

# MARRIAGE AND IT'S INSTRUCTIONS

**1 Corinthians 7:1-40**

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## PREAMBLE

In line with our study of the book of Corinthians, I have been assigned to handle **1 Corinthians 7:1-40** that mainly gives instructions concerning marriage. To provide effective learning and minimise questions, we will discuss this in two parts {part 1 & 2}. Today we will be looking at **1 Corinthians 7:1-24** and Part 2 will be vs 25 to 40.

Marriage is a lifelong commitment. The notion that a marriage is built on romantic love between a man and woman is fairly new on the world's stage. When Isaac's servant returned and introduced Rebekah to his master, the Bible says that "she became his wife, he loved her" (**Genesis 24:67**). That was the order: Love followed marriage. Commitment comes first; love follows. One chooses to love, just as he or she chooses to maintain a commitment to a spouse throughout life.

**Love has the more to do with one's capacity to care for another person than it does with qualities attributed to a husband or wife.** When Paul instructed husbands to love their wives (**Ephesians 5:25**), he was commanding something more profound than attraction or infatuation. The book of **1 Corinthians 13:4 - 8a** paints a graphic picture of love.

A husband and wife who follow God's guidance **respect one another and deal gently with the dependence each has on the other**; they are considerate of the vulnerability (weakness, susceptibility) each has to be hurt by the loved one. I will encourage you to study the book of **Ephesians 5:21 - 33** for a better understanding of a spirit – Guided relationship for wives and husbands.

In the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed disturbing developments in the church which was communicated to him by those who had first-hand knowledge of the ugly development in the Church at Corinth.

Among the concerns discussed by the Apostle towards the end of chapter 6 is the viewpoint that people should satisfy their physical desires. The slogan "*Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food*" (**1 Cor.6:13**) was not just about hunger. It was a subtle way of arguing that it was good to satisfy the appetite for food to justify the gratification of sexual desires, however it might be done.

Side by side with the indulgence school of thought at Corinth was another group that argued that Christians should suppress physical appetites. This group borrow their teaching from the ascetic Philosophers which had a history among the Greco-Roman culture. “*Asceticism*” {severe self-discipline and avoiding of all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reason} is self-denial for its own benefit, not to benefit others. Fasting, for example, is self-denial for whatever spiritual or physical benefits it may have for the one who fasts; not generally for the purpose of giving the food to a hungry person.

Following the Ascetic teaching, some at Corinth apparently adopted the view that the suppression of desire, especially sexual desire, is beneficial for a believer. Some over the years have even associated sex with evil. **Gluttony or consorting with a prostitute is sinful but eating in moderation is necessary and God has blessed the expression of sexuality within marriage.**

The concerns of chapter 6 flow naturally into Paul’s treatment of marriage in chapter 7. **Here the apostle focus on those who believed that surrendering the body to any type of pleasure is inherently wrong. In his summation, Sexual expression between husbands and wives is approved by God. It is not evil.**

#### **A MATTER OF INDULGENCE OR SELF-DENIAL (1 Cor. 7:1-7)**

After Paul had left Corinth a few years earlier, before his writing of 1 Corinthians, the Christians there were essentially without proper guidance; one may deduce at that point in time, elders were not in place. Various viewpoints and popular philosophy were advocated by different teachers, even the local prophets in some ways contributed to the confusion (see **1 Cor. 14:22-25**). These contributed to the conflicts in the church at Corinth.

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.” **(1 Corinthians 7:1-7 NKJV)**

Some at Corinth had gone beyond his teachings about purity and maintained that it was best for Christians to abstain from sexual relations under all circumstances.

There are two school of thought here; those on one side of the dispute had sought to justify indulgence of appetites with the slogans

(i) “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food” (1Cor.6:13) and (ii) “All things are lawful for me”. The other group had responded with a slogan of their own: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman”.

The first two slogans supported sexual indulgence; the third called for an ascetic lifestyle. The debate in the church about indulgence versus self-denial had apparently become intense, and there Christians had asked Paul to resolve the matter. Who is right?

Having already addressed those who supported indulgence, the apostle turned his attention to the ascetics. As he had done previously (**1 Cor. 6:12, 13**), **Paul cited the slogan and acknowledged the measure of truth it expressed, modified it by asserting that it did not express all the truth. The underlying argument is whether “marriage is commendable, or should Christians remain single?”**

Presenting the question more broadly might have been; **“Is sexual abstinence always preferable to sexual indulgence?”** Paul affirmed the goodness of sex within marriage. **He refused to support the claim that abstinence in all circumstances is a virtue.**

**Instead, he wrote, “.... each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2).** Richard B. Hays in his Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics, paraphrased verse 1 and 2, placing his additions in italics:

“Now I will respond to the matter about which you wrote. *You propose that, for the sake of holiness and purity, married couples should abstain from sexual intercourse. As you say, “it is a fine thing for a man not to touch a woman.”* But – *since that is unrealistic* – let each husband have sexual intercourse with his own wife, and let each wife have sexual intercourse with her own husband”.

Sexual expression is not the most basic of human needs provided for in the commitment between husband and wife, it is nevertheless important. Paul said that husbands and wives have a mutual duty to meet the sexual needs of their marriage partners. **Sexual abstinence is not a decision for either husband or wife to make alone.**

When Paul wrote, *“The husband must fulfil his duty to his wife” (7:3)*, he meant that husbands and wives are to be considerate of one another. Paul affirms that sexual fulfilment between a man and a woman is blessed by God within the marriage relationship and none of the parties should see it as a favour to the other.

**The apostle's teaching made husbands and wives equals:** *"The wife does not have authority over her own body, ... the husband does not have authority over his own body..." (1 Cor. 7:4).* To marry someone is to become one with that person. It is to surrender oneself and claim the spouse as part of oneself.

In marriage one surrenders exclusive rights to his or her body. **Sexual expression is mutual; it is not a favour to be granted or withheld.** Consideration and respect for the needs and desires of both husband and wife are fundamental.

With these ideas in mind, Paul presented Christians with a forthright prohibition: *"Stop depriving one another" (1 Cor. 7:5a).* Paul told the Corinthians to stop doing what they had been doing. To whatever degree husbands and wives had been withholding conjugal rights from one another.

they were conducting themselves in a manner unacceptable for Christians. Christ placed no restrictions on intimacy within marriage; it is a gift God has given husband and wife both for the sharing of mutual love and for the procreation of the race.

**An exception to the general rule was given. If "by agreement for a time" (1 Cor.7:5b) a couple mutually wished to forgo sexual relations so that they might devote themselves more single-mindedly to communion with God in prayer, they could do so.** He found no harm in such an agreement.

indeed, it might bind the couple more closely to God and to one another. When their time of prayer had come to an end, a couple was to *"come together again" (1 Cor. 7:5c).* To fail to do so would be to allow the adversary, Satan, to tempt [them] because of [their] lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:5d).

In **1 Corinthians 7:6** Paul explained, *"This I say by way of concession, not of command".* The word "this" may refer to Paul's admonition concerning marriage. In that case, the "concession" Paul granted was for a Christian either to marry or not to marry depending on "his own gift" (1 Cor. 7:7b).

The probable reason *"this"* refers to the immediately preceding matter of Christians separating themselves from each other for a time so they could devote themselves to prayer. The apostle was neither commanding nor commending the practice.

The apostle clarifies that abstinence from a sexual relationship with a marriage partner was not a sign of holiness, nor would it cause God to be more favourably inclined to one's praise or requests. The choice of marriage partners to abstain from sexual relations for a time by mutual consent was strictly a private matter.

It is not necessarily true that prayer was made more effective because of abstinence. **Apostle Paul explicitly attests in all his words that marriage,**

**including the intimate relations in marriage, is an honourable and holy way of life.**

The book of Hebrews 13:4 made it very clear that Marriage and the marital bed are holy.

When Paul wrote, “I wish that all men were even as I myself” (1 Cor. 7:7a), understandably he meant that he wished all could remain unmarried. Why did he make such a statement after defending the holiness of marriage relationship?

**Perhaps the apostle meant that he wished sexual temptations were not so strong for most people.** Abstinence had allowed him to give his life more completely to serving God, but what was practical for him was not necessarily practical for all.

More likely, the pressure on Christians in Corinth caused Paul to think it best for them not to marry under such conditions (1Cor.7:26) – we will discuss this in our subsequent learning.

In Paul’s concluding teachings on this matter, two points require emphasis.

1. God has placed sexual desire in men and women. It is a powerful impulse given for the procreation of the race, but it is also a means by which God has made possible the satisfaction of important emotional and psychological needs. Underestimating this drive can wreak havoc in one’s life.
2. Sexual exploitation of another person or preying on the needs of another person in order to gratify sexual desire is not acceptable for a Christian. The body, as the temple of God (1 Cor.6:19, & 3:16), is to be kept pure. See 1 Thessalonians 4:3 **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3 NKJV)

#### **ADVICE FOR THE UNMARRIED AND THE MARRIED (1Cor. 7:8-11)**

“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife”. **(1 Corinthians 7:8-11 NKJV)**

Paul addressed the unmarried virgins {the marriageable maidens} in 1 Cor. 7:25-31 and widows in 7:39, 40. Why did Paul insert instructions “to the unmarried and to widows” (7:8) at this point? Some might have been “unmarried” for a variety of reasons.

Possible scenarios; some were likely young people who had never been married; but others could have been divorced, or their mate might have died. **Since Paul offered separate instructions for virgins and widows,**

**in this context the unmarried and widows may mean specifically men and women whose mates had died. That is addressing the Widowers and widows.**

To this group, Paul wrote,.....it is good for them if they remain even as I” (7:8), that is single. While it was advisable for windows and widowers to remain unmarried, it was also acceptable, and sometimes for them to marry. In many cases, the lack of “self-Control” (7:9) contributes to the self-indulgence of sin.

An unmarried person lacking self-control would likely be tempted to seek sexual expression outside of marriage, and that would certainly be sin. **So, the instruction here to Widowers and Widows that have self-control, it was better to remain unmarried; but for those without self-control,**

**marriage was the only Christian option. “it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9).**

The Lord gives explicit instructions about the permanence of marriage to husbands and wives. Married people were not to abandon their marriage commitments. “The wife should not leave her husbands” (7:10), and “the husband should not divorce his wife” (7:11).

Since the apostle later dealt with cases in which only one partner in a marriage (7:12-16), **the implication is that the married people he addressed in verses 10 and 11 were Christian couples.** Neither partner in the marriage was to abandon the mate (7:11) Divorce was not an option.

The apostle acknowledged that people sometimes make mistakes when they marry. In extraordinary situations, the apostle acknowledged, separation may be advisable. Example could be in an abusive marriage where one’s life is endangered; life threatening relationship!

**The Apostle made it very clear that such Separation does not warrant a remarriage.** A wife who left her husband was to remain unmarried or be reconciled to him. What applies to the wife also applies to the husband; **No exception to the rule.**

I do know that some do create scenarios like; one of the separated partners commits adultery and the other sees it as opportunity to remarry. Such thought and action should not be practiced as we become children of God; best practice is to always work towards the part of reconciliation.

**ADVICE FOR A BELIEVER MARRIED TO AN UNBELIEVER (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)**

When only one partner in a marriage was a Christian, the potential for tension between husband and wife was much greater than it would have been between spouses who share the same faith.

Example, let's say during the Christmas season or celebration, how will it be if a sister is a church of Christ member while the other is a misbeliever? If the sister is faithful, she may not join the pomp of the season, but duty demands she makes preparation for the family.

Try and picture the tension that will be created in that household. That is while **it's always very advisable for the unmarried to follow Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39c to marry "only in the Lord"**.

But in life situation, sometimes one partner in a pagan or misbeliever marriage becomes a Christian or member of the Lord's church! When a person becomes a Christian, and the other refused to convert to Christ, this may raise some questions.

But in life situation, sometimes one partner in a pagan or misbeliever marriage becomes a Christian or member of the Lord's church! When a person becomes a Christian, and the other refused to convert to Christ, this may raise some questions. In such situation, was it advisable for the Christian to leave the pagan/misbeliever mate in order to avoid turmoil or friction in the marriage? **Was the holiness of a Christian stained or contaminated by intimate relations with an idolater or misbeliever?** The social situation in which the Corinthians Christians lived which may also apply to us today required Paul to deal with such a challenge in 1 Cor. 7:12-16

"But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" (1 Corinthians 7:12-16 NKJV)

The apostle's first instruction to believers married to unbelievers reinforced the pronouncement he had made in 1 Cor. 7:10, 11 & 13. The wife is not to leave her husband (send him away), and the husband should not divorce his wife. However, Paul recognized that maintaining a marriage requires the consent of both parties. The believing husband or wife was to continue in the marriage relationship when the mate was an unbeliever; the husband "must not divorce" the unbelieving wife and the wife "must not send her unbelieving husband away" {1 Co.7:12-13}.

**Paul noted that an unbelieving spouse in a marriage was “sanctified through” (7:14a) the believer. This is another hard nut to crack!** The apostle had told the Corinthians that the Christian’s body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). He had also forbidden consorting with prostitutes because, among other things, the client became “one body with her” (1 Cor. 6:16). **When a Christian was sexually intimate with an unbelieving mate, did he or she displease the Lord by becoming one body with that unbeliever? Would it not have being better for the believing spouse to divorce the unbeliever, or at to forgo a sexual relationship? Paul answered “No”. Maintenance of the marriage was important.**

The apostle apparently coupled the directive “a man shall ...be joined to his wife” (Genesis 2:24) with Jesus statement “what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6). So far as it was a choice made by the believer, **the marriage bond was to continue whether or not the spouse was a Christian.**

**The apostle emphasised that intimacy between a believer and unbelieving spouse was “sanctified” by the Christian partner’s relationship with God.** A person, object, or behaviour is “sanctified” when it is acceptable to God and suitable for His service. Another way of saying, “It is sanctified” is to say, “It is holy”.

**When Paul said that the unbeliever was sanctified by the believer, he affirmed that God blesses and approves relations between a Christian and unbelieving spouse for the sake of the believing partner.**

Paul did not stop at the Christian and unbelieving spouse marriage as being sanctified, he took his reasoning farther, **saying that children born of this intimacy are sanctified.** If God did not sanctify sexual intimacy between a married believer and unbeliever, their “children”, like the children of unbeliever, would be “unclean” (1 Cor.7:14b). **We may have some challenge here and be tempted to ask why did Paul allow for the possibility that a child might be unclean?**

We may dismiss any teaching that claims a baby is born in sin and condemned by God. Prophet Ezekiel had spoken on that subject many years ago before Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians. **“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself”** (Ezekiel 18:20 NKJV) {see Deut.24:16, 2 Kings 14:6, 2 Chronicle 25:4, Jeremiah 31:29-30}. Neither Ezekiel nor Paul allowed for transference of personal guilt from parent to child.

Anthony C. Thiselton, in his commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians (on the Greek text), suggested that “children are holy when at least one party in



the marriage is a Christian because of the holy way the believing parent lives. **The Christian is a force for godly living on both the unbelieving partner and the children**. When neither parent is a Christian, a child is unholy in the sense that he does not benefit from the teaching, guidance, and influence that a Christian could give.

Paul's concern in this passage was not with children who are born to unbelievers. Rather, he argued positively that when at least one partner in a marriage is a Christian, that neither intimacy nor the conception of children is tainted with unholiness. **God placed so much deliverables on the Christian that is married to unbelieving partner. The Christian is seen as the light in the home whose sole duty is to steer the family towards a holy living.**

**A Christian partner must not be transformed by the unbelieving partner but rather the Christian partner should be the one transforming the home with the spiritual food he/she receives from God's word!** Why this emphasis, many times we do hear some brethren married to unbelievers when confronted for indecent act, they say their partner who is unbeliever likes it. This ought not to be mentioned by a faithful Christian as the unbelieving spouse cannot be used as a standard for righteous living.

The Christian partner in a marriage cannot control the non-Christian: that is, he or she cannot compel the unbeliever to remain married, this Paul recognised. God intends for marriage to be a lifelong commitment; "yet" Paul wrote, "if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave" (1 Cor. 7:15a). The Christian should feel no guilt if the non-Christian mate chooses to leave. The apostle added that the one deserted "is not under bondage" to continue the marriage.

When Paul said that the believer deserted by an unbelieving partner is no longer under bondage, he had in mind the social aspect of marriage: A deserted Christian wife or husband is not held to the societal expectation that one should do all within her or his power to preserve the marriage. Paul enforced this message by reminding the Corinthian Christians by implication all Believers that "God has called us to peace" (1 Cor.7:15b). Devoting one's energies to pleasing an unbelieving mate who refused to live with a Christian marriage partner was not the way of peace. A member of the Lord's Church in marriage with an unbeliever or misbeliever compromising his or her faith is not a way of peace! No good reason can be given for forsaking one's faith!

**The question that verse 15 through is whether the deserted Christian is free to marry again?** Some interpret this passage to mean that the deserted Christian is free to marry again ("the Pauline privilege"). It is difficult to see anything that suggests remarriage. The apostle would hardly have thought of remarriage after divorce as a privilege. He had already decreed that "the wife should not leave her

husband” (7:10) and “the husband should not divorce his wife” (7:11). One who left or divorced a mate was to “remain unmarried, or else be reconciled” (7:11).

A deserted Christian had no responsibility to maintain a relationship with an unbelieving husband or wife if the price of saving the marriage was sacrificing faithfulness to the lord. **“Paul is simply saying, in verse 15 that Christ’s prohibition against divorce does not enslave the believer to maintain the union against the wishes of an unbelieving partner who insists on ending the marriage”**{extract from J. Carl Laney, on Paul and the permanence of Marriage in 1Cor. 7 – Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society}. **The believer’s freedom of obligation to continue the marriage carries no implication for remarriage.**

Paul had a very high view on marriage. He had a positive understanding of the benefits for both the individuals and the community. Hence, Paul urged believers who were married to unbelievers to continue as they were. That is, he encouraged them to preserve their marriages. **However, he gave another reason for the believer to stay married. Marriage to an unbeliever offered an opportunity for evangelism. Through the example and teaching of the Christian, the unbeliever might come to know Christ. “How do you know”, the apostle asked, in effect, “whether a Christian husband or wife might lead an unbelieving spouse to be saved?”** (1 Cor.7:16).

#### **AS GOD HAS CALLED EACH ONE {1Corinthians 7:17-24}**

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remains in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remains with God in that state in which he was called”. **(1 Corinthians 7:17-24 NKJV)**

Paul was thinking of the end of the age, the time when all people will stand before God in Judgment – **“when time shall be no more”**. **The effort to live by faith, the day of visitation, and the hope of eternal life were to govern Christian’s decision making and habits. Therefore, the apostle judged inordinate concern with social relationships to be a fleshly diversion.** Marriage is an important social relationship, but it is insignificant in the scope of eternity. Corinthian Christians linked marital status too closely to one’s relationship with

God. Confessing and obeying Jesus Christ did not require a complete change of marriage or other social relationships.

Earthly ties take on new meaning for those focussed on the Lord's return. In view of the end time, they are not as important as one previously thought them to be. The Apostle, therefore, advised those who were married when called by Christ to continue in marriage. Those who were without a husband or a wife were advised to remain unmarried. "Continue as you are," the apostle essentially said, since "the time has been shortened" (1 Cor. 7:29).

In order to illustrate and reinforce what he had told them concerning marital relationships, Paul painted on other social interactions. One may have been called as a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. Ethnic identification was of no importance to the Christians. Old religious loyalties signified by marks in the flesh were now meaningless. One may have put on Christ while a slave or a free man. Each was to accept his current social status and the toils that attended it. The Lord will return quickly enough, the text implies. Then he will reward each according to his deeds (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The apostle summarized his teaching here by the idea stated in 7:20. To remain with God in that condition in which he was called" (7:24) implies that a Christian is to respect the institution of marriage and the commitment entailed in it. To be a Christian requires no alteration in the domestic sphere, rather Christianity should make homes more stable. **INSTRUCTION FOR THE UNMARRIED 1Corinthians 7:25-40**

When Paul had a direct statement from the Lord for reference, he used it (1Cor.7:10); when he did not, he relied on the guidance of the Spirit and offered fresh instruction applicable to the current situation. The apostle dealt directly with pagan thought and practice by laying down certain principles. Concerning their marriage status, Christians should remain as they were (7:20). A married couple should not impose sexual abstinence on themselves. When a Christian was married to an unbeliever, the Christian should maintain the marriage. "Remain as you are" the apostle instructed.

The apostle next turned his attention to the Unmarried. His intent was not to deliver Decalogue-type commands of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" {typical of the Biblical Ten Commandment of Moses}. Instead, he offered advice in 1Cor. 7:27 and allowed for variance in 1 Cor. 7:28.

### ***"REMAIN AS You Are" {1 Cor. 7:25-31}***

"Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. I suppose

therefore that this is good because of the present distress--that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife?

Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless, such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away". **(1 Corinthians 7:25-31 NKJV)**

The question from the church at Corinthian may have had more than one part, but the general concern was the same: Did being a Christian call for the rejection of generally accepted views on sex and marriage? Paul answered in keeping with the theme he had begun in 7:17 ".....it is good for a man to remain as he is" (7:26).

When Paul wrote "concerning virgins" (1 Cor.7:25a) he was referring to unmarried, sexually inactive females (1 Cor.7:28, 36). The Amplified Bible emphasised virgins as "the marriageable maidens".

Paul's concern about virgins was not in the abstract; it was in the context of marriage. He was instructing both men and women regarding the propriety {correct or appropriate behaviour} of Christian marriage.

What Paul said about marriage in general applied with equal force to those who were contemplating marriage.

"in view of the present distress" (7:26), the apostle maintained that it would be wise for one who was unmarried "to remain as he is." What "present distress" was affecting the Corinthians, the apostle did not say. Turmoil from within and opposition from without were obvious to the Corinthian brethren. No elaboration was necessary.

Paul's admonitions for the unmarried fit into his general theme that believers would do well to remain as they were when called; that is maintain your status quo. The man or the woman who became a Christian after marriage should remain married and "not seek to be released from a wife or husband (7:27).

Believers who were "released from a wife" would include those who had never been married, those who had lost a spouse to death, and those who were divorced. "In view of the present distress," they would all be wise not to marry. Men normally took the initiative for marriage, but what the apostle said to men applied equally to women.

The apostle acknowledged the possibility that some might choose not to follow his recommendation, even though the Lord had counted him to be trustworthy. **To those who rejected Paul's advice and decided to marry, the apostle wrote "You have not sinned" (7:28a).**

He did not believe that his own apostolic authority or the authority of Scripture was compromised by such a decision. **Paul had given his readers a wise judgment to guide them as well as us when challenge with precarious situation, but he had left the final decision to each individual.**

While Christians were free to follow the dictates of their own consciences in the matter, Paul, still stood firm on his advice, as those that do the contrary (by marrying) would "have trouble in this life" (life challenges for married person in a precarious condition) and that the advice provided was to spare them of the challenge.

Paul commended marriage as a holy way of life but at the same time recommended that Christians refrain from marriage because of "the present distress." He seemed to reason that, by committing to love another person, one would become more vulnerable to pressures to turn away from the Lord.

Paul expected the end of the present age to come soon. As far as he was concerned, the world in which the Corinthians lived would pass away in the near future. "The time has been shortened," he said in 1 Cor.7:29a. The apostle was not alone in his expectation of the Lord's return soon.

Our saviour Himself had spoken a parable about a master who returned earlier than his servants expected {Matt. 25:14-30; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3}. Brother James was bold enough to say, "...the coming of the Lord is near" (James 5:8, see 1 Peter 4:7).

Early Christians lived their lives with the idea that the Lord will return in their lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Paul, James, and Peter were not wrong. The apostolic doctrine said that the Lord would appear suddenly, but the apostles did not set a time. We are expected to live our lives faithfully each day as if tomorrow will not come.

Anticipation of the Lord's return called for good works to make the world a better place– for lives of faith, kindness and virtue. Each moment brought closer the time when "those who have wives should be as though they had none" (1 Cor.7:29b).

Knowing that the Lord would return was to have a practical impact on the way they thought and lived. They believed the time would be shortly be upon them; it has always been shortly upon Christians. **Some of the Corinthians brethren were consumed with matters of this life, just like some of us today are doing,**

**but Paul directed their attention toward the heavens.** The only way to expect the return of the Lord was to expect Him to come soon.

To the degree that Corinthian believers came to know God and to expect the return of the Saviour, they would reorder their perspective on marriage and all other worldly affairs. While there is life, God's people will "weep", "rejoice," "buy," and "possess" (1Cor.7:30); but the routine affairs of daily living take on new purpose (New life). Christians recognize that God is directing the world toward an end. Until that time, the world may make life hard, as it did for these believers in Corinth.

As unmarried believers at Corinth contemplated the counsel given on marriage, Paul reminded them of the physical world's transitory nature – "passing away" - suggest activity in progress. The thought is not that the world would eventually end, but that the process had already begun. Sin and rebellion against God were like air being forced into a balloon. The refusal of so many to embrace the Saviour whom God had sent to die for human sin increased the pressure; it seemed that the bursting point could not be far in the future.

A glance around not just to those in Corinth then but also us today in our society demonstrates that "the form of this world is passing away" (7:31). **"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"** (1 John 2:17 NKJV).

### **"DEVOTE YOURSELF TO THE LORD" (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)**

"But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please her husband. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction". (1 Corinthians 7:32-35 NKJV)

Paul wished to spare his readers as much anxiety as possible. **"The present distress" (7:26)** would cause those who were married to-suffer; it would likely also bring suffering on their loved ones. The unmarried man would be concerned with pleasing God because he was free from family concerns.

The apostle maintained that the extreme circumstance of Christians at Corinth at the time of writing would complicate the normal care husbands and wives ought to have for one another.

**The reason he gave for recommending that unmarried Christians remain unmarried was "I want you to be free from concern" (7:32).** It was natural and

right for husbands and wives to be concerned for one another. If a spouse faced imprisonment or torture, the temptation to deny Christ in order to spare the mate from such suffering might be overwhelming.

**Some religious group clinch on this portion of the Bible – 1 Corinthians 7:32 to support their teaching of celibacy for the clergy.** The advice Paul offered had nothing to do with professional clergy, but rather to all Christians at Corinth. Further **it was given in consideration of the unusual distress threatening the church.**

Paul's argument was that the person – man (7:33) or woman (7:34) – who had taken on marital responsibilities must expend energy to support a spouse and children. When one of the spouses is an unbeliever this may create additional concern to the Christian's normal care for a family, he or she might be distracted from obedience to the Lord. Paul added, "This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you" (7:35a).

The advice offered by Paul was best advice at that point in time for the Corinthian brethren and it is for their own benefit. **He made it clear that the conscience of the individual contemplating marriage was the final arbitrator in the matter.** The apostle urged his readers to do "what is appropriate and secure undistracted devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor.7:35b).

#### **"IN THIS MATTER, DO AS YOU WISH" (1 Corinthians 7:36-38)**

"But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. Nevertheless, he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better". (1 Corinthians 7:36-38 NKJV)

These three verses show some complexity and unclear statement with various translations. Example "behaving improperly", KJV used "behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin"; the uncomely or improperly seems not clear. However, the meaning of verse 36a hinges on the identity of the man who might be behaving improperly toward the female, presumably the young woman whom he was interested in taking as a bride. The NIV 2011 edition clarifies the passage with the phrase "the virgin he is engaged to"; the NRSV 1989 conveys the same thought with "his fiancée".

Paul's charge, when so understood, was that a man and a woman who shared a sexual attraction that was difficult to control ought to marry. **They should avoid prolonged courtship and arrange for marriage with little available resources**

## **instead of burning in passion and lust and living in fornication for want of self-control.**

While the nuances of interpretation are different, the practical outcome for application of verse 37 and 38 by the church today is not great as Paul was considering their then “present distress” (v26). In either case {to marry & to give in marriage}, Paul was advising interested parties that marriage is acceptable. The best interpretation is that Paul’s exhortation was aimed at the man who was contemplating marriage and not the man who was thinking about giving his daughter in marriage.

The man considering taking a wife was to determine the firmness of his stance, and only he could make the decision that was best for both himself and his finance, not the father who might give his daughter in marriage.

### **“DO NOT SEEK REMARRIAGE” (1Corinthians 7:39, 40)**

“A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment--and I think I also have the Spirit of God”. (1 Corinthians 7:39-40 NKJV)

One of the first things Paul had said about marriage was that a Christian was not to leave a spouse (7:10, 11). He expressed no reservations about the matter. At the end of his treatment of the subject of marriage, Paul reiterated what he had said earlier: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives” (7:39a). Likewise, we can deduce, the husband is bound by law as long as his wife lives. Paul was returning to his starting point (see Romans 7:2).

The instructions in 1 Cor. 7:25-38 addressed the young male who was contemplating marriage. In 7:39, 40, Paul turned his attention to a widow who might be considering marriage. Marriage is a lifelong commitment; but, in most cases, one partner dies before the other. Sometimes a spouse dies at an early age, leaving a young widow or widower behind. Out of respect for the deceased, driven by love and devotion, the surviving spouse may impose on himself or herself a lifelong commitment to marry no one else. **Paul had no objection to such resolve, but he made it clear that faithfulness to the Lord did not require such a vow.**

When a spouse died, the living partner was free to marry a second time, but Paul gave a restriction. **The widow and by implication the widower was to marry “only in the Lord” (7:39b).** Having enjoyed the joy of a Christian family living, the utmost priority for consideration for a widow or widower considering remarriage, should be married to a faithful Christian that is eligible to marry.



Paul made it clear that it was not sinful for a widow or widower to marry again only in the Lord, adding, “But in my opinion she is happier if she remain as she is” (7:40a). The same factors {...because of the present distress (7:26) and the transitory nature of this world (7:31)} that led him to advise a young man not to marry applied equally to the widow and the widower. She would be happier because she would not be pressed by concerns for husband when Christians were opposed by unbelievers in “the present distress.” In addition, he or she would be able to devote more energy to serving the Lord without distraction.

## CONCLUSION

Marriage, including the intimate relationship in marriage, is an honourable and holy way of life and is approved by God [Hebrews 13:4]. I will encourage you to enjoy your marriage life while still alive on earth as there won't be such relationship in Heaven. However, we should be very cautious about how we conduct our marriages and live our married lives. **These should not create distractions or bottlenecks for our salvation.**

Our marriage lives should not be a hindrance to our earnest expectation to live in Heaven with our Saviour Jesus Christ; rather it should be an enabler because we heeded to the instructions of God on marriage.

***“Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband”. (Ephesians 5:33 NKJV)***