

Sexual Confusion Corrected

1 Corinthians 6:12 – 7:40

Halifax: 27 June 2010

Introduction

The Apostle Paul certainly had his work cut out for him in trying to minister God's Word to the Corinthians.

- They had confusion about a lot of things, and Paul had to try to bring clarity to them from God's Word.
 - And one of the things the Corinthians were the most confused about was sex and marriage.
 - In the portion we read today, he addresses this subject.

- Most Greeks had an erroneous presupposition that the body and spirit are incompatible, and held that the body was the prison house of the soul—
 - They believed that in time, the spirit, which was pure, would be separated from the body.

- This dualistic presupposition bred two very opposite philosophies about morality...
 - Some held that because the body was base and inferior, it ought to be denied. These folks considered celibacy to be a morally superior state.
 - Others concluded that as the body was entirely separate from the soul or spirit, it therefore did not matter what you did with your body...
 - The body could be indulged and it would have no effect on the spirit.
 - So there were those that advocated no sex at all and those who saw no problem with running wild sexually.

- As you might imagine,
 - most of the common people in Corinth gravitated to the second philosophy in their practice—that it was okay to run wild sexually.
 - Every sort of perversion was practiced...
 - One of the favourite sexual connections among all the Greeks in the first century was that of men with young boys...boys under 12.
 - Sexual perversion was also openly brought into worship—rather than practicing their perversions in secret, the priests and priestesses at the pagan temples engaged in sexual perversion as an act of devotion to their gods.
 - The infamous Temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love) at Corinth had as many as thousand prostitutes working on the same shift.

- This was the environment in which many who were now members in the congregations at Corinth had grown up.
 - This was just the way things were done—this is what they grew up with.
 - They had to be instructed in Christian morality.
 - They had to learn that many of the sexual practices that had been acceptable without question from their youth were not acceptable before our holy Lord.

Now it is often heard that our society is more corrupt than any other,

- but this is simply not true.
- The Corinthians were much more corrupt than we are.
 - We are quickly moving to the same level of corruption, but thanks be to the Lord, there is still, by His grace, a restraint in our society.
 - But as we are becoming more and more confused about sexuality,
 - the instruction that Paul gives to the Corinthians is very much needed for us.
 - More and more young people are growing up in ignorance of God's standard and of what is morally acceptable.

We will do well, as we consider the topic of marriage, to look carefully at what Paul says in 1 Cor 6 & 7, the portion I read to you a moment ago.

- It is not my intention to do a detailed exegesis of this passage this morning...
 - We would be here for a long time if I were to do that...
 - But I will rather look at our text in a summary fashion...
 - looking at three errors that were affecting the Corinthian church and how they are corrected by the Apostle Paul as he, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presents the will of God about this subject.
 - We will see that these same errors have practical relevance for us who live in a society that is increasingly given over to confusion about sex and marriage.

TRANS> So the first error we shall look at is:

I. The notion that sexual immorality or fornication is acceptable.

- As I mentioned, for many of the Greeks, it was thought to be acceptable because it was an act of the body and had no affect on the soul...
 - Paul makes it clear that sexual immorality is not acceptable in chapter 6, verses 12-20.

A. But we need to define the terms here...

- To what is he referring when he speaks of sexual immorality or fornication here?

1. He uses the word πορνεία (porneia) three times in this passage.
 - πορνεία is translated “sexual immorality” or “fornication” in most of our English Bibles—
 - It is used in verse 13 where it says that the body is not for πορνεία.
 - It is used again in verse 18 where we are told to flee from πορνεία,
 - and then a second time in verse 18 where πορνεία is said to be a sin against our own body.
2. But just what is πορνεία, or fornication?
 - πορνεία is illicit sex—sex outside of marriage as God instituted marriage.
 - a. To understand this definition, we must first understand marriage as God’s instituted it.
 - 1) We read of the institution of marriage in Genesis 2 this morning, where the Lord said that,
 - Gen 2:24: a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
 - This shows us that marriage is a bond that unites a man and a woman as one.
 - Because God instituted marriage, He is said to join the man and the woman together in marriage.
 - You may remember how Jesus spoke this way when He was talking to the Jews about the inappropriateness of divorce and said,
 - “What God has joined together let no man separate.”
 - 2) The union formed by marriage is a covenantal one.
 - The couple is married when they voluntarily promise before God and witnesses that they will be faithful to each other until death to live in holy marriage.
 - Upon making this promise, they are authorised by God to enter into sexual union and to live together in a sexually active relationship.
 - Any sexual activity between persons outside of the marriage covenant is illicit sex—it is fornication or immorality.
 - b. The Old Testament has a very helpful description of what sort of sexual activity is prohibited.

- It has become fashionable in our day to play very loose with the terms and to say that caressing or even oral sex with a person to whom you are not married is not really fornication...
 - but in Leviticus 18 we are told that we are not to “uncover the nakedness” (gaw-law er-vaw) of anyone that we are not married to.
 - Some modern translations have loosely translated gaw-law er-vaw, but the literal meaning is “uncover the nakedness of”
- The idea is that the sexual uncovering of the nakedness of anyone to whom you are not lawfully married,
 - whether the uncovering involves touching or looking upon a person sexually is prohibited.
- This idea of uncovering nakedness is very helpful because it makes it clear that it is not only intercourse,
 - but sexual touching or even sexual viewing outside of marriage that is forbidden.
 - When Paul speaks of *porneia*, he is speaking of any uncovering of the nakedness of a person to whom you are not married.
 - It is to enter into sexual contact of any kind with a person to whom you are not lawfully married in accordance with God’s institution.

3. It is significant to observe that Greeks had a specific word for illicit sex...

- the word *porneia* which Paul uses here.
- This shows that even though they indulged in all sorts of sexual perversions, they still knew that they were perversions...
 - They had a reference point of what was morally proper.
- Virtually every society, no matter how isolated they may have been, has been found to have an understanding of marriage and that sex outside of marriage is immoral.
 - This bears witness to the fact that we are all the sons and daughters of Adam, and that we have come from the family of Noah in which marriage was known and practiced.
 - All societies and peoples are familiar with the original institution of God.
 - It is absurd on evolutionary notions to suppose that all societies have come up with marriage independently of each other.
 - Paul did not have to coin a new word to speak to these Corinthian believers about sexual immorality...
 - He used a word that they were very familiar with.

- B. You can see further that Paul speaks of fornication here as being joined to a harlot—
1. In verse 16 he says that a man becomes one body with her in a way similar to becoming one flesh with his wife.
 - Paul is not saying that the man is thereby married to the harlot.
 - Sexual immorality does not produce the state of marriage.
 - The point is rather that the man is entering into sexual union that properly belongs only to marriage with a harlot.
 - It is a misuse of the one flesh relationship—an illicit use that is a violation of God's institution and therefore condemned.
 2. Paul uses the word “harlot” very loosely here, to refer to any woman who enters into sexual contact with a man to whom she is not married.
 - In other words, he is not only referring to a woman who is engaged in the sex trade per se.
 - He is referring to any woman who gives her body sexually to a man outside the covenant of marriage.
 - Like a harlot, she gives her body in exchange for something—attention, pleasure, money, status, companionship—whatever,
 - apart from a covenant commitment—
 - She is a harlot.
 - Young women need to think about this before they give themselves to man for sexual pleasure.
- C. We are given a number of arguments to oppose fornication in this section...
1. Verses 12 and 13 indicate that the Corinthians were using the argument that pertains to food—that all things are lawful...
 - This was a doctrine that was emphasised by Paul among the Greeks because the Jewish believers tried to impose dietary laws on them.
 - Paul and Jesus had both taught that what a man eats cannot defile him.
 - It is not what goes in, but what comes out that defiles the man.
 - But there seem to have been some in the Corinthian church who tried to apply this teaching that “all things are lawful” to fornication!
 - Paul says, “Yes indeed, the stomach is for food and food is for the stomach,” but in no way does it follow that the body is for sexual immorality!
 - These Corinthians were looking at it according to Greek dualistic notions...

- that what one does with his body has nothing to do with the real person—with his spirit and soul.
2. Paul goes on to present the Christian perspective of the body...
- a. He says that body is for the LORD and the Lord is for the body!
 - In Christian doctrine, the body is not looked at as the prison house of the soul...or as unimportant, or even as temporary...
 - The body is looked at
 - as that which is joined to Christ (v. 15),
 - as that which is going to be resurrected to immortality (v. 14),
 - as that which is the very temple of the Holy Spirit—the place where God the Spirit dwells (v. 19),
 - and as that which has been bought by the precious blood of Christ (v. 20).
 - b. Paul emphasises that what you do with your body is therefore very important!
 - You cannot say, “Well it’s just my body. I can do what I want with it.”
 - Not at all!
 - If you are a Christian, your body is part of the body of Christ...
 - your body is going to be raised up to live in glory forever...
 - your body is going to be the habitation of God’s Spirit forever...you are sealed with Him...
 - and you and your body have been purchased at the high price of Christ blood so that you belong to Him...
 - It is all the worse then for you, as a Christian, to take that redeemed body that is part of the body of Christ, that is the dwelling place of the Spirit, and that was purchased by Christ and join it to a harlot!
 - Such behaviour is totally inappropriate!
 - It is inconsistent with a Christian profession!
 - c. Therefore, Paul says plainly, “Flee sexual immorality”
 - You must run away from it!
 - You are not to tease around with it—you just told to run!
 - There is no room for compromise here!
 - You have to settle it in your heart that you will run away when temptation comes knocking!
 - If you go back just a few verses before our text,

- to verse 9, you will see how the scripture declares that:
 - “neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”
 - That is quite serious and quite clear!
 - A person cannot be considered a Christian if they practice these things...
 - Sadly, many churches allow members to remain in good standing and to come to the Lord’s Table who have not repented of such conduct!
- Yet there is forgiveness for those who repent and turn to the Lord for mercy.
 - Paul goes on to say (v. 11)
 - “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”
 - You were some of these things before you came to know Christ, but now that you know Him,
 - you are forgiven and you have been given a new life by His grace.
 - No longer are you a fornicator—you have been redeemed.
 - You may fall into sin, but you no longer live in it as a settled way of life.
 - Praise be to Jesus Christ—He has rescued you!

TRANS> Now let’s move on the second error that was entertained by some of the Corinthian believers...

II. The second error: the notion that celibacy is morally superior to marriage.

- As I mentioned in the introduction,
 - A. There were many Greeks who held to the idea that celibacy was a morally superior way of life.
 - 1. Even though few practiced it, they had it in their minds that they would be more morally pure if they did.
 - Therefore, when they came to know Jesus Christ and came to love Him as their Saviour and Lord,
 - many of them who had not had sufficient motivation to live according to their highest ideals in paganism were now quite motivated...

- Indeed, let me ask you—you have been redeemed by Jesus Christ...
 - If you believed that the Lord would be more pleased with you if you abstained from all sexual contact,
 - would you not seek, by His grace, to abstain?
 - I trust that you would, for it is in the Christian's renewed heart to please his Lord and to lay down his life for Him.
 - If you believed it to be His will for you to abstain from sexual contact for the rest your life, you would surely make every effort to do it!
2. And because many of the Corinthians thought that celibacy was morally superior to the pleasure of sex, they wrote to ask Paul about it.
- a. Some of them were offended with their brothers and sisters who did not live according to this high ideal!
 - Jesus was not married, Paul was not married—
 - so what was wrong with some of their teachers and their fellow saints that they should live in marriage?
 - b. And there were also those who were struggling to keep up this ideal lifestyle, but were finding it to be extremely difficult!
 - 1) Some of them were not married and were trying to avoid marriage...
 - 2) Some of them were married and trying to abstain from sexual relations in marriage...
 - 3) and some of them were considering breaking up their marriages because they were finding their spouse to be a hindrance rather than a help to their spiritual lives.
 - At least we can assume that all this was going on because this is what Paul addresses in chapter 7.
 - c. And what's more, even though he addresses it,
 - this conduct was something that took root in the Christian Church from early on and led to all sorts of problems.
 - The history books tell us of men and women who avoided or even broke up their marriages in order to go off to the monastery or the nunnery!
 - And we are told of popes and bishops who, avoiding marriage, fell in with harlots and with the members of the church—even with young boys and women...
 - skeletons of aborted babies can be found in the basements of nunneries—little bodies that were stashed away by nuns who were

unable to keep their vows of celibacy and wanted to hide the evidence.

- And even today, we see all the problems that the church of Rome has in requiring a celibate priesthood.
 - The news is filled with reports of widespread sexual abuse among the clergy.
 - And should this come as any surprise when the Apostle Paul speaks of “forbidding marriage” as a doctrine of demons that will characterise the last days—from Christ’s ascension to his return?

B. See here how the Apostle not only allows for marriage, but even requires it in some cases!

- We will look at the way he answers three questions that persons who held that celibacy was a higher way of life might have had...

1. First he speaks to the question of whether persons should enter into marriage.

- And his answer is a resounding “yes!”

a. After stating that it is well and good for man not to touch a woman in v. 1...

- that there is nothing wrong with staying single...

1) He then declares in verse 2:

- Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. (1 Cor 7:2).
- With these words, he makes it clear that the normal pattern is that each man is to have his own wife and each woman her own husband...
 - and that this is not only desirable, but necessary because of sexual immorality.

2) His meaning is clarified further in verses 7-9:

- 1 Cor 7:7-9: For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
- Paul himself was not married, and he is glad he is not married...
 - But the reason he is able to live without marriage is because God has given him a special gift that most men and women do not have.
 - Most men and women burn with passion if they don’t marry!

- They are filled with sexual desire.
- And rather than going around burning with passion and being all distracted, Paul says, “Get married.”
- When you preach about fighting against sin and young men are present,
 - the majority of them have one particular sin that immediately comes to mind.
 - There is one temptation that they are constantly having to battle...
 - and Paul says here that such persons are to marry.
 - It is better to marry than to burn.
- b. But don't misunderstand.
 - Paul is not saying that this is the only reason to marry.
 - Marriage was instituted before the fall—before sexual immorality was a problem for us.
 - Marriage, in itself, is not just a way to avoid immorality.
 - It is the way that God has appointed for companionship, for mutual help, and for the generation of children.
 - It is here, more than in any other human relationship, that we live out the relationship that the Trinity has among the three persons—
 - It is here that that very love is to be displayed by us as the image bearers of God, and that we have the privilege of bringing forth children who are the image of God.
 - Marriage is good in itself—and is not merely a provision against sexual immorality...
 - but nevertheless, in this fallen world, it *is* a provision against immorality...
 - and the fact is that most people need it for that purpose.
 - We must not be so proud that we cannot admit this!
 - I have observed how many young men begin to seek a wife soon after they become Christians—because they no longer have the option of fornication.
 - This is the way it is meant to be!
 - God calls them to marriage in this way.
 - I want you to notice something interesting here.

- Before the fall, the Lord said just the opposite of what Paul says in verse 1...
 - Paul says, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,”
 - But in Gen 2:18, the LORD said, “It is **not good** that the man should be alone” and He then made a wife for him.
 - How can both be true?
- It is that they were true under different circumstances...
 - Before the fall, marriage was a good thing—good in itself—not just as a way of avoiding sexual immorality.
 - But after the fall there are many problems associated with marriage, so now, in some cases, it is good to abstain from marriage.
- I will say more about the troubles associated with marriage later, but you see that because of the fall there are two changes related to marriage...
 - that it becomes a necessity for some to escape temptation...
 - that it becomes burdensome and something that is good to avoid for some because of all the problems related to marriage in a fallen world.
- c. We find this same doctrine taught in the Old Testament in that when a couple in covenant with God fell into immorality,
 - God commanded that the man should offer to take responsibility for the one flesh relationship he had unlawfully entered into.
 - He was to marry the woman unless the father refused to give her to him in marriage.
 - This same principle applies to us today—
 - If a couple in the covenant community not only burns with passion for each other, but actually engage in fornication,
 - they are to marry.
 - This is how they take responsibility for the one flesh relationship they have entered in to.

TRANS> So you see from our text that when it comes to the question of whether Christians should marry, the answer is clearly yes.

- There are many who not only are permitted to marry, but who ought to marry.

- Those who do have the gift of continency, so that they do not burn with passion, may marry as well,
 - but for them marriage is optional and sometimes it is better for them to remain unmarried...
 - We will look at that more later.
 - But now lets move on to the next question about celibacy...
2. The question of whether persons who are married should, as much as they are able, abstain from sexual contact.
- a. When the Greek notion that celibacy was the moral high ground took root in the Christian church,
- there were many couples who were already married who felt guilty about engaging in sex and tried to minimise their contact.
 - They remained married, but they tried to avoid intimacy as much as possible.
 - Everyone knows that to this day the Roman Church teaches that the only purpose of sexual union is procreation—the making of children.
 - But this is clearly contrary to sound doctrine.
 - I think this idea has affected many other people also—there is the thought that there is something a little bit unholy about sex.
- b. But the Scriptures insist that married couples are to be sexual active!
- 1) Paul brings this out in verses 3-5 on no uncertain terms!
- He refers to it as an obligation—even a debt—such that a man who woman who withhold sex from their spouse is guilty of fraud.
 - He shows that it is equally the duty of the wife to husband and the husband to the wife to render affection to one another.
 - To refuse your spouse is to put him or her in the place of temptation...
 - and while any sin they may commit is inexcusable, you become a partaker with them in their sin if you withhold yourself.
- 2) You see in verse 5 how Paul is so strong about this that he even forbids a couple to separate from each other for the purpose of prayer and fasting for more than a short time.
- and even then, only by mutual consent!
- a. How far he is from that notion that sexual relations should be avoided as much as possible!
- It is the gift of God in marriage!

- He designed our bodies to have pleasure in this way, He gives us hunger for this pleasure, and He calls us to indulge with thanksgiving in that pleasure!
 - Our God does not delight in us if we despise His gifts!
 - He wants us to enjoy them with gratitude!
- b. But listen—there are many in our society who have an underlying thought that sexual relations are dirty or at least not very holy!
- That keeps you from receiving God’s gift with gratitude—and you need to change the way you think!
 - Hebrews 13:4 puts it like this:
 - Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
 - And Proverbs 5:18-20 puts it like this:
 - Prov 5:18-20: Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?
 - That is what God’s holy Word says!
 - It is not sex in marriage that is unclean...
 - It is fornication and adultery that defile a person.
- 3) Now this is not to say that there should be abuse...
- It is the *affection that is due* that is to be rendered...
 - If you are tired or unwilling all the time, you need to repent for your sin...
 - Yet, if you are wearing your poor wife or husband out by constant advances without regard to health or fatigue,
 - you need to exercise some restraint.
 - But the thrust of scripture is toward regular and frequent relations rather than sporadic and infrequent.
 - And let me add here that while men seem to be able to focus on the mere physical act itself,
 - part of the affection due to a wife involves caring for her, protecting her, showing kindness and affection to her all through the day...
 - it is not *due affection* to her to just jump in bed at the end of the day to be gratified.

- The bottom line is that both need to be giving to the other, and learning how to give to the other.
- The man is not to treat his wife like another man, and the woman is not to treat her husband like another woman.
- The beauty of marriage is that it involves a man and woman who are different coming together and learning to love one another.

TRANS> With that, let us move on to another question about celibacy...

3. The question of whether those who are married should break up their marriage if they find it to be hindrance to them in their walk with God...
 - a. Those who hold to the notion that celibacy is a higher state are often inclined to break up their marriages...
 - I have already mentioned how there are those in history who have left their families—their husband or wife—to go off to a monastery or nunnery.
 - It is clear from what we have already seen that such behaviour is out of the question...
 - You are called to render proper affection to your spouse.
 - To abandon them is not to enter into a higher state, but into a life of sinful neglect and rebellion against God's calling.
 - b. But what if you are married to a person who, rather than being a help to you in your walk with God, is more of a hindrance...
 - 1) Perhaps you have a dead-beat husband who just tags along to church and does not lead in family worship or uphold God's standards at home...
 - or maybe you have a wife who chaffs whenever you try to lead, or who nags you so much that you just want to avoid her...
 - or maybe you just find that your personalities are contrary and you are always getting into quarrels and irritating each other.
 - or even worse, maybe your husband or wife does not even profess to be a Christian...
 - perhaps they have left the faith—
 - or perhaps you have been converted since you got married...
 - or maybe you were disobedient and married an unbeliever...
 - What should you do in these cases?
 - 2) Paul tells you plainly...

- a) He says that a wife is not to depart from her husband and that a husband is not to divorce his wife.
 - You can see that in verse 10 and 11...
 - That is the rule—and if there is a departure (which there shouldn't be) you are to remain unmarried so that you can be opened to reconciliation until the every effort has been made to restore.

- b) And you see that Paul goes on to say in verse 12-15 that even if you are married to an unbeliever,
 - you, on your part, are to do all you can to make the marriage work.
 - In verse 14, Paul explains that your ungodly, unbelieving spouse does not pollute your household...
 - The household is sanctified on account of the believer and your children are regarded as holy (or set apart to God).
 - You cannot use the excuse that the unbelieving spouse (or a slack spouse who is a believer) can ruin your children.
 - If one of you is serving the Lord, God's blessing is on you and your children.

- c) I would in no way discount the hardships that you must endure,
 - but do not even entertain thought of breaking up the marriage as if that would somehow put you in the place you need to be to receive God's blessing.
 - If you are always entertaining the thought of leaving the relationship,
 - you will not be a very good spouse.
 - Your heart will be in finding relief from escaping the relationship rather than in trying your best, by God's grace, to make it work.
 - If you stay where God has called you, you can look for His grace to sustain you there—no matter how difficult it may be.

- 3) Yet, at the same time, if your spouse refuses to stay in the relationship, Paul is also very clear in verse 15...
 - You are to let them depart!
 - It is a third person imperative—a command—let them depart—do not try to stop them.

 - God's grace will reach to you if you let them go.

- There is much more I could say about this, but the main point is that you are to try to work it out on your part,
 - but you are not to force the other person to remain.
 - You can serve God with a clear conscience if you do what you can and your spouse insists on departing.

TRANS> So you see from these three questions that Paul addresses how erroneous the notion is that celibacy is a superior state to the state of matrimony.

- It is perfectly right and sometimes even necessary for believers to marry...
- It is their duty to be sexually active when they are married...
- And to do all they can to maintain their marriage, even if it is to an unbeliever.

Now let's move on to the third error that Paul corrects...

III. The third error: the notion that celibacy is morally inferior to marriage.

A. It would seem that some of the Corinthians, having understood the high calling of marriage, over-reacted—

- and insisted that marriage was the moral high ground and that those who abstain from it are not as holy as those who do.
 - It never ceases to amaze me at how ready Christians are to judge those who are not like themselves.
 - The scripture calls us to judge righteous judgement—
 - for example, if someone is living in fornication, we are not to admit them to membership or count them as a believer...
 - but when it comes to judging someone because they are married or because they are not married (on that basis alone),
 - it is not our place!
- I have known unmarried people to sometimes feel that they are second class citizens in the church because they are not married.
 - Sometimes, I have seen them feel this way without justification—they feel that way even though no one treats them that way...
 - But I have also seen those who are married act as if those are not are inferior because of it.
 - Brothers and sisters, we need to show honour to one another!
 - We need to respect the calling of each person!
 - Yes, there are times when we may need to admonish someone about refraining from marriage for wrong reasons...

- but Paul makes it clear that there is nothing wrong with abstaining from marriage if one is able to bear it.

B. Let's take a look at what he says...

1. We have already seen in 7:1 that he says that it is good for a man not to touch a woman...

- and then in verse 8, he says that it is good for widows and other unmarried persons to remain as he is—unmarried...
 - Paul is not some low grade of Christian, yet he was not married!
 - And so also our Lord Jesus Christ!
 - There are many people who can be a complete Christian without marriage.
 - We have seen that no one should try to live without marriage is who burning with passion,
 - but if you have the gift of continence, it is good to remain unmarried.

2. But why is it good?

a. I have already mentioned this—and told you that I would come back to it...

- It is good because we live in a fallen world of sin and sorrow.
- In verses 25-28, Paul elaborates on why it is good not to be married...
 - because of the trouble that will come through marriage—especially in light of the present distress!
 - You see, the Corinthians were in a very hostile environment.
 - There was increasing opposition from both the Greeks and the Jews.
 - They did not have much longer to enjoy the liberties they now had.

b. In verse 29-31, Paul says:

- 1 Cor 7:29-31: But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.
- When trouble comes, it is twice as hard to have marriage and children and possessions...
 - so Paul is sounding a warning.
 - You will often lose these comforts of this world in such times, and it is easier to have never had them than to have them and lose them...

- If all you have is a tent and it is destroyed, it is not great lose, but if you own a mansion, you suffer...
 - If you are torn from your wife and children and cast into prison, it is far more difficult than it would have been if you did not have a wife and children.
- c. As Paul goes on, he insists that there is nothing wrong if persons get married and give their daughters in marriage,
- but he is trying to spare them from the hardships they will face and advising those who are so gifted to refrain from marriage for their own good.
 - He even goes so far as to say that it is better for them not marry if they are able to bare the unmarried state!
3. And Paul's main concern is that the unmarried person will not be divided the way the married person will...
- a. When it comes being dragged off to be fed to the lions or to be burned at the stake,
- the married person will be torn—he will have more temptation to deny the Lord...
 - and he will not be as bold to testify, perhaps, as the one who is not married.
 - What I mean is, even if he does not deny the Lord, he will be more inclined to hide (and possibly it will be more right for him to hide) than the one who is single.
 - He has to think of his duty to his wife and children.
- b. Of course Paul makes it clear that when it comes down to it,
- the married person or the person with much of this worlds goods, must be as though he had none of these things...
 - He must be ready, as Luther put it, to let goods and kindred go for the sake of the gospel.
 - But if he knows this is coming, he is wise to refrain from ever acquiring goods and kindred if he can avoid it.
- Nevertheless, Paul keeps going back again to say that it is not sinful to marry—
- just not perhaps the wisest thing to do under the present circumstances!
 - It will be easier to serve the Lord, especially given the present distress, without marriage...

- but everyone must do what is best in his own case.

TRANS> And that brings us to conclusion of the whole matter...

Conclusion

Every Christian is to serve the Lord in his or her calling...

- My dear brothers and sisters, you are to serve our dear Lord Jesus in your calling, whatever that calling may be!
 - It is a marvellous thing and you must never forget it...
 - You belong to Him!
 - You are here for Him!
 - You are His dwelling place—a temple for Him!
 - You were purchased out of sin and death and corruption by His precious blood.
 - You are forgiven and headed for a blessed eternity in communion with God in His house forever and ever.
- And so it is not for you to be stressed out about your calling...
 - Whether you are married or not married is not the issue...
 - What matters is that you render whole-hearted service to your blessed Lord!
 - If you are burning with passion, do not fornicate but get married and use that for His glory.
 - If you are married, use it for His glory—rendering due affection to your spouse.
 - If you are married to a difficult person, live to the glory of God in that marriage.
 - If your unbelieving spouse leaves you, live without him to the glory of God.
 - If you are not married, use that for His glory—devoting yourself wholly to the service of the Lord and to selfish pursuits.
 - If you are married and persecution comes, live as if you are not married, leaving everything for Him if called to do so.
- The bottom line is, serve your dear Lord wherever you are!
 - You can see that this is Paul's passion in this passage—
 - His only concern is that you devote yourself to our Lord Jesus.
 - And this is what your Lord wants from you...
 - He has placed you in a calling and He wants you to serve Him in that calling...
 - and He will supply you with all the grace you need to deal with the hardships that are involved in that calling.
 - Don't spend all your energies wishing you had a different calling!
 - Pour yourself out where you are as you are.
 - You will find His grace to be sufficient for you.