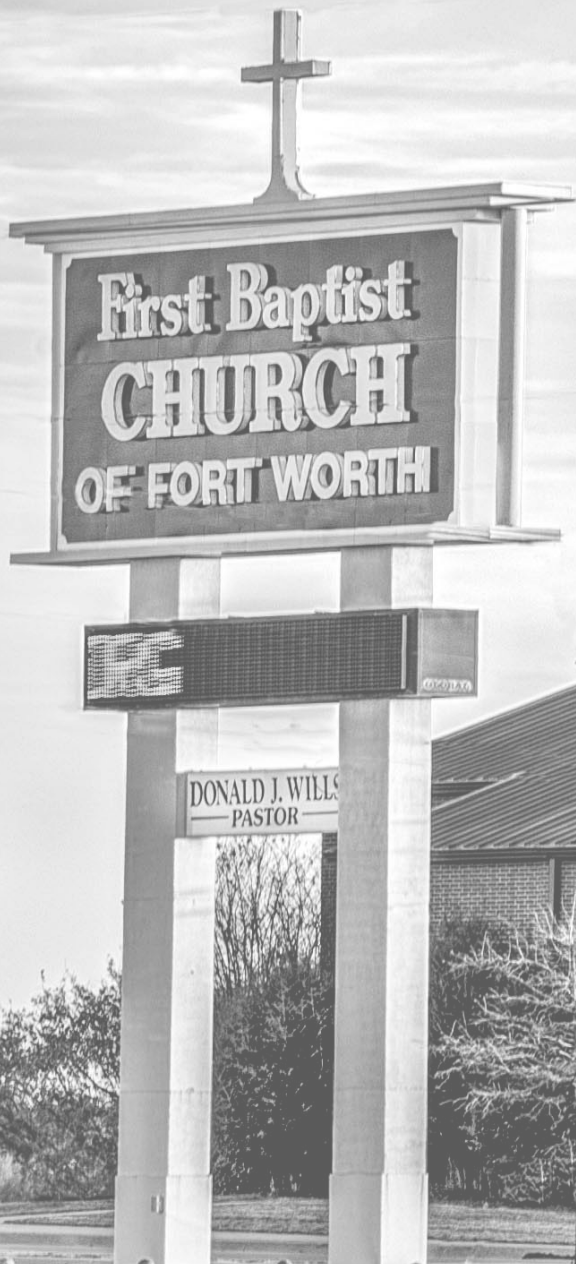
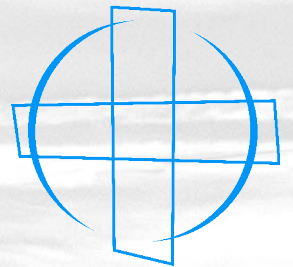


MARCH  
2025

Donald J. Wills  
*Senior Pastor*

# UNITED



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

*A Note From Our Pastor*

Letter Coming Soon!



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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*March 2, 2025*



# *United against Immorality*

## *1 Corinthians 5:1-13*

Focal Verse:

"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

1 Corinthians 5:7

## Introduce

I enjoy cooking when I have the time and have become quite the culinary expert in the kitchen. When my parents visit, my mother even asks for me to cook for them rather than going to a restaurant. Perhaps, she wants to collect repayment for the many years that she cooked for me, but she seems genuinely to enjoy what I fix so much that she has a few specific meals that she will request. Although I like to cook, I loathe cleaning the kitchen afterwards, especially the refrigerator. Yet, keeping a sanitary environment is of the utmost importance for health and safety. As a single person, I try very hard to eat all the leftovers before they expire and buy only as much fresh produce as I can use in a week. With a somewhat unpredictable schedule as a pastor, however, sometimes I can go several days between the times I am able to eat at home. During that time, no matter how hard I may try, the food in my refrigerator sometimes develops that dreaded mold.

Because I despise cleaning my refrigerator, I now have a very unpleasant choice to make. I can ignore the problem and hope the mold doesn't spread to other items. I can simply toss out the infected item. Or I can toss out everything in close proximity, usually in the produce drawer, and thoroughly clean the area



with bleach or some type of disinfectant. Unfortunately, only the last option proves safest and will prevent future foods from being contaminated too. Mold can spread like wildfire through a refrigerator because it releases microscopic particles. These particles can land on nearby food as well as contaminate the surfaces with which they come into contact. In order to avoid health problems and the constant ruination of food, we must eliminate the mold entirely—not just the original source of contamination—or it will continue affecting everything with which it comes into contact.

Sin has a similar effect on the church. Just like mold, it rapidly advances through the community, infecting fellowship and ministry within the body. Sin doesn't exist in isolation, affecting only a single member. It affects everyone in the church. Therefore, we must take sin seriously as a body. Sin can become like a cancer, rapidly

## Introduce

destroying the body if we fail to deal with it. We must repent and eliminate the source of contamination completely from our midst. Because we live in this physical world infected with sin and have not yet been made perfect in Christ, we will all err at times as our old nature resurfaces. How we deal with that sin then becomes vitally important. We must act swiftly and decisively according to biblical standards. We cannot allow ourselves as a church to become apathetic to the point of ignoring it. We must remove it completely lest it continue its destructive course.

As a church, we must stand united against all forms of immorality and sin. Our culture often takes a hands-off approach. They tell us to mind our own business. They don't see someone else's sin as "our" problem collectively. They believe as long as it's not hurting anyone other than the person that we should stand back and do nothing. As a church, however, this type of approach is dangerous. It will lead to the destruction of the community as the Corinthians discovered! Therefore, we must work together as God has outlined in Scripture to confront sin—no matter how big or small it may seem or regardless of how the culture may even dismiss it today. We should confront sin with love through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and never in a judgmental, condemning way. Moreover, correction should always seek to restore the individual and repair fellowship. Dealing with sin biblically will create a healthy environment in which the church will thrive!

Key  
Question

In what ways does sin affect the entire body and not just the individual(s) who engage in the act?



### 1 Corinthians 5:1-3

#### **REFUSE TO CELEBRATE SIN:**

Paul turns from the topic of unified service to address the necessity for unified morality within the body. The church must stand in unity against all forms of immorality, but the Corinthians hadn't. Rather than deal with the sin in their midst, they actually embraced it to the point of celebrating it. Paul had heard a report, likely from the same members of Chloe's household who had brought him the news about the division in the church ([1 Cor 1:11](#)), that **sexual immorality** existed **among** them (v. 1). The **sexual immorality** which they tolerated was so egregious that **not even the Gentiles** practiced it, so it ruined the reputation and witness of the church throughout the city.

The word translated **sexual immorality** is from where we get our modern word *pornography*. In Greek, the word refers to a wide range of **sexual** impropriety, including adultery, per-marital sex, co-habiting, homosexuality, or any other type of **sexual** deviancy. Any **sexual** relationship except within the boundaries of a God-ordained marriage between one biological man and one biological woman for life is a sin. This will become even more evident when we study chapter 6 where Paul instructs us to "flee [any type of] sexual immorality" in general ([6:18](#)). For now, however, Paul focuses on one specific incident that has derailed the church's pursuit of righteousness. He has heard that someone in the church is having an incestuous affair with his step-mother.

Literally, the last clause of verse 1 reads: that one is having his father's wife. From the way Paul constructs this clause in Greek, we can make two observations. First, the present tense of the verb "is having" indicates an on-going sexual relationship. It wasn't some momentary lapse in the heat of the moment so to speak. The pair continued to willfully engage in the act without any sign of remorse or repentance even as Paul penned this very letter. Perhaps, he had already warned them of the evil

"Flee sexual immorality.  
Every sin that a man does is  
outside the body, but he who  
commits sexual immorality  
sins against his own body."

1 Corinthians 6:18

of this reprehensible act in a previous letter and yet they still continued ([1 Cor 5:9](#)). Second, the phrase his father's wife connotes the son's step-mother. Had Paul wished to denounce a sordid relationship between a mother and son, he would have simply written "mother." Regardless, such an act still constituted an incestuous relationship which both Romans and Jews abhorred.

Question  
# 1

Why is sexual immorality in any form so detrimental to both the individuals involved and the church as a whole?

To show the damage such sin does to the testimony of the church in the culture, Paul describes how **even the Gentiles did not** practice such a vile act. In fact, a second-century Roman legal scholar named Gaius records how Roman law strictly prohibited a step-son from marrying his step-mother (see *Institutes* 1.63). Even if the pair had not technically married, the Romans would have considered any **sexual** activity between them as degenerate. For this reason, first-century BC Roman historian Cicero also attests to the long-standing abhorrence of the practice (see *Pro Cluentio* 5.27). Considering how rampant sexual immorality was in the Roman Empire at the time, particularly in the progressive urban area of Corinth, this says a lot. The church had pushed **immorality** to a whole new level even beyond what the culture itself found socially acceptable! Not only did the culture frown upon such a relationship, however, but so did God's law which strictly condemned the practice: "The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death" ([Lev 20:11](#); see also [Lev 18:18](#); [Deut 23:1](#); [27:20](#)).

Why would someone behave in such an unbecoming manner that would shock even the culture to its core? This person had likely misunderstood what it means to have freedom in Christ. Christ came to liberate us *from* the effects of sin and death—*not* to free us *to* commit sin! Such an understanding became a grave abuse of God's grace. In a sense, this person wanted to show how "liberated" he had become by throwing off cultural conventions and even the Roman law. Today, it would be like Christians who want to prove how tolerant, accepting, and "woke" they are. They try to outdo one another in what they believe and practice. In doing so, they wrongly think that somehow this shows the love of God and how He has liberated them to live life to the fullest without any constraints. On the contrary, it shows how tethered they remain

to sin. They haven't really broken free in Christ; they have remained enslaved in their sin! Even Jesus reminds His disciples, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" ([John 8:34](#)).

The church's response to the sin poses an even greater problem for Paul. It was bad enough that they didn't address it and allowed it to continue, but it was even more troubling that they actually celebrated it! Paul, therefore, chastises them for being **puffed up**, prideful and arrogant to the point of boasting in the freedom to perpetrate such a heinous act (v. 2). They should have **mourned** and removed the one **who has done this deed from among** them. In other words, the church should have taken the appropriate steps to correct the problem and restore the individual into right fellowship instead of celebrating the sin.

Although we cannot say definitively, we can safely assume that Paul had already led the church to practice the discipline outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 based upon his fidelity to Jesus' teaching. There, Jesus teaches us a three-step approach to dealing with sin in the church: 1) go to the person individually, 2) take two or three to show them their fault if they won't listen to the individual, and finally 3) tell it to the church and remove them from fellowship if they continue sinning and refuse to repent. It seems that some in the Corinthian church have now arrived at the last step. They must confront the sin in unity together as a community. But this has become somewhat of a thorny issue because many in the church now find themselves caught in the crosshairs supporting the sin! Instead of mourning the sin as a sign of genuine repentance, they celebrated it pridefully.

"Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."

John 8:34

Question  
# 2

Besides sexual immorality, what sins do we see the church largely ignore or overlook today? What sins might some churches even promote or celebrate?

In the name of tolerance and freedom, many churches today fail to speak against sin at the risk of offending someone. Some may even go as far as to champion **immorality** as a sign that they are progressive and have evolved with the times. We have seen twenty-first century churches ignore sins like cohabitation. Others outrightly promote and celebrate alternative lifestyles abhorrent to the Lord as if they were normal. Churches don't just do this with **sexual** sin, but many other types of sins as well. But in this lesson, we will focus on the sins of **sexual immorality** since they provide the main backdrop for the context in which Paul writes.

Such churches compromise their pursuit of righteousness because they want to seem culturally relevant and attractive. God, however, has called us to disassociate ourselves from such sinful practices altogether. He has called us to resist temptation. As His people, we should lead the charge toward transformation rather than following what the culture says. In some cases, some churches even go beyond cultural boundaries to prove how “woke” and relevant they can be. Such an attitude does a grave disservice to the gospel by obscuring the truth about sin and garners charges of hypocrisy against us as believers.

Question  
# 3

How do the social practices of some churches today obscure the truth of the gospel by downplaying sin or even redefining what constitutes sin?

Apathy in the church regarding tolerance of sin is bad enough, but some churches find themselves at the point where they accept the sin and even celebrate it in the name of being inclusive. Although we should never intentionally be offensive in the way we communicate the truth, people will find the message of the gospel offensive. Jesus Himself even points out the gospel's divisive nature because people don't want to admit they're wrong ([Luke 12:51-53](#)). As a church, we must order ourselves strictly by what God has outlined in Scripture and seek to live righteously. Therefore, we must confront sin in our midst—not give the appearance we condone it or celebrate it. As a result, we must deal with sin constructively in a way that seeks restoration of the individuals involved. Moreover, we must speak the truth in love and refuse to celebrate sin or even give the appearance that we accept it. To illustrate, let's look at a few examples from our culture today and how we should potentially address

them as a church. The church must take a clear stand against **immorality** in any form while at the same time pointing people to salvation and forgiveness in Christ our Lord!

First, we as a church should not host a homosexual ceremony despite the government's affirmation of the practice. God defined marriage in the beginning when He created male and female and invested them with the responsibility of procreating and raising a family. Neither should we as members of the church attend such a ceremony or give gifts in acknowledgment of such a union—even under the guise of being a witness and showing “love” to a family member, friend, or coworker. To do these things gives the impression that we consent and support the union. God does not sanction it any way and calls the act an abomination ([Lev 18:22](#)). Second, we should not affirm the mental illness of gender confusion by calling someone by his or her “preferred” pronouns. We should refer to him or her politely according to the biological gender God gave them at birth. Neither should we encourage people to explore or experiment to find their identity or sexual preferences. God has given us clear guidelines and boundaries to follow in Scripture. We shouldn't coddle people, but lovingly point them directly to God's Word.

This third example will undoubtedly cause some controversy, but I include it to show how much influence our culture has on the church today.

We must agree that God has designed intimacy to occur only within the confines of marriage and that He has given both the husband and wife the



responsibility to bear and raise their children together. As a result, we should not celebrate the act of pre-marital intimacy that produces a child outside of marriage. While we should still show our love and not abandon or stigmatize the people involved, we should not celebrate the act publicly. Please hear me when I say that we as a church should love both the parents and the child and seek to nurture the child in a godly home. Yet, we must exercise caution as to how we respond to the act itself.

For example, many unwed mothers celebrate their pregnancy online by making

## Instruct

an announcement or posting sonograms. To which, many people without thinking reply, “Congratulations” and fawn over the conception. Congratulations or other similar words of affirmation trivialize the situation. Instead, we should tell those involved that we love them and are praying for them—preferably in person—so that we can have a chance to share with them what God’s Word says about the subject. This still shows “love” without showing approval of the action. Moreover, the church should not host a church-wide baby shower. If the mother needs help in some way, we can assist privately and individually to provide what they need with the purpose of leading them to restoration in Christ. Unfortunately, we have become so familiar with situations like this that we don’t think about how we should respond. We must strike a delicate balance. We should be joyful of the life God has produced and love the individuals involved, but we must mourn the sin. While we should show love and forgiveness to individuals in Christ leading them to repentance, we cannot support their sin in such a way that it looks like we endorse it or are even celebrating it with them.

Question  
# 4

In what other ways has culture conditioned us to respond to sin rather than take steps to correct the action as a church?

Paul makes his stance on the matter clear. Even though he is not physically present with them in Corinth, he has **already** passed judgment on the issue and **the one who has so done this** deed (v. 3). What does Paul mean by asserting that he has “**already judged?**” Using Scripture as his basis and the Holy Spirit as his guide, Paul has determined the sinfulness of the act and how the church should respond. He hadn’t hastily condemned the person or responded judgmentally, but rather he has followed biblical precedent for dealing with the sin and seeking to restore the person. He hasn’t taken his decision lightly or engaged in an emotional, knee-jerk reaction.

"But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one."

1 Corinthians 2:15

To understand Paul's line of reasoning, notice how he says that he has **judged him who** did this dastardly **deed**. Apparently, only the man claims to be a believer and is a member of the Corinthian church. This does not excuse the woman's role, but shows how the church should deal differently with its members and those outside the body—a point which Paul has already made in this letter. Recall from 1 Corinthians 2:13-16 where Paul has already described how God has given believers discernment and insight through the Holy Spirit to judge right from wrong. The natural man, however, lacks such ability. As a result, God will judge the natural man who does not have a relationship with Him.

At the same time, God has given the Spirit to guide the church to hold its membership accountable to abide by the standards in His Word. So, when sin occurs in the body, the Spirit will lead to church to take the appropriate action to deal with it now lest its mission become sidetracked. Paul will make this principle clear in 5:12-13 where he explains that "those who are outside God judges." So, in this sense, Paul and the church can pass judgment on this man as determined by the Spirit because he is associated with them whereas God will deal directly with the woman who has no relationship with Him. Therefore, Paul leaves her fate to the Lord.

### **1 Corinthians 5:4-5**

#### **RESTORE THE SINNER:**

God has invested the church with the responsibility to judge and deal with sin in the body corporately to safeguard its reputation and ensure the faithful continuation of its mission. Having already articulated his own position on the issue and noting that he has already passed judgment, Paul now specifically outlines how the church should handle the situation with this man. Once the church has formally gathered together to adjudicate this matter under the authority of Christ, he exhorts them to **deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord** (vv. 4-5). This may sound harsh, unloving, and unforgiving until we understand the purpose behind the action. Before looking at the nuances of the phrases, we must comprehend the general tone and tenor of Paul's instruction.

Paul proposes that the church excommunicate or exclude this individual from fellowship and service within the body. As long as the man remains defiant in his sin, the church should not have close fellowship with him. However, this does not leave the man without hope of reconciliation or allow the church to harbor a grudge with

## Instruct

no chance of repentance. On the contrary, exclusion from fellowship should serve as a wake-up call, alerting him to the seriousness of his sin. It should, therefore, spur him to seek forgiveness and restoration with the Lord. The goal of church discipline or any kind of correction should always be restoration administered in love and never out of retaliation or vindication. The Lord clearly tells us to leave such “vengeance” or judgment to Him ([Deut 32:35](#); [Rom 12:19](#)). Even with this overview, this passage contains some difficult subjects to comprehend which we will now examine individually.



### Question # 5

Why is it difficult to practice true biblical discipline today and exclude someone from fellowship within the church? What can we do to overcome this problem?

First, what does Paul mean by the phrases “**in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**” and “**with the power of our Lord**” (v. 4)? Collectively, he uses them in reference to the authority Christ has conferred upon the church to judge and discipline sin. Jesus’ **name** affords the church **with the power** to enact judgment; therefore, we must take this responsibility with the utmost seriousness, seeking the Lord in every step. This principle comes directly from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-20 to which we have already alluded in the previous section. In fact, it reflects the very words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Unfortunately, many people often pluck this verse from the context of church discipline and judgment. They use it as a way to justify or lend credence to a small gathering of believers. For instance, we’ll frequently hear someone lament a lackluster attendance at a Bible study, church service, or fellowship by quoting these words, “Well, where two or three are gathered . . .” In context, however, the two or three are



assembled to judge sin! Based on the insight and authority Christ has given them on the issue, they can confidently pass judgment. Hence, the prior verse speaks about God confirming the judgment that Jesus has led them to make: "If two of you agree on earth concerning anything they ask [about judgment], it will be done for them by My Father in heaven" ([Matt 18:19](#)). Thus, the judgment should always be consistent with God's Word and Jesus' prompting through the Spirit.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

2 Corinthians 5:10

Second, what does Paul mean by telling the church to **deliver** or literally hand over the unrepentant individual committing the sin **to Satan** (v. 5)? In 1 Timothy 1:20, he also instructs his protégé, Timothy, to lead the Ephesian church to do the same with two individuals, Alexander and Hymenaeus, incorrectly teaching about the resurrection. Once again, this directive goes back to Jesus' own teaching on discipline. In the last stage, Jesus tells the church to treat a sinning individual who refuses to repent like a tax collector or Gentile ([Matt 18:17](#)). In other words, they should exclude him from fellowship in the church by treating him as an outsider. This doesn't mean the church should be hostile or unforgiving; it shows the gravity and consequence of the person's sin in causing separation from God as well as His people. The phrase **deliver such a one to Satan** seems to carry this same force taken together with the illustration of leaven that Paul will employ in the next section. Thus, the exclusion should help the person recognize the seriousness of his sin and see the damage it has caused not only for him personally, but also the church so that he might repent.

Question  
# 6

What is the danger of continuing to have close fellowship with someone obviously sinning?

Third, what does Paul mean by "**for the destruction of the flesh?**" Some have proposed that Paul has sentenced this individual to death for his sins or even turned

him over to the Roman authorities for execution since the practice violated secular law. However, only God truly has the power over life and death along with the ability to convict and condemn. To support his view, people will point to the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Yet, one key difference exists between these two passages that would seemingly exclude this interpretation.

Peter certainly confronted Ananias about lying to the Holy Spirit concerning the proceeds from the property the couple had sold. However, Peter himself never pronounced a death sentence upon the man. After God used Peter to reveal Ananias' sin, he simply dropped dead at the Apostle's feet. God, therefore, essentially decreed the death penalty, not Peter or the church. A little while later, Sapphira comes so Peter also confronts her. Based on what had already happened to her husband, Peter announces that the same thing would also now happen to her. And she too fell dead. God had already determined their fate for lying to Him; Peter, in the case with Sapphira, only served as His messenger and not the judge so to speak.

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

Romans 6:5-6

Rather than regard this as the death penalty, we should see this phrase as a challenge to repent by dying to the old, sinful nature. Elsewhere, Paul uses a similar phrase to describe the **destruction** or figurative death of our old way of life. In Romans 6:6, for example, he states "that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." In Galatians 2:20, he makes a similar admission about being crucified with Christ so that "the life which [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by faith in the Son of God." Essentially, Paul says this same thing here in 1 Corinthians with regards to the sin of this man. He must stop it. He must repent and turn to God. In a way, it reminds us of the words of Jesus to the lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" ([John 5:14](#)).

Therefore, the **destruction of the flesh** symbolically pictures dying to our old,

sinful way of life. In so doing, Paul says that the church should take this action so that the man's spirit may be saved at the day of judgment when the Lord returns. Even though harsh, the command to expel the man still offers grace through repentance. It still allows the church to minister on behalf of Christ to the wayward individual by pointing him to the only place he can find hope, encouraging him to receive restoration and reconciliation with Christ if only he would stop sinning. In addition, this actions ultimately serves to restore integrity and holiness in the church, thereby counteracting the penalty for destroying the body in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Question  
# 7

What things have caused you the most difficulty in dying to your old way of life?

## 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

### **REMOVE THE IMMORALITY:**

Having addressed the sin of the individual, Paul now turns to a description of how it affects the whole church and why they need to act promptly to remove this man from among them. Paul uses the illustration of **leaven** to depict how sin infiltrates and affects the entire church. It may seem innocuous and insignificant at first. If not dealt with immediately and completely, however, it has the potential to spread its tentacles of corruption throughout the body, creating discord, disunity, and dysfunction as well as hindering the effectiveness of advancing the gospel. For emphasis, Paul once again reminds them that their boasting (i.e., **glorying**) in the ability to commit sin **is not good** (v. 6).

By way of an illustration, this leads Paul to ask them a question: "**Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?**" Paul expects them to confirm that they do indeed know the answer to this question. Just **a little** affects **the whole lump** of dough. Therefore, they must purge or remove all **the old leaven** so that

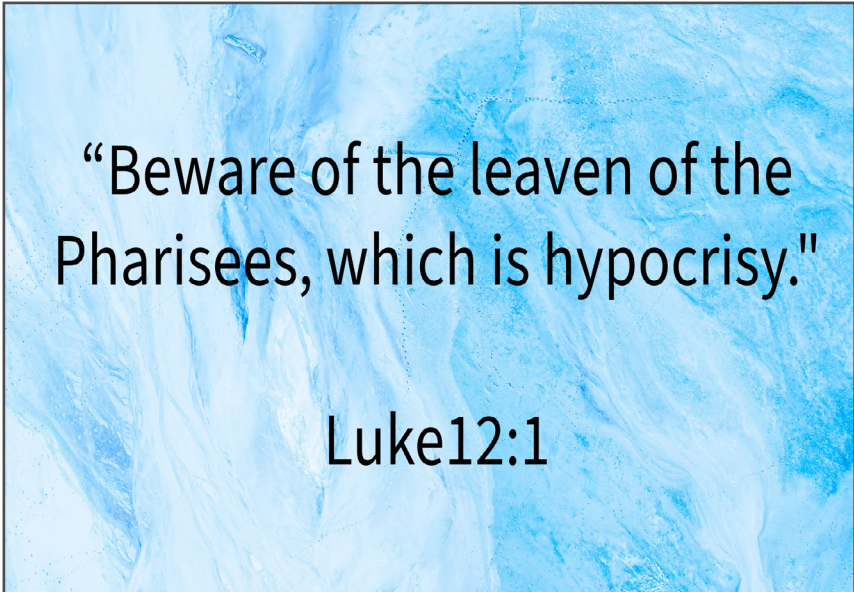


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they may be the whole new lump which God has created them in Christ to be (v. 7). Thus, the church must **purge** any and all sin from their midst! They must strive to live righteously with purity as exemplified through the life of Christ and spelled out in Scripture.

We often commonly associate **leaven** with yeast. Although yeast is a form of **leaven**, **leaven** actually includes any reagent which causes the dough to rise. According to the way that the ancients viewed **leaven**, it would more commonly represent what we would call a “starter” **lump** today. For those who have endeavored to make homemade bread, we know that bakers typically pinch a tiny piece of dough from the original **lump** called a “starter” before forming it and baking it. They then set the starter aside in a warm place so that the active ingredients can cause it to expand and rise. Almost infinitely, the baker can then use this single piece of starter to produce loaf after loaf of bread until they completely discard it and start afresh.

Now, consider how over time that bacteria and other harmful agents may contaminate that starter. Even though we may keep an impeccable kitchen, our utensils and surfaces will inevitably get bacteria on them from time to time. No matter how hard we may try, this starter will likely come into contact with this bacteria. An infinitesimal, microscopic amount



“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

Luke 12:1

of bacteria will rapidly spread throughout the starter and ultimately affect it along with the final product. From that point forward, every time a baker uses that starter the entire loaf of bread will contain that bacteria. Over the course of a year, which is how long Israel would use a starter before discarding it and starting over, imagine how many different kinds of bacteria would have festered in that tiny piece of starter and ultimately infected any loaf of bread produced!

Question  
# 8

What kinds of things have the most potential to affect your life in Christ negatively?

The only way that one can rid that piece of starter from bacteria is to throw it away and start with all new ingredients. Israel traditionally did this once a year as they celebrated the **Passover** (vv. 7b-8). Every Spring prior to the Passover, Jewish households would thoroughly clean their homes and toss out all **the old leaven** they had used throughout the prior year. They would completely start over. As Christians, no longer do we just recognize the **Passover** in terms of God's deliverance of Israel from physical enslavement in Egypt, but we recognize our deliverance from sin and death in Jesus. For this reason, Paul declares that **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us**. As **our Passover** Lamb, Jesus is our change agent. He is the One who has transformed our hearts and cleansed us from our sins. He has paid the penalty of our sins and wiped them completely away as if they never happened ([Psalm 103:12](#); [Micah 7:19](#); [Heb 8:12](#)). In Christ, therefore, we have had a hard reset. God has restored us to our original condition prior to our sinful rebellion. Christ has made us a completely new creation in Him ([2 Cor 5:17](#))!

Consequently, Paul symbolically urges us to **keep the feast** or maintain our purity in Christ which reflects the new creation into which He has made us. With Christ's help, this requires that we constantly rid ourselves of any contamination or sinfulness subject to the pattern of this world. We cannot ignore this contamination and allow it to build up, but we must deal with it immediately as Christ brings it to our attention. However, we can't just rid our lives of sinful contamination; we must also simultaneously fill them with Christ and His righteousness. We must adopt His mindset and imitate His actions. If we remove something from our lives, as humans, we will always fill that void with something else—whether good or bad. As believers, therefore, we must ensure Christ is the central determinant concerning the motives, attitudes, and desires with which we fill our lives. Paul expresses this dichotomy when he warns us not to fill ourselves with the corruption (i.e., **leaven**) of **malice and wickedness** which has infected the world, but instead we should pattern our lives after Christ in **sincerity and truth** (v. 8).

Question  
# 9

With what things do you truly fill your life?  
How do those things compare or reflect  
according to what Christ says about how we  
should build our lives?

### 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

#### **RECOGNIZE THE BOUNDARIES:**

To keep ourselves pure and unstained by the world, we must recognize the boundaries by which we must order our lives. In a previous letter, Paul had written **to** them **not** to associate **with sexually immoral people** (v. 9). He then subsequently clarifies what he means by this statement. He did not imply that they should isolate themselves completely from the immoral **people of this world** (v. 10). This would be both impossible and counterproductive. To avoid **the sexually immoral** along with the greedy, swindler, and **idolator**, they would need to remove themselves or **leave this world**. Paul's words here echo that old adage that we should "be in the world, but not of the world." We must reflect the light of Christ to the world through our transformed lives as His witnesses. While we should not have close, intimate relationship with people who do not know Christ ([2 Cor 6:14](#)), we must still interact with them on a casual, cordial basis, for how else will they hear the good news of the gospel lest we tell them? They certainly won't hear it from the people with whom they surround themselves in the world.

On the other hand, in his previous letter, Paul did warn them **not to** associate **with anyone** who calls him or herself a follower of Christ, but still practices sin (v. 11). To the sexually immoral, greedy, swindler, and **idolator** he mentioned in verse 10, he now

adds the categories of verbally abusive (i.e., **reviler**) and **drunkard**. The list certainly isn't comprehensive, but it communicates Paul's point beautifully. We must dissociate ourselves from those who claim to follow Christ, but continuously practice sin without remorse or repentance. In fact, Paul tells them **not even to eat with such a person**. While we must maintain appropriate boundaries with the world so that their sinful practices don't rub off on us, we must also take even greater precautions against those in the church who are sinning unrepentantly. Not only could separating ourselves from

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Mark 16:15

that person cause them to consider the cost of their sin and repent, but it also helps keep us from coming to temptation and becoming mired in the sin ourselves—the whole point of the illustration of the leaven.

Question  
# 10

What boundaries should we put in place with the world which would allow us to interact act with the people while at the same time safeguard our integrity and righteousness in Christ?

In verses 12 and 13, Paul explains why this seemingly dual standard in judgment exists by asking two rhetorical questions: **What have I to do with judging those who are outside** (the church)? **Do you not judge those who are inside? God judges** the natural man—those who have rejected Christ. God will deal with them. As the church, God has asked us to be accountable to one another ([Jas 5:16](#)). And He has sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us discernment so that we might judge rightly. Therefore, we must separate ourselves from people in the church who continually practice sin so that we can remain pure and focused on our God-given mission. As the church, we must stand united against all forms of immorality. We can't allow it to creep into our midst and get a foothold.

Question  
# 11

Why is it more dangerous to have a close relationship with a Christian who is sinning than a casual relationship (i.e., acquaintance) with a lost person?

In the introduction, we discussed how rapidly mold can consume items in a refrigerator. But now, for a moment, think about black mold—the type that can form in walls of your house because of moisture. Initially, it may not seem to affect us directly. If we don't promptly remove it all from our house, however, it can cause numerous health problems and even prove fatal. Sin in the church may appear like this black mold initially. It may seem small and insignificant. It may seem to have no direct effect on us, but it does. If we don't promptly remove it all from our midst, it will cause problems over time and eventually lead to complete destruction. As a church, we can't allow this to happen. We must deal with sin with the seriousness it deserves so that we can maintain purity in Christ and be in right standing with Him. Therefore, may we as God's people stand united against immorality in all forms, so that we might be His righteous representatives who do the work of evangelism.



## *Incorporate*

Pray and ask the Lord to reveal if you have any unconfessed sin in your life. If so, repent. If not, give thanks. In the lines provided, record anything that God leads you to do in order to correct this sin. Our entire church needs to do this because God expects us to be pure as a body!

In our church, with whom has God allowed you to develop a close relationship so that you can disciple one another and hold one another accountable? If you can't think of a person, pray and ask God to reveal someone with whom you can start. And then act upon it.

Why do we need accountability in the church today? What obstacles must we overcome in our twenty-first century society to have true, biblical accountability such as what Paul proposes here?

March 9, 2025



# *United in Purity*

## *1 Corinthians 6:1-11*

Focal Verse:

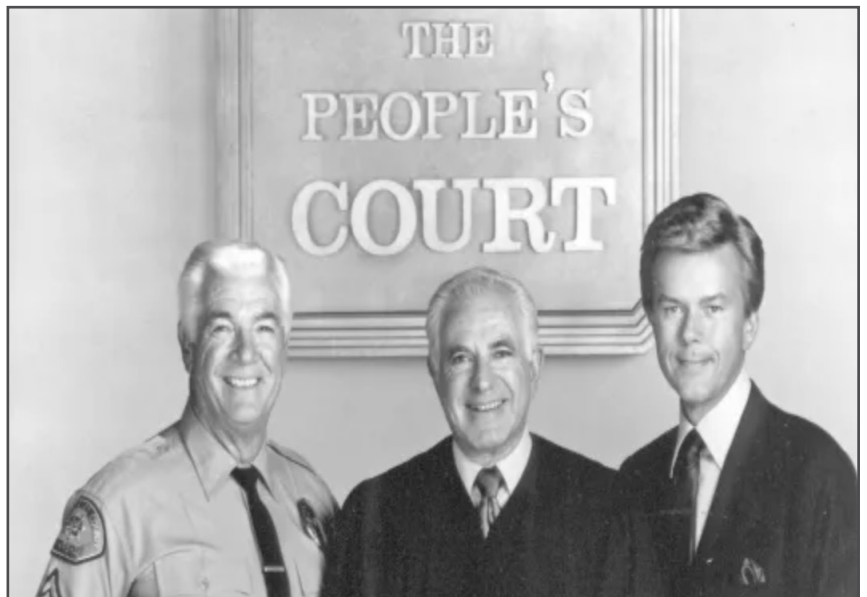
"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

1 Corinthians 6:11

## Introduce

During summer vacations from school in the 1980s, I can remember my mother watching “The People’s Court.” An innovative concept at the time that would pave the way for other reality courtroom television series. Litigants appearing on the show would drop their actual cases pending in a California Municipal Court to have their lawsuits settled before a retired Los Angeles County Municipal Judge named Joseph Wapner. Per the disclaimer at the end of the program each week, the show would pay the amount of the settlement if the plaintiff won the case and both parties would receive compensation for their appearance from a fund as well. In this made-for-tv small claims court, it often seemed as if the litigants in the case had blown a trivial matter way out of proportion, making them look foolish and petty. This description most aptly fits the participants of one trial dubbed “The Case of the Unwanted Cabbage Patch Doll.”

As the cameras commenced rolling on this trial, court reporter, Doug Llewelyn, dramatically rehearses the allegations in the case, noting that the plaintiff had agreed to purchase the cabbage patch doll for the sum of seventy-five dollars. To secure the purchase, she paid a ten-dollar deposit. In less than twenty-four hours, she



renege on the deal and is now suing the defendant for the restitution of the ten-dollar deposit. To audible chuckles in the courtroom, Llewelyn quips that the plaintiff “is not about to let her get away with it—even for *just* ten dollars.”\* The defendant, on the other hand, claims that the cancelation of the deal “cost her money,” so she refuses to refund the deposit.

Beginning with the plaintiff, Judge Wapner asks her to explain what happened. The woman recalls that she had seen an advertisement for the doll in the *PennySaver* newspaper. Although she could have bought it for twenty-six dollars in a retail store, she didn’t have time to wait in line. So, she contacted the defendant who agreed that she could come after church that evening to look at the doll. Because of the late hour, the plaintiff paid a ten-dollar deposit and agreed to return the next day to pay in full

## Introduce

which was all documented in the receipt. Meanwhile, she found the same doll slightly cheaper elsewhere, so she broke off the deal and wanted her ten dollars returned!

When the defendant refused the refund, the plaintiff went to the Orange County Business License Department to file a claim as proof she had attempted to resolve the matter on her own. When that failed to produce results, she called the Police Department the very next day. At this point, a shocked and exasperated Judge Wapner interrupts, "Police Department? This is a civil matter. The Police Department's not gonna . . . they're not . . . they've got other things to do. They wanna catch robbers and thieves." Ultimately, the defendant sold the doll for sixty-five dollars to someone else and the plaintiff bought another for sixty dollars. In all, the plaintiff technically lost \$5 in the deal and the defendant broke even! Yet, here they appear in court to settle a ten-dollar lawsuit!

Based on the written receipt and verbal promise to return, Judge Wapner sides with the defendant in the case. As usual, Doug Llewelyn stood outside the courtroom ready to interview the departing parties and get their raw reaction to the verdict. To the plaintiff, he sarcastically asks, "You left the ten dollars because of a time factor as you said. And, yet, look what happened. You now have gotten all this time involved in coming to court all over ten dollars! Has it been worth it?" Even in the 80s, ten dollars was pocket change. It didn't warrant such a dramatic fight. This frivolous lawsuit especially made the plaintiff look conceited, egotistical, lazy, and petty. The defendant who could have returned the ten dollars to avoid the whole mess doesn't look any less bad.

The Corinthians had a similar problem in their church. They engaged in petty, frivolous lawsuits against fellow believers, giving the whole church a bad reputation. The Lord, however, has called us to settle our own disputes so that we can present a united front for the unbelieving world. God has given us the Holy Spirit to adjudicate such matters and propose an amicable solution that will glorify the Lord without harming the church's witness. Therefore, God has called us to live united in purity as His people washed and cleansed by His blood ([1 Cor 6:11](#)).

Key  
Question

In what petty arguments or disputes have you found yourself in the past? What did you learn from them?

## 1 Corinthians 6:1-4

### PARTICIPATE IN JUDGEMENT PROPERLY:

Briefly, Paul turns his attention from a member of the community engaging in sexual immorality to those having legal disputes with fellow believers. Using an idiomatic expression similar to our modern equivalent how **dare you**, he strongly condemns believers who have legal disputes between them for taking the **matter** to a secular court (i.e., going **to law before the unrighteous**). Instead, both parties should have sought to settle the dispute in-house amongst **the saints** or fellow believers led by the Spirit (v. 1). The Bible never uses the term saint in the way most modern people have come to understand it as a spiritually elite person set apart from others in the church by their particularly holy and righteous lifestyle. On the contrary, the word saint in Scripture refers to all believers in general who have a relationship with Christ. As such, we should all exhibit holiness and righteousness in our lives. We should all live in a way that distinguishes us from those in the world who do not have a relationship with Christ—the ones whom Paul labels **unrighteous**.

Question  
# 1

If someone were to call you a “saint,” how would you respond? How might knowing the biblical definition of the term change the way you have perhaps responded in the past?

If a society offers the legal option to redress a wrong and have justice restored through a lawsuit, why would Paul renounce this as an option to settle a dispute between two believers? We must first notice that he distinguishes between those inside the church with those outside. Technically, Paul only addresses lawsuits between two believers who have **a matter against another**. He does not discuss lawsuits between a believer and a non-believer in these verses. Although he limits his discussion to believers in this case, it does not mean that we can frivolously engage in lawsuits against unbelievers or secular corporations today. The same principle ultimately applies in both cases: What course of action best reflects the character of Christ and brings glory to Him?

In the US, for example, God has given us the legal option to take individuals, institutions, and the secular government to court if they infringe upon our constitutional rights, thereby hindering our ability to serve Christ and advance His

## Instruct

gospel. For example, if non-believers try to violate our right to pray peacefully in public, conduct lawful meetings, or share the gospel, we have the ability to bring that **matter** to court. And countless American Christians have over the years, safeguarding our rights in a hostile world. However, we should never use lawsuits as a means to profit or enrich ourselves, gain notoriety, or to seek vengeance or retaliation (see [Deut 32:35](#); [Rom 12:17-19](#)). Such actions do not display a character consistent with Christ and actually bring dishonor upon Him.

On the other hand, Christians more often find themselves in court today as defendants when non-believers bring charges against us. Some charge us with discrimination because we stand firmly against the sins of homosexuality and transgenderism. Some will bring lawsuits against public displays of the nativity at Christmas or



prayer in public places under the false premise of the separation of church and state in order to take away our individual freedoms. Overall, God gives us the permission to defend ourselves under these circumstances. In fact, Jesus even tells us that He will aid us in pleading our cases: “But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matt 10:19-20)!

### Question # 2

In what other cases, when may it be appropriate to redress a wrong in court?

But why does Paul denounce lawsuits between two believers in a secular court and instruct Christians to handle the **matter** internally in the church? Perhaps, Paul feared that the poor, who predominately made up the first-century church, would not receive a fair trial from corrupt Roman civil courts. At that time, the Roman courts were known to be notoriously corrupt where wealthy citizens would bribe officials to get a

favorable judgment. While possible, it is even more likely that Paul wanted to present a unified picture of the church to the secular community rather than showing a divided, self-seeking church that lives according to its natural, fleshly desires. In other words, the church shouldn't air its dirty laundry for all to see. They should settle such disputes, regardless of how contentious they may be, behind closed doors with the help of the Holy Spirit to guide them through the process. They should publicly show Christ unified in their midst. Division, dysfunction, and sin become tools of the enemy to discredit the gospel and show the church as hypocrites. Just look at how many in our society base their rejection of Christ on the way His followers conduct themselves!

When spats occur between two believers, it gives bad optics to the public. It portrays Christ, although undeservedly, in a bad light and harms the church's witness! In our modern era, look at how quickly media and social media pounce on negative stories of sin and strife in the local church. Rarely do these same sources feature all the good things churches do and the positive impact they make on the community as a whole. But as soon as the hint of a scandal surfaces in the church it becomes instantly newsworthy. Usually, such negative stories in the media involve sexual sin or financial impropriety, but really any type of skirmish in the church that presents Christ in a negative light—no matter how large or small it may seem—becomes fodder for people to criticize. As believers, therefore, we must stand united in Christ faithfully practicing His Word and when disputes arise we must settle them privately.



**Question # 3** In what ways have some in the church or some churches caused us to gain a bad reputation as believers?

Paul continues his line of rhetorical questions to help the Corinthians comprehend the absurdity of adjudicating trivial **matters** in a secular court. He asks,

**“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters** (v. 2)? Several times Paul has already mentioned Jesus’ return in reference to how He would come again to establish His kingdom in full and bring this era of human history to a close by judging all the inhabitants of the earth (see [1 Cor 3:13](#); [4:5](#); [5:5](#)). Perhaps, along with the teaching of Daniel 7:22, the Apostle indicates that Christ would give **the saints** a share in judging **the world**. Daniel 7:22 states, “Until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made [in favor] of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.” Elsewhere, the New Testament also speaks of Jesus’ followers as judging the twelve tribes of Israel ([Matt 19:28](#)), having authority over the nations ([Rev 2:26](#)), and participating in the judgment of the nations along with the forces of evil that dominate this world currently ([Rev 20:4](#)). In the last days, Jesus has graciously extended us the courtesy of reigning together with Him in His kingdom, judging **the world** according to His holy standards.

Let’s not lose sight of Paul’s argument here by carelessly becoming distracted by what it means for us as believers to one day **judge the world** together with Christ. To do so would miss his point entirely! To understand Paul’s argument, we must take both questions in verse 2 together. Based on the second, therefore, we should recognize that he speaks ironically in a somewhat sarcastic tone. The Corinthians, as we have seen in our studies, took pride in their “wisdom”; yet, they could not use their so-called “wisdom” **to judge** even the most menial of **matters**! Thus, Paul employs a lesser to a greater argument here to make his case: If God has given you the ability **to judge the world** (greater), has He not also given you the ability to settle these small disputes amongst yourselves (lesser)?

At some point in our lives, we’ve probably all taken a difficult test whether in a particular subject in school or a standardized test like the ACT, SAT, or GRE for post-graduate school. Sometimes on these tests we spend all our time trying to find a complex solution to a perhaps an easy question, so we





miss an easy answer! We overlook the obvious. Paul warns the church in Corinth not to overlook the obvious answer. God has given us everything we need to find the right answer to our problems. We have the Holy Spirit to guide us. The world doesn't have this same advantage. So, rather than take our problems before a human court which lacks spiritual insight, we ought to resolve our problems in-house where God will reveal to us the right direction to proceed.

Question  
# 4

What is the benefit of solving a civil matter within the church privately rather than taking the issue to secular court?

Unlike the sexual sin in 5:1 where Paul mentions a specific example, he does not give a specific instance of a lawsuit here amongst members. He speaks in general. Like the case from "The People's Court" mentioned in the introduction where the plaintiff sued for a refund of ten dollars for breaking a promissory note, the Corinthians were taking themselves to small-claims courts over trivial, insignificant **matters** which seemed petty in the eyes of the world. Most likely, as they do today, most of these conflicts that ended in court probably dealt with money and finances. In 5:10-11, Paul has already warned them not to keep company with believers who are greedy (i.e., covetous) or swindlers (i.e., extortioners).

Some of the issues the church may have faced might have included people requiring exorbitant deposits or downpayments, charging high interest rates, defaulting or not repaying a loan, swindling people on the actual value of goods or land, or swindling people on the condition of products—similar to a notoriously crooked used car salesman today. At any rate, we should not limit the litigation to these things alone; they only serve as a starting point as concrete examples. Nevertheless, the community as a whole must handle these **matters** delicately with impartiality and integrity exercised through the Spirit in private.

Question  
# 5

In what ways do we see petty differences or feuds being displayed publicly in the church today?

In verse 3, Paul poses two more rhetorical questions: **Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?** Nowhere

does Scripture refer to our role in judging **angels** but here. So, we should not speculate beyond the text as to what this may entail because we will again miss Paul's point. Taken together with verse two, it refers to the day of judgment with Christ. Just as we participate in Christ's judgment of the nations, so also will we participate in His judgment of these other created heavenly beings. Paul doesn't spell out what exactly this will look like because that's not his concern. Whether we **judge** the wicked, fallen **angels** (Rev 20:4?) or all the **angels** to determine their loyalty to Christ, it doesn't matter. Paul's point is the same as verse 2: If God has given us the ability **to judge angels** (greater), how much more should we be able to handle **things that pertain to this life** (lesser)? The Corinthians who were wise in their own eyes should indeed feel silly that they couldn't arbitrate these simple matters amongst themselves!

To close this section, Paul introduces one final rhetorical question into his argument: **If you then have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge** (v. 4)? Through this final question, Paul shows them the error in their logic. If they have small civil matters **in this**



**life**, why do they litigate their cases before those least qualified **to judge**—the secular judiciary. The phrase “**who are least esteemed**” literally means those who are despised. In a sense, how can we trust those outside the church who do not have the Holy Spirit as a guide to do the right things always (see [1 Cor 2:14](#))?

If people in the church can be egotistical, self-serving, and self-centered at times, how much more can those outside? Despite what they say, many people, but not all, in the field of law take cases from which they can personally profit whether monetarily or by advancing their career by making a name for themselves. Thus, it often becomes about the amount of the settlement rather than justice itself. Furthermore, since Christian and biblical standards often differ from the world's view, how can we trust the judges appointed by the world to make the right decision all the time? This question

then underscores the fact that the Corinthians should not even be involved in these disputes at all because they need to set a visible example for the world to see in how Christ has transformed them to live righteously!

Question  
# 6

Regardless of the safeguards in place or the reputation of the court system's integrity, how can the human nature of a judge or jury affect the outcome or decision?

From Paul's line of questioning, we can learn a principle which we would do well to use whether we find ourselves in court or we just have a beef with someone else in the church. We should look beyond the initial moment of the circumstance to determine the effect our actions will have on our personal witness, the image of the church in the secular community, and ultimately how they reflect upon the character of Christ. We should take steps to deal with the issue privately and, if needed, involve other mature Christians led by the Spirit to help resolve the issue. We must not look at what we can selfishly gain in the moment—even if we think we have a right to justice and restitution—but rather what effects our actions have on our future work for Christ as we seek to advance the gospel. Even if we do get personal satisfaction or what we think constitutes justice, at what cost might it come to the church? We can easily destroy unity and fellowship in the church if not careful. This doesn't mean that we let people get away with blatant sin, but that we use this time as a church to restore one another and settle disputes amicably.

### *1 Corinthians 6: 5-6*

#### **PRESENT YOURSELVES UNIFIED:**


In contrast to 1 Corinthians 4:14 where Paul does not write to **shame** them, here he writes these things explicitly **to** their **shame** (v. 5). However, he doesn't want to berate them or guilt them to repentance. Rather, he seeks to explain how their public actions actually brought **shame** upon them. They essentially did this to themselves. Through their own actions, they brought dishonor. Rather than show their wisdom in Christ, they displayed their foolishness in following the pattern of the world. According to our modern idioms, Paul tells them to "quit acting the fool"; in this example, fool still bears the biblical meaning of one who says there is no God. While they don't literally deny God's existence, the Corinthians live like the world as if though God does not

## Instruct

really exist. They engage in petty disputes. They lack grace. They harbor grudges and seek retaliation—all for the world to see! They live as if Christ had never saved them or transformed them.

Once again, Paul asks them another rhetorical question: **Is there not even one wise man among you who is able to judge between his brethren?** Having to answer rhetorical questions should give us pause to self-reflect. If we look deeply at ourselves and how we have responded to a particular situation, God will always reveal

the truth when we truly seek Him. Consequently, this statement should have opened the Corinthians' eyes. They should have realized that they had falsely boasted in their wisdom. Yet, not even one person in their community could step up to resolve this simple matter! In fact, the inability to solve their problems internally with the Spirit's help actually prove how foolish they truly are.



"I say then: Walk in the Spirit,  
and you shall not fulfill the  
lust of the flesh."

Galatians 5:16

Question  
# 7

As you self-reflect on your life this week, what has God shown you about the way you have conducted yourself?

With this, Paul has now arrived at the crux of the problem which he states explicitly what he has been saying all along: One **brother** takes the other **brother** to court, **and that before unbelievers** (v. 6)! Impressions matter greatly. It doesn't matter whether we're on a first date, a job interview, attending the first day of class, or hanging out with a new group of acquaintances; we all try to put our best foot forward and make the most favorable impression. We want others to notice our good qualities and see our true character. While some may be able to fake it for a while, they will eventually be discovered as frauds if they only pretend. As believers, we should act genuinely and not put on false facades so that others might see Christ in us. We ought to display the transformed character He has produced within us. We ought to bear the fruit of the Spirit rather than the works of the flesh (see [Gal 5:16-23](#)). We ought to strive

to make a good impression upon the world and let them know that it is Christ working within us who has changed us.

Question  
# 8

In life, how difficult is it to overcome a bad first impression? What are some things that make a bad first impression? For believers, what are those things?

However, the Corinthians hadn't made a good impression; they hadn't represented their position in Christ well because the world could see no difference in their lives. Unfortunately, this problem isn't unique to the Corinthian church; it was all-too-common among many other first-century churches in that day as well. And we still even deal with this same problem among our churches in the twenty-first century.

"In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you."

Titus 2:7-8

Therefore, Paul must often remind the church to set a good example and make a good impression for Christ (see [1 Cor 10:32](#); [1 Thess 4:11-12](#); [1 Tim 6:2](#); [Titus 2:7-8, 10](#); [3:1](#)). In Titus 2:7-8, Paul pens, "In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you."

Question  
# 9

For us as believers, what makes for the most favorable impression upon the world?

In Christ, we must stand united as His people. We can't do this if we perpetuate petty problems. And most of the problems in the church ultimately boil down to pettiness over a difference in opinion or personal preference and not an issue of morality. In fact, many churches follow the example of Corinth and remain silent over sin, but they have an all-out war over insignificant issues. These issues may seem

significant to the individual, but to the cause of Christ they have little effect. These issues often revolve around how the church spends its money. It may come during a renovation, for instance, for something as simple as the color scheme or even the type of podium from which the pastor will speak. It also may come from personal preference over how the church conducts certain activities or programs. People want to have it tailored to suit them specifically and never think about the church as a whole. Certainly, I can be more specific, but we get the point. We must put aside all our petty differences and concentrate on serving the Lord together effectively in His church.

### 1 Corinthians 6: 7-11

#### **PRACTICE PURITY:**

Paul does not mince words. He calls it **an utter failure** or complete defeat that they take their fellow brethren to court (v. 7). Even though they may win in court, they have brought disgrace to the church—a complete disaster and defeat in the eyes of the Lord! Instead of bringing dishonor upon themselves and the church, Paul asks, “**Why did they not accept the wrong? Why did they not let themselves be cheated?**” The word translated wrong literally means to act wickedly or unrighteously. It covers a wide range of evil! If someone sins against us, we can certainly follow Jesus’ plan for the restoration of the individual ([Matt 18:15-20](#)), but we shouldn’t seek restitution in court. What good would that ultimately do? It would still bring disrepute and dishonor upon the church, giving it a bad name within the secular community. As far as possible, we need to resolve most problems in private within the church amongst mature individuals.

Please hear me when I say that we are under obligation to report to authorities many sins—particularly violent crime—such as murder, all forms of assault, and all forms of abuse as a few examples. The government has mandated us to report these

crimes and cooperate with local jurisdictions in identifying and apprehending such individuals. We cannot conceal or deal with these crimes within the church exclusively,



**DEFEAT**

but we must turn them over to local authorities to face a trial by the state. We are obligated to do this because God has told us to obey the government whom He has put into place ([Rom 13:1](#)). When the government seeks to protect us and doesn't transgress God's law, we are bound by God to follow human authorities.

The word translated cheated literally means defrauded. In our world, we have many individuals seeking to scam us all the time. If you're like me, you've been receiving texts purportedly from the billing department of the tollway authority. But, if you have a toll tag, the money is automatically drafted from the account you have set up. Usually, I delete them immediately, but often can see the first few fiery words of warning that I have an outstanding debt and urgent action is needed lest some worse fate happen. Such a scam or defrauding is the essence of the word used here in 1 Corinthians 6:7.

People with the church are defrauding each other. It may be in the form of an unpaid loan, borrowing something and never returning it, never fulfilling a contract for work, or swindling property. Whatever the case, Paul asks, "Why not let it go? Why take it to court?" Whether or not they even get their money back, it is

**The Toll Roads Notice of Toll Evasion: You have an unpaid toll bill on your account. To avoid late fees, pay within 12 hours or the late fees will be increased and reported to the DMV.**

still a lose-lose proposition. They have set a bad precedent for the world to see. But most likely, it will also strain the relationship between the two individuals and pit people on both side of the issue against one another, creating more division and dysfunction. So, why not just be defrauded, learn a lesson, and allow God to deal with the issue in the end if it can't be settled here on earth through the church?

Question  
# 10

In what instances have you (or should you have) put aside a wrong personally done to you for the betterment of the community?

As Christians, they should be the antithesis of the world. But instead, they are acting just like them. They **do wrong** and **cheat** their fellow **brethren** (v. 8)!

## Instruct

Characteristic of this chapter, Paul asks another rhetorical question: **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God** (v. 9)? The Corinthians should know better. They should no longer live like this because they have seen the truth through the gospel and God has transformed them (see v. 11). However, they have carelessly fallen back into their old way of life. So, Paul adamantly warns them **not to be deceived** or more aptly translated as “stop deceiving yourselves.” Paul is clearly telling them that they must re-evaluate their salvation. If God has truly saved them, He will convict them of their sin and take steps to discipline them. Therefore, they must stop their sin and return to Him immediately.

## Inspire

In the church, just like “The People’s Court,” we have arguments over some of the most silly, petty, and insignificant issues. The world teaches us to strive to get our way, so we bring this attitude into the church. Unfortunately, this presents a negative picture before the world. When we act selfishly, wrong one another to get our way, or fail to settle our disputes amicably as Scripture dictates, it is an utter failure because it harms the reputation of the church. As believers, we must stand united in purity. We must display the character of Christ who washed us, sanctified us, justified us, and saved us! Rather than retaliate against one another, may we work out our disputes through biblical means. If we cannot come to an amicable resolution, may we forgive and turn the matter over to the Lord for Him to deal with as He sees fit. Let us not bring disputes and distractions into the church that deflect from the ministry of the gospel.

## In Reference



*The People’s Court, “The Case of the Unwanted Cabbage Patch Doll” (accessed Feb 27, 2025), available from youtube.com.*



## *Incorporate*

What silly, petty, or insignificant disputes have you witnessed in the church? How were they resolved or how should they have been resolved (biblically)?

Based on the discussion above, how did these disputes affect fellowship and ministry within the church?

Even though it's not our natural instinct, why is it better to suffer injustice or being wronged by a fellow believer than taking them to court or even airing the differences out in public?

*March 16, 2025*



*United in Christ*  
*1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

Focal Verse:

*"But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him."*

1 Corinthians 6:17

## Introduce

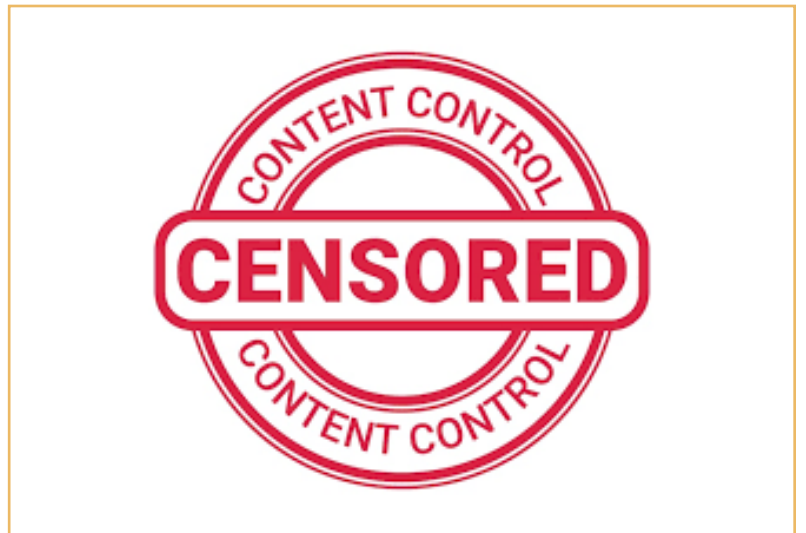
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against the danger of sexual immorality by helping the people understand the true intention behind God's prohibition against adultery in the Ten Commandments. In addition to guarding against the physical act of adultery or any sexual sin for that matter, we must also guard our hearts and minds to keep them unstained and pure. Therefore, Jesus explains that even looking lustfully at another person constitutes adultery ([Exod 20:14](#); [Matt 5:27-30](#)). A stolen glance, a quick peek, or a fleeting daydream and fantasy may sound harmless in the grand scheme of things, but a momentary thought often gives birth to full-blown sin as we begin to linger upon that image. Rarely do thoughts remain hidden in the deep recesses of our minds or concealed within the innermost parts of our hearts; they often burst forth into action.

In his letter, James describes how these seemingly innocuous thoughts can easily conceive and give birth to full-blown sin. He reminds us that

“each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” ([Jas 1:14](#)). The word desires can also be translated “lusts.” Allowing ourselves to be continually exposed to such lustful images and dwelling on them in our minds tends to produce sinful actions. James compares it to childbirth: the initial lustful desire formulated in our minds will eventually conceive and give birth to sin which leads to death and destruction ([Jas 1:12-15](#)). Although temptation itself is not sin, the more we entertain lustful thoughts the harder it becomes to resist the urge to participate.

Our culture bombards us with sexual images which can capture our attention and lead us down a road of despair. Almost every aspect of our society has become hyper-sexualized. It has become commonplace in printed advertisements, commercials, movies, television, video games, literature, social media, and sexting. We almost universally equate lust with only visual imagery which stimulates the brain causing hormones to rage, but so can racy words and dialogues. We must be extremely careful about all the things we consume!

Because of the easy access to such words and images which have somewhat



## Introduce

desensitized our society to their power to enslave, viewing pornography has become an epidemic. In a recent study conducted in 2023 by the George Barna Group, we find some unsettling statistics about the grip pornography has on our nation. According to this report, 61% of all adults in the US admit to viewing pornography at some level of frequency during the year (i.e., daily, weekly, monthly, etc.). While we generally consider it more of a male-oriented problem, 44% of women in the US also admit to viewing pornography regularly. Surely, the use of such vile material would substantially decrease among believers, but the study found otherwise. It lumped respondents into three categories: Christians, non-practicing Christians, and non-Christians. Within these three groups, 54% of Christians admitted to viewing it regularly while 58% of non-practicing Christians and 68% of non-Christians also admitted it. Only a negligible difference, could be found among the three groups!

Moreover, this has caused our society to adopt a casual nonchalant attitude toward consuming pornography. 67% of adults believe a person can watch it and still “live a sexually healthy life.” Or, perhaps more shockingly, only 32% of teens and young adults identify it as “usually or always wrong.” This is substantially less than the 56% who consider not recycling as “usually or always wrong.”\* This rampant lust hasn’t just stayed in people’s minds, but it has translated into all kinds of sexually immoral actions! Like Jesus, Paul warned the Corinthians about the danger of leading a sexually immoral life. Rather than unite ourselves with someone in an immoral physical relationship outside of marriage, we must flee sexual immorality and unite ourselves with Christ in His righteousness.

Key  
Question

How does continually dwelling on lustful images and thoughts eventually alter our thinking and cloud our judgment?

## In Reference



*All statistics and references were taken from the George Barna Group and can be accessed by visiting [barna.com](http://barna.com).*

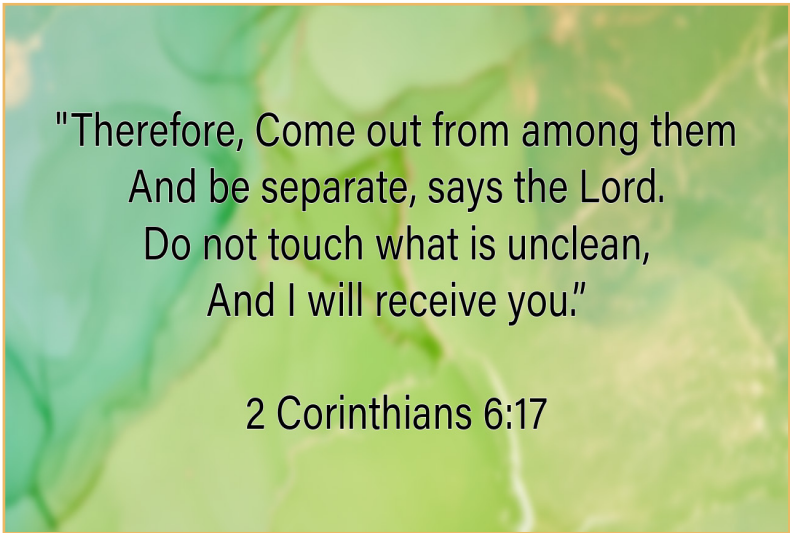
### 1 Corinthians 6:12-14

#### **CONSIDER THE PROFITABILITY:**

After addressing lawsuits between fellow believers, Paul once again returns to the topic of sexual immorality. He focuses on this single issue because it was a widespread cultural problem. If we could travel back in time, we would not see much difference between our own culture and that of first century Corinth. Sexual perversion ran rampant just as much as it does today. With its temple dedicated to Aphrodite featuring over one thousand prostitutes, the city rightly garnered a reputation for promiscuity even among the ancients! Plato, for instance, coined the phrase “Corinthian girl” to describe this extensive immorality among its citizens. Nearly 500 years later in the third century AD, Greek playwrights began using the name of the city as a verb, “to corinthianize,” which became a euphemism for committing sexual immorality. This flippant and permissive attitude of the culture toward sex also infiltrated the church there. Just like the statistics reported in the introduction concerning pornography in our own day, one could not see much difference between a Christian in Corinth and the culture!

In our culture, we have many popular philosophies by which people order their lives. We may rarely state them aloud. We may not plaster them on posters that we carry around. We may not even frequently ponder them consciously in our minds, but many people still live by these creeds. For example, our culture advocates

the Hedonistic approach to satisfying our desires in the pursuit of pleasure over pain. Thus, many ascribe to the mantra, “If it feels good, do it.” We all know immediately what this philosophy entails; it calls us to live without restraint, pursuing the things that make us “happy.” Today, people might express this same principle in a slightly more sophisticated and less offensive way: “Follow your heart.” This expression is still self-seeking and self-centered, focusing on our desires rather than God’s plan for our lives. The human heart will always lead us astray. Scripture describes it as “deceitful above all



"Therefore, Come out from among them  
And be separate, says the Lord.  
Do not touch what is unclean,  
And I will receive you."

2 Corinthians 6:17

things and desperately wicked” ([Jer 17:9](#)).

Such a lifestyle centered around pleasure isn’t a new phenomenon. It has existed ever since the first couple consumed the forbidden fruit that they found “pleasant to the eyes” and “desirable to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). Against God’s explicit directives, they engaged in what pleased them in the moment. But this attitude didn’t end with that momentary lapse in the Garden, it only grew more intense as the centuries progressed. Even though they knew the consequences for their sin, the people in eighth century Jerusalem exhibited this same attitude proclaiming, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” ([Isa 22:13](#)). A few centuries earlier, Solomon adopted this same attitude as he contemplated the futility of life apart from God ([Eccl 8:15](#)). The first-century Corinthian church did not deviate from this misguided pursuit of pleasure. They too had their own slogan akin to these from the dawn of creation to the modern era: “**All things are lawful for me**” (v. 12). Essentially, they wrongly believed that they could do whatever or live however they wanted without consequence.

Question  
# 1

What makes the pursuit of satisfaction and pleasure in our lives so dangerous?

In a way, the Corinthians sounded very childish in their understanding of their salvation and their commitment to the Lord. Probably, at some point in life, we have heard a child say or we may have been that child who said, “I can’t wait until I’m an adult so I can do whatever I want.” As adults, we now know how foolish such a statement is. We still have boundaries, obligations, and commitments by which we must abide—most likely many more than we had as an adolescent. In declaring **all things are lawful for me** the Corinthians had this same childish misconception that as “mature” believers they had the freedom to do whatever they wanted which they ultimately expressed through rampant promiscuity among other things.

Me as a kid: “I can’t wait until I’m an adult and can do whatever I want.”

Me now:



Perhaps, this attitude indicates a misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching about the law. The Corinthians could have erroneously regarded the freedom we have in Christ from sin and death as a license to sin. If we are no longer under the law, but now under Christ, they wrongly surmised that we have no boundaries and can live however we so choose. Many people hold this errant view even today. Although Christ did come to fulfill the law and we are under obligation to Him rather than a legalistic adherence to the law, it does not give us an excuse to engage in any activity we selfishly desire—especially unrighteous, immoral ones. We still have a standard to follow in imitating Christ’s holiness and bearing the good fruit of righteousness. In fact, we have a higher standard by which we must abide because the Holy Spirit dwells within us and helps us attain such a lofty goal when we surrender our lives completely into His control.

Question  
# 2

In what ways do some misuse the liberty we have in Christ?

Although borrowing their slogan to use it in his argument against them, Paul takes exception with their position in two specific ways indicated by the adversative conjunction “**but.**” Even if **all things** were indeed **lawful** as they proposed, Paul explains that **all things are not** beneficial. When Paul mentions the freedom we have in Christ, he never pairs it with a license to sin or even the ability to determine for ourselves what constitutes sin. God establishes and defines these boundaries clearly in His Word. In cultural matters or issues of personal preferences that do not constitute sin, however, we do have some freedom to choose. For example, even though God gave the Jews certain dietary restrictions in the Old Testament, we do not need to base our diet strictly on them as Gentiles. At the same time, however, since our bodies are the temple of God, it doesn’t give us an excuse to mistreat them by failing to eat healthy or forgoing exercise.

So, what does Paul mean by **not all things are helpful**? The word translated **helpful** by the NKJV more aptly means beneficial or profitable. As believers, we must always count the cost of our actions, weighing the benefits against the drawbacks. We must ask ourselves, “How does the activity in which I am about to engage benefit the cause of Christ, others in the community, and my personal relationship with the Lord?” Such a question then inherently excludes any sinful action! Sin is only a detriment

## Instruct

or disadvantage to the cause of Christ, the church, and each of us personally. It has no benefit to us or anyone else whatsoever! On the other hand, in matters of the conscience or personal preference, we must still ask ourselves this same question before making any decision. Every believer should seek to live in such a way that best exemplifies and glorifies Christ, adding value to His kingdom.

Although we may have a choice between two seemingly good options, it may not always be the most advantageous choice at the time. To illustrate, let's look at two examples. Since we previously mentioned diet, we must recognize that we can eat any food freely in moderation combined with exercise, but we must also realize that not all foods



are healthy or beneficial. Bacon, for example, makes almost everything taste better. We can enjoy an occasional slice or two with breakfast or on a hamburger from time to time. Yet, with its high fat content along with the high level of sodium used in the curing process, it may not ultimately be the best choice in our diet because it can result in high blood pressure and even cause heart problems down the road.

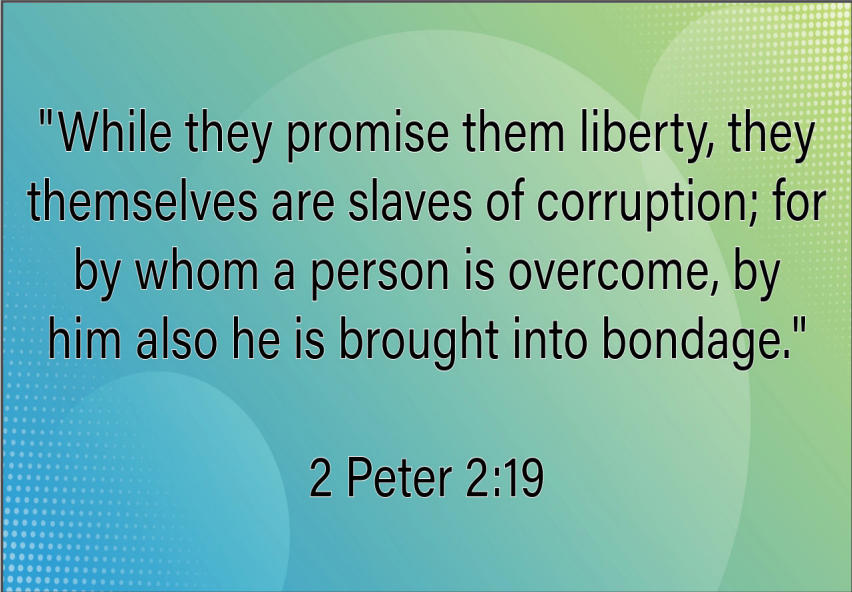
Moreover, consider the cost of making a major purchase on a recreational vehicle, like a boat. It may not be sinful per se, but is it beneficial and the right choice at the time? While we may have the resources to buy the boat outright, will the required maintenance and upkeep strain us financially in the long run? We must also consider whether it might become a distraction or temptation, causing us to lose our focus on Christ and place it squarely upon our leisure. Or will we have the motivation and the willpower to use the vessel for kingdom work? Certainly, these two areas could potentially have many more pros and cons, but this brief discussion should give us an idea of how we ought to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of our actions to make an informed decision that best honors Christ.

Whereas the Corinthians may claim **all things are lawful**, Paul contends he **will not be brought under the power of any**. The phrase rendered **brought under the**



**power** means to overpower or enslave. Consequently, Paul **will not** allow the freedom he has to be misused, thereby enslaving him to the sin and death he escaped through Christ. Sin often promises us freedom, but as a form of addiction it actually enslaves all our faculties. For this reason, Peter warns, "While they [lusts of the flesh, sin] promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves to corruption, for a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" ([2 Peter 2:19](#)). Elsewhere, Paul also urges us, "For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" ([Rom 6:19](#)). Paul, therefore, chooses not to let sin master him and ruin his life despite its fallacious promise of fun, satisfaction, and freedom.

How does sin enslave all our faculties? First, it consumes our minds. We crave it. We dwell upon it all the time. We can lie awake at night thinking about it. It can distract us during the day, hindering our productivity and wasting our time. We may seem to "control" it at times, but the desire can pop into our thoughts randomly and frequently at any



"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage."

2 Peter 2:19

moment. It ends up dictating our lives and controlling what we do. Second, it also governs our bodies physically too. It can affect our hormones and our body's chemicals just like an addiction to a controlled substance, causing our cravings and feelings to intensify. We need more and more of it to experience euphoria, but we can never find satisfaction! Hence, we have coined phrases like "adrenaline junkie" and "work-a-holic." This can strain our relationships because we choose participating in our sin and addiction over having healthy relationships. It can affect our finances because it often requires a hefty monetary investment. It also causes stress, depression, loneliness, and a whole host of other physical problems that can adversely affect our health.

Question  
# 3

What things perhaps consume your time, attention, finances, and physical presence in life?

Paul seemingly introduces another one of the Corinthians' slogans which they cite as support for their sexual immorality. They claim that **foods are for the stomach and the stomach is for foods, but God will destroy both it and them** (v. 13). According to the Corinthians, God designed **foods** to satisfy the cravings of the **stomach**. Since He did, they propose that they can eat freely and even gluttonously to appease their voracious appetites—which we see literally occurring during their celebration of the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor 11:20](#)). Furthermore, they believe that **God will destroy** the physical body (i.e., **stomach**) and the earth (i.e., **foods**) in the end, so they better enjoy life while it lasts. Therefore, they want to make the most of every moment and seize the opportunity to eat, drink, and be merry so to speak because death lurks just around the corner.

In addition, they also apply this same philosophy to all forms of pleasure in life, including sexual activity. If God designed the body to have a sexual function, the Corinthians contended that they have a right to fulfill those desires in any way they see fit. Just as they would satiate their appetite by eating food, they would also quench their appetite for sexual relations in any form they found convenient at the time. Does this not sound much like the philosophy our own culture espouses today? In essence, the Corinthians claimed that God created us this way. If He created us to have these urges and impulses, who are we deny ourselves the right to enjoy them right now before life ends? Once again, the Corinthians have a completely misguided outlook. Even though God created us with these functions in mind, He has given us specific principles by which to live so that we might rightly apply these functions in a healthy way that honors Him and achieves His intended purpose.

"And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Romans 6:13

As a result, Paul strongly disagrees with the Corinthians' assessment about life and takes steps to correct their thinking. He rephrases their slogan to communicate the correct theological understanding they should have. He argues that **the body is not**

**for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.** God has not created us to indulge in sin, but exercise self-control to produce righteousness. Therefore, **the body** belongs to **the Lord** who has redeemed us through Christ. We have become united with Him just as in the sense of marriage which Paul will explain later (see [1 Cor 6:16](#)). Consequently, our **body** no longer belongs just to us to do with as we please. It belongs to the Lord, so we must therefore think about how our actions reflect upon Him as well as upon us. No longer should we selfishly seek to fulfill our own fleshly desires, but we should seek to live in such a way that honors Him and is best for both of us. Ruining God's plan for intimacy by engaging in it indiscriminately is good for no one involved!

Furthermore, Paul reiterates that **God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power** (v. 14). With this, Paul dispels the notion that our physical bodies will simply cease to exist at the end of time. While God will bring history to a close with judgment and establish His eternal kingdom, He **will raise** our bodies physically just like He did with Christ. At that time, our bodies will be transformed into their perfect, righteous state (see [1 Cor 15](#)). Therefore, it does indeed matter what we do with our bodies now because they already belong to the Lord. God has already raised us up to walk in this new life that reflects His character ([Rom 6:4](#)). We don't start living that life after Christ returns; we begin living it right now because we're already citizens of that eternal heavenly kingdom ([Phil 3:20-21](#)).

Question  
# 4

What should our heavenly citizenship in heaven look like here on this earth?

### 1 Corinthians 6:15-17

#### **CONSIDER THE PERVERSITY:**

The Corinthians must not think individualistically; they must think collectively in terms of the community or church. Rather than seeking to satisfy their personal desires, they should strive to fulfill the desires of the Lord by uniting with Him in perfect harmony. Paul shows this through a string of rhetorical questions. He first asks, "**Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ**" (v. 15)? He quickly follows this with another question for emphasis: "**Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?**" Although Paul condemns every form of sexual immorality ([1 Cor 6:18](#)), here he perhaps points to a specific problem in the church. Some of the **members** may be reverting back to their pagan ways by joining themselves to the prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite or other settings. The problem of abandoning their faith in Christ alone and returning to their pagan practices will become even more evident in chapters 8 through 10. For now, however, we must understand the repugnance of any form of sexual immorality since it destroys fellowship both with God and within the church as a whole.

In the strongest terms possible, Paul condemns their cavalier attitude toward sex which conforms to the pattern of the culture rather than the plan of God. The **certainly not** of the NKJV is too weak of a translation for Paul's response to these questions. It means something more akin to never (NIV, NLT, ESV, NET, or RSV), absolutely not (CSB), or even God forbid (KJV). In other words, visiting prostitutes should never under any circumstances occur among believers! We should not limit this condemnation to just the practice of prostitution, however. Any sexual sin drives a wedge between us and the Lord, creating collateral damage in the church by destroying relationships and fomenting hurt and bitterness. We should never under any circumstances tolerate any kind of sexual sin among God's people. Paul will shortly explain why sexual immorality

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;"

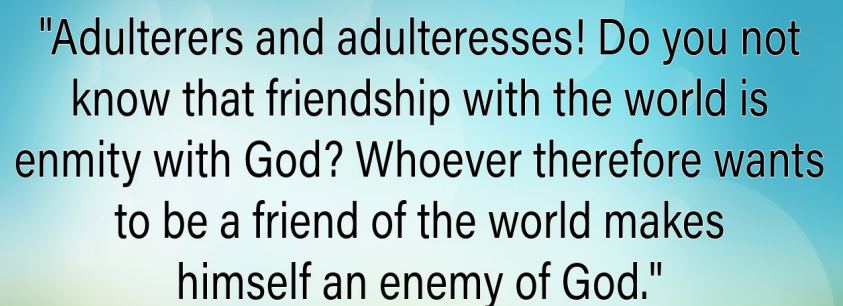
1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

is particularly devastating to the church in verses 17-20. Allowing this permissive, lax attitude of the culture toward sex to permeate the church is destructive. As we will see, it directly attacks the structure of the nuclear family which God has designed for the basic function of both our society and the church.

Again, Paul poses another rhetorical question before following it up with scriptural support: **“Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her”** (v. 16)? He then appeals to Genesis 2:24 for support. When God created the institution of marriage in the Garden, He decreed that **“the two shall become one flesh.”** This applies in two ways to our text here in 1 Corinthians. As in the original context, God designed marriage between a man and a woman to be the most intimate bond in life—even greater than that of a parent and child. In marriage, the couple must think and act as a single unit—what actions best help them honor the Lord and raise their family which God has graciously given them. No longer should each person think solely about their individual needs or the actions which most benefit them, for that type marriage will not work.

In the second level of application, Paul uses this same principle to describe relationships within the church. We must think collectively as one body, not engaging in individualistic, self-serving actions that disrupt the unity. We must do what is best for the community which in turn honors the Lord. In a sense, to engage in sexual immorality means that a person has forsaken the most sacred bond and joined him or herself to another body! We cannot faithfully serve Christ while we have united ourselves to another. Thus, Paul reminds us that **he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him** (v. 17).

Our culture has a very skewed idea of what it means to have a healthy relationship, particularly ones involving physical intimacy. We have many slogans that display a corrupt understanding of love and marriage. For example, our society champions the idea that “love has no boundaries” in order to



"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

James 4:4

## Instruct

promote perverted acts and alternative lifestyles. Although God has called us to love everyone, acts of intimate physical love should occur only between one man and one woman for life within marriage. This should not create arguments or division within the church since it relates God's instruction directly to us. But it does because many have become tolerant of the culture.

We should stand against any form of sexual immorality as a church! Churches too often tolerate divorce for reasons other than those biblically given (see [Matt 5:32](#); [19:9](#); [1 Cor 7:12-16](#)). Our culture often sees marriage as old-fashioned, so many churches choose to ignore people living together outside of marriage or engaging in pre-marital relations under the pretense of evangelism and discipleship in order that they might not offend anyone. Yet, God compels us to speak His truth lovingly so that all may come to the knowledge of repentance. Today, some churches may even go as far as to promote perverse lifestyles like homosexuality or bisexuality. However, sexual immorality in any form destroys the church and distracts us from our purpose in Christ!

Question  
# 5

In what ways does sexual immorality hinder the ministry of the church?

How does sexual immorality specifically harm the church perhaps more than any other sin? It destroys the fabric of the nuclear family which God has instituted as the fundamental foundation of our society. God created the marriage relationship to reflect His relationship with us ([Eph 5:22-33](#)). As such, our goal must always be to please the Lord—not primarily pleasing our spouse or even ourselves. For marriage to function, we must have the right priority (God) and the right perspective (the mind of Christ). We can't if we're selfishly focusing on our own desires. Sexual sin is always based on lust and self-centeredness no matter what society may attempt to argue. It always elevates our perceived "needs" and desires over any other.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;"

Ephesians 5:3

God designed the home to be a place where husbands and wives partner together to serve Him and to raise their children, teaching them to respect Him and become productive members of the society. Sexual sins strain relationships in the home. They break trust, cause suspicion, and create division. This leads to chaos and dysfunction. We need not look far to see the effects of this on both our society and the church. While sexual sin is not the only factor contributing to the decay of the family, it is a significant one because it creates emotional problems that people carry into other parts of their lives for years. This doesn't mean that God cannot forgive all the people involved or even help a person overcome these things, but it can sometimes take years of healing to progress beyond the scars.

Question  
# 6

What emotional scars or problems does sexual sin cause? How do these problems affect ministry in the church?

For a moment, I want to specifically analyze some of the problems that sexual immorality causes in the church. I am speaking in general terms here—and not about who is at “fault” or even the circumstances behind particular cases. We must evaluate and respond to each case separately as warranted according to biblical principles. Moreover, I am not saying people don't need time to heal or address their own spiritual needs for forgiveness, grace, mercy, reconciliation, and restoration. I simply want us to think about the specific problems that such immorality can cause and the effects it has upon the church.

When dealing with weighty problems such as sexual immorality some people isolate themselves while others develop tunnel vision becoming totally self-absorbed and self-focused. Those actively engaging in infidelity or immorality will attempt to hide it. They lie to cover it while at the same time gossip spreads like wildfire rather than the church confronting the problem head-on. In the process, boundless speculation may lead to false accusation or baseless assumptions involving innocent people, creating a toxic environment. On the other hand, those involved in such ungodly practices may cease participating in worship or Bible studies to avoid the conviction of the Spirit while at the same time they might also sever relationships with once-close friends, causing hurt and distrust especially once the sin comes out (Num 32:23). In the eyes of the world, they see the hypocrisy in such acts. They see no

## Instruct

difference between us and them. Therefore, it ruins the reputation and witness of the church, slowing the advance of the gospel.

On the flip side, people who have gone through a contentious divorce or experience sexual immorality in another way can become bitter and sow seeds of division. Their focus can become strictly on their own situation to the detriment of the body.

They constantly gossip about their problems or continually put

down their ex-spouse. They hijack the Bible study or prayer time, focusing on their perceived needs and using it as a complaint session. Ultimately, this creates rifts and divisions in the church. In some cases, people withdraw from fellowshiping with that person because they grow weary of hearing the complaints. At other times, they can join in the complaint session, adding their own heartaches instead of focusing on growing together in Christ. Certainly, we need to deal with the effects of sin, help people heal, and point them toward a biblical solution. But initially this is best done through a one-on-one time of discipleship and counseling.

"But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out."

Numbers 32:23

Question  
# 7

Why is it usually more advantageous to deal with specific cases of immorality in a one-on-one setting with an individual or the individuals involved? Yet, why should we also broadly, or generally, deal with them in collaborative Bible study as well?



### **CONSIDER THE PRICE:**

Because of the gravity of such sin, Paul tells us to **flee sexual immorality**—literally to run away as fast as we can (v. 18). For a moment, consider both Joseph and David's response to the sexual temptation each one experienced. On one hand, Joseph fled the clutches of Potiphar's wife as quickly as he could when she propositioned him, leaving behind his coat which she then used as "evidence" to lie to her husband that the steward made advances toward her. Although Joseph remained pure, he still found himself falsely accused and jailed until God raised him up to save the world from famine. David, on the other hand, should have been on the battlefield with his troops. Instead, he found himself on the roof of his palace where he noticed a beautiful woman bathing. Rather than fleeing, he lingered. His thoughts soon turned into action, so he sent his servants to bring her into his presence. He impregnated the woman and then desperately sought to cover his tracks by getting her husband to sleep with her. When her husband showed nobility and refused since he recognized that he should be on the battlefield, David had him sent to the frontlines where he would surely be killed. (see [2 Sam 2:11](#))

We ought to turn and run like Joseph did as quickly as we can from sexual temptation. We ought to guard our hearts and minds by taking steps not to place ourselves into those tempting situations—whether the kind of novels we read, the movies we watch, the sites we visit, the friends we have, or whatever may tempt us. If we find ourselves bombarded by culture and experiencing lustful thoughts, we need to turn and run as fast as we can. Let us not overestimate our willpower and linger like David did. The more we linger or dwell upon these images, words, or fantasies the more likely we will act upon them in the future. This allows the devil to gain a foothold in our lives. It's not just the initial act of the sin that keeps us enslaved either, but also the cover-up. Look at how extensively David had to re-order his life in hopes that no one would find out his sin!

Question  
# 8

What steps do you take to guard your heart against lustful thoughts that could lead to sexual immorality?


Paul explains that **every sin that a man does is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body**. Although some debate

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exists as to what he actually means by this phrase, it seems abundantly clear when we continue reading. God made our bodies to be instruments of His righteousness—not tools for iniquity. When we have a relationship with Christ, our bodies no longer belong solely to us to do with as we please according to the lusts of our flesh. They belong to God whose Spirit lives within us. Hence, Paul asks, “**Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and not your own**” (v. 19)? Unlike 1 Corinthians 3:16, **the temple** here refers to the individual believer’s body and not the church as a whole. Since God’s Spirit resides within us, we should not use our physical bodies to sin. God paid a great **price** to redeem us and unite us with Him (v. 20). Therefore, we should not prove unfaithful by uniting ourselves to anyone else, particularly in sexual immorality!

Specifically, what makes sexual sin so dangerous that would warrant Paul to interject that the one committing it **sins against his own body**? This most likely centers on the emotional and psychological damage that such acts have upon the person. God created us first and foremost to have an intimate relationship with Him, trusting Him to satisfy all our needs. Secondly, he created the relationship in marriage as an intimate means of companionship through which we have a partner with whom we can serve Him and who would meet the additional need of navigating life together in fulfillment of our physical, social, and emotional well-being. We destroy our intimate fellowship both with the Lord or our spouse if we devote ourselves unfaithfully in an intimate relationship or even allow ourselves to become consumed by the lustful thoughts which Jesus compared to adultery. Even though such actions may promise momentary pleasure, they cause a lifetime of damage and harm our very well-being.

To end our discussion by way of illustration, we will return to where we began this lesson since pornography has so much influence on our world today. For a moment, let’s outline its harmful effects upon people—and many of these effects will also overlap with other sexually



And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

Genesis 2:18

immoral actions too. Although we don't have enough space to discuss each one in depth, listing them will show the tremendous harm they have physically, psychologically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. In addition, we must understand that pornography isn't just seeing the act itself or even nudity, but it is engaging in fantasy whether through implied visual acts, dialogues in movies, or words in literature. Sexual sin is so debilitating that we must guard ourselves on every front!

Question  
# 9

How do tv shows and movies desensitize us to sexual immorality in general? What harm can these cause without even being what some would consider “graphic?”

Pornography, and sexual immorality in general for that matter, is extremely harmful because it distorts our view of people created in God's image by objectifying them. People become objects used merely for our self-gratifying pleasure to fulfill our desires and nothing more. As such, relationships become disposable, equal to an animal-like conquest totally foreign to how God created us for deep intimacy and connection. As a result, mere physical relations or fantasies about them will never satisfy in the way God intended. They will leave people disappointed and searching for their “ideal” relationship.

In addition, pornography creates an unrealistic expectation both for their partner and for themselves. Often, these expectations are based solely upon the physical, which then translate into mental health issues. The person may develop low self-esteem, self-doubt, distrust, and become depressed. Moreover, the euphoria it induces can become compulsive and highly addictive because it stimulates certain hormones in our bodies. Like any controlled substance, it often requires more and more consumption to achieve the same effect. Consequently, it can consume much of our time, ruining healthy relationships and friendships.

Above all, both pornography and sexual immorality in general lead to self-centeredness and narcissism. People devote themselves to finding what they want, what suits their tastes, what benefits them, or what works best for them. It leads to a very distorted, one-sided view of a relationship. Instead of looking comprehensively at what they can contribute to the relationship, they look only at what they can get or receive. For these reasons, Paul admonishes us to flee all sexual immorality and unite

ourselves in Christ. Only when we unite ourselves with Christ adopting His righteous outlook can we have healthy, lasting relationships which meet God's specifications and fulfill His design.

Question  
# 10

In addition to problems listed here, what other problems does pornography, lust, and sexual immorality of any kind cause?

## *Inspire*

We live in the midst of an epidemic—not one of communicable diseases, but one of much greater consequence in sexual immorality. People literally parade their sexual exploits for all to see without a shred of decency or hint of shame. Innuendos, jokes, and risqué images flood our culture every day. We have apps that help people hook-up or cheat rather than develop intimate, lasting relationships as God intended. The percentage of people in pre-marital relations, extra-marital relations, co-habiting, and divorcing for unbiblical reasons remains high and is almost indistinguishable between the culture and the church. This should never be! God has called us to unite with Christ in His righteousness. He has called us to an intimate relationship with Him as expressed through service in the church but also through healthy personal relationships with our spouses and families.

## *Incorporate*

How do you guard yourself against temptation so that you remain pure and committed to Christ and the relationships He's given you?

What are the benefits of a lifetime relationship in the way that God designed it and not the lustful relationships that the world promotes?

*March 23, 2025*



# *United in Marriage*

*1 Corinthians 7:1-16*

Focal Verse:

"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."

1 Corinthians 7:4

## Introduce

In 2004, the morning worship had just concluded at Maberu Baptist Church on our final day of a two-week mission to Western Kenya. While on our way to Nairobi to catch our flight home, we would spend a couple of days recuperating and enjoying God's creation in Africa on a safari in the renowned Maasai Mara Game Reserve. So, members of the team hurriedly changed from their dress clothes, ate lunch, and said their goodbyes before boarding the three fifteen-passenger vans. While we got ready for the journey, the three drivers from Nairobi consulted with locals who informed them of a "shortcut" that would save several hours of travel. The promise to knock off a couple of hours from an otherwise five-hour trip on a well-established route was too much for them to resist. With no map, no GPS, and no familiarity with that region of Kenya, the three drivers took that advice, reassured that others would point them in the right direction along the way if needed.

As we left the church, everything seemed to go smoothly until a series of forks in the road prevented the drivers from finding any recognizable landmarks to guide them. When they finally stopped to ask for directions, a person pointed them in the right way, but informed them that the bridge was out and the vans would not be able to ford the river. So, he insisted we go another way. Even this "safer" way was fraught with peril as the dirt road became less and less navigable. Deep ruts from the recent rains caused the vans to slow to a crawl, rocking violently to and fro. Eventually, one large, deep puddle engulfed the entire road, but we simply had to press forward as the hours passed. This decision would ultimately turn into a disaster. One van became lodged in a quagmire of mud while the other two feverishly worked to free it. After around half-an-hour, a passing tractor fortunately lent a hand, freeing us to go on our way again.

The hours ticked forward and daylight began to dwindle on the plains of equatorial Africa some seven hours after we had begun our "five-hour" journey. When we finally arrived at the gate of the reserve, the drivers had to plead with the wardens to let us enter. The gates to the reserve closed approximately at sunset because the predators, like lions, began their nightly hunt for food. Fortunately, they allowed us to enter with the express instruction to head straight to the lodge where we had reservations. However, our adventure didn't end there. Because of the "shortcut" over the rough roads and getting stuck in the mud, it had loosened all the lug nuts on the wheel of one van, causing the tire to fall off in the middle of the game preserve at dusk. Although the drivers industriously tried to repair the tire, they couldn't. We had to pile

## Introduce

in the two remaining vans until the lodge could dispatch another van to rescue us. Around ten o'clock that night, at long last we arrived at the lodge—dusty, dirty, disheveled, tired, and hungry. What should have only taken us five hours on a well-known, well-marked route turned into an arduous journey of more than ten hours because we had taken an unfamiliar “shortcut!”

Many of you may be asking, “What does this story have to do with marriage?” Paul’s main point in writing chapter 7 is to encourage the Corinthians to be satisfied with wherever they find themselves in life ([1 Cor 7:17](#)). Whether single or married, we must be content with the journey on which God has called us to travel and with where He has placed us at that very moment. This doesn’t mean that our circumstances in life will never change, but that we must wait upon the Lord to direct our path rather than risk taking unfamiliar and unproven shortcuts! We must find our significance in Him which will ultimately translate into the other relationships that He may give us. Many times, however, the road or “shortcut” other than the one on which we are currently traveling may seem more promising and enticing.

People may attempt to persuade us to take these shortcuts, citing all the benefits and advantages they offer. For some, it may be pressuring someone to find a spouse while for others it may be to participate in unhealthy actions detrimental to their marriage and family. The grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence, however. If we fail to do it God’s way based on His timing according to His plan, it will often lead to trouble and heartache of our own doing. It may even turn into a complete disaster where we become distracted and disconnected from Him. In whatever situation we may find ourselves, whether married or single, we must learn to remain content. We must keep our eyes focused on Christ so that all our relationships are grounded upon His truth rather than taking the shortcuts that the world may urge us to follow.

Key  
Question

In life, particularly in relationships, how do you distinguish between the road God wants you to travel and a “shortcut” that you may desire to take on your own to expedite the process?



### 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

#### **RESPECT THE COVENANT:**

In this section of the letter, Paul somewhat switches gears. So far, he has spent much of the first part addressing problems in the church reported to him by its members ([1 Cor 1:11](#)). But now, he begins tackling some of their personal questions about which they had written him (v. 1). Every time we see the phrase “**now concerning**” in this second half of the letter, it alerts us to a new topic about which the Corinthians had written for clarification or additional information ([1 Cor 7:25](#); [8:1](#); [12:1](#); [16:1](#), [12](#)). The first issue Paul endeavors to address is the proper context for sexual intimacy. Before we can discuss what he says about this matter, however, we must first seek to understand the dynamic in the church lest we distort his instruction and misapply his words in our own day.

To understand the crux of this issue, we must go back to the beginning of the letter where Paul described how the church had divided itself into groups according to the personality of the preacher ([1 Cor 1:10-17](#)). Even within these groups, some likely further subdivided themselves because they had misconstrued and misapplied their leader’s teaching. In chapters 5 and 6, for example, we find a faction which had likely misunderstood what it meant to have liberty in Christ. They mistakenly believed that this freedom from sin and death gave them the ability to express themselves sexually in any way they wanted ([1 Cor 6:12-20](#))—even ways that would repulse the culture ([1 Cor 5:1](#)). As a counter response, another group over-reacted to this sinful indulgence by practicing asceticism where they would give up all pleasure in life—including the things which God has given us to enjoy in the right context. Thus, the pendulum began swinging hard in the opposition direction. So, they have written Paul to see which path was right.

With this background in mind, we can return to examine the phrase: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” Little debate exists as to the actual meaning of the statement. The expression to touch is a euphemism for physical intimacy in the same way Scripture delicately handles the conception of Cain by describing how “Adam knew Eve” ([Gen 4:1](#)). In fact, most modern translations make this explicitly clear by rendering the phrase as, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (NIV, CSB, ESV, NET) or even a more general prohibition “to abstain from sexual relations” (NLT). Although we don’t have the Corinthian’s exact question, it seems primarily to revolve around intimacy in marriage or, perhaps, whether one should even marry at all based upon Paul’s response here in chapter 7.

## Instruct

On the other hand, uncertainty surrounds the origin of this statement—specifically concerning who said it and why. The ascetic group in Corinth most likely coined this phrase. So, Paul repeats their slogan in order to qualify and correct it in verse 2. This errant prohibition by the ascetics could have arisen because of their misinterpretation of Jesus' teaching about the resurrection.



In Matthew 22:30, He tells His disciples, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." Consequently, some began viewing this teaching as a call to cease physical relations in the present. Since many in the Corinthian church thought they were already perfect and had experienced the resurrection in full in the present day, they prohibited any form of physical intimacy. Accordingly, they proposed that people who had already married should abstain from intimacy and those who had not married should remain single and celibate—both topics with which Paul deals in this chapter.

Question  
# 1

Besides physical intimacy, what are the other benefits of marriage?

Moreover, regarding this prohibition against intimacy as a catchphrase of the ascetics also seems to best fit the larger context of the letter as well. Because some in the church, perhaps mostly women, chose the path of foregoing physical relations in marriage, their husbands began seeking fulfillment through prostitutes ([1 Cor 6:15-16](#)). Yet, Paul doesn't blame the ascetic group for creating an "unhealthy" environment in marriage nor does he excuse the infidelity of the other since he has already strongly condemned all forms of sexual immorality ([1 Cor 6:12-20](#)); he merely points out the reality of the actions and takes steps to bring the church back in line with God's plan. From the beginning, God's plan for marriage was for man to be fruitful and multiply

([Gen 1:28](#)), but also to enjoy the benefits of companionship through a close, intimate relationship, including—but not limited to—sex ([Gen 2:18, 20](#)).

Because this slogan of the ascetic wing of the church was somewhat misguided, Paul challenges their thinking by correcting it. Verse two begins with the contrastive conjunction best translated as “but” (i.e., **nevertheless** in the NKJV). But, Paul says, **let each man have his own wife** and **each woman her own husband**. Again, the word “have” refers to physical intimacy within the context of marriage. Paul will make this even more explicit when he encourages husbands and wives to **render the affection due** their spouse (v. 3). The phrase render the affection due comes from the realm of finances and literally means “give [pay] what is owed.” Contrary to the way our world frequently operates, Paul does not focus on the right of spouses to receive some benefit, but rather he focuses on their willingness to give. After devoting ourselves completely to Christ above everything else, the goal in marriage should be the act of giving oneself to his or her spouse.

Although not explicitly stated, Paul likely bases his comments here on Genesis 2:24 which indicates that in marriage two have become one. He has already mentioned this verse in the previous chapter in connection with outlining the devastating effects of sexual sin in the church ([1 Cor 6:16-17](#)). Within the context of physical intimacy, both spouses share the responsibility in meeting the other’s needs because they have become one unified body under covenant with God. Thus, Paul reminds them both that they do **not have authority over** their **own** bodies, but rather they share in that responsibility together (v. 4). As one body united in Christ through marriage, each spouse should desire the best for the other! Rather than thinking purely as an individual about what we ourselves want, we must now think about how our actions will affect our spouses.

Question  
# 2

If the goal of marriage is to give oneself to your spouse, how do you accomplish this in a practical way in your own marriage?

No longer should we view our status in terms of “me” and “my”; we should see it as “we” and “our.” However, so many people find their relationships in trouble because they can never overcome this former mindset. They continue to maintain a self-centered worldview—often oblivious to the fact that they do. Therefore, they seek

## Instruct

what they can get or look at a relationship in terms of what it can offer them. With such a selfish view, they will begin looking elsewhere the moment they “feel” their “needs” have gone unmet. If both spouses dedicate to give of themselves completely to the other no need will ever be perceived to go unmet. This doesn’t mean that misunderstandings or disagreements won’t arise at times, but rather the couple will resolve them together in the best interest of their unified body. Consequently, we should never misuse these verses to tolerate selfishness or any form of abuse in a relationship under the guise of having the certain rights within the relationship—specifically the physical one Paul addresses here. Instead of demanding our rights and seeking to get our way, we should surrender our will to make sacrifices necessary to give our spouses what they need.

Having more generally discussed the selfless devotion required in every area of marriage above, let’s apply that more directly to the physical intimacy Paul discusses here. Physical intimacy should never be selfishly used as a tool of manipulation to get what one wants. This tactic usually occurs when one partner



intentionally withholds until the other gives in to a certain demand. In verse 5, Paul will identify this as defrauding or depriving the other what is due them. God created physical intimacy not only for the express purpose of procreation, but also as a means of showing loving and devotion by enabling spouses to connect on an even more intimate level. However, sex isn’t the primary conduit for displaying commitment and cultivating intimacy; it is only one avenue among others to express it.

Question  
# 3

If we “feel” our “needs” are not being met in a marriage relationship, why must we first take a step back and look at our own contributions?

In contrast to the ascetics’ promotion of abstinence even within marriage, Paul implores the married Corinthians **not to deprive one another except with consent**

**for a time** so they **may** devote themselves **to fasting and prayer and come together again so that Satan does not tempt** them **for their lack of self-control** (v. 5). **Deprive** literally means to defraud or swindle and is the same word used to describe the contentious lawsuits of 1 Corinthians 6:7-8. Based on the Greek construction here, we should actually translate it “stop defrauding (depriving) each other” since they were already practicing abstinence within marriage. Therefore, Paul wants them to stop defrauding or taking away that which rightfully belongs to the other partner! Within the context of marriage, couples should practice regular physical intimacy in their relationship at a time when both of them agree **because of** the temptation for **sexual immorality** and our human propensity to **lack self-control**.

Moreover, Paul leaves open the possibility that couples can abstain for **a time** so that they can concentrate on seeking the Lord through **fasting and prayer**. This period does not replace their daily devotion or quiet time they should have with the Lord; it simply adds an additional opportunity for them to concentrate on spiritual matters. In fact, as a couple, they should commit themselves first to Christ and pursue His righteousness daily which will ultimately strengthen their marriage. Furthermore, Paul also knows the importance of filling our lives with righteous activity when we lay aside something else. We as humans don't just cut something out of our lives; we always fill that empty void with something else. Unfortunately, if we are not grounded, we will tend to fill our lives with things that please us and seek to fulfill our desires. But Paul wants that void to be filled with something worthwhile and productive—namely **fasting and prayer**.

Paul, however, makes this assertion by way of **a concession** rather than **a commandment** (v. 6). We should view these remarks as guidelines that will help promote self-control and faithfulness in marriage. In other words, Paul doesn't command them to engage in physical intimacy as some mindless, manufactured, and inauthentic act just for the sake of pleasure, but rather he wants them to consider the



## Instruct

benefit that sharing such a bond with one's spouse offers as they strive to honor the Lord together as one body. He simply describes the act as a natural part of the marriage covenant. It's neither something to be forced or withheld, but an act consecrating the most sacred human institution God created. It represents a spontaneous act of commitment expressed by two individuals whom God has joined together in marriage for the purpose of forming a family that worships and serves Him through the stewardship of His creation. Physically, this represents the closest bond two people can share and we should not take it lightly as if some primal, animalistic instinct; we must regard it as a God-given blessing to be enjoyed through marriage.

In 2008, a local pastor challenged his married congregants to have sex for seven days. In 2012, he subsequently constructed an oversized bed on the roof of his church from which he and his wife would broadcast their discussion about physical intimacy for twenty-four hours which also so happened to coincide with his new book on the same topic. Although it did spur interest with media from all over the country and create conversation, it seemed like a gimmick no matter how one attempted to spin it. Paul, and no Scripture for that matter, commands married people to have sex other than the admonition to "be fruitful and multiply" which apparently was not the sole point of this pastor. Here in 1 Corinthians, more precisely, Paul specifically states that he makes these remarks by way of **a concession** and **not a commandment**—and this includes both abstaining from and participating in physical intimacy within marriage.

### In Reference

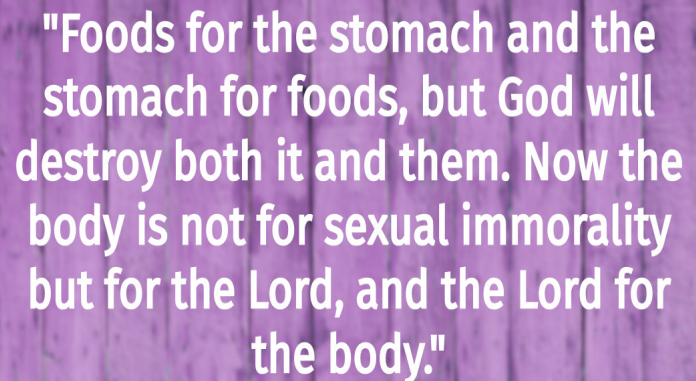


See n.d., "Pastor Challenges Congregation to Seven Days of Sex" (Nov 10, 2008) available from [nbcdfw.com](http://nbcdfw.com); Frank Heinz, "Pastor Ed Young, Wife to Stream in Bed on the Internet" (Jan 11, 2012) available from [nbcdfw.com](http://nbcdfw.com).

The decision to engage in physical intimacy should be a mutual one between a husband and wife to promote a healthy marriage as Paul suggests here. At the same time, the pursuit of sex should not overshadow service to the Lord as couple. Like Corinth, our culture has hyper-sexualized almost everything. Imagery bombards us and constantly steers our thoughts toward the matter. However, Paul merely proposes that we have a healthy balance—not that we focus primarily on sex even within the context of marriage. This becomes just as unhealthy as totally abstaining like some in this

Corinthian church did. The central component of marriage should always be seeking Christ first which will lend perspective to issues like physical intimacy. Unfortunately, as we have seen in our studies so far, the Corinthians often thought selfishly.

In order to understand and rightly apply Paul's teaching in these verses, we must make some crucial observations. Otherwise, it will seem that he has a low view of marriage which centers primarily around the sexual relationship therein. Paul in no way has such a low-brow view of marriage. On the contrary, these verses deal with a specific problem in the



"Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

1 Corinthians 6:13

Corinthian church and they focus on a single issue within the context of marriage: physical intimacy. As a result, Paul does not intend this brief discussion on a single topic to reflect a definitive and comprehensive portrait of everything God decreed that marriage should encompass! We need only to look at Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-21 as two examples of how marriage embodies much more than just sex. To Paul, the institution centers around devotion, love, faithfulness, and provision which cultivates an attitude of serving the Lord together along with the rearing of the family who does as well. As such, Paul can also use marriage to describe the relationship between Christ and the church because of the rich dynamic the relationship entails which provides an even deeper understanding of what human marriage should be. In addition, Scripture, as a whole, provides a comprehensive picture of what a godly marriage should be, including the physical intimacy discussed here, so we must analyze this covenant in terms of the overarching biblical discussion and not myopically limit it to the physical intimacy Paul addresses here!

Question  
# 4

How have some in our culture distorted what Paul says in these verses? What effects can that distortion have on marriages?

Furthermore, intimacy in marriage involves so much more than just a physical

## Instruct

relationship. Because Paul focuses on this single issue here doesn't mean that he has limited intimacy in marriage to sex. Countless books have been written about marriage and, like Paul, we can only treat the topic in very broad terms in such a short lesson. Nevertheless, the principles we can learn will serve us well when we apply them in our relationships. Certainly, we ought to have physical intimacy in marriage in the balanced way we have discussed, but we can also cultivate intimacy in many other ways too. As we briefly identify a few ways we can promote intimacy within marriage, use them to evaluate your own marriages and consider the practical ways you should or already do implement them. If we're single, we also should envision how to apply these principles biblically in our own relationships as we pray and prepare for our future spouse unless God has called us to a life of celibacy in Him.

First, we develop intimacy in marriage by having a time of prayer and Bible study together as a couple which binds our hearts in Christ and allows us to see our roles as husband and wife in unison with His perspective. This doesn't necessarily replace our personal quiet time, but supplements it by allowing us to come together as one flesh



to seek Him, keeping us on the same page as we seek Him together. Second, good communication fosters intimacy; this includes both knowing when to listen and when to speak. Moreover, we must learn to communicate our needs, concerns, and views clearly—not simply expect the other to read our mind or discern our body language even though the latter sometimes offers effective clues.

Third, we should spend meaningful, quality time together. We must continually pursue a relationship with our partner and invest in them in meaningful ways. This doesn't simply mean to be in the same room together with our eyes fixated on the tv or with our heads buried in our electronic devices. We must be intentionally engaged. When pursuing your spouse, did you constantly fiddle with your phone, text, check social media, or look at sports scores and news headlines? No, most likely if you did



your date would have been one and done. Certainly, like anything, we need a balance between personal time, family time, and time as a couple. Set aside time for date nights or other activities where you can meaningfully engage! Although we have only offered three areas, we have so many more that will cultivate intimacy in marriage. We do these things not because of a feeling it produces or something tangible that we can receive, but because love has motivated us to give of ourselves and seek the best for our spouses.

Question  
# 5

What other ways can we produce intimacy in our marriages that help unite us as a couple in Christ?

### 1 Corinthians 7:7-9

#### **EXERCISE CONTROL:**

In verse 7, Paul transitions to a slightly different topic by way of discussing his own personal circumstances. He wishes that **all men** could be **as** he himself is. Apparently, he refers to his singleness which gives him the freedom to undertake the gospel ministry with relative ease without encumbrance. He seems to identify himself either with the category of the **unmarried** or **widows** when he explains that **it is good for them to remain as** he is (v. 8). Traditionally, most have regarded the Apostle as a widower although nowhere in Scripture do we find a clear reference to his marital status like we do Peter, for example.

Even though he wishes **all** people had the freedom to proclaim the gospel like he does without worrying about familial responsibilities (see [1 Cor 7:32](#)), Paul understands that marriage and singleness are both **a gift** and God has called some to be married while others to remain single. Thus, he acknowledges that **each one has his own gift from God**. The word



translated **gift** is the same one he will later use in chapter 12 to refer to the spiritual gifts conferred upon us by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the church. Technically, the word means “grace gift.” Both marriage and singleness should be viewed as gifts of grace from the Lord—not in the exact same sense as the spiritual gifts—but as a calling whereby we can dedicate ourselves in service to Him. Regardless of whichever position God has called us, He expects us to **remain** pure in practice and faithful to Him in every area.

Question  
# 6

Just as we asked about marriage earlier, what benefits does being single have for those whom God has called in this lifestyle?

Based on US census data from 2023, nearly 40% of adults in Fort Worth, both male and female, have never been married. When combined with those who have been widowed or divorced, the number jumps to approximately 50%. Some of these statistics are obviously influenced by our society’s corrupted view of marriage and the number of people living together or having children but never marrying. The church must adopt a biblical position on this issue and not allow the culture to determine our outlook. Regardless of the reasons why people may choose to live together, whether convenience, financial, legal, or any other, in the eyes of God these individuals should commit to marriage or remain separated physically in terms of living arrangements. The same principle applies to the premarital promiscuity practiced without commitment by our society; we should not freely partake in such immorality, but commit ourselves to one person in marriage for a lifetime.

Paul makes it clear one should not participate in any sexual relationships outside of marriage because this indicates a lack of **self-control** and disregards the righteousness in which God has called us to live. Consequently, he makes it clear that **it is better to marry than burn** (v. 9). In the Greek text, Paul does not qualify the word **burn**. Most modern translations, however, will add the words *with passion, desire, or lust* to **burn** in an attempt to clarify it. On the other hand, Paul could very well be arguing that the unmarried Corinthians must exercise self-control lest they incur God’s wrath or judgment upon their sin (see [2 Cor 11:29](#) for a similar usage). Here in chapter 7, he may have both meanings in mind, so he leaves it rather broad and open-ended. Therefore, he encourages the unmarried to remain pure. If they cannot because they burn with passion, they should get married lest they face the indignation of the Lord burning

against their sin.

Although attitudes toward both singleness and marriage have somewhat shifted in recent years, the church still tends to be focused primarily on families. Often, other than perhaps widows, churches can overlook those who are single—even if only unintentionally.

Marriage is a **gift** of grace from the Lord as much as is singleness to those whom He has called. Singles are not second-class kingdom

citizens, but they are as equally vital members of the community as anyone else. No one may actually verbalize such an idea aloud about being second-class citizens, but our actions sometimes communicate it.

If married, we naturally tend to focus on our relationships with other married individuals, forgetting to check on singles and their social, physical, and mental well-being. Perhaps, we assume they have other single friends or family members with whom they can talk or share the struggles of life. Just look at how we may interact with singles in our Bible study groups or small groups outside of church-wide weekly functions. Do we invite singles to join us for a dinner or fellowship where we can have genuine conversations outside of a class-wide function? Do we check on them when sick? In what ways do we minister to them as compared those married couples? Please, however, understand that as with any relationship we must have safeguards in place so that spouses are not ministering alone to single members of the opposite gender, but couples and groups of couples can minister in a healthy way to singles together.



Question  
# 7

In what ways should churches ensure they incorporate singles into service and ministry as a whole?

Above all, allow God to use singles in the church in whatever way He so chooses without questioning their calling, criticizing their ability to minister, or challenging their

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qualifications. When I volunteered to start a ministry for young adults, I received mixed reactions. Frankly, some questioned whether I was the right choice because I am single. They didn't necessarily question my leadership capabilities or even my theological expertise; they did, however, question my ability to counsel and disciple young adults going on dates, seeking spouses, and having relationship problems. This, first of all, questions my calling by discounting the wisdom and insight God has given me. In addition, it doubts the discernment and discretion the Holy Spirit provides as He leads.

While not having “practical” experience, God can still inspire me to give practical application and counsel as I seek Him just like He would any pastor preaching on a Sunday morning. Although marriage has a unique set of challenges at times, much practical advice can be gleaned through Scripture from commonsense. Finally, although God has not yet brought a spouse into my life, it does not mean that I

have not spent hours pondering and praying about what a Christ-centered marriage should look like. If I had never done so, I would also be woefully unprepared to deal with other problems in the church since this relationship too in a way depicts a marriage between us and Christ! Overall, God can use single people in many ways—sometimes unexpected ways—in the church. We need to trust God and work alongside those whom He has called whether they remain single or married.



Question  
# 8

In what ways do churches, even if unintentionally, sometimes limit or even question the ability of singles to minister and serve?

In these three verses, Paul articulates his preference that people **remain** single if they can exercise self-control and not succumb to the promiscuity practiced widely in the culture. For Paul, the single lifestyle has many advantages which help in the spread

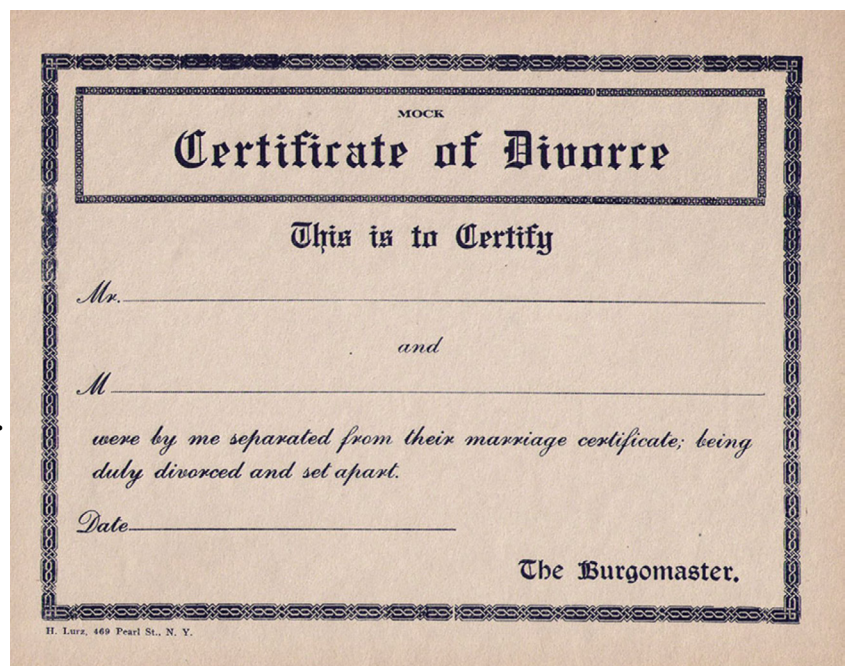
of the gospel. Singles, for instance, can concentrate on their service with Christ instead of the responsibilities with their families. They also have the freedom to be more spontaneous and mobile, taking the gospel wherever and whenever God calls without being tied down to specific location as their responsibilities permit. Paul will address this topic again in the second half of this chapter which we will study next week, so at that time we will discuss these things more in depth.

## 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

### REMAIN COMMITTED:

After taking a brief moment to address singles, Paul once again focuses on those who are married. He begins by issuing a **command** from **the Lord** that **a wife should not leave her husband** (v. 10). Before discussing the meaning of this **command**, we must understand why Paul differentiates between a **command** from **the Lord** (v. 10) and the introductory phrase “**but to the rest I, not the Lord, say**” (v. 12). In the former, Paul intends to show that the **command** comes directly from **the Lord** as found in Scripture—for example the prohibition against **divorce** to which he refers in verses 10 and 11. Conversely, when Paul writes, **I say, not the Lord**, it is not an issue directly addressed by Scripture, but insight which God has granted to Paul on the matter at hand. This, however, doesn’t make Paul’s response any less authoritative or binding. God still inspired Paul to write it as a directive to be applied by the church. Therefore, God still expects us to abide by it just as though He had written it explicitly in the Old Testament Scripture!

With this understanding, we can return to discuss the **command** which has been given: “**A wife is not to depart from her husband.**” Paul qualifies this by adding, **if she does** leave, she should **remain unmarried** or **be reconciled to her husband** (v. 11). To husbands, Paul instructs them **not to divorce** their wives. Both prohibitions essentially deal with **divorce**. Since Roman women



could not initiate **divorce** proceedings, to depart or leave carries the same connotation as divorce in this setting. In contrast, only men could legally initiate divorce—and that for any reason. In either case, Paul tells both husbands and wives not to divorce their spouses. This command comes directly from God Himself who “hates divorce” ([Mal 2:16](#)) and has strictly regulated it ([Deut 24:1-4](#)). In the New Testament, Jesus also reiterates the sanctity of marriage by condemning the practice of divorce by saying, “Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (see [Matt 5:31-32](#); [19:3-9](#); [Mark 10:2-12](#)).

In verse 12, Paul now deals with a specific issue facing the church in Corinth. As a new church with many Gentile converts, some in a household had become Christians while their spouses remained pagan which sometimes caused tension. Therefore, Paul advises the believing spouse on what they should do—whether they should leave a marriage that is “unequally yoked” or how they should respond if their spouse leaves. If any believing husband (i.e., **brother**) or wife (i.e., **woman**) has a spouse **who does not believe**, they should not seek a **divorce** if the non-believing partner **is willing to live with** them (vv. 12-13). Conversely, if the unbelieving spouse chooses to depart, **a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases**, for **God has called us to peace** (v. 15).

Question  
# 9

Since Paul only addresses those who are already married, why should a believer never date or even marry an unbeliever? What is the danger of even dating an unbeliever?

For most, the first scenario on which Paul gives advice is clear. The believer should **not** under any circumstances initiate **divorce**, but instead he or she should live peaceably with an unbelieving spouse who consents to continue the marriage. The second scenario is also clear in that a believer **is not under bondage** if the unbelieving spouse decides to leave; what is somewhat unclear, however, is whether such abandonment permits remarriage. The expression **under bondage** seems to convey the meaning of having no obligation in the sense of being free from the conditions of the contract or covenant. In verse 39, Paul uses similar language in describing how the death of a spouse releases the other from the terms of the covenant and allows remarriage. Hence, it seems as though Paul allows for the possibility of remarriage in the case of an unbelieving partner

abandoning the believer.

In no way can we efficiently deal with the complex issue of divorce and remarriage in a single lesson on Sunday morning. Yet, by way of summary, we need to understand what the Bible says about the matter. God hates divorce for any reason ([Mal 2:16](#); [Luke 16:18](#)), but because of man's sinfulness He has permitted it in two very specific situations. Jesus, for example, allows divorce in the



case of sexual immorality or adultery ([Matt 5:31-32](#); [19:3-9](#); [Mark 10:2-12](#)). And, based on 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, divorce is permissible when an unbeliever leaves a believer primarily because the unbelieving spouse initiated it. Although God permits divorce under these two circumstances, believers should attempt to reconcile and restore the relationship if possible. Divorce is never preferable and should be only the last resort if all other reconciliation fails. Just because God permits divorce because of mankind's sin doesn't mean that it becomes a mandate for it; God has called us as believers to seek reconciliation first ([2 Cor 5:21](#)).

Question  
# 10

Why should reconciliation always be our first course of action instead of divorce?

What should we do in the case of abuse? Any form of abuse, whether physical, mental, or sexual, is wrong and should not be tolerated in marriage ([Eph 5:28-29](#)). In our country, legal ramifications exist for provable cases of abuse and should be reported to law enforcement for prosecution. In fact, if we see abuse or another person confides in us about being abused, we are obligated by law to report it. At the same time, the spouse being abused must remove him or herself from the situation. No one should ever put themselves in danger. As in the two cases cited above, we should still attempt to reconcile the marriage rather than immediately jump to divorce. However,

## Instruct

this requires safeguards to be put into place. Certainly, counseling must occur. The person must show a recognition of the problem and a willingness to change. If not, permanent separation is in order because one cannot put his or her life in danger to live with such a spouse. God never intended the lasting marriage covenant to be used as a means to endure abuse.

Question  
# 11

What are some of the safeguards we must put into place when trying to reconcile?

Although Scripture does permit divorce in certain situations, remarriage becomes a different issue altogether since Jesus equates it to adultery ([Luke 16:18](#)). Most divorce today doesn't fit into the three categories discussed above. Most occur for petty reasons. Couples can't get along or they claim they have "fallen" out of love. No-fault divorce has made it easy to call it quits. Nevertheless, God detests this lack of respect for the marriage covenant. If a believer does divorce under these circumstances, he or she should not remarry. Scripture clearly compares their remarriage to adultery and living in sin.

Does Scripture permit remarriage in the case of sexual immorality, abandonment, or abuse? To be honest, Scripture does not make a definitive declaration one way or the other. Generally, the church views remarriage as permissible under these circumstances as long as steps have been taken to seek reconciliation first. Nevertheless, each believer facing such a decision must seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and not allow emotion to determine his or her actions. If we truly seek the Lord on the matter, He will never mislead us. But so many people don't seek Him. They allow their emotions and desires to dictate their decisions. Remarriage under any circumstance should be prayerfully considered because second marriages statistically have

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

2 Corinthians 5:21



an even higher rate of ending in divorce.

Returning to our text, Paul urges a believer to remain with an unbelieving spouse so that he or she might set a good example and point them to salvation in Christ. He argues that the **unbelieving** spouse **is sanctified** through **the other and the children are now holy otherwise they would be unclean** (v. 14). He follows this assertion with a question to both believing husbands and wives: **“How do you know whether you will save your spouse”** (v. 16)? Paul is *not* saying that the unbelieving partner is somehow saved vicariously through the marriage! Rather, it means that God uses the holy or believing partner to lead the non-believing partner into a relationship with Him through the consistent Christ-like character they display in their lives (see [1 Peter 3:1](#)).

To apply this teaching correctly, we must remember that Paul is speaking to those who were already married—where one partner became a believer after they were already united. No one should ever date or marry another person with the thought that they will change or convert them! Paul explicitly tells us not to be unequally yoked in a relationship because non-believing practices tend to rub off more easily on believers than vice versa ([1 Kings 11:4](#)). If one is already married, however, the believer must live an exemplary life as a testament to the Lord. The unbelieving spouse and children should clearly see Christ in the believing spouse’s actions. In many cases, the persistence of the believing spouse may lead the non-believing spouse to a point of recognition their own need for salvation and responding to Christ’s call!

## *Inspire*

In life, sometimes we covet or become envious of the path other people have taken. That path seems to offer so much more satisfaction and fulfillment than the one on which we currently travel. The world even promises us shortcuts that will help us achieve our goals and realize our dreams much faster. But then we realize how difficult these shortcuts have actually made our journey. Instead of following the advice of the world, we must seek and follow the plan of God for our lives. We must be satisfied with whatever state He has called us to be in life—whether married or single. Our goal should not be to please ourselves, but to serve our Lord who saved us from sin and death. Whether God has called us to be married or to remain single, we must be content with the road He has called us to travel in life, finding our worth, satisfaction, and fulfillment ultimately in Him and nothing else.

## *Incorporate*

In what tangible ways as a couple / family, do you dedicate yourselves to the service of the Lord together? What effect has such service had upon your family?

For couples, what does a healthy balance between serving the Lord, cultivating your relationship as a couple, and rearing a family look like in today's world?

As a single, are you more dedicated to the pursuit of a spouse than the pursuit of the Lord? What is the danger of this type of focus? Why should we pursue God first and a spouse second?

*March 30, 2025*



*United in our Walk*  
*1 Corinthians 7:17-40*

Focal Verse:

“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.”

1 Corinthians 7:17

## Introduce

In the gym of my high school in Madisonville, Kentucky hung a plaque commemorating Frank Ramsey's induction into the National Basketball Association's Hall of Fame. During his outstanding basketball career, Ramsey played as a guard for the University of Kentucky from 1950 to 1954, leading the team to a National Championship in 1951. Subsequently, the Boston Celtics drafted him in the first round as the fifth overall pick in 1953. In nine seasons with the Celtics from 1954 to 1964, he contributed significantly to the team's seven titles under legendary coach Red Auerbach. Although one of the team's best players, he usually came off the bench rather than start, limiting his playing time to the equivalent of two quarters today. Under Auerbach's direction which truly revolutionized basketball, Ramsey became the NBA's first "sixth man"—a role which plays a such pivotal part of the game today.

Most people with Ramsey's talent would aspire to become a starter so they could make a name for themselves and possibly even become the face of the franchise. They would despise coming off the bench. They would probably complain about the lack of playing time, particularly because it would severely limit their stats. Most would even demand a trade to a team where they could start. But Ramsey never did. He knew his role and he accepted it. In an interview with the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, he humbly describes his perspective, "I knew I was playing behind two all-star guards in Bob Cousy and Bill Sherman. They were established pros when I got there. So I didn't take it as an affront."\*



Ramsey could have been jealous of his teammates' positions and he could have become bitter, believing that the Celtics had missed an opportunity to utilize his skills fully. Most likely, this would have created animosity amongst his teammates, frustration from his coaches, and dysfunctional play on the court no matter how talented the team may have been overall. On the contrary, Ramsey fulfilled his role with a sense of duty

## Introduce

in quiet confidence. He played whatever role or position the coaching staff asked of him. He rightly understood his purpose as contributing in meaningful ways to help his team win. To him, it didn't matter how he did it. It didn't matter whether he came off the bench, how much time he played, or even the recognition he may receive. It only mattered that he played a vital role in his team's victory in whatever role and whatever situation he found himself in at that particular moment.

In his advice to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul shared a similar outlook to Ramsey's. Paul reminds the church that it doesn't matter in what role we may find ourselves at the moment: Jew or Gentile, enslaved or free, or single or married. What does matter is how we use our position and circumstances in life to glorify Christ and advance His agenda—the gospel. Like an assignment given by a coach, we must accept whatever role to which God has called us in that moment and walk worthy of our calling. Rather than complain and criticize, we should seek to contribute to the growth of the kingdom. As God's people, may we be united in our walk—whether God has called us to a highly visible role as a starter so to speak or whether he has asked us to contribute off the bench in a less visible, more behind-the-scenes way. Whatever we do may we do it for the glory of the Lord!

Key  
Question

How do you use your position and circumstances in life to participate in the work of ministry with the purpose of glorifying Christ?

## In Reference



Jerry Tipton, "One of UK's All-time Greats has Died Kentuckian Frank Ramsey the Original Sixth Man," *Lexington Herald-Leader* (July 8, 2018), available from [kentucky.com](http://kentucky.com).

### 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

#### **WALK IN YOUR CALLING:**

Since he has dealt with several widely divergent topics in such a brief span, Paul now offers a general summary of his argument thus far so that the Corinthians don't lose sight of his main point. He urges them to remain in whatever situation or circumstance God had **called** them at the time of their conversion (v. 17). The way we **walk**—including both how we perceive the world and how we interact with it—will change because Christ has made us a new creation in Him, but this does not mean that our position and social status to which God had previously appointed (i.e., **distributed**) us will also immediately change. No longer should we selfishly participate in sinful deeds to gratify our own desires; however, we should now use our position to serve Christ selflessly, walking in love and righteousness as a testament to our salvation in Him for all to see.

To be clear, we must define what we mean by position or social status. This would include things like our career, citizenship, financial situation, educational pursuits, or marital status to name a few. When Christ saves us, for example, we don't immediately seek to change careers or even stop working altogether—unless by some chance we are involved in an illegal or immoral profession. Instead, we now use our career as a means to live out our salvation through the righteous way we **walk**. Certainly, elements of visible change in our lives will accompany our salvation, but our salvation doesn't upend everything to which God had previously appointed us and **called** us in life. Over time, things like our career and financial situation may change, but we must always remember to serve God by the way we **walk** regardless of the circumstances in which we may currently find ourselves!

To help us grasp this important point, recall Jesus' interaction with a chief tax collector from Jericho named Zacchaeus which radically changed his life. Even though his acceptance of Jesus' call to



salvation at the dinner in his home completely changed his course and altered his perspective on life, it didn't cause Zacchaeus to quit his job as a tax collector. On the other hand, it did influence the way he conducted himself as a tax collector—showing a stark contrast between his life before and his life after his encounter with Jesus. As a chief tax collector, no longer would Zacchaeus swindle and extort his clients or coerce those under his charge to do so. As a sign of both his repentance and commitment, he vowed to give half his possessions to the poor and to repay anyone whom he had wronged fourfold ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). Zacchaeus didn't give up his profession as a tax collector, but now instead used his position as a way to serve the Lord!

Each of us must also look at our position in life as a means to serve the Lord. Others must see Christ in us. It must be evident in the way we **walk**. Although our position in life may not radically change, our **walk** should. There should be a clear difference in our lives before and after we answered Christ's call to salvation. We must utilize our positions to serve Christ. For this reason, Christians should not aspire to climb the corporate ladder by unscrupulous practices, slandering others, or lying on their resumes. Instead, one should work hard and display Christ whether or not he or she gets a promotion or raise ([Eph 6:5-9](#)). We must **walk** worthy of Christ in our position. Christians should not participate in shady business practices—such as false advertisements of sales or pushing for unnecessary purchases to get a commission—even if standard in the industry. We must walk worthy of Christ in our position! He will ultimately meet our needs so we can focus on representing Him through our righteous **walk**.

Question  
#1

In what ways, can you use your position and circumstances in which God has called you right now as a testament to Him?

Paul notes that he directs (i.e., **I ordain**) **all the churches** to engage in this same practice. He isn't instructing the Corinthians to do something new or even do something that he himself won't do. On the contrary, Paul practiced this very same principle in his own life. He used his secular occupation as a tentmaker to support his mission so he wouldn't place undue financial burden on the church ([1 Thess 2:1-12](#)). Moreover, he undoubtedly declared the gospel verbally while he worked, setting a good example for others to follow. Based upon Paul's discussion so far, the key question for us then becomes: How can I best serve God in the position in which He **has called**

me right now? Instead of seeking to change our position or even the external environment around us, may we use what God has given us and where He has placed us to glorify Him in the way we **walk** through these circumstances.

To reinforce his point about accepting our current position in the world while living out our salvation in Christ, Paul applies this principle to two new scenarios. In the first scenario, he asks, “**Was anyone called** [to salvation] **while circumcised**” (v. 18)? He argues **let him not become uncircumcised**. Likewise, those whom God **called while uncircumcised** should **not**

That you would walk worthy  
of God who calls you into His  
own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:12

be compelled to **be circumcised**. Paul emphatically declares that neither **circumcision** or **uncircumcision** matter in the grand scheme of things; rather, what does matter **is keeping the commandments** of God (v. 19). For all the emphasis that the Jews assigned to the practice of **circumcision**, it was still only an outward sign. It didn't actually change the physical identity or position of the person in relation to the covenant. Only God's gracious invitation to participate in the covenant could change a person's status which he freely offered to all. After accepting God's invitation to join the covenant, people expressed their participation through their character. What truly mattered then was one's obedience and faithfulness to the Lord—not some superficial outward sign like **circumcision** ([1 Sam 15:22](#); [Prov 21:3](#); [Hosea 6:6](#); [1 John 5:3](#)). Thus, our good works should always flow out of our gratitude for graciously being included in the covenant through the salvation Christ has offered ([John 14:15](#)).

Here, Paul incorporates the categories **circumcised** (Jew) and **uncircumcised** (Gentile) in reference to the two ethnic groups rather than the literal religious practice which caused tension in churches like Galatia. Overall, this ritual serves as a good illustration because one cannot change his ethnicity no matter how hard he may try. Participating in a surgical procedure doesn't make a Gentile a Jew! They are now simply a Gentile or God-fearer who follows Jewish practice. Although they adhere to Jewish ritual and abide by the law, they retain their distinctive position or identity as a



Gentile! Reciprocally, the Jews would have fared the same way had they tried to follow Gentile practices. Nothing either of the two groups did could change their ethnic identity. Mere religious ritual doesn't change one's position or status. Only Christ can change the heart by His grace through our faith!

So, what point does Paul intend to make? Christ has overcome all artificial social distinctions and offered salvation freely to anyone who will accept it. In Galatians 3:28, Paul makes this point crystal clear when he asserts, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." With regards to our opportunity for salvation, our background doesn't matter. Christ has removed any social barrier which could have potentially hindered us from coming to the knowledge of salvation through the gospel. Through Him, therefore, we all have equal access to salvation and eternal life! At the same time, however, God hasn't totally removed us from our current position in life. He hasn't abolished roles, blurred the distinction between genders, or removed the different socio-economic classes. He has merely guaranteed life to all—whether Jew or Gentile—who will receive it through Christ.

Whether Jew or Gentile, we should use our position to glorify Christ and not get caught up in arbitrary social distinctions that have no bearing on our salvation. At the same time, however, the gospel does not completely cancel these God-given roles or social distinctions. We retain these same positions that we had before we began our relationship with

Christ. Whether God has called you as single or married, a husband or wife, a father or mother, an employer or employee, or as wealthy or poor, we must **walk** carefully so that we bring honor to the Lord in whatever position we currently hold. After all, Jesus commands us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Therefore, Paul concludes this illustration with the admonition that **each** person should **remain in the same calling in which he**

For I am not ashamed of the  
gospel of Christ, for it is  
the power of God to salvation for  
everyone who believes, for the  
Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 1:16

**was called** (v. 20).

Question  
# 2

What social distinctions or positions in life may people have that they think they must change before they can accept Christ? Why do these things not matter for salvation?

In the second scenario, Paul discusses the positions of **slave** and free. Once again, he introduces the example through a rhetorical question: “**Were you called** [to salvation] **while a slave**” (v. 21)? At this time, slaves were more like indentured servants who had agreed to pay their debts through servitude contracted for a specific period of time. While forced slavery of conquered foreign countries as well as slavery for other reasons did exist, the vast majority of slavery in the Roman Empire resulted from personal debt. As a result, slaves hailed from almost every walk of life. Many were highly skilled and educated, such as teachers, philosophers, doctors, and the like. Slavery, therefore, played an integral part of the Roman economy and estimates indicate that nearly one-quarter of the population were enslaved. Consequently, because of this high percentage, many more of those in the early church like Corinth would have been slaves rather than free.

Nevertheless, believers should focus on using their position as a **slave** to serve Christ rather than constantly striving to elevate their position in society as the culture teaches us to do. In fact, Paul exhorts them **not** worry **about** their situation, but instead they should make the most of it by turning it into an opportunity for ministry by living as Christ. When we fill our lives with the things of Christ instead of allowing our desires and personal ambitions to dictate our pursuits in life, God will take care of the rest. Thus, we should be anxious about nothing, for God will order our steps according to His divine plan. When we pursue the Lord, God will place us where we will be most effective for the ministry unto which He has called us at that very moment.

Therefore, Paul argues that if they can be made free, they should seek their freedom and continue to use it as an opportunity to serve the Lord. Preferably, as a free person not bound to anyone, they would have an even greater ability to serve the Lord—just like those who are unmarried ([1 Cor 7:33](#)). They would no longer have to abide by the boundaries and constraints that their masters set for them; they could serve the Lord freely. We see an example of this in the book of Philemon. Paul offers to

## Instruct

pay anything that Onesimus owed to Philemon in hopes that it might free him to return to service on the mission field. As a word play on Onesimus' name, Paul notes that he wasn't useful to either he or Philemon in his former state, but now that Christ had saved him, Onesimus had become useful as a minister of the gospel.

To underscore his point about serving in any position in which we may find ourselves, Paul further explains that **he who is called while a slave is the Lord's freedman** and, **likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave** (v. 22). Therefore, he reminds the Corinthians that they **were bought with a price** so they should **not become slaves of men** (v. 23).

Here, Paul makes a play on words with the term redemption (i.e., **bought with a price**) to reinforce that whether they were enslaved or free at the time of their conversation they both belong to Christ. Christ paid the **price** to redeem them both from sin (see [1 Cor 1:30](#)). Therefore, it really doesn't matter whether they are slave or free; they all belong to the Lord so they should serve Him in whatever position they may find themselves. For emphasis, Paul concludes this section by reiterating that **each one should remain with God in the state in which he was called** (v. 24).

Whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

Philemon 1:13

### Question # 3

What are some worries that we may experience in our current situations in life that have the tendency to distract us from our purpose of serving the Lord? How can we overcome those distractions?

Paul's advice to **remain** content where we are does not mean that we can never actively seek to change our situation or position at times, for this would conflict with the ability to marry which he will examine in the next section. Rather, it means that we must have our priorities in order. We cannot allow ourselves to become so consumed with changing our positions or circumstances in life that we sideline God and forget

to minister in the moment to which He has currently appointed us. We cannot become so hyper-focused on achieving our desires and aspirations that we miss what God has assigned us to do right now! And this can easily happen when we become focused on our position or standing in life rather than the person of Christ ([Heb 12:1-2](#)).

Because Paul discusses marriage next, let's take dating as our case study in how we should still serve Christ while managing our current state of affairs. Yet, we must also realize these same principles apply to any stage in life whether we are seeking a career change, a change in financial status, having children, planning for retirement, and so forth. Nevertheless, for those of us who may be seeking a spouse, we need to have the right balance between serving the Lord, seeking His guidance, and actively pursuing our options. We certainly should pray persistently and consistently for guidance in seeking a spouse, but that should not be the sole focus of our prayer time. We must hear God speak about other issues in our lives too and not become too emotionally consumed with pursuing a spouse that we miss out on a relationship with God Himself. We can become so involved and invested in this one area that we no longer live a balanced life and other areas suffer because we spend all our time and resources seeking to change our position. This is the very mindset Paul warns us against!

Moreover, we cannot allow our pursuit of a spouse to consume our time and thoughts either. People can find themselves consumed with online dating APPS, going to singles events, or being on the hunt so to speak even at church that they miss the opportunities God has given them to minister in the moment! While people must actively seek



to meet others, we cannot forget that God has called us to **walk** in righteousness in the moment. We still must serve the Lord. We must still evangelize. We must still have healthy relationships in the church. Certainly, we must put forth an effort to change our position if God **has called** us to do so, but this will happen naturally according to God's plan if we seek Him and serve Him through our current position in life. If not, we must

## Instruct

accept our calling and continue serving—not becoming bitter or discouraged, but learning to trust God in all things.

Question  
# 4

Although we primarily discussed dating, what other things in which we may seek a change in position have an adverse effect on our ministry for the Lord?

### 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

#### **WALK AS HEAVENLY CITIZENS:**

In verse 25 with the words **now concerning**, Paul begins to address a second question the Corinthians had written him in a previous letter. Based on the context they appear to be asking whether engaged or betrothed couples should continue with their plans to wed or whether they should break off the engagement and remain single. To introduce the topic, Paul writes rather tersely: **now concerning virgins**. Depending on the context, the Greek word can mean **virgins** just as we would understand the term (NKJV, NIV, CSB, NASB), engaged women (ESV), or young women of marriageable age but not necessarily virgins (NLT, NET). It seems, however, that **virgins** is the best translation since Paul uses three separate Greek words in 7:34 to distinguish between **wives, virgins, and unmarried women**. Therefore, Paul appears to be speaking to a godly couple contemplating what God would have them do in terms of marriage.

In answering their question, however, Paul admits that he has **no commandment from the Lord**, but that God has still given him discernment on the issue. We discussed an issue last week in 7:10 and 7:12 where Paul made similar remarks. The same principle applies to this situation as well. Paul acknowledges that Scripture contains no direct discussion about the matter they raised, yet God has still given him spiritual insight on how to handle it. Even though God hasn't given a specific **commandment** regarding the topic, this doesn't make the



response any less authoritative or binding. God still inspired Paul to write it which he qualifies by stressing how **the Lord in His mercy made it trustworthy**. In other words, **the Lord** provided the basis for this answer and He expects the church to abide by it and apply it to their situation.

Before we can delve into a specific analysis of Paul's answer, we need to reconstruct the historical background and setting of the passage so that we have the right framework for interpretation. Over the years, two main ways of viewing the situation described here have arisen. Traditionally, the church has regarded this as a reference to fathers giving their virgin daughters in marriage—primarily based upon verse 38. However, some elements in the passage make this view less likely. First, the word "father" never appears; the mention of "**a man**" refers to the fiancée or the one contemplating marriage; thus, the masculine pronoun, **he**, throughout this passage refers to the fiancée not the father.

Second, the term translated "**he who gives her in marriage**" can also simply mean "marry" (v. 38). Literally, the Greek states: "So then he who marries his own virgin." In more modern English captured by many of the more recent translations, it reads, "So then he who marries his fiancée" (NLT, ESV, CSB, NET). Third, if it does refer to the father of the daughter, it makes it more difficult to understand what it would mean to behave **improperly** toward her unless merely in the context of depriving her of the opportunity to marry (v. 36).

The second view of this passage corresponds more with the historical setting in Corinth that we have already established (see the lesson on March 23). The ascetics who have misunderstood Jesus' teaching about the resurrection ([Matt 22:30](#)) which they had believed had already happened in full have stopped having physical intimacy in marriage and had also begun to encourage the currently unmarried members of the congregation not to marry. Because of this teaching, couples who had already gotten engaged were now re-evaluating whether they should marry or remain single. In this passage, therefore, Paul speaks directly to young men in Corinth contemplating whether to break off their engagement. With this background, we can rightly understand and apply Paul's teaching in this passage.

With the declaration **I suppose** or think, Paul discusses his personal thoughts on the matter (v. 26). He lands on the side of preferring to **remain** single and celibate, but ultimately leaves the decision to each couple as guided by the Holy Spirit. He believes

**that it is good for a man to remain as he is because of the present distress.** The term **distress** metaphorically refers to any kind of trouble or hardship a person must endure. For instance, Jesus employs the term to describe the events that will precede His second coming, “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be *great distress* in the land and wrath upon this people” ([Luke 21:23](#)).

To describe it as “**present**” **distress**, however, has perplexed some. Besides the inner turmoil within the church itself leading to dysfunction, sickness, and death (see [1 Cor 11:30](#)), the city of Corinth itself endured no especially difficult hardships during this time other than the daily grind to meet one’s needs. Moreover, although persecution for Christians existed in pockets, it had not yet become widespread or intense throughout the Roman Empire. So, it seems that Paul’s use of the term **distress** coincides with Jesus’ teaching on his second coming. He wanted the Corinthians to focus on their commitment, service, and ministry in preparation for Jesus’ second coming since He could return at any moment.

"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!  
For there will be great distress in the land  
and wrath upon this people."

Luke 21:23

Question  
# 5

In what specific ways have you made preparations for the coming distress that will precede Jesus’ return?

Again, Paul spells out the principle which he has advocated from the beginning of the discussion: **remain** as you are. To emphasize his point, he asks, “**Are you bound to a wife**” (v. 27)? To which he replies, “**Do not seek to be loosed.**” At first glance, we may think Paul is talking about marriage and divorce, but these are not the usual terms to describe these actions! Rather, Paul is addressing those who are already engaged. We must remember that engagements in antiquity were more legally binding than in our own day. In this case, the NIV actually captures the sense of Paul’s words best: “Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released.” In other words, Paul suggests that

they proceed with the marriage as planned and not allow the teachings of the ascetics to dissuade them. Likewise, the second question, “**Are you loosed from a wife,**” follows the same basic premise of the first: “Are you unmarried and uncommitted to someone?” Thus, **do not seek a wife**. Just as he had done earlier with married couples, Paul instructs engaged couples and single individuals to **remain** where they are, but also to follow through with their commitments.

Even though Paul prefers the single life so that he can concentrate on ministry, he carefully qualifies his remarks. **If** the couple decides to **marry**, they **have not sinned** (v. 28). After all, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone when He created him, so He instituted marriage to fulfill that need.

Marriage, therefore, is something good because God ordained and sanctioned it.

**Nevertheless**, Paul reveals that married couples **will have trouble in the flesh** and he wants to **spare** them of this. Again, it seems as if Paul has a completely negative view of marriage equating it with being full of **trouble**. The word translated **trouble** is different from the one translated **distress** earlier. This **trouble** most likely refers to the struggle to meet daily needs to provide for the family (see v. 33; [Eph 5:28-29](#)). While a single person also faces such a struggle in life, marriage intensifies it because now one must be more concerned with meeting the needs of his family too! Paul doesn't have a negative view of marriage; he simply points out the reality of the struggle to provide for one's family. With this struggle intensified beyond only caring for oneself, it means less time spent on ministry and more time spent on providing for those needs.



Question  
# 6

What needs are there in a family setting or marriage with which a single person may not necessarily need to deal?



Several weeks ago, the Alegres asked me to babysit their newborn daughter. As a single, I figured it was merely a matter of trial and error. If Aerith cried, I would first check one end and then the other to determine why and then take steps to resolve the problem. Carolann, however, left me a long list of instructions and then had a detailed training session ready for when I arrived, including feeding, changing, swaddling, and so much more. She had also written their address on a white board in case of an emergency should I need to call 911. Unlike most people, however, I had no anxiety because of years of training with senior adults.

Nonetheless, I still had additional responsibility more than just for myself. I had to concentrate on carrying out the wishes of the parents as well as meeting Aerith's needs. I couldn't do any of the things that I had planned to do—including finish work for church. I couldn't even eat because she would cry if I laid her in her crib and she couldn't see me. So, I improvised and ate my sandwich while standing over her cradle. While everything went smoothly and it was a joy to care for her, I had additional responsibilities in meeting someone else's needs and not just my own. Marriage is much the same. While it is a joy and benefit to each person in the relationship, it comes with strings attached. No longer can we just focus on our needs individually; we must meet the needs of others which limits the time we can spend on ministry.

Like last week, we must remember that Paul is addressing only one aspect of marriage. Marriage does come with more responsibility, but it also has many benefits. While we do need to meet the needs of our spouses, they also partner with us to help meet ours. Therefore, they also play a pivotal role in serving the Lord together! On my own, I have just as many weekly tasks in my life as a married couple, but must complete them all by myself. I must cook, do the dishes, go to the grocery, clean the house, do laundry, mow the lawn, pay the bills, and run errands. This does place serious demands on my time with additional responsibilities as a pastor. Couples, though they have added responsibility, share in the work together. As a result, they can



also minister together in the same way if they would intentionally schedule time. Even more importantly, couples have someone to listen, to confide in, and generally share the trials and triumphs of life together. Consequently, having a spouse allows us to have a different perspective of things at times and consider other viewpoints that we may not necessarily see as a single person.

Question  
# 7

What other benefits does marriage have in allowing us to serve the Lord together effectively?

Paul reminds the Corinthians that **the time is short** (v. 29). Jesus could return at any moment like a thief in the night so they must be prepared; they must be focused on doing the things that God has called them to do. To stress this point, Paul speaks hyperbolically. He contends that **from now on those who have wives should live as though they** don't. He also asserts that **those who weep as though they** do not; **those who rejoice as though they** do not; and **those who buy as though they** do not own anything (v. 30). He continues to advocate that **those who use the world as though they** do not rely on it fully **because the form of this world is passing away** (v. 31).

Paul isn't telling husbands to shirk their responsibilities and forsake their families or ordering people to stop weeping and rejoicing. He isn't suggesting that people sell everything they own in preparation for the second coming. On the contrary, he highlights their newfound responsibility in Christ to use all their resources and energy for His glory in the promotion of the gospel. They should have a heavenly mindset and use what time they have left here on earth to focus on ministry! Thus, the Corinthians should have a new outlook. They should focus on Christ rather than their circumstances; they should invest in the eternal rather than the temporal, serving the Lord as He has called them.

Question  
# 8

In our world, what does a heavenly mindset look like? What eternal things do you and your family invest in?

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

**WALK WITHOUT CARE(WORRY):**

Again, Paul urges the Corinthians to be concerned about the things of the Lord. He doesn't want them to be anxious about anything, but to be free from earthly concerns so they can focus on Christ. Therefore, he reminds them that the **unmarried** can concern himself **with the things of the Lord** (v. 32); however, the **married** must be concerned **with the things of the world**, especially how to provide **for his wife** (v. 33). The same principle applies to women as well. Those who are **married** must focus on providing what her husband needs while those who are **unmarried** can focus **on the things of the Lord** so that she might **be holy** (v. 34).

Paul tells them these things for their benefit not so he can restrain or control them by some unalterable **commandment**. Hence, we must be careful not to read this as marriage puts **a leash** on a couple, restricting them unfairly in some way—like our expression “ball and chain.” Scripture never pictures marriage in such a negative light! Spouses complement one another as partners who work



together to serve the Lord. Spouses become one body that equally cares for the needs of the other. Thus, Paul clearly attributes the **leash** to his comments in this section—**I put**. He wants them to do what God has called them to do—that is whether get married or remain single. Paul isn't restricting them to one choice or the other. Both singleness and marriage are appropriate as God has gifted us (see v. 7), but in both cases one should devote him or herself completely to the Lord. Hence, Paul wants us to **serve the Lord without distraction** in whatever state God has called us.

Question  
# 9

As a couple, how do you balance your time between family responsibility and serving the Lord? As a single, how do you manage your time effectively so you can serve the Lord?

While we have already briefly discussed some benefits of having a spouse to partner with us in ministry, let's look at a few of the benefits of ministering as a single. First, we have more flexibility to alter our schedule and do things somewhat more spontaneously—although many people today overcommit themselves quite often. Yet, we don't have to check first with a spouse and can accept opportunities to minister on the spur of the moment. Second, we have financial freedom to some extent. If God calls us to make a monetary investment or donate through possessions, we don't have to consult with our spouse first. We can meet the need immediately as God leads. Third, we have the ability to travel and spend more time ministering abroad and within our community at large—especially if we have a job where we can work remotely or which offers flexible hours. Some marriages may offer some freedom and discretion to do these things, but it is always best to first have a conversation with a spouse before making the commitment. Both spouses, as one flesh, must be onboard with the commitment or at least have some time to process it.

Question  
# 10

Besides these benefits, what other ways might being single help us minister more effectively?

### 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

#### **WALK WITH CONVICTION:**

After this brief aside, Paul returns to answer the Corinthians' original question about whether or not to proceed with marriage. In Greek, verse 36 is a rather complex and convoluted sentence, but the basic sense remains clear: **If any man thinks he is acting improperly toward his fiancée** (lit., **virgin**), **let him** decide the best course of action as God leads (v. 36). If he chooses to **marry**, he doesn't **sin**, so Paul agrees that the couple should go ahead with their plans. Two main issues arise from this sentence, however.

First, what does "**behaving improperly toward his fiancée**" mean? On the one hand, it may represent the view of the ascetics in pressuring the young man not to **marry**. Thus, to act **improperly** would imply that he had begun to think that going ahead with the marriage somehow constituted **sin**. If his fiancée held these ascetic views, then the contracted obligation to marry would in a sense force her to do something against her conscience. On the other hand, to act improperly may mean to keep her engaged or betrothed without fulfilling his commitment to **marry** her. In this sense, the young man would now unfairly hold her captive and prevent her from marrying another while able to have a family. In either case, regardless of the exact meaning, this phrase clearly shows the man's struggle with what to do concerning marriage.

Second, what does the phrase "**past the flower of youth mean**" and does it apply to the young man or the woman? It seems that Paul has actually coined this word himself as there is no other attestation to it in Greek. The root word, if referring to the woman, would mean something akin to coming of age and indicate that she is in the prime of life and physically ready for marriage. The compound word which Paul uses here intensifies this meaning. Thus, it would signify that she is getting past her prime, probably in reference to the childbearing function of marriage (NKJV, NAS, CSB). On the other hand, the word



could potentially modify the young man in which case it would refer to “strong passions” (NLT, ESV, RSV). This would connect with Paul’s advice in verse 7 where he argues that one should **marry** if he or she cannot exercise self-control when it comes to physical intimacy.

In verse 37, Paul discusses the other side of the issue: the decision to annul the engagement or not to **marry**. If one has strong convictions (i.e., **stands steadfast in his heart**) and chooses to annul the engagement and not consummate the marriage (i.e., **keep her as a virgin**), **he also does well**. On this issue, there is no right or wrong choice. Either option is commendable as long as he was not under compulsion (i.e., **no necessity**) from external sources like the ascetics and he made the decision of his own free will in consultation with the Lord. Hence, whoever chooses to **marry does well** and he who chooses to remain single **does better** according to Paul’s preference (v. 38). But they are under no obligation to choose one way or the other. Both choices are good provided that they have allowed the Spirit to guide them. Oftentimes, we are faced with two similar choices in life. Both are good options, but we must seek clarification and confirmation from the Lord about which one works best according to His plan for our lives.

Question  
# 11

At what times in your life have you been faced with deciding between two good choices? How did God help you to decide which option would work best?

Consequently, this passage, despite all its interpretive challenges, demonstrates how we should evaluate between two good options where there is not one “right” answer. While we should seek God’s guidance in every area of our lives, it becomes especially important in times like these. We cannot allow our personal desires and emotions to determine how we respond, for these are as fickle and changeable as the direction of the wind. Nor can we let external forces or people, even well-meaning ones in the church, become a compulsory factor in deciding what to do. Our conviction must always come from the Lord, for He alone knows the best course for us to take in life. Just as we earlier asked, “How can I best serve God in the position in which He has called me right now,” we must also ask when faced with these tough decisions: “Which option best allows God to minister through me to spread the gospel and help His kingdom grow?”

## Instruct

Thorough in his examination of this issue, Paul addresses one last category: widows. He reminds them that **a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives** (v. 39). However, if the husband dies, she is released from the marriage covenant and can marry whomever the Lord leads. As he has stipulated throughout this chapter, he would prefer that she would remain single so that she can focus on serving



the Lord (v. 40). Paul concludes by reiterating that **the Spirit of God** has given him wisdom to speak insightfully on these matters, so they too must allow the Spirit to guide them in how they choose to respond. To summarize Paul's advice and draw this lesson to an end: we must walk worthy of our calling in whatever state or position God has appointed us at this time in life. Walking worthy means that we walk with conviction—not concerned about impressing or following other people's advice—but we concern ourselves with glorifying the Lord through our actions. Therefore, it is important that we keep our commitments and focus on serving Him through whatever opportunities He affords us in life as His Spirit leads us.

## Inspire

How willing are you to do whatever God has asked even if it doesn't seem to fit your plans at the moment? Many of us may respond like Isaiah who exclaimed, "Lord, here am I; send me" ([Isa 6:8](#)). But do we then go immediately and engage in whatever task God has called us or do we become distracted and delayed by our own earthly pursuits? Although not a "religious" example per se, Frank Ramsey whom we met in the introduction serves as a good model. He accepted his role as the "sixth man" and dutifully did whatever his coaches asked of him. He wasn't concerned with his reputation, collecting stats, or receiving recognition for himself. He was concerned with winning championships with his time in whatever capacity he was called. Likewise, we ought to accept the role to which God has appointed us and dutifully do whatever He asks of us. Our goal should be to walk in a way that represents Him well so that we can collectively serve Him as His people in whatever capacity He may call us.

## *Incorporate*

How would you evaluate the way you walk in your calling to which Christ has appointed you right now? What do you do well? What needs improvement?

What is your attitude toward service and being flexible to do whatever God asks of you? How does this correspond to tangible things to you can point as evidence in your life?

When dealing with tough decisions like we've discussed in this chapter, what method do you use to work through them? How does that method correspond or differ to how Paul worked through these tough questions in this chapter?