

Core Study #3

Instructions on Christian Singleness and Marriage

Passage: 1 Corinthians 7:17-40

Themes: Christian marriage and singleness, worship of and devotion to God

Summary:

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul talks about marriage. This is in response to a letter written to him from the church in Corinth, who at the time were seeking to resist the immorality in their city. Corinth was a commercial city, known for its temple to Aphrodite that boasted at one time one thousand prostitute priestesses. Some of the church members in Corinth did not understand that the institution of marriage was created by God (Genesis 1:27) and that it is a good thing. They were unable to see the difference between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage. Paul advises the Corinthians that there is an important difference - sex is a gift from God given before sin entered the world. It is an act made specifically for the confines of marriage, but is against God's will when used outside of marriage.

In this passage, Paul outlines rules that are to be followed, then gives recommendations and commands from God to the Corinthian church. He talks about the benefits of remaining single, and the benefits and bonds of marriage. The central idea here seems to be that we are all to retain the place that God has called us to, and that we are to seek to live rightly in a way where our devotion is directed towards God.

Leaders Preparation:

Pray and then read through 1 Corinthians 7:17-40 a few times. Jot down any questions you may have as you read, as well as any interesting things that stand out to you. Here are some questions you may want to try to answer after you have finished reading and before you prepare your core study:

a) What problem is Paul addressing here in the Corinthian church? What is the cultural context (for example, what were marriages like at that time)?

Some believers in Corinth thought that sex, even within marriage, was wrong.

Others argued that sex was okay even outside of marriage. Paul writes to both groups in Chapter 7.

b) What is the "present crisis" Paul refers to in 7:26?

This probably refers to the pressures of immorality and a hostile environment on Christian life present in Corinth. Paul's recommendation here does not apply to all times and all situations. When Paul talks about many troubles, he is referring to the added hardships of taking care of one's spouse in times of suffering and persecution.

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Introduction Question:

- How do you think the life of a single Christian person should be different from or similar to that of a married Christian person?

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

- What is the “present crisis” Paul refers to in 7:26?
This is an important question, as it sets the stage for all of the advice Paul gives in this passage. Please see leader’s prep for more info.
- Note what Paul writes in 7:25 and 7:40. Why do you think that Paul asserts his own agency in these passages? Isn’t all of Scripture meant to be from God (1 Timothy 3:16)? Can you think of any other passages in the Bible or in Chapter 7 that might help us to understand how we can still trust that Scripture is God’s divinely inspired Word even though Paul asserts his own agency at times?
In 1 Corinthians 7:40, Paul says that he believes he has the Spirit of God. The Spirit is certainly speaking through Paul when he wrote 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 7:10, Paul repeats Jesus’ own words (“not I, but the Lord”) from Matthew 19:6 that a wife must not separate from her husband. Jesus is referring to Genesis where we see God’s intention for marriage, where two shall become one and no one will separate them. Jesus recognizes that divorce does happen, but it is not God’s desire for marriage to end in divorce. In verse 12 and verses 25 and 40, Paul is taking Jesus’ teachings and applying them to the immediate situation in Corinth and so he, speaking through the Spirit, gives further advice concerning marriage.
- 1 Corinthians 7:17 seems to be central to this passage. Why is it important to remain as we are?
It may help you to look at 7:32-35 as you answer this question.
- What does Paul mean when he says the world in its present form is passing away (7:31) (in light of vs. 17-24)?
Here, Paul refers to the temporary nature of earthly things. In a time of persecution, the time for doing God’s work has become increasingly short. We are not to be unduly concerned with the things of the world because material things change and disappear. This passage may also refer to the Second Coming of Christ.
- Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:7-10, suggests that singleness is a gift. In light of this, what is your opinion of singleness as a gift? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that marriage or romantic relationships divide your devotion to God? Can marriage or relationships encourage devotion to God? If so, in what ways?

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We know from Genesis that God brings Adam and Eve together for companionship, friendship, and marriage. Marriage is gift from God, but in this passage Paul is talking about the difficulties of marriage in a climate of persecution.

Response:

- Do you feel satisfied remaining as you are, or is marriage or singleness an idol to you? How can we help each other to be content in the place in life that we are currently in? How can we help one another to find out what God has called us to individually and as a group during our time at UBC?