

1 Corinthians is such a practical letter. We learn a lot about church life from it. Certainly the Corinthian church had its share of problems—and Paul addresses several in this epistle.

Q: How did Paul decide which problems to address in the letter?

--Some he learned about from members of Chloe's household (1:11)

--Some he learned about from a letter sent to him from the church. He mentions this letter in 7:1.

Chapter 7: Paul addresses a subject that the Corinthians asked him about, namely questions about *marriage* and *singleness*.

Q: What other texts in the Bible address the subject? (We should work to familiarize ourselves with the Bible so we can remember where to find texts that address key subjects)

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 addresses the subject of marriage and singleness. His material builds upon itself by moving through five issues...

I. General Instruction about Marriage (1-7)

Q: What is not good, according to v 1? (note: KJV says "to touch a woman") The Greek word is from *hupto* which means "to touch," and speaks of physical relations.

Note: I'm not sure where the NIV came up with the word "marry."

Is Paul being "Victorian"? Elsewhere the Scriptures talk about the beauty of marriage and even of physical intimacy in marriage (e.g. Gen. 2:25; Song of Songs). The key to understanding 1 Corinthians 7 is the *historical setting*.

Q: What was it like to be a Christian in the Roman Empire in A.D. 55? Persecution was a fact of life...

Paul's counsel in 1 Cor 7 grows out of this context. Here are two general principles...

A. Singleness is preferable in times of persecution (1).

1. *This isn't because marriage is bad.*

2. *This isn't because physical intimacy is bad.*

3. *This is because of the unusual strain persecution brings (26, 32-35).*

Q: What kind of unusual pressure would persecution place on marriages?

B. Marriage is still appropriate (2-7).

Q: For what reasons? Paul mentions four...

1. *It prevents immorality (2).*

Q: What did Paul say there was a lot of in his day?

2. *It meets legitimate needs (3-4).*

Q: What happens to the ownership of a person's body when they marry?

Note: God intends for married partners to give themselves willingly to their spouses, to meet their needs. The focus in the physical relationship is to be the

same focus in the entire relationship. The focus is on *giving*. It's not, "What can you do to make me happy?" but, "What can I do to give of myself to please you?"

3. *It protects from temptation (5).*

Paul talks about a subject we might at first consider "unspiritual." He's talking about physical intimacy in marriage. This is a gift God gave to mankind, a good gift. What we do with it is a "spiritual" matter.

Key: Paul assumes that married couples will give of themselves to meet their spouse's physical needs.

Q: When is the only time this is *not* to happen according to v 5?

4. *It is a proper response to the gift of God (6-7).*

Q: What was Paul's personal preference, and why?

Q: Who ultimately determines whether we should marry or not? God does.

II. Specific Instruction about Marriage (8-16)

Paul addresses three groups...

A. Here is instruction for the unmarried (8-9).

Note: Paul refers to the "unmarried" and to the "widows." Are these the same group, or different groups?

1. *Stay unmarried if possible.*

2. *If necessary, marry.*

Q: What do you think Paul meant by v 9?

B. Here is instruction for the married (10-11).

1. *Don't separate.*

2. *If separation occurs, the goal is reconciliation.*

Q: Why so?

Please note that Paul is talking to *Christians* here. Do Christian marriages ever struggle? Yes. We need this counsel.

C. Here is instruction for the rest (12-16).

Q: Why does he say, "I, not the Lord"?

Real life scenario #1:

If a believer has an unbelieving spouse, and

If the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay married...

1. *Don't divorce the unbeliever (12-13).*

2. *The believer's presence has a sanctifying effect on the rest of the family (14).*

Q: In what sense?

Real life scenario #2:

If the unbeliever leaves (i.e. initiates the breakup of the marriage)...

1. *Let him go.*

2. *The believer is not bound.*

3. *We are called to live in peace.*

This is one of two biblical grounds for divorce in the Bible. What is the other?

Next time...

III. An Important Principle regarding Marriage (17-24)

****Stay in the position you were in when God saved you (17, 24).**

A. That's true if you were circumcised or uncircumcised (18-20).

B. That's true if you were a slave or a free person (21-24).

C. That's also true in your marital status (by implication).

IV. Some further instruction about Virgins (25-38)

A. Here is some counsel for the unmarried (25-28).

1. Because of the current crisis, remain in your current state (25-27).

a. If you are married, stay married.

b. If you are single, don't look for a spouse.

2. If you do marry, it's not wrong (28a).

3. If you do marry, it will create challenges (28b).

B. Here are the facts (29-31).

1. Time is short (29a).

2. It's not wise to get too attached to the world (29b-30).

3. The world is passing away (31).

C. Here are some advantages of singleness (32-35).

1. A single person can be devoted solely to the Lord (32-34).

2. A single person doesn't struggle with competing loyalties (35).

D. Here is what an "engaged" couple should do in a time of persecution (36-38).

1. If they want to marry, that's fine.

2. If they want to remain single, that's even better (considering the circumstances).

V. Here are some final stipulations (39-40).

A. Marriage is for life.

B. When a spouse dies...

1. You are free to remarry.

2. You may marry anyone as long as the person is a believer.

3. You may be happier if you stay single (in times of persecution).