

## **Parson to Person**

### **1 Corinthians 7 (Part 2)**

#### **(Singleness, Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage—The Biblical Positions)**

The Corinthians had written Paul asking several questions. However, prior to getting to their questions, he dealt with the things he had heard about from the “household of Chloe” (1 Corinthians 1:11). He then gave specific instructions to the Church about issues necessary for their wellbeing.

#### **Questions**

In chapter 7 Paul began with singleness and moved on into human sexuality and intimacy in marriage, prohibitions against divorce, living with an unsaved spouse, the children of mixed worldview and mixed-faith parents, what to do about and/or how to approach the departure of an unsaved spouse, and the way all believers should prioritize living in these last days.

It is clear that Paul was single—and advocated for singleness. However, he understood the God-ordained marriage covenant and clearly supported marriage and procreation, while warning against divorce.

#### **Is Singleness OK?**

The first thing Paul addressed must have been a question about singleness. He wrote, “*Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (vs. 1). This statement was not a suggestion concerning the virtues or high water mark of singleness. No, it appears to be an answer to

the question, “Is it ok to be single?” To this question Paul gave affirmation! In a sense he said, “Yes! It is ok to be single.”

He elaborated on this throughout the chapter when he wrote, *“I wish that all men were even as I myself”* (vs. 7); *“It is good...if they remain even as I am”* (vs. 8); *“because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is... Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife”* (vss. 26–27); *“I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord”* (vs. 32); *“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”* (vs. 35); and finally, to women who had been widowed he wrote, *“happier if she remains as she is, [single] according to my judgment”* (vs. 40).

### **Is it OK to Marry?**

Inasmuch as Paul clearly advocated for singleness, he also knew that marriage would help solve the horrible propensity toward fornication embraced by the Corinthians. He wrote, *“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband”* (vs. 2). He then added, *“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband”* (vs. 3).

Of note is the fact that Paul was not teaching a man or woman to extract sexual gratification from his or her spouse. He used the word *“render”* and *“due”* to show that it was about giving and serving—not taking. However, when he wrote *“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” (vs. 4), he was indicating that once married, there is no “self.” As married, a husband and wife belong to one another. Moreover, in the event some in Corinth were thinking that sex was base, or that the spiritually lofty might suggest abstinence and/or celibacy—even among the married—as virtuous, he wrote, “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.” (vs. 5).*

His caveat, *“But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment” (vs. 6), was nevertheless focused on his preferred lifestyle: “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. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (vss. 7–9).*

## **Divorce?**

The Old Testament Scriptures were clear and final concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage—this the Corinthians understood. Therefore, Paul wrote, *“to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 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” (vss. 10–11).*

Under Old Covenant, adultery was punishable by death; therefore, divorce was unnecessary in the event of adultery.

Furthermore, if one's spouse died, the living party was free to remarry without causing any future adultery.

## **The Specifics of Fornication**

Concerning the problem of fornication Jesus said, *"I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality [porneia/fornication, not morchio/adultery] causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery"* (Matthew 5:32). Moreover, Jesus said, *"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so"* (Matthew 19:8). Therefore, we need help with the insights provided.

### **1)The Hardness of Heart**

One might suggest that the hardness of heart was related to a failure in keeping the Law. If the Children of Israel were refusing to exercise the death penalty, and nevertheless wanted to end a marriage, Moses allowed them to divorce by writing a certificate of divorce. If they had obeyed the Law, divorce would not have been necessary, nor would the problem of future adultery exist.

An alternative view may indicate that the Children of Israel were hard of heart toward one another and were therefore unwilling to love and abide in their marriage relationships—even in the absence of fornication or adultery. Herein I might suggest that fornication, adultery, or any other concerns

may have been grounds for forgiveness and love—not divorce. We should also note that the “concession” was not a permission or commandment—it was simply an allowance.

## **2) Fornication: Porneia—Not Morchio/Adultery**

Jesus seems to indicate that a bill of divorcement was permitted as a concession—but only for porneia: fornication. This I must explain.

In the Jewish world, a pattern of betrothal, espousal, wedding, and consummation occurred. This was the case with Mary and Joseph. Joseph was espoused to Mary when he discovered she was pregnant—with Jesus. For this reason, Joseph intended to “*put her away secretly*” (Mathew 1:19). Effectively, the “putting away” would have been caused by what Joseph perceived to be Mary’s infidelity (porneia)—a justifiable cause for “divorce.” Moreover, at that time, a certificate of divorce was required in order to end an engagement/betrothal—even though the couple had not yet officially married.

Please note, the cause was “fornication” (“porneia”) not “adultery” (“morchio”). Moreover, a man divorcing his wife exposes her to harm. Therefore, a divorce (even as the result of fornication) is self-protective. The alternative unselfish act would be that the husband maintain his role and protect his (then future) wife—thus removing the possibility of the

woman facing future humiliation and negative consequential action.

### **If the Unbelieving Spouse Departs**

Paul added to what the Old Covenant Law had communicated by writing, *“If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 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. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace”* (vss. 12b–15). This is the only Church Age allowance for divorce. Therefore, if a believer is married to an unbeliever, a divorce was not to be initiated by the believing spouse, but, if the unbelieving spouse “departs” (ends the marriage covenant), the remaining spouse is *“at liberty”* (vs. 39), *“not under bondage in such cases”* (vs. 15)—which I might suggest means at liberty to remarry—*“but only in the Lord”* (vs. 39). However, Paul would advise remaining single (see vs. 40).

Note: In the text we have a mention of children born into a mixed marital union. Suffice it to say, the children are blessed by being born to a believing parent.

## The Matthew 18 Principle

The question of a person's faith is brought into view by the case mentioned herein. Many profess faith, but are "unbelievers." On the other hand, many genuinely born again believers are or have been disobedient. God alone knows those who are His. Therefore, we must be cautious when making a decision about the genuineness of another's faith or eternal destiny.

When a professing believer departs from their spouse, against the will and or participation of that spouse, one is left with the question of the departing person's genuineness of faith. To this I might suggest that if an error in judgment may occur, we error on the side of grace—by allowing freedom to the one abandoned. However, I would also suggest waiting on the Lord for the possible restoration of the marriage until at least such a time as the former spouse dies or re-marries.

Many churches have not condemned divorce, and have likewise failed to make it a matter of church discipline. However, according to the Matthew 18:15–17, those who refuse to obey the Word, as administered by Church leadership, are to be treated as unbelievers. This does not suggest that the one(s) under church discipline are damned to hell, or have "lost their salvation," but as Jesus puts it, "*let him [or her] be to you like a heathen and a tax collector*" (Matthew 18:17b). Therefore, the one "departing" may be classified an unbeliever.

**To Be continued...**

I love you all,  
Pastor Paul