

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 7

Concerning Married Life

Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

7:1 *Now concerning.* Introduces issues to be addressed (cf v 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). (TLSB)

matters you wrote about. The Corinthians had written Paul, asking him a number of vexing questions (see 8:1; 12:1). (CSB)

At the request of the Corinthians. Cf 5:9. (TLSB)

good for a man not to sexual relations with a woman. Because of the crisis at Corinth (v. 26). Elsewhere (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19; 1Ti 3:2, 12; 5:14) Paul spoke strongly in favor of the married state, and in 1Ti 4:1–3 he taught that forbidding to marry would be a sign of the end-time apostasy. Another possible interpretation is that Paul is again quoting a slogan of the Corinthians. He refutes this idea in v. 2 by stating that sexual relations have their proper expression in marriage. (CSB)

Quotation marks indicate that this may be what they wrote, to which Paul gives qualified agreement. (TLSB)

1 Cor 7:1b (“it is good for a man not to touch a woman”) has often been seen as Paul’s opening programmatic statement, the *Leitmotif* that colors the whole chapter. However, it seems more likely that these were not Paul’s own words but a quotation or summation of what the Corinthians had written to him on the topic of marriage. Then the apostle appears in a very different light as a strong advocate of mutual

sexual satisfaction within Christian marriage. Whether 7:1bis understood as a slogan or not, it must certainly be seen in the closest connection with the qualification that follows in 7:2. (CC)

7:2 temptation. Immediately, the suggestion of v 1 raises a problem: it is impractical. (TLSB)

Example: The temple to Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, the rocky eminence above Corinth, at one time had in service 1,000 prostitute priestesses. (CSB)

own wife ... own husband. Marriage, rather than celibacy, better avoids temptation. “Since our priests wanted to avoid these open scandals, they married wives and taught that it was lawful for them to enter into marriage” (AC XXIII 3). (TLSB)

Indeed, it is in 7:2 that we find the center of gravity: “Because of the sexual immoralities, each man must have his own wife, and each woman must have her own husband.” Marriage is to be the general rule. Celibacy, while it can be “good,” καλόν (7:1, 8), is to be the exception. A similar pattern appears a number of times in the chapter. In 7:7, for example, Paul begins by granting that there is some validity to the ascetic point of view (“I want all people to be like myself”), but quickly adds: “Each has his own gift of grace.” Similarly in 7:8–9 he first agrees that it is καλόν (“good”) for the unmarried to stay unmarried but adds that those who lack self-control should marry. The pattern emerges again in 7:25–28, where Paul emphasizes with a twice-repeated “good” (καλόν) that it is good for virgins to stay that way, but he adds that it is not sinful for them to marry (cf. 7:38). (CC)

The normal practice should be that every Christian is married. The imperatives in 7:2, ἐχέτω ... ἐχέτω (“must have ... must have”) should be noted. “Paul leaves no doubt as to what is normal.” In a matter of fact manner, he advocates marriage “because of the sexual immoralities” (7:2), which in this context may be specifically liaisons with prostitutes. At this point some commentators are at pains to insist that Paul does not here lay down the general ground of marriage “as though it were ‘ordained for a remedy against sin,’ ” but is giving “a special reason why those should marry at Cor[inth] who might otherwise have remained single.” But we should not detract from Paul’s sober and realistic statement. While marriage was instituted to provide companionship (Gen 2:18), procreation (Gen 1:28), and so on, one of its important functions is to provide the proper place for the expression of human sexuality, and thus serve as a remedy for sin, a buffer against Satan’s temptations (1 Cor 7:5). (CC)

7:3 conjugal rights. “Rights,” as commonly demanded, are alien to biblical thought. Spouses owe love, fidelity, and physical affection to each other. (TLSB)

Married couples should have normal sexual relations. Permanent abstention deprives the other partner of his or her natural right and may be conducive to temptation. (CSB)

On a basis of full reciprocity, both the husband and the wife are to fulfill their sexual obligations to one another. The context, which speaks of power over one another’s bodies and of not depriving one another (7:4–5), indicates that by ὀφειλή (“marital due”) Paul has the sexual act in mind. He emphasizes the importance of unselfish giving in the sexual relationship (ἀποδιδότω: “must give, let him give,” 7:3) rather than a self-centered seeking to get the best out of the relationship for oneself. Paul’s stress on unselfish love and consideration for the needs of one’s spouse is in harmony with the great discourse on love in chapter 13. It is in striking contrast with the modern emphasis on self-fulfillment and the individual’s sexual autonomy. (CC)

7:4 likewise. Both husband and wife have conjugal rights and exclusive possession of the other in this area. (CSB)

Freedom is abused if exercised without taking account of one's spouse. In this sense, each spouse looks to the authority of the other. (TLSB)

7:5 *Do not deprive one another.* Of sexual fulfillment. (CSB)

Fidelity carries the responsibility of giving a fulfilled physical relationship. (TLSB)

It also stands in contrast with the rabbinic Judaism of Paul's background. The rabbis did not object if a man vowed unilaterally to abstain from intercourse with his wife, although the school of Shammai added this restriction: "[She may consent] for two weeks," and the school of Hillel said "For one week [only]." Moreover, the rabbis permitted "disciples [of the Sages]" to "continue absent for thirty days against the will [of their wives] while they occupy themselves in the study of the Law; and labourers for one week." Compare Paul's insistence that any such abstinence from intercourse for a religious purpose must be "by mutual agreement" (7:5). Finally, it is noteworthy that Paul's only guideline for the frequency of intercourse is the spouse's need. (CC)

"You are not your own," Paul insisted in the previous chapter (6:19). Christians belong first to the Lord who bought them, and then to one another. Thus the wife does not have the right to do what she likes with her body, depriving her husband of his marital due, nor does the husband have the right to deprive his wife. Bengel saw "an elegant paradox" in the way Paul couples the words "her own" with "does not exercise authority over." Paul first insists that Christian women should give themselves sexually to their husbands, and then he gives equal weight to the requirement that husbands must not deprive their wives. In contrast to pagan cultures, where sex is commonly viewed one-sidedly as the man's privilege and prerogative, with the woman at his beck and call,²² Paul stresses the need for total mutuality in the marriage relationship. (CC)

agreement for a limited time. In Jewish tradition, abstinence for a time (as in fasting) was observed to heighten spiritual devotion. This is a matter for each couple to decide. (TLSB)

Thus the Corinthians should desist from depriving one another. The verb in 7:5 translated "depriving" (ἀποστερέω, literally, "defrauding") was used in 6:7 with reference to the practice of some Christians defrauding each other in property cases. To deprive one's spouse of sexual relations is to rob the other of what rightfully belongs to him or her (cf. the use of the same verb in James 5:4). (CC)

Satan ... not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. The Christian deprived of normal sexual activity with his or her marriage partner may be tempted by Satan to sexual immorality. The normal God-given sexual drive in the human being is strong. (CSB)

Satan uses any opportunity for temptation, which is frustrated by the exercise of "self-control." (TLSB)

Only under exceptional circumstances should there be abstinence from sexual relations between husband and wife. Paul spells out three conditions: (1) that it be by mutual agreement; (2) that it be temporary; (3) that it be for the purpose of prayer. There may be times of crisis which call for special prayer, but then couples should resume sexual intimacy as soon as possible. Otherwise the tempter could seize this opportunity to draw them into sin. The marital relationship serves as a "protective shield" against the devil's cunning. (CC)

7:6 *concession, not as a command.* Although marriage is desirable and according to God's plan, it was not mandatory under the difficult circumstances at Corinth (see v. 26). In another situation (1Ti 5:14) Paul urges "the younger widows to marry." (CSB)

Paul allowed the practice of mutually agreed abstinence, but he is not representing it as a divine command. Throughout chs 7–14, Paul offers pragmatic counsel while also presenting ideal practices. (TLSB)

The demonstrative pronoun “this,” τοῦτο, in “I say this” (7:6) must refer to the concession Paul has just made in 7:5 (“unless perhaps it be by mutual agreement for a period, in order to give your time to prayer”). The apostle is conceding, not commanding, temporary abstinence with the consent of both husband and wife. Within the wider context (7:2–5), the passage can hardly be interpreted to mean that Paul’s concession is that the Corinthians may marry. After all, Paul has commanded marriage, using four imperatives to insist that each person take a spouse and then fulfill his or her conjugal duties (7:2, 3, 5). Then he concedes that there may be circumstances which call for a brief abstinence for the sake of prayer. (CC)

7:7 as I myself am. Paul is probably not referring to being single, because the grammar implies a wish that can be achieved. He likely presents himself as an example of self-control. (TLSB)

“To be sure,” he continues, “I want all people to be like myself,” that is, unmarried (7:7). Whether Paul had ever been married will be discussed in connection with 7:8. At the time of writing, however, he was celibate. Thus he was free from the restraints and obligations of marriage and able to devote himself single-mindedly to Christ’s mission (cf. 7:35). Such undistracted devotion to the Lord’s service was his ideal for all Christian people. (CC)

gift. God sets the order of each person’s life by the strength He provides. Each believer is to live according to this. (TLSB)

Although Paul would like everyone to follow his example and remain unmarried, he realizes he cannot require this of anyone. The gracious gift of remaining not only celibate but also free from burning sexual desire is not given to everyone (cf. Mt 19:11; 1 Cor 7:9). Whether the Christian is called to a chaste celibacy or to marriage, his vocation is God’s gracious gift. Both celibacy and marriage are God’s good gifts to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:4). Both vocations can only be lived out in a God-pleasing manner under the blessing of God’s continual grace. (CC)

7:8 widows. Further items may be advanced in support of the translation of ἀγάμοις as “widowers,” instead of “those who have never been married”: First, most ancient cultures had a word for widows, since their problems were conspicuous, but many cultures lacked a word for their male counterparts. Greek speakers could have used the word χήρος, which is the masculine form of the usual term for a “widow” (χήρα, feminine); χήρος is found in classical Greek (LSJ, s.v. χήρα) but not in the LXX or NT. During the NT period ἄγαμος (“unmarried”) served in its place. Second, it may be observed that throughout chapter 7 Paul deals with men and women in mutuality (twelve times altogether), and it would be natural to see the same pattern here. He speaks the same message to both “widowers” and “widows” (7:8), just as he gave the same instructions to both husbands and wives (7:2–4). Third, the use of ἄγαμος at other points in chapter 7 (especially in 7:11 of a divorced woman, and in 7:34 of a currently unmarried woman in contrast to a virgin) indicates that it regularly denotes those who were married but are not now, rather than unmarried people in general. (CC)

Thus Paul grants that it is “good” if widowers and widows follow his lead and refrain from remarrying (7:8). Up to a point, he concurs with the sentiments of the Corinthians’ letter to him, which apparently contained the slogan in 7:1: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” He will have further advice for widows in 7:39–40. (CC)

remain single as I am. “Single” does not appear in Gk, but probably captures Paul’s intention to advise that those who are unmarried should ideally remain so. Throughout ch 7, the apostle recommends that Christians should stay as they are because of the “present distress” (v 26). (TLSB)

7:9 *better to marry.* Paul is not against marriage; he appreciated the benefits of celibacy in the present circumstances. (TLSB)

to burn. With unfulfilled sexual appetite. “Even though they abstain from the act, their hearts are so full of unchaste thoughts and evil lusts that there is a continual burning and secret suffering, which can be avoided in the married life” (LC I 215). (TLSB)

The apostle insists, however, that an exception must be made to his advice that widowers and widows remain as he does. If they lack self-control and are tempted to visit prostitutes (cf. 7:2) or indulge in extramarital affairs, then the remedy is that they must marry. “For,” Paul says, “it is better to marry than to burn” with sexual passion (7:9). Again he is almost certainly countering an ascetic group which sought to forbid the remarriage of widowers and widows. Paul, on the other hand, consistently maintained that the death of a spouse left the surviving partner free to remarry (7:39; see also Rom 7:2–3). (CC)

7:10 Paul now turns to married people in situations where both partners are Christians. He states categorically that they are not to divorce. His authority for this ruling is not his own, although elsewhere he will express his counsel as a faithful apostle (e.g., 7:25, 40). Rather, in this case Paul has a specific word from the Lord Jesus himself, just as he has other specific words when he later reminds the Corinthians of the Lord’s command that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel (1 Cor 9:14; see Lk 10:7), when he passes on the tradition concerning the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26), and when he addresses the role of women in worship (14:37). Jesus had specifically forbidden divorce as contrary to the Creator’s design and will,^a thus putting himself at odds with the liberal views of Rabbi Hillel and his followers, and with the prevailing ethos in Greco-Roman society. (CC)

I give this charge (not I, but the Lord). Paul is citing a command from the Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry that married couples must stay together (Mt 5:32; 19:3–9; Mk 10:2–12; Lk 16:18). Paul probably heard such commands from other disciples (cf. Gal 1:18–19) or from Jesus himself by a special revelation. (CSB)

God’s revealed instruction, based on Scripture. (TLSB)

It is remarkable that Paul first forbids wives from initiating divorce proceedings against their husbands. In Judaism, it was generally not permissible for a woman unilaterally to file for divorce. But Greco-Roman society was different. In communities like Corinth there were no legal obstacles to a woman taking such an initiative. It seems some highly “spiritual” Corinthian women, who were drawn to an ascetic understanding of Christianity and rejected sexual relations with their husbands (“eschatological women”⁸), may have been taking the further step and divorcing their husbands. Paul tells them that in so doing they are contravening the Lord’s command. (CC)

However, if the unthinkable should happen and the wife in fact leaves, she should not seek a new husband. Only two options are open to her as a Christian: to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. This apostolic word reflects the NT view that marriage is indissoluble: the two have become one flesh and will always remain so. Only death can dissolve a marriage (Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39). As one commentator observes, “Divorcing one spouse to marry another is nothing other than a legalized form of adultery.” Note how in both 7:10 and 7:11 the weight falls on what in Greek is the final clause: “a wife from her husband *must not separate*” (7:10) and “a husband his wife *must not divorce*” (7:11). The Scriptures take a stern and uncompromising stand against divorce; “ ‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord” (Mal 2:16). (CC)

7:11 *But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled.* Paul argues that in the light of Christ's command she (or he) is not to marry again. Rather, the separated or divorced couple are to be reconciled. Clearly the ideal is that marriage should not be permanently disrupted. (CSB)

Under Jewish law, only the husband had the right to divorce. Paul's counsel affirms equality in marriage, excluding divorce from the husband as from the wife. Paul's counsel against divorce is like that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in some rabbinic literature. (TLSB)

7:12 Paul has discussed conjugal relations within marriage (7:1–7). He provided counsel to widowers and widows (7:8–9) and to married people in situations where both partners are Christians (7:10–11). Paul now turns to “the rest” (7:12)—believers who are married to unbelievers. Mixed marriages were forbidden in the OT, and Jesus had not left a specific word on the issue, so Paul speaks to it on the basis of his apostolic authority.⁷ By no means were all Christians in the fortunate situation of Lydia, the Philippian jailer, or Stephanas, who had been converted and were baptized together with their entire households (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor 16:15). In Gentile areas newly penetrated by the Gospel, mixed marriages were common. Timothy's mother was a Jewish Christian, while his father was a pagan Greek (Acts 16:1). Peter, too, offers detailed advice to Christian women married to pagans (1 Pet 3:1–6). (CC)

Paul's advice to Christians in a mixed relationship is consistent with his earlier word to Christian couples (1 Cor 7:10–11): remain as you are! If the unbelieving spouse is content to be married to a Christian, then the Christian partner should not dissolve the marriage. (CC)

I say this (I, not the Lord). Paul is not quoting a direct command from Jesus here. (CSB)

brother has a wife ... not a believer. The apostle is talking here (and in v. 13) about couples already married, when one of them becomes a Christian. If at all possible, they should remain together, unless the unbeliever, whether man or woman, refuses to remain (v. 15). (CSB)

The non-Christian spouse still belongs to “those who are perishing” (1:18). (TLSB)

7:13 *should not divorce.* Disagreement in faith does not dissolve marriage. Yet such a marriage does not change the fact that the Christian is a new creature, and the marriage partner might not agree to live with this new person. (TLSB)

7:14 *the unbelieving husband ... wife has been sanctified.* The unbelieving partner is influenced by the godly life of the Christian partner; so that family is under the holy influence of the believer and in that sense is sanctified. (CSB)

One is often led to faith through the example and testimony of a faithful spouse; therefore, they are made holy in Christ. (TLSB)

While we cannot reconstruct with certainty the situation into which Paul is speaking, it seems a reasonable suggestion that he was concerned to calm the fears of some that their marriage to a non-Christian could rob them of their holiness. After all, hadn't the apostle in a previous letter, and now again in the present epistle, warned them against associating with the immoral (5:9–13)? Didn't he command them to expel an evildoer from their midst (5:13)? Moreover, the ascetic group in the congregation may have been arguing that marriage to a pagan defiled the Christian partner. Paul now assures the church that the opposite is the case: the believer is not besmirched by the unbeliever; rather, the unbeliever is sanctified through association with the believer (7:14).

To say that the unbelieving spouse “has been sanctified” (7:14) does not necessarily mean that he or she will be saved. As much as the believing spouse may desire and pray for the partner’s salvation and proclaim the Gospel, the unbeliever may continue to reject the Gospel.¹¹ However, the unbelieving spouse does come under the holy influence of the Christian, whose faith and moral purity set an example and have a significant impact on the tone of the whole household. The atmosphere in the home is constantly sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:5). (CC)

That the holy influence flows from the believer to the unbeliever is an illustration of the biblical axiom “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4). The light of Christ shines in the darkness and dispels it (Jn 1:5). (CC)

your children ... would be unclean. † They at least have the advantage of being under the sanctifying influence of one Christian parent (see v. 16) and so may be called holy. (CSB)

Children may be nurtured in faith by the believing parent. An unequal marriage does not automatically corrupt them. Rather, through receiving the Word, they are made saints clothed in Christ’s holiness. (TLSB)

The holy influence of the Christian spouse also extends to the children: “otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Cor 7:14). If the Christian parent were the father, he would certainly have the authority to raise the child as a Christian from an early age. And in cases where the Christian parent is the mother, she would be determined to do all in her power to see that her child is raised in the faith. Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother Lois saw to it that the boy was subject to the sanctifying influence of the holy Scriptures from early childhood (2 Tim 3:15). Timothy’s Greek father may have been indifferent to what the women were doing; he may even have been opposed, but for the sake of the child, the women feared and obeyed God rather than a man (as did the midwives in Ex 1:15–21; see also Acts 5:29). It would be reasonable to assume that cases like Timothy’s were common in Paul’s day. We may compare recent church history, where, for example, the Russian babushkas (grandmothers) often undertook the Christian instruction of their grandchildren when the parents were unwilling or unable. (CC)

While we cannot deduce from this text with certainty the further implication that the children of mixed marriages were holy because they had been baptized, the adjective “holy” (ἅγια) does tell in its favor. The apostle is assuring the Christian already married—and probably it was mostly wives who needed this reassurance—that continuing the union with the spouse, far from being displeasing to God, was indeed hallowed, and that their children (despite the non-Christian parent) were now holy (ἅγια, 7:14; cf. ἅγιοι in 1:2 and ἁγιάζω in 6:11). In 12:13 Paul will state that those who are baptized (with no restriction stated as to age) are given the Holy Spirit to drink. (CC)

7:15 *brother or sister is not enslaved*. The believer is not under obligation to try to continue living with the unbeliever. (CSB)

Marriage is, of course, a lifelong commitment, but in this case, the bond is broken by the unbelieving partner. (TLSB)

The next situation Paul describes (7:15) probably was common in the early church. Many non-Christians would have found their spouse’s new religion strange and embarrassing, with the result that they wished to opt out of the relationship. Under these circumstances, Paul says—and only under these—may the marriage be dissolved. “Let him (or her) go,” he writes. “Don’t try desperately to save the marriage.” It would have been understandable if Christian women in particular fought to preserve their marriages, for a deserted wife could find herself in severe financial straits. She would also be aware of the divine

injunctions against divorce. Another factor would be her hope that her husband would eventually be won to the faith. But Paul states that the Christian brother or sister “is not bound” (7:15) when the non-Christian partner wants to end the relationship. Since the responsibility for the marriage breaking up rests with the unbeliever, the Christian should not let it burden his or her conscience. Rather than trying to force the unbeliever to maintain the marriage, and thus destroying whatever “peace” (7:15) was left in the home, “one should let the separation occur in as peaceful a way as possible, not creating unnecessary disturbances.” The Christian is called to a life of peace.^b “Do all you can to live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18 JB). (CC)

called you to peace. If the unbeliever were forced to live with the believer, there would be no peace in the home. (CSB)

The marriage in which the Christian is not accepted could be a disharmonious one. (TLSB)

7:16 *you will save.* By leading another to faith. In this case, the mixed marriage would become a blessing. (TLSB)

It is much debated whether 1 Cor 7:16 should be understood “optimistically” or “pessimistically.” According to the optimistic view, Paul is encouraging believers to maintain the marriage if possible in the hope of saving the spouse, because the unbeliever eventually may be brought to the faith and so be saved. But a comparison of similar rhetorical questions in the OT leaves it open whether to interpret 1 Cor 7:16 optimistically or pessimistically, and the context favors the pessimistic view. The Christian does not know whether the unbeliever would ever be converted, so the Christian should not force the unbeliever to stay on the assumption that the unbeliever’s conversion is a certainty if the marriage continues. The apostle understands, and speaks tenderly to, the deep desire of the Christian spouse to save the partner. This is what makes it so hard for the spouse to let the marriage break up. But to cling to the marriage when the partner is determined to leave would only lead to frustration and hostility. “The certain strain is not justified by the uncertain result. Marriage should not be seen simply as an instrument of evangelism. The guiding principle must be ‘peace’ (v. 15).” (CC)

7:1–16 Marriage brings obligations, but being in Christ forms a new being. Treasure marriage because of the blessings God provides through it. In marriage, Christians can encourage one another, non-Christians may be drawn to belief, and children can be brought up in the faith. • God, I thank You for this most precious vestige of the perfection You gave our first parents. Preserve me faithfully according to Your love and Your gifts. Amen. (TLSB)

Concerning Change of Status

17 Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. **18** Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. **19** Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. **20** Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. **21** Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. **22** For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. **23** You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. **24** Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

7:17 Paul's paragraph on the Christian's calling (7:17–24) is a digression from the various marital topics that dominate this chapter. But it enunciates a principle which should govern the congregation's whole approach to marriage issues, the principle that unless there are good reasons to the contrary, a Christian should be content with whatever his marital status happened to be at conversion. Paul states this principle three times (7:17, 20, 24), drawing parallels with circumcision and uncircumcision, then freedom and slavery. (CC)

In these verses we find the verb καλέω ("I call") eight times, the noun κλήσις ("calling") once. The noun in 7:20 refers to one's role or station in life (and is translated above as "state"). But the verb denotes God's call to faith in Christ. Paul is not thinking of calling primarily in the sense of one's vocation, that position in life to which one is called, but of the condition in which God finds a person when he first calls him into the fellowship of his Son (1:9). (CC)

let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned. Each Christian is to live contentedly for the Lord in whatever economic, social and religious station in life God has placed him. See v. 18 for an example. (CSB)

In terms of work and station in life, God assigns a sacred vocation. (TLSB)

Back in 7:7 Paul established that whether a person was single or married, his marital status was a personal gift from God. Now he urges everyone to be content in that status. The particular circumstances in which someone was called to the Christian faith—whether as a male or as a female, single or married, or (as Paul will soon add) circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, rich or poor—have no bearing on his standing in God's sight. Paul's argument here parallels his baptismal catechesis in Gal 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Thus the Gospel does not prescribe what the Christian's social situation ought to be: no one can claim he is a better Christian because of his higher place in society. Even slaves could enjoy the high dignity of the call to eternal life in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14), and indeed, in the early church, great numbers of slaves became believers. In contrast to modern "prosperity doctrine," which sees affluence as a sign of God's call and blessing, Paul stresses contentment whatever one's lot (Phil 4:11–13). All sorts and conditions of people may live (literally "walk," περιπατέω, 7:17) the Christian life with a good conscience, knowing that they are serving their Lord. (CC)

called. Gk *kaleo*, "call by name," "designate." Eng "vocation" is based on the Vulg translation of this term. The new life in Christ does not cancel one's place in society but transforms the way it is viewed and practiced. (TLSB)

my rule in all the churches. Paul's teaching is consistent in all of the Christian communities. (TLSB)

7:18 *circumcision ... uncircumcision.* In the religious sphere, Christian Jews should not try to obliterate physically the fact that they are Jews, and Christian Gentiles should not yield to Jewish pressure for circumcision (cf. Ac 15:1–5; Gal 5:1–3). (CSB)

The intertestamental book of 1Macc (1:15) speaks of those who "made themselves uncircumcised," somehow disguising their circumcision as they participated in athletic events unclothed, as was the Gk custom. Paul's expression may imply a wider rejection of Jewish heritage. (TLSB)

His constant advice is that people should remain as they are (7:18–19). If someone was called to the faith as a circumcised person, he should not have an operation to conceal his circumcision. Such operations had become popular as Israel was subjected to cultural pressure from its Greek-speaking environment, and

Jewish men wished to compete in the gymnasium without embarrassment. Paul condemns the practice. Rather, the Jewish Christian should follow Paul's example and remain "a Jew to the Jews" (9:20). For that reason he had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). As the son of a Jewish woman, Timothy was regarded as a Jew anyway, and once he was circumcised, he would be able to witness more effectively to fellow Jews. But the apostle steadfastly refused to circumcise Titus, who was a Greek (Gal 2:3). As Titus had been called in uncircumcision, it was not right to demand circumcision of him or other Gentiles. After the advent of Christ and his fulfillment of the Torah, whether a man was circumcised or uncircumcised became ultimately irrelevant. That is Paul's great argument in the epistle to the Galatians. What really matters is not an external operation on the body, but "keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19). (CC)

What does Paul mean by "commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19)? A helpful non-Pauline starting place is the succinct definition in 1 Jn 3:23: "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he has commanded us." This Johannine definition corresponds closely to Paul's pronouncement to the Galatians: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). Here we find the core of Paul's theology. Of paramount importance is "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26). While we are justified by faith alone, this faith is never alone; it is "a living, busy, active, mighty thing," constantly serving the neighbor in loving obedience to the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8–10). (CC)

7:19 counts. Outward appearances have no bearing on salvation. (TLSB)

keeping the commandments of God. Completed by Christ. The covenant of circumcision is no longer binding. (TLSB)

This definition of what Paul means by God's commandments lies at the heart of his conception, as is demonstrated especially by Gal 5:6. But in our present context, we need to add that he also works with a broader definition, which understands God's commandments to embrace the whole deposit of divine revelation handed down in the OT and the sayings of the Lord. This revelation constitutes the divine mandates (*mandata Dei*) which the Christian is to honor and observe. It is in this sense that the only other occurrence of ἐντολή ("commandment") in 1 Corinthians (14:37) should be taken. (CC)

7:20 condition ... called. Married or single, whichever is one's vocation (cf vv 21–24). (TLSB)

In 7:20 Paul reiterates the principle of 7:17. The Christian should remain in the "state" or "calling" in which God's call first found him. The noun "state" (κλήσις, 7:20) here approaches the sense of our term "vocation" (the vocation to be married or unmarried, the vocation to live as a circumcised or uncircumcised person). But the verb in the context (ἣ ἐκλήθη, "in which he was called") refers to the divine call to be a Christian, which happens to find a person in a particular social setting. (CC)

7:21 Were you a slave ... ? In the social and economic sphere, the Christian slave should live contentedly in his situation, realizing that he has become free in Christ (v. 22; Jn 8:32, 36). (CSB)

Also a calling, which could be exercised in a God-pleasing way (cf Eph 6:5–8). (TLSB)

Taking his second illustration from the practice of slavery (7:21), Paul encourages the many slaves in the congregation not to let their social condition bother them. They may still live out the Christian life under those circumstances. What matters above all is that they are free of worry (see ἀμερίμουνς in 7:32), allow their calling in Christ to transform them, and glorify Christ as they carry out their roles in life. (CC)

Do not be concerned about it. In Christ, there is neither slave nor free (Gal 3:28), so being a slave does not affect one's position as a free child of God. (TLSB)

if you can gain your freedom, do so. If a Christian slave has an opportunity to get his freedom, he should take advantage of it. In the Roman Empire slaves were sometimes freed by Roman patricians. There is nothing wrong with seeking to improve your condition, but be content at every stage. (CSB)

However, should their master offer them their freedom, they should seize the opportunity (7:21). In support of this positive interpretation of the text are the following considerations: (1) Paul has just been speaking of freedom in the protasis (the “if” clause) of this conditional sentence. Therefore, it is much more likely that the unexpressed object of the verb *χράομαι* (“make use of”) is *ἐλευθερία* (“freedom”) than that we should supply *δουλεία* (“slavery”) from further afield. (2) The verb *χράομαι* (“make use of”) in the Corinthian letters regularly means “take advantage of an opportunity.” (3) Finally, it is highly unlikely that Paul would have taken any other view. On a number of occasions he appealed to his Roman citizenship in order to gain freedom to further Christ’s mission (Acts 16:37; 22:25). He certainly did not regard imprisonment or slavery as desirable states. (CC)

7:22 *free... is Christ’s slave.* A man who was not a Roman slave should realize that in a spiritual sense he belonged to Christ, and, because of his allegiance to Christ, he must not oppress the underprivileged slave. Cf. Eph 6:5, 9; Col 3:22; 4:1. (CSB)

1 Cor 7:22a answers to 7:21 and explains why the person called as a slave should not be concerned about his social circumstances. His calling to be in Christ has conferred on him the glorious liberty of being one of God’s children, set free from bondage to sin. But this does not mean that the Christian is now at liberty to be his own master. Rather, his emancipation in Christ has resulted in transference of ownership. He has come under new management: from now on, he will be a willing slave of his Lord Jesus. Paul served as a pattern in this regard. Although he was a free Roman citizen, he often introduced himself to his readers as a slave of Christ Jesus.^e As slaves of Christ, Christians should not curry favor with people but do God’s will wholeheartedly (Eph 6:6). (CC)

freedman of the Lord. Cf Gal 5:1. In Christ, we are delivered from bondage to sin and death. (TLSB)

Paul’s paradoxical teaching on the Christian life as the way of glorious freedom coupled with devoted service has found one of its finest expositions in Luther’s 1520 treatise “The Freedom of a Christian.” Here Luther sets forth two theses that “seem to contradict each other”: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” This teaching he derives first of all from Paul, beginning with 1 Cor 9:19: “For although I am free of all people, I have made myself a slave to all.” (CC)

The Corinthians’ status as freedmen had come at a price—the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18–19; Rev 5:9). The axiom “you were bought for a price” (1 Cor 7:23) is repeated from 1 Cor 6:20. In that context, Paul’s concern was that the Corinthians glorify God with their redeemed bodies, and not sin sexually. In the present context he is urging them to appreciate their newly won freedom, and not become enslaved to the false asceticism which seems to have been promoted especially by the “spiritual” women, nor sacrifice their freedom by following factional leaders (1:12; 3:4, 21; cf. 2 Cor 11:20) or anyone else who might take them captive through human philosophy and speculation (Col 2:8, 20). (CC)

Paul concludes his digression by repeating in 1 Cor 7:24 his thesis that, unless there are good reasons to the contrary, everyone should continue in the situation in which he was called (cf. 1 Cor 7:17, 20). “Bloom where you are planted” is a modern restatement of the apostle’s message. The call to be a Christian sanctifies and ennobles all stations in life. (CC)

7:23 *bought at a price ... not ... slaves of men.* Christians in all stations of life should realize that their ultimate allegiance is not to men but to Christ, who bought them with his blood (6:20; 1Pe 1:18–19). (CSB)

Slave and free equally belong to their Redeemer (6:20). (TLSB)

slaves of men. In Christ, we are free from bondage to human opinions and esp to their insistence on a law we cannot keep. (TLSB)

7:24 *remain with God.* The summary of vv 17–23 and the new life in Christ. (TLSB)

Whatever his station, the Christian has the assurance that he is not alone. He can live out his calling in God's presence (παρὰ θεῶ, 7:24), confident that God is with him and will never leave him (cf. Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5; Heb 1:5). (CC)

7:17–24 The Lord transforms believers from our previous existence and makes us members of His household. We now live out the new life in the station to which God has appointed us. • With Your help, everlasting God, may we live our eternal life already in this passing world. Amen. (TLSB)

Concerning the Unmarried

25 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. **26** Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. **27** Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. **28** But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. **29** What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; **30** those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; **31** those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. **32** I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. **33** But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— **34** and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. **35** I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. **36** If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong^[b] and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. **37** But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. **38** So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.³⁹ A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. **40** In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

7:25–28 Paul has now given his apostolic counsel to widowers and widows, to married couples in general, and to couples in mixed marriages. There remains one large group whose situation he has not addressed: the “virgins,” who have never married. To this group he devotes much of the second half of the chapter (7:25–38). (CC)

7:25 *Now concerning the betrothed.* Paul answers another major question the Corinthians had asked (v. 1). (CSB)

With the phrase “now concerning” (7:25), Paul signals that he is taking up a fresh topic from the Corinthians’ letter to him. Whereas he had a definite command from the Lord in the case of married people (7:10), he has to use his own pastoral judgment in the case of virgins. Nonetheless, the Corinthians could have confidence that he gives his opinion not as a harsh lawmaker, but as one whose whole life was under the impress of the Lord’s mercy and compassion. Paul was deeply conscious that the apostolic ministry had been entrusted to him by the Lord’s mercy, since he had been “a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Tim 1:13; cf. 2 Cor 4:1). The Lord Jesus had converted him from these destructive patterns to a life of faithful and constructive service. The Corinthians could be sure that he had their best interests at heart. (CC)

betrothed. Lit, “the virgins.” (TLSB)

I give a judgment as one who ... is trustworthy. Paul is not giving a direct command from Jesus here (as in v. 10; cf. Ac 20:35). In this matter, which is not a question of right and wrong, Paul expresses his own judgment. Even though he put it this way, he is certainly not denying that he wrote under the influence of divine inspiration (see v. 40). And since he writes under inspiration, what he recommends is clearly the better course of action. (CSB)

Sometimes it is necessary to make judgments where God gives no specific instruction. These matters are known as *adiaphora*, and the conscience, with Scripture in mind, makes its best attempt to discern what pleases God. (TLSB)

7:26 Paul’s advice is that he thinks it is good for female virgins and their male counterparts to remain unmarried “in view of the present distress” (1 Cor 7:26). What does he mean by “the present distress”? One suggestion is that he is referring to distress in the congregation, where some had become weak and sick, and some had died, because of their disregard for Christ’s body in the Lord’s Supper (11:30). But that is not a likely explanation. That problem would be alleviated by the proper theological understanding and practice of the Supper. Paul would hardly advise them to refrain from marriage because he expected them to ignore his warnings regarding the Sacrament and consequently suffer divine judgment. (CC)

present distress. Probably a reference to the pressures of the Christian life in an immoral and particularly hostile environment (cf. vv. 2, 28; 5:1; 2Ti 3:12). Paul’s recommendation here does not apply to all times and all situations. (CSB)

Christians faced special challenges in that hour, which Paul regarded as the last times. (TLSB)

Another suggestion is that Paul is alluding to the end of the world (thus NRSV: “impending crisis”⁵). Here an appeal can be made to the context, where he says the time is short (7:29) and the form of this world is passing away (7:31). See also 7:32–35. Both the words “distress” (ἀνάγκη, 7:26) and “trouble” (θλίψις, 7:28) are used in the NT of the woes preceding Christ’s second coming. While this may be part of the reason, Paul may have had in mind an additional specific cause of distress for the people in Corinth at that time. (CC)

Numerous Greek states were affected by food shortages in the A.D. 40s and 50s. From that period there is important epigraphic evidence regarding Tiberius Claudius Dinippus, who was responsible for grain during three shortages in Corinth. One of these occasions has been placed during Gallio’s proconsulship of Achaia in A.D. 51 (cf. Acts 18:12), another seems to have preceded Gallio’s term and Paul’s first visit

to the city, while the third has been placed later. Dinippus was honored with inscriptions and possibly a statue, indicating the Corinthians' great appreciation of his services. (CC)

7:27 bound. In marriage, a man “hold[s] fast to his wife” (Gn 2:24). (TLSB)

Do not seek a wife. Planning for marriage would be an additional responsibility in difficult times. The instruction has the character of advice (cf v 28) rather than command. (TLSB)

If the citizens of Corinth, especially the poor, were suffering from famine, Paul's advice to people not to marry becomes more understandable. It is easier for an unmarried person to cope with hardship than for parents who have to provide for their children. The famine crisis may also lie behind the apostle's concern for those who were going hungry at the communal meals which accompanied the Lord's Supper (11:21, 34). That Paul has current food shortages in mind is not at all incompatible with the suggestion that ἀνάγκη has to do with the end times, for Jesus lists famine (λιμός) among the hardships (ἀνάγκη) of those times (Lk 21:11, 23). (CC)

However, if an unmarried person disregards the apostle's advice and decides to marry, he may be assured that this is not a sin (7:28). These words at first sight seem strange, coming from a Jewish man for whom marriage was the norm. As noted above, some have suggested that Paul is countering ascetic slogans which promoted the single life as being more “spiritual” than marriage. More likely, however, he is simply assuring young Christians who held the founder of their church in the highest regard that it was fine if they did not follow him in his preference for celibacy. After all, he had no command from the Lord on this topic (7:25). His advice was simply advice; to disregard it did not imperil anyone's spiritual welfare. Moreover, his words of reassurance here for those who wish to marry are consonant with 7:2 (“Each man must have his own wife, and each woman must have her own husband”) and 7:9 (“If they do not have self-control, they must marry”). (CC)

7:28 betrothed woman. Eligible to marry. (TLSB)

worldly troubles. Times of suffering and persecution for Christ, when being married would mean even greater hardship in taking care of one's mate. (CSB)

Constant companions of Paul in his work (2Co 12:10). (TLSB)

1 Cor 7:26 may be compared to Jer 16:1–4, where God commands the prophet—and only the prophet—not to marry and father children. The reason is the imminent fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. God tells Jeremiah that parents and children in Jerusalem will die from sickness, famine, and the sword. This comparison may support the view that a local famine or other hardship could be a reason for celibacy in Corinth too. (CC)

Since the destruction of Jerusalem because of her sins was a prefiguration of Judgment Day upon Christ's return, this comparison may support the interpretation that “the present distress” (1 Cor 7:26) also has in view Christ's parousia and the world's end. The eschatological perspective of passages such as Matthew 24 suggests that many earthly hardships (e.g., wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, false christs) should be seen as signs of Christ's return and the world's end. That time may come at any moment, and certainly it is closer now for us than it was for Paul and the Corinthians. (CC)

Paul had learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Phil 4:11). Now he again commends the wisdom of this policy to the congregation. The married man should be content with his situation and not seek a divorce (1 Cor 7:27a). Thus Paul reiterates the injunctions of 7:10–13. On the other hand, the man

who was not legally bound to a woman (because he was divorced or a widower or a bachelor) should not seek a wife (7:27b; cf. 7:8). (CC)

Paul adds a warning that the married person will have “worldly trouble” (7:28, literally, “trouble for the flesh”; for similar language see 2 Cor 12:7). Probably Paul is thinking in general terms of the worldly anxieties that afflict the married person in trying to please his or her spouse (7:32–34). These normal anxieties seem to have been accentuated in Corinth by famine (see above on 7:26). Unless they are under necessity to marry, the apostle would like to spare the Corinthians these worries. (CC)

7:29 *brothers* – Paul now speaks with pastoral affection to the whole church, calling the Corinthians “brothers.” (CC)

Paul now speaks with pastoral affection to the whole church, calling the Corinthians “brothers” (7:29). He reminds them that they live in the last days. “The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5); their salvation is nearer than when they first believed (Rom 13:11); the days have been shortened (Mt 24:22). Thus they should live “eschatologically”—as people who are always aware they may have to leave this world at any moment. This heightened awareness of our transience has been well illustrated by the analogy to the terminally ill. The person who knows his remaining time is limited has a changed perspective. He sees, hears, and values everything in a new way. (CC)

time... is short. The time for doing the Lord’s work has become increasingly short. Life is fleeting, as times of persecution remind us. Do not be unduly concerned with the affairs of this world (vv. 29–31) because material things are changing and disappearing (v. 31). Some think the reference is to the Lord’s second coming. (CSB)

The end of time (cf Dn 8:19; 11:27, 29, 35). (TLSB)

During the time that remains to them in this world, believers should “focus on eternal essentials.” This does not mean they should cultivate a stoic aloofness and detachment from the concerns of the present age.⁶ But they should not let their lives be dominated by the world and its values. They should not become too preoccupied, too absorbed, too engrossed in this transient existence. Their true citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20; cf. Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 1:4). Thus, in the middle of all these legitimate earthly concerns, they should always have the attitude of someone who can do without the things this world has to offer (cf. Lk 14:26). (CC)

Kairos means not just “time” in general, but “an opportune or favorable period of time,” “the right season.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

The verb *sustello* means “to draw together, to limit, to shorten;” the form is perfect passive participle. Thus the translation of these words is not just “the time is short, but rather “The time period has been shortened,” During this NT age in which we live, this “now but not yet” era before the Second Coming, our lives have a particular urgency. We do not have “all the time in the world,” for the present world will soon pass away. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

from now on – The phrase *to loipon* means “henceforth, from this time forward.” Because of what Paul had just said about the time having been shortened, the Corinthians Christians were to live from then on in the way he was about to describe. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

7:30 *those who rejoice* – Mourning is a temporary feature of this present world (Rev. 21:4). Christians experience the pain of separation, but they understand that release from these things is assured. Therefore, they do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Th 4:13). (TLSB)

Chairontes is best translated not as “happy,” but as “rejoicing” or “joyful.” Again Paul warns people against getting so wrapped up in the ups and downs of life that they lose sight of what lasts beyond life. The earthly sorrows and joys that Christian experience are passing and are not so to captivate them that they lose sight of the everlasting comfort and joy that they have in Christ. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

buy – People engaged in business, occupied in a station which deals exclusively with matters of this world, must not let their hearts be wrapped up in the gain and in the enjoyment of the world, but always keep their eyes directed to the greatest gift and blessing, that of the final consummation of salvation in heaven. As one commentator has it, we have here “the picture of spiritual detachment in the various situations in life.” (Kretzmann)

had no goods – Because of the temporary nature of all things in this world, we do not really “own” any earthly thing in an ultimate or lasting sense. Therefore, we are to regard such things in the proper way; that is, as stewards of God’s gifts and resources. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

1 Timothy 6:7 “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”

7:31 *had no dealings with* – A literal translation has a slightly different connotation: “Those who use the world as if not overusing it.” Paul, then, is speaking not just about “things,” but about all the affairs and doings of the world. As ones who live in the world but are not of the world, we are to “use the world” in moderation, so to speak, and not in such a fashion that we become engrossed and absorbed in its affairs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

present form – Everything will be dissolved to make way for the new heavens and new earth (2 Pt 3:13). (TLSB)

passing away – Describing the end of this world (cf 2 Pt 3:10). (TLSB)

Even right now, not the present tense, the form of this world is passing away. Why, then, should someone invest an entire life in such a thing that is decaying and will be destroyed? This theme of the passing away of the old world and the coming of the new is evocative of Holy Baptism, in which we ourselves passed away and then were made new. We were buried with Christ and raised with him by water and the Word (Col 2:12; Rom 6:3-5). Christ is the center and the substance of the new creation; therefore, when we are in him by Baptism and faith, we ourselves are made heirs of the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

7:32 *free from anxieties* – Paul counsels against anxiety in general (Php 4:6), but these are anxieties that accompany family responsibilities. (TLSB)

Paul now expresses his wish that the whole congregation be as free as possible from burdensome cares (1 Cor 7:32). This was his underlying concern in the previous admonition to live in this world as citizens of heaven, who did not become too engrossed in this world’s affairs (7:31). As is evident from the context (7:33–34), freedom from care should be understood in a broad sense to include freedom from the worldly anxieties attendant on marriage and raising a family (cf. Mt 6:25–34; Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7). In contrast to

the married person, an unmarried man (like the apostle himself) is able to devote all his time and attention to serving and pleasing his Lord. Paul constantly encouraged Christian people not to be self-centered and please themselves, but to live for the Lord who had died for them and make it their goal to please him and their fellow human beings in everything. (Compare also Luther's morning prayer: "that in all my thoughts, words, and deeds I may please Thee."¹¹) This desire to please the Lord should be the Christian's overriding concern whether married or single. (CC)

things of the Lord – Spiritual matters of individual holiness and service to God. "Neither Christ nor Paul praise virginity because it justifies, but because it is freer and less distracted by domestic occupations in praying, teaching, and serving." (TLSB)

7:33 *please his wife*. A healthy marriage thrives on attending the needs and wishes of one's spouse, but Jesus also set down priorities in this regard (Mt 10:37). (TLSB)

Nowhere in this chapter does Paul argue that it is wrong for a person to marry and assume the duties of married life. Elsewhere he maintains that "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8). The married Christian must not shirk these responsibilities. At the same time, with sober realism, the apostle points out that the mundane cares of maintaining a household and trying to please one's wife do limit the time available to a married man who wants to devote himself to the Lord. He has divided loyalties (7:33–34). (CC)

7:34 *his interests are divided*. He cannot give undistracted service to Christ (v. 35). This is particularly true in times of persecution. (CSB)

One can love God through loving one's spouse, but if these are in conflict, one cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24). (TLSB)

unmarried or betrothed. Both terms describe women, the latter having never been married. (TLSB)

By the same token, unmarried women (widows and divorcees) and virgins are free to consecrate themselves ("be holy," 7:34) in body and soul to the Lord. By "holy" Paul does not mean that they are holier than other Christians, but they can serve their Lord with single-minded devotion. Like the faithful widows referred to in 1 Tim 5:5, they are able to continue in supplications and prayers night and day (cf. Anna, Lk 2:37). (CC)

holy in body and spirit. Pleasing God is the priority. (TLSB)

7:35 *restraint*. Freedom in Christ is naturally directed by the Holy Spirit and loving concern (cf Rm 8:2). (TLSB)

good order. Implies respectability. (TLSB)

devotion. The Gk word is used in Scripture only here and seems to imply constant service. (TLSB)

Paul has been speaking eloquently of the advantages of remaining unmarried in terms of Christian service. No doubt this is the voice of experience: he knows how freedom from family ties and concerns has enabled him to be totally at his Master's service, providing him with freedom to travel and work long hours in fulfilling his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles throughout the Mediterranean world. What benefits, he argues, would accrue to the church if more Christian people could share his freedom and flexibility! (CC)

7:36–38 These verses provide the interpreter with the challenge of identifying the “anyone” who thinks he is acting improperly, and then identifying the “virgin” who is being subjected to his improper behavior. Three views have gained prominence among scholars. (CC)

1. “Anyone” refers to the girl’s father or guardian, who has acted improperly in not providing for her marriage (KJV, NKJV, JB, NIV footnote). It is suggested he may have been motivated by ascetic ideals or concern over the current distress (7:26). On this view, the adjective ὑπέρακμος (which in the translation adopted in this commentary applies to the young man and is interpreted to mean “of strong passions”) must apply instead to the girl (“past the flower of her youth,” NKJV). The further explanation, “and it has to be,” would mean she does not have the gift of contentment in celibacy. The chief consideration in favor of this view is the verb γαμίζω, which normally in the NT means “to give someone to someone else in marriage.” On the other hand, the expression “his virgin” would be unusual for “his daughter.”⁵ Another difficulty in seeing the father as the key figure is the exhortation in 7:36, “let them marry,” which is strange when (in this view) the fiancé has not yet been introduced. (CC)

2. A second view is that Paul has in mind “spiritual marriages,” where an ascetic couple lived together as brother and sister in Christ, abstaining from sexual intercourse (cf. NEB: “if a man has a partner in celibacy ...”; REB relegates this interpretation to a footnote). In this view, the adjective ὑπέρακμος applies to the man, who is becoming over passionate. The chief objections to this view are (a) the lack of first-century evidence for such “spiritual marriages” and (b) Paul’s specific injunction to married couples not to cease sexual relations (7:3–5), which makes it most unlikely he would approve of a “marital” situation where the sex act was routinely avoided. (CC)

3. The view adopted in this commentary (as in NIV, RSV, NRSV, GNB, REB) is that Paul is concerned for engaged or betrothed couples who were postponing marriage because of economic pressures or their expectation of the Lord’s imminent return. Under these circumstances, some of the men found the lengthy abstinence difficult and thought it was dishonorable to keep their fiancées in suspense. Paul assures them there is nothing sinful about finding a remedy in marriage. Such men will be doing well (7:38a). The apostle’s advice is reminiscent of his word to widowers and widows in 7:8–9: “It is good for them if they remain as I do. But if they do not have self-control, they must marry. For it is better to marry than to burn.” (CC)

On the other hand, there may be some men who have the gift to prolong the engagement indefinitely. Such men are under no necessity to marry; they can control their sexual desire and have made a decision to continue the present circumscribed relationship with their fiancées (7:37). Presumably this is because they wish to give themselves fully to the service of the Lord, who could return at any moment (7:29–35). These men will do even better (7:38b). (CC)

7:36 *he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed.* Falling into disgraceful passions. (TLSB)

passions. Or, lust. (TLSB)

let the should marry. In the light of hostility toward believers in Corinth, a man might refrain from marrying his fiancée. But if he then realizes that his fiancée is getting beyond her prime marriageable age and the situation thus seems unfair to her, it is perfectly proper for them to get married. (CSB)

Marriage is the safe and appropriate environment for such feelings. (TLSB)

7:37 *is firmly established..he will do well.* The man who determines that there is no need for him to marry his fiancée under the circumstances has made a good decision too (v. 38). Paul may be referring to a man who has control of his passions, as in v. 7 (cf. v. 9). (CSB)

Perhaps marriage without sex, or a pledge of exclusive devotion without marriage and physical relationship. (TLSB)

7:38 Singleness is not the lesser of two evils, but the superior of two God-given options under current circumstances at Corinth. (TLSB)

7:39-40 Earlier in this chapter Paul dealt in a comprehensive way with the situation of widowers and widows, married and divorced people, those in mixed marriages, and those who had never married. Although he has already had a pastoral word for widows in 7:8–9, that was a general word that applied equally to widowers, encouraging them all to be content with their situation, but to marry if they found the single life intolerable. It was natural for Paul to begin with that group, for he may have belonged to it as a widower, and he was able to use his own situation as a model for the principle he wished to articulate from the outset: remain as you are (7:8, 17, 20, 24). But now, as he concludes the chapter, he adds a special word for widows, a group which often experienced great distress and needed special pastoral support (e.g., Acts 6:1–4). (CC)

7:39 In 7:39 Paul reiterates the Lord’s command that marriage is for life (7:10–11, 13); a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives (see also Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:27). However, if her husband is laid to rest (literally, “should fall asleep”), she is free to remarry. Paul adds a qualification: she should remarry “only in the Lord” (7:39). Undoubtedly this means that her new husband should be a Christian. In 9:5 Paul will say the same thing about himself and the other apostles: they have the right to take a Christian sister as a wife (implying that they should not take an unbeliever as a wife). This principle probably applies to *all* the unmarried Christians Paul addresses throughout chapter 7. Most likely he assumed that his readers would take for granted that marriage should be “in the Lord” (7:39). In his later epistle to the Corinthians he states the principle in general terms that apply to a wide variety of relationships, including marriage: “Do not become unequally yoked to unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). (CC)

bound to her husband as long as he lives. Marriage is a lifelong union (yet see the exception clause in Mt 19:9). (CSB)

if her husband dies. Death breaks the marriage bond, and a Christian is then free to marry another Christian (“he must belong to the Lord”). (CSB)

in the Lord. A variation on the formula “in Christ,” which refers to what a person is or does as part of the new creation. (TLSB)

7:40 Paul allows that a widow has every right to remarry, and that there is absolutely nothing sinful about doing so. However, his personal opinion is that she would be more blessed if she remained single (7:40). The reasons for this, in terms of worldly troubles and distractions, have been spelled out earlier in the chapter (7:32–35). His opinion is given as a Spirit-filled apostle, who is in no way inferior to anyone else in Corinth claiming the gift of the Spirit: “I think I have the Spirit of God” (7:40). (CC)

happier. Paul’s judgment, which others dispute. (TLSB)

as she is. A widow. (CSB)

I too have the Spirit of God. Paul writes as one convinced that he is guided by the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Paul is careful not to present his own opinion as a divine command, yet his opinion is framed by a mind sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

Throughout the chapter Paul has been arguing against the apparent exaltation of celibacy and asceticism by some members of the Corinthian church. On the one hand, he agrees that for those gifted to cope with it, the single life spares a person many worldly anxieties and leaves him or her free to serve the Lord without distractions. On the other hand, Paul affirms marriage as a God-pleasing institution and forbids married people to deny one another their marital rights. To cope with marriage and its responsibilities also requires a special gift of God's grace. Both ways of life are pleasing to God and valid options for the Christian. Marriage is good, and "for those to whom it has been given" (Mt 19:11), the single life is even better. (CC)

7:25–40 Paul outlines two blessed estates, that of marriage and that of celibacy. We are often aware of the blessings of marriage, God's unique gift that survived humanity's fall into sin. Yet there are also responsibilities with marriage, and it is particularly important for the Christian to consider these when sitting down to "count the cost" of discipleship (Lk 14:28). In the Lord and by His grace, each person is fitted to one or to the other. • Lord, help me understand my gifts and calling in accordance with Your Word and mission. O Christ, deliver me from all shame. Amen. (TLSB)