

7:1: *Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

The Corinthians had sent a letter to Paul (“*ye wrote*”), and this letter contained some questions about marriage. At least some of the Corinthians had enough respect for Paul to seek his help and counsel. In the KJV, due to a textual variant, the text adds, “*unto me.*” This opening verse reminds Christians to think about their faith and study the Scriptures; God’s people should not be afraid to ask learned teachers for assistance.

Paul’s response to the questions is like our expression: “Regarding your letter.” We do not have the specific questions asked by the Corinthians, but we do have Paul’s answers and these help us understand what the questions were. “Once Paul has set them right on the three most difficult problems – first, the division in the church (1 Cor. 1:10-16), second, the immoral brother (1 Cor. 5:1-8), and third, the matter of the covetous man (5:9-6:11) – in the rest of the letter he uses a gentler tone. He interposes counsel and advice about marriage and virginity and gives his audience relief from more unpleasant topics” (The Church’s Bible, p. 109). “The questions asked of Paul appear to be: (1) Is marriage right? vss. 1, 2; (2) Are sexual relations in marriage right? vss. 3-7; (3) Should widows remarry? Should those not married contemplate marriage? vss. 8, 9. (4) Should married couples separate? vss. 10, 11; (5) Should a Christian remain in a marriage with a non-Christian? vss. 12-14; (6) Should virgins marry? vss. 25-35; (7) Should fathers give their unmarried daughters in marriage? vss. 36-18; (8) Is it right for a Christian widow to remarry? vss 39-40” (Is There A Universal Code of Ethics, p. 79).

In this first verse we are also introduced to one of the difficulties in this chapter: “*it is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (*touching* is a euphemism for sexual intercourse). Thayer (p. 70) defined *touch* (*hupto*) as “carnal intercourse with a woman, or cohabitation.” Gingrich and Danker’s definition (p. 102) is “of intercourse with a woman.” Gromacki’s definition (p. 87) is “the stimulation of the physical organs with resulting sexual embrace.”

Commentators usually understand this expression in one of three ways. First, it may have meant the Corinthians thought *they* should *not touch a woman* (if this is correct, some must have said Christians needed to refrain from sexual activity, even if they were married. People may have married but been under the impression that sexual fulfillment was wrong. Compare verses 2-5). A second explanation says Paul was responding to a question. Perhaps the Corinthians wanted to know if celibacy was good or evil. Some may have wanted him to say everyone had to remain celibate. If Paul were responding to a question about celibacy, *It is good to not touch a woman* meant celibacy was fine (the single state is permissible, verses 7-8). A third explanation is based upon the “*distress*” in verse 26. According to this view, *touch a woman* was a way of saying “get married.” Because of the current circumstances, it was *good* (in a person’s best interest) to not marry. If a Christian did marry, he did not make the best choice, but he also did not sin (verse 28).

Whatever this expression meant, a few things are clear. We may affirm that marriage has come from God and it is *not good for man to be alone* (Gen. 2:18). We can say those who somehow forbid marriage are apostates (1 Tim. 4:1-4). In writing to Timothy we find Paul affirming that both food and marriage (and marriage includes sexual relations) are “*received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth*” (verse 3). A similar point is made by the Hebrew writer (Heb. 13:4). We also know that those who marry do not lose any of their spirituality (this is affirmed in the following verses). Finally, we know that Paul believed so strongly in marriage that he told the young widows to seek out another husband (1 Tim. 5:14).

All need to understand and apply the information in this chapter because societies often try to deviate from God’s plan. Abandoning God’s plan for marriage and family is an age-old problem. One example of this comes from the third century. During this period there were “*sorores*, devoted virgins who lived together with ascetics and clerics and even shared their beds in order to demonstrate their strength of will and their ability to retain chastity, a practice which, of course, only too often ended in the reverse. The church strongly opposed these unions at the time, and they disappeared” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 310). Although religious people did have an impact for good, it was not permanent. Later on, the *sorores* arrangement was “revived when the so-called Joseph marriages, or angel marriages of Roman

Catholicism, originated” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 310). Every new generation of Christians needs to teach and defend God’s will for every Bible subject. Some of these topics include marriage, divorce, the family, and sexuality.

7:2: *But, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

In the previous chapter (6:16), Paul affirmed that sexual sin joins people together. Sexual sin also severs the bond between Christians and the Lord. In this chapter it is implied that Christians at Corinth were talking about sex and had some disagreements on the subject. Some believed it was acceptable to have sexual intercourse with prostitutes (chapter 6). Now we find others who apparently went to the other extreme (they regarded marriage and/or the sexual relationship in marriage as sinful). “Some scholars believe that a faction of women within the Corinthian church may have advocated abstinence within marriage, and that Paul mainly addressed them here. If this is correct then this division within the church would not only have split the body of believers, but the families within that body by estranging husbands from wives. Thus, Paul may have been working to reconcile families as well as to protect the sanctity of the church” (Holman, 7:113). It is very likely that both sides realized they had two polarizing views and asked Paul to tell them what was right (verse 1). From the information in this chapter as well as the previous one, we find that both views were wrong (the truth was between the two extreme positions, just as in most cases today). When people go to the “right or left” (compare Josh. 1:7), they find themselves in a position not supported by the Bible.

Sexual desire is powerful and can be a great temptation. Paul expressed this with the words “*because of fornications*” (fornications is plural in the Greek text. The ASV recognizes this, but the KJV does not). “The believers at Corinth were surrounded by sinful temptations and excesses that constantly warred against the spiritual control of their sexual desires. In such a situation, a wholesome marital union was not only helpful, but absolutely necessary for many” (Gromacki, p. 87). Paul said Christianity and sexual intercourse go together. “Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible is not against sex. God created men and women with sexual desires. In themselves, the desires are not morally wrong. What makes them sinful are lustful motivations, abuses, and misuses outside of the divine purpose” (Gromacki, p. 86). Since sexual sin is still a huge problem everywhere in the world, people need to be taught that God’s defense to it is marriage and self-control (compare 1 Thess. 4:3).

In the middle of verse 2 Paul said, “*his own wife*” and “*her own husband.*” These descriptions tell us God has a pattern for marriage (one man and with one woman), and a husband and wife are to maintain a sexually monogamous union. Since marriage is a one-on-one male-female relationship, all other arrangements are forbidden. A two person relationship between people of the same gender (i.e. homosexual and lesbian relationships) is wrong (for additional information on homosexuality, see the commentary on Rom. 1:26-27). Premarital sexual relationships are also wrong. Being married to more than one person at a time is wrong. Marriages not in accordance with what Jesus said in Mt. 19:9 are wrong. Furthermore, marriage between a man and a woman is to be a lifetime commitment. God expressed this plan in Gen. 2:24, and Paul repeats it with the words “*let have*” (this is a present tense verb in the original text). The full sense of the present tense is “Let him and her keep on having” each other.

Although the world often fails to recognize the wisdom in God’s plan for marriage and sexuality, heaven’s plan for these areas is absolutely right. Edith Deen (The Bible’s Legacy For Womanhood, pp. 151-160) discusses this in a chapter entitled “Sexual Sanctity In Womanhood.” Key quotes from her book include these statements: “Because there is a strong relationship between sexual behavior and personal integrity, the act of sex demands the ethics of religion. Sex is part of the divine plan first introduced in Genesis. In its right use sex becomes a moral and spiritual commitment; in its wrong use it becomes a fleeting physical relationship only. The woman who accepts only the carnal pleasures of the body becomes cynical, callous, shallow” (pp. 151-152). “When we compare the history of Israel with the history of other nations who have achieved greatness, we see that some of their sexual laws were upheld in other early civilizations too, some of which may not even have had the Bible record to guide them” (p.

157).

Deen also cited some research from a deceased British sociologist J.D. Unwin (*Sex and Culture*, 1934). Unwin studied 86 societies and a period of history covering 5,000 years. His research led him to conclude that “as sexual standards weaken, the civilization itself declines and sometimes disappears altogether” (p. 158). Damage from lowering sexual standards may not be immediately evident to the generation that lowers the bars, “but it shows up in the second and third generations afterward” (p. 159). Unwin “discovered that nations which observed monogamy as the ideal in marriage advanced rapidly and produced strong characters” (p. 158). He also looked at the “records of history” and found “no example of a society displaying great energy for an appreciable period unless it has been absolutely monogamous” (ibid). History says a nation’s sexual standards will create an environment of gradual decline and ultimate destruction or will help it prosper. How can a nation prosper if its energies are typically devoted to the lust of the flesh?

If energy is directed to building, planning, protecting, saving and prospering, then a country has the right foundation to succeed. Marriage as described in the Bible (one man and one woman for life) is the “seedbed of society.” God’s arrangement is the best plan for a society wanting physical, social, emotional, and economic development. Long ago John Adams, America’s second President (1797-1801), said, “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” Part of being *moral and religious* is following God’s rules for sexual behavior.

America’s “Christian foundation”:

When America was founded, there was an enormous emphasis on Bible morality and Christianity. Only after a “culture war” waged by humanists, atheists, evolutionists, liberals, supporters of pluralism and political correctness did the founding religious fabric of the United States begin to erode and start to vanish. This attack really picked up force in the 1940’s and 1950’s; at the time of this writing the culture war was still going strong. In the past, however, America as a whole recognized and honored the one true God and the Bible as His word. Because this fact was so offensive to a select few, historians began to re-write history and judges helped re-write many laws and these efforts made an impact. Adolf Hitler said, “Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.” Such has taken place in America.

While America’s “Christian past” has been denied by those who hate God and are bent on re-writing American history, evidence of and for America’s religious past abounds. It is seen in places like America’s public schools. Up until the 1940’s and 1950’s, the Bible was publically read in American schools. School children were taught Bible morality and the Bible was used to learn the alphabet. Teachers associated the letter “A” with “Adam’s fall.” Children learned about the letter “D” with this phrase: “A Dog will bite A Thief at night.” How shocked modern man would be today if children learned about the letter “F” with these words: “F The Idle Fool Is Whipt at School” (this was actually how the letter “F” was taught in an edition of the New England Primer). Another surprise comes from learning how children learned the letter “C”: “Christ crucify’d For sinners dy’d”? Some children learned about the letter “J” with this memory tool: “JOB feels the Rod,-- Yet blesses GOD.” “L” was associated with the Biblical character of Lot: “LOT fled to Zoar, Saw fiery Shower On Sodom pour.” “M” was for Moses: “MOSES was he Who Israel’s Host Led thro’ the Sea.” “N” was associated with Noah, “P” with Peter, “Q” with Queen Esther, “R” with Ruth, “T” with Timothy, “X” with Xerxes, and “Z” with Zacchaeus. Editions of the New England primer and other textbooks repeatedly emphasized the Bible.

In at least some of the early textbooks children were also taught “An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth” (many of the alphabet lessons were direct quotations from the Scriptures as the following examples show). “A Wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.” “Come unto Christ all ye that labor and are heavy laden and he will give you rest.” “Except a man be born again, he

cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” “Liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.” “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” “Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly.” “Quit you like men, be strong, stand fast in the faith.” “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Early textbooks prove beyond any doubt that the Bible was used as a basis in public textbooks, and sometimes the material consisted of direct quotes from the Scriptures.

Many Americans would probably be traumatized if they went back and saw the types of questions asked and answers given in America’s ancient textbooks such as the New England Primer. Children were asked Bible based questions in their public school textbooks, some of which were these: “Who was the first man? Who was the first woman? Who was the first Murderer? Who was the first Martyr? Who was the first Translated? Who was the oldest Man? Who built the Ark? Who was the Patientest Man? Who was the Meekest Man? Who led Israel into Canaan? Who was the strongest Man? Who killed Goliath? Who was the wisest Man? Who saves lost Men? Who is Jesus Christ? Who was the Mother of Christ? Who betrayed his Master? Who denied his Master?” Who can doubt that America was a *Christian nation*?

Other questions in children’s school textbooks are just as stunning when compared to modern schools and textbooks. Children were asked how many deities there are, what God is, how God made man (evolution was not taught), how many commandments God gave, what the commandments meant, what a father and mother are (homosexuality was not taught), what the wages of sin are, how Christ redeems and saves man, what is faith, repentance and prayer. Children were even taught about Satan. The New England Primer, McGuffey’s Readers, and the Blue Back Speller (America’s early textbooks) are saturated with information about God and the Bible. They contain more Biblical information than some preachers now present in their sermons. Facsimile copies of these books can likely still be found and just a brief examination of the table of contents shows the religious and “Christian” nature of these textbooks as well as life in early America. Public school textbooks *even contained prayers*.

Elementary school was not the only place where people received instruction about Christians—it was also given in America’s universities. Although most universities at the present time are places of skepticism and Christian beliefs and values are disparaged or not tolerated, institutions of higher learning (even famous schools like Princeton, Yale and Harvard) were originally designed to promote the one true God, the Bible, and Christianity. Proof for this is found in the original university charters.

America’s schools were not the only thing calling people to the Bible. Congress also believed the Bible was the right book to guide this nation. A year after declaring independence from England, this country faced the effects of a British embargo. Because this hindered the availability of Bibles, the Continental Congress appointed a committee to see how Bibles could be obtained. The committee found they could import Bibles from other countries and recommended importing 20,000 copies of the Scriptures. This was done, but it was not enough. About 4 years later Congress approved a request from Robert Aitken to actually print Bibles instead of import them. Congress even “endorsed” this edition of the Scriptures with these words: “*Whereupon, Resolved, That the United States in Congress assembled, highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion as well as an instance of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied of the care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorise him to publish this recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.*” In more modern times Newsweek magazine said, “historians are discovering that the Bible, perhaps even more than the Constitution, is our Founding document” (“How the Bible Made America,” December 27, 1982, Woodward, Kenneth and David Gates)

In addition to America’s early emphasis on the Bible in elementary and university classrooms, there is evidence from this nation’s founding fathers. America’s first President (George Washington) gave a “farewell address” in 1796 and part of this speech shows his “Christian orientation.” “*Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the*

influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” Also: “Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be, that good policy does not equally enjoin it.”

Washington spoke to a tribe of Delaware Indian chiefs on May 12th, 1779 and said: “*You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are. Congress will do everything they can to assist you in this wise intention.*” Notice that Washington specifically spoke of “Jesus Christ” (not Buddha or Mohammed).

Benjamin Franklin, one of the lesser religious men and often called a “deist” by those who have tried to deny America’s Christian beginnings said this in a speech on June 28th, 1787: “*In the beginning of the contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine Protection. -- Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance. I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a bye word down to future age. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human Wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, and conquest. I therefore beg leave to move -- that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.*”

Rather than merely refer to “religious writings,” Franklin specifically spoke of “sacred writings” (Christian writings). In this speech he also referred to the “father of lights” (an expression specific to the Scriptures and found in Jas. 1:17). Notice, too, his Bible reference to “Babel.” Readers should not overlook the fact that these words were spoken *prior to the writing of the constitution*.

Noah Webster said: “*In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government ought to be instructed...No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people.*” Also, “*The Christian religion, in its purity, is the basis, or rather the source of all genuine freedom in government...and I am persuaded that no civil government of a republican form can exist and be durable in which the principles of that religion have not a controlling influence.*”

For about the first 185 years of America’s history this country was, for all practical purposes, a “Christian nation.” This religious foundation was illustrated in many ways, including the economy. America used to have “Blue Laws” (something this writer actually experienced). These laws restricted retailers from selling things on Sunday. Some merchants actually draped sheets over their merchandise and counters because it was illegal to sell their merchandise. Prescriptions could be sold at pharmacies and some places like hospitals could be open, but there were no “24-hour stores” and most places were closed because it was illegal to treat Sunday as the other six days of the week. Instead of being a “shopping day,” Sunday was regarded as a day of rest and a time to worship the God of the Bible. America was truly founded as a “Christian nation.”

America’s religious heritage is reflected in its national songs and hymns. Many of these songs have reference to God. Consider the fourth stanza of America’s National Anthem: “*O, thus be it ever when freemen shall stand, Between their lov’d homes and the war’s desolation; Blest with vict’ry and peace, may the heav’n-rescued land Praise the Pow’r that hath made and preserv’d us a nation! Then conquer*

we must, when our cause is just, And this be our motto: 'In God is our trust' And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

More proof for America's "Christian heritage" comes from the state constitutions. Forty-five states have a "preamble" in their constitution. In every one of these preambles there is a reference to God. Some have been revised so readers will need to consult footnoted material, but the references to God are found time and time again. In fact, Vermont's state constitution even refers to the "Sabbath" (an old way of describing Sunday). Here is the specific quote: "Nevertheless, every sect or denomination of Christians ought to observe the sabbath or Lord's day, and keep up some sort of religious worship, which to them shall seem most agreeable to the revealed will of God." Consider, too, this quote from the preamble in the Massachusetts constitution: "It is the right as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons to worship the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Preserver of the universe." Imagine government officials today saying it is man's "duty" (Eccl. 12:13) of "all men" to "worship" God. Those who framed the state constitutions had the same mindset as those who created the federal documents (i.e. America was to be guided by Christianity and the Bible).

God and the Bible are reflected in our "bill of rights." Many are familiar with the first article in this document: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In other words, no official religion could be established by the government. Up until 1776 the Anglican faith had been the "established church." This article meant that could no longer be the case. It was time for religious freedom. Rather than keep God out of government (as these words are now interpreted), the founders intended for America to believe in God and have free course in worshipping Him in a "Christian" way. They were aware of various denominations and wanted the citizens of this country to have the freedom to choose among the various "Christian" groups.

America's "Christian heritage" has been widely displayed on many national landmarks. When the founders thought about freedom and liberty, they realized that these benefits can only come from God. Rather than being able to "do whatever we want," true freedom comes from believing in God and obeying the gospel (Gal. 5:1). This way of life is actually indicated on the Liberty Bell. This national treasure has a Bible verse on it (Lev. 25:10—notice the word "liberty" in this passage). On another landmark—the Statue of Liberty—there are seven jade green glass plaques. Six of these plaques have quotes from great statesmen, but the last one has this: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. LEVITICUS, XXV, 10." The founders realized that a nation must recognize and honor God to have true freedom. Today no nation can copy America's greatness unless it is founded on and grounded in Christianity.

In addition to national landmarks, there are also monuments that show America's religious roots. These may be found at the U.S. Supreme court, the Library of Congress, the U.S. Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the Washington Memorial. In these places there are references to Moses, the Ten Commandments, people praying, and praises to God. In the White House there is an "Adam's prayer mantle." Perhaps one of the most significant landmarks in Washington, D.C. is the Washington memorial. George Washington is generally regarded as the "father of our country" and his memorial actually honors God. At the top of this monument is an aluminum capstone. On one side of this capstone are the words "*laus deo*" (i.e. *laud God*). Stated another way, at the highest point and over the most powerful city in the world God is unendingly praised on the monument dedicated to the man who is regarded as the "father" of the United States. When the sun rises each day in America's capitol city the first rays of sunshine fall upon the words "praise God."

Although there have been and still are repeated attempts to wipe out America's religious heritage and re-write American history, it will probably be impossible to do away with all the evidence. Dotted the American landscape are thousands of cities, towns, townships, and counties that have Bible names. *Las Cruces* means "the crosses." *Los Angeles* means "city of angels." We can find Bible names such as Emmaus, Bethesda, Shiloh, Bethel, Eden, Ephrata, Zionsville and New Jerusalem. One can find places named Gospel, Bethlehem, Canaan, Antiochus, Saint Joseph, Palestine, Sodom, Babylon and Mary. We can find Mount Nebo, Mount Zion, Mount Joy, Mount Lebanon, and Mount Carmel. There are places named Athens, Corinth, Hebron, Paradise, Hell, and Blessing. As of this writing the author lives near

“Goshen.” Even the names of people in early America bear out America’s strong Christian influence. Common names in the early part of America’s history were Jeremiah, Abigail, John, Josiah, Peter, Sarah, Paul, or Elizabeth. We even find that the English language was influenced by Christianity. We can trace back words and expressions such as *adoption*, *bald head*, *busybody*, *holier than thou*, *house divided*, *liberty*, *two-edged sword*, *scapegoat*, and *wrinkle* to God’s word.

America’s founding fathers and other influential leaders did “separate church from state,” but this phrase has been twisted to mean something far different than the founders intended. America’s founders wanted religious freedom (they were opposed to a “state church”). They did not want one group calling itself Christian to be regarded as the exclusive way; they wanted people to be “Christians” and “follow the Bible as they understood it.” This was why there were no “religious tests” for leaders. Few atheists were in this country and the founders showed in many ways (see the preceding information) that they intended for America to be a “Christian” nation.

More proof for America’s Christian heritage comes from the founding documents. Some estimates suggest that up to 34% of America’s founding documents have quotations from or references to the Bible. The Bible was part of the “source material” to form this nation and Bible morality was built into America’s laws while avoiding a national religion. With our God given rights we have responsibilities, one of which is found in 1 Cor. 7:2. Certainly America’s Presidents have shown their understanding of America’s religious past. Up until 1853 every single U.S. President “kissed the Bible” when taking the oath of office. Also, as of this writing, every U.S. President said “so help me God” when taking the Presidential oath, even though these words are not in the constitution (they were added by George Washington).

Many have said America’s constitution has nothing to say about Christianity, but this is untrue. Part of the constitution says, *“Done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven and of the Independence of the United States of America the Twelfth.”* Readers should note how the constitution is dated—it bears a “Christian dating method.” Jewish people do not use “year of our Lord” to designate time (they use CE and BCE). Muslims also refuse to designate time as “year of our Lord.” A second key point from the constitution is found in section 7, “Revenue Bills, Legislative Process, Presidential Veto.” Here we find these words: *“If any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the Same shall be a Law, in like Manner as if he had signed it, unless the Congress by their Adjournment prevent its Return, in which Case it shall not be a Law.”* Why is “Sunday” not counted as one of the ten days? If it is “on the weekend,” why not also include Saturday? The answer is found for all the reasons being cited here (America was a “Christian nation” and Sunday was a day to worship).

Liberalism has tried to explain away or deny many of the facts concerning America’s Christian heritage, but the evidence of America being founded as a Christian nation is overwhelming. In 1892 the U.S. Supreme court (Holy Trinity Church v. U.S., 143 U.S. 457) declared that America is a “Christian nation.” John Jay, America’s first supreme court justice and a co-author of the Federalist Papers said: *“Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”* Jay was once asked about voting for an “ungodly candidate.” He replied: *“Whether our religion permits Christians to vote for infidel rulers is a question which merits more consideration than it seems yet to have generally received either from the clergy or the laity. It appears to me that what the prophet said to Jehoshaphat about his attachment to Ahab [‘Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?’ 2 Chronicles 19:2] affords a salutary lesson.”* [The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay, 1794-1826, Henry P. Johnston, editor (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), Vol. IV, p.365]

In addition to proof from America’s first Supreme Court justice, we may look at America’s Presidents. Every Presidential inaugural address (from the first President to George W. Bush, the President at the time this material was being compiled) has referred to the God of the Bible. William Henry Harrison (the 9th U.S. President) actually referred to the Christian faith. Notice this part of his inaugural speech from March 4th, 1841: *“I deem the present occasion sufficiently important and solemn to justify me in*

expressing to my fellow-citizens a profound reverence for the Christian religion and a thorough conviction that sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness; and to that good Being who has blessed us by the gifts of civil and religious freedom, who watched over and prospered the labors of our fathers and has hitherto preserved to us institutions far exceeding in excellence those of any other people, let us unite in fervently commending every interest of our beloved country in all future time.”

All the preceding information is perfectly consistent with the “Pledge of Allegiance.” The pledge is an oath of loyalty to this country. Originally the Pledge did not have the words “under God” (Congress approved the adding these words in 1954—a time when America still reflected much of its “Christian culture”). Congress could have said one nation “under Buddha” or “under Mohammed,” but they chose “under God.” Children throughout the United States said the pledge, usually in public schools, and God was part of our “public culture.”

In addition to this pledge, there are references to God in the Declaration of Independence. Although this is a very short document, we find a reference to “Divine Providence” (i.e. God), “Nature’s God,” and the “Creator” (capital “C”). The authors of the Declaration believed in “creation” instead of “evolution.” Also in the Declaration is a reference to “the Supreme Judge of the World” (God). They rightly believed that God judges nations in “time”—on the earth—and will be the Supreme judge of every individual when the world ends. Although the Declaration of Independence is an initial political document, it shows beyond doubt that those first involved with this nation had a Christian mindset and Christian intentions.

Liberalism and atheistic people cannot bear to think of America as having been a Christian nation so they have tried to re-write history and bury the past. One example comes from “seals.” Federal agencies, states and cities have seals (emblems) representing who they are and some of these seals have had religious symbols. The village of Tijeras, New Mexico had a “rosary” on its seal and was threatened with a lawsuit. The city of Los Angeles, CA had a cross on its city seal; readers may find it has been changed to something else because of harassment and litigation by those who espouse a completely secular society. Removing religious (Christian) symbols from seals may be possible in many places, but it will be very difficult to remove Christian symbolism from scores of cemeteries. Throughout this nation cemeteries show America’s Christian heritage by displaying hundreds or thousands of crosses. America’s early interest in Christianity is also demonstrated by the “restoration movement.” Thousands and thousands of people began to study the Bible and they embraced New Testament Christianity. Going back to the Bible was partly due to what children were learning in school and following the path set by the founders. History books that have not been written by people angry about America’s religious beginning or authored by those who are ignorant of America’s Christian foundation will reveal the truth. Quotes abound from the founding fathers about America’s religious heritage, some of which are listed in the following paragraphs.

“It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible” (George Washington). Washington also said, “And let us indulge with caution the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion... Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail to the exclusion of religious principle.” “The future and success of America is not in this Constitution, but in the laws of God upon which this Constitution is founded” (James Madison). “And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever” (Thomas Jefferson). Patrick Henry quoted the Bible: “Whether this [new government] will prove a blessing or a curse will depend upon the use our people make of the blessings, which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise they will be great and happy... If they are of a contrary character, they will be miserable. Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation [Proverbs 14:34]. Reader! Who ever thou art, remember this, and in thy sphere practice virtue.”

Liberalism has tried to destroy or deny these quotes; denials often take the form of misquoting the information or omitting the context. Readers may wish to actually read the speech delivered by Patrick Henry on March 23, 1775. Many know how the speech closes (“give me liberty or give me death!”), but

they do not know that the preceding part of his speech is riddled with Bible quotations (i.e. verses like Mk. 8:18; Lk. 22:47-48; 1 Sam. 1:11; 4:4, etc.; Eccl. 9:11). He also made explicit references to “God,” the “Majesty of Heaven,” which he “revered above all earthly kings.”

Some of the early laws in America are just as revealing concerning our “Christian beginnings.” For instance, there was “The Old Deluder Satan Law.” This was passed in Massachusetts in 1647, and it was a follow-up to the Parental Neglect Law of 1642. This latter law, known as The Law of 1642, obligated parents or the masters of children who were apprenticed to ensure children knew both the principles of religion and the capital laws of the Commonwealth. It seems some felt the 1642 law did not go far enough, so in 1647 The Old Deluder Satan Law was passed. Part of this law said: “It being one chief point of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of Scriptures, as in former times, by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times, by persuading them from the use of tongues that so at last the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers, that learning might not be buried in the graves of our fathers, in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavours...” Many credit the Old Deluder Satan law with giving rise to public education for the masses which the United States has enjoyed for many years.

In 1690 Connecticut passed this country’s first “no child left behind act.” This act stressed how the legislature had noticed how “...there are many persons unable to read the English tongue and thereby incapable to read the holy word of God or the good laws of this colony... it is ordered that all parents and masters shall cause their respective children and servants, as they are capable, to be taught to read distinctly the English tongue.”

When historical facts are denied or changed, one can only conclude that “facts” are not what people want. History shows that God and the Bible were strong forces in the early days of American history. This history is so well established people must deny it or lie about it to counter the facts. One difficult proof to deny is our money. From April 22nd, 1864, to the day when this book was published, the words “In God We Trust” were inscribed on all coins that allow space for this wording. These words have been on the one-cent coin since 1909. They have been on the ten-cent coin since 1916. They were put on all gold coins, silver dollar coins, and quarters since July 1st, 1908. Then, on July 30th, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved a Joint Resolution of the 84th Congress that declared America’s national motto was “In God We Trust.”

The *In God We Trust* expression actually goes back to the time of the civil war. The people from this time period were concerned about how later generations would think of them (how could civilized men turn on one another?). In an effort to demonstrate they were not godless heathens (i.e. they were Bible believing people), a decision was made to adopt the *In God We Trust* phrase. This was not, however, the first attempt to associate American currency with God. Very early in this nation’s history people used *Constellatio Nova Coppers*. On one side of these coins there is an “eye” in the center of this money and a series of “rays” emanate from the eye. The eye represents God and the rays represent His providential care of and for the states. In more modern times the “eye of God” is still seen on every \$1.00 bill. On the back of each dollar is a pyramid with thirteen steps. Each step represents the continued development of America and God’s eye (which is located just above the pyramid) symbolizes that America was being formed under God’s providential protection.

In 2005 Congress passed a bill to create Presidential coins valued at \$1.00 each. This program began on January 1st, 2007, and these also contained the national motto of *In God We Trust*. Many initially said these coins did not have *In God We Trust* inscribed on them, but the wording is on the edge of the coins. In 2009 these words are supposed to have the national motto on the actual face of the coins. America’s historical foundations are rooted in the Bible, but we have come to a time when many profess to revere and love the Bible, but fewer and fewer really know God’s word well, if at all. Sadly, this is true for even some who profess to be faithful Christians.

Because America has gone so far from its original foundation, Christians must ask what they can do. This author has six suggestions. First, we must know the facts about the past. If people are allowed to continue to lie about America’s history, the truth will be seldom known and told. Second, we must know God’s word and be prepared to defend it (1 Pet. 3:15). Third, we must be willing to live a sacrificial

Christian life (Rom. 12:1-2). Sometimes this means “bearing reproach” for the sake of Christ (Heb. 13:13). Fourth, we must not only be willing to live for God, we must be willing to die for the faith of the Bible (Rev. 2:10). We cannot be salt and light (Mt. 5:13-14) if we sit quietly by and let others—who are lying about things—lead. Fifth, we must pray for those who are leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-3), and we may also get personally involved in the workings of our nation. We can encourage Christian men and women to serve in positions of power. We may seek political office. We should use our opportunity to vote to help elect good and Godly people. We should also use our right to contact our legislators on key issues.

A sixth and final point involves our children. More than 20 years ago I had a teacher speak of “home schooling” and say this was the wise way to instruct children because America’s public school system was failing. Heathen ideas in the school curriculum and secular teachers made the public school system a dangerous place for a Christian’s children. At the time this suggestion seemed extreme—almost radical. Surely it could not be true. Now, after more than two decades, and living in a fairly conservative part of the United States, I agree with him. Home schooling is becoming a more popular alternative in America and should be considered by all concerned parents. Some who can afford private “Christian” schools are using this resource, though not all that is taught in these environments may be doctrinally correct. America has changed so much in just the last 20 years and parents ought to ask themselves why they would send their children into an academic environment that will often attack and likely want to destroy most or all the spiritual values they are trying to teach.

7:3-4: *Let the husband render unto the wife her due: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife.*

These two verses are not difficult to understand: God has given men and women sexual desires and He has also given them a way to meet these needs. Paul stated the need for sexual fulfillment in verse 2 (“because of fornications”). In these verses he showed how a partner’s sexual needs are to be met. He said a “husband” is to provide sexual fulfillment for his wife. A “wife” has the same duty to her husband. This shows the sexual rights possessed by a man are not more important than those possessed by his wife. The needs of a wife are just as important as those of her husband. Paul described these obligations with the word “due” (*opheilo*). This term has different senses in the New Testament (see how it is used in Mt. 18:28, 30; 2 Cor. 12:14; Eph. 5:28). Here it is “a euphemism for marital duties” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 598). In the ancient world there were *ascetics* (people who said sexual relations were wrong and were to be avoided). Some of the Corinthians may have been affected by this type of error.

Another important term is “render” (*apodidomi*). This verb is in the present tense (on-going action) and the imperative mood (i.e. it expresses a command). Husbands and wives are instructed to be continually concerned about the sexual needs of their spouse and strive to continue to meet their mate’s sexual needs. There is a “conjugal duty” (Thayer, p. 61) to be discharged. *Render* “indicates that sexual intimacies should be a constant part of the marital union, not limited to the honeymoon or to the purposes of bearing children (cf. Prov. 5:18-19; Eccles. 9:9)” (Gromacki, p. 88). Some spouses may treat sexual intercourse as a “favor,” but Paul said this is wrong. If the words *due* and *render* are not enough to convince readers about the importance of the sexual relationship in marriage, Paul used a third term translated “benevolence” in the KJV. This term (*eunoia*) is untranslated in the ASV, but it is enlightening. A simple meaning for it is “conjugal duty.” *Benevolence* is a compound word made up of the adverb “eu” (well, good) and “noia” (mind). When these definitions are combined, they mean married people will seek to understand the needs of their mates and then look for ways to meet them.

The information in the 4th verse further shows that a change occurs after marriage. Those who marry relinquish some of the control over their bodies. When people marry, their spouse has the right to ask for sexual fulfillment. This right does not mean a spouse may use his mate in any way he desires (there are limits). Paul did not authorize, as some have wrongly concluded, that a wife must submit to whatever her husband wants. At the same time there is a sense in which a spouse is entitled to his mate’s body and vice versa. “The bodies, including the sexual organs, of the husband and the wife belong to each other. This

shows that the wife is not a piece of property to be used or exploited at will. She is not a sex object, existing only to satisfy her husband's whims. Rather, they are both persons who lovingly are to give themselves to each other. They are not to give or to withhold sexual privileges as the basis of reward or punishment. Each should be motivated not to have his own desires satisfied, but rather to fulfill the needs of the other" (Gromacki, p. 88).

What Paul wrote is inconsistent with the Catholic faith. Catholicism says sexual intercourse has only one purpose: reproduction. According to Paul, sexual activity has a purpose beyond reproduction. Sexual activity in marriage is partly designed to "*prevent fornications*" (verses 2) and satisfy God given sexual desires (verses 3-4). To be frank, Paul said lovemaking has God's approval.

The word translated "*power*" in 4a (*exousiazō*) also occurs in 1 Cor. 6:12. Here the term "presupposes the equality of man and woman" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:12). Thayer (pp. 225-226) defined it as "to be master of the body, i.e. to have full and entire authority over the body, to hold the body subject to one's will." Readers may be interested in knowing this term is used twice in verse 4 and in each instance it is a present tense verb (husbands and wives *continually* do not have power over their own bodies). Notice, too, the word "*likewise*" in the middle of verse 4. In this single verse Paul left no doubt about marriage being a relationship where couples give, share, and seek to please one another.

To find the type of satisfaction described by Paul, husbands and wives will generally need to understand some things about each other. Men need to understand their wives need *companionship*. When a husband comes home at the end of the day, he may want to sit down, relax, and be by himself. A wife will usually want to spend time with him. Wives also want love that takes the form of compassion (be with them when they do not feel well or cannot really explain why they feel the way they do). Many men want to "fix the problem" when wives simply want love and attention. Romance needs to be kept alive (spend time away from the children, give small gifts, and show other expressions of love). Most wives want to be held as this helps them feel protected. When these needs are met, most wives will be enthused about sexual intimacy.

Men typically operate in an opposite way. Instead of "warming up to sex," intercourse is where they want to start. Men are usually tempted to put their sexual desires and needs first and then pay attention to their wife's needs. If husbands follow their natural inclinations, it will not be long before there are serious clashes in the home and both partners will feel like their marriage is failing. Readers should also remember and apply this point: men typically need encouragement (ego boosting from their wives). If their sexual advances are refused, that eventually takes a toll on the male ego. Husbands are listed first in verse 3; if he strives to meet his wife's needs, the couple can have a blissful and happy home. More information about this topic is available in the commentary on 1 Pet. 3:7.

7:5: *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a season, that ye may give yourselves unto prayer, and may be together again, that Satan tempt you not because of your incontinency.*

The word "*defraud*" (*apostereo*) is an excellent translation of the original term. Another good expression of the thought is "not to *refuse* each other" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:142). Gingrich and Danker (p. 99) defined *defraud* as "*do not deprive each other of marital rights.*" *Defraud* is a present tense verb and other synonyms for it would be "to steal" or "to rob" (see how the same word is used in 6:7, 8). Paul realized it is possible to *rob* or *steal* from our mate. If a Christian does not offer sexual satisfaction to his or her marriage partner, this is a form of robbery. Spouses are entitled to sexual activity from their mate, and those who are denied it are cheated. It seems some of the Corinthians were guilty of this sin. In the Old Testament (Ex. 21) there may be a similar provision. This passage contains information about slaves. If a man married a second wife (i.e. he had two wives at one time), he had to provide for the second mate (see Ex. 21:10). Part of his provisions included "*her duty of marriage.*" Although this could mean the man had to provide a place for her to live, it can be understood to mean fulfilling a female slave's sexual and intimacy needs (this is the view of this writer).

In this verse we find only one reason to *defraud* a mate of sexual activity. If Christians wish to devote an extra amount of time and attention to prayer, they may abstain from sexual intercourse. This is an

acceptable condition if both marriage partners agree. Cases where this might occur include a time of great spiritual burdens or the need to engage in a strenuous spiritual activity. Many may regard this choice as just a “Christian” practice, but that is untrue. The Greeks also practiced abstinence to “purify themselves for the sake of their idols” (The Church’s Bible, p. 108). We even find hints of this practice in the Old Testament (compare Ex. 19:15 and 1 Sam. 21:4). “The rabbis taught that abstinence from intercourse was allowable for generally one to two weeks but disciples of the law may continue abstinence for thirty days against the will of their wives while they occupy themselves in the study of the law” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 404).

In the case of Christianity, both partners must “*consent*” (*sumphonos*) to the temporary abstinence. This word is found only here in the New Testament. In Classical Greek and the Septuagint it meant “‘harmonious, unison of sounds.’ From its musical context comes a general usage that means ‘agreement’” (CBL, GED, 6:170). Thayer defined it as “by mutual consent, by agreement” (p. 598). A similar instruction is found in the Old Testament law (Ex. 21:10). If the Corinthians were to limit sexual activity in their marriages (perhaps because of the “distress” in verse 26), the *consent* was to be for “*a season*.” While this is not really Paul’s main point, here we see one key ingredient for a successful marriage: *communication*. Couples who do not communicate in their marriages are destined for failure.

The word translated *season* (*kairo*) meant a “*fixed, definite time*” (in the KJV this is translated “*time*”). The implication is that a time would come when the sexual relationship would be resumed (“*may be together again*”). This verse leaves no doubt that abstinence from sexual intercourse in marriage, unless there are issues such as health problems, is abnormal. There must be a good reason for a couple to cease sexual activity and both partners must agree that ceasing intimacy is the right thing to do. Another important consideration about abstinence for prayer is found in The Church’s Bible (p. 110): “Here Paul is referring to especially zealous prayer. For if he forbids those who have sexual relations with each other from praying, how would it be possible to *pray constantly* (1 Thess 5:17)?” The word translated “come together” (*sunerchomai*) is also used of Mary and Joseph in Mt. 1:18; there as well as here the term describes a sexual union.

What Paul wrote is still very relevant. We live in a time when couples often both work and each may work different shifts. In some cases one of the spouses may be required to frequently travel. Even if both mates have a similar work schedule or just one works outside the home, their daily lives may be overbooked with activities, clubs, sports, etc. Lives can become so busy that sexual activity becomes a forgotten part of the marriage. Busy lifestyles can lead to sexual sin because of “*incontinency*” (*akrasia*). This word described a lack of self-control. The CBL, GED (1:147) suggests, “Paul was concerned that men whose wives were abstaining from sexual relations on the pretense of piety were yielding to lust and frequenting the ubiquitous temple prostitutes.”

It seems Satan was aware of what was taking place and he saw this as an opportunity to “*tempt*” (*peirazo*), a present tense verb, the Corinthians. *Tempt* is the same term applied to Jesus and His experiences in the wilderness with Satan (Mt. 4:1, 3). It is also used later in this book (10:13). Satan’s work in tempting people is usually assumed by Biblical writers as well as believers, but here it is specifically stated. “Satan is here pictured as being constantly on the watch to bring Christ’s followers to fall. It must be our purpose to thwart his nefarious attempts” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 279).

“While the activity of Satan is carried out in ‘the world’ (i.e., among those who do not acknowledge Christ as Lord), he also works against the followers of Christ. He influenced Peter’s thinking about Jesus to the extent that Jesus said to his disciple, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ (Matt. 16:23). He asked for all the disciples in order to severely test them (Luke 22:31). He ‘entered’ Judas Iscariot (Lk. 22:3), and ‘filled the heart’ of Ananias (Acts 5:3). Believers can be tempted by Satan due to a lack of self-control in sexual matters (1 Cor. 7:5), and he can even masquerade as ‘an angel of light’ to accomplish his purposes (2 Cor. 11:14). He tormented Paul by means of ‘a thorn in (his) flesh’ (2 Cor. 12:7). Some people even turn away from their faith to follow Satan (1 Tim. 5:15)” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 715).

Because sexual urges can outstrip human self-control, Paul said sexual desires need to be fulfilled by a spouse. Stated another way, when a couple is too busy to make love, they are too busy. Not having enough time for intercourse means some activities should be terminated or delayed until a later time so a

couple can have the time they need together. The best defense against adultery is an active and mutually enjoyable sex life between both marriage partners. In order for this type of relationship to exist, a couple must pay attention to all the other areas of married life. It is unrealistic to expect a great sex life if a couple has a shambolic relationship in their daily lives.

The word “*fasting*” is in the KJV but not the ASV. The manuscript evidence appears to favor the ASV reading. “*Prayer*” is in all the manuscripts, and this should be a standard part of all marriages. Here intense prayer is described; this is expressed with a single word (*scholazo*) that is translated “*give yourselves*.” Aside from here the word only occurs in Mt. 12:44 (in this passage it is translated “empty”). Christians need to make time for prayer. Marriage is very important, but it does not supplant man’s relationship with God. If couples would devote themselves to prayer, there would be much less need for counselors and far fewer divorces. Verse 5 may be summarized with three points. God intends for Christians to be sexually active in their marriages unless (1) both spouses agree to refrain from sexual activity, (2) refraining from intercourse is to be temporary, and (3) the purpose for refraining is an important spiritual pursuit. Of course, “Paul is speaking generally, hence he makes no reference to sickness, to separation due to travel, etc. He speaks only about voluntary abstinence while husband and wife are living together” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 277). A final thought about this verse involves the Catholic faith. MacKnight (p. 162) noted how Jerome and the papists took this passage to mean priests must live in “perpetual celibacy.” This is just one more example of how the Catholic faith has incorrectly applied several New Testament verses and it is not the faith described in the New Testament.

7:6: *But this I say by way of concession, not of commandment.*

A proper understanding of this verse hinges on the word “*this*.” Paul said *this* was spoken by “*concession and not of commandment*.” Some believe *this* refers to what is said in verse 8. Others understand it to reach back to verses 2 to 5. The latter seems to be the right explanation and is the view accepted by this author. In verses 5-6 we find two key thoughts: a *command* for mates to provide sexual fulfillment and *permission* to abstain from that command for a limited time to vigorously pursue spiritual activities such as prayer if the husband and wife both agree.

Concession (sungnome) is only found here in the New Testament. It is translated “*permission*” in the KJV and the CBL (GED, 6:134) offers this definition for it: “There is a sense of reluctant vigorously in the word that suggests an act of tolerant concession rather than wholehearted endorsement. The basic idea is that of ‘permission.’” “I do not give this as a binding rule. I state it as what is allowable” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 405). *Concession* is in contrast to a *command*, and it implies some of the things taught by Paul were *not* commandments from God.

In this short verse we find proof of Paul being a spokesperson for God. We also see that he was able to distinguish between the commands of God and his own personal judgment. He was honest about what his own personal judgment was and what God’s express will was (a little more is said about this in the commentary on verse 10 and another example of Paul’s judgment is in verse 25). Today all preachers and teachers should follow Paul’s example. We must be able to separate our opinions and judgments from the commandments of God. For more information on the word *commandment (epitage)*, see the commentary on verse 25.

7:7: *Yet I would that all men were even as I myself. Howbeit each man hath his own gift from God, one after this manner, and another after that.*

Paul wished that “*all*” (i.e. all mankind) *were like him*, but he did not specify what he was like. Most believe he was single. Paul may have been a widower or his wife may have left him (these two possibilities are suggested by Acts 26:10). If Acts 26:10 means Paul had been a member of Sanhedrin, he would have been married. If Paul was married while practicing Judaism and single when he wrote to the Corinthians, his wife either died or divorced him. Thus, many believe the encouragement to be “like him”

meant the single people at Corinth were to stay single unless they had a compelling reason to marry (this was based on the “distress” faced by the Corinthians, verse 26). There are commentators who believe Paul was never married, but this explanation seems to be more based on their desire to justify “celibate clergy” instead of New Testament facts. The New Testament never refers to a clergy; telling people they must remain celibate is a sign of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Sexual self control (verses 7-9) is also in the context of the thought, so being like Paul may include the idea of “not burning with passion.” Paul may not have had strong sexual desires, or more likely, he had found a great measure of self-control and self mastery (1 Cor. 9:27). He wanted the Corinthians to have this same degree of self-discipline. He recognized that some (verse 36, “if need so require”) may not have this same degree of self-discipline and may have needed to find a mate. When one looks at all the problems at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:21; 14:27), more self-control would have indeed been a great blessing.

The ASV uses the word “*Howbeit*” to affirm some might not stay single. The KJV is even clearer with the conjunction “*but*.” Some would find it too difficult to stay single; being without a mate was not their “*gift*.” *Gift (charisma)* is sometimes associated with the miraculous gifts described in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:4, 9, 28). Here it describes the ability to control sexual feelings and desires. Paul believed many single people can adequately contain and control their sexual urges (the sexual fulfillment found in marriage is simply not needed by some people). Paul also realized there are Christians who “*burn with desire*” and marriage will be an aid to them in avoiding fornication (verse 9 and compare 7:2a). Men and women have varying degrees of sexual desire; even Jesus taught this in Mt. 19:11-12. Marriage is a *may*, not a *must*. Unsaved people can be ruled by sexual lust (1 Thess. 4:5).

At the very end of this verse Paul spoke of people having their own gift “*from God*.” A similar statement is made in verse 17 and a fuller commentary on the thought is available there. Here we may say God uses His infinite wisdom, omnipotence and omniscience to give people diverse abilities they can choose to develop, nurture and use (God’s power and man’s free-will are perfectly combined). All are created equal and are in God’s image, but not all have the same abilities, skills or aptitudes. Some abilities, even the control of sexual desires, can be obtained by becoming and remaining a faithful Christian (1 Thess. 4:3-5).

God is said to be the giver of our abilities. If we are not satisfied with what we have received, we imply God failed to provide for us what is right. Too often people want the talents received by someone else. We need to take what we have received and be a good steward of it. The following chart contrasts our “natural gifts” with the supernatural abilities available in the first century:

Natural talents (gifts)	First century supernatural gifts
Given by God and are within us at birth	Given through the apostles, Acts 8:18
These help with the things of day-to-day life	Proved the spoken gospel, Mk. 16:15-20
Must be recognized, developed and used	They had to be used, 2 Tim. 1:6
They benefit us and others	Replaced by the completed Bible, 2 Tim. 3:16-17

7:8: *But I say to the unmarried and to widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.*

Two groups of people are described in this verse and both are single. The first group is the “*unmarried*.” Commentators do not agree on who these people were; some think the word means *widowers*. According to this view (since the second term is “*widows*”), Paul had in mind all Christians who had lost a spouse. This author understands *unmarried (agamos)* to describe Christians who had *never been married*. Paul’s reference to “*widows*” means exactly what it says (women whose husbands had died). Paul hoped the *widows* and the *unmarried* would remain single (verse 8) because of the distress

(verse 26).

It has been asked why Paul would mention widows and the “unmarried” since widows are also without a mate (unmarried). Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that widows were in a special class during the first century times (they were usually poor and there were no government welfare programs). Certainly before the church was established widows were the object of grave injustices (Isa. 10:2). Because they were so easily oppressed, widows were listed with the disadvantaged and exploited (Isa. 1:23; Ex. 22:21-22). Because widows were often mistreated (and may have thus been very receptive to finding a new mate), Paul seems to have meant: “to the unmarried *and especially to the widows*: stay single if you can.”

It has also been asked why Paul would encourage the single state because God said it is not “good” for man to “be alone” (Gen. 2:18). If marriage is encouraged by God, why would Paul say the opposite—it was “good” to be alone (stay single)?

In Genesis we are presented with the normal pattern for life and marriage. In the Corinthian letter Paul was addressing a special situation (in verses 26 and 28 he spoke about a “present distress”). Under normal circumstances Paul did refer back to the Genesis pattern and did encourage marriage (1 Tim. 5:14). Notice, also, that Paul did not command Christians to stay single (verse 9 specifically says marriage was permissible). Paul did, however, give his personal judgment based on specific circumstances and answering questions the Corinthians had asked (verse 1). This judgment was a recommendation to stay single because of circumstances in the Corinthians’ culture.

7:9: *But if they have not continency, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

One reason to find a mate (though this is not the sole one) is sexual fulfillment (verses 5b; 9a). “It must be stated again that Paul is answering a question about a specific situation at Corinth, and not presenting a universal principle for all Christians. To encourage Christians to marry for the purposes of sex alone would be absurd, but it is one of the factors to consider” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:376). If Christians at Corinth believed they needed to be married for proper reasons, and this included a strong need for sexual fulfillment, Paul said, “*let them marry.*” Forbidding marriage is a sign of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1-3), so Paul did not prohibit it. He did, however, recommend that people abstain from this act during a time of great difficulty (verse 26).

The word “*continency*” (*enkrateuomai*) is translated “*contain*” in the KJV. This verb is only found here and 9:25 and in both passages it is in the present tense. It describes “the opposite of self-gratification” (other translations use terminology such as “self-control”). “The proper attitude of the believer is to be one of self-control over all desires, especially his sexual desires” (CBL, GED, 2:213). “A continent man may have to struggle, though he do not burn” (Bengel, 2:200). God wants His people to seek self-control on a regular basis.

The word translated “*burn*” (*purōo*) describes raging sexual feelings and desires, not punishment in hell. This is clear from verse 7 where Paul spoke about sexual self-control being a gift. *Burn* is nicely illustrated by its use in Eph. 6:16 (Paul spoke of Satan’s *fiery* darts). In 2 Cor. 11:29 *burn* describes “intense sympathy or desire to defend others” (CBL, GED, 5:391). Thayer (p. 558) said the word in the present text means “to be inflamed with sexual desire.” Since *burn* is a present tense verb, God says sexual feelings can *continually rage* within a person. Paul left no doubt about sexual passion being a very strong force—a force that should be discussed with young people before they begin to date.

When a society encourages or endorses young people experimenting with sexual activity, they open a door to many, many problems. The best course is to encourage sexual innocence until marriage. Some may not accept the need for purity in thought or deed (just as people reject other parts of the Scriptures), but these matters still need to be taught. “The word translated *better* (*kreitton*) is also found in verse 38, 11:17; and 12:31. Here it means “*more advantageous*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:316).

Since instructions were given to widows as well as those who had never been married, other matters are discussed in the next section. Beginning with verse 10 and lasting through verse 24, Paul provides additional information about marriage (the subject now changes to separations and divorce).

7:10: *But unto the married I give charge, (yea) not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband*

There is a significant difference between what is said here and the information in verse 8. In verse 8 Paul said, “*I say*” (staying single was the best choice and Paul’s preference, but this was not required). Here we find, “*I command*” (I am expressing God’s will). Paul also said his instructions came directly from God (“*but the Lord*”). Paul was a spokesman for God and what he said and wrote was as authoritative as information from Jesus. Some Christians have met people who possessed a “red letter edition” of the Bible (what is in red are words spoken by Jesus). There have actually been people who said the “red letters” are the “really important part of the Scriptures.” Here Paul denied any such idea. Compare, too, Lk. 10:16.

What Paul commanded in verse 10 is apparently related to what Jesus said during His time on the earth (see Mt. 5:31-32; 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18). God invites all people to get married, but heaven has some matrimonial rules. In some cases a government’s rules about marriage (as well as divorce) will not be in harmony with God’s rules for marriage and divorce. Just because a government may permit an action, that does not mean the act is acceptable to God. In addition to marriage and divorce, other examples of this include abortion, euthanasia, and fornication.

The word “*married*” in verse 10 is a perfect tense verb (i.e. there was a time in the past when marriages had been formed and these marriages were still intact when this letter was written). As stated in the following commentary on verses 12-13, it seems those described in verses 10-11 were both Christians (the husbands and wives were both members of the church). Unless a Christian is in a marriage not authorized by God (and this does happen, Mt. 14:4 and Ezra 10:1-19), saved people need to do all they can to preserve their marriage until it is broken by death. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).

Because marriage is an on-going commitment, Paul said, “*Let not the wife depart from her husband.*” This command is related to the first part of the chapter (verses 3-5). There Paul spoke of Christians who had apparently ceased sexual relations with their spouses. Since the sexual relationship had been disrupted, some of the Corinthians might have been thinking, “It is time to divorce.” Paul initially addressed this issue by saying the sexual relationship was to continue and both partners were to meet their spouse’s needs (verses 1-5). Here he dealt with another and a more severe problem—a wife who intended to separate from her husband. To those contemplating this act Paul said *stop*. Do not do it. This command was *from the Lord*.

If it be asked why wives are mentioned instead of husbands, two explanations seem likely. Women may have been more disposed to engage in this action. “Or the woman may have been forced to leave, since the husband normally controlled the property” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:377).

“*Depart*” (*chorizo*) is used about a dozen times in the New Testament. As noted in the commentary on verse 11 (the word is also used there), it is also found in Jesus’ discussion of marriage (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:9). We find it in Acts 1:4 (the apostles were not to “depart” from Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit). Luke used it again in Acts 18:1 (Paul “departed” from Athens). He used it in Acts 18:2 (Jews had to “depart” from Rome). Twice in the Roman letter (8:35, 39) Paul said nothing can “separate” (divorce) us from God’s love. The term is found four times in 1 Cor. 7 (verses 10, 11, and twice in verse 15). It is used to describe the slave Onesimus in Phile. 15 (he “departed” for a season). Finally, the term is used in Heb. 7:26 (Jesus is “*separated*” from sinners). Here the word means divorce; a “divorce took place whenever a ‘separation’ occurred” (CBL, 6:539).

7:11a: *(but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband);*

God does not want married people to separate (verse 10, and see the commentary on that text), but what if this does occur? Is it sinful? Will separation or divorce eternally condemn a person? If a Christian leaves his marriage, can he marry someone else with God’s approval? A key word in exploring these

questions is “*depart*” (*chorizo*). Jesus used this same word to describe divorce in Mt. 19:6 and Mk. 10:9 (it is translated “*put asunder*” in the ASV and KJV. The NKJV uses the word “*separate*.” For other places in the New Testament that use this word, see the commentary at the end of verse 10). Here the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament rightly defined *depart* as “*be separated (get divorced)*.”

Some have the idea that a Christian is authorized to get a “legal separation” from his mate, but a “divorce” is sinful. Although people may make this type of fine distinction, verse 11 indicates this is not God’s view. A person either continues in and with his marriage or he does not (this was also the way ancient people viewed marriage). If a person believes a divorce (separation) is necessary, this type of action is allowed (Paul was realistic enough to know that some Christians would choose divorce). God does not want that (verse 10 and Mal. 2:14, 16), but it is allowed. Readers should take careful note of the fact that permitting a divorce and the authorizing a second marriage is not found in this text. Jesus made this point in Mt. 19:9 and Paul made the same point here: “*let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband*.” *Remain (meno)* is a present tense verb.

Since there are limitations about finding a new mate in the event of a divorce, readers must consider reconciliation. What if a couple who separated (divorced) later wants to restore their marriage? Is this permissible? As long as the previous marriage did not violate God’s terms (Mt. 19:9), this answer is yes. When a divorce or separation occurs, two options exist. A husband and wife may choose to stay single (11a), or they may be reconciled to each other (11b). Divorcing a mate and marrying someone else (whether before or after conversion) is not allowed unless fornication (sexual sin) was associated with the divorce (Mt. 19:9). In situations where sexual sin has caused a marriage to end in divorce, only the marriage partner not guilty of sexual sin has the right to another mate. What is said in verse 11 is in full harmony with Jesus’ words in Mt. 19:9. The word translated *reconciled (katallasso)* is used elsewhere to describe the reconciliation of God and man (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20).

As human beings we do not always see things in the way God does. Our views of holiness, righteousness and sin may be entirely contrary to the mind of God. In the case of marriage and divorce, many believe the legal termination of a marriage (divorce) frees a person from that relationship. A careful reading of verse 11 leads readers to a different conclusion. Paul spoke about a wife “departing” (getting a divorce) from her husband. He also said such a woman is considered “unmarried.” Then, he surprisingly refers to this same woman as having a “husband.” Paul did not say *ex-husband* or *former husband*. The apostle provides us with a small but important fact: Unless a marriage has been disrupted by sexual sin, in the eyes of God people still have a connection to the person they married. Divorce does not sever all ties in God’s eyes, so entering into another marriage may be permitted by a government but not sanctioned by God (Lk. 16:18). Another demonstration of this point is found in Rom. 7:3 (Paul spoke of a woman marrying another man while her “husband” was still living). Paul realized that without death (Rom. 7:3b) or sexual sin (Mt. 19:9) there was still a connection to the first spouse and no right for another marriage. When a society becomes accepting of divorce, many are tempted to lower the divine standard for divorce and re-marriage. Rather than reduce God’s standard to a place where the world finds it palatable, Christians need to bring people up to God’s standard found in the New Testament.

Some have asked if God “recognizes” the types of marriages the Bible calls adulterous relationships. Are people “married” or not married in the sight of God if they have violated the terms in 1 Cor. 7 and Mt. 19? In answering this question imagine that a government says a man can be legally married to 2 wives at one time, or it is lawful for two men to marry each other. Would God “recognize” these marriages? Heaven does indeed acknowledge these unions, but it does not approve of them. Herod Antipas married Herodias (Mk. 6:17); the word “married” is in the text. Yet, this verse also says Herodias was “Philip’s wife” (God did not accept her divorce and subsequent marriage to Antipas). A similar situation is found in Jn. 4:18 (Jesus said a woman had been with “five husbands”). We are not given all the details about her situation. However, unless these men had all died or been sexually unfaithful, heaven recognized but did not approve of at least some of her marriages. It is not a popular message, but Jesus said marriage and divorce can and will cause people to commit adultery (Lk. 16:18).

Another prickly question is the scope of God’s laws on marriage and divorce. Do God’s rules apply to people *after* conversion, or do they apply to all people at all times (i.e. before and after conversion)?

Many believe the information about divorce and remarriage only applies after conversion. It is not uncommon to find people who think all marriage and divorces before conversion “do not count.” The author of this commentary used to hold to this very view and I argued my viewpoint in this way: A divorce for reasons other than fornication is a sin (a true point). Baptism washes away all sin (Acts 2:38)—another true point. Thus, a divorce for reasons other than fornication is a sin God forgives (this is also true). My argument failed to consider one more point: baptism will not change a person’s “state.”

A teacher once told me of how his father, a preacher, used to operate a farm. Workers from Mexico would illegally cross the border, find his father’s farm, and seek employment. If the father hired some of the illegal workers and through his influence they became Christians, all their sins were washed away (Acts 22:16). Although these men were converted, the teacher asked if they were still illegals after their conversion. To this question there is only one answer: *yes*. Baptism and forgiveness of sins most certainly did occur, but these acts did not change the fact that these men were in America illegally and had no right to continue in their illegal relationship to America. To make things right, they had to return to their home. A Bible example of this principle is the book of Philemon. A slave (Onesimus) escaped. He met Paul in a distant place and was converted. Although all his sins were forgiven, he was an escaped slave and it was not right for him to remain a runaway. To make things right he had to return to his master. Paul knew this and sent him back (Phile. 12), even though he really wanted to keep him (Phile. 13). Today a person who has violated God’s marriage laws may become a Christian, but if his marriage has violated the terms in the New Testament, remaining with that partner is not lawful.

It is impossible in a work such as this commentary or any other to discuss every possible scenario involving marriage and divorce. I will, however, discuss three common questions about divorce. First, what if a spouse *encourages* or tricks his mate into committing adultery so he can claim a right for divorce and another marriage (Mt. 19:9)? A similar case occurs when a mate refuses to be sexually intimate with his spouse, hoping his mate will find someone else and the “unfaithfulness” will allow him a scriptural divorce and a new marriage. Do these types of cases justify a person getting a divorce and marrying someone else? Situations like this certainly do occur, but the very nature of the circumstances suggests guilt on the part of the “faithful” spouse. After all, if a mate is trying to ensnare his mate with adultery, is he or she “following the golden rule” (Mt. 7:12)? Too, what can be said about Paul’s previous instructions in verses 2-5?

A fuller answer to these questions is suggested by Jn. 8. Scribes and Pharisees caught a woman “in the act of adultery.” It seems odd that this lady was committing adultery at “just the right time,” the “right people caught her in the act,” Jesus “happened to be teaching,” He was close enough to where the woman was for her to be brought to Him for punishment, and there is no indication that the man was also brought. Many believe and this author agrees the woman in Jn. 8 was set up (after all, the officials were really after Jesus, not the woman). Jesus did tell the woman to “*sin no more*” (Jn. 8:11), so she was guilty of sexual sin. However, there was also guilt on the part of those who sought to condemn her (Jn. 8:6-9).

Police have laws against “entrapment” and luring a mate into adultery is entrapment. Just as our laws recognize “criminal conspiracy,” so a similar thing takes places in the cases being described. A spouse may be tempted or tricked into sexual sin by his mate (think about Eve’s experience with Satan), but that does not mean the one who was tricked is exempt from sin. Guilt is chargeable to both parties. In the case of marriage, God wants husbands and wives to be “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). If one seeks to circumvent this relationship by luring his mate into adultery, he commits the first sin and it is a sexual sin. In the judgment of this writer, neither mate in this type of case would have the right to get a divorce and marry another. Readers should take special note of Mt. 18:6-7: “*But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble [by something like adultery, BP], it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and (that) he should be sunk in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!*”

A second question involves something like spousal abuse. Due to physical abuse, verbal abuse, illegal activities, death threats, fearful for the safety of children, or a combination of these things, a divorce or separation occurs. Being married to an abuser or a killer is a threat that must be taken seriously. There is

authority for a divorce (10b), but there is not a Biblical basis for another marriage as shown by verse 11 and the rest of the New Testament. A second marriage may make life easier for some people, but it is not a necessary part of life. People can remain single and many have made this choice because they respect and want to follow God's rules about marriage (Mt. 19:12).

A final question involves the meaning of "fornication" in Mt. 19:9. It has been argued that if a person divorces their mate for a reason other than fornication (sexual sin), and marries someone else, he or she is guilty of fornication (Mt. 19:9), and that allows the partner from the previous marriage to again marry. To this argument we may simply reply with the words of Jesus: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: *and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery*" (emphasis mine, BP). There is no lexical information known to this author that defines fornication as getting a divorce and marrying someone else. Fornication is sexual sin. If this is not the basis for terminating a marriage, neither partner has the right to marry someone else unless one of them dies (Rom. 7:1-3). Those in a marriage not approved of by God need to carefully consider Acts 17:30 ("all men everywhere are called upon to repent").

7:11b: *and that the husband leave not his wife.*

Having addressed women in the first part of this verse, Paul turned his attention to men (husbands). A husband is not to "leave his wife." Men and women are on equal footing when it comes to divorce (there are not different rules for husbands and wives). While God's rules are the same, careful readers will notice that Paul used two different words for divorce. He spoke of women *departing* from their husbands (*chorizo*) in 11a. Here in 11b he spoke of husbands "*leaving*" their wives (this term is defined in the commentary on verse 10). This second term (*aphiemi*) is translated "put away" in the KJV (in 1 Jn. 1:9 this same word describes the *remission* of sins). Although the words for divorce are not the same, most agree they are synonyms. Thayer (p. 88) defined the second term as "a husband putting away his wife." Gingrich and Danker (p. 125) said it has a "legal sense" of "*divorce*." Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 286) suggests Paul used different words "to indicate the activity of a wife" and "to state the actions of a husband." Though the words are different, "the substance of the commands is the same" (ibid). The term in 11b (*aphiemi*) is used again in verses 12 and 13. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 286) concluded and we agree that "The Greek offers a choice of verbs."

Another small but important point is the *voice* of two verbs describing separation/divorce. When described women *departing* in verse 11a, Paul used the *passive* voice. When describing men *leaving* marriages in 11b, he used the *active* voice. Lenski (p. 287) said the passive voice means the woman is "separated from her husband by something, she leaves him." In the case of the husband, the active voice means "he sends her away, makes her leave him and their home" (ibid). More than 2,000 years ago some women chose to leave their marriages and there were husbands who told their wives to "get out." This verse shows that humanity has not changed (Eccl. 1:9). Paul also reminds us that marriage is a very big commitment. Jesus as well as apostles like Paul warned that marriage is not a "trial run" or a relationship to be entered into lightly and each spouse takes a "let's see how it goes" attitude.

7:12-13: *But to the rest say I, not the Lord: If any brother hath an unbelieving wife, and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her. 13 And the woman that hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband.*

The word “*rest*” is an important term. It seems to refer to the *rest* of the Corinthians’ questions and the *rest* of people who were married. In verses 10-11 Paul described marriages involving two Christians. Now he turns to relationships where a Christian was married to a non-Christian. We may not think too much about a Christian being married to a non-Christian now because these relationships are fairly common. In first century times, with Christianity being new, Christians likely wondered about being married to an unsaved mate. What if one spouse converted to Christ and the other did not? Could the Christian remain with their unsaved mate? Would the Christian somehow be “defiled”? As Christianity spread and only one spouse in a marriage became a Christian, a natural question would have been: “Can the marriage stay intact?” It is, therefore, not strange to find this matter discussed in a chapter that deals with marriage. In very clear terms Paul said being married to a non-Christian is not a reason for divorce. In this section of the chapter he spoke of “mixed” marriages where a Christian and non-Christian were “content” to stay in their marriage (verses 12-14). He also spoke of situations where an unbelieving mate was “not content” to stay in the relationship (verse 15).

“*Unbelieving*” (*apistos*) means “those who refuse belief in the gospel” (Thayer, p. 57). Paul used this term in the previous chapter (6:6), as well as two more times in this chapter (verses 14-15). Later *unbelieving* occurs in 1 Cor. 10:27; 14:22, 23, 24. Here it is important to consider who *unbelievers* are. *Unbelievers* include those who are interested in Christianity but have not become Christians, someone who professes a form of Christianity but is not a member of Christ’s church, a heathen (perhaps to the point of worshipping idols), and someone who has virtually no religious faith or convictions at all. Many people qualify as unbelievers, but they are by no means involved with the same type of level of unbelief.

The Church’s Bible commentary (p. 117) rightly observed that “Paul is not addressing those who had never been married, but those already married. He does not say, ‘If someone wants to marry an unbeliever,’ but **If any has a spouse who is an unbeliever.**” This is certainly correct, but this passage does not mean it is wrong for a Christian to be married to a non-Christian (1 Pet. 3:1). Marrying a non-Christian is certainly unwise and will make the marital relationship very, very difficult, but it is not a sin (for more information on this topic see the commentary on verses 39-40).

The expression “*I, not the Lord*” has caused some to wonder if this information was Paul’s personal opinion instead of inspired communication from God. Paul meant Jesus did not address this exact situation while He was on the earth. It was impossible for Jesus to discuss a Christian being married to a non-Christian because Christianity did not start until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). By this time Jesus had returned to heaven. Jesus’ instructions about marriage and divorce can be found in places like Mt. 19:3-9. Jesus communicated more thoroughly about Christianity to the apostles and here Paul specifically addressed marriages where a Christian is married to a non-Christian. His instructions were the “commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37) and here the primary point is not a Christian being married to a non-Christian. Rather, the information was designed to *regulate a married Christian’s conduct when married to a non-Christian*. The Corinthians must have had questions about this and Paul answered them.

In addition to expressing God’s will, Paul also provided an illustration. He pictured a man married to a non-Christian woman. The unsaved woman wants to live with her Christian husband and Paul said that was fine (the husband was not to “leave her”), 12b. If Christians are married to someone who is not a member of the church, and they are not in violation of Mt. 19:9, they are to stay married. This is also true for a Christian woman married to a non-Christian man (she too should stay married unless the relationship is in violation of Mt. 19:9). God recognizes these so-called “mixed marriages.”

Another point is found in the words “*content to dwell*” (verse 13). This implies that Christianity (the gospel) made some unbelieving spouses unhappy. Perhaps there were cases where two non-Christians got married and the husband or wife later converted to Christianity and the unbeliever found his mate’s new

morals and way of life difficult and restrictive. This led to dissatisfaction and the unbeliever decided to leave the marriage. Some Christians surely experienced divorce because of conversion (compare Lk. 18:29). Even today in marriages where one spouse is a Christian and the other is not, the unbeliever may not be *content to dwell* with a faithful Christian. The word rendered *pleased* (*suneudokeo*) is used once in verse 12 and once in verse 13. It is also found in Rom. 1:32 and Acts 8:1. General definitions for the word are “be pleased with, agree, consent, be willing” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:305).

7:14a: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother:*

One key theme in the New Testament is repentance—a new way of life for the saved. Christians are told the “mind of the flesh is death” (Rom. 8:6), the old way of life is “crucified” (Gal. 5:24), and friendship with the world is wrong (Jas. 4:4). In view of these principles, first century Christians with unsaved mates may have wondered about their marriages. Could Christians remain with unbelievers who did not live in accordance with New Testament precepts? Paul answered this question in verses 12-13. Christians could and should stay married to non-Christians (this assumes the relationships did not violate the information in Mt. 19:9—we need to consider all the Bible says about a topic). In verse 14 Paul took things a step further. He assured the Christians that having an unsaved mate would not associate a married Christian too closely with the world. Instead of there being a negative effect upon the Christian in mixed marriages, there is a positive effect on the unbeliever! *Unbelieving* (*apistos*) is defined in the commentary on verses 12-13.

Paul described this positive relationship with the word “*sanctified*” (*hagiazō*). Under the Old Testament mixed marriages (i.e. Hebrews were married to people like the Canaanites) were condemned. Such marriages were not inherently wrong; they did pose a threat to Israel being a distinctive people and were a potential threat to many of God’s promises to Abraham. Abraham had been promised (1) numerous offspring (Gen. 13:16; 15:3-5; 17:2, 4; 22:16); (2) God would be a God to him and the seed after him (Gen. 17:1-8); (3) he would receive an everlasting inheritance (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:8); and (4) through him and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Israel was the way God fulfilled these promises, but this nation existed during a time of rampant idolatry. Since non-Hebrews like the Canaanites were usually involved with idol worship, limiting the people of Israel to marriages within the nation helped keep the nation free from idolatry (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:3-4). Israel did not completely obey the rule about idols (2 Chron. 24:18-19) or God’s rules about mixed marriages (Ezra 9:3-15; Neh. 13:23-31). Israel was punished for their idolatry and they were told to divorce their foreign wives, even in cases where children were involved (Ezra 10:3; Neh. 10:28-31).

Paul did not want to praise mixed marriages because they are invariably fraught with problems. Neither did he want to somehow imply they are sinful. He therefore described the matter with the word *sanctified*, a term meaning mixed marriages are recognized and accepted by God. *Sanctified* is a perfect tense verb (these marriages had been sanctified in the past—when then the couple was married—and the sanctification was still on-going). Additional information about *sanctification* is available in the commentary on Rom. 11:16 and Mt. 23:17, 19. Here the term can be understood by comparing it to influence. Just as the roots of a tree nourish, strengthen, and beautify a tree, so a Christian nourishes, strengthens, and beautifies a non-Christian mate as well as their children. If a Christian allows an unbelieving mate to destroy his faith, the sanctifying influence is lost.

Paul says the sanctifying is done “*in*” (ASV) or “*by*” (KJV) the “*believing spouse*,” not God. This shows the *sanctification* is not salvation from sin. Each person bears his own individual responsibility for making his relationship right with God (Phil. 2:12). Ezekiel (18:20) said each person is responsible for his or her own conduct (righteousness, salvation or sin cannot be transmitted to others). And, as Paul explained in 2 Cor. 5:10, each person will be judged upon his “*own deeds*” (actions of a spouse cannot save or destroy their mate). Unsaved partners receive a benefit when married to Christians, but it is not salvation. If Paul had meant unbelieving mates are saved by marrying a Christian, he would not have called them *unbelievers*. Too, compare verse 16 (“*save thy husband*”). The word for *unbelievers* (*apistos*)

is used by John in Rev. 21:8 to say this class of people will be eternally condemned. *Sanctified* is also used in 1 Tim. 4:5 and conveys the same type of point. There Paul said food is *sanctified*, but it is certainly not going to be taken to heaven.

Bengel's comment (2:200) is also thoughtful. He said sanctification "is used, because Scripture wishes to guarantee us a conscience in all things not unencumbered." Being married to a non-Christian should not be a source of shame and Christians who are in these marriages should not allow themselves to be swallowed up by guilt, shame, and bad memories. Christians need to be assured they can still please God if married to an unbeliever, and the unsaved are encouraged to stay in the marriage and hopefully become a Christian too.

7:14b: *else were your children unclean; but now are they holy*

When people marry, children often come from the union. Paul used children to illustrate his point in 14a (marriages between Christians and non-Christians are not wrong). If they are wrong, the offspring from the marriage would be "*unclean*." Instead of this, the children are "*holy*." Even in mixed marriages children are holy. *Holy (hagios)* means "belonging to God" (The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:17). It appears the Corinthians accepted the children from mixed marriages as holy, so Paul said they also needed to accept the marriages between Christians and non-Christians (this assumes the husbands and wives were not in violation of Mt. 19:9). If the children were sanctified, the marriages had to be sanctified (these two things stand or fall together). A Biblical example of this point is found in the life of Timothy (his mother was a Christian but his father was not, Acts 16:1). Although only one of Timothy's parents was a Christian, he was still able to be in a right relationship with God (2 Tim. 3:15).

Some understand the words *unclean* and *holy* as a *metonymy* (they represent something—Paul was using figurative speech). According to this view, *clean* has the sense of being exposed to a Christian environment. An *unclean* home meant no or very little exposure to Christianity. Although this is a possible explanation, there is no reason to believe it is what Paul had in mind. Other commentators believe Paul was describing children born out of wedlock (support for this interpretation is drawn from Heb. 12:28). Such an explanation is not consistent with what is taught here as well as verses 12-13. Too, children do not inherit sin (Ezek. 18:20). Any sin involved in being born out of wedlock falls upon the adults, not the children. This writer accepts the explanation given in the previous paragraph.

It is not surprising to find some trying to use verse 14 to support infant baptism. Children are certainly mentioned, but Paul said they are *holy* (i.e. they are already in a right relationship with God). Sin is not transmitted (Ezek. 18:20), and people are only cleansed from sin after it becomes "full grown" (Jas. 1:14-15). This means people must be old enough to know right from wrong (they are accountable for their actions). As stated in Gen. 8:21, man's heart is evil from his "youth," not his "birth." Nothing in 1 Cor. 7 deals with children and sin; the context is sexual activity, marriage, and the marital relationship between adults.

7:15: *Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such (cases): but God hath called us in peace.*

In verses 10-14 Paul spoke about keeping marriages intact. There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule. If a nation allows a same sex couple to be "married," that relationship cannot continue. Polygamy is forbidden, as are marriages not in accordance with Mt. 19:9. Unless a couple has somehow violated God's plan for marriage, heaven wants the relationship to continue. In cases where couples do separate from each other, Paul stressed reconciliation (verse 11). Any separation should be temporary. Now he deals with one more matter: What if a non-Christian does not appreciate the influence and life of a Christian mate (verse 14) and wants to leave ("*depart*")?

Depart (chorizo) is the same term used in verses 10-11 (see the commentary on verse 10) and it means a person leaves the marriage (there is a divorce). In this case, the person is not coming back. If this

happens, Paul said, “*let him depart*” (get a divorce). When a person makes up his or her mind to leave a marriage, it is almost impossible to stop them. Marriage is an agreement formed by adults and both have free-will. If one chooses to discontinue the relationship, the other spouse must face that fact. A Christian cannot control what his marriage partner does, but he can maintain control of his personal relationship with God.

What is said here is similar to verse 11. That is, a divorce or some type of separation may occur and this action is not a sin. A Christian can allow an unsaved mate to leave, **but this does not necessarily mean the Christian who remains behind has the right to again marry** (Mt. 19:5-9). If someone is left by his marriage partner, Paul said the remaining spouse is “*not under bondage*.” *Bondage* (*doulooo*) meant: “To make a slave, enslave” (see how this same word is used in Acts 7:6; 1 Cor. 9:19; Gal. 4:3). *Bondage* is a *perfect tense verb* (this means the marriage partners were *never* under bondage). If bondage means the marriage bond as some contend (this is discussed below), Paul meant the couple was never married. Because the two were never joined together, departing is acceptable. Such a view makes no sense of the text.

If *not under bondage* does not refer to the marriage, it must mean something else. Paul had in mind *renouncing Jesus and the Gospel* (people are never obligated to do this). When people get married they make many promises to their spouse. There are also Biblical duties they owe to their mate (Eph. 5:22, 25). Many have seen cases where a spouse finally said, “Choose me or the church.” “Choose our marriage or choose your God.” In cases such as this Paul said the believer was *not under bondage* (the spouse never had an obligation to forsake God to keep his marriage intact). If such an obligation did exist, a person would elevate his spouse above Jesus.

When a Christian is married to a non-Christian, God wants the believer to influence and seek the salvation of the unbelieving mate (1 Pet. 3:1). If this does not happen, God’s will is for the couple stay together (verses 12-13), if the marriage does not violate the terms of Mt. 19:9. Verse 15 describes an extreme case where a Christian is abandoned by a non-Christian (compare Lk. 18:29). When marriages get to this point, things can turn very ugly. Police officers know (and will affirm) that some of the most dangerous situations they face are “domestic disputes.” In these cases it is best to literally let the unbeliever depart. Willis (p. 193) wisely observed that “to force oneself on an unbelieving mate who did not want to continue the marriage relationship would be to cause nothing but hatred and strife, which are contrary to the peaceful nature of the Christian calling. This clause then gives support to the opening statement ‘if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.’ God has not called us to involve ourselves in a relationship in which we beg, plead, fight, and strive to maintain a marriage which the non-believing mate does not want to keep. Hence, if he decides that he does not want to maintain the marriage, let him go.” Such information is not really new; we can find parallels in the Old Testament (Deut. 13:6-10) as well as in the teachings of Jesus (Mt. 10:35-37).

A parallel to what is being taught in verse 15 is found in Rom. 13. Christians are to obey civil authority. What if civil authority orders Christians to worship idols? What if Christians are told to worship idols or lose everything they own? Obeying the government has never included compromising the gospel, and being a faithful marriage partner has never meant compromising the gospel. If Christians are forced to choose between renouncing Christ or leaving a marriage, they must be willing to cling to Christ. Jesus must be honored and served at all costs (compare Mt. 22:37).

Although this explanation makes perfect sense of the text, it is parallel to what Paul taught about civil government in Rom. 13, and it is consistent with other passages about marriage and divorce, not everyone accepts it. There are those who use verse 15 to say “desertion is grounds remarriage after divorce.” Proponents of this view usually refer to the matter as the “Pauline Privilege.” Charles Hodge favored this view and explained it thusly on page 118 of his commentary: “if the unbeliever broke up the marriage the Christian partner was thereby liberated from the contract [and therefore could marry again, BP]. This is the interpretation which Protestants have almost universally given to this verse.” Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 295) is even more succinct: “Desertion is exactly like adultery in its effect.” Hodge and others believe there are three reasons for a previously married person to again marry: (1) a mate loses their spouse due to death, (2) a divorce and re-marriage is allowed for someone if their mate was sexually

unfaithful, (3) the “Pauline Privilege” (if a spouse leaves or deserts a marriage, the remaining spouse is free to again marry).

There is no question about another marriage being allowed after a spouse dies (Rom. 7:1-3), or a divorce and re-marriage permitted for someone whose spouse was sexually unfaithful (Mt. 19:9). Neither does anyone question that a person is permitted to let an unsaved partner leave a marriage (divorce). The problematic question is: Can the person who suffered desertion again marry? Paul does not discuss a second marriage in this case, so assuming that one is permitted is conjecture. Back in verse 11 Paul said two *Christians* who separate or divorce must exercise one of two options (*reconcile* or *stay single*). If there is a “Pauline privilege” for Christians married to non-Christians, it does not apply in marriages where both parties are Christians. In view of this fact we would be forced to conclude it is far better for a Christian to marry a non-believer because there is another possible reason for a later marriage! Such a view is unthinkable for a Christian, but it is the logical consequence of the Pauline Privilege doctrine.

At the end of verse 15 Paul said God has called His people to “*peace*.” In other words, even if a Christian is abandoned by an unsaved mate, he or she can still have *peace* (contentment can be found in all circumstances, Phil. 4:11). *Peace* describes a general state of well-being in our relationship with God, an unimpaired relationship with heaven, and spiritual fulfillment in life. A Christian who is deserted does not need to worry about preserving the marriage if his mate refuses to stay married. He can let the person go and remain single. It is far better to live without a mate for a few or several years on earth than to hear on the day of judgment we had a spouse that was “not lawful” (Mt. 14:4) and through an unlawful relationship we committed adultery (Mk. 10:11-12).

7:16: *For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife?*

Two lessons come from this verse. A Christian should be persistent in staying married and being a good example to their unsaved partner (one never knows if an unsaved mate or anyone else will become a Christian through our influence). Stated another way, “marriage can be a means to evangelize an unsaved spouse.” Nagging and begging hardly ever work in converting someone, especially in a marriage. Peter (1 Pet. 3:1) spoke of wives winning disobedient husbands “without a word.” If we are married to an unbeliever, our job is to “sow the seed” (Mk. 4:14), even if the ground seems “hard and rocky” (Mk. 4:15-16). Faithfulness and persistence in the gospel are a Christian’s best hope at converting a spouse.

Also, a Christian should not make concessions or accept compromises regarding their commitment to God (they are “not under bondage” to do this, verse 15). Most preachers have seen instances where a Christian modified his faith or lessened his convictions to accommodate an unsaved mate. For instance, a Christian attends services less often, avoids special church functions, neglects personal Bible study, and God is no longer the first priority in life. Making such concessions are not only wrong, they can actually deter an unbelieving mate from becoming a Christian. If Christians are willing to die for their faith (Rev. 2:10), they also need to be willing to live for it, especially if their mate is unsaved. God’s people need to “bear their cross daily” (Lk. 9:23).

7:17: *Only, as the Lord hath distributed to each man, as God hath called each, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches.*

At the end of verse 15 Paul introduced the word “*called*.” Here he expands on that thought: “*as God hath called each, so let him walk*.” In other words, when a person becomes a Christian, their outward relationships do not matter and do need to change. If someone was “*circumcised*” when they became a Christian (verse 18), that was okay. If another were “*uncircumcised*” (verse 18) at the time of their conversion, that also was fine. *Called* (*kaleo*) is a metonymy (a figure of speech) to describe conversion. If a person is converted as a *slave* (verse 21), he or she could stay a slave and please God. Those who were *free* (verse 21) could remain free. Today we could add the words “*rich*,” “*poor*,” “*educated*,” plus

many more descriptions. Our “status” has no effect on our relationship with Jesus (compare Gal. 3:28). Paul used social relationships to further demonstrate the permanence of marriages.

Paul’s point is easily understood, but it has often been misapplied. Verses 17-22 have been used by people to support things like homosexuality. A typical argument goes something like this: “Come to Christ as you are. God accepts you no matter what, and no changes are necessary.” This type of teaching denies the necessity of repentance, something Jesus said is necessary (Lk. 13:3). Paul also said repentance is required (Acts 17:30). Throughout the Bible people are told they cannot remain in sin (Rom. 6:1-2; Col. 3:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:14).

Abiding in one’s calling describes and is limited to “neutral” matters (things such as slavery and circumcision. Compare Gal. 5:6). One commentator put the matter this way: “The call to conversion radically altered an individual’s spiritual relationship but need effect no changes at all in physical relationships that were not immoral” (Bible Knowledge, p. 519). In spite of this what Paul said has been misapplied since the days of Tertullian (A.D. 160-240). Tertullian was a prolific writer and by his time people were using this verse to say idol makers could continue in their craft. If it is really true that people can “come as they are” (no changes are necessary), the murderer, thief, bigamist, and all liars must be allowed to continue their way of life because this is how they are. Too, if this passage means “come as you are” in a universal sense, it forbids people from “bettering” themselves in the areas of health, education, employment, etc.

God’s will for the Corinthians was also His will for “*all the churches*” (17b). This exact expression is also found in Rom. 16:4; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 8:18; 11:28; Rev. 2:23. It occurs in the English text of Rom. 16:16 (ASV) but is not in the Greek text of the verse. Jesus is the head of His church (Eph. 5:23), and He has left information (Jude 3) for how His church is to function (compare 1 Cor. 4:17). For additional information about the church of the New Testament, see the information on 14:34 as well as the special study at the end of this commentary.

Apostolic instruction applied to *all* the local congregations. In the church of the New Testament rules were not made by preachers. Elders are to “take care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3:5), but they do not make the rules. God has given a “pattern” (2 Tim. 1:13, ASV) and this pattern is to be followed in every assembly (church). If all congregations are following the pattern recorded in the New Testament, they will have some striking similarities. A lack of similarity among religious groups indicates that people are not following some or several parts of the Scriptures. Hodge (p. 121) rightly said, “The apostles, in virtue of their plenary inspiration, were authorized not only to teach the doctrines of the gospel, but also to regulate all matters relating to practice.” We find them doing this in several of the New Testament epistles.

At the beginning of verse 17 are the words “*distributed to each one.*” If these words are kept in their context, they mean God has given (distributed) things to people that are morally neutral (circumcision and slavery, verses 18 and 21). Paul affirmed a similar truth in Rom. 12:6-8. Jesus said God is the giver of our talents, and He gives “according to our ability” (Mt. 25:15). A similar thing was true for the spiritual gifts given in first century times (the Holy Spirit determined what gifts should be given to specific Christians, 1 Cor. 12:11). Readers may also wish to study Acts 17:26 (God has established national boundaries). He has determined what countries should exist and how far their borders should extend. How and why God has done these things is known only to Him. God has made other determinations in and about the world, though this does not mean He has predetermined who will be saved and who will be lost.

Paul referred to this same type of divine activity earlier in the chapter (verse 7); there he said each Christian receives “his own gift from God.” Our status in life (Jew, Gentile, ruler, factory worker, homemaker, preacher, etc.) is somehow “*distributed*” (*merizo*) by God. Though nations and all persons are able to make decisions and choices about their lives, God is somehow behind the scenes in the life of every person. Willis (p. 194) suggested, “One’s outward circumstances in life are assigned to him by God.” Other interesting verses to compare in this regard include Lk. 12:48b and Jn. 19:11. If God is not involved with what we have and who we are, how can we “render an account of our stewardship” (Lk. 16:2)? Who has made us stewards if it is not God?

In saying God is “behind” certain things we are not affirming the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination

(i.e. God has foreordained what men and women must do—they have no free-will). This error is discussed and refuted in the commentary on 2:14. Calvinism is one false extreme and the other false extreme believes God plays no part in distributing talents and abilities to mankind. Nowhere in the Bible do we find statements claiming God is inactive in our world and lives. God has a part in the governments of the world (Dan. 4:25) just as He has a part in the abilities possessed by people. God’s work in this area has been compared to a card game. When participating in a card game people are “dealt a hand” and it is up to them to do with it what they will (they must use what they have received). Some receive “much” and others receive “little” (Lk. 12:48b and Jas. 1:17). There are also those who have received difficult circumstances (Jn. 9:2-3). We must be faithful with what we receive.

As this material was being written a well-known radio talk show host often boasted about his talent “being on loan from God.” Whether this was a jestful comment or not, the broadcaster’s statement reveals the truth of this verse. God gives people varying talents and abilities. When people refused to acknowledge this, they got into trouble. King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson the hard way (Dan. 4:29-33), as did King Herod (Acts 12:21-23) and the rich farmer (Lk. 12:16-20—notice all the times this man said “I”). In Ex. 4:11 we are provided with further proof about all we have coming from God. This passage says, “*And Jehovah said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh (a man) dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, Jehovah?*” Because God has had a hand in our lives, we need to “walk” in a way where we please Him and use our talents wisely. When we do this, we will have the promise found in 1 Cor. 10:13: “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.*”

At the end of verse 17 the ASV and the KJV have the word “ordain” (*diatasso*). Paul *ordained* (gave orders, commands) concerning certain practices (compare verse 19b). “Rule” is how the word is defined in the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:314). This term is used of the emperor Claudius in Acts 18:2 (he “issued an edict”). Jesus also *ordained* things (1 Cor. 9:14) as did angels (Gal. 3:19). In 1 Cor. 7:17 this word means “*I make this rule in all the churches*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 189). In 1 Cor. 11:34 this same word is translated “set in order.” In the final chapter of this book (16:1) it is rendered “gave order.” Although it is popular to believe there is little divine regulation for worship or Christian living, this term says God has regulated things. Readers should take careful note of the fact that this term is also used by Jesus in Lk. 17:10. Jesus’ use of this word conclusively proves God has commandments and people must keep them. Kittel’s comments on the word in Lk. 17:10 (8:35) are excellent: “God’s concrete directions which fill life with works of obedience.” When Paul wrote to Titus (Tit. 1:5) he also used this term. Since the context of the term in Tit. 1:5 deals with church organization, we may conclude part of God’s commandments include having a local congregation organized as the Scriptures describe.

7:18: *Was any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Hath any been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised.*

“*Uncircumcision*” (*epispao*) was a medical term; it is found only here in the New Testament and it meant “*to pull over the foreskin.*” It referred to a surgical operation that concealed what had previously been circumcised. It appears there were Jews who tried to hide their circumcision from public view when they went to places like the public baths (they wanted to avoid persecution or ridicule). In addition to this brief reference by Paul, we find a reference to the practice in the non-inspired book of 1 Maccabees 1:15: “they covered over the mark of their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant.” The CBL (GED, 2:557) adds: “In the Maccabean era some Jewish men who participated in the Greek games underwent this operation since all athletes participated naked. Circumcision was a source of embarrassment to the Jewish participants who were conspicuously different from the other athletes. To the pious Jews this was an act of rank apostasy.”

In 18b a different custom is pictured. Gentiles sometimes sought circumcision to gain some type of advantage (“having the mark” may have put Gentiles on better terms with Jews and they could have fared better in business dealings). This verse is just one more demonstration of the point in verse 17. Christians

are to be content with their lot in life. Both verses 17 and 18 remind us that Christianity is not primarily concerned with the physical part of life. In the New Testament the emphasis is spiritual things. Jesus built a spiritual kingdom (Lk. 17:20-21; Jn. 18:36) and heaven's blessings are primarily spiritual (Eph. 1:3).

Verses 18-24 stress the need to "abide in one's calling." The "context makes clear that this means *temporal* relationships—the Jew should not want to become a Gentile, the slave should be content in that status for he is really a freedman in the Lord, etc. The Christian who is married to an unbeliever should not seek to be loosed from that relation, and those in other temporal and earthly unions should make the most of their situations for Christ. The problem of this passage is the idea held by some that if you are involved in an adulterous marriage, and wish to obey the gospel, you 'should still abide in that particular marriage,' which meaning was never intended by Paul. In no way is this passage meant to sanction and bless adultery or any other sinful relationship. It applies only to earthly and 'non-spiritual' relations where sin is not involved. Those who use it wrongly in the divorce problem say that one is to *remain in* an alien-begun adulterous union, and which somehow they hope will be sanctified and made blessed by their baptism, so that the same union can continue.

"Obviously when people repent and are baptized, they must give up their homosexuality, their polygamy, their idolatry, and all other sinful attitudes and practices which God's word labels as sinful, regardless of whether their own culture approves or allows the practice. Oftentimes what human law or human culture approves is different from what God approves. We need to learn the attitude, 'Speak Lord, thy servant heareth,' command I will obey!" (Divorce and Remarriage, J.D. Thomas, pp. 48-49).

7:19: *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.*

Any ancient Jew would have been shocked by hearing a Christian say, "*circumcision is nothing.*" Circumcision, the removal of the male foreskin from the penis, was practiced by other nations, but among the Jews, it had a special meaning (it was the sign of the covenant with Abraham, Gen. 17:11). Refusing to practice circumcision was very serious (Ex. 4:24-26; Josh. 5:2-8). Since the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, God has removed the Old Testament (Rom. 7:1-3) and all are now bound by the New Testament (Heb. 8:13). Under this New Testament physical circumcision has no spiritual value (Gal. 5:6). Salvation now comes through obedience, not race (Gal. 6:15). In the Philippian letter Paul claimed that those who insisted on circumcision were guilty of mutilating the body because this process has no religious value (Phil. 3:2). In the Galatian letter he went even further: Anyone who tries to bind a part of the Old Testament law (circumcision is one example) must follow the whole law (Gal. 5:3). If this did not make the point plain enough he said in the next verse (Gal. 5:4) that anyone following the Old Testament law is "severed" from Jesus (ASV).

Instead of being physically circumcised, people must obey God's will expressed in the New Testament (this is why the New Testament is called "new" and the Old Testament is called "old"). Here following the New Testament is called "*keeping the commandments of God.*" Only those who abide by the information in the New Testament will be saved (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21-23). Although the world often laughs and scoffs at "commandment keeping," the Bible says God requires it. People must be obedient to His word no matter who they are. Downplaying the need for obedience under the New Testament system or suggesting God's love will compensate for a lack of obedience is a different gospel and is a belief that will destroy all who adhere to it (Gal. 1:8-9; Mt. 15:14).

Members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church as well as other religious denominations have often appealed to verse 19 as proof we are to "keep the Ten Commandments." Paul did use the word "commandments," but he did not say "the Ten Commandments." In the Scriptures *commandments* has many different senses. It is used in Gen. 26:5 to describe Abraham "keeping commandments" but not the Ten Commandments. God gave Adam and Eve a "commandment" (Gen. 2:16), but this too was not one of the Ten Commandments. In the context of 1 Cor. 7, the *commandment* involves marriage (see verses 20, 10-11). Later Paul said *what he was writing* consisted of God's "commandments" (1 Cor. 14:37). He made a similar point in the Thessalonian letter (2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 10, 12). All men are now "under law to

Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21), not the Law of Moses. Whereas the Ten Commandments were a “ministration of death” (2 Cor. 3:7), we now have the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25) that “sets us free” (Gal. 5:1) and allows us to live by a law of faith” (Rom. 3:27). The Old Testament law (which included the Ten Commandments) has been made “old” (Heb. 8:13).

7:20: *Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called.*

These four verses are very similar to the information in verse 17 (there Paul discussed “outward relationships”—matters that are neither good or bad). What is said here has no relationship to illegal activities, unscriptural practices, or sinful relationships. A person cannot remain a thief, fornicator, liar, or continue in other sins and still have God’s approval. Our outward circumstances, however, can remain the same. The word “*abide*” is a present imperative verb (an on-going command). “*Calling*” (*klesis*) is understood in different ways by commentators, but this author understands it to mean *conversion*. Although the word is not the same term used in verses 17-18, I believe the meaning is the same. The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:381) noted how *calling* can mean three things in Scripture: “a designation of a calling or vocation, an invitation to attend a supper, or an official summons to appear as a witness or advocate in court. Here it means ‘the summons to the knowledge of God, to membership in the church, to the kingdom of Christ.’”

Denominational teaching has taken the Biblical idea of “being called” and twisted it. God offers a simple explanation of His calling in verse 22: When a person is “*in the Lord*,” they are called of God. All are called through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14; Jn. 6:45), and when we obey the word of God, we become “the called.” Other designations for Christians include the “elect,” “saints,” and “sons of God.” On the Day of Pentecost (the first recorded gospel sermon), Christians were called through the gospel (Acts 2:14, 22, 40). Those who responded to this call were “added by the Lord” to His body the church (Acts 2:47). At this point they were *the called*. Jesus said “many are called” (all have the opportunity to become Christians, Mt. 22:14), but “few are chosen” (most will not respond to the gospel call). Those who do respond are told to “walk worthy of their calling” (Eph. 4:1). Many seek or expect some supernatural sign or call from God, but the Bible says the Holy Spirit has a “sword” and this is the “word of God” (Eph. 6:17). If God’s word cannot motivate and change a person, nothing else will (compare Lk. 16:30-31). Eternal life comes by believing what has been “written” (Jn. 20:30-31).

Barclay (First Corinthians, p. 72) suggests *remaining in one’s calling* had special significance to first century saints. “Here there is a picture in Paul’s mind. In the ancient world it was possible for a slave at a great effort to purchase his own freedom. This was how he did it. In the little spare time he had he took odd jobs and earned a few coppers. His master had the right to claim commission even on these poor earnings. But the slave would deposit every farthing he could earn in the Temple of some god. Then, it might be at the end of years, he had his purchase price complete laid up in the Temple. When that happened he would take his master to the Temple; and the priest would hand over the money; and then symbolically the slave became the property of the god and therefore free of all men. This is what Paul is thinking of.” If this is the background Paul had in mind, we can readily understand why this subject is repeatedly addressed in verses 17, 20, 24. No Christian would ever want to pay tribute to or be considered the “property” of a pagan god, even if the end result was release from slavery. Finding physical freedom through paganism is repugnant to faithful Christians. Such a choice is “doing evil that good may come” (compare Rom. 3:8).

Our situation is not exactly like what the Corinthians faced, but we may still find a practical point from Paul’s thought: The gospel is not designed to change our outward circumstances. Christianity “is designed primarily to change one’s spiritual life, not his social status. The change in status may come later, as a result of personal improvement or a change in society” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:381). Although this is what Paul said, it is not how people often think and act. Many use a religious group as a social club, a place to “climb the social ladder,” or an opportunity to cultivate business contacts. Such people are more interested in “gaining the whole world” while losing their own soul (Mt. 16:26). Godliness becomes a way of gain for them (1 Tim. 6:5).

Verse 20 reminds readers that slavery was rampant in the first century. It is generally estimated that more than half the Roman Empire population consisted of slaves. First century slaves were often well educated (some served in professions such as medicine), but they were viewed as personally inferior to non-slaves. As the gospel was preached, some slaves became Christians. Thus, the New Testament has a significant amount of information about slavery (compare 1 Pet. 2:18-21). More information about slavery is available in the commentary on Eph. 6:5-7.

7:21-23: *Wast thou called being a bondservant? Care not for it: nay, even if thou canst become free, use (it) rather. 22 For he that was called in the Lord being a bondservant, is the Lord's freedman: likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's bondservant. 23 Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men.*

Verse 21 is a bit of a puzzle; the context suggests some slaves had found a lawful means to obtain freedom that did not involve the type of pagan arrangements described in the commentary on verse 20. Perhaps there were Christian masters who released their slaves from servitude. "In the days of the Early Church, a slave could be freed (a) by the death of a master who left a legal will freeing him, (b) by a reward for services given to a generous master, or (c) by an act of worship on the part of the master, who gave the price of the slave as an offering to his god. In the latter case, no one could enslave him again, for he was the property of the god" (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:382). In cases such as a master's death or a master's reward, Paul said slaves could accept the opportunity and become free (there was no need to remain a slave). Paul "knew that slavery is not the ideal condition for human beings, and he wished that no one be enslaved to anyone but Christ (Rom. 6:18; Eph. 6:6)" (Holman, 7:118). If slaves accepted an opportunity to become free, they needed to "use" their freedom to advance the gospel. If we have "received much" (Lk. 12:48), God requires us to return much to Him.

While some slaves did have the opportunity to become free (verse 21), others did not. Those who remained slaves might have been tempted to become despondent. In verse 21 Paul told these Christians to "not worry" about being a slave; there was no need to lose the joy of their Christian faith. "Care" (*melo*) is a present tense verb and it means slaves were to continually work at not being worried about their lack of freedom. In fact, if a slave was a Christian, he could regard himself as a "freedman" (in the spiritual realm), verse 22.

In verse 22 a paradox is given: Slaves were *free* (in the spiritual sense) and free men were *slaves* (in a spiritual sense). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 305) said, "slavery in Christ is true freedom; freedom in Christ is true slavery." Slaves may have been primarily concerned about physical freedom, but Paul said something else is much more important (status before God). Through the gospel slaves and non-slaves have the same standing in the church (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). God "raised the status" of every person. Paul then went a step further and spoke of those who were not slaves ("was called being free"). A person who was no longer a slave or had never been a slave was "free" and may have thought he had no responsibilities or duties. Paul said this is incorrect. A "free-man" is "*Christ's bondservant*." That is, all non-slaves were obligated to offer "total submission" to Jesus (Lk. 9:23; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). Most who lived in the first century would not have said slaves and free-men had much in common. Paul affirmed both classes did have much in common. Each was on equal footing in the early church and such is still true today (all are spiritually equal, though this does not mean everyone fulfills exactly the same function). For information on the word *called*, see the commentary on verse 20.

The word translated "*bought*" (*agorazo*) in verse 23 is used 30 times in the New Testament. In many places it describes common business transactions (see Mt. 14:15; 25:10). In six places it describes the "purchase" of Christians (1 Cor. 6:20, here, 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3, 4). Just as a master purchased a slave and the slave became the property of his owner, so the same is true for all Christians (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Jesus redeems ("buys") people with His blood shed on the cross (1 Pet. 1:18-19), so it is as if we are His "private property." We demonstrate this fact by willingly submitting to His authority (Col. 3:17). "According to Roman law, a person freed from slavery by a generous benefactor was obligated to take his patron's name, live in his house, and consult him on business affairs. The Christian likewise owes a debt

to Christ that he can never fully pay” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:382). Part of our dedication is wearing the divine name (Christian, Acts 11:26).

Because Christians have been bought with Jesus’ blood, 23b says we are to “*not serve men.*” That is, we must seek to please and submit to Jesus instead of others (we must not be enslaved by the world). Though we may be tempted to act a certain way or give in to peer pressure to better conform to the world, this is forbidden (Rom. 12:1-2). If we are slaves to Christ, we recognize Jesus as the supreme authority in our life (Mt. 6:24). No other person, social relationship, job, force or organization can have more control over us than Him.

“Joseph was a slave, but not a **slave to men.** Thus, in his slavery he was freer than all those who were free. He did not give in to his master’s wife, to the desires of the woman who owned him (Genesis 39). Again, she was free but more of a slave than anyone when she flattered and entreated her attendant. But she did not persuade that free man to do what he did not want to do. This, then, was not slavery but the greatest freedom. How did slavery hinder Joseph from being virtuous? Let slaves and free alike pay attention: Who was the slave? The man who was prized or the woman who prized him? The woman who entreated him or the man who disdained her entreaty?” (The Church’s Bible, p. 119).

7:24: *Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God.*

This verse reaffirms the material in verses 17-22. Paul may have repeated the preceding point to prevent Corinthian slaves from telling their masters, “I am a slave, but I am also a Christian. Since we are members of the same body, you must (should) release me.” A Christian slave needed to remain a slave because the gospel does not change our outward circumstances. Since Christians have been brought into fellowship with God, “let us disregard and never lay undue stress on our condition, station, or outward form of life. Let us not keep looking downward to these things that may be more or less hard, disagreeable, and subject to change although they need not be changed; let us look upward to God” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 307).

Remaining in our calling is still a very valid and useful truth. One example of its application is found in the penal system. A person in jail or prison may become a Christian. When this happens he may say, “I am different; I have become a Christian and should be released.” God says conversion does not necessarily correspond to or imply a change in circumstances. In the case of prison inmates, verse 24 says the prisoner should *abide in that calling* (i.e. serve the sentence and take responsibility for his crime). This is following the will of God and it helps demonstrate that a person’s faith is real. In most cases prisoners make pleas for release because they “got religion” or “found God.” Using God as a reason to get out of prison is one more example of godliness for gain (1 Tim. 6:5).

The ASV and KJV translate the end of this verse as “*with God.*” The point seems to be, “let every one continue in his original condition and relations; and yet so conduct his affairs as not to disturb his fellowship with God in them” (Willis, p. 202). Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 307) suggests this means “being ‘beside God.’” The idea is “resting and remaining at God’s side in peace and contentment” (ibid). “All secular conditions whether of family life, or caste, or service, are capable of being made the expression of a Christian character” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 408).

In the next section (verses 25-38) Paul continues to discuss “abiding in one’s calling,” but he changes the meaning of this expression. He spoke to widows and those who had never been married and said, *abide in your calling.* Unless the desire for sexual fulfillment was especially strong (verse 9), he urged single people to remain unmarried because of the Corinthians’ special circumstances (verses 26-28). Also, the single state provided an opportunity to serve God without distraction (verses 32-35).

7:25: *Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be trustworthy.*

The phrase “*now concerning*” is found elsewhere in this letter (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12). Paul often used

it to introduce a new subject. Here it shows the Corinthians had asked some questions—questions about “*virgins*” and *widows*. In answering the questions about these groups he spoke about their “status.” This writer understands *virgins* (*parthenos*) to describe mature young women, but other expositors believe the term also includes males.

Some might think it odd that Paul paid special attention to virgins, but virginity has been highly regarded in some societies. “Among the Greeks virginity was highly esteemed; consequently, many of the mythical goddesses were said to be virgins” (CBL, GED, 5:91). “In Israelitish society (cf. Deut. 32:25) virgins sometimes wore distinctively long garments (II. Sam. 13:18-19). They received special consideration (cf. Amos 8:13) and were so characterized by ornaments (Jer. 2:32) and joyful dancing (31:13) that their sorrow represented calamity (Lam. 1:4, 18). Virgins rejoiced as brides’ companions (Ps. 45:14; Matt. 25:1; cf. S. of Sol. 1:3; and 6:8), though in times of distress (1 Cor. 7:26) or for religious service (vs. 32) a virgin might not be given in marriage (vss. 36-37) or might remain single (vs. 28); though cf. Judg. 11:38-39” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 543).

Bengel (2:203) suggested the “Corinthians expected a special commandment by revelation, which Paul was to receive.” If this is right, Paul told them he had not received any such information. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 309) suggested “that in Corinth certain persons insisted on some ‘command’ that came directly from the Lord himself and then claimed that there was none and so drew false conclusions from that fact.” In a church as troubled as Corinth, there were all types of questions and problems for Paul to unsnarl. He had taught these Christians well, but pettiness and a failure to mature created an environment of uncertainty and upheaval.

Most commentators regard the *virgins* as young women and very possibly young women who were engaged. If this is correct, what follows in verses 26-28 is not a termination of wedding engagements. It is a postponement of them until the “current distress” had passed (see the commentary on verses 26-28). If the text is understood in this way, it provides people with a passage to share with children who want to marry at a very young age. That is, there are times when it is best for people to delay marriage plans.

In 25a Paul said he did not have a “*commandment of the Lord*” for the Corinthians’ question. That is, the Lord did not specifically deal with this issue when He was on the earth. *Commandment* (*epitage*) is only found seven times in the New Testament and Paul was the only writer to use it. For the other places this term occurs, see Rom. 16:26; 1 Cor. 7:6; here; 2 Cor. 8:8; 1 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:3; 2:15 (“authority”). A good definition for *commandment* here as well as verse 6 is: “The trustworthy, transmitted and binding *concrete* instruction of Jesus, the messianic teacher” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:41).

Have no commandment of the Lord has been falsely interpreted to mean Paul was not inspired. Not only has this argument been made, this false conclusion has been joined with 6:9 to say Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality was his personal opinion. All such claims are easily refuted by verse the 40th in this chapter (Paul *did have* and did write by the “Spirit of God”). Compare, too, Gal. 1:11-12 and 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37.

Having no commandment also meant Paul had not received specific instruction on this subject from God. On many topics God did provide him with exact information and these revelations were binding. No doctrinal truth had been revealed to Paul concerning widows and virgins so Paul offered his “*judgment*” on this subject (a similar point is found in verse 6) and said he was “*trustworthy*.”

Judgment (*gnome*) is related to a Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*) and describes Paul’s judgment based on experience and observation (i.e. the conclusion was not based on his personal likes and dislikes). *Judgment* is again used in verse 40, and both here and there the word means Paul’s “understanding, judgment, counsel (in contrast to a commandment, a binding admonition from Jesus relating to the marital relationship in 1 Cor. 7:25, 40)” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:255). Paul was qualified to make a judgment about this very serious but non-doctrinal matter and he did.

Part of Paul’s basis in forming a conclusion involved his “*obtaining mercy*” from the Lord and his being *trustworthy* (the KJV says “*faithful*”). *Trustworthy* (*pistos*) means Paul had faith in God, and he demonstrated this faith to man and God (trustworthy is also found and well illustrated in Mt. 25:21). Although it is difficult to see in the ASV and KJV, Paul’s trustworthiness (faithfulness) is expressed with a present tense verb. It was not like he had not been faithful in the past and stopped. He had been faithful,

was continuing to be faithful, and intended to stay faithful until the end (2 Tim. 4:7).

Trustworthy is also used to describe God in 1 Cor. 1:9 and 10:13. In fact, faithfulness (being trustworthy) is a key theme in the New Testament. “In the NT a faithful man does his duty diligently, as a servant (Matt. 25:21, 23), steward (Luke 12:42; 1 Cor. 4:2), or witness (Rev. 2:13). Several apostolic companions were deemed faithful: Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7), Onesimus (Col. 4:9), Silas (1 Pet. 5:12). Paul viewed his divine commission as a proof of his faithfulness (1 Cor. 7:25; 1 Tim. 1:12) and affirmed, near his death, his complete loyalty (II Tim. 4:7)” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 212). If God regarded Paul as faithful and reliable, the Corinthians could and should have accepted his personal judgment on this and all other matters related to marriage.

7:26-28: *I think therefore that this is good by reason of the distress that is upon us, (namely,) that it is good for a man to be as he is. 27 Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife. 28 But shouldst thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Yet such shall have tribulation in the flesh: and I would spare you.*

Paul’s *judgment* about virgins (verse 25) and marriage (verses 26-28) was partly based upon the “*distress*” (some difficulty affected the Corinthians). In the KJV the text says “*present distress*.” *Present* (*enistemi*) has the sense of “immanency” and is also used in 2 Tim. 3:1. In both passages the idea is “threatening circumstances” (CBL, 2:440). Special circumstances affected Paul’s recommendation and twice in verse 26 he said it would be “*good*” for the Corinthians to do as he suggested (remain single until the hard times ended). Because these circumstances were unusual, Paul’s instructions about marriage cannot be applied in every place and to every time period. Under normal circumstances, marriage is encouraged (Gen. 2:18). Under normal conditions Paul commended marriage (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:14; Tit. 1:6; 2:3-5). Corinth had a special set of circumstances and these circumstances affected these church members, especially those who were contemplating marriage.

Today Christians may also act or not act in certain ways because of special circumstances. For instance, faithful Christians regularly attend services. When a blizzard sets in and a snow emergency is declared, there are “special circumstances” and Christians do not assemble. Special circumstances are also found in other parts of the New Testament (another example is the subject of head coverings in 1 Cor. 11). If special circumstances are not understood or correctly interpreted, incorrect conclusions are usually drawn. Some wrongly dismiss many New Testament instructions, claiming they were based on “special circumstances.” Others wrongly claim the Bible never presents information related to special circumstances. The truth is between these two extremes (some of what the Bible says had application to people undergoing special circumstances).

“*I think*” (*nomizo*) is translated “*I suppose*” in the KJV. Jesus used this term in Mt. 5:17 to say we should not “think” He came to destroy the law. He also used it in Mt. 10:34; 20:10. The word is used twice in the First Corinthian letter (here and verse 36). “In every case, except for 1 Corinthians 7:26 and 36, that which the individual thought or supposed was untrue or incorrect (cf. e.g., Acts 7:25 of Moses’ mistaken conjecture)” (CBL, GED, 4:266). In the other places where this term is used, God reminds us that people may believe something but be very, very wrong in their conclusions.

Although we have no way of knowing what the *distress* at Corinth was, commentators have offered several suggestions, one of which is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (this seems unlikely because of the distance between Corinth and Jerusalem). A more likely possibility is an economical, political or religious problem, possibly religious persecution. According to 1 Cor. 16:8, Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus. This was where Paul had “*fought with wild beasts*” (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:32). Paul and other apostles had already endured persecution (4:9-13) and Christians in the area of Corinth may have been under persecution as well. Whatever the specific nature of the problem, Paul said, “*it is good for a man to be as he is*” (26b). Stated another way, Paul meant “stay single.” Due to the current circumstances, this was the best choice as long as the distress was on-going.

If a man had already married (verse 27), Paul said the marriage was to continue. The word translated “*bound*” (*deo*) is the same term Luke used to describe Saul’s *binding* of Christians (Acts 9:14). Jesus used

this word to describe binding Satan (Mt. 12:29) and to say people will be *bound* before being cast into Hell (Mt. 22:13). When God joins people together, they are truly united. Here *bound* is a perfect tense verb (this tense again emphasizes that when God joins people together in marriage, the knot stays tied till death or through a divorce due to sexual sin). This term is also used in verse 39.

Paul further stressed the permanency of marriage with the word “*loosed*” (*luisis*) in verse 27. In the ASV and KJV this term is used twice, but there are two different words in the Greek text. The first word (*luisis*) is used only here in the New Testament and it meant “*release, separation, (in marriage) a divorce*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 482). Non-Biblical writers used it to describe deliverance from guilt, release from financial obligations, the soul being released from the body of death, and the unraveling of a plot. The second word (*luo*) is a common New Testament verb. It also reminds readers that those who marry are joined together by God.

If Christians at Corinth chose to reject Paul’s recommendation and get married, they did not “*sin*” (28a). God would not regard the choice to marry as wrong, but Paul predicted there would be “*trouble in the flesh*” (the husband and wife could expect problems, and Paul probably meant instant problems because of the “present” distress). If the distress was related to persecution, imagine a couple getting married and within the first few weeks or year of their marriage one was killed or imprisoned for being a Christian. Persecution could have resulted in job loss, a devastating experience for any couple, but especially for the newly married. Because of the potential problems, Paul issued a strong warning: Stay single. He hoped to “*spare*” his brethren from additional pain.

In the NIV verse 28 reads: “*but those who marry will face many troubles in this life.*” Anyone reading this translation might conclude marriage is God’s guarantee for misery. More literal translations do a better job of expressing the thought here and elsewhere. Certainly “Paul did not mean that married life is always more difficult and troublesome than single life. After all, God ordained wives to be partners of their spouses, not hindrances (Gen. 2:18)” (Holman, 7:120).

7:29-31: *But this I say, brethren, the time is shortened, that henceforth both those that have wives may be as though they had none; 30 and those that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 and those that use the world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Gromacki (p. 95) described these verses as: “Be Alert to the Brevity of Life.” The Corinthians needed to remember that life is brief (Jas. 4:14) and this meant their problems were short-lived trials when compared to eternity. In fact, Paul simply said “*time was short*” (KJV, verse 29). This does not mean Paul believed Jesus’ second coming was imminent or would occur in the first hundred years of the church. Paul made long range plans (Rom. 15:24-25) and said Jesus’ coming will be like a thief (we cannot know when He will return, 1 Thess. 5:2). Paul meant the “distress” (verse 26) would not be permanent. Too, although marriage is very important, it pales in importance to eternity. Thus, these Christians needed to put their energy into staying faithful while enduring difficult circumstances. Paul wanted to “spare” them from undue hardships (verse 28) and thus recommended postponing marriages until their secular circumstances had changed (see the comments on verse 25).

Time (kairos) often stands in contrast to another word for time (*chronos*). This second term, which is not used in verse 29, can be likened to “tick-tock” time or “calendar” time. *Kairos*, the word used here, often dealt with very specific events, and these events are often very important. Here Thayer (p. 318) defined *kairos* as “for a certain time only, for a season.” Another key word is “*shortened*” (*sustello*). This is a perfect tense verb and it is found only here and Acts 5. “In Acts 5:6 it is used to describe the ‘enshrouding’ of Ananias’ corpse for burial. The term has been variously interpreted here to mean ‘enshroud, wrap up, pack up, remove’ (*Bauer*). The second figurative occurrence is in 1 Corinthians 7:29 in the phrase ‘the time is short,’ signifying that time has been drawn together, contracted, into an abbreviated scale” (CBL, GED, 6:217). When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., God shortened the time of the devastation for the benefit of His people (Mk. 13:20). Here in 1 Cor. 7, the words *time* and *shortened* indicate God would do a similar thing for the Corinthians (heaven would limit and shorten the

distress they faced). Implied in this information is the need for patience and endurance on the part of the Corinthians (today God's people still need these qualities). Another New Testament book that encourages Christians to stay faithful in the midst of severe trials is Hebrews.

The end of verse 29 is difficult. The thought may be "If you get married, the current circumstances may force you to choose between Jesus and your newly formed family. If you are put into this position, live as a single person (put Jesus above your mate and marriage). You must always choose Jesus since He has first place in your life." Any Christian who married during this time of distress (verse 26) risked having to choose between his spouse and the Lord. Imagine a husband being placed before his new wife and she is told "Renounce Christ or your husband will die a slow and painful death." Wives may have pleaded with their husbands to abandon Jesus to preserve their lives. Throughout the ages bitter persecution has often come upon God's people (compare Heb. 11:32-37), and the Corinthians were facing some very difficult times. Thus, Paul reminded these brethren that Jesus must always come first; as Jesus said, we must "bear His cross daily" (Lk. 9:23) and pledge to put family and friends beneath Him (Lk. 14:26). It would not be wrong to marry, but it would be very, very unwise at this time and place in history.

Paul was so intent on making his point he illustrated it five times in verses 29-31 (each comparison is expressed with the word "as"). Christians were told to look at life *as if* they had no spouse, no sorrow, no happiness, no permanent possession, and no attachments to this world. These things are not true in an absolute sense (be sure to see Eph. 5:22-25; 1 Thess. 5:16; Phil. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:8). His illustrations meant a person's attention is to be focused on seeking first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33). Christians live their lives as if all these things are ultimately irrelevant. After all, the "world does not keep its promises but is a liar and deceiver. That is why in this world men never cease to hope, yet few achieve everything they hope for" (The Church's Bible, p. 123). Husbands and wives must pay attention to their marriages (verse 33; Eph. 5:25; 1 Pet. 3:7), but they also realize marriage is ultimately inconsequential when compared to eternity. How can 50, 60, or 75 years of marriage ultimately compare to time without end (eternity)? In reflecting on this information we see where many Christians fail—they do not really consider their life in view of eternity.

The lasting value of Paul's instruction has application to many things. For instance, there have been parents who lost their children to criminal behavior (a child was abducted and then killed). Police investigated the crime but failed to catch the killer. In many of these cases parents have become obsessed with finding the person who took their child from them. The remainder of their lives and all their resources are dedicated to finding and bringing a murderer to justice. As horrible as this type of tragedy is, it demonstrates a life with wrong priorities. This world is not a permanent home and God will one day have sinners account for their actions (2 Cor. 5:10).

The need to elevate Christ above life's circumstances and family ties is also related to verse 30. MacKnight attempted to capture the thought with this expanded translation: "*And they who mourn* the death of relations, *as not mourning* bitterly; *and they who rejoice* on account of worldly prosperity, *as not rejoicing* immoderately; *and they who buy estates*, as little elated *as if they possessed them not*." "Mourners can easily become engrossed in their sorrow (e.g., death of a loved one), rejoicers can be taken up with their happiness (e.g., marriage and honeymoon), buyers can concentrate on their new possessions (e.g., new car or home), and the users of the world can become enamored with it (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15)" (Gromacki, p. 96). As important as marriage and the other things of life may seem to be (employment is one example), commitment to Christ supersedes every single thing for Christians. "Eternal duties and concepts should possess the believer rather than the temporal activities that mark this passing world" (Gromacki, p. 96). If people allow themselves to be affected too much by outward circumstances, they find that life overtakes and will spiritually destroy them. Excellent cross-references for this point include 1 Cor. 6:12; Mk. 4:19; and Lk. 21:34.

"Weep" (*klaio*) is a verb and it describes weeping, mourning, lamenting, crying, and showing emotion. It occurs more than 30 times in the New Testament and is sometimes associated with death (Rachel "wept" for her children, Mt. 2:18). It is also combined with the death of Lazarus (Jn. 11:31, 33) and the death of Jesus (Jn. 20:11, 13, 15). It is connected with remorse, specifically Peter's remorse (see Mt.

26:75). It is coupled with people weeping over divine judgment and eternal doom (Rev. 18:15, 19; Mt. 8:12). We find it united with Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41) and in a woman anointing Jesus (Lk. 7:38).

"*Rejoice*" (*chairo*) is a common New Testament verb. Here it means a Christian's "existence manifests itself as autonomous aloofness over against the world's joy" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:451). As an old hymn goes: "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up beyond the blue." "*Buy*" (*agorazo*) has already been discussed in the commentary on 6:20 and 7:21-23. Here it means to purchase "something for someone" (Gingrich and Danker, p. 12). It was wrong for the Corinthians to be absorbed by the things of the world (no activity was to interfere with their service to God, just as today Christians cannot let the world interfere with their Christian life).

The information in verse 31 continues the point. We should "*use*" (*chraomai*) what is available to us. *Use* is a present tense verb and it is found primarily in this book (verse 21; 9:12, 15). It is also found in Acts 27:3 ("entreated" is how it is translated in the KJV); 27:17; 2 Cor. 1:17; 3:12; 13:10; 1 Tim. 1:8; 5:23 (this last reference offers a good illustration of the word's meaning). Here it tells us Christians are to make full and complete use of what is in the world. Though this earth and our problems are temporary (verse 31b; Heb. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 3:10), we can and must be good stewards of what exists. This is true for each person. Even if we do not regard ourselves as rich, smart, well educated and successful, we must work to use the things in the world to our advantage (Lk. 16:8) as well as the advancement of the gospel. We must do this as fully as we can and for as long as we can. One day the property we own will be in the hands of another. Someone else will have our furniture, stocks, bonds, offices and positions, fields, businesses, and sit where we worship. From now until the end of time Christians will surely have technology and resources to do much in God's kingdom and these resources must be used.

In the middle of verse 31 the KJV says, "*not abusing*." The ASV says, "*not using it to the full*." These translations are based upon a single word (*katachraomai*) that occurs only here and 9:18. The KJV rendering ("not abusing") makes the best sense of the thought. The Corinthians were to use what was in the world, but they were to avoid any sort of abuse. They were to "make full use of, to use to the utmost, 'using it down to the ground,' 'using it completely up'" (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 409). History has often shown that resources and technologies that could be used for good and God are wasted or used for sinful purposes. Christians need to use their talents and the world's resources for Christ. Verse 31 tells us that God wants His people to work and work hard. Far too many Christians have concluded God has saved them, this world is not their permanent home, and they can coast along to eternal bliss. They feel like they do not need to learn more about God, say anything about Christ to others, and may "warm the bench" in the Lord's kingdom. This attitude is very, very wrong.

At the end of verse 31 Paul spoke of "*fashion*" in the "*world*" "*passing away*." *Fashion* (*schema*) is only found here and Phil. 2:8 (this second passage describes Jesus coming into earth in human form). Here it means the "*world in its present form is passing away*." Kittel (7:956) said, "This world in its distinctive manifestation (or form) is (already) in the process of perishing." As the second law of thermodynamics says, our world is like a wind up clock and the clock is winding down little by little. It was "wound up" by God and all things will one day be ended by God (Heb. 1:11-12).

We may summarize these verses by saying Paul pondered "the conditions of life faced by all believers—married, divorced, widowed, engaged, and single alike. He began and ended with acknowledgments that this life is fleeting: **time is short...this world in its present form is passing away**" (Holman, 7:121). Christians therefore need to cling to God and His word, always seeking to be obedient, because only Christianity offers man something that never fails.

7:32-35: *But I would have you to be free from cares. He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33 but he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and is divided. (So) also the woman that is unmarried and the virgin is careful for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married is careful for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is seemly, and that ye may attend upon the Lord*

without distraction.

The Corinthians were very important to Paul so he again expressed his love and concern for them (compare 28b). Paul wanted them “to be” (present tense) “free from cares” (the KJV says “without carefulness”). *Free from cares* comes from a single word (*amerimnos*) that is only found here and Mt. 28:14 (in Mt. 28 it describes chief priests who told soldiers they would be “kept out of trouble”). Here Thayer (p. 32) defined it as “free from earthly cares.” Since this word is expressed in the present tense, this was Paul’s on-going desire. One of the ways Paul tried to free these Christians from *cares* was his recommendation to avoid marriage (verses 26-28). Until the *distress* ended (verse 26), it was best for single people to remain unmarried.

Those who decided against marriage would not only avoid extra hardships, they would have more opportunities to serve God (32b). Paul then expanded on the thought with the word “careful” (“careth,” KJV). This term (*merimnao*) is a present tense verb and it shows that some things in life continually require attention (marriage is one of these items). Jesus used this same word in Mt. 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34 (in these passages the ASV says “anxious”). Although Jesus used the word negatively, here the term is used positively. It means Christians still have some responsibilities and obligations when they marry (time, energy, ability and money are all required to maintain the relationship). When a person is not married, he or she has additional time and opportunities to serve God. Stated another way, marriage places some limitations upon what people can do in God’s service. Paul personally experienced this principle in his life. As a single man, Paul was able to travel with little preparation. He had no need to maintain contact with a wife or children. He could be gone for long periods and have no concerns about fulfilling the needs of immediate family members. Compared to a married man whose spouse needs attention and who has children who need rearing, Paul was able to literally devote his life to God. This is the general point of these verses.

There are some textual problems in verses 33-34 and readers will find that the wording in translations noticeably varies. One way to see the differences is to compare the ASV with the KJV. The **KJV** says, “But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. 34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” The **ASV** says, “he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and is divided. (So) also the woman that is unmarried and the virgin is careful for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married is careful for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” In spite of the textual variations, it is possible to make some observations.

Unmarried Christians have some special opportunities to serve God and these opportunities exist whether times are peaceful or turbulent. Paul also reminded these Christians that married couples are to serve God (verses 33-34). Married couples can be just as effective in their church work as single people, but they are also “careful for the things of the world.” Husbands must pay some attention to worldly matters so their wives will be “pleased” (*aresko*). Stated another way, husbands are to seek ways to make their wives happy (*pleased* is applied to the dancing that pleased Herod, Mt. 14:6. It is applied to wives *pleasing* their husbands in verse 34, Christians *pleasing* the Lord in verse 32, and used negatively in Rom. 8:8). A general definition for *please* is a “desire to please” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:151). Because husbands pay attention to both spiritual and secular things (and marriage is just one example), their energy is “divided.” *Divided* (*merizo*) is in the ASV but not the KJV; including it in the thought makes the passage easier to understand. For the other places where *divided* is found in the New Testament, see Mt. 12:25, 26; Mk. 3:24, 25, 36; 6:41; Lk. 12:13; Rom. 12:3 (“dealt”); 1 Cor. 1:13; 7:17; 2 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 7:2.

Husbands *divide* their attention when they devote time and energy to providing the needs of their family (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education) and the activities associated with the Christian life. If a man wants a successful, happy and godly home, his attention must be *divided* between the Lord and his family. Although this conclusion would seem to be so fundamental it does not need to be stated,

many have failed to properly divide their time. Some married men have paid so much attention to church work or secular employment they have destroyed their families. Others have spent too much time on recreation and hobbies and had no or insufficient time to serve God and meet the needs of their family. When a person—single or married—takes on so many secular activities that they are not active in the church and/or their family life suffers, they need to repent (priorities must change). When spiritual priorities are placed first, children may not get to do all they want to do (some secular activities may need to be dropped), but this is in what God requires (Mt. 6:33).

In addition to husbands *dividing* (sharing) their energy and attention, Christian wives have this same responsibility. This point is made in verse 34 and it is expressed with the present tense (“cares” is a present tense verb in both verses 33 and 34). Just as it would be wrong for a man to ignore his wife because he is too busy with God’s work, such is also true for wives. Married women have an obligation to God as well as their household. Paul made this same point but used different wording in 1 Tim. 2:15.

If a woman chooses to stay single (*unmarried* or a *virgin*, 34a), she is “*holy in body and in spirit*.” This means single women are like single men: They can devote themselves to God’s service. *Body* and *spirit* are used together to describe full devotion (the entire person). Single Christians are not obligated to have a “divided interest” (i.e. be involved with the things of God and matters associated with the world). Anna (Lk. 2:36-37) typifies this type of person.

Paul did not mean married Christians are less holy or less spiritual than unmarried Christians. He simply meant single Christians “*may attend upon the Lord without distraction*” (35b). *Attend* (*euparedros* or *euprosedros*—there is a variation in the Greek text) is found only here in the New Testament. It described “undisturbed devotion” (CBL, GED, 2:643). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:81) defined it as “so that you may remain without distraction proper and *faithful* to the Lord.” The variant reading (*euprosedros*) has a similar meaning (“steadfast,” Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:82).

Paul also made it clear he did not want to “*snare*” the Corinthians (35a). This word (*brochos*) is found only here in the New Testament. It described “a ‘slipknot’ or ‘noose’ used in war or hunting” (CBL, GED, 1:583). Here it means “lay a restraint upon” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:227). Paul’s purpose was “not to cast a noose upon the Corinthians; he is not like a hunter who ropes a wild animal in order to render it helpless. Paul is not throwing a noose of legal commandments about the necks of the Corinthians in order to force their consciences into helpless surrender” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 324). Stated another way, he did not want these Christians to believe celibacy is a better state. He wrote to “*profit*” his readers (his purpose was to help and not harm). *Profit* (*sumphero*) described “the ultimate good and not necessarily the good of the present situation” (CBL, GED, 6:167).

Because of the *distress* (verse 26), the “*seemly*” (“*comely*,” KJV) choice was to stay single. *Seemly* (*euschemon*) means “for the sake of propriety” (Spicq, 2:141). In other words, if these Christians chose to stay single they would have an easier life and they could serve God without distraction. If the Corinthians wanted or needed to marry (verse 9), they could. Married Christians may have more monetary income available for use (especially if both work), and a couple can join their other resources to serve God, but single people are often blessed with more opportunities to serve (35b). For the Corinthians, remaining single allowed them to “be steadily and unremittently close to the Lord” (Spicq, 2:141) during this period of distress. Paul wanted these Christians “to be like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, rather than like Martha, working in the kitchen (Luke 10:30-42)” (Gromacki, p. 97). *Without distraction* comes from a single word (*aperispastos*) and it is found only here. Outside the New Testament it was sometimes used to describe “property deeds without encumbrances” (CBL, GED, 1:339). Here it describes people who were free from the *distraction* of marriage. In commenting on this word Spicq (1:161) said, “virginity allows exclusive concentration on God.”

Local congregations can learn an important principle from these verses when searching for a minister. At the present time (and probably until the end of time) local congregations prefer evangelists who are married. Most believe a married man will have children who will be enrolled in a local school and a wife who can integrate into the community and congregation. A man who has these “ties” will be less likely to move. A married preacher has had experiences a single evangelist has not, and some of these experiences

are helpful in dealing with people. A married man can often help make an “instant contribution” to a congregation’s youth group with his children and ladies’ activities with his wife. Many men with excellent speaking skills and an eagerness to preach the whole counsel of God are often rejected by congregations because they do not have a wedding ring (i.e. they are single).

Local congregations need to remember the point made in this section of 1 Cor. 7. Does a congregation really need a married man or a mature man? A mature single man can offer some things a married man cannot. He will be more available for church members as his family concerns are less. He may be more objective in counseling situations as he will not compare things to his own family. An unmarried man enjoys a type of independence and freedom that cannot be matched by a married minister.

7:36: *But if any man thinketh that he behaveth himself unseemingly toward his virgin (daughter), if she be past the flower of her age, and if need so requireth, let him do what he will; he sinneth not; let them marry.*

Verses 36-38 are difficult to interpret. Because a proper explanation of the text is complex, some have used this passage to say Paul authorized premarital sex (“*let him do what he will*”). Paul was not endorsing premarital sexual activity or unmarried cohabitation (these types of activities are forbidden by the information in chapters 5 and 6). Sexual sin will keep people out of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-11); if people will not repent of it, fellowship must be withdrawn (5:1-5, 11).

One of the first problems in interpreting these verses is identifying the “man” at the beginning of verse 36. Does this describe the father of a young woman or does it refer to a woman’s fiancé? Although a strong case can be made for this being a fiancé, this commentary accepts the other view (i.e. a young woman’s father).

In the Corinthian’s culture, parents often had complete control over their children (this control extended to the point of fathers arranging marriages for their daughters). However, “In the lower social classes from which most of the members of the Corinthian church were drawn the contracting of marriages would often be left to the young people concerned and would not be viewed as the possibility of the parents” (A New Testament Commentary, Howley, Bruce, and Ellison, p. 390). This background information suggests Paul answered another of the Corinthians’ questions. Perhaps they were asking, “*What was the father’s role in giving away his virgin daughter?*” If the father did not arrange his daughter’s marriage, what was he supposed to do? What responsibilities did he have?

If readers wonder why these questions were even asked, Holman (7:124) provides a thoughtful answer. “Apparently some members of the Corinthian church sought to control others in these matters, perhaps by pressuring them to pursue the ‘highest’ spiritual status.” Just as some Christians today want to tell others “how to do things” (i.e. “how to raise children” and “how to be a good Christian”), such appears to have also happened at Corinth. Advice is not wrong and in many cases it is needed. Matters that are not doctrinal, however, need to be decided by each individual or within a person’s own family. Christians may offer input and advice to others (usually after it is requested), but they need to be wary of thinking they know how to best guide the lives of other Christians (compare Mt. 7:3-5). We must be busy in the Lord’s work, but not busybodies (a meddler in the affairs of others).

In answering the questions Paul said a father could behave “*unseemingly*” (uncomely, disgracefully, or dishonorably) towards his daughter. This word (*aschemoneo*) is a present tense verb and it is only used here and 13:5. Gingrich and Danker (p. 119) defined it as “*to feel that one ought to be ashamed*” (in the KJV it is translated “*uncomely*”). It seems to picture a situation where a young lady and her fiancé wanted to get married, but the girl’s father opposed the marriage. Perhaps the father’s opposition was based on the “distress” mentioned in verse 26. Whatever the reason, the young lady felt frustration by her father’s opposition and her father may have also struggled in telling her no. Another key word is “*thinketh*” (*nomizo*). This is a present tense verb and is explained in the commentary on verses 26-28.

In the ASV the text says “*virgin (daughter)*.” In the KJV the text simply reads “*virgin*.” A literal reading of the passage is *virgin* (the ASV tries to complete the thought by adding the word *daughter*). In the Greek New Testament there is a standard word for daughter (*thugater*); Paul could have used this word, but he specifically chose the word *virgin (parthenos)*. We cannot know the exact reason why he chose one word over another, but one wonders if he was not suggesting that purity (i.e. virginity) was considered the normal state of unmarried people who were Christians. From an early age young people need to be taught God’s plan for human sexuality. Rather than let children learn the “facts of life” from places like public schools, this instruction needs to be given in the home and be based on God’s word.

The expression “*if she be past the flower of her age*” comes from a single word (*huperakmos*) that is found only here in the New Testament. It is an adjective and it is formed from two different Greek words. The first part of the term is based on a preposition (*huper*) that meant “above, beyond.” The remainder of the word is based on a noun (*akme*) that meant “the peak of development” or “climax.” Here the word may mean one of two things. It could “refer to a woman who has exceeded the age of marriageability and

whose father or guardian is concerned that she marry. It may also refer to a man whose sexual desire is on the verge of being out of control with the woman to whom he is engaged” (CBL, GED, 6:357).

Whichever view is right (and this commentary accepts this first view), the term tells us Paul was dealing with ladies old enough to marry (Plato said the “flower” of a girl’s age was 20 years old). Paul was not dealing with “under-age” girls—he described women mature enough to understand why it was unwise to marry at this time (verse 26, “distress”). Bengel (2:206) described these women as “Without marriage, as if despised by suitors.”

Another important detail is found in the words, “*and if need so require*” (this relates to the information in verses 2 and 9). Paul realized there are those who need marriage to avoid sexual temptation and fornication. If young women needed to marry to satisfy their physical desires, this was acceptable (verse 28 and Heb. 13:4). The word translated *need* (*opheilo*) is also used in 7:3. Here it means “general necessity” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:551).

Earlier in this chapter Paul told fathers their daughters could marry (verses 2, 9, 28). Fathers knew what was right, but Paul still provided more information. He went out of his way to tell fathers that if their daughters wed, and they supported the marriages, this would be acceptable to God [36b: “*Let him do what he will* (allow the marriage, BP); *he sinneth not: let them marry*”]. Though the marriage of a daughter was permissible, Paul knew some fathers might still be hesitant. Thus, he continued to make his point in verses 37-38.

7:37-38: *37 But he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power as touching in his own heart, to keep his own virgin (daughter), shall do well. 38 So then both he that giveth his own virgin (daughter) in marriage doeth well; and he that giveth her not in marriage shall do better.*

While there are conditions under which a marriage would be allowed (verse 36), there were also conditions under which a marriage was to be avoided (these two verses). The first case involved a father who stood “*steadfast in his heart*” (37a). If a man was staunchly opposed to his daughter getting married, his conviction (opposition) could be the basis for canceling the wedding.

“*Standeth*” (*histemi*) is a perfect tense verb (i.e. a father had previously taken a stance on this issue and he had not changed his mind). Such a man was firmly opposed to his daughter getting married.

“*Steadfast*” (*hedraios*) is an adjective and it is also important; it meant “settled” or “fixed.” Thayer (p. 168) defined *steadfast* as “those who are fixed in purpose.” See how this same term is used in 1 Cor. 15:58 and Col. 1:23 (the only other places it occurs in the New Testament). By combining these two words Paul pictured a father who was very insistent that his daughter not marry. Towards the middle of verse 37 Paul said, “*no necessity*” (urgency). If a daughter did not feel a strong need for marriage, the *necessity* of marriage was minimal and she could remain single until the distress (verse 26) passed.

At the end of verse 37 is another set of circumstances involving fathers and daughters. This situation involved a father’s “*own heart*” (the KJV has “*own will*”) and it is based on an illustration. A free person (a non-slave) can follow his own will. Paul used this fact to say there was a sense in which the Corinthian fathers were *free* and their daughters were not. Thus, these fathers could decide whether or not their daughters could marry. This power is described as “*power*” to “*decree in his heart*” (KJV). Fathers had the right to decide what was best for their daughters. Since *decree* is a perfect tense verb, Paul described final and binding decisions. Lenski (First Corinthians, p. 328) described this as “a decision that, once rendered, stands.” Some decisions in life must be made and not changed.

Guy N. Woods (Questions and Answers, Volume 1, pp. 88-89) presented a good summary of these verses. He said, “Under consideration is a father and his unmarried daughter. The daughter has reached and has already passed the age when girls ordinarily marry. If the daughter is to marry at all, it is time that consent by the father be given, and the usual arrangements be made. This procedure is entirely in order and violates no rule of revelation. However, if the father, (who in that day arranged for the marriage of his children) chose to keep his daughter single and at home, in view of the trials soon to come, his decision was not subject to criticism, inasmuch as such a course would likely work out to the advantage of the daughter. Either course was proper; perhaps the better one, because of impending persecution and trial,

would be for the daughter to remain unmarried.”

Today we do not have unique circumstances faced by the Corinthians and parents do not usually have this same type of power over their children. Yet, we must ask how this information can be applied to our time. What role should parents have in the marriage of their children, and what should be done if children want to marry someone who appears to be a poor mate? Ten suggestions may be helpful to parents. (1) Teach children the basics about marriage and Christianity early in life. (2) Pay attention to our child’s friends. (3) Pay attention to whom our children want to date. (4) Establish in advance clear rules about dating. (5) Be prepared to tell our children they cannot date someone who does not have our approval. If we see all our children’s dates as a prospective marriage partner, we will find it easy to say “no” when that is necessary. (6) Warn children before they start to date that all dating situations may not be handled in the same way. As the caretaker of the child, we reserve the right to modify certain arrangements and rules when we believe it is necessary (this right should be reserved for the gravest of circumstances). (7) If a friend or date appears to be inappropriate, we should try to quickly, kindly and firmly correct the problem. (8) When children date, remember that we cannot see into the future. We may think a person who dates our child is good when he is bad, or bad when he is really good. (9) Work very hard to keep the lines of communication open during the dating and engagement process. (10) If a poor mate is selected by our children, we must do the best we can with the circumstances.

Paul’s conclusion about fathers and daughters is in verse 38. If a man allowed his daughter to marry, he did “*well*” (he did not sin). A better choice (because of the distress, verse 26) was to not marry. The contrast was *not* between good and evil; it was between good and better. The word rendered “*better*” (*kreitton*) is often used in the book of Hebrews to affirm that the New Testament is *better* than the Old Testament (see Heb. 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). This term is also used in 1 Cor. 7:9; 11:17; 12:31.

7:39-40: *A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she abide as she is, after my judgment: and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.*

Many of the Jews who lived under the Old Testament did not regard marriage as a permanent arrangement (Mt. 19:7-8). When the New Testament was given, a higher standard (the standard God originally used, Gen. 2:24 and Mt. 19:9) was reinstated. Under the New Testament a wife is “*bound*” to her husband as long as he lives (this wording is almost identical to what Paul said in Rom. 7:2, though the point is not identical). Husbands are *bound* to their wives for this same length of time. Only death or sexual sin allows for a second marriage (Mt. 5:32; Rom. 7:1-4). Here *bound* (*deo*) has a figurative sense. In other places it is very literal (see Mk. 5:4; 15:7; Acts 21:33). Although the term is used figuratively, it still means that those who marry are bound to abide by their marriage covenant.

In the KJV the first part of verse 39 says, “*bound by the law.*” Since this law cannot be the Old Testament law of Moses (it has been taken away, Rom. 7:1-4), Paul meant the “*law of the gospel*” (i.e. the New Testament), or “*God’s law about marriage.*” In either case the point is the same: God has rules about marriage as well as divorce and all are obligated to follow them. A further statement of this fact is found in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (before conversion some of the Christians had been guilty of “*adultery*”). If God’s marriage laws do not apply to non-Christians, the Corinthians could not have been guilty of adultery.

The Corinthians may have believed widows were compelled to remain single and mourn the loss of their husbands until they, too, died. Whatever these Christians were thinking, Paul said a widow could remarry (i.e. it would not be sinful), but the marriage had to be “*in the Lord.*” This was her “*only*” choice. This closing point can be understood in one of two ways. No matter which explanation is accepted, the information in verse 26 must be considered in interpreting the text (there was a special situation that applied only to the members of this congregation). Here we find that this instruction also applied to widows who might enter into another marriage. It was best for single people (including widows) to stay single because of the distress, but entering into a second marriage was permitted. The one exception to this was *virgin daughters* (young women) who could be restricted by their father’s will (verses 36-38).

The expression “*in the Lord*” may be understood as an adverbial phrase. If this is right, the verb “*married*” modifies “*only in the Lord*” and the meaning is “*guided by the Lord*.” This interpretation means widows were to marry *in a Christian manner* (the emphasis is on a woman’s motive). Marriage should always be approached with God as the first concern and a woman’s motives must be pure (a “gold digger” sees marriage as little more than a financial transaction or a way to increase her social standing). Instead of meaning the marriage partner must also be a Christian, understanding the text as an adverbial phrase emphasizes the *purpose* of marriage. At least two other passages in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:18) use similar wording (“in the Lord”) and convey this same meaning.

A second explanation says the word “*whom*” is modified by *in the Lord*. That is, if a widow marries *in the Lord* she must marry a Christian (she is forbidden from marrying a non-Christian). Support for this view is sometimes based on 2 Cor. 6:14, but that passage does not deal with marriage. In 2 Cor. 6 Paul described relationships that had to be *severed* (2 Cor. 6:17a). Thus, if 2 Cor. 6:14 applies to Christians who marry non-Christians, God requires a divorce from the unbelieving spouses. Such a conclusion must be rejected because it conflicts with 1 Cor. 7:12-14. It is unfortunate that the NIV renders the end of verse 39 as: “*he must belong to the Lord*.” This rendering is not a translation; it is an interpretation.

If verse 39 prevents a Christian from marrying a non-Christian (and this is the view some take), Paul’s prohibition is specifically applied to widows, not every Christian. If a person wants to argue that a Christian marrying a non-Christian is sinful, they can make a better case by appealing to the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). Solomon had many wives who were pagans and these ladies caused him many problems (1 Kgs. 11:1-14). Hebrew men married foreign women (Ezra 9:11) and these marriages were condemned. These Old Testament examples certainly show that believers joined to unbelievers have faced some terrible consequences and in some cases the marriages were wrong. From now until the end of time all people live under the New Testament. Under this final testament Paul said Christians can be married to non-Christians (verses 12-14).

Another key point many overlook is the word “*only*” (*monon*). This is an adverb and it means “*uniqueness, isolation, or exclusivity*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:442). If Paul had said “*in the Lord*,” the point would have been very clear. By saying *only in the Lord*, he assured his readers a second time that *this is the only way a widow can ever marry again. Any other course of action is forbidden if she wants to ever re-marry*. Thus, if this passage means what some claim (a woman “*must*” marry a Christian), it would mean a Christian widow is forbidden under every possible set of circumstances to marry a non-Christian. *Only* is used in several other New Testament verses, including James 2:24 (this passage says we are *not* saved by faith “*alone*”—*only*).

Marrying a non-Christian is not sinful, but it is very unwise. In cases where mixed marriages occur, Christians almost always fail to consider how an unsaved mate will affect their Christian life. This writer has heard Christians claim that they have found a prospective mate (a non-Christian) and marrying an unbeliever will not have a negative effect on their faith or Christian commitment. Often the Christian in this position will say, “I know this couple and just one of them is a Christian. They have a great marriage and we will too.” While there are exceptions, for every mixed marriage that is successful, a thousand will fail or the Christian spouse will be miserable and at some point struggle to maintain his or her faith. One wise preacher once said, “It is better to be home alone on Saturday night than be at home with the wrong person.” If a person will not change prior to marriage (and this includes becoming a Christian), there is little hope of their changing after marriage. Even in cases where both partners are religious but have a different faith, the marital relationship is almost always strained. Things typically worsen when children are born because Christians and non-Christians have different priorities and moral values. Marrying an unsaved person may be “*lawful*,” but it is not “*expedient*” (1 Cor. 6:12).

Christians considering marrying a non-Christian should carefully consider at least two questions. First, if a Christian’s priority is seeking first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33), what will be the first priority of his or her non-Christian mate? How can the different priorities be reconciled? Second, will an unsaved mate attend and be supportive of the Christian’s interest in fellowships and evangelistic activities? In virtually every case the best choice is to wait for and seek out a Christian mate.

For those who insist that a Christian sins when marrying a non-Christian, we must ask some simple but

important questions. First, if a Christian must marry a Christian, how do we identify a *Christian*? If a person became a Christian and stops attending worship, could a widow marry him? If a man is “somewhat faithful” does his mediocre life (Rev. 3:15-16) mean he is a Christian and thus a suitable candidate for a faithful Christian? Exactly what criteria must be met to qualify as a “Christian” mate?

Teaching that Christians must marry a Christian is binding a rule that God has not bound (1 Cor. 4:6). Too, all who teach this doctrine are faced with answering the following questions.

- If it is sinful to marry a non-Christian, what should be done to preachers who perform these ceremonies?
- Are not elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7) obligated to oppose and withdraw from widows and all other Christians who marry outside the faith?
- How can fellow Christians participate in or even attend a wedding ceremony for a Christian and a non-Christian if these unions are wrong?
- Since sin requires repentance (Acts 8:22), and repentance means a person forsakes (leaves) their sin, does this not mean marriages between Christian widows and non-Christians require divorce? It is not enough to “confess” wrong—there must be repentance (a turning away) from what is wrong.
- If mixed marriages are sinful but prayer and confession allow a couple to stay married, why can’t thieves “pray and confess” their sin and keep stolen goods? If prayer and confession allow a person to stay in a bad marriage, a thief is entitled to keep what he has obtained.

Verse 39 means a Christian widow (just like every other Christian) must be faithful at all costs (Rev. 2:10). At Corinth, the best and easiest way to do this was remain single until the distress (verse 26) had passed. If Christians (and this included widows) needed to marry, the best choice was to find a Christian spouse. If anyone married a non-Christian, the relationship would not be sinful, but additional problems would come.

Paul said it was best for widows not to marry and he expressed this point with the word “*happier*” (*makarios*) in 40a. Jesus used this same term in the Sermon on the Mount (there it is translated “*blessed*”). Here it means “the widow is happier if she does not remarry, being free to consecrate herself entirely to the service of God and neighbor” (Spicq, 2:440).

The word translated “*judgment*” in verse 40 (*gnome*) is also used in verse 25. In both places it means Paul’s “understanding, judgment, counsel (in contrast to a commandment, a binding admonition from Jesus relating to the marital relationship in 1 Cor. 7:25, 40)” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:255). To further insure the Corinthians understood his authority, Paul said, “*I think that I also have the Spirit of God.*” Paul did have the Spirit of God and he wrote by inspiration (2:16; 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:3). This statement is an expression “of modesty, not misgiving” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:838). This chapter finishes the discussion about marriage.

Introduction to chapter 8:

Chapter eight brings readers to the fourth major theme in this book (eating meats that had been sacrificed to idols). This was a major problem for many Christians who lived outside the area of Palestine. Worshippers offered meat sacrifices and there were usually some leftovers. Rather than throw the leftover meat away, it was sometimes eaten (compare Lev. 2:1-3; 6:14-16). Among the pagans, excess meat was sometimes sold to local shops since storage facilities and storage capability were both limited. Priests received part of the sacrifices for their pay and, since they often had more than they needed, they sold some of what they received to local shopkeepers. Archaeologists have discovered a first century inscription in Corinth that indicates idol temples and meat markets were sometimes joined together (so much meat came from the pagan temples the two structures were joined for economic convenience). In Corinth a lot of meat was sacrificed to idols.

In the United States, consumers go to the supermarket and think about meat in terms of quality and price. First century Christians had different concerns. They wondered where the meat had come from. What if they bought meat that had been sacrificed to an idol? Could the sacrificial meat be eaten with God's approval? Would eating idol meat mean Christians were honoring a pagan deity? What if Christians were invited to someone's house and their host served meat that had been offered to an idol? Should Christians ask if the food had been part of a pagan sacrifice? Could Christians eat a meal at a pagan's house? For the Corinthians, these were important questions that had to be answered. The Jews had been "uncompromisingly strict" (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:838) about eating idol meat and this subject was also a great concern to many first century Christians (compare Acts 15:20-21).

Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 594) said, "There were two sources of meat in the ancient world: the regular market (where the prices were higher) and the local temples (where meat from the sacrifices was always available). The strong members of the church realized that idols could not contaminate food, so they saved money by purchasing the cheaper meat available from the temples." Because of these circumstances, Paul had to answer several questions: (1) Could a Christian attend a feast if an idol was being honored? (2) Could a Christian eat at a friend's house if meat was served? (3) Could a Christian eat, in his own house, meat that had been sacrificed to an idol?

Some of the Corinthians must have said *yes* to all three of these questions, understanding that idols are nothing and cannot hurt Christians. Because idolatry is nothing but superstition, the meat could be eaten at home or at a friend's house (there was no need for concern). Other Christians were bothered by these practices (these Christians are described as *weak* because they could not conscientiously eat the idol meat). Disagreement about idol meat was one more issue fueling the division at Corinth.

Christians *not* bothered by the idol meat are described in chapters 8-10. These brethren are mentioned in conjunction with words like "*freedom*" (9:1, 19; and 10:29) and "*rights*" (8:9). They were the "*strong*." Christians confident about idol meat did have the right to eat it, but the freedom and rights had some limitations. Paul said Bible love is superior to knowledge and individual liberty (1 Cor. 13). Thus, even though some knew eating idol meat was right, love meant this would not be done so other Christians would not be troubled.

Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 595) capably summarizes the problem between the weak and the strong members of the Corinthian congregation: "you don't always solve every problem with logic. The little child who is afraid of the dark will not be assured by arguments, especially if the adult (or older brother) adopts a superior attitude. Knowledge can be a weapon to fight with or a tool to build with, depending on how it is used." Weak brethren could be shown a logical argument, but this was not the complete solution to the problem of idol meat.