

1 Corinthians Class 10 Transcript

Welcome back to class number 10 in our series on Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. We really appreciate you joining us once again.

Each time as we begin the class, we like to begin by answering the questions from the previous class. However, we had no questions from class number 9.

So we'll just continue on this evening by asking God's blessing on this class. So if you will, please join me, bow your heads, and we will ask God's guidance for class number 10.

[Prayer]

[1:26]

We need to pick up this evening where we left off last time. We had gone through the first part of **1 Corinthians chapter 7**, and in that chapter Paul has begun by answering a question that was sent to him by the members in Corinth.

Now, up to that point he's been kind of laying a foundation, and please keep in mind that there are a couple of themes that are going to run through this entire book. And they're going to be a part of what Paul says as he begins to answer the direct questions that had been asked.

This first question that he addresses seems to have to do with whether it's acceptable for a person to remain unmarried, if they choose to, or is it better in some way, spiritually, to remain unmarried? And Paul needs to address that, and he's going to as we go through this particular chapter.

But again, there's something underlying that. Remember we said that in Corinth, one of the causes of the division, of the kind of segmenting that was taking place within the congregation, was a certain level of spiritual pride. And the question really seems to relate to that. That is: "Which is spiritually superior, being married, or, being single and remaining celibate?"

Now again, a lot of that has to do with the Greek culture and what was going on, and Paul addresses that. But, he's making a point here that it isn't a matter of spiritually "better or worse." That's not the issue that you need to consider. And, underlying this as well is the principle we saw, again in **chapter 6**, that said: "God may allow me to do many things, but what is "legal" is not always what's the best thing to do." Now that doesn't mean we can do what's "illegal"; that's not his point. But he's saying that just because God allows us to do something, does it mean that it's always the best thing to do in that way? And of course, he brought that out in **chapter 6** as we went through that.

[3:45]

Now as you remember, as we started into **chapter 7**, we noted that there are three groups of individuals who are being addressed in the first part of the chapter.

1. First of all, he dealt with the unmarried and the widows in **verses 8 and 9**, and he talked about the approach that they should take, and he basically said it's fine to remain in that state if you choose to. There's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing spiritually superior, but it's perfectly all right and acceptable to God.
2. He then moved on to talk to the second group of people—the married people. And that goes through **verses 10 and 11**. He said, and again he makes the point as we saw early on that this

isn't just Paul's idea. He said this is based upon what Jesus Christ taught about marriage.

3. But, as we got up to **verse 12**, we are faced with a question because Paul talks to what he calls *the rest*, and he goes from **verses 12** through **16** talking about *the rest*.

3 GROUPS – 3 ANSWERS

1. Unmarried and widows (verses 8-9)
2. Married (verses 10-11)
3. The rest (verses 12-16)

So what do we mean by that? We've talked about unmarried. We've talked about married. What's left besides those two? Well, we're going to see very quickly that what's left is a special group of individuals that all of us know, a part of every congregation, and it's a group that needs to understand as well, "What does God expect of me? How am I supposed to do things? If I'm unmarried, I've been told: 'Here's how I should conduct myself. I should certainly be celibate in that state. If I choose to stay in that state, it's all right, no problem. If I'm married, then I have certain responsibilities to my mate, and so that includes sexuality, and that aspect of marriage.'" But, where does that leave this other group? Who are we talking about?

[5:36]

Now to be honest, for many years in the Church, we really didn't fully grasp the concept of *the rest*. And it was probably in early 1974 that the Church addressed this for the first time in the way that we do today, to recognize what's there. We had at one time believed that God was involved in every marriage that took place, no matter where it was or when it was, unless fraud was involved. And we had to come to recognize that: "Well, that's not exactly what the Scripture shows us." God is involved where there are converted people. We ask God in a marriage ceremony to bless and bind that couple together in a unique and special relationship in which He is a part. But, what do we do with this next group, *the rest*? Who are we talking about?

Paul shows that the instruction here applies to those situations where one individual is a called and converted Christian and the other person hasn't been called yet. So we have a marriage between a believer and someone who is—I hesitate to use the word "unbeliever" because that almost sounds like they're rejecting the truth. It's not that. It's just simply one who has not yet been called. God doesn't call everyone at the same time, even in the same family.

So Paul recognizes: "All right, how do you conduct yourself in that situation?" If you're unmarried, God's instructions are clear—you're celibate; you remain in that situation; you don't compromise with that. If you're married, then here's the way you conduct yourself within a marriage with a converted person. And he very clearly showed us in **verses 10** and **11** that when you're married to a converted person, that marriage is for life. It's not something that you would take lightly and set aside, or, simply because you can't get along, then you decide: "Oh, let's divorce, and we'll marry someone else." Paul says, "No, that's not the standard Jesus Christ taught. He said, '*What God has bound together, let not man put asunder.*'"

But, what do we do when one member of the marriage relationship is striving to live by the standards that Jesus Christ set, and the other one isn't living that way. How do we conduct ourselves in that kind of relationship? And I think it's logical that there would be people saying: "Well, since the ideal would be to be married to someone who is a believer, then if I'm married to an unbeliever, should I maybe get rid of that person and go find myself a believer to be married to? What should I do?" Well, Paul felt it was very important to give some explanation of that, and I think his explanation is very, very important even for us today.

[8:33]

I thought it was interesting as well—*Expositor's Bible Commentary* makes this comment about this:

Since Paul preached in Corinth for over a year and a half, with many turning to the Lord, we may conclude that while he was still with them, many marriages became mixed marriages. Had he at that time given them advice about this? Well, probably he had, but the problem then was probably not so acute for the unbelieving partner, when the other partner was a new Christian. The unbelieving one may have thought that this “stand” for Christ was a passing fad or a superstition. But as time went on, the condition in many Corinthian homes became more serious.

So in other words, it seems to be telling us here that probably early on, just as we’ve sometimes seen today, someone will say: “Well, okay, my mate is embracing this new belief, but you know, it’s probably not going to last long, and it’s not really going to have any big impact.” But as time goes by, yes, it does have an impact. The Sabbath by itself has a tremendous impact on how a family is going to function when one member is a believer in keeping the Sabbath and another is not. This can create quite a few conflicts. When we look at the standards of clean and unclean foods, when one member believes—the member believes in doing what God says in Scripture and the other person doesn’t, again, how do we handle that? We begin to run into all kinds of conflicts.

Unfortunately, sometimes—and we’ll see this principle as we go a little bit further on in this chapter, especially toward the end—sometimes people who are unmarried become attracted to someone who is not a believer, and that’s not a surprise. There are some very fine, nice, good-standard people out in the world that God hasn’t chosen to call just yet. And, sometimes we can tell ourselves, “Well, this person is very understanding. I’ve talked with them about my beliefs, and they say that’s not a problem to them, and so therefore it should be fine for us to go ahead and get married, even though I’m a believer and they’re not.”

Well, what happens very often, as time goes by, the unbeliever wasn’t particularly lying to you or deceiving, they just didn’t really understand how profoundly Christianity changes the way we live, and the conflicts begin to come up. That first child comes along, and before that you can say, “Oh, well, Christmas doesn’t matter that much to me.” But now that first child comes along, and the grandparents are saying, “I want to give my child Christmas gifts. I want to share this with them.” Conflicts can begin to come up a whole lot more. So, these situations are things that we need to know how to address.

So, how do we address them? Now, don’t misunderstand what Paul is saying here when he talks to *the rest* about their marriage relationship. This should never be taken to imply that Paul is saying that a Christian marrying someone who is not a believer is perfectly all right. No, that isn’t what he says. Now, he is going to make it clear that we’re not going to look upon that relationship as a sinful relationship, as an adulterous relationship, or something like that. But that certainly doesn’t mean it’s a wise move. Again, maybe no one is going to block you from doing it, maybe legally you can do this, but is it really the best move? Is it really the wisest move?

[12:16]

So Paul goes on to say, you know, what he says in that passage here in **verse 12**:

[1 Corinthians 7:12] *But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.*

Oh. Keep this marriage relationship together. Now, what does Paul mean when he says here: *I, not the*

Lord? Well, basically Paul is saying: “We’re addressing the situation here that Jesus Christ didn’t give specific instructions about, so we’re going to have to use the principles that He gave in order to see, what does God expect of us?”

Now, why didn’t Jesus address this? Well, remember Jesus was dealing in Judea, and in one sense everyone who lived there was, I guess you could say, a part of the Church. Everyone was a part of Judaism. Everyone lived by, was brought up with, was born into that same system. So, marrying someone who was a nonbeliever was a rather unusual circumstance there. Now I’m not saying it didn’t happen at all; certainly, it did. But Jesus evidently was not called upon to address that particular situation during His earthly ministry. So that guidance had to come from Him later on. And Paul is saying, “All right, here’s what I believe the principles show us. So, I’m giving you my instruction based upon what Jesus Christ has taught.”

Now he says, if that person *is willing to live with you*—the unbeliever *is willing to live with you*—what do we mean by that?

Louw & Nida, the commentary, the lexicon, says:

“To decide with someone else that something is preferable or good, to agree with, to consent to.”

In other words, the unbeliever, after the believer is called—now, what are we dealing with again? Let’s make it clear. I don’t think I’ve done that quite enough, yet. We’re not talking about entering **into** a relationship like this. We’re talking about people who are already married, when God chooses to call one of them, and He doesn’t choose to call the other at the same time. So, what do we do in that situation?

Okay, if the unbeliever is willing to continue on with the marriage—they say: “I love my mate. I love my children. We have a happy home. I really don’t want to end that relationship.” Then, Paul says, by all means, don’t seek to end it; keep it together. Don’t—will there be difficulties? Will there be challenges? Of course, there will, but there are challenges in every marriage. But keep that relationship together, and we’ll see a little bit more as we talk about that in just a moment. But I think it’s very important—Paul is telling us: keep this relationship together.

[15:14]

Now, sometimes through the years, unfortunately, I’ve known of people who have looked at this phrase, *willing to live with*, as if it’s some kind of a magic talisman that determines whether you stay with your mate or whether you divorce your mate. And I’ve known of people who would go to their unmarried—you know, it’s an unhappy marriage, and they’re struggling as it is, and they go to their unbeliever mate and say:

“Are you *willing to dwell with me*?”

And if that individual says, “No,” —

“Okay, then I’m free to run from that relationship.”

No, that’s not what this is talking about.

What does it mean? It has the sense of—that the unbeliever is willing to do those things which are necessary for a normal marriage to exist—provide for the family in some cases, or at least carry out those family responsibilities that you would expect of a mate in a marriage—faithfulness to their mate, providing for children and caring in those ways. If the individual’s willing to do those things that are

necessary for a marriage to take place, then that's what it means by "*willing to dwell*." They're *willing* to be in that situation.

But, I think we also have to ask ourselves a question: why is it that God would say to a converted person, "You're married; you're bound to an individual who is not a believer. Stay in that relationship if at all possible." Why does He say that? Well, there are going to be a couple of reasons, but one of them, I think, is very important for us to have in mind.

Marriage is a sacred and unique relationship, created by God and given to mankind as a blessing. It is never something that we should take lightly—not something that we would place on the same level as any other relationship. It is a unique and special relationship. The marriage relationship—whether you're married to a converted person or not—is always to be treated with great respect and reverence. We don't enter into it lightly. We don't destroy it carelessly, through sin or lack of effort or just simply not doing our part.

[17:38]

Now, we're going to see some other reasons as we go a little bit further, but we should also realize that God calls each individual when **He** determines it's best for them. Just because they're not ready to be called immediately doesn't mean that they're evil people, or that they should be denied the benefits of a stable and happy marriage relationship. If they're willing to do their part to contribute to the marriage as you would expect, then by all means, there's nothing that we should do to separate them from that.

I think sometimes people get the idea that if you're married to a converted person, this will resolve all kinds of your problems. Well, that would be nice to think that, but to be honest, converted people have their problems as well to work through. One of the big differences, though, is that converted people—a converted couple—have the same standards and the same resources to draw from. We're able to know where—if we're converted, then both of us are going to want to keep the Sabbath. Both of us are going to keep the Holy Days. Both of us want to live by the same standards. We may struggle. We may have to work through relationship issues, **as everyone does**, but having a mate that shares the same belief is a very important thing. We don't want to minimize that either. That is a very, very great blessing. But, it isn't a magic solution to every disagreement that comes into life.

So, likewise, Paul tells the person who is married to a nonbeliever: "Don't think that it's just 'that's the problem'—that you're married to an unbeliever, that's what creates the difficulties in your relationship." It could, but it could also be just normal human struggles that we have and need to work through.

He goes on to say, [**1 Corinthians 7**] **verse 13**:

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

Now this would have been unusual especially in the Jewish culture, but it was—it did take place on occasion. There were situations where it might take place. So, primarily the emphasis is to the man, but it goes both directions. Don't seek to get rid of your mate simply because they're unconverted, they're not called, yet.

He goes on to say, and he explains this in **verse 14**:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

We need to understand the words that are used here. “Sanctify” is again the same basic word that we get for “saint” or “holy.” It’s that same concept that’s there. *Hagiazo* means “to sanctify” or “to make something holy.”

Now, remember, we’ve talked about this before. The concept of holiness involves three different aspects. It is:

1. Being set apart “from” the world, “from” something else. In this case, set apart in a special way from all other groups in the world.
2. It is set apart “for.” In other words, God has a reason for setting people apart. He doesn’t just separate them, but it’s for purpose.
3. And third, God is the one who does the separating or making holy, the sanctifying.

[21:11]

So it says here that the unbelieving husband is set apart by God, for God’s purpose, because of the believing wife. In a sense, we’ve used the metaphor, or description, I suppose, of the wife—in this case, in this verse—being a converted person, and the Spirit of God dwells in her, and therefore the Spirit of God is a part of that home. Now that doesn’t mean the husband is called. It doesn’t make him spiritual. It doesn’t make him necessarily a better person. But, the Spirit of God dwells in that home, and it has an influence in that home. And if that man chooses to live in peace with his converted wife, then he dwells within the influence of the Spirit of God in a very positive way. He is set apart in that way.

The next door neighbor is not set apart that way. He doesn’t have a converted wife, so he’s just like everyone else out in the world. Whereas, this individual who has a converted mate has the opportunity to be in the presence of the Spirit of God. And, as he goes on to say in that verse, likewise *the unbelieving wife is sanctified, set apart, by the believing husband*. The Spirit of God is in that home, and that’s what leads him to say: *otherwise, your children would be unclean*. Now, “unclean” doesn’t mean they’re evil, they’re terrible. It just simply means they haven’t been cleaned up. They’re not in this special category. He says: *now **they** are holy*.

Now, all of you with children know that your children are not perfect. Whoever they are, whatever age they are, they’re not perfect. Any parent knows that about their children. But, don’t take lightly this concept that it says: “In God’s sight your children *are holy*.” They’re set apart from the rest of the world, from all those other children out there. They’re set apart in a special category, and, God can work with them. God can call them. God—it doesn’t always mean that He does, but He can call them. And if they’re living in a stable and happy home, and they see the example of the one who is a believer—if their heart and mind is right—they’re going to be attracted to that, and God can deal with them, places them in a special category.

We even remind our camp staff—when we have our summer camps, that we have the preteens and the teenagers—certainly they make mistakes, and they’re not perfect by any means, but we remember that in God’s sight, those young people are holy; they’re set apart. And, when you go to the camps and you get a chance to work with those young people, quite honestly, you can see the influence of the Spirit of God upon them, even though it isn’t dwelling within them yet. There are many of those young people that are some of the finest young people you will ever meet. And you can see the influence of the Spirit of God in their homes.

[24:18]

So it's telling us this: "So, if one person in that family has the Spirit of God, all the others in that immediate family are set apart. Doesn't mean they're called right now, but they do have a unique access to God if they want it."

Now, I want to read this from the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

The word *hagiazó*, "to sanctify," does not refer to moral purity—Paul is certainly not teaching that the unbelieving partner is made morally pure. What the word emphasizes is a relationship to God, a claim of God on the person and family to be set apart for Him. The perfect tense of the verb stresses that, being in a Christian family, the unbeliever has already become and continues to be a part of the family unit upon which God has His claim, and which He will use for His service. The same is true of the children born in such a family. That God has laid His hand on the Christian means that God has laid His hand on the children and set them apart for Himself. They are holy (*hagia*, "set apart for God") and not "unclean"—that is, not spiritually separated from God as was and is the case in unbelieving families.

So the concept is clear. Okay, now that's going to help us understand why it's so important to keep the marriage together, even if you're married to an unbeliever.

He goes on to say, [1 Corinthians 7] verse 15:

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

What do we mean by this? Well, we are told that, if the individual decides that he or she doesn't want to remain in that marriage relationship (The unbeliever we're talking about here.) —they don't want to stay in that relationship; they find it, for whatever reason, it's untenable for them—then okay, the believer can't force them to stay. You do everything you can to keep the marriage relationship together. You do all you can to make it a proper marriage relationship. You make sure you're doing your part, but they're going to be times when the unbeliever just says: "No, I'm not willing to live this way. I want to leave." Okay, when that takes place, the believer must allow them to depart.

[26:54]

Now, what does it tell us about that? It then says *a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases*. It can be translated: *has not been bonded*.

Again, *Expositor's* makes this clear:

The Greek perfect form of the verb is graphic—"the Christian brother or sister is not in a bound condition as a slave." (Or does not remain as a slave.)

The relationship that we have in marriage is a binding together. It's voluntary binding, but it is binding. When we ask for God to take a part, we ask God to **bind** husband and wife together, to—the term that is used in some cases means "to **cement** together." What God has "cemented together," man is not to pull apart." So, it's a very strong bond.

But, if the unbeliever says, "I will—I'm not willing to live in this relationship as long as you're living as a Christian," then you have to let them go. You can't hold them. But, what does that mean about **your** status?

Well, it tells us that when an unbeliever leaves, then that's not something—there's not something we can do about that. We have no way to control them. So, if it's their choice to leave, all the brother or sister can do is allow them to leave, and that individual then—we would say, the phrase we sometimes use—is “not bound.”

Now that's not a decision that individuals make on their own. That's a decision that they bring to the Church and seek counsel from their pastor, and seek to have a proper decision made. These are the principles that are used for those decisions. But it's a decision that you don't want to just take upon yourself: “I'm free. I can do whatever I want.” No, we need to have a good solid decision that's made there with all the things that are needed to be considered.

[29:02]

And then he tells us something else, and this is an important part as well in understanding the relationship and what needs to be maintained.

He says, [verse 16] —*but God has called us to peace.*

Again, let me quote *Expositor's*:

A second reason for allowing an unwilling partner to leave is that God has called his people to live in peace, which would not be possible if the unbelieving partner were forced to live with the believer. Try to live with the unbelieving partner in the peace that God gives, but do not attempt to force the unbeliever to stay.

We are to live together in peace. If a relationship is one of turmoil and chaos, and especially if it is a relationship involving abuse, God does not require a person to stay there. That's not something that God requires. If it is constant pressure to compromise with God's truth, or to turn from it—there's a constant resistance—then we need to look at that situation more carefully. And again, I would certainly say, don't take it upon yourself to make this decision on your own. It's too important! Get counsel. Get counsel to see: “Is there something that we can do more?” Remember that striving to live together in peace is a responsibility God places on every believer.

Notice in **Romans chapter 12** and **verse 18**, Paul says: *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

This is something that is a real challenge for us at times. We realize that. And, I think the way that Paul says it there in **Romans 12** acknowledges the fact that in some cases, no matter how hard you try, you can't live at peace with some people. So, it is possible that situation will come about. God wants us to have peace. God wants us to be in a situation where we can grow and develop, and an abusive situation, a frightening, chaotic situation, is not one where God's people have the ability to grow effectively.

So, he does acknowledge that we are to have a marriage relationship that is essentially peaceful. That doesn't mean you agree on everything. That doesn't mean that you always get to do what you want to do. That's not true in any situation. But, when you're dealing with an unbeliever, if it is impossible—you've done everything you can do to be at peace, and it's just not possible—again, seek that counsel. But we realize that God does not require a person to stay in that kind of a situation. And again—I can't emphasize it enough—if you find yourself in an abusive relationship, please, **please** seek counsel. That is a relationship that, in virtually every case, will get worse, can become a dangerous and even a life-threatening situation. So please, get wise counsel.

[32:12]

But understand that God intends a marriage relationship to essentially be a relationship in which there is peace in a home. “Peace” means more than simply “absence of conflict.” It means there’s not constant fear. There’s not a home that’s filled with confusion, or anxiety all the time. It shouldn’t be there. God intends us to live in peace. And if we follow His examples, His instructions about the marriage relationship, the marriage can be. The home is a bastion of peace and safety, a place of protection where you can always know you’re safe with the people who love you and care for you. That’s what God intends.

Okay, let’s go on here. He goes on to explain a little more.

All right, [1 **Corinthians 7:16**] *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?*

We have to always remember that God calls people at **His** time, when He sees it’s best for them. We would certainly love the idea that our mate could be called at the same time. If we were married to an unbeliever, we would certainly want them to be called, and in many cases God has done that. Many of you who are listening to this were called together as a family. But probably all of us know people as well, where one came into the Church **years** before another. I think of one couple my wife and I were very close to, where I believe the man was a part of the Church something like 12 years before his wife was called; but then she was called.

I can think of other examples where in some cases—in one case I particularly think of, the man was really rather hostile to his wife’s relationship with the Church for **years**, but eventually began to come to the Church and was baptized and is to this day a solid member of the Church of God, serves in many ways.

I think of another gentleman who was friendly; he was very nice. His wife was a Church member, and he was very friendly. He would go to the Feast with her; he was kind; he enjoyed Church people coming to his home or would come to a Church social or activity—but never attended. And shortly after his wife died, he began to attend Church, and again, became a very solid Church member.

We don’t know God’s timing on these things. That’s God’s choice. But what’s the point that’s being made here? We just said that if there is a converted person in that home, then the Spirit of God dwells there, and the unbeliever has an access to God that people out in the world, as a whole, generally don’t have. We don’t know when or how they may respond to that, but, if we take it upon ourselves to end that relationship, then not only are we ending the marriage relationship, we’re sending that person away from contact with the Spirit of God. That’s a decision that belongs to God. It’s not one that belongs to us. We don’t **dare** usurp God’s position and determine: **this** person doesn’t need to be called now. That’s God’s decision, and that’s one that we want to leave in His hands.

[35:39]

So we maintain that marriage relationship as long as we can, doing everything we can in our power. We recognize that when we’ve done everything we can, it may still not be possible. And in those cases, a Church member is not bound for the rest of his or her life in a relationship with someone who is an unbeliever. But again, seek counsel on that, don’t take it upon yourself.

Now we’re going to switch the subject a little bit here in one sense, but we’re continuing with the marriage concept. And, I’m going to go a little bit faster through this section for a couple of reasons, but

one is because part of it is unclear, so it's difficult to know exactly how to explain it all.

So, let's go on here, [**1 Corinthians 7**] **verse 17**:

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

Now, this is a continuation. Okay, are you—let's go on—well, it won't say it here—but he basically will say: "If you're married, okay, that's fine; continue with that. If you're not, that's fine; continue with that."

The first example he uses here is circumcision.

He says, **verse 18**: *Was anyone called while uncircumcised [circumcised]? —*

Well, most of the gentiles [Jews] would certainly fit that category.

—Let him not become uncircumcised.—

That's really not a factor, spiritually, that they need to be concerned about.

—Was anyone called while uncircumcised? (Well) Let him not be circumcised.

Okay, we have here, then, the gentile being called—they are uncircumcised. *Let him not become circumcised.* (I got a little ahead of myself there.)

The first part of it is, *is anyone called while circumcised?* That's referring to the Jew. *Let him not become uncircumcised.*

Now, that sounds very strange to us, but we have to understand it was a very different world in the first century. Public baths—well, people would say, "Well, how would you know?" Well, there were public bathrooms, and it would be pretty obvious in such a situation, whether a person was circumcised or not. In the Greek culture, circumcision was almost an offensive thing. The body was considered to be created just fine as it was, and the idea of making cuttings on it was really kind of offensive.

[38:02]

Now, I know that may be kind of hard for us to understand, so let me give maybe a parallel. Suppose your next-door neighbor brought home a new baby from the hospital. And, the lovely little baby, just as cute as can be, and on the eighth day of that baby's life, your neighbors cut off his earlobe. Well, you would think that would be a terrible thing. Now, can you function without an ear lobe? Certainly, you can; that's not a big deal. It would probably look a little different, but we all have different size earlobes, so it's not going to change the functioning of that child. But, you would think: "Well, what a terrible thing!" You'd probably report them to the authorities if they did that, cut off the ear lobe of a child. What a strange thing to do! Well, in the minds of the Greeks, that was what circumcision was. It was a strange cutting, a strange custom, and it was almost offensive.

So, when a person was circumcised, it was pretty obvious that they must've come from a Jewish background, and it could create a number of problems even within the community, of being who you conducted business with, and so on. So, it appeared that there were some who—and again, this is historical information—there were some who perhaps were circumcised as babies and decided they wanted to fit in with the gentile community more. There literally was a type of surgery that was performed to try to reverse circumcision. Now, again, considering the knowledge—the lack of knowledge of hygiene and those things that took place in the first century world, there were undoubtedly an enormous number

of infections, and probably even deaths, from such a thing. But, for some people it seemed to be important. Paul is saying: “No, don’t; don’t do that.”

Now, I don’t think Paul is simply talking about the “flesh.” There’s more to it. In a sense what he’s saying is: “If you’re a Jew, you don’t have to become a gentile to be pleasing to God, to be a Christian. If you’re a gentile, you don’t have to become a Jew. You don’t have to do Jewish things. You don’t have to speak Hebrew words.” And again, sometimes it seems even in our society today, even in our Church sometimes, there are people who seem to think there’s something more righteous about using Hebrew terms. You know, when we talk about—instead of “the first five books of the Bible,” the “Torah.” Well, okay, that’s fine. That’s what it’s called in Hebrew. But saying “Torah” is not more important or more righteous than talking about “the first five books of the Law”; it’s not more righteous in some way. To say “*Shabbat Shalom*” is not any more righteous than to say “Happy Sabbath. Hope your Sabbath is good.” It’s not more righteous. It’s not more pleasing to God. That’s not something that we need to be worried about. We don’t need to go look at how the Jews observe their Seder to figure out what we ought to do during Passover time. No, that’s not necessary. There’s nothing **wrong** with Jewishness, and there’s nothing wrong with the gentiles doing things their way, as long as we’re within God’s law. So, God permits that.

[41:20]

So again, here we have this situation of: “Is it okay for—is it **legal** for a person who is not circumcised to seek to be circumcised? Yes, but it may not be the best decision. That may not be the wisest thing to do. There may be other factors to consider, and likewise, the reverse.

Now, Paul goes on to say:

[1 Corinthians 7] verse 19 *Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.*

That’s an important concept there. Now, when you actually look at this, circumcision, physical circumcision, was symbolic of a system called “Judaism,” and it was a way that people had lived. But that physical system, the physical circumcision itself, was really meaningless to God. You do not have to be physically circumcised in order to be in a covenant relationship with God. That’s the way Judaism saw it: “You must be physically circumcised, or you are cut off from a covenant with God.” And we understand, in the New Testament, that no, physical circumcision is irrelevant as far as your relationship to God. It may be a wise thing to do; it may be an unwise thing. That’s a physical decision that people make. And again, uncircumcision, as far as God is concerned, doesn’t cut you off from God. That’s not it at all. It’s neither here nor there as far as God is concerned, but as he says here, *keeping the commandments of God is what matters.*

Now that’s a very powerful statement, especially for those who would set aside at least some of the commandments of God, like the Sabbath. Why don’t they believe this? If this is what Paul said, why don’t they very clearly say *keeping the commandments of God is what matters*? Well, in part because the Greek doesn’t actually say “*is what matters.*” Okay? Those words are not there. But, it’s a very logical point to put in. After all, if what it said was: *circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.* We kind of stopped in the middle of his thought. What do you mean: *but keeping the commandments of God*? Uncircumcision is not keeping the commandments of God. So, how can we apply it there? So, the authors—the translators have very rightly added this: “Circumcision doesn’t matter; uncircumcision doesn’t matter. Keeping God’s commandments matters.”

That's a very logical place to put that concept, and it fits very, very well.

One of the commentaries says:

Circumcision is of no value. Uncircumcision is of no value, but keeping God's commandments is of value.

[44:13]

So he says, [1 Corinthians 7] verse 20:

Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

Now, we're not talking here about occupation or the work that you do. It's just simply saying that God knows your situation when He calls you, so, it's not like you have to make some sudden change because of that calling.

He says: [verse 20] (*Were you—*) *Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.*

[Verse 21] *Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.*

Well, certainly, slavery was not a desirable situation to be in. But, he says, if you can be freed from it, great, but if not, don't let it worry you because God knew your condition before He called you, so don't be concerned about it.

Verse 22 *For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.*

We are bought with a price. We agreed to have the blood of Jesus Christ purchase us out of slavery to sin. We agreed to that, and in allowing that, in agreeing to that situation, we are freed from our old master, sin, and we become servants of—bond servants of—our new Master who paid for us with His own blood.

For, he says, **verse 23**: *You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.*

That is a very profound concept for us, especially, I think, as Paul was writing around Unleavened Bread time. It's a very important Unleavened Bread concept that we need to remember: "the price that was paid for us." It was the blood of Jesus Christ given for us. And, of course, *the life is in the blood*. So that's what we're being told. It is the **life** of Jesus Christ given for us. That needs to be in our minds always—to remember: "To whom do I owe loyalty? To whom am I expected to give obedience, and service, and genuine love? The One who paid for me with His own life."

[46:30]

And the phrase here, don't *become the slaves of men*, is really what's called in the Greek—it's a present tense—present progressive, in a sense— "stop becoming the *slaves of men*." Now, how do you do that? How do you and I become the slaves of men? Well, if we allow the standards of society around us, of other people, to influence us in a wrong way, then we're becoming the *slaves of men*. We're conforming ourselves to the world around us instead of the standards that God has given to us. So, we're told, "Stop doing that." And I think all of us have to stop at times and look at ourselves, and say: "Am I doing what I'm doing—is my approach the godly approach, or am I being improperly influenced by the society around me, by human beings, by men? If so, then I'm going off base. I have to stop becoming the

slaves, the servants of human beings.”

We don't belong to ourselves any more. We willingly were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we therefore don't have the right to enslave ourselves to someone else. As Christ said in **Matthew 6 verse 24**, you cannot *serve two masters*, only one. And Jesus Christ is our Master.

So, he says in [**1 Corinthians 7**] **verse 24**: *Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.*

Okay, so the phrase “in God” is important. The fact that we are called and we are in this relationship with God alters everything about life. As long as you can be “in God,” as you can be living the way of life that God has called you to live, then you can remain in that situation. Otherwise, the other physical situations that you're a part of—which would include marriage; it would include slavery—you don't need to change that because of your calling, as long as you can be “in God,” as long as you can be living that way God's called you to live.

Now we come to [**1 Corinthians 7**] **verse 25**, and he says: *Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.*

This next section is a little bit difficult to, frankly, comprehend, and we're not really sure exactly what is being said. Paul, even though he is an apostle, does not claim apostolic authority for what he's about to say. Now God's preserved it, so there's meaning for us, and we should look at that. But he said, “I really don't have a specific commandment from Jesus Christ or of a principle that I can necessarily use.” But he said, “Using the judgment that I have through the Spirit of God, and through knowing God's truth, and through living this way, I'll give you some advice, and I think you can rely upon that advice because, after all, Jesus Christ, in His mercy, has made me fairly trustworthy.”

[49:41]

Now he talks about virgins. The term literally refers to “unmarried women.” In classical Greek, the term really wasn't applied to men, and probably part of that was because men had a freedom of choice that women didn't have. So it was probably one of the questions that was asked of Paul, and it's related here.

He goes on to say in **verse 26**—we'll try to understand this question a little more. That's probably the biggest—the hardest part in understanding this passage is, what exactly was the question?

He says: [**1 Corinthians 7:26**] *I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is: 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*

Okay, so apparently what the question here has to do with is: “Okay, for the unmarried, should they go ahead and seek marriage?” Now, we already said it's acceptable to remain single, but kind of: “Well, would it be better to go ahead and marry? Would that be something that we should seek?” And Paul makes a statement here that we don't really understand. He talks about “the present distress.” In other words, it tells us whatever that distress was in Corinth, there was a very difficult time. Perhaps it was persecution from families, increasing persecution from the authorities. We really don't know. We don't know exactly what it was. But, there was a distressful situation that was temporary. And basically, Paul says: “During this temporary time, it's probably best to put marriage on the back burner and not seek that right now. It's probably best to just kind of—to put that on hold and not to go forward with that.”

Now, there are other places later on when Paul very clearly encourages marriage. So, it's not a matter that Paul, for all time, says: "It's better, don't marry." No, that's not what he said—"present distress." There are undoubtedly times through human history, and specially through Church history, when the Church is undergoing unusual stresses and persecution. And during those times, yes, Paul's going to go on and show us: "There may be reasons why you want to hold off on pursuing a marriage and family relationship." And he'll explain that as we go further. But, there are other times when it's perfectly proper.

[52:16]

He says in **verse 28**: *But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; —*

So, he says: "I suppose for right now that's probably a good thing, but if you choose to go ahead and marry, even in the present distress, that's not sinful. You haven't done something wrong."

—and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

Now, what does he mean by *trouble in the flesh*? The word "trouble" has the sense of "pressure." He said, "If you marry, there are extra pressures, so to speak, upon you that you don't have when you're single." Now, what do we mean by that? Well, we'll see as we go a little bit further. But let's first of all note what he says about this present distress.

He says, **verse 29**: *But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.*

What do we mean by all of that? Well, basically he's saying that "Under the situation that we're going through"—or, the implication can be something that's about to occur, and Paul may have thought that, you know, Jesus Christ returning, the Great Tribulation was very quickly around the corner. That's certainly a possibility here as we'll see later here in this same book. But, he seems to be saying that times will come along when it will be—when everybody functions in a different way, when we will not be functioning in a normal way. When we perhaps—when it talks about "weeping," *those who weep as though they didn't*, that things are in such turmoil that there is no time to grieve; that people are cast from one thing to another; rejoicing—very short-lived, and won't be there very long, not as a normal type of thing. But just, life is so chaotic at certain times that these things would not be.

[54:22]

When he talks about *misusing* the world, more the sense of it is: "consuming, or using it up, or being over-using the world, that those who use this world be not over-using it." And then the phrase here, *the form of this world is passing away*. The term that is used here for *form* is one we've talked about—we do talk about—in the book of **Philippians**. It's *schema*, and it basically means the "outside appearance." And as it's applied to the world, it has to do with, kind of, all that goes into making up society.

Louw & Nida says:

In **1 Corinthians 7 verse 31**, *schema* does not refer to the physical form of the earth, but to the way of life in the world. The reference is primarily to culture rather than physical form. It is possible therefore to render this expression as "the way of life in this world is passing away."

So Paul is saying that as we approach the end time, we approach the Great Tribulation and the chaotic

times ahead, everything that's normal is going to change. So, during those times, it may be best not to seek to enter into a marriage relationship. But again, he says, "If you have, you haven't sinned."

[verse 32] *But (he says) I want you to be without care. —*

"You know, I don't want you to have extra pressure on you."

—He who is married— (excuse me) is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.

Now, that can sound to our ears kind of, almost, a putdown of the marriage relationship, as if single people are really devoted to God, whereas married people are not. Well, no, I think what he's telling us here is that when you're single, you don't have to consider anybody else in the decisions that you make. And, when you're married, there's always someone else who has to be considered. Say, for example, a single person decided to give a large offering, and they decide, "Well, you know, I have certain things that I can cut back in my life that will enable me to give a little bit more." Well, that's wonderful, but a married person may have to consider other people before he or she does such a thing.

[56:44]

Okay, let's go on. [1 **Corinthians 7:34**] *There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband.*

Again, there's nothing negative in this. Paul is simply saying: "When you're married, there are extra considerations that are part of your life and must be there."

And this I say (verse 35) for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, (I'm not trying to hold you back, or tell you you can't do this.) but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

So he said: "This is my advice in the present distress." And then the last few verses become a little more difficult even to understand.

[Verse 36] *But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.*

Now, I will tell you that in looking through this, one of the handouts that I prepare for the students here is a handout that shows 17 different translations of this verse. It's hard to tell exactly what's being talked about. Is it talking about a father who has control over whether his daughter marries or not, and he is hesitant to allow her to marry, or he wants to allow her to marry? Or is it talking about a relationship between two adults who want to marry and are deciding whether they should go ahead with it or not? It's difficult to say.

Going on here, he says that it's not sin. You can go ahead and do this, either way.

Nevertheless (he says, verse 37) he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity (in other words, no pressure placed upon him), but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.

Again, is it a father; is it a fiancé? It's hard to say. But, the point that's being made is, as long as you're making this decision without pressure from some other source, or some other aspect of it, then it's a perfectly legitimate decision for you to make. I kind of skipped over this about *past the flower of her*

youth. I think what it's telling us there is that it's perfectly normal for a young woman to desire to marry and bear children. But if she's reaching the point where bearing children is not so likely—because as we age there's decreased fertility—then it may be good to let her go ahead and marry so that she can have those children.

[59:28]

Anyway, let's go on here. **verse 38** *So then he who gives her in marriage (which sounds like a father) does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.*

So he's saying not "one's right, one's wrong." It's not a matter of right and wrong, but it may be better to hold off until that time when the present distress is gone.

Then he says, very important principle:

[Verse 39] *A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, (and then a very important phrase) only in the Lord.*

Now this is not a matter that says it's a sin to marry outside of the faith, but it is a very unwise thing to do. Being able to share the most important part of your life—which should be your relationship to God and God's people—being able to share that with a converted person who shares that value with you is one of the most important gifts you can have in life. You can't share that with someone who is not a believer, so why would we want to? But, Paul's saying she's free to marry whoever she will. It's legal. The law allows her to. But wisdom says *only in the Lord*.

Verse 40 (He says:) *But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.*

So, during that present distress, this was Paul's advice.

Later on, specifically he will give advice to widows, especially younger widows: "Go ahead and marry, have children, have a family; that's a good thing to do." That was a little later in Paul's life when he gave that advice.

Well, we've used up all of our time for this class. Thank you for joining us.

Please join us again next time for class number 11, and we'll pick up a fascinating subject that begins in **1 Corinthians chapter 8**.

[1:01:33]