



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-40

INTRODUCTION

First-century Corinth was well-known for its sexual immorality, so it was no surprise that Paul had to address reports of it within the church (1 Cor. 5-6). Others in the church, however, perhaps as an over-reaction to Corinth's blatant immorality, promoted an ascetic lifestyle which looked down on sex, even within marriage. Paul now turns to address this group in the church.

MAIN POINT

Marriage and singleness are equally gifts of God to be enjoyed by those to whom he gives them, and neither is holier than the other.

REFLECT

Up until this point in the letter, Paul has been responding to reports about the church in Corinth (1:11; 5:1). Now he turns to address issues that the Corinthians had personally written to him about. Staying on the topic of sexuality, he first addresses those in the church who believed that celibacy was to be preferred over marriage, even viewing it as morally superior (7:1).

At the heart of the slogan Paul quotes in verse 1 though isn't so much a disdain for marriage as it is a disdain for sex. Surrounded as they were by the abuse of sex within their culture, this group felt it was better (and holier) to abstain from it entirely. Naturally this thinking began to affect some in the church who were already married, causing them to feel that it was their godly responsibility to abstain from sex with their spouse. Some who found this impossible to do began to separate from each other. Others who had become Christians after getting married were tempted to take the same

approach, believing that being married to an unbeliever somehow made them unholy to God.

In seeking to keep themselves free from Corinth's hyper-sexualized culture, this camp had swung so far in the opposite direction that they came to see a good gift of God as evil. So Paul first reiterates the importance of sex within marriage and the responsibility each spouse has toward the other (vv. 2-5). Abstinence in marriage is permissible only by mutual consent and for a brief time devoted to prayer. (Even then, Paul is *allowing* rather than recommending this course of action.)

To married Christians, Paul speaks against separating from one another and strongly urges reconciliation for those who have (vv. 10-11). To the unmarried and widows, he affirms the goodness of their singleness while reminding them of their freedom to marry (vv. 8-9; 39-40). His counsel is much the same for engaged couples who were wondering if they should follow through with getting married. Neither option is sinful so long as their chief aim is to have an undivided service to the Lord (vv. 25-38). To those in mixed marriages who felt "unclean" being married to a non-Christian, Paul stresses the blessings they can have on the unbelievers in their home. For this reason, they should stay in the marriage as long as the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay in it, in the hope that one day they will be saved (vv. 12-16).

At the heart of this chapter (vv. 17-24) is the general principle behind Paul's counsel to these believers. A Christian should "remain in the condition in which he was called" (v. 20). Paul isn't saying that a Christian who came to faith as a single can never get married or that we can never leave the job we had when we were converted. Rather, he is cautioning against viewing certain life circumstances as inherently holier or more useful to God than others. God has equipped all believers, regardless of circumstance, with the tools to faithfully serve him and others. He is promoting a heart of contentment that asks, "How can I faithfully serve the Lord with where he has me *now*?"

- What are some ways that Christians today can over-react to prevalent sins in our culture?
- According to this passage, in what sense are both marriage and singleness gifts of God? What are some benefits of each?
- What are some practical ways that you can serve others given your current life circumstances?

MEMORIZE

1 Timothy 4:4-5 – "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."