**LIVE IN UNDIVIDED DEVOTION TO THE LORD**

***1 Corinthians 7:1-40  
“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.” (v. 35)***

In last week’s passage, we learned about fleeing from sexual immorality because sinning sexually is not only sinning against God, but against our own bodies. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. So, Apostle Paul concludes chapter 6 with, *“…Therefore, honor God with your bodies.* This verse is a good segue into chapter 7. As Apostle Paul transitions into sexual morality, marriage and singleness. The topic of married life and singleness lead to one spiritual theme, and that is to live in undivided devotion to the Lord. May the Spirit guide us to understand what it means to live in undivided devotion to the Lord.

1. **Sexual morality and marriage (vs. 1-16, 25-28)**

Before I begin this passage, I want us to keep in mind our key verse as we deal with sex, marriage, and singleness. Let’s think about the relationship between these topics and our key verse today.

Now let’s begin this passage. Look at verse 1, ***“Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*** Apostle Paul must be referring to questions that the Corinthian Christians had. In view of the sexual temptations the Corinthians faced in Corinth, they questioned whether it is perhaps better to take a vow of celibacy, to renounce marriage for life, and to withdraw from all contact with the opposite sex?" So, the Corinthian Christians’ question probably arose from the difficulty that some were having trouble handling their sexual drives and living a holy life at the same time. They were living in a sexually—driven society, very much like what we have in America today. They were facing exposure to temptation in these areas every time they turned around, just as we do today, and some of them became tired of constantly struggling against such temptation and reacted by saying, "Well, rather than struggle all the time, why not just forget the whole thing and get away from the opposite sex and live as monks?"

But to correct this view, Apostle Paul gives a general rule for sexual morality and marriage. He says, ***“…*** ***But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.” (vs. 1b-2)*** By saying this, Apostle Paul is saying that to protect from sexual immorality, one should have sexual relationship with his own wife, and a wife with her own husband.

Apostle Paul is advising a general rule regarding sexual morality. A person should marry one partner of the opposite sex and live with him or her while living in an immoral world. Paul did not mean that the purpose of marriage is to prevent sexual immorality. From a moral point of view, however, a healthy marriage is the best way to prevent sexual immorality. It is good to be single. But it is not good to be a single if it causes anyone to be tempted by Satan and sin sexually. Married people should enjoy conjugal relations and be satisfied with God’s gift to them. Then they can overcome the temptations to indulge in sexual immorality. In verses 3-4, Paul explains that the husband and wife should fulfill their marital duty to each other. Neither one should have a selfish view of this; it is not for their own gratification, but for mutual satisfaction. Thus, sex within marriage is like our intimate relationship with God, and becoming one in Him.

Apparently, some in Corinth were trying to practice celibacy within marriage. Such a practice was frowned upon by Apostle Paul because it sometimes led to sexual immorality. Thus, he encourages that if there was going to be celibate during marriage then three conditions should be met. One, is that both husband and wife need to consent to it. Two, it should only be for a limited time. And lastly, it should be used so that the married couple can give themselves more completely to prayer. When their consented time was done, they were to come together again to avoid the temptation of Satan. The point of being celibate for a time in marriage is to draw closer to God while remaining as one through intense and committed prayer.

Look at verse 7, ***“I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”*** We can see Apostle Paul recommended singleness more than marriage, but both were considered gifts from God. Both singleness and marriage have their advantages and disadvantages. But he makes it clear that both are a blessing and based on God’s sovereignty. It is God who enables each Christian to be married or single for our good according to His good will.

After speaking about gift of marriage or singleness, Apostle Paul turns his attention to instructing four groups: singles and widows, married couples among Christians and those who have unbelieving spouses. So, what did Apostle Paul say to singles and widows. Look at verses 8-9, “***Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.*** ***But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion”*** First, for single people including widows, Paul affirmed the suitability of remaining single (25-27), if they had the appropriate spiritual fortitude from God. He anticipated the practical question of how a person can know whether he or she is able to remain celibate. Paul gave his judgment; if one lacks sexual control, he/she does not have the gift of celibacy, and should marry. The only constraint Paul placed on a widow who sought remarriage was the obligation to marry another Christian (40).

What was Paul’s instruction to the married? Look at verses 10 and 11, “***To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.*** ***11But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”*** For a married couple, there should not be a thought of divorce. This is according to the word of the Lord. Jesus taught that the hidden motive for divorce is lust. Jesus called it adultery. In the United States, one can divorce for any reason. While legal, the motive for divorce is clear, to marry a different person. For humans, divorce is viewed as an option and taken lightly, but in reality, it is adultery in the sight of God. That’s why Christians view of divorce has to be different. To divorce is to disobey God. Christ redeemed us from the power of sin and death to enable us to fulfill God’s original high calling, including the establishment of holy families. Jesus said in Mark 10:8-9, “*…the two will become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two, but one flesh.* *9Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* Understandably, there are rough moments in every marriage. But when Christ is the Lord of the family they are rooted in an everlasting love and truth that unites them inseparably to bear much fruit for the glory of God. When problems occurred in a Christian marriage, the resolution is forgiveness and reconciliation, not in divorce.

Now Apostle Paul gives instruction to those with unbelieving spouse. What did Paul say to those who had unbelieving spouses (12-16)? This is more complicated. It is assumed that those mentioned here had married before becoming Christians, for the Bible strongly warns that believers must not marry unbelievers (2Co 6:14). In that situation, if the unbeliever is willing to live with them, the believer must not divorce (12). There are difficulties involved in a spiritually mixed marriage, but they must do their best to work it out. God regards their union as sanctified through the faith of the believer. Their children will share in God’s blessing. Some are serving God with all their hearts, even though their spouses do not share their faith. We only thank God for their faithful struggle which no one else can understand.

Look at verse 15, **“*But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.”*** But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. Sometimes, unbelieving spouses can become the devil’s instrument to destroy the faith of the believer. Their constant harassment is a fierce spiritual battle. Though it is painful to bear, the believer is not to seek a divorce in this case. However, if the unbeliever decides to leave, the believer should let them go. God wants his children to live in peace. We must acknowledge that believers have no control over the rebirth of others, even of spouses. Spiritual rebirth is God’s sovereign miracle.

1. **Live in Undivided Devotion to the Lord (vs. 17-24, 29-40)**

Apostle Paul takes a small break in his discussion about marriage and singleness. And now he makes a subtle but beautiful connection. Let’s look at verse 17a, ***“Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them…”*** Paul desires that Christians not exhaust themselves trying to change their marital status. Christ is Lord over us and our place in life is given by him. We must accept God’s sovereignty and do our best to serve God as we are. Some single people think they will be happy and serve God better if they marry. While dreaming about their future marriage, they do not serve God. A married person may think that if they were single, they could serve God better. With these excuses nothing gets done for God. We just become idle dreamers. Paul teaches us to accept our God-given place in life and serve God now, as we are.

To illustrate this further, Paul mentions in verses 18-24 circumcision and slavery. Whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, one is to regard his or her place in life as God-given. Often times, we may compare ourselves with others. We may wish to be in another’s shoes. But Apostle Paul is reminding us that our life is God-given. And each person is responsible to God. Thus, it doesn’t matter one’s social position, marital status or even one’s freedom. What matters most is our personal calling from God and taking that responsibility before the Living God. So, verse 19 says, ***“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.”*** We usually hope for better situation, But, better human situation doesn’t guarantee us to serve God better. In each of our current statuses and circumstances, God wants us to serve him and keep his commands. In verses 20 and 24 Paul repeatedly emphasizes this truth***, “Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them…Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.”*** May the Spirit give us peace and contentment in our situation that God has prepared for us, and take responsibility before God.

Look at verses 29-31. ***“What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”*** The world in its present form is passing away. The things that concern us so much in this world will vanish. Marriage as we know it is limited to this world. We should not try to hold temporal things as if they last forever. Rather, we must put our hope in the coming kingdom of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross, has forgiven us and called us to eternal life in his kingdom. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. His kingdom is paradise. There are no tears, sorrows or pains, and no more death. We must live for his kingdom. We must do our best to prepare for his kingdom while living in this world.

Look at verses 32-34 ***“I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.”*** The benefit of singleness is that it has potentially fewer burdens and distractions than the married state, so it more easily facilitates a spirit of undivided devotion to the Lord. At the same time, Paul warns of the danger of a divided heart among married believers. Marriage demands husbands and wives to be concerned about each other. However, there is a danger that their concern can become worldly. Some people dream of endless romance without mission, or endless family gatherings without mission. However, this leads to misery. When the family becomes an end in itself, it has lost the connection with Christ. Then the marriage or the family takes one’s heart from God. We should carry family duty but should not be family-centered. If our hearts are divided in this way, we cannot please God.

Let’s read our key verse, verse 35, ***“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*** What does it mean to live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord? It means to give our whole heart to God no matter the circumstance, the situation or our marital status. Whether, married or single our right way to live is undivided devotion to the Lord. When we do so, God blesses us abundantly so that we can bear much fruit in our lives and be truly happy. Whether we are married or single, or will be married, or whatever our situation God leads us to, we should give an undivided devotion to the Lord by following Jesus and raising disciples of Jesus Christ among the students in Upper Midwest campuses, in America, and to the ends of the earth in obedience to Christ, our Lord. May God bless each of us to stand firm where we are and serve the Lord with all our heart, soul and strength.

There are many examples of those who have given their devotion to the Lord both married and single. An example of a family who devoted their lives to God is the Mayhew family. Thomas and Ana Mayhew came to America in 1631. God blessed their son Thomas Jr. to be a missionary to American Indians. He had one faithful convert, Hiacoomes, who became an evangelist, and 300 Indians came to the Lord in ten years. When Thomas Jr. died, his father took over the mission at an age of 70 and served for 22 years until he died at the age of 92. Then his grandson John took over the work. After him, fourth generation missionary, Experience Mayhew carried on. Without marriage, they could have served for one generation. But as a godly house church, they could serve for four generations.

The best example of one who devoted her singleness to God is Mother Sarah Barry. Here is a woman who gave her marriage to God and remained single to serve the Lord she loved. In her wonderful gift of singleness, she served Koreans with a mother like heart. Then when she returned to America, she has been serving us with God’s love, the word of God and prayer. This year she is 88 years old. Because she devoted herself to God fully, God blessed her with a giant spiritual family of her own around world.

In my case, my gift has been the gift of married life. God blessed me with Elizabeth who simply loves Jesus. When we first got married, out of my curiosity, I asked Elizabeth if she had a boyfriend in high school. She said yes. I asked, “what was his name”. She said, “his name is Jesus”. And throughout our marriage, I can say, she has loved him most. As it should be. God also blessed me with Noah and Hudson who also loves the Lord and who try to please God with their lives. I thank God that Noah wants to be a light in his school. I believe this the God’s calling for him to prepare him to be a blessing in Mounds View School district. This is what I am most proud of. I am too thankful for my married life because I can use my house as a blessing for others, like Joe, Spencer and Duane, along with Jacob, Moses, Stephen, Daniel and Abraham. May the Spirit continue to use my married life and family to be a blessing in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Through this passage, we learned that sexual morality is between a husband and wife in the sanctity of marriage. Through the God given gift of marriage or singleness, we need to please God and love him as of first priority. May the spirit guide us to use the gift of either our singleness or marriage to devote ourselves to God in an undivided heart.