

Worksheet 6: 1 Corinthians 7:1–40

Introduction: First Corinthians 7:1 marks a major transition in the structure of the book with the words, “now concerning the things of which you wrote to me.” Up to this point in the book, Paul has been treating the various issues that Chloe’s people mentioned to him in their oral report (1:11). Now, Paul takes up various questions which came to him in a letter from the church at Corinth—issues which dominate the remainder of the book of 1 Corinthians.

The first issue from their letter is the focus of chapter seven, our passage for this week. In this chapter, Paul confronts misunderstandings prevalent in the church at Corinth regarding marriage. For instance, there is good reason to believe that Paul is quoting a Corinthian slogan in 7:1b, a slogan which he then rejects in 7:2–5. Because Paul’s primary focus is the problem in Corinth, this chapter should not be understood as “a marriage manual or his systematic thoughts on marriage.”¹ Paul is seeking to correct an ascetic view of sex and marriage that apparently existed in the Corinthian church.

Paul applies a single principle, “remain as you are,” to a variety of situations in this chapter. These situations include those who are already married (7:2), singles (7:8), widows (7:8, 40), wives (7:10), husbands (7:11), spouses of unbelievers (7:12–16), and the engaged (7:26–27, 37). In each case, Paul provides limited exceptions to this general principle. A careful, contextual application of this chapter provides guidance in virtually any situation.

Abbreviated Outline² (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
- II. Response to Oral Reports (1:10-6:20)
 - A. A Proper Perspective on Christian Ministers and Ministry (1:10-4:21)
 - B. Immorality in the Church (5:1-13)
 - C. Disputes Between Believers (6:1-11)
 - D. Limitations on Freedom in Christ (6:12-20)
- III. Responses to a Letter from the Corinthians (7:1-16:4)
 - A. Matters related to Sex and Marriage (7:1-40)**
 - 1. To the Married (7:1-7)**
 - 2. To Singles and Widows (7:8-9)**
 - 3. To Those in Difficult Marriages (7:10-24)**
 - 4. To Virgins (7:25-38)**
 - 5. To Widows (7:39-40)**
 - B. Matters related to Idol Feasts (8:1-11:1)
 - C. Matters related to Christian Worship (11:2-34)
 - D. Matters related to Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
 - E. Matters related to the Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - F. Matters related to the Relief Offering (16:1-4)
- IV. Conclusion (16:5-24)

¹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 242.

² The complete outline is available on the Meadowlands Baptist Church website (www.meadowlandsbaptist.ca). Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 482–483.

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. What seems to be the Corinthian slogan in 7:1? What does this statement mean, and how does Paul argue that it is wrong in 7:2–5?

2. Explain God’s command in 7:10–11.

3. How does Paul limit the exception in 7:15? Why does Paul encourage those married to unbelievers to remain as they are in 7:12–16?

4. What is the point of the illustrations in 7:18–22?

5. Considering what Paul says in 7:28, 38 (and throughout the rest of this chapter), is Paul condemning marriage in 7:25–27?

6. What is Paul’s overriding concern in 7:32–35?

7. How does 7:36–38 provide an exception to what Paul says in 7:27? How does Paul limit that exception?

8. How do the instructions to widows in 7:39–40 express the general principle found throughout this chapter?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
