

7066U

WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

OUR FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

CHALLENGE OF CORINTHIANS

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Study #3: Concerning Marriage

Reading: 1 Corinthians 7

Good morning brethren and sisters!

You'll realize looking at 1 Corinthians 7 this morning, there are going to be parts of Paul's letter to the Corinthians that we're not going to be able to get round to this week, and I've made a selection of the parts which I felt would perhaps be most helpful, and if this means I'm missing out chapters that you'd have preferred, then I make the apology now! The reason however for moving forwards to 1 Corinthians 7 at this stage, is that if you look at commentaries on Corinthians that were written 100 or 200 years ago as I have done, you'll see how little time the commentators spend on this chapter; almost as if they couldn't quite understand why it was that the Corinthians had all the problems that they did, or why the apostle spent so much time dealing with those issues.

Now we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century aren't quite in that position, we can understand the difficulties that the Corinthians had, because we live in a society which is so very similar to the society of first century Corinth, that if the apostle were here, we would like to ask questions concerning marriage because we're in a society which is obsessed with sex. Wherever you turn those are the issues which are brought before us, and it was exactly the same in Corinth, to the point where the Corinthians as they wrote to the apostle Paul, had come up with a sort of mantra and we have it there in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 7, 'Surely, they said to Paul, **it's good for a man not to touch a woman**', and you can understand, can't you? in Corinth which was a city given over wholly to immorality, why it was that the brethren and sisters said, 'well, all of these things are so worldly that it is wrong for any disciple of Christ to get involved in any way at all, therefore, it is much better to abstain completely from anything to do with a physical relationship between a man and a woman. 'It's good for a man not to touch a woman', and I believe those words there in verse 1, are the apostle quoting back to the Corinthians things that they first had written to him.

Well, were they right? Is it good for a man not to touch a woman? Well, let's think about it, shall we? and really we need to consider very carefully, because as I've said, we live in a similar sort of age, an age where the same sort of problems exist. So here are

some of the questions that the Corinthian brethren and sisters asked:

1. Is marriage a desirable thing? You may think that's a foolish question but it was a very real one in the minds of the brethren and sisters as they asked the apostle these things, and considered them themselves, as I say, particularly against the background of the times in which they lived.

They also had this question as well,

2. If one partner is an unbeliever should the marriage be dissolved? How is it possible for someone to be espoused to Christ and joined physically to someone who was a pagan, and remember what paganism was in those days, and what it involved. It involved, as we're going to see in a later class, going to idols' temples which were little better than brothels; well really they were brothels, how could it be possible that you could have one partner in a marriage who is seeking to live a holy and sanctified life, and the other partner in a marriage living a life which is so dissolute that it was part of the sewer of Corinth, as we saw in our first class. Surely in those situations, it's better that the marriage be dissolved! and you can understand why it was that brethren and sisters in Corinth felt that. Just imagine if that were your marriage, if you were link to someone who was living a life of such gross immorality, could you really continue in that marriage? and it was a very real burning issue for the brethren and sisters in Corinth, and they sought the advice of the apostle in those situations.

3. What about virgins? You see, the first question, is marriage a desirable thing? was really concerning those who were already married, should they continue in that state? The second question if that marriage is with an unbeliever, should that marriage continue? Now the question is what about those who are not yet married? should they enter into marriage? and this is an issue today, isn't it? Should those that are unmarried seek marriage? What about parents whose children are yet unmarried, should they actually help them find partners or should they try and deter them from finding partners in this world in which we live? Should virgins marry?

4. What about those who are widows, should they marry? That's a question we'll have a look at in a moment. Well, it's interesting to see the apostle's answer to this! Verse 2, 'Nevertheless, to avoid fornication let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband'. That might have seemed a strange response that the apostle is making, that each man have his own wife, but that was the reason you see, **to avoid fornication**. The apostle saw marriage as a deterrent against the immorality of Corinth. You could see individuals going to idols' temples and the unions into which they were entering were not marriage. That was fornication, gross immorality! and to avoid that the apostle says, 'better to marry'. The same situation, I suppose, applies today, much better to marry than to enter into a string of other relationships. Better to marry than to live in sin; better to marry than to involve yourself in what the world euphemistically calls 'one night stands'; better to marry than to have your mind just churned up with all sorts of things which take you away from a consideration of the things of God; much better marriage than that! We can enter in with the apostle and

say, 'yes', surely that must be the better route to follow. In a world that's consumed with immorality, marriage becomes a **safe haven**, something which saves you from all of those things.

If the apostle had ended it at that point, we could say, 'well, yes, we can see what he's saying, but it's almost as if he's saying, that really marriage is just **a point of safety,**' well that's not the only thing he's saying, and marriage isn't just a point of safety from something that's worse. Marriage is rather better than that, as the apostle is going to go on to teach us. You see, marriage also fulfils the requirement which God recognized right back at the beginning, 'it's good that man should not be alone', or rather as it's put in scripture, 'it's not good for the man to be alone'. We're going to have to examine that comment of the LORD God a little bit later on this morning. But that's what the apostle is saying, isn't it? better to marry than to be involved in immorality.

But you notice what the apostle does say here in verse 2, 'Let every man have **his own wife** and let every woman have **her own husband**'. This is repeated if you'd like to look at verse 7, 'I would that all men were even as I myself, but every man has his proper gift of God; one after this manner and another after that'. Again, he's talking about the individual person, that each have his own wife or her own husband; it's there again in verse 8, 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it's good for them if they abide even as I', and he's speaking again to the individual, they have to make their own decision; there again in verse 11, 'if she depart let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband; let not the husband put away his wife', again speaking to the individual, and all of those verses that are listed there (verses 26, 27, 32-36) that's the point that's being made. It's not as if the apostle is giving a general comment and saying everybody must do exactly the same, he's saying to the individual, 'now think very carefully about your situation, about where you stand; let a man have **his** own wife, let a woman have **her** own husband. We mustn't extrapolate from that and say therefore the apostle is saying, every individual must be married. That was the Jewish point of view, by the way! you were somehow incomplete unless you were married, which is one reason why there were multiple marriages allowed in Jewry. Because there were more women than men and if everyone must be married, then there were occasions where a man had more than one wife; because marriage was so important, you couldn't envisage the situation where a person would be unmarried. There was a pressure also on those who were widows, to re-marry. So let every man have his own wife, let every woman have her own husband.

That pressure on the Jews was so great, and we shall have to think about this in a moment in connection with the apostle Paul, that to become an elder in Israel, a man had to be married and it was impossible for a man to be a member of the Sanhedrin unless he was married. There's a little bit of a reflection of that when it comes to ecclesial life in the first century. 1 Timothy 3 for example, in speaking of those who seek to be bishops, who desire an honourable role, the apostle says then they should be the husband of one wife. So something of that Jewish thinking rolls forward **to teaching within the ecclesia.** Now I think for a different reason there and I think that elders

being the husband of one wife, is saying that in that situation the person that is taking the role of eldership, should not have some sort of mixed marital history, which would mean that those outside the ecclesia could point the finger (I think that's more the point), but there would be those who would say, 'well, it would be wrong for someone who was unmarried to take up the position of eldership. But that's not what the apostle is saying here, where he's saying that every man have his own wife and that every woman have her own husband, **he's not saying everybody should be married**. But he's saying, marriage is the thing which is more important, because of the immorality of the time, and if that is such, then perhaps it's right that each should have his own wife or her own husband.

So in that sense the apostle is redefining the basis of marriage as **it was understood in the first century world**. He's not, of course, redefining the basis of marriage scripturally, he is reinforcing that; but for the first century world, he was now teaching something which was rather new to them and taking them back to the original teaching. You see, what had happened in Corinth was that because of the immorality in Corinth, there was a **perverted view** of relations between men and women. Men were dominating their wives, women were being subjugated in marriage, and the apostle viewing these things said that that was not how it was from the beginning. Sadly, it's still true today, that the husband can dominate his wife and a wife can be subjugated to her husband; actually, it can also work the other way around that a woman can dominate her husband and the husband is subjugated to the wife. The apostle is saying that both those things are wrong. Marriage in Corinth and marriage today can be viewed as some sort of commercial transaction, in just the same way as that can happen outside of marriage; the physical relations between a man and a woman can become a commercial transaction. They were in Corinth, that's what the prostitutes were there for in the temple that loomed over the city; and once again that is not what marriage is! that's not how relations between men and women ought to be! and the apostle was teaching them a better way.

So he confirms that marriage is based on mutual selflessness! Just look at verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 7, 'Let the husband render to the wife due benevolence and likewise also the wife unto the husband'. It's not that one should dominate and the other should be subjugated, but there is something **mutual** about marriage, and that's what's most important of all! 'The wife hath not power of her own body but the husband and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife', so the apostle now starts to deal with the physical relationship in marriage, that physical relationship which assumes such a large proportion in Corinth as it does in 21<sup>st</sup> century western society. So his words now are important for us because of all the things that are said, and the billboards which shout so loud to us today in every advertisement, these are the things that are brought before us, aren't they? So what was it that the apostle had to teach about the physical relationship in marriage?

Well, there is a great distinction, isn't there? because there was flagrant immorality in Corinth; you could see people walking each day up the hill towards the temple and you

knew what it was that they were going to do when they reached that temple. But the picture that Paul paints is very different, it's a very tender picture of the physical relationship in those verses that we've just seen in 1 Corinthians 7. Then he goes on to tell us something which is particularly important, just look at verse 5, 'Defraud ye not one the other' (and he's speaking now of the physical relationship in marriage) 'except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer'. He just says that there's something more important than the physical relationship in marriage, and that's a man or woman's relationship with God! I mean, it's such an obvious statement, isn't it? but perhaps we don't draw it from this verse as much as we should. Much more important than your relationship-husband, with your wife, much more important, wife, than your relationship with your husband, is your relationship through Christ with Almighty God. That must come first, has to come first. If you just imagine (I'm just trying to draw an example right now just to explain to us, what this situation is). Just imagine that you have taken a wife, and this is your honeymoon; does that mean that you don't go to break bread the following morning) You've been married on the Saturday; and you don't break bread on the Sunday morning, because you've taken a wife? and the marriage bed is more attractive to you than the memorial table? Well, it can't be, can it? the memorial table is much more important than the marriage bed, and we should leave the one in order to go to the other, and forge the relationship, which is, the priority in our lives, the relationship that we have with our Lord. If it's true in those circumstances then it must be true throughout marriage, mustn't it? that our relationship with the Lord is more important than our relationship with our husband or our wife. So the **spiritual** must always predominate; the things of the marriage mustn't take first place in the things of the truth but rather the things of the truth do. Now that's not to demean marriage but rather it's to say that that which the world views as so important, and which we view as important, is however secondary in our lives. There is something more important than that, to which we apply ourselves, and that relationship with God must supersede the relationship in marriage.

But in saying that, notice how verse 5 ends, 'and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency'; just recognize the danger of pushing marriage down the list, and recognize that it does have its place and if we continue to push it to try and subsume it in our lives, then we'll find that we just open ourselves to temptation, particularly, in the world in which the Corinthian brethren and sisters lived, and in the world in which we live, where we are being bombarded from every side by visual and oral temptation. So yes, remember the relationship with God but not to the extent that you allow yourselves to be exposed to greater and greater temptation, which ultimately will draw you away from Him and your service to Him. You can see how pragmatic and practical the apostle's advice is; the apostle isn't asking us to do things which are impossible, just like the LORD God who knows our frame and understands that we are dust, the apostle understands the sort of people we are and his advice is laced with common sense and an understanding of our real needs.

But these were not the answers that the Corinthians were expecting, I'm sure, had they not written to the apostle, 'it's good for a man not to touch a woman'? so the apostle

now says I speak this **by permission and not of commandment**. Now, what do you think he means? Is he saying, 'well, had the Lord Jesus been speaking He would have commanded you differently from this, but He's permitted me to allow you some sort of secondary teaching'. Well, putting it in those terms, it's obvious it's not what the words mean, no, that's not what he's saying! But what he is saying is, 'Look, you want me to give you a black and white command, either 'yes' you should marry or 'no' you shouldn't marry', but he said, 'no, I'm not going to give you that command, but what I am saying is, there are principles here that you've got to apply in your own life; and if you feel that marriage is for you, well, then, marry! but remember that your marriage is going to be under these terms. If however you feel that you can remain single and be unmarried, then we'll support that decision as well. We're not saying that you have to be married, but if you do choose to marry, then 'yes, follow these rules that are being set down. But this is **by permission** not by command, you are **not** being commanded'. Now these words of the apostle are very important because it's very easy for us as a community, as a brotherhood, to give the impression that brethren and sisters have to be married and sometimes we speak to our young people, 'oh, you're 25, are you? you're not married yet and haven't got a girlfriend? there's something the matter with you!' Well, we've still got a 30 year old son at home, who's not got a girlfriend, and there's nothing wrong with that; you shouldn't be forced to be married, because the apostle says, 'I speak this by permission and not by commandment'. So if someone decides not to marry, well, that's up to him or to her, and we'll see as we move later on in 1 Corinthians 7, that the apostle balances his comments about marriage by speaking about the **single life**. He's not raising one way above another despite what he says about the single life, he's not raising one above the other, he's saying 'it's up to you, and you have to decide your own situation and how it is you're going to live. **BUT HE'S NOT COMMANDING MARRIAGE** let's just remember that! it's by way of permission!.

You see, it was the Corinthians who wanted to legislate either for **abstinence** if you were already married or for **celibacy** if you were not married, and the apostle has put a line through that and said, 'that's wrong! you cannot legislate' because one man has a gift in this direction and another man has a gift in this direction. It's for each individual to decide what he or she must do. He makes it plain that these issues are intimate, personal, between a man and a woman. It has to be decided on the basis of scriptural principles but it's for them to decide and not for someone else to tell them what they should be doing. The apostle is really very forceful in that teaching and I think we need to recognize that and realize the implications for our own behaviour.

He now uses his own situation as an example! Verse 7, 'I would that all men were even as I myself, but every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that', but as I put on the slide, it's probable that the apostle had been married, but is no longer married. As I've already said, for the Jews, marriage was something which was a state into which a man had to enter; if the apostle Paul had been trained for the Sanhedrin and perhaps even starting to be a junior member, it is probable that he was married. Now what had happened to his wife we don't know, but if that is the situation and his current state of being single, then he is setting himself up,

showing himself as an example of the things which he was teaching. So he's not just saying to them, 'do as I say', he's also saying, 'do as I have done'.

So now he turns on to assume specific situations. What about the unmarried and widows? He says it's better to remain as they are; here he is using himself as the example, one who is no longer tied to a wife; better to remain single. But if you can't, remember what he said, 'every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that, marriage is much more preferable to so burning inside with a desire, a desire which might in a moment of weakness be turned into an act which is immoral. Much better to be married and if that is going to be something which quiets down your life, then better to enter into marriage than to remain single. Again, the apostle is speaking pragmatically, isn't he? he realizes just the sort of people we are, the sort of stuff we're made of, and being very reasonable in the advice that he gives.

So now he goes through various different situations, he thinks now of two who are married both of them being believers. Remember what the Corinthians said, 'it's good for a man not to touch a woman', so that this means, if you are married, it's better that you should abstain from all physical relationships. Should in fact, your marriage be a spiritual marriage? Now you may think this is a strange comment, well, it isn't! it's something that's been raised in the brotherhood and there are brethren and sisters who sincerely believe that marriage in the brotherhood ought just to be a spiritual relationship with no physical part to it at all, and they sincerely believe that! Clearly, there were some in Corinth who believed the same, that marriage should be a spiritual relationship. You may take the view, well, unless there are physical relations in the marriage, it can't be a marriage, and there is some evidence that you could put forward in order to support that. Let me just pose a question to you to just think about, I'm not going to give you the answer, because I don't know the answer to be honest, but just think about this; just imagine you have two people where at least one of them was so disabled, physically disabled I'm talking now, so physically disabled that it would be impossible for a marriage to be physically consummated. Yet these two love each other and they wish to spend the rest of their life together, they seek companionship with each other and seek to marry. Now can they marry? Now I can give you part of an answer from my own point of view, this is my own personal view, and that is, yes, they could go through a marriage ceremony and I would not say that it would be wrong for them to do that. Is that then a marriage? I lean to the view that it is, now you may think differently, that the marriage cannot be physically consummated. But you see, there is a situation, isn't there? one that the Corinthians might, in effect, have brought before the apostle Paul.

What answer does he give about two who are married? Well, we've already seen one answer, haven't we? earlier in the chapter, 'the wife has not power of her own body, but the husband, and likewise the husband has not power of his body, but the wife'. So if one thinks it should be a spiritual marriage but the other thinks it should not, then there has to be physical relationships, because neither can impose his or her will on the other. But say they both feel that they should abstain, what in those circumstances? or

should they, in fact, remain together? which the Corinthians asked the apostle Paul. So what does he say? Well, Paul confirms Jesus' teaching that husband and wife should not divorce; that's the main thrust, isn't it? of the teaching of the Lord in all of those passages I've listed. Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10, and in exactly the same way that's what the apostle says, to the married, verse 10, 'I command, not I but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband'. But he then goes on to say, that there maybe situations where a separation occurs, just as the Lord recognizes in His teaching; so if a couple separate they should remain unmarried or else be reconciled. Verse 11, 'But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband, and let not the husband put away his wife'. So the apostle is here confirming the teaching of the Lord Jesus, he's not going into all the details that the Lord goes into, particularly in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, he's just talking here in generalities, and saying, 'If a couple separate they should remain unmarried or be reconciled. He does not deal with those situations which the Lord mentions **'except it be for'** in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19.

He then goes on in verse 12, 'But to the rest speak I, not the Lord', now you mustn't assume from that verse that the apostle is saying, 'here is something that I am telling you, the Lord Jesus wouldn't be saying this'; what he's saying is, 'here is something that I'm saying that the Lord did not deal with, if the Lord were here, He would be saying the same as what I'm saying, it's just that now you can't go back through a passage in the gospels and find the Lord Jesus saying this; because here is an aspect that He did not deal with, but it fits in to the same pattern that He started in His teaching about marriage'. So what does he say that Jesus did not get round to saying? he says, verse 12, 'If any brother has a wife that believes not, and she be pleased to dwell with him', so we've now changed the situation. This was marriage between believers, he's now going to move on to talk about marriage between the believer and the unbeliever and as we've already commented, he doesn't enter into any greater detail, but what we must not do, is to use these general comments of Paul to **amend the detail comments of Jesus** back in the gospels! It's very clear that the apostle Paul is building on the Lord's teaching in the gospels. So let's move as the apostle Paul did to marriage between a **believer to an unbeliever**.

As we've seen there in verse 13, 'the woman that has a husband that believes not, if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him'. Of course, this must have been a very common situation in Corinth, the Lord had much people in that city but they weren't all married couples. There would be many who came that were one of a couple who accepted the gospel message, and we've already thought, haven't we? of the situation of someone who is joined to Christ, being joined as well to a pagan, whose life was dreadfully immoral. What Paul says is everything depends on the attitude of the unbelieving partner, as you see there in verse 13, 'if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him'. So if he's willing to remain, there are no justifiable grounds for separation; whatever sort of life he's living (and this is the hard part) whatever sort of life he's living, **there is no justifiable grounds for separation**, the apostle Paul says. But equally, and we need to have this in order to balance that view, **if he leaves, there's no reason to seek reconciliation!** Now there was in the previous case where there were



two believers who were married, 'but and if she departs, let her remain alone or else be reconciled. But not here, if he leaves, well, he's left! and the sister is now still drawing to her Lord, but not drawing to her unbelieving partner. But here was the real point of their question, you see, it wasn't just that you've got a man and a wife, one a believer and one an unbeliever, but you've got children of this union, what about them? and you can understand, can't you? the believing partner's concern about the child. There are all sorts of strange ideas that have been produced about the children in verse 14, 'else were your children unclean but now are they holy'. In just the same way as there are many strange ideas about the earlier parts of that verse, 'the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, or the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, as if in some way there is spiritual protection for an unbelieving partner, some sort of umbrella of spirituality over his head, as if he is going to be treated differently by the Lord when He comes, because that unbeliever was married to a believer! Well, I don't believe any of those things, I don't think that's what we're being taught at all, I don't think that's what the apostle Paul was teaching; so what is verse 14 telling us? We need to look at it fairly! When he says that the unbelieving husband is **sanctified** by the wife, I believe the apostle is saying that, because he has a believing wife, he is now being exposed to spiritual things where previously he was not! She is doing her readings, she is praying, she is going to breaking of bread, she's trying to teach the children godly principles; previously she wasn't, and whether he likes it or not, he is conscious that those things are happening. He is living in a house where the other members are thinking about God! and in that sense he's being brought close to holy things. Doesn't mean he's accepting them, doesn't mean necessarily that he's affected by them; many people have been brought close to godly things and have never espoused them or been affected by them. But he has been brought close to them, and that's what the word 'sanctified' means in this context, 'he had been brought close to holy things'.

In the same sense, the children of the marriage are holy. Because of the believing partner they've been brought near to God. They may or may not accepted the gospel message, that's not the point! But just in the same way as the children of a marriage where both parties are believers are brought close to godly things, it doesn't mean that they're going to accept them! But they are holy in just that same way, they're being exposed to spiritual teaching within the marriage. That's all that verse 14 is saying! But of course, by that exposure, verse 16, 'What knowest thou, O wife, where thou shalt save thy husband, or how knowest thou O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife'? You see, he being exposed to godly things may be saved. It's not the exposure in itself that makes a difference to him, it's **his response to those things** which he's being taught that will make the difference. That's the important part! So the question about the children was a very real question, is this a proper marriage? that's what the brethren and sisters in Corinth were asking? How can I as a believer, married to a pagan, is this a marriage? because if it's not, what about my children, are they bastards? You can understand, can't you? the thinking that was there. Now, of course, they're not, God recognizes that marriage and we're thankful that He does!

Then the apostle moves on, what then **about virgins?** Now there was some ambiguity here as to what he was actually speaking about; it is either referring to a father who's worried about his daughter's future, and the RV, RSV, in fact, most modern versions from 1881 onwards, will have (let's find a verse with 'virgin daughter' - the RV brings 'virgin daughter' into one verse but I can't find it, but verse 38, yes, RV reads) 'so both he that giveth his own virgin daughter in marriage doeth well, but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better'. So perhaps it's a man with a daughter, who worried about her, or the other view is that it is a man who is **engaged to be married**, should he marry or not? Well, what about that question, what should one do? Paul advises against marriage for various reasons: First of all, he says because of the present distress, that's verse 26, 'I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be'. Now we don't know what the trouble was in Corinth, but he's saying there was a situation in Corinth and under those circumstances, it was better that marriage should not take place. Now I suppose a similar situation could arise today and for the time being, you would say, it's better that you don't get married, because of some particular pressing circumstance. But that was clearly a specific incident that applied at that time, may or may not apply now, it's something for us to think about.

The second point he made was that he advised against marriage to save from potential difficulties. This is verse 28, 'Such shall have trouble in the flesh, I would spare you'. Whereas the world seems to see marriage through the soft focus lense and thinks it's all terribly romantic, everyone who is married knows that marriage is a combination of pleasure and pain. (Sorry about that, dear!) But there are good times and bad times, aren't there? there are difficulties and joys, marriage is not a bed of roses, and we're being taught by the things that happen within marriage about real life, because those things do occur and when children come along, that's not a bed of roses, either! You know, because of the difficulties that arise then and through them and with them; Paul advises against it to save a man or woman from potential difficulties. He also says there are great advantages in remaining single (we shall have to go on and look at that in a moment) and so he says, 'it is good, it's good for a man not to touch a woman, oh! that's what the Corinthians said in verse 1, 'it's good for a man to remain as he is', verse 26, now these are the apostle's words now; almost sounds like he's agreeing with what the Corinthians said; but that's not what Genesis said, is it? **It is not good for the man to be alone**, almost as if those phrases are being set there **deliberately** in the record, just to remind us of what God said! and we should never forget that these are God's words, 'it's not good for the man to be alone', God recognizes that man needs companionship. Now you can have companionship outside marriage; we have it, don't we? we speak about the fellowship that we've got, and we're very grateful for it, that companionship is there! But there can be that within a man that needs a **closer companionship** than we have in our fellowship one with another, and God recognized that, which is why He brought Eve from Adam's side and presented her to him.

So it seems here as if Paul is taking the words of the Corinthians and just very gently showing them the more excellent way! No, they were wrong really to say that it was good for a man not to touch a woman, to try and make that a law, but the situation

must be looked very carefully and each man has his own gift, one after this sort and another after that.

So he does speak about the **single** life and this is the counter balance; any comments that he has made which would suggest that marriage is much better than remaining single. He says this is something that you've got to decide for yourself. So he celebrates the life of the single disciple, he **will not prescribe** what's best for each individual; he just won't do it. Therefore, he says in verse 35, 'This I speak for your own profit', I'm not going to put a leash upon you, I'm not going to cast a snare upon you, I'm not going to put a noose around you; don't ask me to legislate, the apostle is saying. This is something that you have to decide for yourselves! You can see how this fits in with the whole line of argument that the apostle has been using right from the beginning of the chapter.

So what about **widows**? which is the last question which the apostle addresses in this chapter. Obviously, her husband is dead, and it's interesting there in verse 39, 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband **be dead** (the AV, KJV has it, the word is literally 'be fallen asleep' (RV margin). It's actually speaking about a believer; so here is a widow who has had a believing husband. It's not a widow whose unbelieving husband dies, it's a very specific case. So therefore, the Corinthians question I think, is an interesting one! what about the widows? You see, what I think they're asking was this, can a woman have 2 husbands in the kingdom? This was a question that the Sadducees asked, do you remember, of the Lord? Matthew 22 verse 28, and it's as if the Corinthians are asking the same. They could envisage a situation where there was a widow whose unbelieving husband had died, yes, she could remarry, because her unbelieving husband in not going to be raised and have a chance of life in the kingdom; but if a widow's husband had died who was a believer, well, can she remarry? So what does the apostle Paul say in this situation?

Is she free? well, she must choose! You see, it fits in with everything he said before, this is for the individual; she is free to remarry because her husband is dead and marriage is ended by death. But if she remarries, it must be, **only in the Lord!** I just wonder, you know, whether the Corinthians have come up with this little scheme in their minds, that alright, if you've got a widow whose husband had been an unbeliever she could remarry because then she would be with a partner in the kingdom. If you've got a widow whose husband had been a believer and died, well, she could remarry but only if she married an unbeliever, because then in the kingdom her husband would be the believer! it's both logical and illogical, isn't it? But you can understand the way the Corinthian's mind was working, so the apostle says, 'no, if she remarries only in the Lord, only in the Lord. Then he concludes by saying, 'but she's happier if she so abide after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God', the apostle says. I'd save her from further distress, I'd save her because of the current difficulties in Corinth. All the things that he had said about the virgins before also apply about widows.

But that's not the last thing that the apostle has to say about marriage. In fact, the most

important thing he has to say about marriage, he saves until 2 Corinthians, and this is the more excellent way; this is what should colour everything that we try and think about on this particular subject. The apostle says in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 2, 'I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: **for I have espoused you to one Husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ**', and unless the answers we come up with to our questions about marriage, reflect that teaching, then our answers are wrong, and I believe that everything that the apostle speaks about in 1 Corinthians 7 is written against the background of that language. Hold that in mind and we'll not go wrong!