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**Divorce  
and  
Pauls Teaching  
on  
Marriage**

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Divorce and Pauls Teaching on Marriage.

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### Topics.

- Each man and woman should have their own wife and husband.
- Husbands and wives should give each other their conjugal rights.
- Satan, temptation, and lack of self-control.
- It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.
- The unbelieving husband and unbelieving wife are made Holy.
- He who marries does well, but he who refrains will do even better.
- If a husband dies, his wife is free to be married to who she wishes.

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### 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER SEVEN

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#### **Each man and woman should have their own wife and husband.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:1-2:** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”<sup>2</sup> But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

Paul’s focus here is both, men and woman who are single, notice that in this context the purpose of marriage is not about having children, but so that a man and woman can safely enjoy the pleasure of a sexual relationship which in turn stops sexual immorality amongst a community and the many other troubles that come with it (i.e., emotional hurts, unplanned pregnancies, and diseases etc.).

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#### **Husbands and wives should give each other their conjugal rights.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:3-4:** The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.<sup>4</sup> For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Paul is saying the husband and wife should put the sexual needs of their spouse before their own. Notice the equality in the sexual relationship, the husband has authority over his wives’ body, likewise the wife has authority over his body. Clearly sex should not be used as a manipulative weapon or a tool to inflict revenge (i.e., to get payback) on a spouse by withholding sex and causing frustration and hurt in the other partner, nor should it be used as a reward to get something one or the other desires by offering sex. It, should be pointed out that the words: “the husband has authority over the woman’s body” (v4), does not mean he can rape her, or use force to get what he wants, since the spirit underpinning marriage should be love. It is from a spirit of love the husband and wife, should be putting each other’s sexual well-being before their own.

#### **Satan and lack of self-control.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:5:** Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

There are times when both will agree to abstain from sex for various reasons, but Paul warns this should never be for too long. Notice, many say that the sole idea of marriage is to produce children, though that is

one idea it is not the only idea, here Paul's focus of marriage is not children, but upon the idea a man and woman can safely, and without being promiscuous enjoy the pleasure of a sexual relationship. The words, "So that Satan may not tempt you," appear to conflict with the following words of James:

- Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire (James 1:14).

To understand how these two verses harmonise with each other we need to firstly look at the word Satan. In the Hebrew and Greek language, the word Satan does not have a capital \*S\* and simply means an adversary, one who withstands, opposes, or resists it is a word that has come to symbolize everything that is the total opposite to what is good, decent, and right, and especially used to signify everything opposed to God.

In many verses of the Bible the word Satan is often personified as the arch enemy of God, and the works of Satan are described as:

- Adulteries.
- A false witness.
- Blasphemies.
- Covetousness.
- Deceit.
- Drunkenness.
- Emulation's.
- Evil thoughts.
- Envy.
- Foolishness.
- Fornication's.
- Hatred.
- Heresies.
- Idolatry.
- Lasciviousness.
- Murders.
- Pride.
- Revelling.
- Sedition's.
- Strife.
- Thefts.
- Variance.
- Wickedness.
- Witchcraft.
- Wrath, and such like things.

The Bible tells us all of these, dwell in the human heart, and that they are all the works of Satan, which shows us that Satan's dwelling place must be in the human heart, which means the word Satan is a personification of the evil in the heart that influences a person's own lust, ego, and pride etc., in rebellion against God, or to act as an adversary to Christ and those who follow him.

However, the word Satan is not limited in its meaning to only religious matters, Satan in its widest and fullest sense is a personification of everything that is opposed to what is good, religious, or secular, which is why the word Satan fittingly is summed up in the universal title, "The Arch enemy of good." This influence can be manifested through an individual, a group, a government or leaders of nations that act as an adversary and enemy to everything that is good, decent, and right.

**Satan and temptation:** Paul's words, "So that Satan may not tempt you," (1 Cor. 7:5) and the words of James, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (James 1:14), carry the same idea, since Satan in this context is a personification of the lust that is within each person's own heart. But the word Satan, should not be limited to this idea only, for it also has the following applications:

- If a sensuous woman begins to tantalise and tempt a married man to lie with her, it could be correctly stated that she is being a Satan to that man.
- If a man, by sweet-talking a married woman tempts her to lie with him, it can be rightly said that he is being a Satan to her.

Understanding this principle, helps us understand why Jesus called Peter a Satan in the following verse:

- **Matthew 16:22-23:** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”<sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Peter was speaking words to Jesus that were against the will, the purposes, and the plan of God and in this sense, Peter was being a Satan to the Lord. For further information see the title:

- Demons, in, Satan and his Family (ON WEBSITE MENU).

**The unmarried and the widows:** in the following verses, Paul (a single man) is expressing his own opinion:

- **1 Corinthians 7:6-7:** Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.<sup>7</sup> I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.<sup>8</sup> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.

Paul feels remaining single is the better option, but realises that it is not the ideal for all, which is why he makes it clear that what he is saying is not a command, but simply his opinion. Paul most likely thought remaining single was the better option because of his relationship with God, and the reality single believers have far less responsibilities than a married person, and can therefore give more time to the service of the Lord, though this is true, the words, “Each has his own gift from God” (v7), show that both marriage and remaining single, is a gift from God. It is God’s gift to both the one who can remain single, and the one who marries, neither one is exalted above the other since Paul counts being able to remain single and being married both as gifts of God.

**It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion:** some say the words, “aflame with passion” refer to a sense of loneliness and the craving for a partner to share life with, but the context of Paul’s letter so far has been sexual desire, sexual promiscuity and sexual pleasure which clearly shows that though loneliness and the craving for a partner to share life with is very real, it is not what Paul has in mind when he said, “It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.” Once again, we see that in this context the focus of marriage is not upon having children, but preventing sexual promiscuity and men and woman enjoying the pleasure of sex together in a safe and caring relationship.

- **1 Corinthians 7:10-11:** To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband<sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

God’s ideal for all marriages is stated in the book of Genesis, “A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). God’s ideal for all mankind has never changed, for the following reasons:

- It is a wholesome and nourishing environment for children to be raised in.
- It fulfils the human heart.

- It enables the pleasure of sex to be safely enjoyed.
- It brings order to a community.
- It prevents the spread of diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

It is for these reasons Paul states that a husband and wife should not separate from each other.

**NOTE:** It should be mentioned that even though the statement, "A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife," was made prior to the fall, God's ideal remains the same since the Bible teaches God's perfect ideal. Nevertheless, within the body of Christ some marriages fail to attain to this perfect ideal, though this is true, not one of us can point a condemning finger, for we have all sinned, and not one of us stands before the perfect Holiness of God free of sin. John in his letter wrote:

- **1 John 1:8-10:** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Not one of us is saved by our own self-righteousness, but by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, and by God's grace.

**If a brother or sister has an unbelieving spouse let them remain together.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:12-13:** To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

Paul's focus here is upon unbelieving wives and husbands. The words, "To the rest," refer to all those in a different circumstance to the ones Paul has already covered above. Once again Paul makes it very clear that what he is saying is simply his opinion. If a husband or wife has an unbelieving spouse, and they are willing to remain living with them it is better for them to remain together, they do not need to divorce simply because their partner does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the reasons Paul makes it clear that this advice is only his opinion, is very likely, because he would be aware that in certain situations this could be quite difficult for a brother or sister in Christ who finds themselves in this position.

**The unbelieving husband and unbelieving wife are made Holy.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:14:** For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Paul's focus here, is unbelieving husbands, unbelieving wives, and children. It should be noted that the phrase, 'Made holy' does not mean saved to eternal life, because no-one is saved by another person's faith. During Paul's generation the Jews considered themselves the holy race and the Gentile an unclean race, and because of this, the Jews would not mix with the Gentiles for fear of becoming unclean. This attitude no-doubt remained with some brothers and sisters in Christ, which is the reason Paul says, "the unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife is made holy (sanctified in KJV), because of the believing partner. The words, "made holy," means that those who do belong to the family of Christ are to accept the believing wife or believing husband's unbelieving partner and their children as being holy and treat them in the same way as they would treat their brothers and sisters in Christ.

**The practical application today:** to apply this principal in today's churches means that the congregation or any Christian group should consider an unbelieving husband or an unbelieving wife of a Christian woman or Christian man to be holy in contrast to separating from them or treating them as an outsider (i.e., unclean), and they are to treat the children the same way, but it does not mean they are saved to eternal life. This is simply talking about the attitude Christians are to have towards their brothers and sister's unbelieving family and children. The world 'unclean' in this context as used in the Bible does not mean a person is a gross sinner, but that they do not believe in God or the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a term that is often used in the Bible, and carries the idea that a person was separated from God, today we would say unsaved.

**A brother or sister is not enslaved, God has called you to peace.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:15-16:** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Paul now tells the believing husband or wife that they are not in bondage to the law and covenant of marriage if their unbelieving spouse desires to separate, it is OK to let them do so, since God does not want his children living in contention and strife, but peace. The words: how do you know whether you will save your husband, and, husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife? Carry the idea that the believing husband or believing wife is holding onto their unbelieving partner in the hope they will at some stage accept the Lord Jesus Christ, but Paul is asking how long are they prepared to live in tension when they cannot even know if their partner will ever repent and believe, therefore the better option is to let them have their wish and allow them to go so that they are happy, and the believing spouse has peace.

**Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to them.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:17-24:** Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. <sup>18</sup> Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. <sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. <sup>21</sup> Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise, he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. <sup>24</sup> So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Whether a person is married, single, a slave or circumcised at the time they became a believer they do not need to change their situation now that they have become united to God. This does not mean that if it is possible to enhance their lifestyle, they should not take advantage of that opportunity since the only thing God counts of value is keeping the commandments which Jesus summed up in the following words:

- You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:37-39).

These are the only two commandments anyone needs to know, because if a person loves God, and their neighbour as themselves, they will never hurt or harm another human in anyway, which means no other commandment would ever be broken. The words, "Love your neighbour as yourself" means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others

as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, sexually, emotionally, verbally, or spiritually, and the thing God loves the most is when we do-good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah's time, and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land. Leviticus chapter nineteen makes it clear that our neighbour is every other person, showing that the law requires justice to all people. The six commandments regarding mankind should be applied to everyone and we must abide by them ourselves. To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of the law of love in relation to our neighbour, for the law love your neighbour as yourself contains the law of justice and what is right and fair for all. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ.

**Do not become slaves of men:** these words do not mean that we should not have bosses over us as some think, since working for a boss is not slavery, because the employee is rewarded for their effort, rather the words, "Do not become slaves of men" mean, do not to let men control our behaviour or our actions to sin, but rather live as slaves to Christ, in the sense that we are to follow his example and let his lifestyle control how we speak, act, live and behave.

**You were bought with a price:** (1 Cor. 7:23), the price Paul refers to is the life of God's only beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who laid his life down, that we could be made righteous by faith apart from the law, self-effort and works. Despite the sinful aberrations and dysfunctions that dwell in our flesh, God counts our faith in Christ as our righteousness, and imputes it to us as a pure and free-gift. Consider the following words of Paul:

- **Romans 5:8:** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **Romans 5:10:** While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

These two verses shine a brilliant spotlight on the truth that God loved us long before we loved Him. Some in the Christian faith determine whether God loves them by their good or bad circumstances, if their life is charmed and blessed God loves them, but if it suddenly takes a turn for the worse and trouble comes, they feel God has withdrawn his love, but this is superstition and judging God according to the fickle circumstances of this world. When anyone who believes in Christ doubts God's love all they need to do is look back to the bloodstained cross, and see what it cost the heart of the Father to save us, and how much his Son suffered to redeem us, and spiritually crown and cloth us with his robe of righteous so that we could be justified by faith, and granted eternal life in everlasting glory apart from works, and strictly adhering to ceremonial rites and holy days, or keeping religious customs and traditions.

### **Those who marry will have worldly troubles.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:25-27:** Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. <sup>26</sup> I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. <sup>27</sup> Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. <sup>28</sup> But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.

For engaged men and woman Paul has no command from the Lord therefore whatever he says here is once again his opinion. The words, 'in view of the present distress,' (v26) most likely refer to Roman persecution of those who confess Christ and to Rome's aggression toward Israel since Paul's letter is written around A.D. 55 which means in another fifteen years (70 A.D.), Roman soldiers destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, whatever the distress refers to, it implies life was not easy for them (see the following verses), and because of this distress Paul's opinion was that it would be better for single people to remain as they are, however if an engaged couple did marry it was okay.

No-doubt even today there are some young Christian couples who because of the many troubles in all nations of the world and the financial struggle, wonder if it is wise to marry and raise a family, or better to spend their life serving the Lord. Paul is saying to these couple's whatever decision they make it is okay, nevertheless because of the troubles in the world, they will find raising a family more difficult than remaining single (there are probably very few who would disagree with this statement).

### **The appointed time has grown very short.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:29-31:** This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,<sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,<sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

NOTE: the KJV does not say "The appointed time" (which to some seems to imply that Paul is referring to the return of Christ), but simply says "The time has grown very short" which clearly shows that Paul is referring to the time of the Corinthian church, and not the return of Christ. To support this idea are the words, "For the present form of this world is passing away" (v31), meaning the present order of rule, government, authority, command, and control as they have known it.

To fully understand the words, 'the present form of this world is passing away,' (v31), it needs to be noted that fifteen years after Paul made this statement the Romans attacked and pillaged the city Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of God, and with it the Old Testament priesthood and ceremonial law that the Jews had lived by for over 4000 years.

Pagan Rome took the rule and authority over Jerusalem, Israel, and the known world. Though Paul probably did not foresee these events in a vision it would no-doubt have been very clear that enormous trouble was coming because of the might of the Roman armies who were victoriously conquering the nations of the world at the time of the Corinthian church and Rome's aggression toward the Jews and those that confessed Christ, which explains why Paul said to the brothers and sisters in the Corinthian church, from now on:

- Let those who have wives live as though they had none.
- Let those who mourn as though they were not mourning.
- Let those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing.
- Let those who buy as though they had no goods.
- Let those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. (1 Cor. 7:29-31).



Paul is basically warning the Corinthian brothers and sisters not to set their heart on anything other than God, sharing the testimony of Christ, and doing his will, since all these things have eternal value, contrasted to the temporal order of the world, they are living in, which was slowly passing away. (v29-31).

**NOTE:** Paul is not telling the Corinthian brothers and sisters that they should not take care of their wife and children, but rather that they should not set their heart on building their life on the temporal and mortal things of this world since everything in it could be taken from them, rather, Paul being aware of the trouble that is looming, is telling brothers and sisters in Christ the only way to be free from mental and emotional anxieties, and not stress or be anxious about worldly things is to set their heart and mind on God and the things that have eternal value.

**The practical application today:** obviously the Bible teaches a husband and wife should always love and care for each other, but because trouble in life can come at any moment, we should all build our lives on Christ and the eternal hope of everlasting life in glory since this hope will keep us when trouble arises, (i.e., a spouse dies, a family home is lost or the global economy collapses etc.

**I want the single person and married couple to be free of anxieties.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:32-35:** I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.<sup>33</sup> But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife,<sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.<sup>35</sup> I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Paul's focus here is upon single men and women, contrasted to married men and women. In these verses Paul is showing that both the single person and the married person have their own anxieties. Neither the single person nor the married couple are totally free from anxiety, there are positives and negatives in both.

**The single person:** the positive for a single person is that their time and interests are not divided by a spouse which means they are totally free to focus on how to please the Lord, but on the negative side they must contend with keeping themselves from sexual activities (how to be holy in body and spirit) (v34) and their time can be consumed with seeking a partner.

**The married person:** the positive side for a married person is that they do not have to contend with keeping themselves sexually holy in body and spirit since Paul throughout this chapter has been stating that one of the purposes of marriage is so a man and woman can enjoy the joys of sexual pleasure, added to this married couples are not consumed with seeking a wife or husband. On the negative side is the obvious fact that their time and interests are divided, since they need to think of worldly things, because it is proper in the eyes of the Lord for them to please and care for their spouse and their children. One of the most likely reasons Paul is pointing out the advantages and disadvantages within a single person's life, and within marriage, is that whether single or married they would be free from the following thoughts, because both have their own troubles to contend with:

- The single person cannot think, "if only I was married, then I could serve the Lord in greater ways."

- The married person cannot think, “if only I was single, then I could serve the Lord far more.”

No matter whether single, engaged, or married, no believer should be envious of another, since all have their own struggles, and all have different advantages, that can be used to advance the Kingdom of God and benefit those in it. Paul, in these verses is highlighting the fact, whether single, engaged or married, all should give their devotion, and what time they have available to the Lord, despite the fact they have their own unique difficulties to deal with.

**He who marries does well, but he who refrains will do even better.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:36-38:** If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin.<sup>37</sup> But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.<sup>38</sup> So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

Paul in these verses is simply saying, if an engaged couple cannot control their sexual passions, then its best for them to marry, but if they are able to restrain themselves, it is better for them to continue in the engagement, until they decide to marry or not to marry. The words, ‘he who refrains from marriage,’ (38) in the context of this chapter, do not mean he who never marries, but refers to those who refrain from having to get married because they can control their sexual passions. The thought behind the words, ‘will do even better’ (38), is the idea, if the couple can remain in their engagement as a courting couple until they decide to marry, they will do better than the couple who marry because they cannot control their sexual passion.

**If a husband dies, his wife is free to be married to who she wishes.**

- **1 Corinthians 7:39-40:** A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to who she wishes, only in the Lord.<sup>40</sup> Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

Once again this is only Paul’s opinion. It is certain that throughout Paul’s travels, he at various times observed the restrictions and struggles a marriage can sometimes put on a woman, and because of his deep relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and his abundant understanding of the Lord’s love and grace, he naturally considered a widowed woman who loves the Lord, would be happier if she remained on her own.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*