

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1–13

44

PERSONAL APPLICATION – 1 CORINTHIANS 9:1–27

46

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“For those who wish to follow God’s Word in their daily lives Paul’s writings offer some direction, and they help define the stability and strength of Christian marriage in a rapidly changing world.”

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1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–40

We can only imagine the extent to which the Corinthian Christians were influenced by the sexual laxity of their city and culture. Because their city was the center of worship for the goddess of love, the Corinthians had to endure many temptations, particularly in matters of marital fidelity. To many Corinthian pagans, the act of love was something to be enjoyed with multiple partners as a means of worshipping Aphrodite. And in an extreme reaction to this call for promiscuity, there may have been ascetics who claimed the relationship of marriage itself was sinful. The Corinthian Christians, then, were curious about the proper role of marriage in their lives. Paul, having admonished the Corinthians for their divisiveness and moral laxity, turns his attention to questions about marriage and sex. And for American Christians who find themselves living in an age of “sexual liberation,” his [Paul] words can be as enlightening today as they were two thousand years ago.

The surprises begin as soon as Paul writes, “Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.” What! Should every Christian feel guilty about enjoying the love of a spouse? Of course not! Paul goes on to explain that because the world is so immoral, it is important that Christians who find themselves susceptible to the temptations of the flesh get married. And there’s nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, Paul is highly supportive of marriage in his other letters. In Ephesians 5:22–23, he compares the marriage of a man and a woman to the bond which exists between Christ and His Church. And in 1 Timothy 4:1–3 he condemns those who claim it is a sin to marry. In our present chapter, however, Paul wants to stress that the single life is also

honorable. There is nothing shameful about choosing to live without a husband or wife. After all, Paul himself has chosen celibacy.

Choosing to remain celibate is an honorable option to marry. But, celibacy is not a requirement for following the Lord. Nor does the Bible demand celibacy for the ministers of His Church. As a matter of fact, when Paul writes to Timothy about the qualifications of being a minister, Paul asks that he be a “husband of but one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2). How unfortunate that the Roman Catholic Church has interpreted Paul’s personal desire to remain celibate as a requirement that all priests remain unmarried.

Because of the world’s temptation to immorality, Paul asks that husbands and wives fulfill their sexual “duties” to one another frequently. In marriage, husbands and wives promise to give their bodies to each other. They are asked not to deprive each other of sexual pleasures unless there is mutual consent. Abstinence, if agreed upon by both partners, should only last for a limited period of time. Still, marriage is not something Paul is commanding. It’s not for everybody. He offers it as a concession to the desires of the flesh. In his opinion, the ideal lifestyle involves being single, but Paul realizes that the option of remaining unmarried is best allotted to those who have been given the gift of celibacy.

The reason for his opinion is given later in the chapter. He explains in verses 31–35 that when a Christian marries, he or she becomes entangled with the problems of another individual. A spouse becomes concerned with the needs and demands of his or her family. This is good and proper, but it will

detract from a focused life of service to the Lord. So, celibacy is the preferred method of serving the Lord if one has been given the appropriate gift of self-control. Still, whether a Christian is married or single, it is an honorable lifestyle.

More specifically, Paul turns to married couples. Although his bias for remaining single is an expression of his opinion, he now moves beyond opinion and refers to the Lord’s command. The command is that a wife should not leave her husband and a husband should not leave his wife. Simple, right? Still, there are times when Paul realizes a spouse can no longer tolerate the marital situation and must divorce. If a spouse does divorce, he or she is commanded to remain single until the day when he or she is able to reconcile with the spouse.

It is uncomfortable for Americans to hear the New Testament’s commands concerning marriage and divorce. Over the decades we have convinced ourselves that marriage is not particularly significant. Some claim we were never really intended to be satisfied with only one partner. Society has relaxed its attitude towards marriage to the point where its principles have become shamefully unchristian. From the time of Adam and Eve, the consistent command of our Lord has been that one husband remain with one wife for as long as they live. It is particularly important that Christians who socialize in a sexually tolerant society understand the truth of God’s will.

Divorce has never been God’s intent for mankind. Jesus explains this most clearly in Mark 10:4–9. When the Pharisees argue with Jesus that Moses allowed a man to

write a certificate of divorce so that he could separate from an undesirable wife, Jesus explains that the only reason divorce is granted in some situations is because of the hardness of heart which afflicts a fallen world. Divorce is an indication of our sinful state and it is not part of God's original intent. From the beginning of creation, Jesus explains, God "made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate."

But what happens when a Christian husband is married to an unbelieving wife? Isn't that grounds for divorce? Not if she doesn't want to divorce. If she is willing to live with her husband, he must remain faithful to her. The same is true for a Christian wife whose husband is an unbeliever. Paul explains it like this: "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."

It is true that a Christian can "sanctify" an unbelieving spouse by his or her presence. By godly living and faith, the Christian can lead the spouse to strengthen his or her own relationship with the Lord. In the same way, children who are raised with at least one believing parent will have the advantage of being exposed to the saving and forgiving power of the Gospel. In time, the influence of one Christian can bring salvation to the whole household.

In a more general sense, when one becomes

a Christian, one does not have the license to abandon all of life's commitments. The new life in Christ does not allow us to neglect our responsibilities. As an example of such behavior, consider the televangelist Pat Robertson. According to Christianity Today (August 12, 1996), when Pat Robertson was converted, "he went home to his startled wife... Soon she was more than startled: he left her seven months pregnant with a second child, going off to a month-long Intersity conference where he would pray and study the Bible. A note came from (his wife): 'Please come back. I need you desperately.' After consulting the Bible he replied, 'I can't leave. God will take care of you.'"

It is not unusual for new Christians to become so excited by their faith that they lose interest in other earthly responsibilities. Even Pat Robertson, a sinner like the rest of us, may have been tempted for a while to forget the situation into which God had placed him. So, in verses 17–24, Paul expounds on this theme: "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him." Even slaves who might have felt their conversion was a license to demand freedom were to remain in their captivity until they were able to legally win their freedom. The call to Christianity is not a call to abandon all responsibility. It is to dutifully fulfill those obligations which have been allotted to us.

Because Paul feels the return of the Lord is imminent, he expresses his opinion (not a command from the Lord, but his own sanctified opinion) that it is good for those who are unmarried to remain so. Those who are already married should also remain as they are. Of course, it's not sinful to get

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married, but Paul observes that marriage relationships are often the cause of many unnecessary troubles. Paul's opinion is supported by present day statistics which show that half of all marriages end in divorce. It's not easy for two individuals with diverse backgrounds and varying opinions to live in harmony and peace.

In all things, Paul asks his readers not to be unduly concerned with the affairs of the world because each day allows us less time to serve the Lord. The time for doing the Lord's work continues to shorten as our lives progress. Therefore, Christians should not allow worldly concerns to hinder their witness. "From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 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..."

Finally, Paul repeats, God's intent is that a husband and wife live together as long they both live. If one spouse dies, of course, the other is allowed to remarry. Paul's opinion is that the surviving spouse would probably be happier remaining single, but again, that is only Paul's opinion. It is not sinful to remarry. If the spouse remarries, however, the new partner must be a believer.

Paul's outline for marriage and divorce reinforces the seriousness with which our Lord upholds the union of a husband and wife. Perhaps it is in this area more than any other that the teachings of Scripture have been derailed by the mores of society. For those who wish to follow God's Word in their daily lives Paul's writings offer some direction, and they help define the stability and strength of Christian marriage in a rapidly changing world.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1–13

There was another question which caused some dispute among the Corinthian Christians concerning the meat which had been offered to idols. The pagans who worshipped in the Corinthian temples would often sacrifice animals to their gods. After the sacrifice, there would be meat left over, some of which might be given to the temple priest. Some of the meat might be eaten by friends and neighbors in a large feast at the temple. Some of it might be eaten at home. And some of the meat might even be sold in the public markets. Now, this meat was of some concern to the Christians in Corinth. Was it right and proper for them to consume meat which had been used in pagan ceremonies? Were they demonstrating a lack of zeal in their witness to the Lord should they partake?

These concerns are not irrelevant to our day. We may find ourselves in the same position when some of our Christian brothers and sisters are offended by the use of alcohol, or disturbed when Christians enjoy Halloween. Some Christians are offended by the behavior of their brothers and sisters in Christ, even though that behavior has little to do with their faith and love for the Lord.

Paul recognizes the reality of Christian freedom. Because Christ has died for our sins, we are no longer bound by many of the laws which once encumbered God's people. Christian freedom sometimes gives us the option of doing things which others might judge wrong. Eating food once offered to pagan idols is such an example. Certainly, worshipping false gods is wrong, a violation of God's will and law. But of what importance is the meat which is offered to false idols? In and of itself, meat has nothing to do with our faith and love for the Lord. As such, there is no reason to view the meat as intrinsically wicked. Christians have the freedom to eat such meat and not feel guilty about it. After all, Christians are aware that idols are worth nothing. There is only one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and all others are false and meaningless. So, when a Christian eats the meat which was once offered to such idols, he or she is not involved in an act of worship. It's just good meat that should not go to waste.

In the same way, there is nothing intrinsically wrong about going from house to house and yelling "trick or treat," then collecting candy and sweet foods. Just because Halloween was once associated with a pagan holiday doesn't mean Christians, who understand there is one Lord, shouldn't enjoy a chance to have some good clean fun.

Another example might be found in the use of alcohol. Nowhere in Scripture is alcohol

condemned. We are told not to become drunk, but moderate use is never prohibited. In fact, Paul encourages Timothy to drink a little wine with dinner as an aid in digestion (1 Timothy 5:23). Jesus used wine to institute Holy Communion. But, there are some Christian brothers and sisters who view alcohol as intrinsically evil and will condemn those who drink as being faithless to their Lord. Here again is where Christian freedom allows us the choice to drink should we be so inclined.

But, Paul reminds us that freedom must be accompanied by responsibility. Rights and responsibility are the two legs upon which Christians walk. Certainly, we have the right to observe Halloween, and we have the right to drink alcohol. But even as we are given those rights, so we act towards others with responsibility. If a Christian is offended by the use of alcohol, then we should refrain, not wanting to shake the weaker faith of our brother or sister. If a Christian is an alcoholic and will be tempted to drink if we do, then we have the responsibility to refrain. If our celebration of Halloween is an obstacle for someone's walk with the Lord, we should be sufficiently responsible not to offend. Of more importance than our Christian freedom is the desire to lead others to the grace of God.

To the Corinthians, Paul writes that there is nothing wrong about eating the meat which was once offered to idols. Unless, of course, such eating leads weaker Christians to believe their faith can be compromised with pagan worship practices. If what we do in Christian freedom is a stumbling block to those who don't yet fully understand Christian freedom, then we have the responsibility to refrain from that behavior. It is all part of the love we have for our fellow man, desiring to lead whomever we can to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION*1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-27*

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the work Paul accomplished in bringing the Gentiles to You. As a result we Gentiles, as well as Jews, may know and love You. We pray that You would give us Your Spirit to witness our faith to our friends and neighbors. Help us support and care for the spiritual leaders You have given us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Look up "apostle" in the dictionary and describe how the word originated.

How did Paul become an "apostle"? (Acts 9:1-9, 22:6-21, 26:12-18)

2. What is the marital situation of the other apostles, Jesus' brothers, and Peter according to verse five? (Mark 1:30)

What does this suggest about the popularity of celibacy among the spiritual leaders of the early Christians?

3. How did Paul earn his living while with the Corinthians? (Acts 18:3, 20:34)

What kind of advantages would this allow him? (9:1-19; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10)

4. How were the priests of the Old Testament supported? (Leviticus 7:28-36; Numbers 18:8-20)

How were church workers to be supported in Paul's day? (9:14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

What is the reasoning for this according to Paul in verses 7-11?

5. What motivates Paul's preaching? (9:16-17; Romans 1:14-15; Galatians 2:7-8)

How does this compare to the compulsions felt by the Old Testament prophets and other disciples? (Job 32:18; Jeremiah 20:9; Amos 3:8; Acts 4:19-20)

6. What is Paul's technique for winning as many converts as possible? (9:20–22; Romans 14:1; 1 Corinthians 10:32–33)

If you were to follow Paul's example, how would it change your witness to the Lord?

7. If you were to take 9:25–27 out of the context of Paul's other writings and the rest of Scripture, how might it suggest we attain salvation?

But what does Paul say about salvation in Ephesians 2:8–10? How about Jesus in John 3:16?

And what about John in 1 John 5:1, 11–12?

And Peter in 1 Peter 1:3–5?

How is the relationship between faith and deeds most clearly described in James 2:22–26?

8. Which laws are Christians no longer concerned with? (Galatians 4:8–10; Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 10:1)

Which laws are still applicable to the Christian lifestyle? (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:3–5)

9. What illustration is frequently used by Paul to describe the Christian life? (9:24–25; Galatians 2:2, 5:7; Philippians 2:16)

Why is this a good illustration?

10. How does Paul's success in Corinth indicate he is a true prophet of the Lord? (9:2; Matthew 7:15–20; 2 Corinthians 3:3)
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