

*God's Wisdom in an Age of Confusion*  
**1 Corinthians 7:1-16**  
*Exalting Christ in Marriage*

**Introduction**

Good morning! Welcome to EBC, please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians.

*Why we are studying 1 Corinthians*

This letter gives us moral clarity in an age of confusion. It's critical in our day that we learn to think God's thoughts after Him, and allow the scripture to mold and shape our minds/hearts concerning how to think about important issues of life, marriage, gender, sexuality – all of which are contested and up for grabs in our culture. So, I realize that the last couple of weeks working through chapter 6 has brought up topics which are challenging and uncomfortable to talk about in church – at least publicly. However, friends, if we are going to take the whole counsel of God into consideration – and if I am going to preach it – then we have no choice but to take what God has given us and deal with it. So, I want you to know that my commitment to you as one of your pastors is to give you the whole counsel of God, as best I can, and go where the text takes me.

*Is Paul inconsistent?*

As we move into chapter 7, Paul is going to address issues of marriage, divorce and singleness. This chapter is interesting in that it is a mix of opinions/convictions from Paul as well as directives that are also from God coming through Paul.

However, the main thing I want you to see is what Paul desperately wants for the Corinthians, and what he desperately wants for us. The reason I think this section is here and given to us as inspired scripture is not because we have to follow all of Paul's directives here – as we will see over the next few weeks not all of them apply – but, the heart behind it all is the very key. And this is what we don't want to miss...

So, whether you are here this morning as someone who is single, married, divorced, widowed, I hope you hear the plea of Paul.

Let's pray...

**Background to Corinth: Review**

*Laying the Christ-exalting foundation for Christian identity and morals*

The big challenge Paul faces is forming their identity. As I have tried to show you, **IDENTITY INFORMS BEHAVIOR**. As followers of Jesus, we are *people who have been given new desires for a new destiny: fellowship with Christ!*

Last week Paul warned the Corinthians to not go back to their former practices, particularly visiting the temple-cult prostitutes. Unlike the views in Corinth, Paul says that immorality actually damages the body. And that our bodies have actually been bought with a price, and have become one with Jesus in the Spirit, that they are now temples of the Holy Spirit, and that we are to glorify God with our bodies, as they are destined for resurrection and eternity. I showed you a parallel passage from Philippians where Paul expresses his desire that Christ would be exalted in his body, whether by living or dying. We too are to have that same purpose in our lives.

Which leads us to our text...

**Exposition of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16**

*Should we just give up on marriage?*

1 Cor. 7:1

This phrase we have as “touch” is a Jewish euphemism referring to marital intimacy. So why the negativity from Paul?

Another cultural cliché? Some see this as Paul’s own word – which is possible but why the pessimism? If, on the other hand, it’s another cultural cliché, then we can see Paul critiquing the Corinthians’ position. It would seem that some, in reaction against the immorality of the culture and in becoming Christians, are going to the other extreme by saying that they should just quit marrying altogether, and those who are married should withhold themselves from one another and, in some extreme cases, get a divorce.

The main reason I am going with this second view is that the statement in verse 1 seems to be at odds with what God said about human beings back in the Garden in Genesis 2. Do you remember? He said it was “NOT good for the man to be alone.” Paul, as a first century Jew, certainly knew this text and would uphold the goodness and gift of holy marriage.

So, the Corinthians position would have been something like this:

*“Since you [Paul] yourself are unmarried, and are not actively seeking marriage, and since you have denied porneia in your letter to us, is it not so that one is better off not to have [marital relations] at all? After all, in the new age which we have already entered by the Spirit, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Why should we not ‘be as angels’ now? Besides, since the body counts for nothing, if some wish to fulfill physical needs there [is always the temple-services].” – Summary by NT scholar Gordon Fee*

Paul’s response:

*Stop depriving each other!*

1 Cor. 7:2-6

Let’s try and unpack this carefully. Some of the Corinthians seemed to be settling for “spiritual” marriage without intimacy, as a way of being more “holy.” Paul says this is not a good idea for practical purposes (the immoral culture around you), but also you are not fulfilling the Lord’s purpose for your marriage. Your bodies belong one to another; and glorifying God in marriage is to give the gift of the body to the other. When one withholds, purposely, from the other, it can cause deep and significant damage to the union. The union is to be fed, nurtured, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. And so, it’s a mutual partnership. So, the concession is (Paul speaking) that you can take breaks to focus on prayer/fasting, but that shouldn’t be the norm.

*Widows & Unmarried: It’s better to remain single*

1 Cor. 7:7

Why would Paul say this?

*Better to marry than to “burn”*

1 Cor. 7:8-9

So, if it’s hard not to be married when you are single, then by all means get married! It’s a good thing to be married! (As long as it’s in the Lord). We will have more to say on singleness in a couple of weeks. Stay tuned!

*No divorce for Christian marriages*

1 Cor. 7:10-11

Important to keep context in mind here, friends. The Corinthians were “over-spiritualizing” here. But the principle applies that Christian couples, who are committed to Jesus, should be committed to one another and stay that way. Why? Two reasons: one, it’s not an appropriate witness to the gospel. Second, as Christians, we have the spiritual resources to make a marriage work.

*What about spiritually mixed marriages?*

1 Cor. 7:12-16

Here Paul says that if the unbelieving partner wishes to stay, then the believing partner should not divorce them. Instead, they are having a sanctifying influence that could lead to salvation. Interesting that he seems to have a high view of God’s grace working through the saved marriage partner. What does sanctified mean? It literally means “set apart”, so I think the best way to take it is they are set-apart to the Lord’s influence through the ministry of the believing spouse to the family.

What’s underneath all of this?

*Paul’s earnest desire: Undistracted Devotion to the Lord*

For a moment, let’s step away from these verses and go to verse 35. Here is the key:

*Undistracted devotion to the Lord*

1 Cor. 7:35

ESV – “but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”

NET – “so that without distraction you may give notable and constant service to the Lord.”

NIV – “that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”

NLT – “I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.”

Philips – “I tell you these things to help you; I am not putting difficulties in your path but setting before you an ideal, so that your service of God may be as far as possible free from worldly distractions.”

**Main Idea:**

*Christian marriage is a gift from God, and should be esteemed as such by believers, even when such marriages happen to be “spiritually-mixed” or fraught with difficulties*

**Application: Staying Devoted to Christ despite Marriage Difficulties**

*Hope for spiritually-mixed marriages*

*Hope for struggling Christian marriages*

- Resolve to never using the “D”-word
- Refuse to let the “sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26)
- Commit to practicing “resurrection” in your relationship

## Exalting Christ in Marriage

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1 Cor. 7:35

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### **Questions for Small Groups:**

- 1) How are the Corinthians misunderstanding the purpose of marriage? (v. 1)
- 2) Why do you think Paul prefers the unmarried to stay single? (hint: see v. 35)
- 3) What are the spiritual benefits of remaining in a spiritually-mixed marriage?
- 4) How might God be calling you to “practice resurrection” in your marriage?

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