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1 Corinthians 7:1-40



1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul responds to various questions from the Corinthians regarding asceticism, celibacy, and marriage, among other issues. He offers advice on remaining celibate, addressing temptation, and the moral implications of sex and marriage. Paul also discusses divorce, remarriage, and being married to non-believers. He emphasizes the importance of serving God without distraction and prioritizing eternal judgments over temporal comforts. Ultimately, he suggests that individuals should follow their own calling to serve God.

Transcript

Okay, today we studied 1 Corinthians 7. It's a somewhat longer chapter than most of the chapters in 1 Corinthians that we've covered up to this point. In fact, we've had chapters that are as short as 13 verses in the case of chapter 5, and about 20 verses or so would be kind of average, it looks like. This chapter, however, is a little bit longer.

It's a little bit shorter in the case of chapter 5, and it's a little bit longer in the case of chapter 6, and it's a little bit longer in the case of chapter 7. The length of this chapter is 40 verses long, which is fully twice the length of chapter 6, and yet we have the same amount of time to cover it. That is one session. I would feel bad if we had to take two sessions to cover it.

Sometimes we've had to. I'm hoping that won't be the case today. Paul at chapter 7 begins something of a new departure.

He says, It seems clear that he received a letter from them. There's no other way to understand those words. And that he is now beginning to address some things that were in their letter that they wrote to him.

Apparently some questions. There was some confusion on some issues. And it's probable that we can deduce what was in their letter, though of course it's been lost and we don't have it, from what he says, especially when he says, Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me.

In verse 25 also says, Now concerning virgins. And in verse 1 of chapter 8, Now concerning things offered to idols. And chapter 12, verse 1, Now concerning spiritual gifts.

Every time he says, Now concerning, it may be that he's addressing yet another point that had been raised in the letter that they had sent to him. And the letter, no doubt, arose because there were some contentions, as we are aware. In the church in Corinth, there were different opinions.

We are aware, of course, of camps that were aligning between Paul, Apollos, and so forth. But there may have even been in Corinth something more dangerous. And that was more of a camp that was leaning toward Greek sophistry and philosophy.

And if that is so, frankly, it looks as if that is so. By many of the things Paul has to say, it looks like he's addressing errors that are based on a Greek way of looking at things, which would not be too surprising. Anyone who preaches in this country has to deal with errors in the church that arise out of American culture and American presuppositions.

The Corinthians were Greeks and had been raised in Greek culture, obviously would struggle with trying to find out how many of their Greek ideas were harmonious with their Christian faith and how many of them had to be abandoned in favor of Christian faith. And that appears to have been a problem. And one of the problems may have been an asceticism may have been advocated that recommended celibacy as the highest way of life.

Celibacy meaning just remaining unmarried and being sexually inactive for an entire lifetime, suppressing sexual desire would be considered to be a more noble, more spiritual course than to be married or certainly to have any other kind of outlet for sexual desire. Now, we know that in Corinth there were people who were pretty libertine in this area. And I told you that the Gnostics of a later time, which reflected a merger of Greek ideas and Christianity, had two different branches.

Those that affirmed the, well, what we call Epicureanism, that basically go ahead and indulge the body because it's not going to be any better or worse for having indulged it. It's a bad body. Nothing to make it good.

And if it's going to be bad anyway, you might as well not try to be good, in which case they would recommend things like fornication. The body's made for fornication, just like the belly's made for food, they would argue. And Paul addressed that in the previous chapter.

But there were also the other branch of Gnostics, which said, well, because the body is evil, we should not indulge it. We should do everything we can to punish it. It's an evil thing.

We should not give it any pleasure. We should not do anything that gives it any strength over us, that gives any affirmation to the desires of the body. And they would move toward the area of asceticism, of denying even legitimate pleasure to the body.

Again, both of these problems arise out of the total misunderstanding of the nature of the material world. We know that from the Bible that God created the material world. And when he first created it, he said it's very good.

There's nothing wrong with matter just because it's matter. But the Greeks had the idea that matter was, because of being material, was evil. And anything spiritual was good.

And that was a heresy of the, I guess, going back to Plato and possibly before Plato's time. Anyway, it's quite obvious that since the body is not in itself evil, although it is tainted in the fall by propensity towards sinfulness, but the body can be a matter, something with which we glorify God. So he said at the end of chapter six, for we've been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

He said in verse 19 of chapter six, don't you know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? This being so, it means there are moral ramifications to having a body. One can do the right thing with the body or wrong things with the body. If they do the wrong things, they're going to be defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit.

If they do the right things, they'll be living to glorify God in their body. Now, the question is, is marriage and sex and marriage, is that a right thing or a wrong thing or a good thing or a better thing? Because really what Paul addresses in this whole discussion, there are several issues, all of them related to marriage in this chapter. And he makes frequent reference to that which is good and sometimes to that which is better.

You see, Paul addresses the issue of being single. He addresses the issue of being married. He talks about the issue of being a widow.

And all of those, he says, are good. There's nothing wrong with any of them. Although he does suggest that some things are better than others in his judgment.

And in this chapter alone, really, I don't know of any other chapters in Paul's writings where he does this, he makes a distinction between what his judgment is on a matter and what he knows to be true from what the Lord said. Now, Paul, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, had to affirm what Jesus said. That's what an apostle is supposed to do.

He's supposed to stand and represent faithfully the one who discharged him. He's a steward of the mysteries of God and has to be faithful with him. But there are times when Paul had to address situations that Jesus had never had opportunity to address.

One of the things that's going to come up in this chapter is the issue of Christians married to non-Christians. Well, Jesus' audience were all Jews, married to Jews. He didn't

have to address the question of marriages that were interfaith.

And Paul had a new situation he had to address that Jesus never had been in, namely that pagans, sometimes who were already married to other pagans, would get converted, but their spouse would not get converted. And now you have a new situation never brought up in the teaching of Jesus, and that is, what do you do in a case where a marriage exists between people who are not of the same faith? And Paul has to go beyond sometimes what Jesus said, but trying to be true to what Jesus' principles were. And when he does that, he generally says, now, this is me.

This is not the Lord. This is I'm giving my judgment in this matter about three different times in this chapter. He says, I give my judgment or my my opinion in the matter.

For example, in chapter seven, verse 12, he says to the rest, I, not the Lord, say this is not the Lord. He just means Jesus. The Lord never spoke on this subject.

So I'm going to have to go a little beyond what he anything he had said in verse twenty five. He says now concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy. So he figures his judgment has got to count for something.

And then. A couple other times, actually, at least at least one of the time he gives the idea that he is giving his judgment in the matter. For instance, in verse 40, talking about widows.

Whether they should marry again or not, he says, they're free to do so. But he says, but she's happier if she remains as she is, that is unmarried, according to my judgment. And I think I also have the spirit of God.

Now, by saying I think I also have the spirit of God. He may be saying my this is my judgment, but I think also in this judgment I have the mind of God. I think I think that I mean, I know this is my opinion and my opinion is not an uninformed opinion.

I'm a very mature apostle. I've received mercy to be made trustworthy. And my opinion should count for something.

But in this, I think I also have the mind of the spirit. I could be saying that places I think have the spirit of God also. But he also could mean in that last line, I think that I also that is, in addition to people in Corinth who might think themselves more spiritual because they're ascetic or whatever.

They might think that Paul's not as spiritual as some. And he's saying, well, I, too, have the spirit of God. In other words, if there are those among you who claim to be spiritual and have the spirit of God and give instructions that are contrary to what I give you.

Well, I think I have the spirit of God, too. And my judgment should count for something. We'll go through it.

But he actually drifts from one subject to the next, probably reflecting the order of questions that were asked him. In the first verse, this is now concerning the things of which you wrote to me. It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Now, there's no way to know for sure, but many commentators believe that the statement it is good for a man not to touch a woman should be in quotation marks. Even as I mentioned earlier, when Paul says all things are lawful to me on several occasions that many commentators feel that that expression, all things are lawful to me, should be in quotation marks. Whether that's true or not, we don't know.

But that suggestion means that the commentators often feel that this is quoting back to them something that they are saying. But he wants to modify it a little bit when they say all things are lawful to me. He wants to say, yeah, but not everything's edifying.

Not everything's helpful. And I certainly don't want to be brought into bondage to anything. And the similar suggestion that commentators make is that in their letter, maybe not in their letter, but maybe there were people in Corinth that Paul knew about who were saying it's good for a man not to touch a woman.

And Paul quotes that back to them, but gives a modification of it, a bit of a balance on it. Now, we can't be sure that that's what he's doing here. In fact, we can't really be sure that that's what he's doing in any of the places.

There get to be subjects about which commentators begin to be kind of in agreement in their opinion, but we don't know if their opinion is correct or not. There is no punctuation in the Greek New Testament. Therefore, you don't have in the Greek New Testament quotation marks in the places where they're suggested here.

And I guess my question would be challenging a bit of what the commentators say is, how would Paul expect them to know that he's quoting something he doesn't necessarily agree with since he didn't use quotation marks in the Greek text of his letter? If he was saying something that he didn't intend to stand by, how would he set that off? It seems like he should say, they say, or as some have claimed, or something like that. He could add such words to make it clear that he doesn't mean to affirm the thing that commentators think he's not affirming. In any case, we can't be sure.

And it doesn't matter an awful lot because Paul apparently doesn't object to the statement completely. He just wants to, if the commentators are correct, he just wants to put some balance on it. The statement that he balances is this statement in verse 1, It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

And that in itself, we could take a long time examining its meaning. The word touch

there, the Greek word hapto, H-A-P-T-O, you could write it in English characters. It means a variety of things.

If you look it up in a lexicon, it can mean touch. It can mean to fasten to. It's the same word that Jesus used in John 20 and verse 17 when Mary Magdalene saw him, first of all, after his resurrection.

We're not told what she did, but we have to assume she laid hold on Jesus and didn't want to let him go. And he said, touch me not for I'm not yet ascended to my father. Well, that's how the King James reads.

Don't touch me. The word is hapto and many translators believe he means don't cling to me, don't fasten to me because I'm going to leave again. And I personally think that's probably the meaning in that particular context.

Sometimes the word is used of a mere touch, like just physical contact in places in the Gospels, where it talks about people touching the hem of Jesus' garment or Jesus touching a sick person and being healed or a leper. The same word is used, Matthew 8, 3, for example, when Jesus touched the leper. It's the same word.

So it can refer to fastening to or clinging to on the one hand, or it can refer to just touching in the simplest sense of that word. It also is used sometimes in the New Testament, figuratively, of kindling, as kindling a fire. For example, in Acts 28, when Paul and his companions were shipwrecked on the island of Malta, they went out and gathered sticks to set a fire, to kindle a fire.

The word kindle in that place, in Acts 28, 2, is the same word hapto, to touch off a fire. Probably to take a burning torch or ember or something and to touch something else to kindle it is how that imagery began to be used. But sometimes the word hapto means nothing more than to light something or kindle a fire.

In Luke 8, 16, for example, this Greek word is used that way. Luke 8, 16 says, no one when he has lit a lamp covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand that those who enter may see the light. Now the verb there in that, no one who has lit a lamp is the word hapto, no one who has touched a hapto, a lamp.

Now, I bring up all those things not just to burden this lecture with all the idiosyncrasies and possibilities of translation. We could do that with every word in the Bible and take up a lot more time than we do. The reason I give these different means is it's hard to know exactly how he means it here.

On the one hand, he could mean it's not good to touch a woman at all. Now he does go on to say, nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband. If that's his meaning, then what he'd be saying is it'd be good if a man could go his whole life without ever touching a woman.

However, some men would find that exceedingly difficult and therefore they should get married. And of course, within marriage, they can touch their wives, obviously. And he goes on to make that very clear in the next verses.

But the suggestion would still be if they're not getting married, they should still not touch a woman. That touching a woman is something to be avoided, except in the case of marriage. Now, we would find that in our own culture, extremely over-restrictive.

I mean, I think if we started teaching, OK, brothers, don't touch a woman, don't give her a hug, don't give her a handshake, don't give her a back rub. There'd be a lot of people who'd feel like man has had ever legalistic. And we've always had sometimes students here who did all of those things, of course, between themselves and the opposite sex.

And no doubt felt it to be entirely innocent. And perhaps it was. We are not legalistic about such things.

But at the same time, just because our culture would find it restrictive doesn't mean that that isn't the standard of propriety that Paul was advocating. I mean, Paul may, in fact, in his churches have advocated that men who are unmarried don't touch women who are unmarried to them. You know, again, I'm not trying to enforce that because the word can have more meaning than that.

But I'd like to suggest it can have that meaning. And in terms of just plain advice to single people, I would think it a good piece of advice. I don't say a command that can be enforced upon them without being overly legalistic.

But it's not a bad piece of advice. I mean, when a man starts giving a girl a back rub or even a hug, I've seen hugs between brothers and sisters that are quite sensual, whether they acknowledge it to themselves or not. Obviously, there are hugs that are not sensual.

Nonetheless, I'll tell you this. Men will find and women, too, fewer temptations toward immorality and probably even toward immoral thoughts. If if they limit the amount to which they touch each other and I would not make it a rule.

But although for myself as a single man, I generally tried to follow it as a rule. It's not that I wouldn't touch. I remember my policy when I was single is I'd shake hands with a girl and hug a guy.

You know, I guess shaking hands is touching, too. So I never put myself under such a great restriction. I never touch a woman in any way.

But but I'm saying that those who are committed to purity and are not yet married would not perhaps do poorly to follow this in the strictest sense that it could be met. Although, like I said, I couldn't enforce that because it may have a different meaning. The word

hapto can mean cling to and could figuratively refer to marriage because the Bible says for this cause, a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.

Although it's not exactly the same word. The concept is obviously similar. A man clings to or joins himself to fastens himself to a woman in marriage.

And that can be the meaning here. There are some translations. I'm not sure.

I think the NIV might be among them that actually translate this. It's good for a man not to marry. Someone have an NIV here? Does it say that? First Corinthians 1 says it's good for a man not to marry.

That's not exactly a translation. That's an interpretation, but it's a possible interpretation. It's good for a man not to fasten to a woman.

It could have the meaning of getting married, and it could be seen as a recommendation to remain single. In which case, it's a different kind of a thing altogether than saying that a single man should never touch a woman. It'd just be saying it's good for him to stay single.

That would agree with some of the things Paul says later on, though that doesn't necessarily mean that's the only possible interpretation of the word. One thing, though, when we talk about it as kindling a fire, I think that that too is a possible meaning because Paul talks a little later, it's better for a man to marry than to burn with passion. Actually, he doesn't say burn with passion.

With passion is added. It's in verse 9. Paul literally says it's better to marry than to burn, and the translators in this case have felt like burn with passion is what he means. In fact, most Calvinists think that's what he means.

The other option is that he means burn in hell because you got involved in illicit sex and end up going to hell. It's better to get married than to try to brave it as a single guy when you don't have control over yourself. You may end up burning in hell for that.

However, most agree that in verse 9 he says it's better to marry than to burn with passion is the meaning. He speaks of sexuality or sexual drive like a fire that burns. He gets this imagery from the Old Testament in Proverbs chapter 6, which happens to be talking about illicit sex.

It talks about adultery in this particular case. It says in Proverbs 6, Can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife. Whoever touches her will not be innocent.

Now, notice the analogy he makes here is a man taking fire into himself or walking on coals and hoping not to be burned. Obviously, he's talking about lack of sexual restraint

here. It's possible that when Paul says it's good for men not to touch a woman, that the word touch in this case has to do with kindling sexual passion in himself and in her.

And that can be kindled any number of ways that would be good to avoid. It can be done, of course, by a touch. Women, I think, are more often kindled in that sense by touch, whereas men are often without touch aroused just by sight.

But I think probably certain kinds of touching, even if it's not technically sexual touching, it can certainly cause arousal. But even certain kinds of looks, certain kinds of postures. I mean, there's all kinds of flirtatious ways of glancing or smiling or standing or doing any number of things which may not involve physical contact, but which are calculated to arouse the wrong kind of interest on the part of the opposite sex or ways of dressing, for example.

And Paul's meaning could here be it's good for a man to do nothing that would arouse passions either in himself or in a woman. To kindle a woman to get her aroused and or even to arouse himself toward her would also be implied. I don't know the meaning of this particular verse because of those three possibilities that all would make perfectly good sense in the in the context.

I suppose those who wish to play it safest would wish to avoid all those things outside of marriage. Of course, he he gives marriage as the one exception outside of marriage. It's good for a man not to arouse a woman, kindle her or touch her even.

It's good, not necessarily the only good thing that can be done, but it's a good, good decision. If you make that decision, no one's going to fault you for that. I hope.

Nevertheless, even though it's good to not touch a woman because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband. Now, here we have an example of a statement that's made in an absolute sense, which later has to be modified. We have to be aware of such statements in the Bible.

In fact, when we come to some of the things Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, we have to realize that modifying them is appropriate in some cases. He'll make the statement the most absolute sense. Give to everyone who asks you, he'll say.

And if we take that in the absolute sense, then you could never deprive your children of anything they ask you for. Or any alcoholic who on the street who begs you for money, you could never deprive them of that. You'd have to support every indigent sluggard who wanted you to do so.

I mean, obviously there are qualifiers attached, but sometimes not spoken. In this case, Paul sounds like he's making an absolute statement. Everyone should get married to avoid fornication.

Every man should have a wife. Every woman should have a husband. But that Paul doesn't really mean that without qualification is clear by his ensuing discussion.

He actually prefers, and he says if it's possible, he'd recommend that they don't marry. But it's quite obvious that they shouldn't if by staying single they can still remain pure. The main thing is to stay pure.

Keep yourself pure before God. And if a single state of life just puts too much of a burden on a man or woman in that area, then they should marry. He says now in verses 3 and following, Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her.

The King James says due benevolence and some translations say her conjugal rights or whatever. It is apparently a reference to sexual satisfaction. That is to say that although it's good for a man not to touch a woman outside of marriage, within marriage it's not good to abstain.

When people are living together, male and female, there are of course even greater sexual pressures there than if they don't. If men are living with other men and women live with other women, there'll be temptation enough when they are around the opposite sex. But if people are living in the same house, it's even greater stress in that area.

And Paul indicates it's not right at all for married people who are living together to abstain or to cause each other to abstain. It's often the case that one party in marriage has more drive than the other party has, has more desire than the other party does. And Paul would suggest here that the sexual activity of the couple should be dictated by the person with the greatest desire, not the least.

Now of course in marriage people should always be sensitive. Most of our students are not married but may well be someday so it doesn't hurt for us to talk about this. Frequently it's the man who has a stronger sex drive than the woman, though not always so.

But let's just take for an example if a man has a stronger sex drive than his wife has, or desires physical contact of that kind more frequently than the wife does, he ought to be sensitive to her. If she doesn't feel like it, it'd be nice for him to be generous and not impose or enforce his wishes on her. But at the same time, the instructions of scripture are that she should be sensitive to him too.

She may not really feel like doing anything but if it's important to him, or Paul makes it both ways, if it's important to her and he's not feeling like it, there should be willingness to not deprive the other of the affection due to them. And likewise also the wife to her husband. So he makes it clear that there might be times when it's the wife and sometimes when it's the husband who has a desire for sex at a time when the other party does not.

But the person who's not feeling like it should not deprive the other. Of course there'd be some health conditions and things that would often make it impossible to do so. But Paul indicates that I think what he's addressing there is that in Corinth if there was an ascetic sort of a group that were saying it's good to not touch women, it's good not to be married, they were probably even saying that married people, now that you're married, you can still be spiritual by not having sex.

You can live as it were as celibates under the same roof and Paul is definitely cancelling out any validity to that suggestion. No, if you're married you shouldn't live as celibates together. There's nothing particularly spiritual about that.

You should give the wife what's owed her and the wife should give the husband what's owed him. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, verse 4 says, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife does.

Now one thing Paul does in Corinthians that's new as far as what the New Testament teaches beyond what the Old Testament did, is that he gives the same kinds of rights in marriage to women as he gives to men. In the Old Testament a man could have several wives but a wife could not have several husbands. In the Old Testament a man could divorce his wife but no wife in Jewish society could divorce her husband, it was just not open to her.

For no grounds. Now see if a woman went out and had another man, her husband could divorce her, that'd be called adultery. If her husband went out with another woman, that'd just be called polygamy or whatever, I mean a concubinage.

It wouldn't be something she could divorce her husband over. There's definitely a double standard in Jewish society. And I know some Christians, not very many fortunately, but I know a few, one in particular states that was very adamant on this, who feels that men can divorce their wives but wives cannot divorce their husbands in this present age, and he bases it on Jewish customs in that respect.

But it seems to me that Paul elevates our understanding of sexual roles in a way that the Old Testament does not, in that he gives the wife and the husband equal privileges over each other. He says, as we saw in verse 3, the man should give his wife the affection that's due to her, and she should give her husband the affection due to him. It's both ways, it's not just one has the right over the other.

And he makes it clear in verse 4, the wife does not have authority over her own body, but her husband does. Well, in saying that, every Jew would agree with Paul, that's true. The wife doesn't have authority over her body, her husband has authority over her body, she belongs to him.

But then he turns around and says what most Jews would never have believed, and that is that the husband doesn't have a right over his body either. The wife has authority over her husband's body, or the right to it. Now, I understand this pretty much to do away with polygamy, though that wasn't the main issue Paul was addressing here.

If the principle that he gives here stands universally, which it seems like it would, then it would no longer be possible for a man to have several wives. It was never okay for a woman to have several husbands, because the husband had full rights over his wife's body, no other man could share her. She couldn't have several men, because her one husband had the right to her body.

But it was not necessarily the case that she had exclusive rights to him, because he could have several women who had equal rights to him as wives to him in the Old Testament. But if Paul's words are taken to extend this far, and I think they should, then just as the man has exclusive rights over his wife's body, so the wife has exclusive rights over her husband's body, which means there's no room for him to have additional wives, because the one wife he has has the same kind of rights to him as he has to her, and those are exclusive rights. Now, that's not the point Paul is making directly.

Basically, he's talking about how the wife and the husband both have the right to be sexually pleased as much as possible by the other party, but it would go so far, I think, as to say, well, as the husband's right over his wife is an exclusive right, so her claim over him is also exclusive. Verse 5, Now, Paul says there might be times when both of you will agree that because of the desire to press into God and get off alone and fast a bit and pray and not, you just kind of put aside the gratification of the body in order to cultivate something devotional, that you could call off sexual relations for a while, but this cease should not be extended very long, certainly not long enough to create pressure and extra temptation, which is interesting, because Paul suggests there that sex between marriage partners is as, can actually take priority over fasting and prayer if, in fact, the fasting and prayer is taking up so much time and being extended so long that it's creating undue temptation because of the abstinence. It's better to stop abstaining, even if it takes away from your fasting and prayer, than it is to allow yourself to succumb to such pressure as may lead to sexual sin.

A lot of good fasting and prayer will do you if you're succumbing to sexual sin at the same time. Fasting is, of course, something that the Bible doesn't teach much about. In the Old Testament it was never commanded, except on the Day of Atonement.

In the New Testament, a few things are said about it, but not very much. There's certainly no place in the New Testament that commands fasting, nor that even describes fasting in terms of what a normal fast would be. It would appear, judging from Jesus' fast in the wilderness, that he probably drank liquids, probably only water, but didn't eat food.

So the normal fast is usually considered to be just drinking liquids, usually water, and no food. Although there are other kinds of fasts. Moses didn't eat food or drink water when he fasted on the mountain.

Esther and Mordecai commanded a fast that would be no food or water for anyone for three days. So there are different kinds of fasts. It's quite clear that Paul felt that some fasts would include even abstinence not just from food, but in addition to that, from sexual relations.

And if the purpose of fasting is to sort of say no to the flesh in order to focus on the spirit, then even the denial of eating, which is a legitimate lawful pleasure, would be analogous to denial of sexual relations between married partners, which is also a lawful form of pleasure. But to put those things aside, there certainly is an analogy to eating and sex, that both of them are pure in themselves, both of them are pleasurable, but also both of them can become obsessive, and there may be a time to take some time off from both of them for the sake of cultivating something in the spirit. Well, what is he saying as a concession? He said quite a bit here.

I believe he's referring back to verse 2, where he said, Because of sexual immorality, let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband. He says, I'm not really making this a commandment to the church. I don't want every single man to feel like I'm commanding him to get married, and every woman that I'm commanding her to get married.

It's a concession. I realize that if I... Actually, he goes on to say, I would really like to see everyone stay single. But if I am trying to impose that, that would be too hard for many of you, and I'm making a concession.

Go ahead and get married to avoid fornication. But I'm not commanding you to get married. I'm just making a concession here.

He says, because I wish that all men were even as myself, meaning not married. So here he just said back in verse 2, Let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband. But in verse 7 he says, I wish that all men were single.

And he says, this business of everyone getting married, I make that as a concession. I'm not really commanding all Christians to be married. I just say, some people are going to find it difficult not to be.

Therefore, I would concede that to you. To avoid fornication because of fornication, it's go ahead and marry. But I could wish, if I had my way, if everyone had the same grace in their life that Paul had, he'd like everyone to stay single.

And he has definite reasons for saying so. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. Now the word gift there is the word charisma in the

Greek.

It's the same word that's used for gifts of the Holy Spirit in chapter 12 and in other places. It's quite obvious that the gifts that God gives people are not confined to just those nine gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. A gift is a state of grace.

It is a gift of grace. It's a manifestation of grace. And it can be in the form of a miraculous ability or it can be in the form of some other thing.

It can actually be a manifestation of God's grace in marriage. Or it can be a manifestation of God's grace in giving someone grace to be single. It is a gift of God to be married.

It's the same thing that says in the Old Testament. He that finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. A wife is a gift.

A godly wife is a gift from God. But then the ability to remain single is also a gift from God. One man has this gift and one another.

Paul may be alluding back to Jesus' own words on this subject in Matthew 19. He doesn't give a clear indication that he's alluding back to it, but there's a good chance that he is. Because after Jesus makes some pretty strict teachings on divorce, that is basically forbidding it, in Matthew 19.10, it says, His disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it's better not to marry.

In other words, if you can't divorce your wife for any causes of fornication, boy, that's pretty binding. Maybe man shouldn't marry at all. It's better for a man not to marry, they suggested.

And Jesus answered somewhat conceding the point to them. He says, But he said to them, All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

He who is able to accept it, let him accept it. So Jesus, when the disciples said, It's better for a man not to marry, Jesus didn't say that they were wrong. He was just saying, Well, maybe so, but not everyone can accept that.

Not everyone is able to stay single. There are some who have been gifted with it, he says, those who have received it, to whom it has been given. He talks about eunuchhood, successful in being a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven, which would mean remaining celibate all your life and ignoring the opposite sex in order to devote yourself to the kingdom of God.

That's a gift. Only those to whom it has been given, presumably from God. So Paul turns around and says, Well, some people have this gift, and some have another gift.

Marriage is a gift, and singleness is a gift. Paul actually preferred singleness because of the way it freed a man to be undistracted in ministry, as he goes on later on to state. Now back to 1 Corinthians 7, he says in verse 8, 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. And the new King James adds the qualifiers with passion. As I said earlier, better to marry than to burn could mean better to marry and have a legitimate outlet for sexual drive than to have no such legitimate outlet and to just be consumed with passion that has no lawful expression.

Or it can mean it's better to marry and have a lawful sexual outlet than to not marry and be unable to contain yourself and therefore, because you don't contain yourself, you involve yourself in unlawful sexual outlets and then you suffer the consequences and the flames of hell. As Jesus said, it's better to pluck out your eye if it will cause you to sin or cut off your hand than to go to hell with it. And so Paul could have been referring to that, though almost all commentators seem to agree that he's talking about burning with desire that can't be relieved.

Yes? What is the basis of the argument I've heard? There is no proof that Paul is married. There are some who say that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and that as a member of the Sanhedrin, we know from the Mishnah that it was required for a man to be married and therefore they say, well, Paul must have been married at least at some point in his life. It is possible, of course, that Paul was married earlier in his life.

Paul never denies that he had been previously married. Some have felt that his wife may have left him because of his conversion to Christianity or for some other reason, he may have lost his wife before his conversion. But he does speak later in this chapter about if an unbeliever is unwilling to live with you since you're a Christian, let them go.

Some commentators have suggested maybe he's speaking something there from his own experience, possibly that he had a wife at one time and she may have left him because of his Christian conversion. Of course, alternately, he could have been married and been widowed. We don't know.

We simply have no information. Paul gives us no information except that we know he wasn't married at the time that he served as an apostle of Christ. Whether he had ever been married before, we don't know.

Now, the argument that says he must have been married because he was a member of the Sanhedrin seems to me to be a weak one because we have no actual statement from

Paul or in the Bible that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. We know he was present when the Sanhedrin condemned Stephen. And he watched their courts, but it's interesting that he did not participate in the act of stoning Stephen directly.

And he is said to have been a young man at that time. And the Sanhedrin was principally made up of the elders of Israel. It seems to me more probable that Paul was not a member of the Sanhedrin, but he might have been a protege of Gamaliel.

He was, in fact, a protege of Gamaliel. We know that from Paul's own statement. And Gamaliel was a member of the council of the Sanhedrin.

It's possible that Saul was being groomed for a seat on the Sanhedrin as the principal protege of Gamaliel, but had not yet obtained a seat on the Sanhedrin, which would explain partly because of his youth. And possibly that would explain why he didn't actually take part in the stoning of Stephen when the rest of the Sanhedrin did. So I would suggest that there's no certainty that Paul ever was a member of the Sanhedrin.

If he was not, then there's no reason to deduce that he had to have been married. Apparently, according to Jewish tradition, if he had been on the Sanhedrin, he would have had to be married. And if that were the case, then it's clear he was not married any longer at the time that he was writing these epistles.

He makes it very clear in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians that he and Barnabas did not have wives, whereas Peter and others did. But he never says whether he previously had a wife or not. Since there is no statement, yea or nay, on that in the scripture, we are open to consider any of those possibilities.

But he certainly describes himself as a single person in this passage and says it's really a recommended state if possible. Now, I wanted to say something here, too, because I'm often asked, I was even asked on the radio only about a week ago, about masturbation. And I mean, it seems distasteful to talk about that in a mixed group, but it seems like I think everyone knows that the thing exists.

And it seems like this passage may be one of the places that would rule against it. I've heard people say, well, there's nothing in the Bible against masturbation. And therefore, we shouldn't put people under bondage about that.

They can just put pressure on them. We should just let them do it or whatever. But, you know, it seems like if masturbation was, in Paul's mind, an option that was open to Christians, he wouldn't say it's better to marry than to burn with passion.

Because those persons who couldn't contain themselves that he was recommending they should get married, it seems like there'd be a legitimate outlet of their passion in that practice, which he does not recommend as an option. He seems to indicate there's two possibilities, to be burning with unrelieved sexual passion on the one hand, or to be

married and have an outlet for it. I don't know that we could use this argument as a certain proof that it was a sin, but it certainly seems to point that direction.

Paul would certainly be aware of that option if there was one. It doesn't sound like Paul had any open-mindedness toward that. Now, verse 10.

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. Now, these two verses, along with verse 39, where Paul says, A wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives. But if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whomever she wishes, only the Lord.

These verses have been taken to indicate, many Christians have understood, that a person can never divorce and remarry. That they can remarry if they're widowed, but they cannot remarry if they're merely divorced. Because it says in verse 39, a wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives.

Only if he dies is she released to be married to another. And, of course, verses 10 and 11 seems to say that. He says that a woman should not depart from her husband, but if she does depart, or maybe in a case where she already has before she receives this letter, before Paul's letter gets to her, maybe some women had already departed from their husband, well, what should they do? Well, they should try to be reconciled to their husband, and if that's not possible, they should just remain unmarried.

It certainly sounds like Paul is not leaving open the option of remarriage for them. If he says either be reconciled to your husband or remain unmarried, and a woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives, it sounds very, very strong. And there are certainly Christians who believe that remarriage after divorce is always wrong, and that it's always adultery.

There are statements that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, which we will look at another time, which are also taken to be equally restrictive, that divorce and remarriage are always wrong, they would say. Now, I would like to suggest to you that there are some mitigating factors here that need to be taken into consideration. We'll talk about some of them when we talk about the Sermon on the Mount and the passage on it.

But first of all, I'd like to say in verse 39, a wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives. As long as she has a living husband, we could say. I think what Paul is saying is that a woman cannot just walk away from her husband, presumably without grounds.

You have to modify some of these things by other passages of Scripture. And Jesus says,

except for the case of fornication. Now, of course, when Jesus says except for the case of fornication, he only frames it in a sentence that suggests that the man can divorce his wife in the case of fornication.

If any man divorces his wife except for the cause of fornication, he does such and such. But I would like to suggest that Paul seems to give equal privileges in marriage to women and men. And what is stated of men is often just stated as a generic for humans.

So when Jesus said, if a man divorces his wife except for the cause of fornication, if Paul's principle holds true, that women and men basically have the same rights within marriage, then Jesus' statement could be extended or extrapolated to include, if any woman divorced her husband except for the cause of fornication. That is to say that fornication would be a grounds for divorce. Of course, Jesus was addressing a culture where women didn't have the rights that men did.

For Jesus to say, if any woman would divorce her husband, the Jewish listeners would say, what? Women don't divorce their husbands. That's not even a consideration. But Paul seems to give the same kind of rights to both parties.

Fornication on the part of a spouse seems to give the faithful spouse the option of divorce, according to the teaching of Jesus, as I understand it. Now, there's many Christians who understand it differently. Why doesn't Paul say so here? Well, I'll tell you why.

Because in verses 10 and 11, he is addressing Christians married to Christians. Now, you might say, where does he say that? He doesn't ever say that in there. He just says the married.

How do I know that he means Christians married to Christians? Because of what he says in verse 12 and following. He says, but to the rest I speak, not the Lord. Now, notice in verse 10, now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord.

He's basically saying, Jesus addressed this group that I'm about to speak to in verses 10 and 11. But there's another group, the rest, who are not included in verses 10 and 11. Another category that Jesus' words did not apply to.

Jesus did not address this, and Paul has to go beyond and address a situation that Jesus' words are not taken by him to refer to. What is that other group? Well, he says, if any brother has a wife who does not believe and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who does not believe and he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

Now, do you see what category he's addressing there in verses 12 and 13 is Christians married to non-Christians. Now, what I find significant is that in giving instructions to Christians who are married to non-Christians, he considers them a separate category

from the group addressed in verses 10 and 11. Or else he wouldn't have called them the rest, right? I mean, this is just playing the way language is used.

He has some group of married people in mind in verses 10 and 11. He has another group, an entirely different group. The remainder of married people that are not included in his instructions in 10 and 11 are those addressed in verses 12 and 13.

They happen to be Christians married to non-Christians. Therefore, the group that verses 10 and 11 must be about are Christians married to Christians. And he says the Lord addressed that situation because, you see, Jesus spoke to Jews married to Jews.

People married within the same faith. And Judaism was the true faith in Jesus' day. Before Jesus instituted Christianity, Judaism was the faith that God had approved of, had instituted, had established.

So, Jesus essentially was addressing believers married to believers. Or Jews married to Jews. People who were married in the covenant community to others who were in the covenant community.

That's the only class of people Jesus ever set eyes on. He never had Jews married to Gentiles or Gentiles married to Gentiles or whatever in his audience. That wasn't the group that he addressed when he addressed the disciples.

Therefore, Paul, when he says, I will tell you what the Lord said in verses 10 and 11, by what he goes on to say in verse 12, it's clear he meant the Lord said this and it has reference to Christians married to Christians, or at least people who are married in the same faith. Covenant people of God married to other covenant people of God. Now, there's another category.

Covenant people of God who are married to people who are outside the covenant, non-Christians. And he says Jesus did not speak to them, which means that the teachings of Jesus don't apply in Paul's mind to this other category. And he says, so I'll go on beyond that.

Now, think about that a moment. Why doesn't Paul mention adultery as a grounds for divorce in verses 10 and 11? Because the assumption is that both parties are Christians and adultery is not an option open to Christians. Christians are not adulterers.

Adulterers shall not inherit the kingdom of God, he said in chapter 6. Now, of course, Christians have been known to commit adultery. Paul's given the benefit of the doubt that his converts will not be among them. He's not going to stick in except for the cause of fornication, as if he's allowing that fornication may be a normal situation among Christians in marriage.

Besides, that's already been stated by Jesus. He's basically encapsulating what Jesus

already said when he says, not I but the Lord. He's basically reminding them of a statement of Jesus that was already known to them.

He's just kind of summarizing it and making an application. Therefore, if a wife, a Christian wife, has left her Christian husband, she shouldn't go out and marry again. She should be reconciled to her husband because he's a Christian and the teachings of Jesus do not permit remarriage in that situation.

There's assuming there's no fornication or adultery there. Now, I say it's assuming that because Paul makes it very clear he's alluding back to what the Lord said. And when the Lord spoke on it, he did include that exception.

Paul doesn't have to mention every detail of what the Lord said in order to call it all to mind. The assumption that fornication or adultery throws something of a different light on the situation and brings different factors into it, I think, in a sense, goes without saying. But if it did not, consider this.

Jesus said in Matthew 18, if your brother sins against you, go to him. If he repents, you've won your brother. If he doesn't, go with two.

If he repents, you've won him. Otherwise, take him to the church. If he doesn't hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen.

Now, here's the deal. Jesus would not let a Christian marry to a Christian and divorce their spouse. Now, on the other hand, though, apparently if a Christian did divorce a Christian without the cause of fornication and remarried, there was adultery there.

But what if we have this picture? Here's two Christians married and one does commit adultery. Then what? Well, Jesus said if your brother sins against you, go to him. Try to get them to repent.

So, let's say it's the wife who commits adultery. The husband goes and says, listen, I'm willing to forgive you if you repent of this adultery. She says, okay, I repent.

I won't do this anymore. The marriage is saved. There may be some rough spots to overcome, but the marriage is saved.

You've won your brother or your sister in this case. But what if she says, I don't care. I've decided that this other relationship is more important to me than walking with God.

Then what's the guy going to do? Well, then he takes two witnesses, like Jesus said. Try to persuade her to repent. If she doesn't repent, then what? Take it before the church.

If she doesn't repent, then what do you do? Well, then she's treated like an unbeliever. And now what you have is what? A believer married to an unbeliever. And that puts it in an entirely different category, according to Paul.

Now, of course, you don't know for sure that she's an unbeliever. She may be a believer who's going through, I mean, it's hard to say. You obviously can't live in adultery and be a safe person.

Though it's quite clear that people who really are safe sometimes have their moments, their days, or their weeks, where they are kind of slipping a bit, and then they come back. But the point is, while you can't pronounce finally on the state of their soul and on their eternal destiny, you have to deal with them as if they're an unbeliever. Because that's all the evidence they're giving you.

They're not repenting. They're living in sin. They're committing themselves to sin.

They won't hear the church. They won't hear rebuke. They have to be to you as if they were an unbeliever.

In which case, your dealings with them are the same as they would be with an unbeliever. You, the married party, are then in a position to fall into the category of the rest. So, in verses 10 and 11, I believe what we have there is the assumption that Christians, married to Christians, are not going to be committing adultery.

Or if they do, they will repent when confronted, and the marriage can be saved. And in such a case, you should never have Christians divorcing their Christian spouse. Now, there are other circumstances.

One who seems to be a Christian may not be. Or a person who was a Christian may backslide and fall into adultery. In which case, you go through the steps Jesus said, and if they don't respond to that, and they remain in sin, then you treat them as an unbeliever, and then you're dealing with verses 12 and following.

Then what do you have? You have a brother married to a woman who's not a believer. Or a sister married to a man who's not a believer. And, of course, even then, divorce is not recommended.

Although, of course, here's the thing. If the adulterous party, let me put it this way. If the sinning party is sinning the sin of adultery, that seems to put things into the class of grounds for divorce.

It seems as if a married party has a spouse who's committing adultery, that person can file for divorce according to the teachings of Jesus. But even if it were not adultery on their part, suppose a Christian man and Christian woman get married, and the man starts beating the wife. And he's an alcoholic, a drunkard, or whatever.

And beating the children. People say, well, can they divorce in that case? Well, that's not grounds for divorce in itself. But it certainly is sin which needs to be confronted.

And if you go through the steps and two people confront him, he won't repent, the church repents, and he doesn't repent, then he's like an unbeliever. Then you've got a situation where even though the man may profess to be a Christian, Jesus himself says, count him as an unbeliever. Now you've got a wife who's married to an unbeliever.

And that, again, puts it into this other category. And Paul says, in verses 12 and 13, that if a Christian is married to an unbeliever, and the unbeliever is content to dwell with them, well then, don't leave them. Now there's a serious question that arises as to what means content to dwell.

I mean, on the one hand, Paul describes the person who's not content to dwell as departing. Because it says in verse 15, but if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. But arguably, there are ways short of actually physically departing the house that an unbeliever might show himself unwilling to dwell with the believer.

If he does nothing but beat her up and beat up the kids and so forth, that might arguably be taking as evidence that he's not content to dwell with them. Even though he hasn't left the house, because it's his house. He doesn't want to go anywhere he wants to go.

He'd rather stay there, but he's not content to dwell with his wife, which he evidences by his abusive treatment. There are some, at least, Christians who, with, I feel, some justification, would interpret that as a situation where the wife is not in bondage to that marriage anymore. Because the guy's been confronted, gone through all the steps, she's tried to redeem the situation.

That for her to get out is possibly permissible under the language that Paul gives us here. I personally believe it's always a higher road to not divorce, even if your spouse has committed adultery or even if you're suffering some form of abuse. Unfortunately, when we begin to talk about abuse as a possible grounds for divorce, we get into the slippery slope of what is abuse then.

Is it the guy beating his wife on the head with a hammer every evening? And she's in danger of having her skull crushed and killed? Is he throwing knives at her across the room? That kind of abuse. Is he beating her to unconsciousness every night? That kind of abuse, no one can deny. That's abuse.

But then we get into things where people say, the counselor told me that I'm experiencing emotional abuse from my husband. Well, what the heck is emotional abuse? If someone looks at me cross-eyed and I don't feel affirmed by them, am I experiencing emotional abuse? If someone calls me bad names or my wife doesn't show the same kind of attraction to me that I wish she did, maybe I'm experiencing emotional abuse. After all, I'm emotionally unhappy about the situation.

And it's caused by the way my wife or my husband is treating me. I guess that must be

emotional abuse. In our lame-brained, valueless culture, as it has become, there are many people, including people in the church, who feel like a woman should be able to divorce her husband because of emotional abuse.

Like I said, what in the heck constitutes emotional abuse? If someone's not being nice to you, then at what point are you called upon to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ? I mean, if just having your feelings hurt is enough to justify divorce, what marriage will ever survive? I'm very cautious about introducing as a possible grounds for divorce, abuse. Although I do think that where a woman's life is in danger, a child's life is in danger, I do think that there's a very good case that the man is not content to dwell with her. He's trying to do away with her.

In which case, what Paul says about them departing may apply. They may not have physically departed, but certainly they may have departed from their vows long ago. Now, in verse 14 he says, For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife.

That means made holy by the wife. And the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they're holy.

This verse has occasioned a lot of curiosity as to what it really means. A couple of possibilities. Some feel that because a person is married to a believer, or because they have believing parents, that they are therefore somehow saved, holy, because the unbeliever is sanctified by the believing spouse, and the children are sanctified by the believing parents.

This verse is often quoted by those who advocate infant baptism, because there's very few verses they can find that can support the practice. This, they think, might do so, because your children are holy, since you're a believer. Therefore, if they're holy, you certainly should be able to baptize them, they say.

Although that depends on what's meant by holy. Holy means set apart for special purposes. It could mean nothing else but that a husband who has a believing wife, an unbelieving husband with a believing wife, or an unbelieving wife with a believing husband, or children who have believing parents, those children are in, or those persons are in a situation set apart from that which they would otherwise be in, and which most unbelievers are in.

That is, they are continually under the influence, or exposed to the influence, of a believer. The gospel, no doubt, is not only communicated to that unbeliever verbally, but also lived out in front of them, putting them in a position where they have to constantly deal with the issue of the gospel in ways that other unbelievers, who have only other unbelievers in their home, are not confronted with it. And it puts that unbeliever in a place of special dealings with God that others are not necessarily in.

And that would be enough to justify saying that they've been set apart, that the unbeliever is set apart by this special circumstance for special dealings from God. Likewise with children also. I don't know if that's how Paul means it, but it's been a verse that has occasioned a lot of speculation as to what his exact meaning was.

I don't think it can be that just being married to someone makes them saved. If you're saved and you marry them and they're saved, otherwise that would be a great means of evangelism. Every Christian should just go out and marry non-Christians and get them all into the kingdom that way.

Generally speaking, when Christians marry non-Christians, it doesn't go well for the Christians. It's usually the Christians who end up compromising as a result of this. But of course, Paul is addressing cases largely where both parties were probably pagans when they married.

And through the preaching of Paul, one would get converted, but their spouse didn't get converted. Now they've got a situation where there's been an improvement on the part of one of them, and it leaves their unimproved spouse in a position to be under pressure of the constant testimony and witness of a believer under their roof. Now he says in verse 15, 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. Now notice, a brother or a sister is not under bondage. Again, Paul extends the same rights to a woman as to a man.

Whereas, as I said, I know someone who would say, Well, a brother would not be under bondage, but a woman would be. A brother could remarry, but a woman could not remarry. And they would base that on verse 11, where it says, If a woman departs, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

It seems to not give the woman the right to remarry. But as I said, in the context there, I believe he's restating what Jesus said. With all of Jesus' qualifiers taken for granted, and also speaking of a situation where it's married to believers, and what he says to women in verse 11, I think he would say the same to men.

In fact, he does. He says, And a husband is not to divorce his wife. So, I don't think Paul is making a difference here, saying men can do certain things, but women can't.

It appears that Paul would say, Brothers and sisters have the same kinds of rights in marriage and in divorce. In marriage and in dissolution of marriage, as each other have. Now, what does it mean for them to be not under bondage in such cases? This has caused people to say, Well, they can remarry.

I personally agree that this does mean they can remarry, but not everyone agrees with that. Some say, Well, they're just not in bondage in the sense that they're not required

by God to try to keep that marriage going. But to me, that would go without saying.

Because we're talking about a case where the unbeliever has already departed. The unbeliever isn't even there anymore. How could one consider the believer in bondage to keep the marriage together when it's not an option open to them? It seems that Paul would not have to say that.

Under bondage. Let's take, for example, a real case. A man who's an unbeliever leaves his believing wife.

She is not under bondage. But if she doesn't have a gift of singleness, the fact that she was married before suggests probably she doesn't. She doesn't have that gift, but she has to stay unmarried if that's the scenario.

Then she is under a very difficult bondage. She's under a restraint that will put tremendous pressure upon her, which Paul seems to be saying she doesn't have to have. She's not under bondage.

Now, if you'll look over at verse 39 again, where it says, A wife is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she's at liberty to be married to whomever she wishes. Now, notice the bound and liberty, the contrast there.

On one case, she's bound. In the other case, she's at liberty. What does liberty mean? Liberty means she's free to remarry.

Now, if she has a living husband, she is not free to remarry because her husband is still her husband. But if he divorces her, or if there's a lawful divorce according to the grounds that God allows, she doesn't have a husband. The guy who was her husband may be alive, but he's not her husband.

He's no longer her husband because divorce has changed the status of that situation. If she has a living husband, then she is obviously bound to him. If some circumstance causes that marriage to lawfully dissolve, and I say lawfully in the sense of according to the laws of God, there's a divorce based on fornication or an unbeliever departs or whatever, and the marriage is dissolved, well then she's not bound to him anymore.

He's not her husband anymore. But if she has a husband, if she's got an intact marriage, well, she's bound to that until he dies. And the point is she's not bound to it after he dies.

He's not trying to stress that there's a lifelong bondage that the woman has to the man, regardless of what transpires in the marriage, even if it dissolves. He's trying to say that her bondage to that marriage does not extend beyond his death, because some women might think so. Some women might think, well, my husband's dead, but I could never remarry.

I've got to be faithful to my vow to my first husband. Paul says, no, that's not the case. If he's dead, she's at liberty to marry another.

He makes the same point in Romans 7, where he says essentially the same thing. Now, I understand not under bondage to mean not bound. But at liberty means she can marry someone.

In verse 39, the woman being bound means she can't marry someone else. But at liberty means she can marry someone. Now, when he says of the brother or sister whose unbelieving spouse left, they are not in bondage in such cases.

It sounds to me like his own use of the concept of being in bondage is that they can remarry. If the unbeliever is departed and presumably a divorce has occurred as a result of that, then the believer, male or female, is free to remarry. And God has called us to peace, he says.

Actually, in verse 15, God has called us to peace means that we should do the peaceful thing. We should always be seeking, in all our relationships, a just peace. The whole purpose of God in not wanting people to divorce is that it's breaking a vow to somebody.

Not to God, for one thing, but also to the other person. And it's not just and it's not faithful. It's bad to break vows.

And God would rather have you keep your vows. Of course, if the other party is the one who has broken the vows, then there's freedom there. But you should always be, as much as lies in you, living peaceably with everyone, as Paul said elsewhere in Romans 12.

Verse 17, but as God has distributed to each one and as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk and so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Now, you might not think it's possible to become uncircumcised once you're circumcised, but actually the Jews had come up with, during the Maccabean time, an operation by which people could remove the marks of circumcision because in Greek culture it became unfashionable to be circumcised.

So some Jews actually were getting operations to remove the evidence of their circumcision, which I don't know how they did that and I don't know why they'd want to do that. But anyway, some did. And Paul said if you're circumcised, you don't have to become uncircumcised.

Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing. Uncircumcision is nothing.

But keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Now, there's two other times when Paul says circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Both of those are

over in Galatians.

In Galatians 5.6, the first of those, he says, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but faith working through love. And then over in chapter 6, in verse 15, Galatians 6.15, Paul says, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but a new creation. Being born again, in other words, being a new creature in Christ.

Now, three times, therefore, in his writings, Paul says circumcision doesn't avail anything, uncircumcision doesn't avail anything. In each case, he says something slightly different. Keeping the commandments of God, faith that works through love, a new creation.

These are the things that matter. But all these things are basically the same thing. When it says keeping the commandments of God, I've had people quote this to me to say that we have to keep the Ten Commandments.

But the commandments of God are not restricted to the Ten Commandments and are not necessarily to be equated with the Ten Commandments. The commandments of Jesus are also the commandments of God. And we know from other passages that obeying Christ is what we are required to do.

But obeying Christ is simply to walk in faith that works through love, which is what Galatians 5.6 says matters. Here it says keeping the commandments of God, but in the same position in the statement in Galatians 5.6, Paul says, but faith that works through love. The commandments of God have to do with faith working through love.

It's not just a matter of keeping rules. It's doing everything that love would dictate. Now, verse 20 here, first Corinthians seven again.

Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can be made free, rather use it.

For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man. Likewise, who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price.

Do not become slaves of men. Brethren, but each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called. Now again, this is not so much an absolute sense.

That if you were unmarried when God called you, you have to remain unmarried. Because God called you in that state, you have to remain in that state. And he makes it plain as he goes on in the next verses that there is no absolute on this.

But what he's saying is if you were, let's say, a slave when God called you. Or a free person when God called you. Or if you were circumcised when God called you or

uncircumcised.

It's quite clear that those do not represent conditions that you need to change. Likewise, if you were married or unmarried when God called you, it's not necessary to change those things. In fact, it may be very undesirable to change them in some cases.

If you were unmarried, it may be good to stay single, Paul indicates. God, if he called you as an unmarried person, maybe he wants to use you as an unmarried person. Getting married might cause a conflict in what God has in mind.

And what Paul is saying is that God can use people in any state. You don't have to consider that any of those states he mentioned are states that have to be thrown off before you can be of service to God. You don't have to get married to serve God.

You don't have to be single to serve God. You don't have to be a slave. You don't have to be free.

A man who's a slave in the social sense of the word is nonetheless free in the Lord and can serve God as a slave. And this is stated also in Ephesians and Colossians and 1 Peter that servants can serve their masters as unto the Lord. But a person who's free, when he's saved, he becomes a slave of God anyway.

Paul doesn't treat slavery as an institution that is necessarily an abomination. When we think of slavery, we think of the blacks and the mistreatment many of them experienced in the South in our history. And no doubt a great deal of injustice was done there, I'm sure of it.

But not all slavery necessarily has to result in unpleasant circumstances. A person who's a Christian, he says, you don't have to be obsessed with your social circumstances. If you're a slave, you don't have to be obsessed with getting free.

Although he says, if you have opportunity, fine. If your master offers you your freedom, you don't have to say, no, I'm a Christian, I have to stay a slave. It's okay, you can be free.

But it doesn't really make a big difference. If you're sold out to God, you're a slave anyway. You're a slave to God.

You've given up your freedom just to be a Christian. And while you may not be a slave of some earthly master, you're still a slave. You're not at liberty to do just everything you desire.

And so it's not really that big a difference, he says, whether you're a slave or free in terms of your societal role or rank. Now, verse 25, now concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord. That is, Jesus didn't ever address this subject.

Yet I give my judgment as one whom the Lord in his mercy is made trustworthy. Now, Paul's judgment's got to count for something as far as I'm concerned. Even if he did say, I don't have anything from God on this point, his judgment's bound to be a lot smarter than mine.

I suppose, therefore, that this is good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

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.

But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on, even those who have wives should be as though they had none. Those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy as though they did not possess. Those that use this world as not misusing it, for the form of this world is passing away.

Now, what does this mean? He starts by saying in verse 26, I suppose it's good because of the present distress that a man to remain as he is. You're married, you're single, stay that way, I think it's good. Now remember, he says a lot of things are good, but he doesn't necessarily say they're required.

In verse 1 he says it's good for a man not to touch a woman. In verse 8 he says it's good for single people to remain even as he is. But then he says in verse 9, it's better to marry than to burn.

So some things are good and some things are better than other things. So also he says because of the present distress, it's good for a man to remain as he is. Now, I guess we need to ask ourselves what the present distress is of which he speaks.

Now, we don't know the answer. We don't know of any particular crisis that was going on in Corinth at that time that he could be referring to unless it was just the general persecution that the church was facing, which may have been at a greater or lesser level, we don't know. Certainly such things waxed and waned in various areas, and there may have been more persecution than ordinary at that particular time.

Although some people feel that the present distress of which he speaks is Paul's way of saying that they are living at the very end of time and Jesus is coming back soon and getting married could just waste precious time. After all, he does say in verse 29, But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, and so forth. Now, the time is short, but he doesn't say until what.

And many people feel that these expressions suggest that Paul is thinking in terms of the

soon coming of Christ that perhaps the man of sin is about to rise and then Christ is going to come and things are going to look pretty bad for a while and you'd be better off not trying to change your circumstances if you're single. And maybe so, although in 2 Thessalonians, which Paul wrote before this, he said if anyone says that the time is near, don't believe them. Remember, 2 Thessalonians 2, don't be moved by any letters that purport to be from us or any prophetic oracle.

Well, this is a letter that professes to be from Paul. If he was saying that the second coming of Christ was near, then they should disregard his letter because he's already wrote an earlier letter to the Thessalonians. Don't believe any letter that purports to be from us that says the time is near.

I don't think he's here necessarily saying that the second coming of Christ is near. The time is short, he says, but that's true for every man and every woman at any age. We only have a short lifetime.

The time is short. Use your opportunities as best you can. The present distress could refer not to some specific thing that was happening in Corinth or about to happen in Corinth at that particular time in history.

It could just mean the new pressure and distress that has come upon a person after conversion. They are now in tension with the world, unlike before. The distress we face presently is in contrast to before.

Before we were Christians, we were not in tension with the world as we are now. Now that we're saved, we are in tension. There is persecution.

There is a world that is now our enemy. We have to use it, but we don't want to misuse it. We don't want to get too worldly.

We don't want our roots down too deep. We've got too short a life. And so I don't know that we have to assume Paul made some kind of mistake here thinking that the second coming was imminent.

Everything he said could simply be a reference to the Christian life in general. There was a pre-Christian life these people had been in, of course, and now they were Christians. The present life brought new distresses and pressures and so forth, and responsibilities, and the time was short for them to fulfill those responsibilities.

And it's true for every man at any age that he only has a short life. And therefore, he may be saying that at all times, Christians are called upon to live an otherworldly kind of a life, to make decisions that are eternity-based, eternity judgments, rather than thinking in terms of our temporal comforts and so forth. Now, Paul certainly felt this way about marriage, that a choice to be married or to be single was not ideally to be made on the basis of which would make me more comfortable, which would make a happier life for

me.

Of course, if the sexual pressure was so great that you couldn't remain pure and single, then getting married made sense. But to get married just because you think you'd be happier in that state, well, even those who get married sometimes are called to forsake houses and lands and wives and children and so forth in some measure, in some sense, as Jesus mentioned. Time remains when men who have wives sometimes have to live as though they had none.

That doesn't mean that men can just walk out on their families, but it does mean that they can't just consider, well, this life and this family is just for me to enjoy, like for other men who have only this life to live. My family is a state of life that I'm in to serve God in, and I should only be in such a state of life if I felt like that's a calling to serve God in, that's more God's calling for me than doing so single. To Paul, there was no reason to live except to serve God.

In his case, being single was a better way to serve God in. Some people, because of whatever, sexual pressure, or even just because it's a calling in God that they feel like they're called to serve God in the context of a family, that's for them to do. But they have to always be willing to put family or other worldly interests and business and so forth on the back burner for the kingdom of God because the time is short and we have to do as much as we can to promote the kingdom of God in the time we have.

Now, he says in verse 27 and 28, Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. That is, don't seek to be divorced. Are you loosed from a wife? Now, loosed could mean just single, but since in the previous sentence in verse 27, don't seek to be loosed, loosed there specifically would mean divorced.

If you're married, don't seek to be divorced. Don't seek to be loosed. Some people feel that in the second sentence in verse 27, it's are you divorced from a wife? Loosed from a previous binding relationship.

Don't seek a wife. Now, on one hand, if loosed in the second sentence does mean divorced, it could seem to play into the hands of those who say that divorced people should never marry because Paul says don't seek a wife. But notice his next verse.

But even if you do marry, you have not sinned. If the persons he's speaking to are the same people in verse 27 who are married or are loosed from a wife, read divorced from a wife, he says if you marry, again, you haven't sinned. He says I'm recommending that you don't, but you haven't sinned.

I'm giving advice. I'm not giving commandments here. You can take my advice or not.

If a virgin marries, she's not sinned. Nevertheless, such will have trouble in the flesh, and I spare you that, he says. And he goes on to say the same thing in verse 32.

I want you to be without care, that is, without worries and unnecessary distractions. He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to 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.

There's a difference also between a wife and a virgin. 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.

And I say this not to, excuse me, 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. It's quite clear that in verse 28 when he says, if you get married, you're going to have trouble in the flesh. I spare you that.

And in verses 32 through 35, he talks about how unmarried life, you don't have to be concerned about a spouse to whom you answer, whose happiness and well-being you're in some measure responsible for. Children also that come along. Being single, if you can do it, is a desirable thing.

But not so that you can just be free, swing and single. But so that you can serve the Lord undistracted. A lot of people in our society stay single for selfish reasons.

Not because they want to serve the Lord without distraction, but because they just don't want the bondage of a marriage. They like to be free to play the field. They like keeping all their money to themselves, not having a spouse or children to have to spend some of it on.

There are many selfish reasons for which people stay single, and Paul doesn't recommend singleness on the grounds of any of those. He says the reason to stay single is to serve God undistractedly, both in body and in spirit. Now, you might ask, well, if I'm married, do I have to be distracted from the Lord? Yes.

Paul said so. Yes, you do. That doesn't mean you can't please the Lord and you can't serve the Lord.

You can, but unfortunately, on one level it's certainly unfortunate, it does take time away. I'm happily married. I've been happily married for many years.

But I have to say that married life, even in a happy married life, is time consuming. Where I was single, I didn't have to worry about how much I slept. I didn't have to worry about what hours I slept.

It didn't matter about being home at any particular time. I could be out witnessing. I could be out studying.

I could be out praying. I could go out to fast and pray for days at a time without having to consult anyone. But when you're married, you've got people that you answer to, that care about you, that their concerns and yours are merged.

And you just do have that distraction. It doesn't have to be a great distraction. Some people get overly distracted, thinking, well, now that I have family, I've got to earn 30,000 or 40,000 or 50,000 a year so I can put my kids through college and I have to get them all the designer clothes and stuff and I have to work two jobs and so forth.

That kind of distraction is self-imposed. It is possible to be married and still have a fair amount of time and energy to be freed up for serving the Lord. In fact, even service to your wife and children is service to the Lord.

But it is a distraction. You cannot be married without having distractions, period. There can be blessed distractions, but some people like Paul would rather not have those kinds of distractions so he can just devote himself fully to ministry all the time.

And I can understand that. I haven't been single in the ministry. I can appreciate the kind of freedoms that are given up, even for a good marriage.

Verse 36, But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, this probably means the woman that he's betrothed to, but now he's a Christian, he's not sure he wants to get married because Paul's made some good cases for being single. But he's got this woman that he's promised he's going to marry. She's his virgin.

She's betrothed to him. And now he's thinking about not marrying her. He says, well, but maybe that would be improper toward your virgin.

Maybe you're leaving her up the creek without a paddle. If she's passed the flower of her youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin, let them marry. And what he means by that is, you promised this girl you'd marry her, and now you've kind of kept her on hold because you're not sure you want to marry her now that you're a Christian and might want to be single.

Now she's getting older and she's lost certain opportunities that she would have had if you'd broken up with her earlier. She could have maybe found a husband more easily. But now she's beyond the flower of her youth.

You've kind of, in a sense, taken advantage of her inadvertently here. You might be doing an injustice to remain single now to her. Perhaps you should just marry her.

That might be the thing you should do. Nevertheless, he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. Perhaps meaning that he'll support her but not marry her, if she'd be just as happy.

It's hard to know what he means by keeping his virgin. Some people have applied this to the father of the virgin, but I think in the context it's talking about the man who is betrothed to her. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

Now the expression gives her in marriage certainly sounds like it's the father, but the Greek word here is a very infrequent word in the Greek language and scholars don't know for sure exactly what all it means. In the context, it sounds like it's talking about the man marrying his virgin, not a man giving away his virgin daughter. There is debate among commentators as to which poem it is, but I think he's talking about a man who's betrothed.

If you're already engaged, it may be just the only fair thing to go through with the marriage. Although if you can do right by her without marrying her, you've gotten yourself a better situation in terms of being able to stay single and undistracted from the Lord. Verses 39 and 40 we've looked at.

A wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives, but if her husband's dead, she's at liberty to be married to whomever she wishes in the Lord. It's not just that God has one man you have to marry. Anyone you want, as long as it's in the Lord.

But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment, and I think I have the Spirit of God. So they asked him, should you marry? It's okay to marry, but you may be happier unmarried. You may be freer, and that's my recommendation, he says.

We've just run out of time.