

Marriage vs Celibacy



I Corinthians 7:1-16; 25-40

Introduction

- In chapter 7, the Apostle Paul answered seven questions posed to him by the Corinthian believers.

I. Difficult Questions (part 1)

- a systematic overview which develops Paul's arguments question by question

II. Divine Principles (part 2)

- a thematic analysis

Background

- Among the religions of the ancient world, teachings concerning marriage and sex were varied.
 - 1) Marriage is mandatory.
 - 2) Celibacy (abstention from marriage) is mandatory.
 - 3) Immorality (sex outside marriage) is acceptable.

Background

- The Corinthians asked Paul to clarify the biblical teaching on these subjects.
- The Apostle addressed them in chapter 7 of this epistle.
- Note the phrase, “***Now concerning the things ye wrote unto me.***”

A. Sexual Relations in Marriage (7:1-6)

- In Paul's day certain pagan philosophers extolled the virtues of celibacy as a holier lifestyle.
- The statement, "***It is good for a man not to touch a woman***" (v.1) may well have been a Corinthian slogan (Gordon Fee).
- "***To touch a woman***" is a euphemism for sexual intimacies.

A. Sexual Relations in Marriage (7:1-6)

- Q: Isn't it preferable for a Christian man to abstain from sexual relations with any woman, even one's own wife?
- This would reflect the misconceived spiritual viewpoint of the Corinthians who held a negative attitude toward the material world and the body.

A. Sexual Relations in Marriage (7:1-6)

- Paul strongly urged them that the type of abstinence within marriage that they were arguing for was totally wrong.
- In view of the temptation to commit fornication, each partner in marriage needs to fulfill his or her sexual obligation to the spouse (v.2-3).

A. Sexual Relations in Marriage (7:1-6)

- There are legitimate reasons for abstinence from sexual relations, but three conditions are required (v.5):
 1. by mutual consent
 2. for a good object (e.g. prayer and fasting)
 3. temporary.

A. Sexual Relations in Marriage (7:1-6)

- Paul viewed regular sexual relations in marriage as the norm.
- Abstinence was the exception.
- **Counsel: No married couple should attempt to live a celibate lifestyle.**

B. Propriety of Marriage (7:7-9)

- Paul evidently was not a married man when he wrote this epistle (v.7a).
- He wished everyone could live as he did, but he realized that most could not.
- Each person has his proper gift of God(v.7b): some to live single, and some to live married (cf. Matt. 19:12).

B. Propriety of Marriage (7:7-9)

- Paul affirmed that it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain single (v.8), but chastity is more important.
- The expression “*to burn*” does not speak of burning in hell, but rather the stirring of intense passion.
- **Counsel: It is better to marry than to risk immorality (v.9).**

C. Remaining Married to Converted Mates (7:10-11)

- Paul repeated what the Lord Jesus taught regarding the permanence of marriage (v.10; cf. Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12).
- If separation occurs, they should remain unmarried or else be reconciled with their spouse (v.11).

D. Remaining Married to Unconverted Mates (7:12-16)

- The Corinthian church had the problem of mixed marriages in which one partner was saved and the other was not.
- Q: Should a believing partner divorce an unbelieving mate instead of continue living mismatched with him or her?

D. Remaining Married to Unconverted Mates (7:12-16)

- Paul counseled the believer to go on living with the unbelieving spouse as long as the unbeliever was willing to do so (vs. 12-13).
- This is because the unbelieving spouse and children are better off with a Christian influence than without one (v.14, 16).

D. Remaining Married to Unconverted Mates (7:12-16)

- The word “*sanctified*” does not imply that the spouse or children are automatically saved because of the saved partner; but when one spouse is saved, the other enjoys a special spiritual influence, and the conversion of the remainder of the family is far more likely.

D. Remaining Married to Unconverted Mates (7:12-16)

- But if the unbeliever departs, the believing partner is “***not under bondage***” (v.15).
- Does this mean that the believer is released from the marriage contract and is free to remarry someone else?
- “The point is clear: in a mixed marriage the Christian is not to take the initiative ... in a move towards [permanent] separation.” - Barrett

E. Remaining Unmarried (7:25-35)

- In this section Paul is directing his comments to “*virgins*” (v.25) - those who had never been married.
- His advice is that in view of “*the present distress*” (v.26)--some kind of impending persecution--it would be good for people not to marry (v.27).

E. Remaining Unmarried (7:25-35)

- However, those who felt that they must marry could do so without sinning.
- His aim is not to forbid marriage but to spare them from trouble (v.28).
- In verses 29-35 Paul argues that the unmarried state frees a person to serve the Lord more effectively.

F. Allowing Christian Daughters to Marry (7:36-38)

- Two interpretations of these verses are common:
 1. An **engaged man** having difficulty deciding whether to consummate the proposed marriage.
 2. A **father** having difficulty deciding whether to allow his daughter to marry.

F. Allowing Christian Daughters to Marry (7:36-38)

- The Greek verb in verse 38 translated “*giveth her in marriage*” applies best to a father contemplating his daughter’s marriage.
- Probably for the same reasons he gave earlier, Paul advised fathers not to allow their daughters to marry.

F. Allowing Christian Daughters to Marry (7:36-38)

- Paul again made clear that marriage is acceptable (v.36).
- To allow a child to marry is fine but under the circumstances the alternative was better (v. 37).
- The question was not between right and wrong but between good and best (v.38).

G. Remarriage after Death of Mate (7:39-40)

- The marriage vow is binding until death, but after a spouse's death the surviving spouse is free to remarry.
- Paul advised against remarriage, but he commanded only that they marry "*in the Lord.*"

Conclusion

- We have considered **I. Difficult Questions** posed to the Apostle Paul relating to marriage and celibacy.
- In the next message we shall analyze the **II. Divine Principles** relating to marriage and celibacy.

Quiz

- 1) **Marriage is required of Christians. True or False**
- 2) **Married Christians should refrain from sexual relations in order to develop spiritual discipline. True or False**
- 3) **The ability to remain celibate is a gift from God. True or False**
- 4) **Once a couple are married, they should never consider trying to live in celibacy. True or False**

Quiz

5) It is better to have the burden of caring for a family than to experience constant temptation to immorality. True or False

6) The presence of a Christian is a sanctifying influence on an unsaved family. True or False

7) If Christian spouses divorce, they should remarry someone else rather than live with constant temptation. True or False

Quiz

8) Upon becoming a Christian, a married person may divorce an unsaved spouse after allowing a sufficient time for the spouse to accept Christ. True or False

9) A man and woman can devote themselves more completely to the Lord's work as a married couple than as single people. True or False

10) Paul's teaching on marriage was conditioned by special circumstances facing the Corinthian church. True or False