

## Singleness, Marriage and Divorce

**1. There are five groups of people that Paul addresses in this chapter. These groups include everyone.**

- a. Single
- b. People in a relationship but not married
- c. Married
- d. Divorced
- e. Widow(er)

**2. The clause “It is well for a man not to touch a woman,” should be regarded as a Corinthian slogan to which Paul responds as okay but not as a commandment from the Lord.**

- a. The Corinthians have submitted for Paul’s approval a view of marriage that involved abstinence.

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman.” 1 Corinthians 7:1

- b. Paul’s views of Christian marriage do not match those of his questioners.
  - i. True religion was never meant to be used for sexual denial.
  - ii. Paul calls for moral and sexual purity, and not abstinence.

“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. **3** Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.” 1 Corinthians 7:2, 3

“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” 1 Corinthians 7:5

- c. Sex is a God-given blessing if used as He intended and directed.
- d. Paul always talks about sex in the context of marriage, and this is in harmony with the Scriptures as whole.

“Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” Hebrews 13:4

**3. Paul recognizes the gift of singleness and that in some cases to remain widow(er) is better.**

- a. Paul advocates for sex purity above anything else.

“But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. **7** For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. **8** But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; **9** but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.” 1 Corinthians 7:6-9

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman.” 1 Corinthians 7:1

**4. What are the reasons Paul encourages people to appropriate the gift of singleness?**

- a. The “present distress”—religious intolerance—caused instability for Christians to establish a family.

“Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord... **26** I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: **27** Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:25-27

- i. However, Paul recognizes that this is a wise counsel that shouldn’t be taken as a commandment or applied to every case.

“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.” 1 Corinthians 7:28

- b. Have more time to dedicate to the Lord’s Work.

“But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 7:32

“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.” 1 Corinthians 7:35

**5. What does the Bible teach about marriage and divorce?**

- a. Divorce is not an option for a Christian couple.

“Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband.” 1 Corinthians 7:10

- b. The only justifiable reason for a Christian married with another Christian to remarry is in case of adultery.

“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ **32** But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” Matthew 5:31, 32

“So He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. **12** And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’” Mark 10:11, 12

“The command of Jesus leaves no room for the many excuses for legal separation that are accepted by the civil courts today, such as incompatibility, mental cruelty, and others of a more trivial nature. The Greek and Roman laws allowed separation of husband and wife for trifling reasons. The same was true also among the Jews (see on Matt. 5:32).” The SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 708

- c. If a Christian that was married with another Christian chooses to divorce (not for reasons of adultery) he/she should not remarry.
  - i. God expects Christians to work on their marriage and experience spiritual growth.

“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.” 1 Corinthians 7:11

“We do not give ourself a good chance for growing personally if we keep hankering after our fantasy of the ideal woman. Or man. **We grow when we keep renewing our commitment to the only spouse we've got.** We grow when we stop dreaming of a perfect marriage, and adjust caringly to the one we have. Our best growth comes when we forget about our own growth, and **focus on caring** instead. Here's a nice twist: instead of giving us a good reason for giving up a lifetime commitment, **our need to grow is a prime reason for keeping it.**” Lewis Smedes, *New York: Harper Paperbacks*, 1992, p. 95.

- d. Paul expands on the teachings of marriage and divorce and he permits divorce when an unbelieving spouse chooses to divorce from the believing spouse.
  - i. In this case the believing spouse that was abandoned by the unbelieving spouse may remarry.

“But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace.” I Corinthians 7:15

“The two exceptions for divorce, *porneia* and divorce by an unbelieving spouse, as discussed in 1 Corinthians 7, are different. Only in the first case can the spouse who was not involved in adultery request a divorce. In the other case, the believing partner is passive and does not take the initiative to get a divorce. [...] In the two exceptional cases just mentioned, not only is divorce possible—as tragic as that is—but also the faithful partner or the believing partner who is divorced by the unbeliever may remarry.” Ekkehardt Mueller, *Jesus and Divorce and Remarriage in Matthew 19*, p. 17, Biblical Research Institute.

#### **6. Paul counsels those who are in a relationship but have not married yet:**

- a. By mutual consent Paul acknowledges that it is appropriate for some people to remain in a committed relationship, but not marry (without the sexual privilege).
- b. In cases of long-term engagements, the fiancé has moral obligations to his fiancée because she has passed the normal age to find another person to marry.

“But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his [d]virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. **37** 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.” 1 Corinthians 7:36, 37

#### **7. What does Paul say about widow(er)s?**

- a. He or she is free to remarry a believer.

“A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 7:39

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.” Romans 7:2

- b. Paul believes that they are better-off not marrying, but he understands the relational impulses of the human nature.

“But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.” 1 Corinthians 7:40

“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; **9** but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.” 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9

#### **8. Conclusion:**

- a. Singleness is a gift and can be a blessing in various cases;
- b. Marriage should be between two individuals of the same faith;
- c. Sexual intimacy is a blessing in the context of a married couple;

- d. Divorce was not part of God’s original purpose for marriage;
- e. Divorce and remarriage is biblically accepted in cases of adultery;
- f. Divorce and remarriage is biblically accepted when an unbelieving spouse abandons the believing spouse;
- g. A man in a long-term relationship with a woman has moral obligations toward her;
- h. Biblically widow(er)s can remarry, though Paul counsels caution.

“God has placed men in the world, and it is their privilege to eat, to drink, to trade, to marry, and to be given in marriage; but it is safe to do these things only in the fear of God. We should live in the world with reference to the eternal world.” E. G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality*, Vol. 1, p. 221

### 9. Self-reflection:

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.” 1 Corinthians 7:17

- a. If you are not married:
  - i. Has God given me the gift of singleness which I can exercise for the good of His kingdom? (1 Cor. 7:7, 17, 37)
  - ii. Does my proposed marriage partner share my dedication to Jesus Christ? (verse 39)
  - iii. Will my marriage detract from or enhance my preparation for Christ's return?
- b. If you are married:
  - i. Am I practicing the degree of mutual respect that seems so important to Paul? (Verse 4).
  - ii. Am I deeply committed to my marriage? Do I allow Christ to help me retain loyalty to my mate even though he or she falls short of my ideal? (Verses 10-14; compare Mark 10:2-9).
  - iii. How can my spouse and I join in more “unhindered devotion” to the Lord?