

Text: 1 Cor 7.25-40

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)**

- A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)
- B. Lack of discipline in the church (5.1-6.20)

III. Questions asked of Paul (7.1-16.4)

1 Cor 7.1 ¶ Now concerning the things about which you wrote...

“The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* (‘now concerning,’ 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).”¹

A. Questions about marriage (7.1-40)

- 1. On the state of marriage: How to conduct yourself in marriage (1-7)
- 2. On the question of marriage: Legitimacy of choices (8-9)
- 3. On the question of divorce: No initiation by Christians (10-16)
- 4. Underlying principles in view of the question of divorce (17-24)

5. Now concerning virgins (25-40)

1 Cor 7.25 ¶ Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.

“The second occurrence of the phrase *peri de* (“Now concerning”) occurs in verse 25 and indicates another subject about which the Corinthians had written Paul (cf. v. 1). This was the subject of single women. This section belongs with the rest of chapter 7 because this subject relates closely to what immediately precedes. Paul continued to deal with questions about marriage that the asceticism of some of the Corinthians raised.”²

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 7.1.

² Constable, 1 Co 7.25.

Keep in mind the **asceticism** behind the questions Paul is dealing with.

A scenario some suggest that lies behind this question is Christian fathers in Corinth who wonder whether they should give their daughters in marriage (see 36-38). Some are urging asceticism, there is also some other concerns in the background. What should they do? [Note: other suggestions seem less plausible to me.]

There are four paragraphs in this section. We will organize our study around these paragraphs.

Theme of 7.25-31: **Should young people marry at all?**

What terms in the following verses point to another concern that lies behind Paul's advice in this section?

(26) **the present distress**

(28) [2 terms] **trouble, spare you**

(29) **time shortened**

What is Paul's concern in answering the question? **The possibility of some external pressure that could make marriage problematic**

When Paul says he has no command of the Lord, how does that affect the advice he is offering? (25)

The statements are inspired, though the Lord didn't directly address the question

What general principle should govern decision making? (see v. 26-27, compare 21-24)

The principle of maintaining the status quo, don't seek change that might impact your Christian service

If someone nevertheless chooses to marry, does Paul condemn them? (28) **no, they have not sinned, though circumstances may give them trouble**

What should be the overriding philosophy of life for a Christian? (29-31)

Serving God should be first, the troubles of life can't pull us away from that

Theme of 7.32-35: Clarification of Paul's view of marriage and singleness

Paul gives his rationale for his advice in this section. What concern does he have for those who marry "in this present distress"? (33, 34b) **their duties as good husbands or wives could distract from serving God**

On the other hand, what is the advantage of singleness? (32, 34a) **no distractions, potentially full devotion to the Lord**

What is Paul's ultimate goal in giving these instructions? (35) **to secure devotion to the Lord, not restrain the believers**

Theme of 7.36-38: The question of fathers and daughters, should I let her marry?

In general, whether a father gives his daughter in marriage or not, does Paul indicate he has sinned in either case? **No, they are free to marry or not marry**

Theme of 7.39-40: the question of marriage for widows

What is the only restriction Paul places on the remarriage of widows? (39) **"only in the Lord"**

In keeping with his chapter long theme, what does Paul advocate in v. 40? **She would do better to remain single**

"One of the unfortunate things that has happened to this text in the church is that the very pastoral concern of Paul that caused him to express himself in this way has been a source of anxiety rather than comfort. Part of the reason for this is that in Western cultures we do not generally live in a time of 'present distress.' Thus we fail to sense the kind of care that this text represents. Beyond that, what is often heard is that Paul prefers singleness to marriage, which he does. But quite in contrast to Paul's own position over against the Corinthians, we often read into that preference that singleness is somehow a superior status. That causes some who do not wish to remain single to become anxious about God's will in their lives. Such people need to hear it again: Marriage or singleness per se lies totally outside the category of 'commandments' to be obeyed or 'sin' if one indulges; and Paul's preference

here is not predicated on 'spiritual' grounds but on pastoral concern. It is perfectly all right to marry."³

"Paul undoubtedly knew that he represented the mind of God in what he said. He simply expressed himself as he did in order to avoid laying too much weight on his preference."⁴

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 334.

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, 1 Co 7.40.