

Marriage and Divorce to Christians and Non-Christians

The general introduction

Paul's letter we know as 1 Corinthians is a response to two sources of information he received.

First, the report from Chloe's household, 1:11

Second, their letter to him, 7:1

The second source, their letter, poses many interpretive challenges

We do not know all that it said. In places, "reading between the lines" is challenging.

Chapter 7 is clearly a response to specific matters that were broached in their letter to him.

This material is not a general teaching portion.

The specific matters

All of Paul's comments are founded on 1 Cor 6:19-20

What about intimacy and marriage, 7:1-5?

What you wrote is incorrect: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman," 7:1b. It was taught by some that abstinence in marriage was good, much more spiritual than intimacy.

What is correct is that a man should have his own wife and the woman her own husband, 7:2-5. "To have" refers to intimacy.

What about the "de-married," 7:6-9?

It is good to stay "de-married," 7:8

It is better to marry if you can't control those passions, 7:9, but only in the Lord, 7:39.

What about marriage and divorce, 7:10-15?

Some considerations

There are some biblical commands with exceptions

Sabbath day command for "no work" did allow for exceptions (Matthew 12:11)

The command for "no divorce" (Mark 10:1-12) does allow for exceptions, Matthew 19:1-9.

No one should choose to live his life by exceptions, but by God's commands

What about believers married to believers, 7:10-11?

Paul commands exactly what the Lord Jesus commanded: A wife must not separate (Greek demands divorce) from her husband (and vice-versa), 7:10, 11b

In a day when divorce rates are 50% and the divorce rates in churches are no different than outside of churches, this needs to be heard.

In a day when people are getting divorced because they aren't happy and "God wants me happy," this needs to be heard.

Marriage is about duties, obligations and responsibilities to your partner. Marriage is not about "personal fulfillment."

When the believer fulfills his/her duties, obligations and responsibilities to his/her partner, God is glorified and the believer grows more like Jesus Christ.

If that happens, she should remain unmarried "de-married" in order to be reconciled to her husband, 7:11a.¹ The goal is reconciliation!

Paul's statement is in response to some specific situation (as in 5:1,2) that they presented to him. We don't know the details of this.

What about believers married to unbelievers, 7:12-15?

Jesus never broached this specific matter in his earthly sojourn, 7:12a.

What is this specific matter? A partner converted to Christianity after marriage.

The Bible makes it clear that Christians should never marry unbelievers, 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Deut 7:3; Neh 13:25

But why this "wrinkle?" Probably because of questions about the 5:9-13 discussion.

Believers should not divorce their unbelieving spouses, 7:12b-13.

Why? The unbelieving spouse "has been sanctified" through his believing spouse," 7:14ab. What does that mean? "The Christian united to Christ brings the non-Christian partner into a power sphere of holiness..."²

The children of such a union are not unholy or polluted. They too are brought under the "power sphere of holiness," 7:14c.

Unless the unbeliever chooses to initiate the divorce, 7:15.

This presumes that the believing spouse has done everything biblically allowable to keep the marriage intact.

People are not "enslaved" in such situations

People are not called to live in the turmoil of an unbelieving spouse who insists on divorce, they are "called to peace"

¹ I am grateful for Garland's commentary on this matter, 1 Cor, p. 283.

² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, ECNT, p. 288.

The aim for the believing spouse is the salvation of the unbelieving spouse. But this outcome is not certain, 7:16.

Why make an unwarranted change in your marriage circumstances and lose the opportunity to convert your spouse?³

The idea of marriage in the ancient world

The idea that marriage would bring personal fulfillment and great happiness was “quite foreign” to them. People thought that marriage was for the purpose of legitimate children.

Even the Bible itself does not view the purpose of marriage as “personal fulfillment and happiness.” It isn’t as though the Bible is opposed to this, but does not see that as the purpose. The Bible views marriage as the fulfillment of “one flesh” obligations that are made in the covenant of marriage.

So what?

Does God have anything to say about who you marry?

Absolutely. If Jesus Christ is your Lord, then he has a great deal to say about the kind of person you marry and under what kind of circumstances you marry or don’t.

If your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, if you have been bought with a price, then any believer needs to submit to God’s principles for marriage.

³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, ECNT, p. 294