

1 COR. 6:12 – 7:40

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C. Sexual immorality (6:12-20)

1. Rejecting the rationalization (6:12-17) – ¹²"**All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial; "all things are lawful for me," but I will not be mastered by anything.** ¹³"**Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food, and God will do away with both the one and the other."** **But the body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body,** ¹⁴**and God both raised the Lord and will raise us, through his power.** ¹⁵**Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Absolutely not!** ¹⁶**[Or] do you not know that the man who unites himself with the prostitute is one body [with her]? For it says, "The two will become one flesh."** ¹⁷**But the man who unites himself with the Lord is one spirit [with him].**

a. Some of the men in the Corinthian church were having sex with prostitutes, and they justified this behavior on the basis that the body was created for sex and that the physical was merely temporary so it could not be of consequence to God. To support this idea, they apparently were taking comments Paul had made regarding freedom from dietary restrictions and applying them to sexual restrictions.

(1) The Corinthians were quick to adopt Paul's comment that "all things are lawful for me," but they were misusing it. Not only had he said that in the context of eating "idol meat" sold in the marketplace (see, 10:23-26), a morally neutral matter, but it also needed to be qualified even in that context.

(2) Paul doesn't dispute the statement (because he said it), but he adds the necessary qualifications that not all things are beneficial and that he will not be mastered by anything. Just because something is lawful does not mean that it is always right to do it. When the exercise of one's freedom will damage another person, one needs to abstain from the conduct one otherwise is free to do. This will be developed in chapters 8-10.

(3) Regarding the freedom to eat meat previously sacrificed to idols, Paul may have said something like "The food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food." That is a way of saying they were made for each other, the implication being it was not improper to ingest that food. The Corinthians may have picked up that statement and added, in line with their spiritualized view of the resurrection, "and God will do away with both the one and the other," which addition served to magnify or reinforce the moral insignificance of the eating. (If Paul included the clause that God will do away with the stomach and food, he meant the immortal and glorious resurrection body would have *no need* for the stomach and food, unlike in our mortal state, which leaves open the possibility of eating for other reasons.)

(4) Whatever the source, the Corinthians were applying this slogan to the body's sexual appetite, and Paul flatly rejects that application. The Corinthian argument apparently went like this:

(a) All things are permitted for satisfying one's appetite for food. After all, the stomach and food are intended for one another. And the stomach and food have no eternal significance because God is going to do away with them both in the end.

(b) By analogy, all things are permitted for satisfying one's appetite for sex. After all, the body and fornication are intended for one another. And the body and fornication have no eternal significance because God is going to do away with them both in the end.

b. Paul denies their argument at both points: the body is *not* intended for fornication but for the Lord (and he adds that the Lord is for the body to maintain a parallel with their argument – food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food), and the body is *not* destined for destruction but for resurrection, the proof of which is the Lord's resurrection.

(1) The body is intended for the Lord in the sense that the work of redemption includes the whole person, which in the Jewish view of things includes the body. The body is not irrelevant for future existence; it is destined for resurrection and therefore is "for the Lord" in the present.

(2) The Corinthians, as suggested in ch. 15, looked for a "spiritual" salvation that would finally be divested of the body. Lying behind this is a Greek world view that placed little or no value on the material order.

(3) The Lord is for the body in the sense that he gave himself for the body as part of his redemptive work. He rescues people, not just particular elements of people.

c. In vv. 15-17 Paul applies his reformulation of their slogan, "the body is *not* for fornication but for the Lord," to their going to prostitutes.

(1) His argument is that in uniting themselves to the Lord they entered into a union that made their bodies parts of Christ's body. The connection between Christ's resurrection and our own in some sense links our physical body to his resurrected body. His resurrection has determined that our body is for the Lord.

(2) Being joined to Christ himself through the resurrection, it is absolutely unthinkable that one should take away a part of the body of Christ and make it part of the body of a prostitute, which is what happens during intercourse.

2. Prohibition stated directly (6:18-20) – ¹⁸**Flee fornication. Every sin, whatever a man may commit, is outside the body, but the man who fornicates sins against his own body.** ¹⁹**Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and [that] you are not your own?** ²⁰**For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.**

a. In vv. 18-20 Paul now flatly states the prohibition implicit in his argument: Flee from fornication (sexual immorality).

b. He then offers one further theological reason, namely that sexual immorality in particular is a sin against one's own body, which is "for the Lord" because it is also a "temple of the Spirit."

(1) Sexual immorality is distinct as a sin against the Christian's body, understood as part of the Lord's body, because it is the only sin in which an inconsistent bodily union is achieved. It uniquely desecrates the temple of the Spirit, the body, by making that temple part of the body of a pagan.

(2) The bottom line is that our bodies belong to the Lord, they are not some temporal irrelevancy, so we must glorify God in our bodies. In this context, that means no sexual immorality.

IV. Matters the Church Wrote About

A. Marriage Issues (7:1-40)

1. Error of denying sex within marriage (7:1-7) – **Now about which things you wrote, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."** ²**But, because of the cases of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.** ³**Let the husband render to the wife what is due, and likewise also the wife to the husband.** ⁴**The woman 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**Do not cheat one another - except perhaps by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer and [then] be together again - so that Satan not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.** ⁶**But this I say as a concession, not as a command.** ⁷**Now I wish that all men were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, the one this and the other that.**

a. With the words, "Now for the matters you wrote about," Paul moves to his response to the Corinthian letter. The phrase, "It is good for a man not to touch (i.e., have sexual relations with – see ESV, NET, NIV, CSB) a woman" is probably a slogan some in Corinth were using to urge cessation of sexual relations within marriage. Paul is quoting from their letter, at least the sentiment if not the actual language.

(1) This is just another expression of their misguided "spirituality," with its negative attitude toward the material world and the body.

(2) According to Fee (p. 276), their position would have been something like: Since you, Paul, are unmarried and are not actively seeking marriage, and since you have denied fornication in your letter to us, isn't one better off not to have sexual intercourse at all? After all, in the new age which we already have entered by the Spirit, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Why shouldn't we "be as the angels" right now?

b. Paul doesn't deny their slogan outright because in certain situations it *is* good for a man not to have relations with a woman. But as a justification for denying sex within marriage or for divorce or for not getting married, Paul will have none of it.

c. In vv. 2-4 Paul qualifies their slogan by making clear that it cannot be used to restrict full sexuality within marriage. Because of the instances of sexual immorality that were occurring in the church, the use of prostitutes about which he had just spoken, they must stop urging abstinence between married couples.

(1) They must permit each man to have his own wife (sexually) and must permit each woman to have her own husband (sexually). "To have a wife" is different from "to take a wife." The verb "to have" was used as a euphemism for having sexual intercourse (see LXX of Exod. 2:1-2; Deut. 28:30; Isa. 13:16; see also Mat. 14:4; Mk. 6:18; Jn. 4:18). As David Garland explains (p. 256):

The immediate context, with the reminders about what is owed in marriage, the assertion that husbands and wives have authority over one another's bodies, and the command not to deprive one another, makes clear that the phrase "let each one have his own wife or her own husband" refers to sexual relations within marriage, not getting married.

(2) And that means a *full* conjugal life with one's spouse. The husband is to give his wife her due and likewise the wife to the husband. Each is sexually obligated to the other. In marriage, one does not have authority over one's own body, to do with it as one pleases; rather, one's spouse has authority over one's body so one cannot deprive the spouse of sexual relations.

d. The point of v. 5 is that they must stop cheating one another in this regard so that Satan might not tempt them because of their lack of self control (as evident in the cases of immorality). The only possible exception is if they want to agree for a time to abstain in order to devote themselves to prayer, but this is a concession to couples that choose to do so, not a command.

e. Paul wishes that all people had his gift of freedom from the need of sexual fulfillment that made it possible for him to live unmarried. He realizes, however, that his celibacy is a gift, not a requirement. Celibacy is for those gifted to be celibate. They cannot use Paul's circumstance to urge celibacy on the married.

2. Widowers and widows (7:8-9) – **⁸Now I say to the unmarried men and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain as I also [do], ⁹but if they are not exercising self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn.**

a. Having just spoken of his gift of celibacy, Paul speaks to those who are in his situation of no longer being married but who lack his gift. I believe that in these verses he is addressing widowers and the widows.

(1) The word *agamos*, which literally means "unmarried," was used during this period to refer to widowers. So we know it can have that meaning. NIV gives "widowers" in a footnote as an alternative translation.

(2) This translation explains the mention of widows. If *agamos* here refers to *all* unmarried people, then widows are already covered. You also have the problem of why Paul separately addresses certain unmarried women in v. 25 ("virgins"). If it refers to all unmarried *men*, then widows is not a balanced contrast. The way Paul deals with husbands and wives in mutuality throughout this section, it seems reasonable to expect the same here.

(3) This translation also makes better sense out of Paul's flow of thought. All the cases in vv. 1-16 deal with those presently or formerly married, while vv. 25-38 deal with the never-before married. Paul's use of the word in v. 11 and v. 34 suggests that for him it normally means not the "unmarried" in general but the "de-married," those formerly but not now married.

(4) In fact, if you accept, as many scholars do, that Paul was formerly a rabbi, then he almost certainly would have been married at that time. Paul's being a widower fits the most natural reading of v. 8: "Now I say to the widowers and widows, it is good for them if they remain as I also [do]."

(5) Various scholars – Gordon Fee: "On balance, 'widower' seems to be the best understanding of the word here." Craig Blomberg: "[W]e should probably understand the unmarried here to refer to men whose wives had died." Darrell Bock: "However, several observations suggest it is perhaps better to understand the term as referring exclusively to widowers" (*The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts – Ephesians* [2006], 255). Others sharing that view: Orr, Moiser, Schrage, Baumert, Laughery, Hays, and Collins.

b. To those who have lost a spouse by death, Paul says it is good for them to stay unmarried, as he does.

(1) That represents a good choice, but it is not something commanded. As he says in vv. 39-40, a widow is free to remarry "in the Lord," meaning a Christian, but he believes she will be happier if she remains a widow.

(2) This advice does not apply, however, to those who are not exercising self-control. Paul probably has in mind some who are doing the same as some of the married people in vv. 1-7, i.e., practicing sexual immorality by going to prostitutes. The antidote for such sin is to get married instead. (Note that the power of sexual desire seems to be behind Paul's later instruction in 1 Tim. 5:14 that the *younger* widows should marry.)

c. The clause "for it is better to marry than to burn" could be a reference to burning in judgment, but it probably means that those who are committing sexual sins should marry rather than be consumed by the desire that was leading them to sin. In other words, Paul is offering marriage as the proper alternative to those who are being consumed by their sexual passion. Garland notes (p. 274), "What is distinctive about [Paul's] use of the metaphor is his conviction that romantic passion necessitated marriage. Others in the ancient world did not think that burning required marriage. Overpowering sexual desire only necessitated having sex, not marriage."

3. Divorce between Christian spouses (7:10-11) – **¹⁰Now to the married, I command (not I, but the Lord) the wife not to separate from her husband -- ¹¹but if she does indeed separate, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to the husband -- and the husband not to divorce his wife.**

a. As a variation on the idea that participation in the new age of the Spirit ("being like the angels") justified abstaining from sex within marriage, some in Corinth were contending that it also justified dissolving their marriages altogether.

b. Paul here addresses the situation in which both partners were Christians. As Fee states, "In speaking to 'the married,' Paul is presupposing in the first instance that both partners are believers. This is made certain by vv. 12-16, where, in a way that balances with vv. 10-11, he addresses 'the rest,' whom that context defines as believers married to unbelievers."

c. He commands, on the basis of what Jesus said during his earthly ministry, that a Christian wife must not divorce her Christian husband and a Christian husband must not divorce his Christian wife. (The word "separate" [χωρίζω] is used in Greek literature and legal documents as a technical term for divorce. That it has that meaning here is clear from the fact it renders the parties "unmarried." The word also refers to dissolution of a marriage in 1 Cor. 7:15.)

(1) You can find Jesus' teaching on this in Mat. 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mk. 10:2-12; and Lk. 16:18. The only exception given by Christ is recorded in the Matthew passages. There we see that *porneia*, unlawful sexual relations on the part of one's spouse *permits*, but does not *require*, a divorce.

(2) I suspect Paul did not mention the exception because he was addressing the propriety of divorce on ascetic grounds, on the grounds that abstinence from sexual relations was spiritual. The right to divorce for sexual immorality is not relevant to that issue.

d. In v. 11 Paul adds that, if despite the command against it, a Christian wife does in fact divorce her Christian husband, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. She cannot marry someone else.

(1) He bases this on Jesus' teaching as recorded in the Gospels. Jesus taught that divorce is permitted for Christians *only* where one's spouse has been sexually immoral. If you divorce your spouse for a reason other than your spouse's cheating on you, you are not free to remarry. (I know this does not exhaust the permutations and questions surrounding divorce and remarriage, but it is the issue Paul is addressing.)

(2) Since the Christian wife under discussion here has divorced wrongfully, meaning divorced for some reason other than her husband's sexual immorality (for some ascetic notion), she is, according to the Lord's teaching, not free to remarry. That is why Paul says her choices are to remain unmarried or reconcile with the husband she impermissibly divorced.

(3) Now, if she *does* remarry, she clearly has sinned in doing so, but what is the status of that second marriage? Paul does not address that directly, but it seems to me the second marriage is effective or valid *despite being wrongful* (just like her divorce was effective – made her unmarried – despite being wrongful). As such, they are bound to each other for life and are not to divorce. (As I have explained elsewhere, I believe the "adultery" of which Jesus speaks is not literal adultery but the metaphorical adultery of the wrongful remarriage.)

4. Divorce between Christian and non-Christian spouses (7:12-16) – ¹²**Now to the rest, I say (not the Lord) if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, let him not divorce her; ¹³and if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not divorce the husband. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in the brother. Otherwise, your children are unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵But if the unbeliever separates, let him or her separate. The brother or the sister has not been made a slave in such circumstances. But God has called you in peace; ¹⁶for how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?**

a. In this section Paul addresses the matter of divorce when one partner is a pagan and the other is a Christian. Just like today, when one spouse became a Christian, the other did not always follow. It seems that in the case of such mixed marriages some Corinthians argued for divorce not only on the basis that suspension of sexual relations was spiritual but on the additional basis that the pagan partner was unclean and defiling. You can see how this argument would flow from the same kind of analysis Paul used in forbidding sex with prostitutes - it amounts to making part of Christ's body part of the body of a pagan.

b. Paul flatly forbids the Christian partner in such a marriage from divorcing his or her non-Christian spouse. If the non-Christian spouse is willing to live with the Christian, the Christian must not initiate a divorce.

(1) When Paul says that *he* says this, "not the Lord," he does not mean that his words are not inspired or authoritative. He speaks as one to be trusted (v. 25) because he has the Spirit of God (v. 40). He simply means that Christ did not have occasion during his earthly ministry, in his teaching preserved in the church, to address mixed marriages between people of God and others. As Blomberg notes:

Too often readers have inappropriately questioned the authority of Paul's instructions in verses 12-16 on the grounds that these are merely Paul's fallible, spur-of-the-moment opinions. Paul's ironic conclusion to this chapter in verse 40 is actually a strong avowal of inspiration by the Holy Spirit for his entire letter.

(2) He rejects the argument that the non-Christian spouse defiles the Christian by declaring that, on the contrary, the unbeliever is sanctified in his or her marriage relationship with the believer.

(a) This does not mean they are saved, something v. 16 makes clear; it means they are not *defiling*. So it is not like having sex with a pagan to whom you are not married.

(b) If the believer in a family did not have such a sanctifying effect on the spouse, then their children, the product of their defiling sexual union, would be unclean or defiling. In that case, maintaining a family relationship with their children would be impossible, which was not something they were willing to accept. So Paul engages in a *reductio ad absurdum*, showing that their position led logically to an absurdity, a result with which they were unwilling to live.

c. Though the *Christian* in a mixed marriage is forbidden from divorcing, Paul says in v. 15a that in the event the *unbeliever* leaves, the believer is to let the unbeliever go, meaning he or she is to accept the fact of the divorce. The believer has not been made a slave in such circumstances, as Paul says in v. 15b, in that the believer is not thereby put under an obligation to prevent the divorce or restore the marriage afterward.

(1) If this is right, then this text does not speak directly to the issue of whether the divorced believer is free to remarry. But I'm inclined to think remarriage is permitted in such cases simply because that right normally would accompany a permissible divorce. In other words, permission to allow a divorce normally would be understood to include a right to remarry. As Instone-Brewer writes in "1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri," *Tyndale Bulletin* 52 (2001) 241:

When Paul says they are "no longer enslaved," any first century reader would understand him to mean that they can remarry, because they would think of the words in both Jewish and non-Jewish divorce certificates: "You are free to marry." If Paul had meant something else, he would have had to state this very clearly, in order to avoid being misunderstood by everyone who read his epistle.

(2) Any uncertainty about a right of remarriage in such cases is not a major issue in the church today because in our society a divorcing unbeliever is usually quick to engage in sexual relations. That provides a less controversial basis for remarriage.

d. The permission given the believer to allow a divorcing unbeliever to leave is, however, the exception. The rule is that God has called the believer to peace, which in this case means to live in peace with the unbelieving spouse, to maintain the marriage bond. After all, by doing so the believing wife may eventually save her pagan husband or the believing husband may eventually save his pagan wife.

5. Basic principle that Christian conversion does not require changing social relationships (7:17-24) - **¹⁷Nevertheless, as the Lord allotted to each, as God has called each, so let him walk. And so I command in all the churches. ¹⁸Was anyone called having already been circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God [is everything]. ²⁰Let each remain in the calling in which he was called. ²¹Were you called being a slave? Do not let it be a concern to you; but if indeed you are able to become free, by all means use [it]. ²²For the one who was called in the Lord being a slave is the Lord's freedman; likewise, the one who was called being free is Christ's slave. ²³You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴Let each one, brothers, in whatever [state] he was called, remain in this [state] with God.**

a. Despite the fact the believer is free to let the unbeliever leave if the unbeliever so chooses, the basic principle is that the Christian should not use the fact he has been called into fellowship with Christ as a basis for changing his social relationships (in this particular case, his or her marital status). As far as a person's being a Christian is concerned, *as far as that is the determining factor in the decision*, he is to continue in the setting he was in at the time of his conversion.

(1) This does not mean that a Christian cannot change his social circumstance; it simply means that his being a Christian doesn't compel him to do so.

(2) By calling a person to Christ in a particular social setting, that setting itself is given by the Lord as an appropriate place for living out one's life in Christ. God's call thus eliminates their social setting as having any kind of religious significance, as being something one must leave or change because one is now a Christian.

b. Paul illustrates the point by way of another social setting, the matter of Jews and Gentiles.

(1) Those called having already been circumcised (Jews) should not therefore seek to become Gentiles by having an operation to conceal their circumcision, and those called being uncircumcised (Gentiles) should not therefore seek to become Jews via circumcision.

(2) The gospel transcends the social distinction between Jew and Gentile, bringing the two together into one body, and thereby renders it religiously insignificant. Being a Jew or Gentile makes no difference to God spiritually, so whatever one was when one was called, there is no need to change.

(3) Paul intends for the Corinthians to transfer the principle to their desire to divorce for religious reasons. Just like circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing in the sense that being a Christian does not demand a change from one to the other, being married and not being married are nothing in the sense that being a Christian does not demand a change from one to the other.

(4) What matters is not one's social state but the authenticity of one's faith as expressed in keeping the ethical imperatives of the Christian faith. (Paul did not want the Corinthians to turn his statement that "circumcision is nothing" into "obedience to the will of God is nothing.")

c. Paul repeats the principle in v. 20: "Let each man remain in the calling in which he was called." As far as being a Christian is concerned, they can live in whatever social circumstance they were in when God called them, so there is no spiritual reason to change.

d. Paul uses slavery for his second supporting illustration.

(1) If one was converted as a slave, it is not to be a source of concern because one's status as a slave is not religiously significant. Neither slavery nor freedom counts for anything to the one who is called into fellowship with Christ. The slave should not consider his status a matter of importance because he has become the Lord's freedman. Likewise, the converted free person should not consider his status a matter of importance because he has become Christ's slave.

(2) The fact Paul parenthetically notes that if the converted slave is able to become free he should take advantage of the opportunity makes clear that his point throughout has not been that Christians *must* stay where they are but that their social condition is not to be of religious concern. If the slave can get free, he should do so but not because he is a Christian, i.e., not for religious reasons.

(3) Because the Lord has purchased both slaves and free persons by his blood, he is the one to whom they owe allegiance, so they must not become

slaves of men in the sense of coming under the bondage of merely human teaching. Particularly, they must not let merely human wisdom, disguised as "spirituality," dictate their present anxieties about the need to be free from certain social settings, especially marriage.

e. Paul concludes with a variation of his refrain: Each is to remain with God in whatever social state he was in when converted. It has God's blessing and can be an avenue of faithful Christian service.

f. Here's how Garland (p. 299) summarizes the point of vv. 17-24:

What do uncircumcision and circumcision, slavery and freedom, have to do with marriage, divorce, and celibacy? They illustrate the divine principle that no earthly status, such as one's racial heritage or social standing, is incompatible with the Christian's calling by God [cite omitted]. Those who were circumcised when God called them do not advance their spiritual condition by undergoing an operation to restore their foreskin, nor do those who were uncircumcised when God called them enhance their standing with God by undergoing circumcision. Slaves are no less accepted by God than are free persons. Both belong to Christ, and their social status has no spiritual significance. Whether a Christian is circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, married or single is inconsequential to God. One condition is not bad and the other good, nor is one condition less good and the other better. No condition presents an obstacle to living the Christian life, since a Christian is now defined by God's call (1:9) and nothing else.

6. The case of betrothed women ("the virgins") (7:25-40)

a. Advice in light of the present distress (7:25-28) – **²⁵Now about the virgins, I do not have a commandment of the Lord, but I give a judgment as one having been given mercy by the Lord to be faithful. ²⁶Therefore, I consider this to be good because of the present distress, [namely] that what is so is good for a man. ²⁷Are you bound to a woman? Do not seek release. Are you free from a woman? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸But if indeed you marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned. But such people will have affliction in the flesh, and I am trying to spare you.**

(1) Having dealt with the married people interested in altering their present situation, Paul now turns his attention to the matter of "the virgins" that they raised in their letter. "The virgins" probably refers to some young betrothed women who, along with their fiancés, were being told by the "spiritual ones" in Corinth that it would be sinful for them to go through with their marriages.

(2) Paul has no command from the Lord on this matter, but he gives a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy has trustworthy judgment on the matter.

(a) Paul agrees with the general Corinthian claim that it is good for a man to maintain the status quo with regard to the virgins, but he does so not because it is unspiritual to marry but because of "the present distress." In other words, he would agree that the betrothed should not go through with their marriages but for a significantly different reason.

(b) The "present distress" that causes Paul to counsel against getting married is some hardship the Corinthians currently are undergoing. Suggestions include persecution or a famine (see Garland, 324), but whatever it was, the following verses (vv. 29-35) suggest that Paul sees it in the larger context of the hardships the church must face in these last days, in the time before Christ's return. He wants to spare them the increase in troubles that being married will bring during this particular spasm of distress they are experiencing in an age of distress.

(c) In his examples of maintaining the status quo in relation to the virgins, he says that men who are betrothed should not break off the engagement (seek a release from that bond) and those who are not betrothed (or perhaps already broke their betrothal) should remain so and not hunt for a wife.

(d) Though he agreed that the betrothed should not go through with their marriages in the present situation, which would be changing the status quo, he did not include that as an example because he did not want to give any ammunition to the Corinthian's false claim that it was *sinful* to do so. As he makes clear in v. 28, this was a matter of wise advice, not a matter of sin.

(e) Fee (p. 333) summarizes the argument this way:
(a) I agree it is good for the virgins to remain single, but that is because of the present distress; but (b) it certainly is no sin to marry; nonetheless (a) those who marry will experience many difficulties (because of the present distress), and I would spare them that.

(f) Fee writes (p. 334):

[W]hat is often heard is that Paul prefers singleness to marriage, which he does. But quite in contrast to Paul's own position over against the Corinthians, we often read into that preference that singleness is somehow a superior status. That causes some who do not wish to remain single to become anxious about God's will for their lives. Such people need to hear it again: Marriage or singleness per se lies totally outside the category of "commandments" to be obeyed or "sin" if one indulges; and Paul's preference here is not predicated on "spiritual" grounds but on pastoral concerns. It is perfectly all right to marry.

Unfortunately, our reading of the text this way cuts two ways. Our culture, especially Christian subculture, tends to think of marriage as the norm in such a way that singles are second-class citizens. For such people,

this text is merely "Paul's opinion," and is seldom listened to at all. That, too, misses Paul's point. Some are called to singleness still; they need to be able to live in the Christian community both without suspicions and with full acceptance and affirmation.

b. Need to live as end-time people (7:29-35) – ²⁹**Now this I say, brothers, the time is shortened, so that from now on those having wives should be as not having, ³⁰and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, ³¹and those using the world as not making full use of it. For the present form of this world is passing away.**

³²**Now I want you to be without anxiety. The unmarried man is concerned for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; ³³but the married man is concerned for the things of the world, how he may please the wife, ³⁴and he is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are concerned for the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but the married woman is concerned for the things of the world, how she may please the husband. ³⁵Now this I say for your own advantage, not that I may throw a noose around you but for the sake of propriety and devotion to the Lord without distraction.**

(1) The afflictions the Corinthians currently are suffering are a specific expression of the fact we are in the last days (Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:2), the fact that the "time is shortened" in the sense that we are at the end of history, an end which has been brought clearly into view. We must allow that reality to control our relationships in the present.

(2) Garland writes (p. 329):

Paul is not concerned about the duration of time (chronos; cf. 7:39) but the character of the time. He is talking not about how little time is left but about how Christ's death and resurrection have changed how Christians should look at the time that is left. . . . [H]e understands the compressing of the time to mean that the future outcome of this world has become crystal clear. The time has been "foreshortened," which means that "the event of Christ has now compressed the time in such a way that the future has been brought forward to be clearly visible" (Fee 1987: 339 n. 14). Fee comments (1987: 339), "Those who have a definite future and see it clearly live in the present with radically altered values as to what counts and what does not."

(3) We must live as an end-time people, as those who are not unduly vested in the world, because the world is on its way out. Every aspect of our relationship with the world is to be affected. We must not lean too heavily on anything that is passing.

(a) We continue to be involved in the things of the world, but we are not to do so with the same attitude as those lacking our end-time perspective. None of these temporary things are to be seen as things of ultimate importance.

(b) Our knowledge that this world is already passing is to inform every aspect of our involvement with the world. Just like Paul told the Thessalonian Christians not "to grieve *like the rest of men*," we are not to view our wives like the rest of men or to weep like the rest of men or to rejoice (in the things of the world) like the rest of men or to purchase things like the rest of men or to use things like the rest of men. As Garland says (p. 331), "The 'as not's' are a rhetorically more dashing way of saying, 'Do not be conformed to this world' (Rom. 12:2)."

(c) As the song says, "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through; my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

(4) Paul wants them to be free from anxiety by living according to the end-time perspective he has just mentioned.

(a) Doing some reading between the lines, I *think* Paul means that the key to being without "anxiety" is to live "as not." In other words, he told them in vv. 29-31 to live "as not" *because* he wants them to be free of anxiety. But married people rightly are concerned (anxious in a good sense) about pleasing their spouses, in addition to being concerned about pleasing the Lord, and that makes it a challenge to keep a spouse in proper perspective, to have a spouse "as not" having a spouse. In times of distress, such as the Corinthians were experiencing, the potential anxiety from failing to meet the challenge of keeping one's spouse in proper perspective is so great that the distraction it poses to discipleship makes it generally a wise thing not to marry.

(b) In other words, because we rightly are concerned about our spouses, there is a higher than normal risk of placing undue importance on them, and if we do that in times of distress we're set up for such high anxiety that the distraction it poses to our discipleship makes it generally wiser not to get married under such circumstances.

(c) Paul says what he says to benefit them. He does not say it to restrict them but to increase the likelihood in the present situation of their living with a devotion to the Lord that is unhindered by the distraction of anxiety.

c. Reassurance regarding decision about marrying betrothed (7:36-38) – **³⁶But if anyone thinks he is behaving shamefully toward his virgin, if his passions are strong, and thus it ought to be, let him do what he wishes. He is not sinning; let them marry. ³⁷But he who stands firm in his heart, who, rather than being under necessity, has authority concerning his own will and has decided in his own heart to keep his own virgin [as she is], he will do well. ³⁸So then, he who marries his own virgin does well, and he who does not marry [her] will do better.**

(1) Paul again assures the betrothed man, against the "spiritual ones" in Corinth, that if he thinks he is behaving shamefully toward his virgin by

not marrying her and if his passions are strong, he should do what he wants and marry her. He is not sinning by doing so.

(2) On the other hand, the one who makes up his own mind not to go through with the marriage, as opposed to having that decision forced on him by the "spiritual ones," will do well, meaning act in an appropriate or proper fashion. NIV's "does the *right* thing" has moral overtones which incorrectly imply that the contrary is somehow "wrong."

(3) The bottom line in Paul's view is that the man who marries his virgin does well (it is in no sense bad) and the one who does not marry her will do better (because of the present distress).

d. Reminder for the virgins who do marry (7:39-40) – ³⁹**A wife is bound for as long as her husband lives, but if the husband falls asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.** ⁴⁰**But she is happier, in my judgment, if she remains that way; and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.**

(1) Paul concludes by reiterating for the virgins who go through with their marriages what he previously said to the married Christians. They are to remain married for life. In other words, divorce is not an option for Christians (with the exception not relevant to this context).

(2) If her husband dies, however, she is perfectly free to remarry; it is in no way sinful or unspiritual to do so. With the large majority of interpreters, I take the restriction "only in the Lord" to mean that her new husband must be a Christian. Paul uses "in the Lord" to mean Christians in Rom. 16:11. Even if one takes "only in the Lord" to mean she is to marry in a way fitting for a Christian, I think one winds up at the same conclusion. As Fee remarks:

To be "in the Lord" is to have one's life come under the eschatological view of existence outlined in vv. 29-31. Such a woman lives from such a radically different perspective and value system from that of a pagan husband that a "mixed" marriage, where the "two become one," is simply unthinkable. If she becomes a believer after marriage, then she should maintain the marriage with the hope of winning him to the Lord (vv. 12-16); but it makes no sense from Paul's perspective for one to engage such a marriage once one is a Christian.