

END-TIMES ISSUES

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

#118

Commandment #7 – Marriage options (3).

1

MARRIAGE OPTIONS

(ACCORDING TO PAUL AND THE REST OF THE BIBLE).

- **Why does it matter?**
 - ✓ Our choices affect not only ourselves, but everyone around us – and even future generations. Our choices can even have *eternal* impacts on people – whether good or bad.
- **What we have seen so far:** In 1 Corinthians 5-6, we looked at...
 1. **Choices that are not a legitimate option.** These include *any* type of sexual sin, as defined by God in both Old and New Testaments. (The definitions are the *same* for both testaments.)
 2. **The "spiritual" dimension of the Seventh Commandment.** Paul mentions just one aspect of this issue (since that is not his main focus): the incompatibility of someone united with Christ also uniting with a prostitute.
 - » We plan to look at the "spiritual" dimension in the future.

2

The foundation for legitimate marriage options

(as described in 1 Corinthians 7).

- These issues explain the *reason* for the marriage options we have. (They also are the foundation for everything else in life.)
 - ✓ **When we choose to follow Jesus, normal Christian life is characterized by trials.** There are also blessings, but in this present life, there will be what we can call "the present distress." This includes not only the typical trials that anyone in the world might experience, but also the persecution *caused* by the world – which hates those who follow Jesus.
 - ✓ **We are also living in the "last days."** Our time in this present world is coming to an end, and the world itself will "pass away" – to be replaced by a *new earth*, after Jesus returns.
 - ✓ **Both of these issues must influence our values and actions!**

As we look at 1 Corinthians 7, we will see how this foundation is to influence not only *marriage options*, but *life itself*.

3

- ✓ A similar focus in values can be found elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, we should take heed to what Peter tells us, about *how to live* as we wait for Jesus to return:

... what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to **live holy and godly lives** as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

... in keeping with his promise we are **looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to **be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.**

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation ...

2 Peter 3:11b-12a, 13-15a (NIV)

HOW TO LIVE!

1. Live holy and godly lives.
2. Look forward to a world, filled with righteousness.
3. Be spotless, blameless and at peace with God.
4. Remember that this "delay" is occurring so that *more people can be saved!*

4

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ⇒ 1. Should people marry, or remain single (i.e., celibate)? (Also: Be aware of marriage obligations.)
- ⇒ 2. Options if one's spouse has died.
3. Divorce between Christians.
4. Divorce when one partner is unsaved.
5. **Contentment in one's circumstances.**
6. **Attitude toward life (which will influence the next issue).**
7. Marriage considerations for those who are betrothed/engaged.
8. Marriage considerations if one's spouse has died.

The "Foundation Focus"

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1. SHOULD PEOPLE MARRY, OR REMAIN SINGLE (CELIBATE)?

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good to abstain from sexual relations.
1 Corinthians 7:1 (BSB)

ALSO: MARRIAGE OBLIGATIONS.

- **YES! Celibacy is a good option!**
- **The OCCASION for this chapter:**
 - ✓ **False teachers** were probably promoting the idea that remaining celibate was "spiritual," whereas marriage wasn't. (This was happening in other churches – see 1 Timothy 4:3.)
 - ✓ [A "literal" translation says to not "touch" a woman; but contextually, it has a *sexual focus*. It does not forbid 100% of all physical contact!]

HELP!! SAVE ME!!

I'M SORRY, BUT THE BIBLE SAYS I CAN'T TOUCH YOU!

NOT THIS!

6

But because there is so much sexual immorality [= fornication], each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

1 Corinthians 7:2 (BSB)

- **YES! Marriage is *also* a good option!**
 - ✓ This is especially true when you're surrounded by temptation and sin – a reference to the sexual sins described in the previous chapters.
 - ✓ This *doesn't* necessarily mean the "weak" man is "drooling" with desires to gratify lust. Corinth was a city that was known for its sexual excesses. Temptation was essentially *forced* upon people.
 - ✓ There are also *other* reasons a person might choose to marry. After all, even before sin entered the world, Adam was aware that he needed a helper to accomplish the tasks God had given him (Genesis 2:18+).
 - ↳ Today, because of sin's existence in the world, the whole "marry or not" issue has become more complicated.

7

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4 (BSB)

- **Each spouse must be willing to fulfil the duties of marriage.**
 - ✓ Choosing to sin in this matter could be equivalent to *encouraging* the other partner to yield to temptation – although it does not excuse or legitimize any sin that might occur. Such conduct is definitely *not* dealing with the temptation issue!
 - ✓ It seems that some at Corinth were promoting sexual abstinence *even in marriage*. Paul had to focus on this issue. In doing so, he does not deny that there are also "non-sexual" obligations that married people have toward each other!
 - ✓ There may be times when fulfilling these sexual duties is not an option (such as when a medical issue exists).

8

Do not deprive each other, except by mutual consent and for a time, so you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again, so that Satan will not tempt you through your lack of self-control.

I say this as a concession, not as a command.

1 Corinthians 7:5-6 (BSB)

- **Is abstinence in a marriage *ever* a legitimate option?**
 - ✓ **Only temporarily.** And for an agreed-upon purpose – such as a season of prayer.
 - ✓ **It is *not* to be a permanent situation!** Doing that *does not* make you "spiritual"! Instead, it opens the door for Satan – who *knows* our weaknesses better than we do, and who can wear us down with constant temptation, and make it difficult for us to focus on following Jesus ... and could even make it easier for us to yield.
 - ✓ Paul isn't *commanding* this temporary abstinence; rather, he's conceding that there might be *temporary value* in it.

9

I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

1 Corinthians 7:7 (BSB)

- **The ability to remain celibate and *not* be tempted is a gift.**
 - ✓ There were several false religions (such as Gnosticism) which associated holiness with *sexual abstinence*, and which considered *sexual activity* to be "unclean." Paul had to oppose this *false* focus with a *balanced* focus, acknowledging the place for *each*.
 - ↳ At times, abstinence *can* have value; but it is a gift that not everyone has. Marriage can also have value – though it can increase the difficulties of life (mentioned later in the chapter).
 - ✓ Down through history, many godly leaders were married. They did not have the gift of remaining single.
 - ↳ This proves *false* the claim that abstinence (or celibacy) means you're "spiritual," and sexual activity in marriage means you're "unspiritual"!

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- ✓ **The gift of celibacy** may be due to: ① having such an intense focus on the kingdom of God that it causes other matters to become less of an issue. Or, it could be due to: ② a medical issue. Either way, *it does not mean the person is "super-spiritual"!*
- ✓ **Jesus said something similar about celibacy**, when the disciples were responding to his teachings about divorce:

His disciples said to Him, "If this is the case between a man and his wife, **it is better not to marry.**"

"**Not everyone can accept this word,**" He replied, "but only those to whom it has been **given**."

For there are eunuchs who were born that way; others were made that way by men; and still others live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

The one who can accept this should accept it."

Matthew 19:10-12 (BSB)

A GIFT THAT NOT ALL CAN ACCEPT

MEDICAL ISSUES KINGDOM FOCUS

ACCEPT IT IF YOU CAN

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- ✓ **The Old Testament?** It does not focus on this specific issue. There are some situations that involved temporary sexual abstinence (whether voluntarily, or because of a religious or ceremonial obligation, etc.). But marriage is the primary focus (along with the obligation to *not* commit sexual sin).
 - » God created sexuality and marriage. It was part of the "very good" creation – Genesis 2:24. This occurred before the idea of "celibacy" even came into existence. Also: Proverbs 18:22; etc.
 - » The need for fulfilling mutual obligations is implied; the two *belong* to each other – compare to Song of Solomon 2:16a; 6:3a.
 - » Bear in mind that Paul was in the process of correcting a false view about this matter. He was taking the teaching of the Old Testament and was applying it to the situation at hand.
- ✓ **Was Paul ever married?**
 - » Scripture doesn't say. But at the time he wrote this, he did not have a wife – either due to celibacy, or (if previously married) due to the death of his wife.

I wish that all men were as I am.

1 Corinthians 7:7a (BSB)

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2. OPTIONS IF ONE'S SPOUSE HAS DIED.

Now to the unmarried and widows I say this:
It is good for them to remain unmarried, as I am.

1 Corinthians 7:8 (BSB)

- **Who does Paul refer to?** The word "widows" is obvious. The issue has to do with the word "unmarried."
 - ✓ Like many languages, the New Testament Greek uses different word endings to indicate gender – male, female, neuter.
 - ✓ This word "unmarried" is ἀγάμος (agamois), which is a *masculine plural* noun. (The word "widows" is obviously *feminine plural*.)
 - ✓ In the New Testament era, this word was used in reference to:
 1. Men who had never been married.
 2. Men whose wives had died. (There was no commonly-used word that was equivalent to our word "widower.")
 3. Unmarried people as a *group*, without reference to a specific gender. (= No spouse, regardless of the reason.)

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... the unmarried and widows ...

1 Corinthians 7:8b (BSB)

- ✓ **Which definition applies?**
 - » It should be obvious that Paul is *not* treating men and women as a *group*, since he mentions widows separately. He is referring to *men*.
 - » In the previous verses, he has already dealt with the issue of people who have *never* been married.
 - » This leaves us with men whose wives had died – who, in the English language, we call "widowers."
- **Paul's recommendation to people whose spouses had died (i.e., widowers and widows):**
 - ✓ It's the same as for those who have *never* been married: It is good to remain unmarried... just like Paul was.
 - ✓ Later in the chapter, Paul will give the *reason* for this conclusion – the foundation that defines how "following Jesus" affects life.
 - ✓ However, like those who have never married, *there is a second option:*

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But if they cannot control themselves, let them marry.
For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:9 (BSB)

- **There may be good reasons to marry.** "Let them marry" is close to a *command*, and is sometimes translated as "they *should* marry."
- **No "self-control"?**
 - ✓ People tend to think this refers to someone burning with lustful desire, and unable to control it. That *is* a possibility, but ...
 - ✓ It could simply be a situation in which two people have such a strong desire to get married, that it's becoming distracting to their focus on God's kingdom. That could include *most* of us who are following Jesus! (After all, most of us *have* gotten married!)
- **"Burning"?** The words "with passion" are added, to prevent a misunderstanding. The emphasis is on "burning" with *desire*, not on "burning" in "the fires of hell." (Paul is not talking to people who are *involved* in sexual sin – which he dealt with in previous chapters.)

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More about the concept of "self-control."

- **It *doesn't* always refer to "keeping from sin."** **TWO EXAMPLES:**
 - ✓ It can refer to the ability to "stay focused" on something that you are doing!
 - ✓ It can refer to doing something *when you should*, instead of at the wrong time – such as knowing when to talk, vs. keeping silent.
- **It *often* does refer to the ability (or inability) to "keep from sinning."**
 - ✓ In this case, it would apply to *any* kind of sin, not just sexual sin.
 - In connection to our current topic, if you were to hear someone say that they were having trouble "controlling" themselves, how would you react? Some people would consider it humorous; others would view it as something to gossip about. What about you?
 - Many who react in these wrong ways are having trouble controlling their attitude, speech, actions, or thoughts in *some other area* of life. In that case, their sinful reaction to that person is probably increasing the judgment *they* will receive for *their own* lack of control in *their* problem areas (unless they repent).

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A view that has grown in popularity.

Now to **the unmarried** and widows I say this:
It is good for them to remain unmarried, as I am.

1 Corinthians 7:8 (BSB)

- **As churches have moved toward an ever-increasing acceptance of marrying after divorce ...** there has been an increasing trend to interpret the word "unmarried" in a different way:
 - ✓ NOT as referring to "widowers," contrasted to the "widows,"
 - ✓ BUT RATHER as referring to *anyone* (both male and female) who currently doesn't have a spouse – whether ① the spouse has died, ② they never had a spouse, or ③ a divorce has taken place.
- They say this in spite of the fact that divorce is not mentioned by Paul, until he moves to the *next* issue (beginning in verse 10). And in *that* context, he *never* states that remarriage is permissible.

In Paul's sentence, it would be like saying
"all people without spouses *and* widows" – which sounds
about as awkward as saying "all people *and* women"!

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**But if they cannot control themselves, let them marry.
For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

1 Corinthians 7:9 (BSB)

- **Having such a view also influences one's interpretation of verse 9.**
 - ✓ If verse 8 includes *divorced* people (as they claim it does), then (according to them) verse 9 gives divorced people permission to remarry. ("After all," they would argue, "it's better for them to marry than to burn with passion.")
- **Back when we looked deeper into the divorce issue, we saw that:**
 - ✓ *No* Scripture (Old or New Testament) describes marriage after divorce as a *legitimate option*; though it acknowledges that people will do it. Furthermore, Jesus describes it as *committing adultery*.
 - ✓ The only exception is in the case of *fornication* (not *adultery*), which could happen *before* the couple "came together" sexually – such as in a Jewish betrothal situation.

18

Can we apply this concept to the matter of marriage after divorce?

For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:9b (BSB)

- Verses 1-9 are a *different context that does not deal with divorce*.
 - ✓ This passage focuses on two *good* options: marrying vs. remaining not married. Both are said to be *good* options for: ① someone who has *never* married and ② someone whose spouse has died.
 - ✓ In contrast, though marriage after divorce is recognized as something that will happen, it is *never* described as a *good* option after divorce (except in the case of fornication during betrothal).
- Yet, *perhaps there is a way it might apply (if we viewed it as a general principle)*: In the past, we suggested that some violations of the Seventh Commandment might put us in a *bad* situation that leaves us with only *bad* options. Then, the best we could do would be to pick "the lesser of two evils." Might there be a situation where marriage was the better of two *bad* options? Or could it be viewed as an *honest* admission of weakness, and a means of avoiding something worse?

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HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THIS DIVORCE ISSUE?

- Suppose a person is convinced that this modern interpretation is correct, thus turning these verses into a permission to divorce and remarry... *Even if their view is wrong, we must consider these things*:
 - ✓ Scripture does *not* place this issue in the same category as the sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.
 - ✓ Jesus says the *ultimate* issue isn't divorce, but a "hard" (= spiritually "uncircumcised") heart. And such a heart is the source of *many types of sin* (not just divorce) – Matthew 15:19.
 - ✓ This means we should treat divorced people the way *we ourselves* should be treated! *We all need encouraged to pursue a way of life that keeps us away from a "hard heart."*

But **encourage one another** daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that **none of you may be hardened** by sin's deceitfulness.

Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

(We all started life with a "hard heart." Removing it requires repentance and trust in God. But some aspects of it may be a process, rather than an instant change.)

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- **NOTE**: People who believe these things may *want* to follow the Bible. They may have read a book that promotes such a view, and it has influenced their thinking on this topic. Though we may disagree, we still have to treat such people with Christian love. If they have made a bad choice, it's usually too late undo it, without further damage.

NEXT TIME... We will look at the *only* passage in this chapter, where Paul mentions divorce.

- We will see that *nothing* he says disagrees with what we have already seen in Scripture. Nor will we find anything that *endorses* marriage after divorce.
- Even so, we may discover that there are a few verses that some people have begun to "reinterpret," in order to promote their views about the issue. We will point these out, because you will most likely meet people with these views.
 - ↳ It usually involves combining concepts mentioned in *different* contexts, making various assumptions, deciding that certain words "imply" something not mentioned in the passage, etc.

21

TODAY'S MISSION:

**FOLLOW JESUS,
and encourage others to do the same.**

**We all have weaknesses in various areas of life.
We all have sinned
and have consequences we must experience.**



We can encourage each other, pray for each other,
and attempt to build each other up...
so we can *all* learn to follow Jesus together!

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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