

**1 CORINTHIANS 7-8 MARRIAGE PRINCIPLES; FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS**



We are now covering **1 Cor. 7**, (which I call the Marriage Chapter), where Paul gives vital marriage principles. He says about staying unmarried in his day: “In my opinion that is what should be done, though I don't know of anything the Lord said about this matter. I wish that all of you were like me, but God has given different gifts to each of us. Here is my advice for people who have never been married and for widows. You should stay single, just as I am. But if you don't have enough self-control, then go ahead and get married. After all, it is better to marry than to burn with desire” (1 Cor. 7:6-9, CEV).

Paul later gives two reasons for staying single in his day: (1) “the present distress” (7:26) or *the coming Great Tribulation* he thought was imminent and (2) the need to be spiritually ready for it (7:32).

He then says, “Now *to the married* I command, yet not I *but the Lord*: [or what Christ said in Mt. 19:9, where He says sexual immorality is a cause for divorce]: A wife is not to depart from her husband. *But even if she does depart*, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Paul uses two terms that basically mean the same thing--“depart” or *chorizo* in Gk. and “divorce” or the Gk. *aphiemi*. So, the biblical teaching is that divorce is permissible among members, but if they do divorce, they should remain unmarried, unless it's because of sexual immorality as Jesus stated.

Now, there is another category that Paul goes on to cover—*marriage between a believer and an unbeliever*. He states: “But *to the rest* I, not the Lord, say [since this is something Christ did not address, being a problem only in the Gentile world]: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not *divorce* [Gk. *aphimeî*] 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 [Gk. *chorizo*], *let him depart*; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. *But God has called us to peace*. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

Paul makes a judgment here that had not been covered in Scripture—that *of a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever*. He says that if the unbeliever is pleased to live with the believer, respecting the person and one's religion, the believer should not seek a divorce. The believer is an example to the other person and it will be a blessing, just as Jacob was to Laban's household (Genesis 30:27) and Joseph to Potiphar's (Genesis 39:5). Perhaps the unbeliever will be converted by the good example set by the converted spouse, as 1 Peter 3:1-2 says. Also, children are considered blessed by the converted parent's example and have God's calling if they accept it, for the door is open to them but they must choose to go through it.

What happens, however, *if the unbeliever does not agree to live in peace with the believer*? Paul says: “But if the unbeliever *separates* [the Gk. term *chorizo*—divorce], let him *separate*; for a brother or sister is not under *bondage* [the Gk. word is *dedoulotai*—from *doulos*, or to be a bondsman—for the marriage covenant binds people, but here the marriage can be unbound and dissolved].

As *The Jewish New Testament Commentary* brings out: “The New Testament teaches *a second ground for divorce*, besides adultery, but it applies only in the case of a marriage between a believer and a nonbeliever...it is clear that if the unbelieving spouse separates himself, *the believing spouse can get a divorce and remarry*, because in circumstances like these, *the brother or sister is not enslaved*. Anything less than freedom to obtain a divorce and remarry would be enslavement to a marriage that retains only formal existence.” Yet, Paul emphasizes every effort should be made to save the marriage.

He continues, “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's

freedman. Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7:17-25).

Here, Paul makes one of his most important statements in the New Testament about the division of God's law between what is *the temporary ritual law* and what is *the spiritual and permanent law*. God Himself inspired the Church in Acts 15 to rule Gentile believers didn't have to be circumcised. As we read, "They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, *unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law'*—to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:23-24).

We see that in the New Testament there is indeed a division *between the commandments that must be kept and those rituals no longer necessary*. The ritual laws related to *circumcision* include the civil laws concerning Hebrew nationality—circumcision, purification, sacrifices, clothing, the Levitical priesthood, civil government, etc. But the commandments that remain are the laws that are universally applicable—to all the peoples of the world—based on the Ten Commandments and the statutes derived from them.

As G. E. Ladd notes: "Most of the studies on Paul emphasize the fact that Paul does not explicitly distinguish between the ethical and ceremonial aspects of the Law. This is of course true; but *the implicit distinction is unavoidable and should be stressed*. Although circumcision is a command of God and a part of the Law, *Paul sets circumcision in contrast to the commandments, and in doing so separates the ethical from the ceremonial—the permanent from the temporal*" (*New Testament Theology*, 1974, p. 510).

Hence, Paul explains each person must do their part to be at peace with God and man in whatever situation they find themselves. If single, don't despair about getting married; if married, strive to make the marriage work, and if it isn't possible, seek the biblical solutions that have been provided. If you are a slave, strive to gain your freedom (1 Cor. 7:21) but if it's not possible, they can still serve God.

Paul now gives two prime reasons why a member did not have to get married in his day. He says, "Now, concerning what you wrote about unmarried people: I do not have a command from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is worthy of trust. Considering *the present distress*, I think it is better for a man to stay as he is. Do you have a wife? Then don't try to get rid of her. Are you unmarried? Then don't look for a wife. But if you do marry, you haven't committed a sin; and if an unmarried woman marries, she hasn't committed a sin. But I would rather spare you the everyday troubles that married people will have. What I mean, my friends, is this: *there is not much time left*, and from now on married people should live as though they were not married; those who weep, as though they were not sad; those who laugh, as though they were not happy; those who buy, as though they did not own what they bought; those who deal in material goods, as though they were not fully occupied with them. *For this world, as it is now, will not last much longer*. I would like you to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the Lord. *But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife; and so he is pulled in two directions*. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord's work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but a married woman concerns herself with worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband.

"I am saying this because I want to help you. I am not trying to put restrictions on you. Instead, I want you to do what is right and proper, and to give yourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservation. In the case of an engaged couple who have decided not to marry: if the man feels that he is not acting properly toward the young woman and if his passions are too strong and he feels that they ought to marry, then they should get married, as he wants to. There is no sin in this. But if a man, without being forced to do so, has firmly made up his mind not to marry, and if he has his will under complete control and has already decided in his own mind what to do—then he does well not to marry the young woman. So, the man who marries does well, but the one who doesn't marry does even better" (1 Cor. 7:25-38, GNB).

Clearly, Paul did not have the benefit of hindsight like we do of hundreds or thousands of years and sincerely believed Christ would return soon. So, he urged those unmarried not to be desperate to marry, for he had in mind the great persecutions ahead—namely, the Church's flight to her place and the difficulties of pregnant women or parents with young children that Jesus had mentioned in Mt. 24:15-22.

Secondly, since he thought this Great Tribulation period was very close and single people should just dedicate themselves more fully to getting close to God while they can, since they can pray and study their Bibles more and be more concerned with the needs of the Church than if they were married. He knew married people prioritized their spouse and children's needs. In that patriarchal society, the father could also decide whether his daughter would marry, and Paul supports this principle, provided she also agrees with it (1 Cor. 7:29-38).

Finally, Paul says about *widows and widowers*: "A married woman is not free as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, then she is free to be married to any man she wishes, but only if he is a Christian. She will be happier, however, if she stays as she is. That is my opinion, and I think that I too have God's Spirit" (1 Cor. 7:38-39, GNB).

Here we have the principle of a widow or widower being able to remarry—but it should be with a believer and not an unbeliever.

Now, from chapters 8 - 10, Paul will answer specific questions regarding food offered to idols. He says, "*Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him*" (1 Cor. 8:1-3).

It is important to first note that the topic dealing with *biblical clean food* offered to idols had already been settled at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Pork was outrightly prohibited (Lev. 11) and was *not part of that discussion*. This decree said, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: *that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.* Farewell" (Acts 15:28-29).

Paul begins by answering two specific questions on this subject: (1) whether a believer was free to eat biblical meat which he knew or suspected may have been part of an offering in the pagan temple's market; (2) the acceptability of eating this meat as an invited guest in a friend's home.

From the start, Paul establishes the principle that it is not only what knowledge you have, but how you use it wisely that is so crucial. As the Bible warns, "There is one whose words are like the piercing of a sword" (Pr. 12:18). So, having much biblical knowledge can make one vain, if God's truths are used to offend others.

Paul then gives an example of this: "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, *we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.* For even if there are so-called [pagan] gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is one God, the Father*, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and *one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live* [See John 1:1-3]. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now *eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.* For if anyone sees you who have knowledge *eating in an idol's temple*, will not *the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?* And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother *perish* [or return to paganism], *for whom Christ died?* But when you thus *sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.* Therefore, if *food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*" (8:4-13).

Here he explains although many gods were worshipped at that time—Zeus, Apollos, etc.—in reality, *they did not exist* and *demons* were behind this deception (1 Cor. 10:20). So, God the Father has the preeminence, but Christ is also *our Lord and God*. They are now part of a *growing* God family (Heb. 2:10) Notice also he doesn't say anything about a *Third Person existing in heaven*, for the *Trinity is a false concept*. More to cover next time.