

Responsibilities and Regulations for Marriage

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

1 Corinthians 7:1-16: *"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. 8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. 12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"*

Background Notes

In 1 Corinthians 1-6, the apostle Paul wrote about some problems in the church at Corinth. In chapter 7 he began to answer questions that the Corinthians themselves had raised in a letter that they had written to the apostle Paul. Some of the questions had to do with sex and marriage.

Paul had already covered the question of sex outside of marriage in chapter 6. In no uncertain terms, Paul had stated that sex outside of marriage was immoral and sinful. 1 Corinthians 6:16-20: *"Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you,*

whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

So sex outside of marriage is clearly immoral and sinful, but what about sex within marriage? Is it more holy to have less sex? Is it better not to get married? Those questions and other questions about sex and marriage are answered here in this chapter - not only for the Corinthians, but for us as well.

Doctrinal Point

1. Marriage as God intended it has its responsibilities.

When the apostle Paul wrote, *"It is good for man not to touch a woman"*(v1), he meant that it's OK, and even commendable, to stay single and celibate - as Paul himself was. Verse 8: *"But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am"* - that is, single, unmarried. However, celibacy is not for everyone. If God did not give you the gift of celibacy, then it is good and right and proper to get married, because it's better to get married than burn with lust (v9).

Sex within marriage is not immoral. Verse 2: *"Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband."* In fact, not to have sex in a marriage relationship is sinful! Verse 5: *"Do not deprive one another"* – that is, do not deprive one another of marital sex.

A husband and wife may agree to defer sexual relations for a while because of a special time of devotion to prayer (v5), but it should only be by agreement together, and it should be temporary. This is not a command, but common sense, as we see in verse 6: *"But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment."*

In the limited marriage counseling that I've done, I've found that when there are problems in the area of sex, generally speaking it's because there's been a breakdown in communication. Couples need to keep the communication channels open, and talk it out, and come to agreement in all areas, including the area of sex. Marriage as God intended it has its responsibilities.

2. Marriage as God intended it has its regulations.

Verses 10-16: *"Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let*

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

In verses 10-11, we have a case of an unhappy marriage. Is "easy divorce" the biblical solution? No. No divorce. Verse 10: *"Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband."* What about separation? Separation is not desirable, but it is permissible if the situation is unbearable - and that can happen. But a separation should ideally lead to future reconciliation, not divorce. The separation is ideally only temporary, while the problems are being worked out.

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

When a husband or wife becomes a believer, should the believer divorce or separate from the unbelieving spouse? No, absolutely not. In many cases, it's only a matter of time before the unbelieving husband or wife also becomes a Christian. We all know of happy examples of this in our Bible studies and fellowships.

However – the Bible does not teach here that a believer can marry an unbeliever! This exhortation that a believing spouse should not to leave a mixed marriage does not mean that a Christian can go ahead and marry an unbeliever. The Bible is very clear on that point. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."*

The context for this exhortation is when one spouse in a marriage becomes a Christian but the other spouse is still unsaved. God sees these households as "sanctified: - not saved, but "set apart" as special because of the Christian influence in the home (v14).

But what should happen when an unbelieving spouse just can't handle this Christian influence in the marriage, and he or she wants to leave? What's the answer? Let them leave (v15). Don't force them to leave; don't hound them with the gospel because you want them to leave - but if they do leave, let them leave. *"But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases"(v15).*

What does this phrase mean, *“not under bondage”*? Does that mean the saved husband or wife is free to remarry, or does it just mean that the saved husband or wife should not try to stop the divorce that the unbelieving spouse has initiated? Christians do not agree on this point. My own view is that if the unbeliever leaves for a new marriage (and that is the situation 99% of the time), the first marriage is over and cannot be reconciled. In that case, I believe the believer is free to marry, but only *in the Lord*.

However, if a new marriage has *not* taken place, there is always the chance for salvation of the unbelieving spouse and reconciliation of the marriage. Then I would counsel the believer to wait on the Lord, hard as that may be in many cases.

These are tough issues to be sure, but marriage as God intended it has regulations.

Practical Application

Remember, you don't have to be married!

When Paul said, *“But to the rest I say, not the Lord,”* he didn't mean that the information he was about to give was not inspired, or that it did not have God's authority. He meant that the Lord did not speak about “mixed” marriages when He discussed some things about marriage in the Gospels.

The Lord did, however, emphasize what Paul wrote here about celibacy. Matthew 19:10-12: *“His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But He said to them, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.”*

In other words, it's OK not to be married. In fact, if you can handle it, celibacy is good. Why? In general, a believer can be more efficient and dedicated to serving the Lord if he or she has no family responsibilities.

It's not the norm, but God does call some folks to be single - for His glory! Remember, you don't have to be married.