

Week of July 9 - 15

Instructions to The Married and Those Who are Single (1 Corinthians 7:1-31)

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul answered six questions that were apparently asked in a letter from the Corinthian church about marriage and remaining single.

(1) Should married couples continue normal sexual relations after becoming Christians? Yes, it is their duty to do this (1 Corinthians 7:1-7).

(2) Should single persons get married? Yes, in all typical situations, but for the gifted, like Paul, celibacy was advantageous, especially in dangerous times (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

(3) Is divorce permitted for Christians? No (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

(4) When one partner of marriage becomes a Christian, and the other refuses to do so, is the marriage binding? Yes, except when the unbeliever deserts the Christian partner. Becoming a Christian doesn't free a man from obligations already binding upon him. (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

(5) Should Christian fathers (or guardians) give their daughters in marriage? The fathers and guardians were given authority to solve their individual problems when there is no sin involved, however the decision went, but specific guidelines were suggested (1 Corinthians 7:25-38).

(6) May a Christian widow remarry? Yes, provided that she marries "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39-40).

Paul said it's good to be married, as opposed to being single and celibate, to prevent sexual immorality. However, Paul made it clear this teaching is not a commandment from God, but just a recommendation. Paul made a lot of recommendations to the churches. Some of what he said is based on what God commands; some are only recommendations that are just that: recommendations.

When Paul said it is sinful to steal, commit adultery, kill, etc., these are not recommendations since they are based on God's law. But when he gave suggestions on whether it is good to marry or stay single, it was a recommendation, which he plainly stated.

Paul said that if remaining single is difficult for a person, then he should marry. To the married, he said they should remain married, as it is God's will. His point is that everyone should remain in the situation that he was in when he became a believer in Jesus Christ, regardless of what his spouse does.

Paul then moved to circumcision, saying, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but obeying the commandments of God is everything." He explained that obeying God's commandments is what makes a person a Jew, "but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Instead, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart: spiritual and not literal. Speaking of both circumcision and marriage, Paul said, "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were when you became a believer."

Paul then talked about those who were slaves when they became believers, and then he spoke of those who are unmarried. He told them he is only giving a suggestion, saying no one sins if he marries but that he thought it is good for them to remain unmarried since marriage brings on other problems.

He explained that these suggestions were because of the great danger they were facing in their lives and that he wanted everyone to be as free as possible for the Lord's work.

Food Offered to Idols (1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

Paul again returned to the subject of food to discuss this topic more in-depth.

He explained that food sacrificed to idols is okay to eat because there is only one God, and idols are just wood and stone. However, he said they should be careful about eating food sacrificed to idols because there are believers who have always believed that idols are real gods. It could cause them to stumble when they partake in these sacrifices.

It is just food to the strong believers, but it is food sacrificed to an idol to the believers who are weak in their belief. Paul said that he would never eat meat again if it were causing a weak believer to stumble in the faith.

While accepting that some might understand God and idols, he said that all might not, and it would be extremely easy by abuse of "liberty" to cause those with weak consciences to stumble. That would be a serious offense, even against Christ, prompting Paul to say how far he would go to avoid causing a brother to stumble.

The Rights of an Apostle (1 Corinthians 9:1-27)

Paul continued talking about eating food sacrificed to idols, having said he would choose not to eat meat ever again if it was causing a weak believer to stumble. He explained that he is free to eat what he wanted, or to have a wife, or to not work for a living (instead taking donations), but that he chose not to do any of these things so as not to make anyone stumble.

Paul told the Corinthians he had planted good spiritual seed in their souls. He added, "Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing? You gave them to others who preached to you, and you should. But shouldn't we have an even greater right to them? Yet we have never used this right but supply our own needs without your help. We have never demanded payment of any kind fearing you might be less interested in our message to you about Christ."

Paul added, "In the same way, the Lord commanded those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel. But I have made no use of any of these rights" He explained he lives this way so no one who is weak would stumble by his actions so that he can be a witness for the Gospel without any hindrance.

When Paul is giving this explanation, he was speaking of non-sinful issues – choosing not to eat meat, choosing not to have a wife, choosing not to take donations, following the Jewish regulations for Jews, and following Gentile regulations for Gentiles, etc.

Paul said he is free to live how he wants regarding these non-sinful issues, but he chose to live the way he does to help spread the Gospel. This is what Paul meant when he said, "I punish my body and enslave it."

Therefore, if the food were a cause of their falling, he would never eat meat, so that he won't cause one of them to fall.

Paul would never partake in any sin to help spread the Gospel because sin contradicts the Gospel. Everything he writes opposes sin: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived...obeying the commandments of God is everything." Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

Warnings from Israel's History (1 Corinthians 10:1-33)

Paul talked about sinful issues again, telling them never to forget what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness. God guided them by sending a cloud that moved along ahead of them, and he

brought them all safely through the Red Sea. This might be called their "baptism" as followers of Moses- their commitment to him as their leader. And God sent them food to eat and water to drink there in the desert; they drank the water that Christ gave them. He was there with them as the Rock of spiritual refreshment. Yet, most of them did not obey God, and he destroyed them in the wilderness.

Paul told them if they were thinking, "Oh, I would never behave like that"- let this be a warning. For they too may fall into sin. But remember this - the wrong desires that come into a person's life aren't anything new and different. Others have faced the same problems. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so you can patiently bear up to it.

Paul again spoke about food sacrificed to idols saying, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are permitted, but not all things build up. You are certainly free to eat food offered to idols if you want to; it's not against God's laws, but that doesn't mean you should go ahead and do it. It may be perfectly legal, but it may not be best or helpful. Don't think only of yourself. Try to think of the other person, too, and what is best for him.

When Paul says, "All things are lawful," he is not talking about sin, which he has already made clear, "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God."

You must do everything for the glory of God. So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Propriety in Worship (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

Now Paul began to speak of specific issues that had arisen in the church at Corinth, saying women should have their head covered when they pray. Paul explained why this rule should be followed, but his overall goal that there are order and structure in worship.

For any culture where women do not typically cover their heads, this instruction by Paul appears weird and unimportant. Paul is writing to a church where it was common for women to cover their heads. He is essentially telling his audience how they should behave so that their actions are not perceived as evil or disruptive.

Paul continued to give reasons why men and women should listen to his instructions on orderly worship and instructed them not to have divisions or arguments.

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

Next, Paul addressed people abusing their gathering to celebrate communion. He explained they could eat and drink at home and should keep communion as a time of worship only.

Paul spoke explicitly about people abusing communion by being gluttons and drunkards.

Nevertheless, it is good for those participating in communion to examine themselves to see if there is any wrongdoing that needs correction. He told the Corinthians that the reason they had been sick was because they abused communion. Paul concluded by telling them to eat at home if they are hungry, so they can keep communion worshipful and as a remembrance of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for us.