

**Principles of
Marriage in
View of the
“Present Distress”**



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Important Context

- The Corinthians appeared to have questions about the matters which Paul discusses in this passage. The questions specifically seem to appear in light of the "**present distress**" (v.26), whatever that may have been.
- Whatever the "**present distress**" was, Christians who were married or desired to marry could expect "**trouble in the flesh**" (v.28).
- Paul was concerned that the cares of married life might keep some from serving the Lord "**without distraction**" (v.32-35). He, therefore, cautions against marrying in this passage.
- In spite of the "**present distress**" and in spite of many brethren's false claims and false doctrines on MD&R, there is nothing uninspired nor contradictory about 1 Cor. 7.

V.1 - Addressing Questions

Now concerning the things of
which you wrote to me (v.1a)

- **“Now concerning”** appears throughout this epistle (1 Cor. 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12), as well as once in the second letter (2 Cor. 9:1).
- It may not be that in every case Paul was addressing specific questions the Corinthians had, but the majority of instances appear to indicate this is the general idea, that Paul was addressing and providing inspired answers to their questions.
 - At the very least, this phrase indicates a shift in focus is occurring.

V.1 - Addressing Questions

It is good for a man not to touch a woman (v.1b)

- There is debate about whether “touch a woman” refers to:
 - illicit sexual activity,
 - marriage, or
 - approved sexual activity in a marriage.
- There are even discrepancies among translations:
 - **ESV** - Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have **sexual relations** with a woman.”
 - **ISV** - Now about what you asked: “Is it advisable for a man not to **touch a woman inappropriately?**”
 - **GNT** - Now, to deal with the matters you wrote about. **A man does well not to marry.**
 - **NET** - Now with regard to the issues you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have **sexual relations** with a woman.”

V.1 - Addressing Questions

It is good for a man not to touch a woman (v.1b)

- The word marriage is at times used interchangeably with sexual activity.
 - **"it is better to marry than to burn with passion"** (1 Cor. 7:9).
- Consider some commentaries on v.1b:
 - **NET Translator Footnotes** - "It is good for a man not to touch a woman: A euphemism for **sexual relations**. This idiom occurs ten times in Greek literature, and all of the references except one appear to refer to sexual relations."
 - **Gill's Exposition** - "It is good for a man not to touch a woman; which is to be understood, not of merely touching a woman . . . nor of the matrimonial contract, which is lawful and honourable; but of **the act of carnal copulation with a woman**: in this sense the Jews use the phrase."
 - **Pulpit Commentaries** - "Not to touch a woman . . . generally '**not to marry**.'"
 - **Barnes' Notes** - "Not to touch a woman - **Not to be connected with her by marriage**."

V.1 - Addressing Questions

It is good for a man not to touch a woman (v.1b)

Possible Explanations:

- Paul is referring to illicit sexual activity because he says it's not good for a man to have sexual relations with just a **WOMAN** (v.1); he should only do so with his **WIFE** (v.2).
 - Such teaching is supported by the scriptures but doesn't seem to fit the context.
- Paul is simply restating the Corinthians' question in v.1 and agreeing that celibacy is generally a good thing, but is saying there is no need for celibacy in marriage, in general.
 - I agree that Paul is restating the Corinthians' question, but I'm not sure the latter is what the verse is teaching.
- Paul uses "**touch a woman**" figuratively for marriage, thus saying it was better to be unmarried in view of the "**present distress.**" However, due to sexual immorality, it is still perfectly acceptable to marry.
 - This is the strongest argument to me.

V.1 - Addressing Questions

It is good for a man not to touch a woman (v.1b)

- Whatever the case, on the surface v.1b appears to contradict other passages, such as Gen. 2:18.
- But Paul's words do not contradict any passage. Instead, Paul is continuing a thought presented at the end of the previous chapter (1 Cor. 6), and that thought is:
 - ¹⁸ **Flee sexual immorality.** Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

V.2 - Marriage and Sexual Activity

Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband

Two immediate observations:

- 1) Polygamy is prohibited by this passage. Each man is to have his own "**wife**," not wives. Each woman is to have her own "**husband**," not husbands.
 - 2) Homosexuality is prohibited. Paul does not say that each man is to have his own wife OR husband. Likewise, Paul does not say that each woman is to have her own husband OR wife.
- A man can have a wife and a woman can have a husband, nothing more or different. Marriage is only between a man and a woman and sexual intimacy is only authorized between a scripturally married husband and a wife.
 - Sexual immorality was so prevalent during the first century that it is discussed in nearly every epistle that Paul wrote (see 1 Cor. 5, 6:9-18; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:7).

V.3-5 - Marital Duties / Obligations

➤ **"Affection"** (sexual fulfillment) is something a husband and wife owe each other. It is **"due"** each one; it is their **"duty"** (NASB).

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 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. 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.

- It is not good for man (or woman) to be alone because when we are, we can easily fall victim to sexual immorality (v.7).
- Self-control, especially in regards to sexual activity, is not something easily obtained, nor is it easily maintained; it's also a gift.
 - **"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"** (v.7).

V.3-5 - Marital Duties / Obligations

➤ Eph. 5:31-32 and 2 Cor. 11:2 illustrate how marriage was designed by God as a mirrored image of the relationship He wants with us.

- In the marital relationship, there is a giving over of the body, and in our spiritual relationship with God, we are also to give our bodies.
- "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1).
- Sex exemplifies a giving of the body because "the wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife" (1 Cor. 7:4, ESV).

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 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. 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.

V.5-6 - A Concession

➤ In v.6, Paul says spouses coming apart (ceasing sexual activity) was granted as a "**concession.**"

➤ Paul was not allowing marital separation. Here is how we know this:

- "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: **A wife is not to depart** [chorizo] **from her husband**" (1 Cor. 7:10).

➤ "Chorizo" is the same word that appears in Matt. 19:6 for separation:

- "Therefore what God has joined together, **let not man separate** [chorizo]."

➤ Thayer defines "chorizo" as "to separate, divide, part, put asunder, to separate one's self from, to depart."

➤ Not only does "chorizo" not appear in v.5-6 signifying marital separation, the context itself never indicates such is under consideration.

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. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

V.8-9 - Unmarried and Widows

- Two groups are under consideration: **“unmarried”** and **“widows.”**
- Many want to include the divorced in the category of **“unmarried,”** thus claiming there is no such thing as an unscriptural remarriage since Paul says, **“If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry.”**
- Yet, as we will see in v.10-11, **Paul does not have the divorced in mind during v.8-9.**
- Paul also says there is nothing wrong with a person deciding to stay single (**“It is good for them if they remain even as I am”**). It can be **“good”** that they are not married because they can be dedicated to the Lord in an even greater way than those who are married.
 - “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” (1 Cor. 7:32-33).

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.

V.8-9 - Unmarried and Widows

- Later in the chapter, we see that widows are given a specific qualification as to who they can marry.
 - “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**” (1 Cor. 7:39).

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.

Three common interpretations of the command for widows to marry “**only in the Lord:**”

- 1) The instruction is limited to the “**present distress**” and is no longer applicable.
- 2) The phrase “**in the Lord**” means “according to God’s will.” So, she is free to marry whom she wishes as long as both he and she have a right to marry.
- 3) The phrase “**in the Lord**” is equivalent to “in Christ.” So, if she wishes to marry, she must choose a man who is a Christian.
 - **#3 IS DTS’S VIEW** (see Rom. 16; 2 Cor. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:5).

V.10-11 - Repeating the Lord's Teaching

- **"Yet not I but the Lord"** signifies Paul is repeating what the Lord taught during His earthly ministry in Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9; Luke 16:18; etc.
- He is essentially saying, "I'm not telling you anything new; Jesus already addressed this."
- "A husband is not to **divorce** [aphiemi] his wife."
 - "To send away; to bid going away or depart; of a husband divorcing his wife" (Thayer).
- This is a different Greek word than what appears in Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9; and their parallel accounts. There, the word for divorce is translated from the Greek word "apoluo" (also translated "put away" in the KJV).
- Apoluo - When speaking of a captive, "to loose his bonds;" When speaking of the marital relationship, "used of divorce, to dismiss from the house, to repudiate" (Thayer).

Now 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.

Looking at the Original Greek

APOLUO

(MATT. 5:32, 19:9)

- Used of divorce, to dismiss from the house, to repudiate (Thayer).

CHORIZO

(MATT. 19:6; 1 COR. 7:10)

- To separate, divide, part, put asunder, to separate one's self from, to depart (Thayer).

APHIEMI

(1 COR. 7:11)

- To send away; to bid going away or depart; of a husband divorcing his wife (Thayer).

Termination of Marriage

Marital Separation or Termination of a Marriage

Termination of Marriage

Both condemned by 1 Cor 7:10-11

V.10-11 - Repeating the Lord's Teaching

- Mental divorce advocates contend that after a wrongful divorce of an unwilling mate, the couple are still married for as long as they are bound. 1 Cor. 7:10-11 disproves this though.
- When a person wrongfully divorces an unwilling mate (that is what occurs in 1 Cor. 7:10-11), God calls them "**unmarried.**" They were once married, but are now unmarried due to what civil law has authorized.
- This tells us that the bond and the marriage are not the same thing, as well as telling us that God recognizes (although not authorizes) ALL civil divorces. In other words, a civil divorce is a real divorce (see Mark 6:17; Matt. 19:9; Matt. 5:32).
- This "**unmarried**" category is clearly different from the "**unmarried**" group mentioned in v.8-9 because the unmarried in v.10-11 have no right to remarry. They have two options:
 - 1) Remain unmarried,
 - 2) Or be reconciled.

Now 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.

V.10-11 - Repeating the Lord's Teaching

- Many argue that this passage teaches that divorce is not a sin as long as no remarriage follows. However, that argument completely contradicts what Jesus taught in Matt. 5:32.
 - **“whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery.”**
- Remarriage isn't even mentioned in the first half of the verse. Divorce is condemned, with only one exception.
- The same language of “don't do this, but if you do . . .” is found in 1 John 2:1:
 - “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (ESV).
- When Paul says, “if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband,” he is simply providing the options of what to do if a departing occurs, not granting license to depart.

Now 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.

V.10-11 - Repeating the Lord's Teaching

- Some say 1 Cor. 7:10-11 speaks only about marriages between two Christians. However, this passage speaks to all marriages, just like Matt. 19:9.
- When Jesus gave the same command as Paul did in these verses, He was speaking to the Jews. Did Jesus' teaching only apply to the Jews? No. Was He only giving the law for Israel and those under the Law of Moses? No, because He quoted Gen. 2:24, which goes all the way back to creation.
- Who was God giving marriage to in Genesis? These marriage laws were not given to Christians, because Christians did not exist yet, nor were these laws given to Israel because Israel did not exist yet either. God gave these laws to Adam and Eve, and therefore to all of humanity.
- It does not matter if you are a believer or unbeliever. God's marriage laws are universal and apply to all people at all times, including alien sinners.

Now 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.

V.12-16 - Addressing What Jesus Did Not

- **“To the rest I, not the Lord”** signifies Paul is addressing things Jesus did not specifically address during His earthly ministry.
- Again we see that God’s general rule is DO NOT DIVORCE.
- Much debate has come from the statement, “If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under **bondage** [enslaved, ESV] in such cases.”
- **“Not under bondage”** DOES NOT mean the marriage bond of Rom. 7:2-3 is loosed. Instead, it means the innocent party is not obligated to be enslaved to that person fulfilling their marital obligations.

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: 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. 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?

V.12-16 - Addressing What Jesus Did Not

➤ We know a person deserted by a spouse has not right to remarry because:

- **v.11** - "even if she does depart, **let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.**"
- **Luke 16:18** - "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and **whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.**"

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: 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. 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?

V.12-16 - Addressing What Jesus Did Not

➤ The reason believers should not divorce their unbelieving spouses is found in v.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?"

➤ This idea is also taught in 1 Pet. 3:1-2:

- "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear."

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: 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. 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?

V.12-16 - Addressing What Jesus Did Not

- Does this passage provide authority for a Christian to marry a non-Christian? I contend it does not.
- Whereas 1 Cor. 7:12-16 explains the reason why the believing spouse must not depart from the marriage, 1 Peter 3:1-2 explains how the believer should act in that marriage if they want to save their unbelieving spouse.
- Neither passage speaks about the act of entering such a relationship; they only explain what to do once in it.
- Consider further 2 Cor. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 5:17.

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: 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. 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?

V.12-16 - Addressing What Jesus Did Not

Sanctified, Not Saved

- A person's unbelieving spouse is "**sanctified**" (not saved) by the believing spouse.
- Every person is responsible for his own salvation (see 1 Cor. 3:13; Gal 6:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; Rom. 14:12; Mark 16:16). Forgiveness of sins of sins cannot be transferred from one individual to another (Ezek. 18:20).
- This appears to be one of the Corinthians' questions: Is the marriage unclean? If so, do we need to terminate the relationship? (see Ezra 10).

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: 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. 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?

- Paul refutes this by saying if the unbelieving spouse is unclean then the children are also unclean, but neither are unclean under the law of Christ.