

**Concerning the Married and the Unmarried; An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 7  
and related Scriptures**

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The purpose of this exposition is to understand God’s perspective with regard to singleness, sex, marriage, divorce, and other related topics. Since every Christian has experienced at least one of these things, the subject is very personal and relevant indeed. It is my prayer that you come to understand and come to peace with where God has you in these areas. We will take each topic in turn.

Singleness is alluded to three different times in 1 Corinthians 7 (verses 1, 7-9, and 32-34). It is good in itself and is seen as a gift from God, not the curse that it seems to be at times for the lonely man or woman. The gift aspect is made manifest in the special freedom to serve God that it allows because of the absence of cares “for the things of the world”—namely a spouse and children. It is not for most people, however, because God has gifted us with a sex drive which ought to be used in the context of marriage only. If you “burn with passion”, that may be an indication that singleness is not your gift. The idea of the institutional church forbidding certain people or clergy to marry is a direct violation of Scripture. Such a teaching or requirement is called a “doctrine of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Sex is the covenant sign of marriage and any sex outside of the one man and one woman marriage is strictly forbidden by Scripture (Genesis 2:18-24). Unfortunately, what God creates to be good Satan often turns to evil purposes. There is no such thing as pre-marital sex in God’s economy. It is simply assumed that the only context for sex is within the bounds of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2). You may ask: ‘What if I am doing this now?’ The advice of Scripture would be to cease doing so, and either get married or head for the proverbial hills (Exodus 22:16). Extramarital sex (a.k.a. affairs) defiles a marriage and is disgusting in God’s sight (Hebrews 13:4). The grass is not greener elsewhere. In fact, pitfalls surely await the man or woman who falls into this trap (Proverbs 5:15-19). Extramarital sex is also grounds for divorce, and we will cover that in more detail later (Matthew 5:31-32). Marital sex—defined as sex within the marriage covenant between one man and one woman—is the only sex that is within God’s boundaries and involves mutual submission (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Remember that sex is only one facet of love, not a synonym for love in and of itself. Sexual love (eros), sacrificial love

(agape), and goodwill friendship love (filial) should all be present in the God-honoring marriage, to which we now turn our attention.

A Christian marriage should reflect the love of God in ways that imitate Jesus Christ and glorify Him. Husbands are called to love sacrificially, giving honor and preference to the wife (Ephesians 5:23,28-29,31). The man is called to take the lead in physically providing for his wife and household (1 Timothy 5:8). More importantly, the husband is called to be the spiritual leader in his household. The godly wife should have no problem submitting to a loving godly husband in the same way we ought to have no problem submitting to our loving God and Savior Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). I know that these things are easier said than done, but we are called to attain to them to the best of our ability nevertheless. At the same time remember that God's Word, and obedience to it, always takes precedence over a husband who leads in ways clearly contrary to it. For example, it would not be appropriate for a wife to cease reading Scripture because her husband demands complete control of her time. Wives are called to lovingly submit to their husbands, allowing and encouraging them to fulfill their God-given responsibilities (Ephesians 5:22,31). She should respect her husband both privately and publicly (Ephesians 5:33). The virtuous wife seeks to cultivate the character of the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31. Finally, always remember that your spouse needs grace just as you do, and that he or she is God's special gift to you. God only gives good gifts (James 1:17).

The subject of divorce is addressed in 1 Corinthians 7:10-17 with a particular emphasis on desertion as a cause of it. Divorce was not in God's original plan (Genesis 2:18-24). It was not instituted by God but instead by sinful human beings. God responded to a situation that was already happening by giving Moses a remedy but never endorsed the practice of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). The remedy was given as an act of mercy because husbands were abusing and/or neglecting their wives. Gross abuse and neglect amounts to desertion, and I believe those things are included in the biblical definition of desertion. Desertion by an unbelieving spouse is given as grounds for divorce in our text as well (1 Corinthians 7:10-17). Adultery, or any sex outside of the marriage covenant is also given in Scripture as a valid reason for divorce. There is much debate in Christendom today regarding what constitutes adultery. My personal conviction is that we should limit the definition to inappropriate physical contact with someone other than one's spouse. The reason I say this is because in the broadest sense, even an impure thought is adultery and this would allow just about anyone to divorce for the cause of adultery because most people have had an impure thought (Matthew 5:27-28). The bottom line is that there are two allowable causes for divorce in God's economy; namely, desertion and adultery. There is no such thing as irreconcilable differences in the Bible. That term flies in the face of the heart of God, which is forgiveness and reconciliation. God hates divorce, even ones obtained on biblical grounds, because it is a result of human sin and it constitutes the breaking of an oath

made in His sight—even if the parties involved do not see His hand in it (Malachi 2:14-16). Remember that just because someone has ‘grounds’ for a divorce, it is never the better option. God’s heart is always forgiveness and reconciliation, hard and costly emotionally as that may be (Ephesians 4:32). Remember, God’s forgiveness of you and I cost Him the death of His Son.

What does the Bible say about remarriage? It is certainly permitted upon the death of a spouse with the stipulation that the subsequent spouse be a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39). Jesus says that “except for sexual immorality” (adultery), remarriage is not permissible (Matthew 19:9). This statement affirms that remarriage is clearly permitted when the divorce was because of adultery. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that the innocent party in a divorce due to desertion is “not under bondage in such cases” (1 Corinthians 7:15). Therefore, such a one is also free to remarry. Thus there are two Scriptural grounds for divorce and remarriage—adultery and desertion. There is one other circumstance we will need to address with regard to divorce and remarriage. It is my conviction that if someone was divorced before they came to know Jesus Christ as God and Savior, then that does not disqualify such a one from remarrying regardless of the reason because when we become Christians, we are new creations in Him and all things have become new for us (2 Corinthians 5:17). God does not hold our unsaved past against us. Beginning at the point of salvation, we are free to serve Him whereas prior to salvation we were incapable of serving Him (John 8:36; Ephesians 2:1).

Paul addresses other related concerns in 1 Corinthians 7:18-31 which are also of interest as they relate to our study. If a partner becomes a Christian when he or she is already married, they should not seek a divorce. Instead he or she should be content in the marriage and endeavor to honor God as much as possible from that point forward. He also states that marriage in times of trouble such as persecution, famine, or war brings with it particularly difficult problems. Material poverty, concern for the safety of one’s spouse and children, and the necessity that one may be called upon to be away from the home to serve the cause of God and/or country constitute very real challenges that ought to be considered carefully in such times.

Now we will address the responsibilities of the local church with regard to marriage. While it is the responsibility of the parties to learn and study God’s design for marriage, it is the job of the church to provide the means for that to happen including Scripture and pre-marital or marital counseling. The first subtopic we will take up is the stage where a couple is considering marriage. It is required in Christian marriage that both the man and the woman have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14). The couple must be advised not to engage in pre-marital sex. If either or both parties have been divorced, it is necessary to

confirm whether the couple meets the biblical guidelines for remarriage set forth above. It is absolutely essential that the couple understand that Christ is at the center of every Christian marriage. “A three strand cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Church attendance and involvement is an important indicator of spiritual readiness, commitment, and obedience (Hebrews 10:23-25). As such, it is also to be taken into account. These steps have to be taken for the purpose of ensuring as far as the church is able that Christ is honored in the marriage and before the watching church and world. The second subtopic is regarding those who are presently married. The church is called to affirm the one man and one woman covenant of marriage as God created it and actively support those unions in the church which do exist through personal encouragement, acknowledging anniversaries when aware of them, and counseling if need be (Genesis 2:18-24; Ephesians 4:11-12). With all these things said, we should always remember that each marriage is unique and is to be approached uniquely within the parameters set forth in Scripture. The third subtopic is regarding single people. The church is called to encourage single people to cast their cares upon God and His work, waiting patiently upon the Lord to provide a partner if and when He sees fit. At the same time, the church needs to be sensitive to the struggles of loneliness and depression that sometimes arise.

Hopefully, you have learned much through this study. Maybe you were even convicted of some sinful behavior or pattern in your past or present through this study. God’s Word has a way of doing that (Hebrews 4:12). I will leave you with this thought. You do not need to feel guilty. If there is something you need to change to conform to God’s will, by all means change it. But don’t take on the guilt. Jesus already did that for you (Matthew 11:28-30). Because of what He did and does, you are forgiven. Your sins will not follow you past the grave if you are a blood bought believer in Jesus, but instead they will be removed and blotted out (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25). You will be cleansed in this life too if you speak directly to God about your shortcomings as well (Psalm 51:17). No sin is too great. There is no sin that has not been paid for at the cross, however great or small (Hebrews 10:12). If you have not accepted his provision for you to have eternal life, do that first—do not delay (John 3:16). If you have, or when you have, accept his provision of continual forgiveness and go forth in communion with Him in the newness of life. Grace and peace and glory belong to Christ Jesus alone! Amen and Amen.