



**AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH**  
*A Study in 1 Corinthians*  
**CLASS – Lesson 11**

**GENERAL OUTLINE**

**1 Corinthians 7:1-11:16, Questions asked about marriage, idols and head coverings**

**OUTLINE: Lesson 11**

**1 Corinthians 7:1-16, Questions about sex and marriage**

- 7:1-7 Sexual abstinence in a Christian couple
- 7:8-9 Preliminary statement to unmarried Christians
- 7:10-17 Remain married
  - 7:10-11 Christian couples
  - 7:12-16 Mixed faith couples

The problems of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church present an odd and contrasting mixture of cases. The church tolerated a case of incest but wouldn't eat with sexually immoral non-Christians. Some were going to prostitutes, while others were apparently advocating sexual abstinence even for married folks. (Those going to prostitutes may have been married to someone practicing abstinence.) While some were promoting sexual abstinence within marriage, others (or maybe the same) were considering divorce. Paul deals with both issues.

Students should pay particular attention to the specific audience for each paragraph as indicated in the outline.

**DISCUSSION**

**1 Corinthians 7:1-7, Sexual abstinence in a Christian couple**

Two of the most difficult and important questions in this passage relate to the first verse, for the answers exert great influence on our understanding of what follows. Those questions are: 1) What does it mean to "touch a woman"? and, 2) Who said that is it not good to do so? As background to our study consider these points. The word for "touch" usually means exactly that – to touch. Many times in the Gospels, Jesus "touched" people, usually to heal them. In nonbiblical Greek writings, "to touch" was often a euphemism for sexual relations. Nowhere in known writings of the time did it mean "to marry." The most literal translation of the phrase is "to touch a woman," as shown in the NKJV. The ESV has, "have sexual relations with," and the NIV says, "to marry." Anything other than "to touch" is an interpretation which may be correct or not. So our first challenge is to decipher verse 1 and accurately identify Paul's main theme.

- 1. What is the general attitude of God towards marriage as revealed in the Bible? Although Paul had a personal preference for remaining single, what does the Bible say in support of marriage, and where does it support the general principle that it is not good for a man to marry?**
  
- 2. In light of general Bible teachings about marriage, is it more likely that, “It is not good for a man to touch a woman” is Paul’s inspired response to something the Corinthians had written, or is this phrase the Corinthian statement to which Paul responds in the following verses?**
  
- 3. If it is permissible to remain single (like Paul), why does he say that “each” man and woman should have his or her own spouse? Consider the possibility that verse 2 does not mean that because of immorality everyone should get married? If it doesn’t mean that, then what does it mean?**
  
- 4. What does Paul say about sexual abstinence for a married couple? Since Paul devotes verses 2-5 to this topic, does that tell us anything about the meaning and source of the statement in verse 1 about not touching a woman?**
  
- 5. What is the “concession” of verse 6? Is the concession found in the preceding verses or the following? Does the Bible generally treat marriage and the sexual relationship between husband and wife as a concession that should be avoided if possible? Different translations lead to different understandings.**
  
- 6. Paul is very clear that celibacy should be practiced by a specific group of people. Who are they?**

- 7. Considering modern-day concerns about abusive spouses, should we take verse 4 in an absolute sense, or does the immediate context limit the application of spouses having authority over each other's body? What is that "immediate context"?**
  
- 8. In conclusion to this section (vv. 1-7), what is the basic problem or question that Paul addresses? What is the topic that he talks about the most? This gives us the context of the passage.**

### **1 Corinthians 7:8-9, The unmarried and widowed**

Paul makes a brief statement about life and options as a single Christian.

- 9. Fundamentally in verses 1-9, Paul offers two acceptable responses to a Christian's normal sexual desires. What are those two options?**

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-17, Remain married**

**7:10-11 Christian couples**

**7:12-17 Mixed faith couples**

Once again determining the context and the exact questions behind Paul's answers is not easy, and this makes understanding certain details of Paul's answers extremely difficult. It is possible, and even likely, that he is now treating what some readers promoted as a Plan B to be used if abstinence in marriage (Plan A) was not accepted. Another avenue to promote sexual abstinence would be to be unmarried, even if that meant ending current marriages. Paul responds by affirming that God wants marriages to be permanent.

Even when we understand the questions to which Paul is responding, this passage contains some extremely difficult statements. Many of our difficulties arise because we want Paul to answer our questions instead of the questions that were troubling the Corinthians.

- 10. If verses 1-5 answered the question, "Should married couples abstain from sex?" what question do verses 10-16 answer?**

- 11. Verses 8-9 are addressed to “the unmarried and widows,” and verses 10-11 “to the married.” So who are “the rest” introduced in verse 12?**
  
- 12. Why might Christians have thought it preferable to divorce from their non-believing spouses? This assumes that the marriage predated the conversion of the believing spouse. What is Paul’s response and what is his reasoning?**
  
- 13. What benefits are brought to a marriage and a family if even one spouse is a faithful Christian?**
  
- 14. What does Paul say to do if the spouse commits adultery?**
  
- 15. What does Paul say explicitly about remarriage after divorce? Does verse 15 address this issue?**
  
- 16. Verses 17, 20 & 24 will be included in the next lesson, but they summarize Paul’s basic message in verses 1-16, and that is, “Stay as you are.” In verses 1-16, Paul states only two exceptions to that principle. What are they?**