



villagebible.church/cylinders

A detailed, grayscale illustration of a multi-cylinder internal combustion engine, viewed from a three-quarter perspective. The engine is the central focus, with its various components like the intake manifold, belts, and pistons clearly visible.

FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

I Corinthians

SMALL GROUP LESSONS

PACKET 4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON 13 | As You Were Called 2

LESSON 14 | Contentment in Every Season..... 8



FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

1 Corinthians

As You Were Called

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Early in our study of 1 Corinthians, we observed that many of the dysfunctions and struggles the Corinthian believers faced fell into one of two categories: conflict—struggles within the church, and compromise—struggles with the surrounding culture.

In chapter 7, Paul is addressing specific questions or topics that the church sought clarity on. It seems they were struggling to discern how their faith should practically influence various areas of their lives, especially as they navigated the intersection between life in the church and life in the broader culture. This is, of course, something Christians continue to wrestle with today.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-24, Paul deals with topics like marriage, divorce, and remarriage (7:10-16), as well as if their circumstances or status affected the value or productivity they might bring to Christ and the church (7:17-24).

“Paul teaches us that because we are in Christ, we should not be anxious “about anything” (Phil 4:6). He teaches us that our Lord enables us to “be content in whatever circumstances” we find ourselves (Phil 4:11). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 that we are not to worry whether we are married, single, divorced, or widowed. We should not concern ourselves about ethnic or social distinctions and status. Rather, each should find contentment in his or her identity in Christ and station in life, whatever it is. After all, it is our Lord who put us where we are.

One word dominates this passage: “call.” The word occurs eight times in our English text but nine times in the Greek text. It is properly translated as “situation” or “condition” (ESV) in verse 20. Paul will use the word primarily to speak of our call to salvation and identity in Christ, but he will also use it to speak of vocation, one’s situation in life. As Stephen Um notes, there is both a vertical and a horizontal dimension to our calling that Paul will unpack (1 Corinthians, 135). Both callings have been sovereignly determined by our Lord.”¹

Our aim is to frame this lesson and its conversations within the larger context of why these issues are being addressed: the believers in Corinth were seeking wisdom on how to honor God in their lives, and these were questions they wrestled with, just as we do today. So, let’s dig in and humbly explore how we are to faithfully live out our calling in Christ wherever He has called us.

¹ Akin, Daniel L., and James Merritt. *Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians*. Kindle ed., B&H Publishing Group, p. 148.

BREAK THE ICE

What is one change you would make to your current home to improve its functionality?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

EXPLORE IT

1. What specific instructions does Paul give to married couples in verses 10-11?
2. How does Paul address the situation of believers married to unbelievers in verses 12-16?
3. How would you summarize Paul's teaching on marriage and divorce in this passage?
4. What principle does Paul state in verse 17 regarding remaining in the situation one was in when called by Christ?
5. How does Paul use the examples of circumcision and slavery to illustrate his point in verses 18-22?
6. How would you summarize Paul's message in verses 17-24?

APPLY IT

Paul turns to those who are presently married and draws on the words of Jesus found in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-12 (cf. Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18). Paul says these words come as a “command,” a divine order: “A wife is not to leave her husband. But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife” (vv. 10-11). ... These are strange-sounding words in a culture that has trivialized the covenantal nature of marriage as designed by God. They sound quaint and old fashioned. Well, they are old, going back to Bible times. As our Lord said in Matthew 19:6, “Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” There is a permanence to marriage that we ignore at great peril to ourselves, our families, and our society.²

7. How does Paul’s teaching on marriage and divorce challenge modern cultural views on the permanence of marriage?

8. Why do you think Paul emphasizes reconciliation and remaining unmarried as the only options for a separated spouse in verses 10-11?

9. In what ways might ignoring the permanence of marriage, as Jesus describes in Matthew 19:6, affect individuals, families, and even society as a whole?

² Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. *Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (pp. 141-142). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

10. How do you personally wrestle with the tension between cultural norms surrounding marriage and divorce and the biblical teaching on these matters?

“Some of the Corinthians probably believed it was right to divorce unbelievers if one belonged to Jesus Christ and was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they argued that one who belonged to Christ must not have sexual relations with unbelievers since believers would be defiled by having sex with those who were alienated from God. Perhaps they even appealed to Old Testament precedents, for Ezra summoned Jewish believers to ‘separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives’ (Ezra 10:11; cf. Neh. 13:3). According to Jewish tradition, Joseph refused even to kiss Aseneth while she was an idolater (Jos. As. 8:5–7).

Paul now provides a reason (‘for’, *gar*) why marriage to an unbeliever does not defile or render the believing spouse unclean. Once again, the situations of both the believing wife and the believing husband are considered so that the pattern of mutuality which stands out in this text continues. If an unbeliever is married to a believing wife or a believing husband, the unbelieving spouse has been sanctified (*ēgiastai*). The perfect tense of the verb denotes the state of the unbelieving spouse. What Paul says here is quite astonishing, for we might expect from the Old Testament that the unclean person would defile the clean person, especially when the two engage in sexual relations (cf. 1 Cor. 6:16). Paul, however, argues for the opposite. The holiness of the believer transforms the unbelieving spouse so that he or she becomes holy. Their marriage and sexual union are not defiling but sacred and beautiful. This is analogous in some ways to Jesus touching the leper (Matt. 8:1–4): the uncleanness of the leper does not defile Jesus; instead, the power of Jesus’ holiness and his healing authority cleanse the leper.”³

*Further Reading Materials*⁴

11. How does the idea that the holiness of one spouse affects the other shape our understanding of the purpose and significance of marriage in God’s design?

³ Schreiner, Thomas R.. 1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Book 7) (p. 200–201). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴ For further reading on VBC’s Position on Divorce & Remarriage, read our distinctive titled: “Divorce & Remarriage: What God Joins Together” which can be found at: villagebible.church/divorce-and-remarriage-what-god-joins-together

12. How can the concept of holiness influence our relationships with those who do not share our faith, especially in the context of marriage?

13. How can the church faithfully support someone who is facing challenges in a divided marriage with an unbeliever?

Daniel Akin summarizes Paul thoughts in verses 17-24 well:

“Bottom line: God knows where you are, and he can use you where you are. ... The principle: “Let each one live his life in the situation the Lord assigned when God called him.” Simon Kistemaker says it well:

In whatever situation a person becomes a Christian, he or she must remain there. That is the place in life the Lord has designated for everyone. . . . New converts to the Christian faith are often of the opinion that the only way to show gratitude to God for the gift of salvation is to become a minister or missionary of the gospel. This is commendable but not necessary. The Lord calls his people in all walks of life to follow him. He wants them to be Christian fathers and mothers, Christian husbands and wives, Christian employers and employees. Each one should fulfill the role the Lord has assigned to him or her and live (literally, walk) accordingly. (*Exposition*, 230)

Paul tells the Corinthians this is not a word just for them. This is his “command” (CSB) or “rule” (ESV) for everyone, “in all the churches.” It is a universal command for all Christians of all times.”⁵

14. In what ways can remaining in our current situations as Christians demonstrate our faith and commitment to God, according to Paul’s teaching?

⁵ Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. *Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 149). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

15. **Considering your current station in life, how might you intentionally serve the Lord faithfully through your daily decisions and interactions in greater ways?**

“He says, ‘You were bought at a price,’ the shed blood of the Son of God. In 6:20 the atonement of Christ sets us free from sexual immorality as we become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Here we are set free from slavery to sin and earthly distinctions as we become slaves of Christ. Therefore, he says, ‘do not become slaves of people’ (v. 23). One’s social status according to human standards now means nothing! As a new creation in Christ, then, don’t be enslaved to shame or pride. Don’t be enslaved to the opinions of others because they don’t matter. Christ is Lord, and he says we belong to him. That is what counts! Find your identity, value, and worth in Jesus.”⁶

16. **How does your understanding of what it means to be "bought at a price" impact your sense of identity and worth in Christ?**

17. **What are some practical ways we can actively resist the temptation to be enslaved by societal standards of success or failure, as Paul advises?**

“We are prone to think that a change in circumstances is always the answer to a problem. But the problem is usually within us and not around us. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart.”

~ Warren Wiersbe

⁶ Akin, Dr. Daniel L.; Merritt, James. Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 153). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. **Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Jeremy Anderson** (Indian Creek Campus Pastor)



Contentment in Every Season

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

You know, being single is not a new dilemma. It's a relatively old dilemma. In fact, I have in my files archives of all kinds of rather antiquated viewpoints and I have a file that has to do with singleness. And in that file there are some expressions of the woes of singleness from back in the nineteenth century, the late 1800's. In fact, there were a whole group of single people who got together for the Ladies Home Journal and all wrote poems expressing their distress.

Now I'm not going to read you all of the poems, but they're quite interesting. Here's one from a gentleman. He writes, "Of all the girls that ever I knew, I never saw one I thought would do. I wanted a wife that was nice and neat, that up-to-date and had small feet. I wanted a wife that was loving and kind, and that hadn't too much an independent mind. I wanted a wife that could cook and sew and wasn't eternally on the go. I wanted a wife that was strikingly beautiful, intelligent, rich, and exceedingly dutiful. That isn't so much to demand in a wife, but she's still not found though I've looked all my life."

And then one from a young lady. "The only reason why I've never wed is as clear as the day and as easily said. Two lovers I had who'd have made me a bride, but the trouble was just that I couldn't decide. Whenever John came, I was sure it was he that I cared for the most, but with Charlie by me, my hands clasped in his and his eyes fixed on mine, twas as easy as could be to say I'll be thine. Now tell me, what was a poor maiden to do who couldn't to save her make choice between these two? I dillied and dallied and couldn't decide till Johnny got married and Charlie, he died. And that is the reason why I've never wed for how could I help it as everyone said, when Johnny was married and Charlie was dead?" Fair warnings, ladies, the struggles of being single, as going about as an unclaimed blessing.

What does the Bible have to say about being single? And how are we to understand singleness, this unique design by God for some of you? We all are aware of the fact that God has designed the relationship of marriage to be the most common expression of human life in an intimate social way. God has designed marriage and called it the grace of life, the gift of God for the fulfillment of most people. And marriage is the only relationship in which sexual intimacy can take place at all. It is God's design and God's gift.

But it is not the only design of God. God designed that some people be unmarried. And that too fits into God's will and God's purpose. And to see what God says about that, I ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 7...1 Corinthians chapter 7.⁷

⁷ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-109/the-blessings-of-being-single>

BREAK THE ICE

What is the perfect age to get married and why?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

EXPLORE IT

1. The Apostle Paul states that a person should “remain as he is” because of what?
2. Is this question of whether to get married or not a matter of right or wrong?
3. In verse 28, Paul says that married folks will have _____.
4. In verse 32, Paul says he wants the Corinthians to be free from _____.
5. What can the married person be anxious about?
6. How long is a wife or husband bound to their spouse?

APPLY IT

The Reality of Marriage:

1 Corinthians 7:25-35

Even with all the “present distress” of the world and our time being short, it is not sin to be married. Paul already told us that it is better to marry than to burn with passion, marriage is a gift and that it reflects the gospel (1 Corinthians 7:7, 9, Ephesians 5:25-33). So of course it is not a sin, but it does come with a certain set of troubles.

We can appreciate how real the scripture can be to our experiences when it says that “those who marry will have worldly troubles” (1 Corinthians 7:28). Many people who have delayed marriage or looked down on commitment do so because of poor examples of marriage in their lives like divorced parents or couples who no longer strive to love each other in word and deed. Some marriages get overrun with worldly troubles like financial stress, sexual challenges, argumentative spirits and struggling to be on the same page. If you’re married you also lose some sense of worldly freedom, for example you cannot easily pick everything up and take a job somewhere else and spending time doing X comes at a cost of time with family the responsibility there. If you’re a godly husband or wife you will be filled with what Paul calls “anxieties” when it comes to how to please your spouse and care for your kids (1 Corinthians 7:32-34).

We may cringe at the word anxiety in this passage, but it is not meant to describe something inherently sinful but rather something we can be preoccupied with. Paul accurately calls this being “divided” and it is not to our shame but just the reality of being a godly husband or wife in this world. You should be thinking about how to nurture your family, earn a living and invest well into the lives of those God has trusted to you. We can recoil at this word “anxiety”, but Paul is being real with us and God would have you do those things well, yet they come at a cost. You will be unable to fully invest in some areas of ministry. You will have a hard time serving in all the places you could serve or maybe even want to serve, studying all the things you can study and there will be seasons of time where your attention will be pulled towards shepherding those in your family as you navigate crises and challenges. This is because “the time is short” and “the present world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:29, 31).

Marriage is a good gift from God, and he uses it to picture the gospel to the world, but it comes with its challenges and there is also another gift that God has given that we ought to consider and support: Singleness.⁸

7. What does Paul mean when he says married people are divided or filled with anxieties about the world?

8. What do you think it means to be anxious about the things of the Lord and how to please the Lord?

⁸ <https://www.westhills.org/blog/2021/07/22/1-corinthians-7-25-40-study-guide-christian-singleness>

9. How should the reality of the imminent return of Jesus Christ impact our relationships with other people?

10. How does Paul describe the unique concerns and impacts of marriage on a believer's devotion?

Singles have more freedom to devote themselves fully to God and His service. In verses 32-35, Paul points out that the single person has more time to devote to the things of the Lord than a married person does. Marriage carries with it certain responsibilities that take time and effort which otherwise could have been given to the Lord. Of course, both married and single people can be fully devoted to the Lord. But Paul's point is that if a single person gives himself fully to the Lord and His service, and a married person does the same, the single person can do more, since he does not have the family obligations that the married person has.

Or, if you have a ministry that requires long periods of travel, it might create such a strain on your family that it would be better not to get married. I have read of missionaries whose long absences from home damaged their families. C. T. Studd left his wife, who was too ill to travel, in England while he went to Africa. They were only together a couple of weeks during her last eleven years of life. David Livingstone left his wife and children for years while he pioneered in the interior of Africa. They suffered greatly as a result.

For over 15 years, Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, was away from his family an average of ten months each year. When he visited home, he often didn't even unpack his suitcase (Marilee P. Dunker, *Days of Glory, Seasons of Night* [Zondervan], pp. 79, 91-92)! He used to say (p. 103), "I've made an agreement with God that I'll take care of His helpless little lambs overseas if He'll take care of mine at home." But his marriage ended in divorce, one daughter committed suicide, and the daughter who wrote about their family had to struggle through a lot of emotional trauma.

While God accomplished much good through these dedicated men, I believe their witness was marred by neglecting their families. I think that if God is calling you to be a missionary, your first responsibility is still to your wife and children. Singles don't have to be concerned about those responsibilities.⁹

11. Considering the benefits Paul suggests for singleness, how might the church and her mission benefit from more active singles?

⁹ Sermon by Steven Cole. Found at: bible.org/seriespage/7-some-practical-advice-singles-1-corinthians-71-9-25-40

12. Marriage and singleness both have advantages and disadvantages. What are some potential challenges to singleness?

13. Paul explains that unmarried people can focus more on pleasing the Lord, while married people are concerned with pleasing their spouses. How do you see this balance of responsibilities playing out in your own life or the lives of those around you?

Singleness can feel like the participation trophy in the game of life. The default for the relationally dismayed. The “gift” no one asked for.

That assessment, however, couldn’t be further from reality. And I say that as a still-single man who aspires to marry. All of us experience singleness. And even for those who do marry, more than half will be single again. God cares about our unmarried years. He desires all of us to make the most of them. So what steps can we take to steward these years well? ¹⁰

14. If you’re married, what are some ways you were able to serve the Lord when you were single?

What are some unique ways you can serve the Lord as a married couple?

¹⁰ Lee, J. (2023, January 28). Single but not lonely: Living well while unmarried. Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/single-but-not-lonely>

15. If you're single, what are some things you wish that married couples in the church knew about being single in the 21st century?

How can your current singleness allow you to devote yourself more fully to serving God and engaging in ministry?

16. What are some steps the church can take to grow in being brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of marital status?