

Now Paul Answers Their Questions. In the first 6 chapters Paul solemnly admonishes the Corinthians for their spiritual condition. He knew this from reports he received from locals. He did not give credence to anonymous reports but names his sources. Now he proceeds to respond to several questions they had asked him. The first is regarding marriage. Chapter 7 is a comprehensive instruction on what may be said to be the second most important decision one makes in life. (The most important is to trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.)

There are many other passages that speak of marriage (See Matthew 5:27 & 19:3-12; Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 5:22-31; Colossians 3:18-19; 1Thess 4:3-7; Hebrews 13:4), but here most practical issues are systematically treated. The city of Corinth was a mess morally. The Corinthians having been raised in this and living in the midst of it were understandably confused about relationships between men and women. We live in similar conditions today. Chapter 5 deals with open fornication and infidelity. Chapter 6 denounces sexual sins as being against one's own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. This leads to the discussion of marriage here in chapter 7.

What Paul writes is based upon what the Lord Himself has said as recorded in the Gospels. In this chapter he marks out the Lord's statements, but as the Lord's apostle he fills in more detail especially suited for the post-Pentecost age we now live in. All this is now to be considered to be the inspired word of God.

He takes up the alternative issue of remaining single, then he works through the permanency of marriage, separation, marriages between believers and unbelievers, and perspective on things to consider in decision making regarding life and particularly marriage.

Inspired scripture states:

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled."

God Himself invented marriage, instituted it and encourages it. It is the norm for mankind. This is the subject of the first seven verses of chapter 7. There is indeed a case for remaining unmarried, but he immediately reaffirms the sinfulness of fornication. Any sexual intimacy outside of marriage is sinful. The only reason given for intentionally remaining single is to better enable serving the Lord. There is absolutely no hint of celibacy being required of any one for any

reason. In fact, Paul condemns those who forbid marriage (particularly for religious reasons), 1Timothy 4:1-3. The Lord states that to intentionally remain single requires a special gift and calling from God. Those who have that gift and forgo marriage in order to serve the Lord are blessed if they do so. Remaining unmarried otherwise may open a person to powerful temptations they would avoid if married, Matthew 19:3-12 (especially 10-12). There is no merit in the act itself of intentionally remaining single, Colossians 2:23.

Matthew 19:10 - 12 All [men] cannot receive this saying, save [they] to whom it is given ... He that is able to receive [it], let him receive [it].

When married, the spouses belong to each other.

They are equal in this respect, even though the husband is head, Ephesians 5:23. While in most cases the initiative and leadership in forming and maintaining a male/female relationship seems to be the responsibility of the man, the intimacies are equally due each gender. Neither uses the other, yet each truly belongs to the other. Of course, for they are to love each other. Sensitivity and consideration govern, so these are not rights demanded but privileges granted. On the other hand, intimacy is not to be withheld for any reason other than by mutual agreement and then only for a spiritual reason, such as prayer and fasting. (I suppose health and fatigue issues would also be a practical consideration) Either one initiates and the other reciprocates. To use it to coerce or as a weapon dishonors the One who created marriage.

The permanence of marriage is insisted upon next. Neither spouse is to break up the marriage. This is the Lord's direct command, taken from the gospels. Matthew 5:31,32; Mark 10:11,12; Luke 16:18. Here an interesting gender distinction in the statements is apparent. (The wording here may be one reason for the form our wedding ceremonies usually take.) The wife is not to depart from the husband. The husband is not to put away his wife. In the wedding ceremony he "takes her." He is not then to put her away undoing what he has done and promised to do. The wife is not to leave. In the wedding she comes (usually escorted) to him. She is not to leave him and break her promises to him.

The wife is directed to not remarry. (This shows that this does not refer to what is known as a

legal separation available in our nation, but to be truly divorced and legally allowed to remarry). Apparently she is not to remarry even if divorced. The husband is under a stricter burden. He is not to leave her at all. I see the difference here as permitting temporary separation in cases of an abusive husband who may endanger his wife or children.

Such should normally be disciplined by the assembly. See chapter 5. Disputes that can't be resolved personally should be taken up and settled before believers rather than in court. See chapter 6.

These statements regarding separation are the Lord's, and are not optional. But the Lord Himself seems to have allowed an escape for one whose spouse is unfaithful and commits adultery.

Matthew 5:27, 19:9. . . except it be for fornication. . .

The faithful spouse is allowed to escape from one who

is continuing an adulterous relationship. This is a very narrow gate offered because of the hardness of our hearts.

It does not allow for a separated couple to wait for one or the other to succumb to temptation and take up with another thereby permitting the one who out waits the other to remarry. This would not be Christian love in action. Rather if separation occurs, the intent is that reconciliation occur. Room is to be left for that. That is the norm.

These are the general principles. Special cases will be taken up next. This is a controversial subject. Was then, still is. We will do best to stick very close to scripture and the intent and desire of the Lord regarding marriage.

By Ron Canner, March 19, 2003