

# 1 Corinthians

## Verse by Verse



**Letter to a  
Problematic  
Church**



# 1 Corinthians 7

## Letter to a Problematic Church



Introduction

The Text of  
1 Corinthians 7

Conclusions

# Introduction to 1 Corinthians 7



**Previously in  
1 Corinthians**

**What's in  
1 Corinthians 7?**

**Key Verses**



## Previously in 1 Corinthians

- So far Paul has brought up four main problems in Corinth.
  1. Divisions in the church.
  2. Admiration of worldly wisdom.
  3. Sexual sin
  4. Lawsuits among believers



# Introduction to 1 Corinthians 7



**Previously in  
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**Key Verses**



## What's in 1 Corinthians 7?

- In this chapter Paul does not deal with a specific problem.
- He now turns to questions that the Corinthians asked him.
- Chapter 7 covers questions dealing with issues of marriage and singleness.

Background

## Background

- Paul has already criticized Corinthian (lack of) morals within the church.
- In response to the rampant sexual immorality in Corinth, some were evidently going to an opposite extreme.
- They were abstaining from sexual relations entirely, by abstaining within marriage or even forsaking marriage.
- To this extreme response Paul's answer could be described as "Yes, but ..."



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Background



# Introduction to 1 Corinthians 7



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**Key Verses:**  
**1 Corinthians 7:23-24 (ESV)**

23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.  
24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

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# The Text of 1 Corinthians 7



**Marriage and  
Singleness I  
7:1-16**

**Live as You  
Are Called  
7:17-24**

**Marriage and  
Singleness II  
7:25-40**



## Marriage and Singleness I 7:1-16

- **7:1-5** Sex and Marriage
- **7:6-9** Paul and Singleness
- **7:10-16** Marriage and Divorce

**7:1-5**

**7:6-9**

**7:10-16**

## 7:1-5 Sex and Marriage

- The original question was something like, "Is it good to not have sexual relations at all?"
- To this Paul says, "Yes, but that might not be realistic and should not be the norm for marriage."
- Sex is a completely good thing within marriage, but is not appropriate outside that context.
- A married couple may also choose to abstain by agreement for a limited time.
- Note that Paul does not leave room for polygamy.



## Marriage and Singleness I 7:1-16

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**7:1-5**

**7:6-9**

**7:10-16**



## 7:6-9 Paul and Singleness

**Paul's  
Singleness**

- Paul, like Jesus, was single.
- He considered singleness on the whole better than marriage.
- He is also realistic, and he knows that the single life is not going to work for many people.

**From  
Warren  
Wiersbe**

## Paul's Singleness

- Paul's view is unusual among Jews of his day.
- Jewish men were generally required to get married and have children.
- In the Talmud we read, "Any man who has no wife is no proper man" (R. Eleazar, Yeb. 63a),
- Given his rabbinical training he may have been married at one time but he never actually says that.

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Bible Teacher and  
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“It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18) is generally true for most people; but some have been called to a life of singleness for one reason or another. Their singleness is not “subspiritual” or “superspiritual.” It all depends on the will of God.



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## 7:10-16 Marriage and Divorce

- Paul is not a fan of divorce in the church.
- Neither was Jesus.
- He does allow for one exception - when an unbeliever leaves their believing wife or husband.
- Otherwise staying together is better both for the unbelieving spouse and for the children.

**Matthew  
19:9-12**

## Matthew 19:9-12 (ESV)

9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” 10 The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

11 But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

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# The Text of 1 Corinthians 7



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7:1-16**

**Live as You  
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**Marriage and  
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7:25-40**



## Live as You Are Called 7:17-24

- Paul brings up two situations which are comparable to marriage in that they affect a person's whole life.
- The first deals with circumcision.
- The second deals with whether a person is currently a slave or free.

Circumcision

Slavery

Key Verses

## Circumcision

- In some places there were *Judaizers* who tried to get Gentile converts to accept circumcision. Paul opposed this.
- Believe it or not, there were also Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world who sought to reverse their circumcised state.
- This tells us a somewhat more about the ancient baths and gymnasiums than we probably want to go into right now. =)
- In any case, Paul's counsel is that people should live as they are called and not be overly concerned to change their life setting.



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## Slavery

- Slavery in the ancient world could be harsh, but was *usually not as harsh* as that which we think of in the Americas.
- Again, in general, Paul's counsel is to remain as you are.
- If you are free, you should not become anyone's slave.
- If you are a slave and have the opportunity to gain your freedom, then go ahead and do that.
- In either case, there is no spiritual advantage to being a slave or free, only an obvious practical advantage.

Work as  
Vocation

## Work as Vocation

- It is important to remember that work was part of creation prior to the fall.
- God **calls** each of us (the root meaning of *vocation*) to a particular role in the world. We each have a calling.
- All forms of **honest, legitimate work** are ways to bless the lives of others and simultaneously serve the Lord.
- All work is spiritual if we do it as our service to him.

Colossians  
3:23-24

Finding Your  
Vocation

## Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)

23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

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## Finding Your Vocation

- The first step in fulfilling your calling from God is to be faithful where you are right now.
- The next step is to move toward things you are good at and things that you like when you can.

**Luke 16:10** says, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"



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7:25-40**



## Marriage and Singleness II

7:25-40

7:39

- This was probably another question from the Corinthians having to do with engaged couples.
- Some translations take the question as being about fathers dealing with children in arranged marriages, but the translators of the ESV consider this less likely. (I tend to agree.)
- In any event, Paul again expresses his preference for the single life, but only a *preference* - not a command

Summary

## 7:39 "only in the Lord"

- Paul gives widows full permission to remarry.
- He does, however, want a Christian widow (or widower) to marry only a Christian.
- No Christian should ever knowingly marry someone who does not share their Christian faith.



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- Again, Paul's emphasis is on being content in the state we are presently in.
- It is a common mistake among newer Christians to imagine that some big change in their situation will be the secret to a more spiritual life.
- This might be either marriage or (alas!) divorce, a different job or career - or something.
- Usually such changes are not helpful.





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# Conclusions



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  - Prior, E. (1988). The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Key Verses

From  
Tim Keller

On Marriage  
and  
Singleness

On Marriage  
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## On Marriage and Divorce

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    - o *Thessaly of Ancient Greece*: <https://buff.ly/sha/1?i=145424>
    - o *Map of the Eastern Roman Empire*: <https://buff.ly/sha/1?i=145424>
    - o *Map of the Roman Empire*: <https://buff.ly/sha/1?i=145424>
  - Prior, D. (1985). *The Message of 1 Corinthians: His in the local church*. Leicester, England: Downers Grove IL, InterVarsity Press.

Christians, you see, have been set free to enjoy working. If we begin to work as if we were serving the Lord, we will be freed from both overwork and underwork. Neither the prospect of money and acclaim, nor the lack of it, will be our controlling consideration. Work will be primarily a way to please God by doing his work, in the world, for his name's sake.

- in *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Plan for the World*, p.214



Tim Keller, pastor,  
theologian, apologist

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- Hendriks, Craig L., 1 Corinthians (The NIV Application Commentary Book 7) (Zondervan Academic, Waco Edition).
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## **On Marriage and Singleness**

- Paul expresses a personal preference for singleness over marriage.
- Even so, he sees marriage as a good thing, created and blessed by God.
- Christians have wavered over the years, diminishing the single status or exalting it to something hyper-spiritual.
- In reality, single or married, we need to faithfully live out our calling from God.



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## **On Marriage and Divorce**

- Paul, like Jesus, takes a negative view of divorce.
- For Christians divorce is never required.
- Christ only allowed one exception where divorce is permitted - in the case of marital unfaithfulness.
- Paul added one more - in the case of an unbelieving spouse wanting a divorce from a believer.
- As a rule, it is always better to work on a marriage than to look for excuses to get a divorce.

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    - **What was at stake?** <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-americas-15042426>
    - **How did Paul come to Corinth?** <http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study-topics/old-testament/corinthians/Pauls-Journey-to-Corinth-Apostle.html>
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Warren Wiersbe  
Bible Teacher and  
Commentator

## Five Questions to Ask When Considering Marriage

1. What is my gift from God?
2. Am I marrying a believer?
3. Are the circumstances such that marriage is right?
4. How will marriage affect my service for Christ?
5. Am I prepared to enter into this union for life?

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