SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · LIVING IN THE LIGHT



DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter Seven, Verses 1–40

Married, Single, and Called — Paul answers the Corinthians' letter on marriage, divorce, singleness and the call of God

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Paul answers the questions the Corinthians wrote to him: is sex in marriage unspiritual, may a believer leave an unbelieving spouse, should the single marry? At the center stands one principle, said three times — remain with God where He called you — because the form of this world is passing away. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 7:1–40

marriage · divorce · calling · time · devotion

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" to "I also have the Spirit of God"

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"You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." — 1 Corinthians 7:23

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 7:1–40

Married, Single, and Called — Marriage is not less holy, singleness is not second-class, and God's call meets every man where he stands

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 7 in 5 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 7:17

"Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as △ God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches."

† Before the Passage

Chapter 7 turns a corner in the letter. Chapters 1–6 answered what Paul had heard — quarrels, the incestuous man, lawsuits, men visiting prostitutes. Now he opens their letter: "Now concerning the things about which you wrote" (v. 1). The same "now concerning" marks each new question that follows — virgins (7:25), food sacrificed to idols (8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), the collection (16:1), Apollos (16:12). Guzik: "1 Corinthians 7 begins a section where Paul deals with specific questions asked him in a letter by the Corinthian Christians."

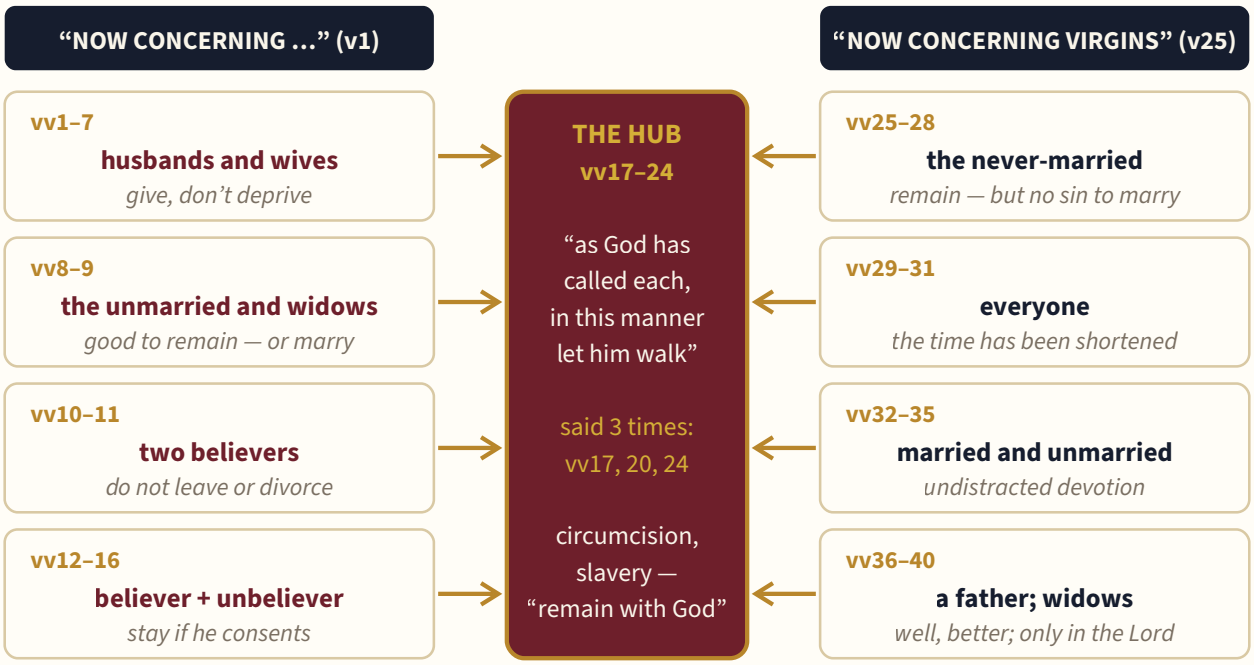
The church was swinging between two ditches. Chapter 6 ended with men who said "All things are lawful for me" and joined themselves to prostitutes; Paul answered, "Flee immorality" and "you have been bought with a price" (6:18, 20). Others swung the opposite way and decided that sex itself was unspiritual, even inside marriage. Guzik: "Satan's great strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to encourage sex

outside of marriage, and to discourage sex within marriage." Chapter 7 is Paul's answer to the second ditch, written to a port city famous for the first.

Behind the chapter stand Genesis 2:24 — "they shall become one flesh" — and Jesus' own teaching on divorce in Mark 10 and Matthew 19, which Paul repeats in verse 10 ("not I, but the Lord"). Henry notes why converts asked: "Moses's law permitted divorce; and there was a famous instance in the Jewish state, when the people were obliged to put away their idolatrous wives, Ezra 10 3." And Jewish custom treated marriage as a duty — Guzik cites the Gemara: "It is forbidden a man to be without a wife." Paul will honor marriage without making it the only way to please God.

Read the chapter as a wheel. At its hub, said three times, is one principle: "as God has called each, in this manner let him walk" (vv. 17, 20, 24). Around it Paul answers married couples (vv. 1–9), believers whose marriages are under strain (vv. 10–16), the never-married facing "the present distress" (vv. 25–35), a man and his virgin daughter (vv. 36–38), and widows (vv. 39–40). Watch how carefully he labels his authority as he goes — a concession, the Lord's command, his own apostolic word, an opinion, the Spirit of God.

FIGURE · THE WHEEL OF CHAPTER 7



Paul answers each group the Corinthians asked about, and every answer turns on the hub he states three times in verses 17–24: walk with God where He called you.

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–9

Marriage Is Not Less Holy

Give, don't deprive — and singleness and marriage are both gifts from God

[1] *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.* [2] *But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.* [3] *The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.* [4] *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.* [5] *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* [6] *But this I say by way of concession, not of command.* [7] *Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.* [8] *But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.* [9] *But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–9

ὀφειλή

OPHEILĒ · "DUTY" · G3782

A debt — something owed, not a favor granted. "The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife" is *tēn opheilēn apodidotō*, "let him pay what he owes" (*apodidōmi*, to pay back, render). The KJV's "due benevolence" softens it to good will; Paul's word is a creditor's word, and it runs both ways — "and likewise also the wife to her husband." Verse 4 then uses *exousiazō* (G1850), "to have authority over": neither spouse holds sole rights over his or her own body. In a world where only the wife was thought to be owned, Paul writes the husband's debt first.

ἀποστερέω

APOSTEREŌ · "DEPRIVE / DEFRAUD" · G650

To rob, cheat, withhold what is due. It is the same verb Paul used one chapter earlier: "you yourselves wrong and defraud" (6:8). Withholding marital love is a kind of fraud. Three conditions bound the only exception: "by agreement" (*ek symphōnou*, G4859 — from which "symphony"), "for a time" (*pros kairon*), and for prayer. The danger is *akrasia* (G192), "lack of self-control" — literally powerlessness. Verse 9's "have self-control" is its opposite, *enkrateuomai* (G1467), the athlete's discipline of 9:25.

χάρισμα

CHARISMA · "GIFT" · G5486

"Each man has his own gift from God." *Charisma* is a grace-gift — the word Paul uses for the spiritual gifts of chapter 12 (12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31) and in 1:7. Singleness and marriage are each a *charisma*; neither is first-class or second-class. Verse 9's "burn with passion" is *pyrousthai* (G4448), "to be set on fire" — present tense, an ongoing burning, not a passing temptation. Paul's remedy for that fire is not shame but marriage.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads verse 1 as the Corinthians' own claim: "This was probably a statement made by the Corinthian Christians, which they asked Paul to agree with." Paul agrees only with the large "nevertheless" of verse 2. The duty is mutual, and the emphasis is on giving — "on "I owe you" instead of "you owe me"" — though this "does not justify a husband abusing or coercing his wife." Deprivation is about romance as well as frequency. Both states are gifts: "Each state is a gift from God," and "no one is "gifted" for sexual immorality!" With Calvin he separates feeling heat from burning, and he warns that marriage does not cure lust: many a man "has been grieved to find that his lust for other women did not magically "go away" when he got married."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul did not preach 1 Corinthians, but in his sermon on Mark 10:1–12 at Saint Andrew's Chapel (22 Oct 2006) he stands where Paul stands in verse 2. Marriage is God's institution — "The two shall become one flesh" — and "There is no more basic unit to civilization and culture than the family." He does not soften the alternative: "for Christians ever to cohabit outside the institution of marriage is a gross and heinous sin against God." "We are called as Christians to march to a different drummer." His teaching series *Sex Within a Context* takes up the single believer's side — "How far is too far regarding physical affection between an unmarried man and woman?" — warning that God's word is too often re-examined "not for guidance and strength, but for liberty and license."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry takes verse 1 as Paul's own counsel, but carefully limited: good "in that juncture of time at least," not as if marrying were sin — "an extreme into which many of the ancients have run in favour of celibacy and virginity." Marriage is God's provision against "all sorts of lawless lust," and within it each must render the other what is owed. A pause for "fasting and prayer" is allowed — "Seasons of deep humiliation require abstinence from lawful pleasures" — but not for long: "If they abstain from lawful enjoyments, they may be ensnared into unlawful ones." On verse 9: "This is God's remedy for lust." "Marriage is honourable in all; but it is a duty in those who cannot contain."

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10–16

Stay, Unless the Unbeliever Leaves

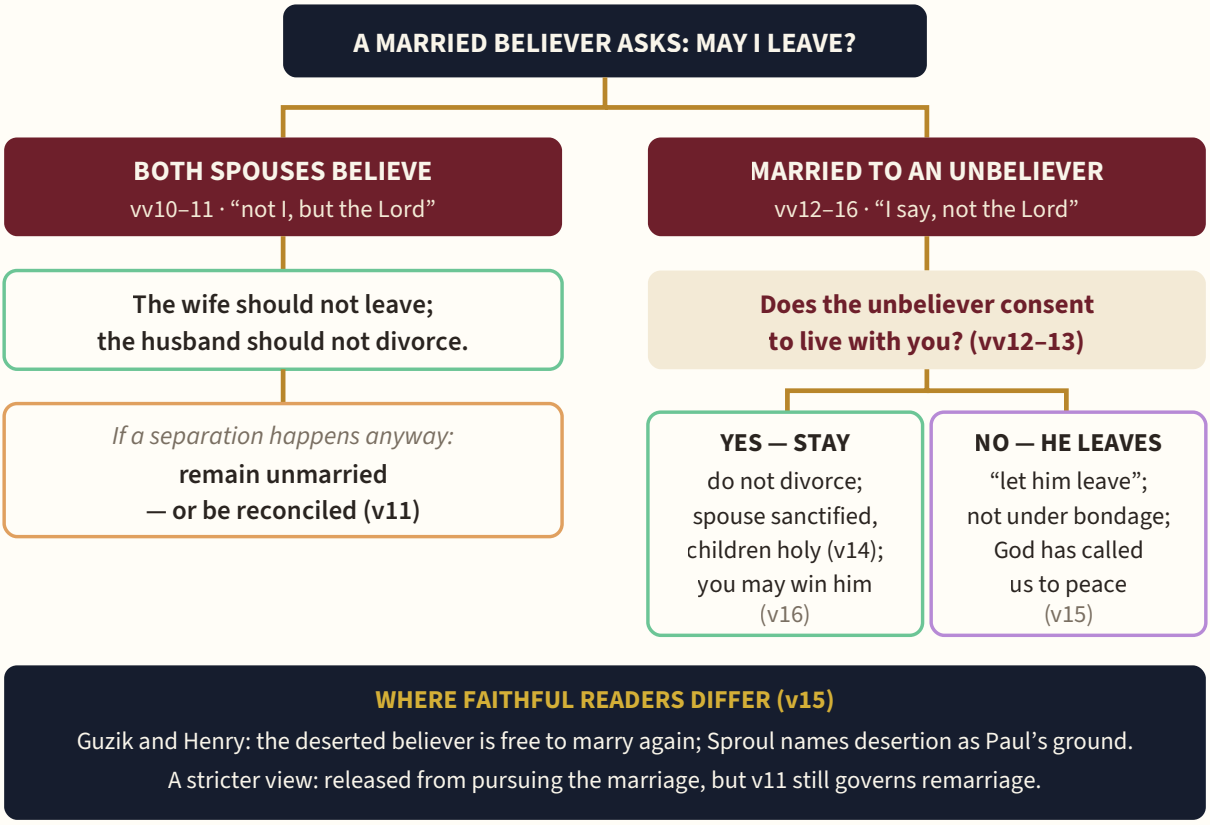
Two believers stay or reconcile; a believer with an unbelieving spouse stays if the spouse consents

10 *But to the married I give instructions, △ not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband* 11 *(but if she does leave, she must ⟲ remain unmarried, or else ☆ be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.* 12 *But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.* 13 *And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.* 14 *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but ☆ now they are holy.* 15 *Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is ◷ not under bondage in such cases, but △ God has called us to peace.* 16 *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10–16

> *"What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*
>
> MARK 10:9

FIGURE · MAY A BELIEVER LEAVE? (VV10–16)



Follow the branches: two believers stay or reconcile; a believer married to an unbeliever stays if the spouse consents — and is not bound if the unbeliever leaves.

χωρίζω · ἀφίημι

CHŌRIZŌ (G5563) · APHIĒMI (G863) · "LEAVE" · "DIVORCE"

Paul uses two verbs. *Chōrizō*, "to separate, put apart," is the verb of Jesus' "let no man separate" (Mark 10:9) — the wife is not to "leave" (vv. 10, 11), and the unbeliever who "leaves" (v. 15, twice). *Aphiēmi*, "to send away, release," is what the husband must not do (vv. 11, 12, 13). Greco-Roman divorce needed no court: walking out or sending away ended a marriage. That is why verse 11 matters — the one who leaves "must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled" (*katallassō*, G2644, the word for God reconciling us to Himself in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

ἡγίασται

HĒGIASTAI · "IS SANCTIFIED" · G37

Perfect tense of *hagiazō*, "to set apart, make holy": the unbelieving spouse "has been set apart" in (*en*) the believing partner. It cannot mean saved — verse 16 still asks whether the spouse will be saved. It means the marriage is clean, not defiling; the believer need not leave it to stay holy. The children are *hagia* (G40), "holy," not *akatharta* (G169), "unclean." Readers differ on how far that reaches: Henry reads it as covenant membership ("the holy seed"); Guzik as God's special favor until the age of accountability.

δεδούλωται

DEDOULŌTAI · "IS UNDER BONDAGE" · G1402

Perfect passive of *douloō*, "to enslave" — the verb of Romans 6:18, "you became slaves of righteousness." The deserted believer "has not been enslaved" in such cases. Paul does not say "bound" here; he uses *deō* (G1210) for the marriage bond in verses 27 and 39 ("a wife is bound as long as her husband lives"). Whether the slave-word frees the believer to remarry is the question faithful readers answer differently. The last word is not a rule but a calling: "God has called us to peace" (*en eirēnē*, G1515).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik hears Jesus behind verse 10 (Matthew 19:3–9): Christians may not break up a marriage in "a misguided search for higher spirituality." Where a couple separates for reasons that do not justify divorce — "conflict, or abuse, or misery, addiction, or poverty" — they remain married before God: "They may live as separate, but not single." "I, not the Lord" (v. 12) is no lower inspiration: "if Jesus did not speak on this specific point, Jesus' inspired apostle will!" The unbelieving spouse is not saved by marriage but "set apart for a special working in their lives by the Holy Spirit." If the unbeliever leaves, the believer is "free to remarry because God has recognized their divorce as a valid divorce." He holds two grounds: sexual immorality and desertion.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In his Mark 10 sermon (22 Oct 2006) Sproul starts where Paul's "not I, but the Lord" points: "Marriage was intended to be forever." God's allowance for divorce on account of sexual sin is a condescension to human sin, but "that condescension does not go so far as no-fault divorce or divorce on the grounds of incompatibility." He names the second ground "added by the Apostle Paul in the case of a marriage where one partner is a Christian and the other a non-Christian" — "the desertion of the unbeliever." Then a pastor's step: a professing believer who walks out without biblical grounds and refuses the church's call to repent "is to be excommunicated and called an unbeliever," for the sake of the abandoned partner. In *Essential Truths* he sums it up: "Paul adds desertion by the unbeliever as grounds for divorce."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry: "marriage, by Christ's command, is for life"; husbands and wives "are bound to each other for life" and "cannot throw off the burden, and therefore should set their shoulders to it." Faith in Christ does not dissolve a marriage to a pagan; it binds it "the faster." The relation is sanctified to the believer, and the children are "a holy, not a common and unclean seed." If the unbeliever deserts after every means of reconciliation is tried, "the deserted person must be free to marry again" — otherwise "marriage would be a state of servitude indeed." But stay if you can: "Endeavour to save a soul." "Mere possibility of success should be a sufficient motive."

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17–24

Walk Where God Called You

The hub of the chapter — circumcision, slavery, and the price that makes us free

17 *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has* ↻ *called* *each,* *in this manner let him walk*. *And so I direct in all the churches.* 18 *Was any man* ↻ *called* *when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been* ↻ *called* *in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.* 19 *Circumcision is*

nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.
20 Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. *21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.* *22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.* *23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.* *24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.*

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17–24

"For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

1 CORINTHIANS 6:20

κλῆσις · καλέω

KLĒSIS (G2821) · KALEŌ (G2564) · "CALLING" · "CALL"

Kaleō appears eight times in these eight verses (vv. 17, 18 twice, 20, 21, 22 twice, 24), after verse 15's "God has called us to peace." In Paul "calling" is first God's summons to Christ (1:9, 26), not a career. Verse 20's "condition" is *klēsis*, "calling": "remain in that calling in which he was called" — the station of life where God's call found you. Verse 17 adds that the Lord "has assigned" (*emerisen*, G3307) that portion. The command is *peripateitō* (G4043), "let him walk" — a whole life lived, not a single decision.

ἀπελεύθερος

APELEUTHEROS · "FREEDMAN" · G558

Only here in the New Testament: a slave who has been set free, who still bore his former master's name and owed him honor. Paul plays both ways: the slave called in the Lord is "the Lord's freedman"; the free man called is "Christ's slave" (*doulos*, G1401). Verse 21's "rather do that" translates *mallon chrēsai*, "rather use it" — most English versions take it as "take the freedom if you can," though some ancient readers took it as "make use of your slavery."

τιμή · ἀγοράζω

TIMĒ (G5092) · AGORAZŌ (G59) · "PRICE" · "BOUGHT"

Agorazō is the marketplace verb — to buy in the *agora*, where slaves were sold. "You were bought with a price (*timēs*)" repeats 6:20 word for word in the Greek. Revelation 5:9 names the price: "You … purchased for God with Your blood." Because Christ bought them, Paul forbids the next step: "do not become slaves (*douloi*) of men."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik makes verse 17 the overarching principle: "Instead of thinking that you can or will walk for the Lord when your station changes, walk for the Lord in the place you are right now." It is also a warning against trying to undo the past — a man on his second marriage when he comes to Christ should not leave his wife to go back to the first. Circumcision is only Paul's example; by analogy, "Married is nothing and unmarried is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters." A slave can please God as a slave, but should take freedom if he can. "Do not become slaves of men" reaches spiritual control too; he quotes Spurgeon: follow anyone "if he goes Christ's way." This never means staying in a sinful occupation.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul does not take up this passage directly in what we found, but his Ask R.C. answer on the doctrine of vocation (July 2014) explains the Reformation idea these verses feed. Luther taught "the priesthood of all believers" — not to abolish the ministry ("Luther did not do away with an ordained clergy") but to end the medieval notion that only clergy have a calling. The farmer, the banker and the baker have a vocation too, and "every believer is called to participate in the establishing and building of the kingdom of God." Whatever the work, it is to be done "to the glory of God," living "coram Deo, before the face of God" — Sproul's phrase for Paul's "remain with God" (v. 24).

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Redemption and Its Claims" (No. 1163, 8 March 1874) takes 6:20 and 7:23 together: "You are bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ." From "I am not my own" he draws the inference of verse 23, "be not you the servants of men." He means it plainly. Follow no human leader slavishly — "Did Calvin redeem you? Did Wesley die for you?" — and "Do not pin your faith to anybody's sleeve." Resist fashion and party when they are wrong. A believer still works for his earthly employer: "If you have masters according to the flesh, serve them with all faithfulness." But no man owns his conscience: "Let no man be your master!" — "consciences were made for God alone!"

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry: "Our states and circumstances in this world are distributions of divine Providence." "The rules of Christianity reach every condition," and in every state a man may live so as to be a credit to it. Circumcision or not, slave or free — "Our comfort and happiness depend on what we are to Christ, not what we are in the world." The slave is freed from "the dominion and vassalage of sin," and the free man is bound to Christ's service, "and yet that service is perfect freedom." Christ "has paid a much dearer price" than any master, and must be obeyed above him. "No man should make his faith or religion an argument to break through any natural or civil obligations." "The favour of God is not bound."

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:25–31

The Time Has Been Shortened

Counsel for the never-married in the present distress — and a world held loosely

25 Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. 26 I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:25–31

FIGURE · A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS (VV29–31)

"THE TIME HAS BEEN SHORTENED" (v29) — sails furled as the ship nears harbor

ACT I HAVE WIVES	ACT II WEEP	ACT III REJOICE	ACT IV BUY	ACT V USE THE WORLD
as though they had none	*as though they did not weep*	*as though they did not rejoice*	*as though they did not possess*	*as though they did not make full use*
not set the heart too much on it	grief is brief; hope remains	enjoy, but hold it loosely	possess without being possessed	use it, do not abuse it

Spurgeon preached these lines as "A Drama in Five Acts" (1862); Henry's counsel in the cream boxes.

"for the form of this world is passing away" (v31) — σχῆμα, the outward shape, the stage set

Five ordinary parts of life, each held "as though" — not despised, but held loosely, because the stage set of this world is already being struck.

ἀνάγκη

ANANKĒ · "DISTRESS" · G318

Constraint, pressure, hardship — the word Jesus used of the days before Jerusalem fell: "there will be great distress upon the land" (Luke 21:23). It returns in verse 37 ("under no constraint") and in 9:16, where Paul is "under compulsion" to preach. "Present" is *enestōsan*, "standing in, at hand." Readers take it as a local crisis then pressing on Corinth (Guzik, Henry) or as the pressure of the whole age between Christ's comings. Verse 28's "trouble" is *thlipsis* (G2347), affliction — the married will feel the squeeze more.

συνεσταλμένος

SYNESTALMENOS · "SHORTENED" · G4958

Perfect participle of *systellō*, "to draw together, contract, wrap up." The verb occurs only twice in the New Testament — here, and Acts 5:6, where the young men "covered up" Ananias' body for burial. Guzik quotes Trapp: "contracted and rolled up, as sails used to be by the mariners, when the ship draws nigh to the harbour." Henry: "It is just ready to be wrapped up in eternity." The time is not merely short; it has been shortened — drawn in by God's hand.

σχῆμα

SCHĒMA · "FORM" · G4976

The outward shape, figure, fashion of a thing — elsewhere only Philippians 2:8, Christ "found in appearance as a man." Some hear the theater in it: the scenery of a play. The verb is *paragei* (G3855), present tense, "is passing away" — already going by, like a procession. Verse 31's "not make full use of it" is *katachrōmenoi* (G2710), to use up, use to the full; the KJV's "not abusing it" reads the same word in its other sense.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sees no lesser authority in "I have no commandment from the Lord": life-situations differ, so Paul gives inspired counsel rather than a command. The "present distress" was "apparently … some kind of local persecution or problem in the city of Corinth" — imagine the threat to a man's wife and children when he is told to renounce Christ. Yet the married should not abandon their families: "At a time of great distress, your family needs you more than ever." Above all, "Paul never implies that being married or single is more spiritual than the other state." "The time is short" is Jesus' own teaching to be ready; the sails are furled — "The harbor is near, and the sails are shortened!"

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached these verses as "A Drama in Five Acts" (No. 481, 23 Nov 1862): wives, weeping, rejoicing, buying and using the world, each a scene the worldling takes for the whole play. "The first act is over, take breath and say, 'This also is vanity.'" Of every good gift: "Handle these things, brethren, knowing that they take to themselves wings and fly away." In "The Time Is Short" (No. 2861) he turns the text into a summons — "Every time the clock ticks, it seems to say 'now.'" "Do something, sirs, do something." And in "The Fashion of This World" (No. 3032, 1869): "All that we see around us is passing away" — "Self-righteousness is a fashion that will not outlast the trial hour of death."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry calls the counsel modest in wording but apostolic in authority: "It is not the mere opinion of a private man." In the persecution of the first planting, singleness was wiser — yet "Duty must be done, and God trusted with events," and marrying is no sin. He scorns those who "forbid many to marry" by vows of celibacy: "How opposite in this are the papist casuists to the apostle Paul!" Then a holy indifference to the world: those with wives must not set their hearts too much on them — "They know not how soon they shall have none." "Possess what you must shortly leave without suffering yourselves to be possessed by it." "The world may be used, but must not be abused." "It is not so much a world as the appearance of one."

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:32–40

Undistracted Devotion

Free from concern — the married rightly divided, the single free, the widow free "only in the Lord"

32 *But I want you to be* ☆ *free from concern*. *One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord,*
how he may please the Lord; 33 *but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may*
please his wife, 34 *and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about*
the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about
the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 *This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint*
upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure ☆ *undistracted devotion to the Lord*. 36 *But if any*
man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be
so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. 37 *But he who stands firm in his heart, being under*
no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin
daughter, he will do well. 38 *So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he*

> *who does not give her in marriage will do better.* [39] *A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes,* *only in the Lord*. [40] *But in my opinion she is happier if she* *remains* *as she is; and I think that* *I also have the Spirit of God*.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 7:32–40

FIGURE · HOW PAUL LABELS HIS WORDS

VERSE	WHAT PAUL SAYS	WHAT KIND OF WORD IT IS
v6	*"by way of concession, not of command"*	a permission (the pause for prayer), not a requirement
v10	*"not I, but the Lord"*	Jesus' own teaching on divorce (Mark 10; Matthew 19)
v12	*"I say, not the Lord"*	an apostle's word where Jesus left no recorded saying
v25	*"I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion"*	counsel from one made trustworthy by mercy
v40	*"I think that I also have the Spirit of God"*	Spirit-given judgment — a quiet claim to inspiration

Guzik and Henry: all five are inspired — they differ in kind (command, counsel, concession), not in authority.

Read down the middle column: Paul tells the reader exactly what kind of word he is giving at each step, from the Lord's command to an apostle's Spirit-led counsel.

ἀμέριμνος · μεριμνάω

AMERIMNOS (G275) · MERIMNAŌ (G3309) · "FREE FROM CONCERN" · "CONCERNED"

Merimnaō is the verb of Jesus' "do not be worried" (Matthew 6:25–34) — to be pulled by care. *Amerimnos*, "without care," is used elsewhere only in Matthew 28:14. Paul uses the verb both ways: the unmarried is "concerned about the things of the Lord" (good care), the married about "how he may please his wife" (rightful care). Verse 34's "his interests are divided" is *memeristai* (G3307), the same verb as "assigned" in verse 17 — divided portions. The KJV's "carefulness" means anxious care, not caution.

ἀπερισπάστως

APERISPASTŌS · "UNDISTRACTED" · G563

"Without being dragged around" — *perispaō* is Martha, "distracted with all her preparations" (Luke 10:40). Only here. Its partner *euparedron* (G2145, "devotion"), also only here, pictures one who sits constantly beside (*para* + *hedra*, seat) — attending on the Lord. And Paul refuses a *brochos* (G1029), "restraint" — a noose or lasso. He will not lasso anyone into singleness.

γαμίζω · παρθένος

GAMIZŌ (G1061) · PARTHENOS (G3933) · "GIVE IN MARRIAGE" · "VIRGIN"

Gamizō (v. 38) normally means "to give in marriage," as a father does (Matthew 22:30; 24:38) — the basis for the NASB's italic "daughter." *Parthenos* is simply "virgin," and verse 36's "past her youth" is *hyperakmos* (G5230), "past the peak" (some read it of the man's passion). So readers divide: a father and his daughter (KJV, NASB, Guzik); a man and his fiancée (ESV, NIV); or, as Henry prefers, a man's own virginity. Verse 40's "happier" is *makariōtera* (G3107), "more blessed."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik: Paul preferred singleness for himself because the unmarried are freer to serve. But the married man's divided concern is no sin — "There is something wrong if a married man does not care for how he may please his wife." Paul throws no leash on anyone, yet the church has done it both ways: forced clerical celibacy, and Protestant groups that "will not ordain or trust the single." Single believers should see their state "as a special opportunity to please God." He reads verses 36–38 of a father arranging his daughter's marriage: "the choice between married and single was not the choice between good and bad, but between better and best." A widow may remarry, but "is really only free to remarry another Christian."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul's lecture "The Authority of Apostolic Teaching" in his *Hard Sayings of the Apostles* series takes up the question this section leaves ringing. Its description notes that "In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives a command and qualifies it by saying "I, not the Lord"" — "while earlier Paul says "not I, but the Lord."" Then it asks the reader's question outright: "Are there two levels of authority?" Only the description is open to us, so we do not quote the lecture itself; but its title is his answer. Read that way, "I give an opinion" (v. 25) and "I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (v. 40) are not a lower grade of Scripture but an apostle's Spirit-given judgment.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Without Carefulness" (No. 1692, on v. 32) begins frankly: "Paul bids Christians, in the first place, not to marry" — counsel shaped by persecution, when a single man could flee — but the principle outlives the instance. "Many men and women rush into marriage" without asking whether it will help or hinder their service; judge by that — "That is the rule to judge by" — for some serve God better married. Avoid the pursuits that multiply anxiety: "Do not fill your pocket at the expense of your soul." Then rest: "Commit your way unto the Lord, and then be without carefulness." Of troubles to come, "Never meet them half-way." "You never find Jesus worrying."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry: "to be careless is a fault," but to be full of anxious care "is a sin," for God "must be attended upon without distraction." "Celibacy is not in itself a state of greater purity and sanctity than marriage"; the rule cuts both ways — "That condition of life is best for every man which is best for his soul." He gives the father-and-daughter reading (parents should still "consult their children's inclinations"), then prefers another: "the man's virgin being meant of his virginity." From verse 39, "second marriages are not unlawful," but only in the Lord: "Marriages are likely to have God's blessing only when they are made in the Lord."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From Eden's one flesh to the world that passes away — where 1 Corinthians 7 reaches back and forward

> *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."*
>
> GENESIS 2:24

> *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*
>
> MATTHEW 19:9

> *"What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*
>
> MARK 10:9

> *"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."*
>
> HEBREWS 13:4

> *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

> *"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives …"*
>
> 1 PETER 3:1

> *"For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband."*
>
> ROMANS 7:2

> *"The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."*
>
> 1 JOHN 2:17

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sends the believer married to an unbeliever to 1 Peter 3:1–6: “your unbelieving spouse will probably not be led to Jesus by your words, but by your godly and loving conduct.” And he reads “only in the Lord” (v. 39) with 2 Corinthians 6:14 — a reason not to marry an unbeliever, “but it is not a reason for ending an existing marriage with an unbeliever.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry hears verses 29–31 with Psalm 39:6 — “Surely man walketh in a vain show” — and asks, “How irrational is it to be affected with the images, the fading and transient images, of a dream!”

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter — though not four in every movement. Guzik walks every verse and holds two grounds for divorce; Sproul, who never preached 1 Corinthians, speaks from his Mark 10 sermon and other teaching; Spurgeon preached on verses 23, 29, 31 and 32 but on nothing in verses 1–16; Henry gives Puritan counsel throughout. They differ on verse 1 (a Corinthian slogan or Paul's own counsel) and on "his virgin" (vv. 36–38); they agree that marriage is not less holy and that a deserted believer is not bound.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Mutual duty, two gifts	A Corinthian slogan corrected; "I owe you," not "you owe me"; marriage won't cure lust.	Marriage is God's institution; cohabiting is a heinous sin; march to a different drummer.	— (no sermon on these verses)	God's remedy for lust; abstaining from the lawful can ensnare in the unlawful.
II · Divorce	Separate, but not single; two grounds — immorality and desertion; the inspired apostle speaks.	Marriage intended forever; no no-fault divorce; desertion of the unbeliever; discipline for deserters.	— (no sermon on these verses)	Bound for life; shoulder the burden; deserted, free to marry; endeavour to save a soul.
III · Calling	Walk for the Lord right now; don't try to undo the past; follow men only on Christ's way.	Every believer has a vocation; work to God's glory, coram Deo.	Bought with blood; pin your faith to no man's sleeve; consciences are for God alone.	Our states are Providence's distributions; Christ's service is perfect freedom.
IV · The time is short	Local distress; families need you more; the harbor is near — furl the sails.	— (nothing found on these verses)	A drama in five acts; every tick says "now"; self-righteousness won't outlast death.	Duty done, God trusted; possess without being possessed; the appearance of a world.
V · Undistracted devotion	Caring for a wife is right; singleness an opportunity; better and best.	Two levels of authority? The lecture's title answers: apostolic authority.	Don't rush into marriage; judge by service; never meet trouble half-way.	Careless is a fault, careful a sin; the best condition is best for the soul; marry in the Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–40 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **Paul writes the husband's debt first.** *Opheilē* is a debt owed, and "the husband must fulfill his duty to his wife" comes before "likewise also the wife." Guzik: the emphasis is on "I owe you" instead of "you owe me." THE GREEK
- **Withholding love is a kind of fraud.** The verb for "deprive" (7:5) is the verb for "defraud" in 6:8. The only exception has three fences: by agreement, for a time, for prayer. THE GREEK
- **Both states are grace-gifts.** *Charisma* — the word for the spiritual gifts of chapter 12 — names singleness and marriage alike. Guzik: "no one is "gifted" for sexual immorality!" GUZIK
- **Marriage does not cure lust.** Verse 9 is a remedy for burning, not a license to rush. Guzik: many a man found his lust did not "go away" when he got married; Spurgeon: "Many men and women rush into marriage." GUZIK
- **Separate is not single.** Where two believers part for reasons short of biblical grounds, Paul gives two doors only: remain unmarried or be reconciled (v. 11). THE TEXT

- **The believer sanctifies the home, not the reverse.** *Hēgiastai*, perfect tense: the unbelieving spouse has been set apart in the believer, and the children are holy, not unclean. Under the old law, contact with the unclean defiled; in Christ, the holy reaches the unclean. THE TEXT
- **"Called" is the chapter's key word.** The verb appears nine times in vv. 15–24. Every station — married, single, Jew, Gentile, slave, free — is a place where God's call can find a man and keep him. THE TEXT
- **Bought men are free men.** Spurgeon: "You are bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ" — so "Let no man be your master!" — "consciences were made for God alone!" SPURGEON
- **The sails are being furled.** *Systellō* wraps up sails near harbor, and a body for burial (Acts 5:6). Henry: time "is just ready to be wrapped up in eternity." THE GREEK
- **Paul labels every word he gives.** Concession (v. 6), the Lord's command (v. 10), his own apostolic word (v. 12), an opinion (v. 25), the Spirit of God (v. 40) — different kinds of word, one inspired letter. THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **In my marriage (or my last one), was I living "I owe you" or "you owe me"? What would it look like to pay what I owe this week?**

The husband's debt is written first, and it includes affection, not only frequency.

7:3-5; Eph 5:25

2 **If I am single, do I treat it as a waiting room or as a gift? What could I do for the Lord now that I could not do with a family?**

Charisma — the same word as the gifts of chapter 12.

7:7, 32-35

3 **Who in this room carries a divorce? What does Paul offer that is neither a club nor a shrug?**

Two doors where it is still open: remain, or be reconciled; and where an unbeliever left, "God has called us to peace."

7:10-16; Mark 10:9

4 **What station am I waiting to change before I really serve God — getting out, getting married, getting a better job?**

"As God has called each, in this manner let him walk" — said three times.

7:17, 20, 24

5 **Who or what has become my master since I got free — a person, a crowd, a habit, a leader?**

Spurgeon: "Do not pin your faith to anybody's sleeve."

7:22-23; 6:20

6 **Which of the five "as though" scenes holds my heart too tightly — a person, a grief, a joy, a possession, the world itself?**

Henry: possess what you must shortly leave without being possessed by it.

7:29-31; 1 John 2:17

1 Corinthians 7 refuses both ditches: sex is not unspiritual, and marriage is not the only way to please God. Married or single, bound or free, God's call meets a man where he stands, and the One who bought him with a price is the only Master he owes. The world's stage set is already coming down; give the Lord undistracted devotion right where you are.

Teaching the Word. Living in the Light. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; his *Commentary* on 1 Corinthians was completed after his death by Simon Browne from his notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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