

## A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #7

*Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 7: 1~40*

In this chapter apostle Paul writes both principles and his recommendations/ advices on marriages.

### 1. Principles and advices on marriage: v. 1~16

In the first part of Chapter 7 Paul lays down some important principles that must be held between a husband and a wife in marriage.

First, marriage between a man and a woman, thus prohibiting polygamy, is an institution that God has established for human prosperity and for avoiding sexual fornication [v.2] Thus, marriage must be honorable and the sexual relationship between a wife and a husband must be kept sanctified to the marriage vow.

*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.  
[Heb 13: 4]*

Secondly, a person in marriage has to 'render due benevolence/ affection' to the spouse [v. 3]. Control of each spouse's body belongs to the other mutually [v. 4], which indicates that the conjugal relationship should be done in love in full consideration of the other person. Since the bodies of a couple belong to their spouses, sexual immorality would be in violation of this principle in that violation of due ownership and consideration of the spouse is committed when a person unites with another who is not his/her spouse [v. 5]. Paul expounded on this mystery of marriage based on the typology of the relationship between Christ and the church, in his letter to the Ephesians as follows:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.*

*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. [Ephesians 5: 22-33]*

Thirdly, although keeping celibate as Paul and some of the apostles did in the first century for the sake of the traveling mode of evangelism ministry, Paul recommends people to be married [v. 7-9]. Based on the verses in Ephesians cited above, we can see that Paul might have been a married man who is familiar with the mystery of marriage. Yet he chose not to accompany his wife for the sake of the mission although Peter and some other disciples went about accompanied by their wives.

*Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? [I Corinth 9:4-6]*

Some churches, such as the Catholic Church, requires celibacy for their ministers and priests. However, we need to be aware that the choice of Paul, Barnabas and certain other evangelical workers in the first century to not

accompany their wives although they were married, was a matter of placing a higher priority to the mission work than to their family life. On keeping single, which Jesus referred as being 'eunuchs,' He remarked that not everyone is able to keep this status for the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus indicated it is a personal choice and not a mandate:

*But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it." [Matt 19: 11-12]*

Obviously some evangelist in the first century chose to stay single while others did not. Yet, the celibacy requirement for the priesthood was instituted in 1047 AD through a papal edict and has stayed in the Catholic Church. Certain other churches also adopted this policy.

Fourth, professing people should not discard or divorce their spouses for reasons of the Christian faith but strive to help them have the faith to believe as they do [v. 12-16].

## **2. Advice on young women and widows: v. 25-40**

Paul was not against marriages as he makes clear in v. 36. Yet in this part of the chapter Paul is encouraging the believers to stay unmarried as he is because that is a good way to keep one's life devoted to the Lord and not be bound in caring for and trying to please the spouse [v. 33-34]. The purpose of Paul's admonition is clear at this point -- Paul is most concerned and interested in the spiritual growth of the believers while ensuring that their marriages are kept holy and sacrosanct. He wants Christ to be manifest in the believers' home life and that their spiritual growth be uninhibited because of marriages.

*Discussion topics:*

- 1. Is the celibacy requirement of Christian ministry/priesthood desirable and scriptural?*
- 2. What is the contemporary perception of marriage in contrast to the view presented in this chapter?*