous and He has intended it to be for life. That was God's original intent. In the beginning when God made them male and female, He intended that it be marriage for life.

Now Jesus, in His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:31-32), said that if a man put away his wife, and so forth, that if they were married they were committing adultery. This was the teaching of Jesus. So the Pharisees recognized that the teaching of Jesus was in conflict with the Mosaic Law. Because in the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) it said, if a man marries a woman and he finds uncleanness in her, that he could write her a bill of divorcement. And so knowing that there was an allowance for divorce, under the Law, (There were two schools of thought concerning the phrase, if he finds uncleanness in her. The one school of thought was the uncleanness was a moral impurity. The second school of thought was just anything that displeased you about her. You didn't like her cooking. And it was a very liberal interpretation of that.)

So they came to Jesus (Matthew 19:3-9). The purpose was to entrap Him. You see, it was commonly recognized that God gave the law to Moses. That was a given. Everybody accepted that. That it was God who gave the law to Moses. Thus, if Jesus is saying something contrary to what Moses said, then how can Jesus claim to be of God? They were constantly trying to pit Jesus against the law of Moses. This was one of the endeavors to do that. So they were seeking to trap Him. Knowing His teachings, that if a man put away his wife except it be for an adulterous affair, that whoever married her would be committing adultery as she was. They came to Jesus. They asked, can a man put away his wife for any cause? Jesus repeated the teaching that He had been giving, that if a man put away his wife and married another, except it be for fornication, he causes her to commit adultery. Whosoever marries her commits adultery.

They then closed the trap. How is it then that Moses said, let him give her a writing of a bill of divorcement? Jesus responded (you see, we've got You. You're giving something contrary to what Moses said.) Jesus said that Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, said, let him give her a writing of a bill of divorcement, but from the beginning it was not so. So Jesus goes back before the law. He goes back to God's original intent (Genesis 2:23-24). The original intent, was, for this cause, a man shall leave his mother and father, cleave to his wife. The two shall become one flesh therefore those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

So Paul is going again to the original intent of God for marriage. If she departs, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away or divorce his wife.

¹²*But to the rest* (To the rest of the situation.) *I, not the Lord* (This is my speaking. This is my advice.), say: *If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.* ¹³*And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.* ¹⁴*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.* This is an interesting passage here. It brings up an interesting situation. We're not certain. We don't have any Scripture, where we can say, thus says the Lord, concerning children who die before they reach the age of accountability. Now we do know that God is just. We do know that God is righteous in His judgments. We do know that

whatever God does, will be right. But Paul seems to indicate here that either a believing wife or a believing husband, by their belief, puts a covering or a shelter over the child, where there are believing parents, one of the other or both, that the children in those cases are saved. They are holy, otherwise he says, they are unclean.

It could be a reference to the future. It could be a reference, actually, just to the godly influence that the children will have by the godly parent. Thus led into a holy life, rather than into just the life of the world. But it is an issue. It is an issue that should be of concern to every parent, who loves their children, that they see that their children are raised in a godly atmosphere so that if something should happen to them they would be covered or they would be saved. I don't like to live in a question mark.

Now it doesn't mean that the unbelieving husband is saved because his wife believes. Peter (1 Peter 3:1), of course, writes concerning the issue of a wife who has an unbelieving husband. Let her just live such a life before him that he will be won by her love and her righteous living.

But then Paul goes on to say and here is another thing, ¹⁵*But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.* In other words if you have a wife or a husband, you are a believer and they are not, and they say I can't stand living with you any longer. I can't stand your religion. I can't stand your reading the Bible and all. I'm not going to live this way. Let them depart. You are not, Paul said, under bondage. Now, how far can you carry that, is a matter of opinion. Does he mean that you are not under bondage to remain with them? Does that mean then that you are free to marry someone else? It's not clear enough to give you a definite "one way or the other." But there are many who do interpret that, "That you are not under the bondage of the vows that you took." That you are free, actually, now and you can marry someone else if you so desire. That's one of the interpretations and usually the common interpretation.

But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶*For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?* That is, that they will become converted as they just observe the life of Christ in you?

¹⁷*But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.* ¹⁸*Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.* Now, I really don't know how, if you are talking literally, how the right of circumcision could be undone. So we have to assume that Paul was talking about, if you come to Christ as a Jew, that is, circumcision, then don't try to discard the law completely, go ahead and continue in the things of the law. And surely the early church in Jerusalem, they did observe much of the Jewish law. In fact, they had many within the church in Jerusalem, who were strong adherents to the keeping of the tradition of the Jews, the keeping of the Kosher as far as you were eating and things of that nature. So Paul said, if you were called being circumcised, living under the law, the traditions of the Jews and so forth, then don't try to throw off the law, throw off these practices, but if you are called in uncircumcision, then don't seek to be circumcised.

Now there were those Jews, who had difficulty accepting Gentile believers. They thought that you could not be saved unless you were circumcised and kept the Law of Moses. They actually created division in the early church among the Gentile believers, declaring unto them, "You've got to be circumcised. You've got to keep Moses' Law, in order to be saved." So Paul stood against them. In fact they came back to Jerusalem (Acts 15). They called the council of the church to deal with this issue. It was decided in Paul's favor, so to speak, in that the Gentiles were not commanded to be circumcised or to be under the law, the ceremonial and the dietary parts of the law. So Paul is saying to abide in the calling where you were called.

Don't try to make radical changes, because ¹⁹*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.* Circumcision is really nothing. It is just a ritual. And if, you know, if it hasn't happened in your heart then it's of no value anyhow.

²⁰*Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.* ²¹*Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it (Don't worry about it.); but if you can be made free (Don't be constantly be finagling, trying to be free, but if the opportunity comes, take advantage of it.) but rather use it.* If it comes

take advantage of it, be free. But don't worry about being a slave.

²²*For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman.* You're free in Jesus! Though you may be a slave, you are the Lord's freeman! There is nothing so freeing as Jesus Christ! There are a lot of people who are slaves to their habits, to sin.

Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. ²³*You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.* ²⁴*Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.* Three times he declares this. What's important is what's gone on in your heart. Don't try and make these radical changes from not being a Jew to being a Jew or from being a Jew to being a Gentile. If you are a slave don't struggle to be free. Wherein God has called you, just be there. Abide in the calling.

²⁵*Now concerning virgins* (So now he goes from the married to the unmarried.): (He acknowledges) *I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.* ²⁶*I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress* (I told you that at that time there was the threat of Roman persecution of the church. There had been some initial indications of this from Rome.)

So for the present distress, I say,—*that it is good for a man to remain as he is:* ²⁷*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.* ²⁸*But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.* In other words, Paul is acknowledging that if you get married and say you are facing martyrdom, being married would make it more difficult to maintain your stand for Jesus Christ. I would spare you. Things are going to be tough. Our futures are foreshortened. He is going to tell them in a moment. So I would spare you. However, it's not a sin to get married.

²⁹*But this I say, brethren, the time is short* (our futures are foreshortened), *so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,* Now that has to be taken in context. Don't just run with that. In verse thirty-two he says, but I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. So he is telling you that you need to live to please the Lord. Time is short! The time is short. We don't have much time. And so if you are married, live to please the Lord, don't live to please the world.

³⁰*those who weep as though they did not weep* (We don't have time to indulge ourselves in sorrows nor do we have time to indulge ourselves in joys.), *those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess,* Don't get into the material things of this world. Don't get caught up in the material possessions that they begin to possess you.

³¹*and those who use this world as not misusing it.* Keeping a light touch with the world and worldly things. Be as light as possible. *For the form of this world is passing away.* The time is short. We don't have time for a lot of extraneousness, unnecessary things, encumbrances, as was written in Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1-2). Let us lay aside every weight and sin which so easily ensnares us. So get rid of those encumbrances that would weigh you down, that would hinder your race.

³²*But I want you to be without care.* Now the cares of this life, Jesus said, and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things, choke out other things for a persons' fruitfulness for Jesus. The Bible says, be careful for nothing. It means be anxious for nothing. Don't be worried about things.

I have a friend that used to be one of the most carefree, easy-going fellows that you would ever want to be around. He was just a lot of fun. He was always joking, always kidding around. He was just a pleasant, pleasant, fellow to be around. He owned a business. The business became very successful. He became a very wealthy man. But unfortunately, he was no longer that carefree, fun-loving fellow. In fact, he began to walk the streets at night. At one or two o'clock in the morning, you would find him walking the streets. He couldn't sleep. He was so worried about all of the wealth that he had amassed. All of the things that he now possessed, and he would walk and try to figure out how he can best protect himself and protect the things

that he has. Night after night he would walk the streets because he couldn't sleep because he was so worried about his wealth. He finally died of a heart attack. That's tragic!

Paul said, that I would have you without cares. I don't want you to be worried about things and so if you possess, be as though you didn't possess them. In other words, don't let them possess you. I want you to be without care.

Now, he said, *He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord.* ³³*But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please his wife.* ³⁴*There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please her husband.* ³⁵*And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.* So, he's really sort of advocating the celibate life because of the ability for a greater dedication, a single-ness of purpose. Serving the Lord. If you are married you are going to have sort of this desire to serve the Lord but yet the responsibilities of pleasing your husband or your wife. I'd rather you'd be able to serve the Lord without distraction.

³⁶*But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.* In other words there were those who made a covenant or a vow or a pledge. You know they said, they were not going get married, I'm going to live for the Lord.

We had that around here back in the seventies. We had a bunch of fellows that got together and formed a club, "Bachelor to the Rapture." And these guys decided they were going to live celibate lives and just get out and serve the Lord and you know, just travel freely, going where ever the Lord calls and were bachelors to the Rapture. Well, the club sort of dissolved. I don't think that there are any members left.

But Paul said, that's all right, you don't sin, you know, if you find that you cannot live a celibate life. You're not to try unless God has given you that gift of celibacy. Of course, unless you do have the gift of celibacy, it is really difficult and really can become a great problem as we have observed lately. Unless a person has a gift of celibacy, it's better not to try.

³⁷*Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart* (I mean "Bachelors to the Rapture", if you stand steadfast in your heart.), *having no necessity* (That's the key! You don't have the strong sexual urges.), *but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.* ³⁸*So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.* (According to Paul. I don't agree with him, but he said it was just his opinion. I have my opinion.)

³⁹*A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.* Make sure that the man that you chose, loves the Lord!

⁴⁰*But she is happier* (Paul said) *if she remains as she is, according to my judgment* (Acknowledging that it was his judgement)--*and I think I also have the Spirit of God.*

So we have instructions, practical instructions, concerning marriage. Basically, it's good to be married. It's better to be married if you don't have the gift of celibacy. Paul was advocating celibacy for those who had the capacity or the ability and the gift. The idea is serving the Lord with greater freedom and mobility.

When I first went into the ministry, I wasn't married. I understand what Paul is saying. I traveled across the country. I took off for Missouri and I had a bag of apricots in my car. That's all I needed! I'd pull aside the road at night and went to sleep. When I woke up, I got up and you know, just drove again. I wouldn't think of stopping at a restaurant. I wanted to get there. I traveled very freely. I didn't need much. I remember, very clearly, after Kay and I were married, we were living in Prescott, coming back to California. She suggested that she was hungry and wanted a cup of coffee. I wanted to get home. I didn't want to stop. It would take an hour! But I stopped. And I began to understand the seventh chapter of First Corinthians. How he may please his wife.

So, we have good instructions, good advice for the married couples and for the singles, for all of us.

Father, we thank You that the Word of God is so practical and deals with the practical issues of marriage,

of singleness, of service to You. Lord, we thank You for the counsel and the advice that is given by Paul. And Lord, we just pray that You will guide each of us in our calling. And Lord, if there are those that You have called and You have given them the gift of celibacy, may they use that, the freedom that they experience in it. That they may get out and to be Your slave, to serve You, in that freedom that is allowed them by being single. To those of us who are married, may we render due benevolence to our spouses, care, love, concern, consideration, seeking to please them, Lord. For those that are here who have spouses who are not believers, help them Lord, and strengthen them. And Lord may their lives so reflect You that their spouses will be brought to conviction of their sin and their need of Jesus Christ. We thank You, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.