**UNDIVIDED DEVOTION TO THE LORD**

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Key Verses 35

“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”

**Introduction**

 

 The Bible teaches us that marriage is God’s blessing upon mankind to live a happy and fruitful life for the glory of God. There are so many reasons why it is a blessing. In Corinth Paul saw a further advantage of marriage: to avoid sexual immorality. In this passage Paul gives detailed instructions regarding marriage. It is like a marriage course in one message. In essence, Paul teaches us how to serve God in regard to marriage. The point of the whole passage is for Christians to live in undivided devotion to the Lord.

1. Read verses 1-9. What does Paul say about marriage? (1, 2) What is the marital duty of both the husband and the wife? (3-6) What does Paul say about staying unmarried? (7-9)

1-1, Read verses 1-9.

 Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” **2** But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. **3** The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife,and likewise the wife to her husband. **4** The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. **5** Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **6** I say this as a concession, not as a command. **7** I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. **8** Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. **9** But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1-2, What does Paul say about marriage? (1, 2)

 ***Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”***

* Paul is writing a specific letter to the Corinthian church, dealing with questions they had asked Paul in a letter.
* Now Paul answers to such specific question, "It is good for a man not to marry."
* Apparently, the Corinthians had an aversion to sex and marriage. Under the influence of Greek stoicism, some thought that to live a holy life required renouncing sex and marriage altogether.
* They had an aversion to these things in the name of holiness. Some in our time have an aversion to sex and marriage. To correct this, Paul lays down a general rule regarding marriage.

***2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.***

* A person should marry one partner of the opposite sex and live with them while on earth.
* Married people should enjoy conjugal relations and be satisfied with God’s gift to them. Then they can overcome the temptation to indulge in sexual immorality, such as adultery, prostitution, or pornographic activity.

1-3, What is the marital duty of both the husband and the wife? (3-6)

 ***The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife,and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command.***

* Paul explains that the husband and wife should fulfill their marital duty to each other. Simply put, neither one should have a selfish view of their marriage, knowing that it is not for their own gratification, but for mutual satisfaction and for becoming one in God.
* Paul warns that neither one should deprive the other. Sometimes, in anger, one partner does so, using this as a weapon. This is selfish and mean spirited. According to marriage counselors, it carries a danger of inciting illicit affairs.
* The only time a husband and wife should suspend conjugal relations is to devote themselves to personal prayer. This must be done by mutual agreement, for a specified time. As soon as it is over, they should come together again.

1-4, What does Paul say about staying unmarried? (7-9)

***7 I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.***

* Paul was convinced that he could serve God better than others as a single man. However, Paul deeply acknowledged that this is a gift from God, echoing Jesus’ own teaching (Mt 19:11-12).
* Those who have this gift should not just live quiet, secluded lives, unburdened by anyone, but rather serve God in single devotion all their lifetimes.
* Mother Sarah Barry, the co-founder of our ministry said, “I devoted myself fully to God’s work. God blessed me with many spiritual children I didn’t have time.”
* Her spiritual descendants are spread all over the world. We offer up our sincere gratitude to God for her undivided devotion to God from her heart.
* Jesus lived as a single. Women who can live like Anna should. Men who can live like Paul should. Amen. Yet not everyone can.
1. Read verses 10-24. What is God’s command concerning marital faithfulness? (10-11) What is Paul’s teaching for those whose spouse is an unbeliever? (12-16) Why is it important for us to remain as we are to serve God? (17-24)

2-1, Read verses 10-24.

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.**11** But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. **12** To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. **13** And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. **14** For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. **15** But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. **16** How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? **17** Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. **18** Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. **19** Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.Keeping God’s commands is what counts. **20** Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. **21** Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. **22** For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. **23** You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. **24** Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

2-2, What is God’s command concerning marital faithfulness? (10-11)

 ***To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.***

* But marriage in the sight of God is a oneness that nothing in this world can separate!
* When God blessed Adam and Eve to become one, he intended for their marriage to last a lifetime, and their relationship to grow and make them inseparable.
* There were some people in the Corinthian church who wanted to change their situation in life.
* Maybe they felt that being married was unholy. Maybe they wanted to separate from a spouse that refused to accept Jesus.
* They wanted to change their situation. But Paul counsels them otherwise. Married people should not separate. This is according to the word of the Lord.
* Jesus taught that the hidden motive for divorce is to marry someone else. Jesus called it adultery. (Matt 19:9)

Mark 10:8,9, says

 “...the two will become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

* Christ is the Lord of both partners and he does not want divorce. Christ redeemed us from the power of sin and death to enable us to fulfill God’s original high calling, including the establishment of holy families.
* To be sure, there are rough moments for every married couple. But when Christ is the Lord of the family they are rooted in an everlasting love and truth that unites them inseparably to bear much fruit for the glory of God.
* Therefore, if a believer has even a slight thought of divorce, he or she must repent immediately and ask God’s mercy upon them. God will give them grace to overcome.

2-3, What is Paul’s teaching for those whose spouse is an unbeliever? (12-16)

 ***To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.***

* This is more complicated. It is assumed that those mentioned here had married before becoming Christians, for the Bible strongly warns that believers must not marry unbelievers (2Co 6:14).
* In that situation, if the unbeliever is willing to live with them, the believer must not divorce. There are difficulties involved in a marriage of mixed religions, but they must do their best to work it out.
* God regards their union as sanctified through the faith of the believer. Their children will share in God’s blessing.

***15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?***

* But there is one concession. Sometimes, unbelieving spouses can become the devil’s instrument to destroy the faith of the believer.
* Their constant harassment is a fierce spiritual battle. Though it is painful to bear, the believer is not to seek a divorce in this case.
* However, if the unbeliever decides to leave the marriage, the believer should let them go. God wants his children to live in peace.
* We must acknowledge that believers have no control over the rebirth of others, even of spouses.
* So believing spouse detach oneself from unbelieving spouse who determined to leave, rather pray for their salvation by trusting in the Sovereign Lord. Each is liable for their own salvation ultimately!

2-4, Why is it important for us to remain as we are to serve God? (17-24)

 ***Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. 20 Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.***

* Paul urges that Christians not exhaust themselves trying to change their marital status. Christ is Lord over us and our place in life is given by him.
* We must accept God’s sovereignty and do our best to serve God as we are. Some single people think they will be happy and serve God better if they marry.
* While dreaming and obsessing about their future marriage, they do not serve God.
* A married person may think that if they were single, they could serve God better. With that excuse their minds become occupied by all kinds of plans to change their situation in life.
* They have no room for Jesus or Jesus’ word. They end up doing nothing for God also.
* Paul teaches us to accept our God-given place in life and serve God now, as we are without being preoccupied by all kinds other things.

***21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. 24 Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.***

* Whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, one is to regard his place in life as God-given.
* It is sobering to realize that even slaves should accept their place in life and grow in faith instead of complaining and chafing to change their situation.
* Understandingly, slaves were in a most difficult and humiliating situation. But Paul says not to let that trouble them.
* Because they know Christ, they are free…free from the most terrible bondage of sin and death. They have the freedom to grow in faith and in inner character.
* God can use their situation to produce good fruits in them. Paul encourages a slave to trust in God despite their social status.
* God will destroy all injustice as he brings his divine rule on earth as it is in heaven at His time.
* However, sometimes individual believers are caught in unjust systems. When this happens, their primary concern should be to obey whatever God commands.
* Those who are stuck in a difficult situation and always want to escape from it, without learning from it, do not please God.
* They miss the chance to grow spiritually through suffering. Some people are always looking for a better job when God rather wants them to learn and grow in character, and meet their present challenge.
1. Read verses 25-40. What is Paul’s teaching for unmarried people? (25-28) How should we devote to the Lord faithfully? (29-35) What is Paul’s advice for those who are engaged and also for widows? (36-40)

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3-1, Read verses 25-40.

Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. **26** Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.**27** Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. **28** But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

**29** What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; **30** those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; **31** those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

**32** I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. **33** But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— **34** and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. **35** I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

**36** If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28524b)] and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. **37** But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. **38** So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

**39** A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. **40** In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

3-2, What is Paul’s teaching for unmarried people? (25-28)

 ***Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. 26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.27 Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. 28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.***

* Paul encourages virgins to remain single. It is because these early Christians believed that there was a present crisis, the end of the age with the imminent Second Coming of Jesus.
* They expected dreadful events to occur before Christ comes in power and great glory. Jesus showed great concern for the plight of pregnant women and nursing mothers at the end of the age (Mk 13:17).
* Maybe Paul remembered historical accounts of the terrible events that occurred when Jerusalem was besieged by her enemies. Paul here shared Jesus’ concern.
* Virgins are free to marry; it is not sin. Yet Paul warns that those who marry have many troubles in this life.

3-3, How should we devote to the Lord faithfully? (29-35)

 ***What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.***

* The world in its present form is passing away. The things that concern us so much in this world will vanish. Marriage as we know it is limited to this world.
* We should not try to hold temporal things as if they last forever. Rather, we must put all our hope in the coming kingdom of God.
* Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross, has forgiven us and called us to eternal life in his kingdom.
* His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. His kingdom is paradise. There are no tears, sorrows or pains, and no more death.
* We must live for his kingdom. We must do our best to prepare for his kingdom while living in this world.

***32 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. 35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.***

* Paul warns of the danger of a divided heart among married believers. Marriage demands husbands and wives to be concerned about each other.
* It is right to be concerned with one another, but there is a danger that their concern can become worldly or too much family oriented.
* Some people dream of endless romance without mission, or endless family gathering without mission.
* However, this leads to much disappointment and at times, misery. When the family becomes an end in itself, it has lost connection with Christ.
* Then the marriage or the family takes one’s heart from God. If our hearts are divided in this way, we cannot please God.
* This does not mean that married people should all divorce in order to serve God better; not at all! It is simply a warning that we must please God as of first importance, in this perishing world.
* Paul is teaching us the good life, the happy life, the most rewarding life. It is to serve the Lord in undivided devotion and to seek first His kingdom and righteousness.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says,

 “Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

* God did not give us this command to burden us, but to bless us abundantly. God is the source of life and blessing.
* When we love God with all our heart, God blesses us. When a husband and wife love the Lord and are devoted to him, they can be blessed by God abundantly.

3-4, What is Paul’s advice for those who are engaged and also for widows? (36-40)

***36 If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. 37 But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. 38 So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.***

***39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. 40 In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.***

* Paul clarifies himself here that the choice between married and single was not the choice between good and bad, but between better and best. He regarded singleness as best.
* Unmarried state(virgin or widow) can be superior because it offers a person (only if they are gifted) more opportunity to serve God.

**Conclusion**

 The Bible begins with the establishment of the first house church in Genesis 2, with Adam and Eve. When Jesus performed his first miraculous sign, it was to bless a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The Bible ends with a spiritual marriage between the bridegroom, Christ, and his bride, the church, who enjoy the wedding supper of the Lamb in the glorious kingdom of God. The best way to spread the blessing of God in our corrupted culture may be to fill the world with godly Christ centered house churches. So we pray for 10,000 house churches to be raised in UBF for God’s world mission purpose. To those who have already established house churches, let us today rededicate them to the Lord in undivided devotion. To those who have not yet established house churches, may God bless you to do so. Whatever your situation, may you find the most happiness when we serve the Lord in undivided devotion. Let’s decide to do so today. As we do, may God transform the culture of our nation to lead the whole world to Jesus.

**One Word: Undivided Devotion**