



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 12

GENERAL OUTLINE

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

OUTLINE: Lesson 12

1 Corinthians 7:17-40, Various questions about being single

7:17-24 Stay as you are

7:25-40 Questions about remaining single

7:25-28 Concerning “virgins”

7:29-35 The time is short

7:36-40 Freedom to choose

As a bridge from the previous teachings about being married to the next section about being single Paul presents two examples (circumcision and slavery) to illustrate the basic principle of remaining in the same situation as when called. Obviously, this idea is to be understood in context. There are many things in a person’s life that one is called to abandon when converted to Christ, but social status is not one of them.

After this statement of principle, Paul turns to questions asked by single Christians who wondered if singleness not only presented some practical advantages for Christians but might even be mandatory for spiritual reasons. So Paul discusses at length the spiritual pros and cons of remaining single but decisively leaves the decision to the individual. Neither getting married nor remaining single is a spiritual obligation or command.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Stay as you are

Paul is still addressing Corinthian questions about being married or single, but he uses two seemingly unrelated examples to convey his message. Illustrations in which the subject is not connected to the original topic can sometimes be useful in overcoming preconceived ideas. In this case, circumcision and slavery were not directly related to the subject of marriage, but they served to demonstrate a common principle.

Note: Concerning “becoming uncircumcised,” there is evidence indicating that some Jewish men sought a surgical procedure that reversed, or at least disguised, the circumcision they had received at birth (e.g., 1 Maccabees 1:14-15).

1. Identify all the times in chapter 7 that Paul says to “remain” in one’s present situation. (Note: He doesn’t always use the word “remain,” even though the idea is present.) Which “situations” are mentioned and for which ones does Paul offer (but not command) an alternative to the status quo?

2. How did one’s social situation or status (e.g., married, single, circumcised, slave, etc.) affect one’s spiritual condition? See also: Galatians 3:27-28; Philipians 4:11-13.

3. If such things as those mentioned above were not important in one’s relationship with God, what two things does Paul identify in this passage as being highly important?

4. For which ethnic or religious group might verse 19 have been the most shocking or disturbing and why?

5. How might we today qualify or describe Paul’s apparent attitude towards slavery? Can you think of any modern day earthly “causes” for which Paul might not be as interested or as passionate as some today would prefer?

6. What is the common principle expressed in these passages: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Colossians 3:1-2, Matthew 6:32-34?

Note the textual similarities between certain phrases in this passage and Colossians 3:1-2.

Col 3:1-2		1 Cor 7:21, 23
If then you were raised with Christ...	=	You were bought with a price;
 set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.	 = 	 Do not be concerned about it....

1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Questions about remaining single 7:25-28, Concerning “virgins”

In the first part of the chapter Paul has dealt with various marital situations: the relationship between husband and wife (1-7), singles and widowed (8-9), and Christians married to nonbelievers (10-16). He then affirmed the general principle that changing one’s social status was not a spiritual accomplishment (17-24). With the expression, “Now concerning virgins” (v. 25, cf. 7:1; 8:1), he turns to a different, though related, group about whom the Corinthians had asked for instruction. Clearly identifying this group is our first challenge as we go forward.

7. In what way are the instructions of 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12 & 25 from or not “from the Lord” as opposed to being from Paul?

There is confusion over who is intended by the pronoun “you” in vv. 25-28. If the phrase, “Are you bound to a wife” means married to a wife, then why does Paul add in the following verse, “even if you marry.” And if “loosed” means to divorce in “Do not seek to be loosed,” does it also mean divorced when he says, “Are you loosed from a wife?” and then adds that if you marry, you do not sin. So let’s try to determine who “you” is in verses 27-28.

8. Is “you” the same as the virgin of verse 25 or someone different? If different, who is “you” and who is the virgin? What different people or groups are clearly distinguished and instructed in verse 28?

(Note: Different translations lead us in different directions on these identities, so check around.)

9. Could “bound to a wife” (NKJV, ESV) mean something other than being married?

Now let’s try to identify the “present distress” (NIV, crisis) in verse 26 (cf. “trouble” in verse 28). The word for distress is more often translated “necessity” or “need” (7:37, 2 Cor 6:4; 9:7; 12:10), but “distress” in 1 Thessalonians 3:7.

10. Distress might refer to overt persecution. What do we know for sure from Scripture (1 or 2 Corinthians and Acts 18) about persecution of Christians in Corinth?

11. What other possibilities for “present distress” do passages such as 1 Cor 4:11-13; 7:33; 2 Corinthians 5:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 3:7; Philippians 3:20-21; 4:11-13; 1 Peter 2:11-12, give us?

**1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Questions about remaining single
7:29-35, The time is short**

Paul’s words in verses 29-31 may strike us as being a bit odd. It is probably best to take them as somewhat exaggerated statements intended to be taken other than literally and more as general examples summarizing a specific principle. Identifying that principle is one of the challenges we face.

We are also concerned with the phrase “the time is short” as applied both to the Corinthians and to ourselves. Some commentators think this refers to a specific time of hardship that was soon to fall on the Corinthian Christians, while others think it refers to final judgment. Paul gives us little information that would provide a clear answer. Nothing elsewhere in the letter suggests that his original readers would soon face an unusual crisis. In any case, the New Testament frequently admonishes Christians to be aware of the brevity and uncertainty of life on earth.

12. What has Paul taught earlier in the chapter that tells us something that Paul *could not* have meant in his words to husbands in v. 29?

13. Does the last part of verse 31 suggest a local “passing away” (i.e., limited to Corinth) or something more general? Based on your answer, what general attitude should Christians adopt towards life on earth (e.g., marriage, mourning, rejoicing or using anything of this world)? (Consider the thoughts and passages of # 11 above in your discussion).

14. Is it wrong, even sinful, for a husband or wife to be concerned about pleasing his or her spouse? What is God’s will for addressing family responsibilities (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 5:8; Proverbs 31:10-31)?

**1st Corinthians 7:25-40, Questions about remaining single
7:36-40, Freedom to choose**

This paragraph begins with a return to the topic of engaged couples (vv. 25-28), in which he states his preference (which he explains in the following verses), but also offers options. The NIV and ESV clearly interpret this as instructions to a man engaged and wondering if he should go ahead and marry. This seems to be a correct reading of vv. 36-38, even though the literal text allows some commentators to think that the “man” is actually the father of the virgin.

15. What does this passage (from v. 25 on) say to the modern-day Christian single (engaged or widowed) who wants God to “let me know” if he wants me to marry or not? How does this topic and this question relate to the matter of the sufficiency of Scripture and the need for modern-day revelation?