

1203 Marriage, status, perspectives, consideration for others—1Co(7)1-8(13)
(by Whirlwind)

First, we discussed Paul's understanding of how husbands and wives should relate to one another, addressing a specific situation he did not mention. Second, we mentioned the Lord's command regarding those who are married and Paul's words to the rest: the former states that one should not divorce, while the latter advises that even if one spouse is an unbeliever, one should strive to remain married; however, if the other insists on divorce, let them go. Third, we discussed the importance of maintaining the status one had at the time of one's calling before God, citing an example and noting that we are servants of Christ. Fourth, we discussed Paul's teaching on those who remain unmarried. Fifth, we addressed Paul's personal perspective as he stood on God's side. Sixth, we discussed the need to be considerate of others, especially those who are weak, and touched on a general principle of knowledge, emphasizing that not everyone possesses this seemingly common knowledge. Finally, we briefly discussed that if eating certain foods causes a brother to stumble, one should refrain from eating them.

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (8/16/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>'; click on 'Understanding Spiritual Life'.

1. Paul's understanding of marital relationships

"Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this I say by way of concession, not of command. Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that."(1 Corinthians 7:1-7)

Paul clearly states, "But this I say by way of concession, not of command."(1 Corinthians 7:6) So at most, this represents a general principle based on his understanding. Different approaches may be taken in special circumstances, but these must not be used as an excuse—just as we should not "...turn the grace of our God into licentiousness ..." (Jude 1:4). From his perspective—which is also a very practical one—when a man and a woman find a suitable partner, they should marry and treat each other with respect, which can also help avoid sexual immorality.

He says, "Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."(1 Corinthians 7:5) The general principle he states is that couples

should share a bed to avoid Satan's temptation; however, if a person is not at all susceptible to being tempted by Satan's agents in this way, sharing a bed is not a law that must be strictly followed. For example, in a situation where one partner snores and disturbs the other, is it really necessary to share a bed? Therefore, his statement, "...except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again ..." (1 Corinthians 7:5), does not apply in such a situation!

He was aware of these special circumstances which indeed existed and made it very clear: "But this I say by way of concession, not of command." (1 Corinthians 7:6) He clearly did not marry after his conversion, as this passage makes clear: "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" (1 Corinthians 9:5) But he understood very well that each person's calling is different, which is why he said, "Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that." (1 Corinthians 7:7)

He also knew full well that there would certainly be those whose calling differed from his own. If everyone were the same, how could God's blessings be fulfilled? The Scripture says, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."" (Genesis 1:27-28) Since we don't want to see that people were to have children without getting married, if no one got married, how could God's blessing to "fill the earth" be fulfilled?

2. The Lord's command to the married and Paul's words to the rest

"But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the 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?

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." (1 Corinthians 7:8-19)

In this passage, he speaks very clearly to those who are unmarried and to widows, and he also explains what the Lord commands for married couples where both have come to faith—namely, that they must not separate. He further makes his position very clear: if only one spouse has come to faith and the unbelieving spouse wishes to leave, let them go! For "...God has called us to peace."(1 Corinthians 7:15) However, he is not encouraging divorce, for he immediately adds that one should at least strive to avoid it, emphasizing, "Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches."(1 Corinthians 7:17) Please read the passage yourself for further details.

Finally, he addresses the issue of circumcision, stating that it is unnecessary: "...but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God."(1 Corinthians 7:19) As this passage says, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."(Romans 2:28-29)

3. Each person must remain in the status in which he was called before God

"Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.

Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called."(1 Corinthians 7:20-24)

Although it says, "Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called."(1 Corinthians 7:20), it goes on to say that this is not meant to restrict people from seeking something better, because the law at that time allowed a master to set a slave free. It also states that we have all been bought at a great price—since Jesus was crucified for us—and therefore we are slaves of Jesus Christ; we must not be slaves to people, but "...glorify God in your body."(1 Corinthians 6:20) He emphasized this once more: "Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called."(1 Corinthians 7:24)

We can see in the Epistle to Philemon that he indeed acted in this way (see Philemon 1:1-25). In that epistle, Paul pleads with Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, his son in the bonds of imprisonment—Onesimus, who had originally been a runaway slave—for the Scripture says, "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."(Philemon 15-16) At the time of Onesimus' salvation, he was still a slave; therefore, Paul insisted that he maintain this status before God. He required Onesimus to return to Philemon before he could shed his status as a slave, comply with the laws of that time, and obtain his freedom in this world.

4. Paul on those who remain unmarried

"Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away."(1 Corinthians 7:25-31)

He spoke of his advice to those who remain single—not as a command from the Lord—because the circumstances at that time were difficult. He urged people to maintain their present state: those who were married should not separate, and those who were not married should not seek to marry. However, the latter is essentially contrary to human nature; it is not the norm, nor does it align with God's blessing to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." It was merely a necessary recommendation given the circumstances of that time. He goes on to say that marriage is certainly not a sin, but it absolutely requires two people from different backgrounds to come together in harmony. Of course, there will be the hardships he mentions, but one should not refrain from marriage because of them. Not everyone has the same divine calling as he did; therefore, he is merely an exception.

We must understand that our perspective must be correct. He then viewed marriage, weeping, joy, buying and selling, and the use of worldly things from the perspective that this world is passing away, and thus reached his conclusion. But some situations are different. For example, if joy comes from God, how can we not "Rejoice always"?(1 Thessalonians 5:16) "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, ..." (2 Peter 3:10). Therefore, before the world passes away, we should still do what we ought to do and not walk around with a long face.

5. Paul's personal perspective on standing on God's side

"But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So

then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God."(1 Corinthians 7:32-40)

Paul goes on to express his own views, which clearly demonstrate that although God was leading him—just as during his second missionary journey, when the Holy Spirit prevented them from going north or south and directed them westward to Macedonia—God also gave him some leeway to express his own perspectives. On controversial issues, if his guidance came from God, he would state it very clearly, as shown in this passage: "But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife."(1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Then, standing on God's side, he expresses his own viewpoint. We can tell from his words that he stands on God's side when he says, "...but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord."(1 Corinthians 7:35) The details are clearly laid out in the Scripture; please read the passage for yourself.

Next, he addresses a matter of basic common sense: marriage is not a sin—especially since, as we just discussed, marriage is a blessing from God. Didn't Jesus also say, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."?(Mark 10:9) It is not the case, as many people think, that every marriage is joined together by God. If that were true, given the reality of so many divorces, would that mean God has made so many mistakes? Absolutely not. But those marriages that are truly joined together by God—those, people must not separate. He also specifically mentions unmarried women, so please read the passage for yourself.

He says, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."(1 Corinthians 7:39) The former passage states consistently, "Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man."(Romans 7:1-3) The latter point should also be quite clear, as this passage states: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"(2 Corinthians 6:14-15) He was indeed that "...I think that I also have the Spirit of God."(1 Corinthians 7:40) when he spoke these words. But when he said that it is more blessed to remain single, he made it clear that this was merely his opinion, not a blessing from God intended for all people throughout the earth.

6. Be considerate of others, especially those who are weak

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love (G26, God's love) edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat."(1 Corinthians 8:1-8)

From the very beginning, it was said that only love builds people up; we truly should not rely on knowledge. Knowledge tells us, "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."(Romans 14:14) So this is what Jesus Himself said, as the Scripture shows: "And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)"(Mark 7:18-19) Therefore, there is no such thing as unclean food. "However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled."(1 Corinthians 8:7) Yet he truly understood that "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."(Philippians 2:4) For the sake of those with weak consciences, he chose not to eat, because "...food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat."(1 Corinthians 8:8)

Prior to this, he had spoken of the general principle: God is infinite, while humans are finite; God can open our eyes at any time and in any place, granting us new knowledge which is something that person ought to know. That is why he said, "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know."(1 Corinthians 8:2) He also shows what God's perspective is: "but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him."(1 Corinthians 8:3) This leads to this true statement: "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."(1 Corinthians 8:6) This emphasizes that not everyone possesses this seemingly common knowledge.

7. If food causes a brother to stumble, don't eat it

"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by

sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."(1 Corinthians 8:9-13)

The main point here is that food offered to idols should not be eaten, but the basic principle remains the same: if food causes a brother to stumble, do not eat it, so that your brothers and sisters do not fall because of your knowledge, thereby offending Christ. However, when the issue is not about food, there are times when it is truly necessary to speak up, as in the situation described in this passage: "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"(Galatians 2:14) In order to ensure that the truth of the gospel was passed down correctly, Paul had no choice but to speak to Peter in this way.