

Week 7, 1 Corinthians 7

Hook



Main Point: Jesus desires to use you to serve Him in your vocation and relationships.

Group Activity

Changing one's name when becoming a performer is an old tradition. Below are a few celebrities who adopted stage names:

Snoop Dogg – rapper– Snoop was born Calvin Broadus. In childhood, Calvin was given the nickname Snoop Dogg because he apparently bore a similarity to the Charles Schulz Peanuts character Snoopy.

Albert Brooks – actor– This performer only changed his last name, formerly Albert Einstein.

Michael Keaton – actor– Before he had aspirations of becoming a Hollywood star, this young man was known by his given name: Michael Douglas. Given that another “Michael Douglas” had already become a known commodity in film, he took another surname.

When you were a child, were you known by a nickname? At what point in your life did you stop using that name? Why?

What are some things about you that you felt convicted to change when you became a Christian? What are some things about you that you did not feel convicted to change when you became a Christian?

Transition: Today's lesson will tackle a few questions that the Corinthians have concerning marriage. In particular the Corinthians are wondering if they should change their marital status

after their conversion. Through the course of chapter 7, the reader will discover that God desires to use believers right where they are.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus desires to use you to serve Him in your vocation and relationships.

Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 7

1 Corinthians 6 ended with a clear command: Since Christ purchased your body and soul, “glorify God in your body” (6:12). 1 Corinthians 7 logically follows this command at the end of chapter 6, as Paul offers specific instructions on how to glorify God with one’s body as it relates to sexuality (vv. 1–16, 25–40) and station in life (v. 17–24).¹ While his tone in chapters 1–6 was very stern and corrective, Paul moves to a pastorally informative tone starting in chapter 7.² Now that he has sufficiently rebuked the Corinthian believers regarding their unrighteous behavior, he can offer pastoral instruction on how to recover in a godly way. With the transitional marker “now concerning,” Paul organizes his instructions on how to use one’s body and station in life as Christians instead of pagans.

1 Corinthians 7:1–16 [Read]

Sub-point: Believers must seek to honor God in their current stage of life.

While chapter 6 focused on obvious, significant errors in the Corinthian church, chapter 7 is Paul’s way of dealing with issues that are not as black-and-white and need depth of insight and pastoral guidance.³ If it was difficult for the Corinthians to see that engaging in prostitution was wrong, how much more difficult would it be for them to navigate the sexual nuances and expectations of their own marriages?

In verses 1–7, Paul opens with general principles for sex within marriage.⁴ Because the Corinthian culture was extremely indulgent, hedonistic, and sinful in their sexual practices, some believers in Corinth were teaching that it was *never* permissible for a man to have sexual interaction with a woman (restated in quotes in v. 1). This ascetic group believed that sex inside of marriage was only permissible when procreation was in view, and that using sex as a form of marital pleasure alone was sinful.⁵ While it was correct for these believers to avoid the sexual norms of the culture, Paul’s instructions show that this group of believers was seriously overreacting in their view of sexuality within marriage.⁶

¹ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 160.

² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 74.

³ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 90.

⁴ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 121.

Against these two extremes of pagan hedonism and religious asceticism, Paul offers a balanced and humanizing view of sexuality.⁷ In his view, Paul maintains that married couples should engage in sexual activity regularly, unless they are in a period of fasting. He also asserts that both genders have equal rights in their sexual experiences, something very foreign to the Corinthian culture, which was known for depriving women of consent in sexual encounters. According to Paul, the physical body was good and sex was good, as long as it was in the context of marriage.⁸

The “concession” mentioned in verse 6 is commenting on the mutually agreed-upon short period of abstinence so a married couple could focus on prayer; Paul is not commanding that husbands and wives begin to observe these periods of abstinence, but he does permit it. Paul takes a moment in verse 7 to ward off any apprehension toward celibacy as a choice (for the unmarried). Paul sees great benefits in remaining single and focused on the Lord as he was. Paul sees that being married or single is a gift from God; He enables one to be married or single (Matthew 19:12).⁹

In verses 8–16, Paul deals with special and diverse marital situations that are still applicable for us today.¹⁰ Following his guiding principle, his primary instructions are for the unmarried, the widowers, and those contemplating divorce to simply remain faithful in their current situations in light of Jesus’ teaching.¹¹

Verses 8 and 9 reveal that if an unmarried person or a widow desires to remarry, he or she is permitted by Paul, however remaining in his or her current state is to be preferred for reasons listed in the next section (26; 32–35). However, if one cannot remain pure in singleness (if one lacks the gift of singleness), it is better to marry.

Paul shifts his focus to believers who are married to other believers in verse 10; the apostle speaks the teaching of Jesus—as a rule, no divorce.¹² The distinction between the words “separate” and “divorce” on the part of the wife and husband respectively likely has little

⁷ Ibid., p. 121–122.

⁸ Ibid. p. 122.

⁹ He realized, however, that marriage or remaining single was more than a matter of weighing alternative benefits; each was a **gift from God**.

¹⁰ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 169.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 172–173.

¹² David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 518.

significance; they both speak of divorce. Reconciliation, not divorce, is the course to be sought when believers face challenges in their marriage.¹³

“To the rest” in verse 12 refers to believers who are married to unbelievers. If the Christian is married to someone who is without faith, the believer is to remain faithful to Jesus’ views on marriage and divorce. As the believer in the marriage lives a God honoring life, she is a witness to her husband and her children. The words “sanctifying”/“making holy” implies that as long as the unbeliever remains in the marriage, the potential for his/her salvation remains as he/she watches the lifestyle of the believer.¹⁴

If a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever ends, it should only be due to the unbelieving partner. The believing partner should remain faithful to Jesus’ views on marriage and divorce. Marriage to the believer is not about the benefits that one can receive from a spouse, but rather reflecting the very commitment that Christ has made to the Church. While other marriages would break down at the point of spiritual disagreement, the believer instead seeks to represent God’s unconditional and steadfast commitment to His people.¹⁵

How many times is the word “remain” repeated in chapter 7? How does that inform the way we interpret this chapter?

What does Paul mean in verse 7 when he says “each has his own gift of God?”

How does someone know if they have the gift of singleness?

How does Matthew 19:3–12 inform your reading of 1 Corinthians 7?

1 Corinthians 7:17–40 [Read]

Sub-point: God has a purpose for believers in their current stages of life.

The section including verses 17–24 is the centerpiece of all of chapter 7. Many in the Corinthian church assumed that a change in Gospel-identity meant escaping from or changing all the other callings in their daily lives, whether physical, vocational or marital. Paul reminds them that the Gospel alone gives them identity and instructs them to live ordinary, faithful lives in whatever calling they find themselves.¹⁶ The Gospel makes all believers equal before the eyes of the Lord, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, bondservant or citizen. Christ’s work bought every

¹³ David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 518.

¹⁴ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 174–175.

¹⁵ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 131.

¹⁶ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 134.

believer with a high price, and to change callings after conversion only proves that one cares about the approval of man instead of God.

Like sexuality, the Corinthians swung between two extremes in their view of calling and vocation—one view claimed that upward mobility in one’s career was all that mattered, and the other view held that upon becoming a believer, one should try to change or escape from one’s current vocation. Paul’s instruction remains consistent to these believers and offers a remarkable balance between these two extremes: Their temporary vocations should not be something to escape from nor something to idolize as if it were God, but instead something to engage in diligently every day “with God” (v. 24). The Gospel-identity of these believers should fuel them to remain in the condition in which they found themselves upon conversion to serve God and help others flourish.¹⁷

In verses 25 to 40, Paul circles back to his general principle of “remaining” as it relates to the betrothed (or “virgins”). In contrast to verse 10, Paul mentions that he has no Scriptural words from Jesus on this issue,¹⁸ but he offers his apostolic opinion that should not be taken lightly. Nevertheless, the Corinthian church can decide for or against his particular instruction in this section, and it would not be considered sin on their part.¹⁹ While there is debate over what Paul means with the word “betrothed” or “virgins,” it is clear that these instructions involve single people. His opinion for single people is for them to remain single, though he expresses that this is his personal opinion and not a Christian mandate.

Paul gives a reason for his advice to single people: the “present distress” in verse 26. This present crisis was more than likely the famine that hit Corinth in A.D. 51,²⁰ and scholars surmise that Paul interpreted this famine as an end-time event.²¹ In light of what Paul thought may be the coming of Christ, he warns singles to stay as they are, lest they spend the remainder of their time distracted by the cultural endeavors that Corinthian marriage demanded. Being married in the Corinthian world meant setting up a household, which would be very difficult and painful to sustain during famine, especially as many children soon followed marriage in ancient times.²² To Paul, both singleness and marriage are gifts, but singleness in “this present crisis” was to be preferred. Verses 32–35 further flesh out this idea. Single people needed not divide their time, resources and focus between the Lord and a family.

¹⁷ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 134.

¹⁸ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 109.

¹⁹ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 185–186.

²⁰ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 110.

²¹ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 186.

²² Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 110.

In sum, Paul's authoritative direction for married believers is to always remain married; this is non-negotiable. His opinion for singles is to remain unmarried, though they have the right to choose for themselves. Their Gospel-identity makes both the single person and the married person complete, not their marital status.²³

How does Luke 21:22–23 help us understand Paul's logic in 1 Corinthians 7:26–28?

What does Paul desire these believers to be free from (verse 32)?

What is the underlying purpose Paul gives for his instructions in chapter 7 (verse 35)?

Do you feel that single believers are pressured to marry? In what ways do you feel local churches can help to fight/alleviate that pressure?

²³ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 148.

Week 7, 1 Corinthians 7

Took



Main Point: Jesus desires to use you to serve Him in your vocation and relationships.

Group Discussion:

What opportunities to serve Him has God given to you in your current life stage?

Describe several things that you are grateful for in your current life stage.

Lesson Conclusion: Chapter 7 is Paul's direction to the Corinthians on what it looks like to honor God in marriage, socially and vocationally. When one converts to Christianity, there is no need to immediately change positions or seek to alter one's status. God desires to use every believer right where he or she is.

Challenge:

Stop escaping. While we may not be in the same "present crisis" as Corinth, we all desire to escape from our present circumstances sometimes. What circumstances do you try to escape from? What situation in your life is God calling you to "remain" in? List out your favorite passages on endurance and remaining faithful, and pray through them.

Love those who have a different marital status. Paul gives exceptional honor to both single people and married people in this chapter. Our culture usually pits one ideal over the other; Paul holds both as valuable and worthy to be praised. If you are single, how can you love the married people in your life and bestow honor upon them? If you are married, how can you bestow honor on your single friends? List ways that you can tangibly treat those in a different phase of life as equal to yours.

Honor God where you are. Perhaps you have become frustrated with your current stage of life. Remember that God has a purpose for you whether you are single or married. Ask the Lord to help you focus on the opportunities He has given you to serve Him in the here and now. Thank God for where He has placed you. Surrender to Him your work for today and your hopes for tomorrow.