

# On the Single Way of Life (1 Corinthians 7:25-40)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

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## I. Review from the Prior Lesson

- a. After addressing a problem of sexual immorality in the church, Paul tackled a number of issues related to married Christian life and the single way of life.
- b. In the current message, we will pick up that discussion in the second half of **1 Corinthians chapter 7**, where Paul focuses more specifically on the single way of life.
- c. Even for those who are currently married, this subject may have some surprising applications.

## II. Background: Considering Paul's Own Way of Life

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 9:1-6**.
  - i. Paul was living as a single, celibate man.
  - ii. He may have been single his whole life, or a widower, or someone who was separated from his wife by mutual consent for the sake of the gospel.
  - iii. This was not the general pattern among the apostles, most of whom, like Peter, had believing wives accompanying them.
- b. Read **1 Corinthians 9:26-27**.
  - i. Paul had disciplined his own fleshly desires and kept them under control, so that he did not sin and disqualify himself from the prize he was looking forward to, his eternal reward.
- c. Read **1 Corinthians 7:5-7**.
  - i. To the unmarried, Paul says, "It is good for them to remain as I am", which I assume is referring to the single, celibate lifestyle.

## III. Some Married Christians May Be Called to Live Single/Celibate for a Time

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 7:8-9**.
  - i. Widows (and widowers) who lose their spouses to death may be called to return to the single, celibate way of life.

b. Read **1 Corinthians 7:10-16**.

- i. While I have seen churches use the promise of a happy marriage and family life as evangelistic 'bait' to draw unbelievers to the gospel, this passage is a sober reminder that life as a married Christian can be very hard.
  1. Let us not hold out worldly false promises to those we are reaching out to. Jesus calls us everyone who follows him to deny themselves and take up their cross. (**Luke 9:23**)
    - a. The Christian way of life often calls us to endure suffering for righteousness' sake, including in marriage.
- ii. Those facing severe challenges in their marriages may need to go through a time of separation. That could be short-term, after which they are able to reconcile.
  1. However, they might remain in that state until either they or their spouse dies!
- iii. While a marriage between two faithful Christians should have the best opportunity for a good relationship, *there is no guarantee* that this will be the case!
  1. Sometimes that will not happen.
  2. However, in any event, we must remain faithful to the Lord and to the instructions given here by Paul.
- iv. Also, for those of us who are married, our spouses could become very sick, and they could die. We too may find ourselves, at some point, living a single life. This passage we are about to read can help prepare us for that possibility.

#### IV. Paul Says More on the Single Way of Life

a. Read **1 Corinthians 7:25-40**.

- i. This is an overview of the text we are covering today. First, I wanted to read the entire passage to hear Paul's entire explanation. Then, we will look at various parts of what he is saying and explore the implications.
- b. This is largely a discussion about what is 'good' versus what is 'better'.
  - i. "So then he who gives her in marriage does *well*, but he who does not give her in marriage does *better*." (**1 Corinthians 7:38**, NKJV)

- c. I see three categories in Paul's discussions related to marriage and the single life.
  - i. Some things are *completely unacceptable* and will lead to our eternal destruction.
  - ii. Some things are considered *good and acceptable*.
  - iii. Other things are considered to be *even better*.
- d. Based on what Paul says here, combined with what Jesus taught, the following things are *completely unacceptable* for a Christian.
  - i. Fornication (sexual relations between two unmarried people).
  - ii. Homosexual relations.
  - iii. Adultery (violation of the marriage covenant; sexual relations between a person who is married and someone other than their spouse).
  - iv. Divorcing your spouse (except in the case of marital unfaithfulness).
  - v. Getting remarried while your first spouse is still living.
  - vi. Being consumed with lust.
  - vii. For someone who is a Christian, to enter a marriage with someone who is not a Christian.
- e. According to Paul, the following are considered *good and acceptable* for a Christian.
  - i. For a single person to marry another Christian.
  - ii. For a widow (or widower) to get remarried to another Christian spouse.
- f. However, Paul considers the following to be the *best way of life*.
  - i. For a single person to remain single, if they can be content in that condition and not struggle with lust.
  - ii. For a widow (or widower) to remain single, if they can be content living a self-controlled life in that state.
    - 1. However, let us also note that elsewhere, Paul advised younger widows to remarry in order to avoid various temptations.

- a. “Therefore, I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.” (1 Timothy 5:14, NKJV)

## V. Is it Better to Remain Single?

- a. **Question:** Why does Paul believe it is better for a Christian to remain single?
  - i. To avoid problems.
    - 1. “But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless, *such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.*” (1 Corinthians 7:28, NKJV)
  - ii. Because “the time is short”.
    - 1. “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, 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, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For *the form of this world is passing away.*” (1 Corinthians 7:29–31, NKJV)
    - 2. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles warn us repeatedly that the time is short; we are in the last days. Jesus could come at any time, and we need to be prepared at all times. This reality should completely change our priorities.
    - 3. Peter warned in **2 Peter 3:1-14** that the Lord will come “like a thief in the night”. Many will be caught surprised and unprepared, as in the days of Noah and the Flood.
    - 4. Early Christian writers saw this statement by Paul that “the time is short” as something that applies to all of us, since we are in the last days.
      - a. See Tertullian in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 3, p. 446 and Cyprian in vol. 5, p. 536.
  - iii. To permit undivided attention in serving the Lord.
    - 1. “But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he

may please his wife. 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. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.” (1 Corinthians 7:32–35, NKJV)

2. Married people have divided attention and will face many distractions. They are called to please the Lord *as well as* their spouse.
  - a. When children enter the picture, the division in attention can become even more acute.
    - i. For example, even spending time every day in the Word of God can be a challenge for mothers with young children!
  - b. Single people can serve the Lord in an undivided way. However, many today remain single for other unspiritual reasons, such as:
    - i. Fear of commitment;
    - ii. Desire for comfort and independence;
    - iii. Desire to live an Epicurean lifestyle of maximizing pleasure; or even
    - iv. Not wanting the burden of responsibility for children and a family.
  - c. A good question to ask single Christians is: “*Why* do you want to remain single?” What is the *real* reason?
  - d. Those who have families, especially with small children, have very little discretionary time.
    - i. The life of a married parent can be particularly challenging if one is attempting to follow a single-income financial model with many small children, homeschooling, and living here in Massachusetts.

- ii. Perhaps you hadn't noticed, but our own state of Massachusetts was recently ranked the #4 most expensive U.S. state in which to live!
- b. **Question:** Did Jesus ever teach anything like this, that it is better to remain single than to get married?
  - i. Read **Matthew 19:1-12**.
  - ii. After Jesus closed the door to divorce that Moses had left open, his disciples responded: "If such is the case of the man, *it is better not to marry.*"
    - 1. Jesus did NOT reply, "No, guys, you misunderstood me... it's not that bad!"
    - 2. Rather, he *doubled down* and used this as an opportunity to hold up those who would choose the voluntary, celibate lifestyle "for the kingdom of heaven's sake".
  - iii. Growing up in the Roman Catholic church, I was quite familiar with this passage. If you asked me as a young man what was the most devoted life to God one could possibly live, I would think of this passage.
    - 1. I was taught by Christian Brothers in high school, a religious order of men within the Roman Catholic Church who had renounced marriage, so that they could serve God and the academic/spiritual needs of young men in an undivided way.
    - 2. When we had the annual 'vocations day' at my Catholic high school, all the speakers were priests or brothers who had taken a vow of celibacy for life.
- c. In contrast, within Protestant, Anabaptist and Restoration Movement circles, there has been virtually no emphasis on these teachings (at least, not to the best of my knowledge).
  - i. The 'married and family life' was held up as the most important, best way to live.
  - ii. The 'singles ministry' typically emphasized helping single members in the church find marriage partners. Also, there was a strong emphasis on keeping the single Christians socially active with each other, so they would not wander into sins.

- iii. The promise of a happy married life and family often was held out as 'bait' in evangelism, to help get people interested in learning more about the Christian faith.
- d. **Question:** What about the command to "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (from **Genesis 1:28**)?
  - i. How can someone fulfill that directive unless they marry and have children?
- e. The attitude of Christians in the early church regarding marriage and procreation (having many offspring) is reflected by Eusebius, writing c. 320 AD:
  - i. "This being so, the question naturally arises, if we claim that the Gospel teaching of our Savior Christ bids us worship God as did the men of old, and the pre-Mosaic men of God, and that our religion is the same as theirs, and our knowledge of God the same, *why were they keenly concerned with marriage and reproduction, while we to some extent disregard it?*
  - ii. "...The men renowned for piety before Moses are recorded as having lived when human life was first beginning and organizing itself, while we live when it is nearing its end. And so they were anxious for the increase of their descendants, that men might multiply, that the human race might grow and flourish at that time, and reach its height; but these things are of little moment to us, who believe the world to be perishing and running down and reaching its last end, since it is expressly said that the gospel teaching will be at the door before the consummation of life, while a new creation and the birth of another age at no distant time is foretold.
  - iii. "Such is one reply, and this is a second. The men of old days lived an easier and a freer life, and their care of home and family did not compete with their leisure for religion; they were able to worship without distraction from their wives and children and domestic cares, and were in no way drawn by external things from the things that mattered most. But in our days there are many external interests that draw us away, and involve us in uncongenial thoughts, and seduce us from our zeal for the things which please God. The word of the Gospel teaching certainly gives this as the cause of the limitation of marriage, when it says:
  - iv. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remains that they who have wives be as though they had none. And those that wept as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use

this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world is passing away. But I would have you without care. He that is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin cares for the things of the Lord how she may please the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit; but she that is married cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your profit; not that I may cast a cord upon you, but for that which is comely, and that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction.’  
**(1 Corinthians 7:29-35)**

- v. “This expressly attributes the decrease of marriage to the evils of the time and of external circumstances, such as did not affect the ancients.
- vi. *“And I might give this third reason why the godly men of old were so devoted to the procreation of children. The rest of mankind were increasing in evil, they had fallen into an uncivilized, inhuman, and savage mode of life, they had given themselves up completely to godlessness and impiety, while they themselves, a very scanty remnant, had divorced themselves from the life of the many, and from common association with other men. They were living apart from other nations and in isolation and were organizing a new kind of polity; they were evolving a life of true wisdom and religion, unmingled with other men.*
- vii. *“They wished to hand on to posterity the fiery seed of their own religion; they did not intend that their piety should fail and perish when they themselves died, and so they had foresight for producing and rearing children. They knew they could be the teachers and guides of their families, and considered it their object to hand on to posterity the inheritance of their own good qualities. Hence many prophets and righteous men, yea, even our Lord and Savior Himself, with His apostles and disciples, have come from their line.*
- viii. “And if some of them turned out wicked, like straw growing up with the corn, we must not blame the sowers nor those who tended the crop, just as we should admit that even some of our Savior's disciples have erred from the right way through self-will.
- ix. “And this explanation of the ancient men of God begetting children cannot be said to apply to the Christians to-day, when by God's help through our Savior's Gospel teaching we can see with our own eyes many peoples and nations in city and country and field all hastening together, and united in running to learn the godly course of the teaching of the Gospel, for whom I am glad to say we are able to



provide teachers and preachers of the word of holiness, free from all ties of life and anxious thoughts.

- x. *“And in our day these men are necessarily devoted to celibacy that they may have leisure for higher things; they have undertaken to bring up not one or two children but a prodigious number, and to educate them in godliness, and to care for their life generally.”*
  - 1. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 1, chapter 9)
  - 2. Takeaways from this explanation of Eusebius include:
    - a. In the beginning, the world was largely empty of people and needed to be populated. In Eusebius’ day, that was no longer the case. In fact, he considered that world was already in the process winding down, with the end being near.
    - b. The Jews, under the old covenant, needed to have many offspring in order to create a base of people who followed God in the midst of a largely wicked world. The Jewish nation was imperfect, but it provided the base from which the prophets, Jesus and the apostles came.
    - c. The directive to have many physical offspring was part of the old covenant, but we Christians have a new direction now.
    - d. Now, in contrast, the challenge is to *bring the unbelieving nations of the world to knowledge of the Savior*. For that task, Eusebius said, many had devoted themselves to celibacy, to be able to single-mindedly be about the mission of God. Christians should be primarily concerned with having a *vast number of spiritual descendants, rather than a (relatively) few physical ones*.
- f. Cyprian, writing c. 250 AD, makes a similar point, contrasting the two different dispensations.
  - i. “The first decree commanded to increase and to multiply; the second enjoined continency. While the world is still rough and void, we are propagated by the fruitful begetting of numbers, and we increase to the enlargement of the human race. Now, when the world is filled and the earth supplied, *they who can receive continency, living after the manner of eunuchs, are made eunuchs unto the kingdom*. Nor does the Lord command this, but He exhorts it; nor does He impose the yoke of necessity, since the free choice of the will is left.”

1. (Source: Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise No. 2: On the Dress of Virgins*, chapter 23; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 436)
- g. Tertullian, writing c. 212 AD, commented on this passage from **1 Corinthians 7**. He made the point that the prior command to multiply (by having many physical offspring) had been superseded.
- i. “Now, if in all cases he says it is best for a man thus to be; ‘You who are joined to a wife seek not loosing’ (that you may give no occasion to adultery); ‘if you are loosed from a wife, seek not a wife,’ (**1 Corinthians 7:27**) that you may reserve an opportunity for yourself: ‘but withal, if you shalt have married a wife, and if a virgin shall have married, she does not sin; pressure, however, of the flesh such shall have,’ (**1 Corinthians 7:28**) —even here he is granting a permission by way of ‘sparing them.’
  - ii. “On the other hand, he lays it down that ‘the time is wound up,’ in order that even ‘they who have wives may be as if they had them not.’ ‘For the fashion of this world is passing away,’ (**1 Corinthians 7:29-31**) - (this world) no longer, to wit, requiring (the command), ‘Grow and multiply.’ (**Genesis 1:28**)
  - iii. “Thus he wills us to pass our life ‘without anxiety,’ because ‘the unmarried care about the Lord, how they may please God; the married, however, muse about the world, how they may please their spouse.’ (**1 Corinthians 7:32-34**)”

1. (Source: Tertullian, *On Modesty*, chapter 16; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 92)

## VI. A Great Charge to Virgins, from Cyprian

- a. “Hold fast, O virgins! hold fast what you have begun to be; hold fast what you shall be. A great reward awaits you, a great recompense of virtue, the immense advantage of chastity. Do you wish to know what ill the virtue of continence avoids, what good it possesses? ‘I will multiply,’ says God to the woman, ‘your sorrows and your groanings; and in sorrow shall you bring forth children; and your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’ (**Genesis 3:16**) You are free from this sentence.
- b. “You do not fear the sorrows and the groans of women. You have no fear of child-bearing; nor is your husband lord over you; but your Lord and Head is Christ, after the likeness and in the place of the man; with that of men your lot and your condition is equal. It is the word of the Lord which says, ‘The children of this world beget and are begotten; but they who are counted worthy of that world, and of the resurrection from the dead, neither marry

nor are given in marriage: neither shall they die any more: for they are equal to the angels of God, being the children of the resurrection.’ (**Luke 20:34-36**)

- c. “That which we shall be, you have already begun to be. You possess already in this world the glory of the resurrection. You pass through the world without the contagion of the world; in that you continue chaste and virgins, you are equal to the angels of God. Only let your virginity remain and endure substantial and uninjured; and as it began bravely, let it persevere continuously, and not seek the ornaments of necklaces nor garments, but of conduct. Let it look towards God and heaven, and not lower to the lust of the flesh and of the world, the eyes uplifted to things above, or set them upon earthly things.”
  - i. (Source: Cyprian, *On the Dress of Virgins*, chapter 22; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 436)
  - ii. Cyprian offers virgins the opportunity to participate in the coming age in advance (being unmarried, like the angels).

## VII. On Widowers and Widows Remarrying

- a. Tertullian addressed the issue of remarriage after becoming a widow, pointing to what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 7** as well as **1 Timothy chapters 3 and 5**. Making the case for a widow to remain unmarried after her husband dies, Tertullian reasoned:
  - i. “Therefore when, through the will of God, the husband is deceased, the marriage likewise, by the will of God, deceases. Why should you restore what God has put an end to? Why do you, by repeating the servitude of matrimony, spurn the liberty which is offered you? ‘You have been bound to a wife;’ says the apostle; ‘seek not loosing. You have been loosed from a wife; seek not binding.’ (**1 Corinthians 7:27-28**) For even if you do not sin in re-marrying, still he says ‘pressure of the flesh ensues.’ Wherefore, so far as we can, let us love the opportunity of continence; as soon as it offers itself, let us resolve to accept it, that what we have not had strength (to follow) in matrimony we may follow in widowhood.
  - ii. “...How detrimental to faith, how obstructive to holiness, second marriages are, the discipline of the Church and the prescription of the apostle declare, when he suffers not men twice married to preside (over a Church) (**1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6**), when he would not grant a widow admittance into the order unless she had been ‘the wife of one man’ (**1 Timothy 5:9-10**)....”

1. (Source: Tertullian, *To His Wife*, book 1, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 43)
2. Tertullian referred to what Paul said about the bishops/elders being “the wife of one man”, and that the widows accepted to “the number” (like a religious order) must have been “the wife of one husband”. Paul said the same regarding deacons.
  - a. “A bishop then must be blameless, *the husband of one wife*, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach....” (1 **Timothy 3:2**, NKJV)
  - b. “...appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, *the husband of one wife*, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.” (Titus 1:5–6, NKJV)
  - c. “Let deacons be *the husbands of one wife*, ruling their children and their own houses well.” (1 **Timothy 3:12**, NKJV)
  - d. “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been *the wife of one man*, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.” (1 **Timothy 5:9–10**, NKJV)
3. While Christians *in general* are permitted to remarry after the death of their spouse, that was not the case for the bishops, elders, deacons, or members of the church’s order of widows.
  - a. This “husband of one wife” requirement for bishops/elders is *not* about polygamy (which of course is forbidden for all Christians).
4. As the early Christian writers understood Paul’s qualifications for bishops/elders and deacons, accepting those offices of responsibility involved renouncing the option of getting remarried if their spouse died first.
  - a. For more on this topic, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on “Twice Married”.

## VIII. Concluding Thoughts

- a. For Christians, some things are forbidden. However, others involve a choice between what is *good* versus what is *better*.
- b. If you cannot be content and self-controlled as a single person, you should seek marriage.
  - i. However, don't fool yourself! Throughout history, many have gotten themselves into major trouble spiritually (falling into serious sexual sin) by not having a sober estimate of their own limitations in this area.
- c. The single, celibate life was held up highly by Paul, as it was by Jesus.
  - i. If it is for the sake of the kingdom.
- d. Don't look down on singlehood. Neither should singles look down on married people.
  - i. Both life situations are acceptable. Each comes with its own challenges and opportunities to honor God.
  - ii. Let us also avoid the temptation to *overreact* against the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church in these matters!
- e. This teaching regarding the value of the single, committed Christian way of life is a good thing for us to restore. That also includes how we view widows and the qualifications for leaders (elders and deacons) in the church.
- f. All of this takes nothing away from the truth that children are a blessing from God.
  - i. Let the married among us have as many children as they believe God wants them to have, and that *they are able to train spiritually*.
  - ii. However, let us also be concerned about serving the Lord to the greatest extent that we can and having many spiritual offspring in the kingdom of God.
- g. It can help us to keep a healthy, balanced perspective on the married Christian life vs. remaining single, by recognizing that Christian life is about *taking up our cross and following Jesus*.

# Commentary On 1 Corinthians 7

*Marriage, Celibacy, Self-Control & More*

Early Christian quotes compiled by David Sanabria

August 2023

※ Clement of Rome — *1 Clement*, Chapter 38, v2<sup>1</sup> ※

Let him that is pure in the flesh not boast of it, knowing that it is another who bestows on him his self-control.

※ Ignatius of Antioch — *Letter to Polycarp*, Chapter 5, v2<sup>2</sup> ※

If anyone is able to maintain chastity to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him maintain it without boasting. If he boasts of it, he is lost, and if anyone besides the bishop knows it, he is ruined.

※ Clement of Alexandria — *Stromateis*, Book 3, Chapter 1, §4, vv1-3<sup>3</sup> ※

[4.1] Self-discipline means disdain of the body, following obedience to God. Self-discipline applies, not just to sexual matters, but to everything else for which the soul lusts improperly, because it is not satisfied with the bare necessities. [2] Self-discipline applies to speech, possessions and their use, desire generally. It is not just that it teaches us self-control. It offers us the gift of self-control, a divine power and grace of God.<sup>4</sup> [3] I must tell you our people's view of the matter [of marriage and sex]. We bless abstention from sexual intercourse and those to whom it comes as a gift of God. We admire monogamy and respect for one marriage and one only. We say that we ought to share in suffering and "bear one another's burdens,"<sup>5</sup> for fear that any one who thinks he is standing firmly should in fact fall.<sup>6</sup> It is about second marriages [after the death of a prior spouse]<sup>7</sup> that the Apostle says, "If you are on fire, get married."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Per AFAT.

<sup>2</sup> Per AFAT.

<sup>3</sup> Ch., §, & v numbers per FOTC 85, which follow the standard Gk. mss.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Wisdom 8:21.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 6:2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:12.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Stromateis* 3.12.82.4-5 (FOTC 85.307). When Clement mentions "second marriages" (3.1.4.3) he refers to marriages that succeed a prior marriage "union which has been broken by death" (3.12.82.5). Polygamy is prohibited by the "gospel" (3.12.82.2-3).

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:9; Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:8 "I say this to those who are unmarried and to widows," Clement understood the "unmarried" to be referring to widowers. This most likely means that he believed Paul to be a widower. While there is no direct evidence to support this speculation, there is evidence in *Stromateis* 3.6.53.1-2 to demonstrate that he believed Paul was married at some point.

## Commentary On 1 Corinthians 7

※ Clement of Alexandria — *Stromateis*, Book 3, Chapter 12, §79, vv1-7<sup>9</sup> ※

[79.1] It is a lesson in self-discipline if physical union “is given a rest by agreement to allow time for prayer.”<sup>10</sup> He appends the words “by agreement” to prevent a dissolution of the marriage and “time for” to prevent the husband who is forced to practice celibacy from slipping into sin, falling in love elsewhere while refraining from his own wife. <sup>[2]</sup> By the same argument he said that the man who supposes that he is acting wrongly in bringing up his daughter as a virgin will properly give her away in marriage.<sup>11</sup> <sup>[3]</sup> One man may make himself celibate; another may join in marriage in order to have children. Both ought to have the end in view of remaining firmly opposed to any lower standard. <sup>[4]</sup> If a person is going to be capable of keeping his life strict he is going to achieve greater worth for himself in God’s eyes since his self-control combines chastity and rationality. If he goes beyond the rule to which he has committed himself with a view to greater renown, then he is liable to fall short in relation to his hopes.<sup>12</sup> <sup>[5]</sup> Celibacy and marriage have their distinctive services of the Lord, their different ministries. I am referring to the care of wife and children. The peculiar quality of the married state is the opportunity it gives for the man who seeks fulfillment through marriage to accept the overseeing of everything in the common home. <sup>[6]</sup> The Apostle says bishops should be appointed from those who have learned by practice in their own home the charge of the whole Church.<sup>13</sup> <sup>[7]</sup> So each person should fulfill his service by the work in which he was called, so that he may be free in Christ and receive the appropriate reward for that service.

※ Clement of Alexandria — *Stromateis*, Book 3, Chapter 12, §81-82<sup>14</sup> ※

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<sup>9</sup> Ch., §, & v numbers per FOTC 85, which follow the standard Gk. mss.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:36.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Stromateis* 7.12.70; Clement of Rome — 1 Clement 38.2; Ignatius of Antioch — Letter to Polycarp 5.2.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ch., §, & v numbers per FOTC 85, which follow the standard Gk. mss.



[81.1] The Syrian Tatian,<sup>15</sup> as I see it, had the effrontery to make this sort of thing his creed. Anyway, he writes in his work *On Training Following the Savior*,<sup>16</sup> and I quote, “Agreement conduces to prayer. The common experience of corruption means an end to intercourse. At any rate, his acceptance of it is so grudging that he is really saying No to it altogether. [2] He agreed to their coming together again because of Satan and because of weakness of will, but he showed that anyone who is inclined to succumb is going to be serving two masters,<sup>17</sup> God when there is agreement, and weakness of will, sexual immorality, and the devil when there is not.” [3] He says this in his exegesis of the Apostle. He is playing intellectual tricks with the truth in seeking to establish a false conclusion on the basis of truth. [4] We too agree that weakness of will and sexual immorality are passions inspired by the devil, but the harmony of responsible marriage occupies a middle position. When there is self-control it leads to prayer; when there is reverent bridal union, to childbearing. [5] At any rate, there is a proper time for the breeding of children, and Scripture calls it knowledge, in the words, “Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son, and called him by the name of Seth, ‘for God has raised up for me another child in Abel’s place.’”<sup>18</sup> [6] You see who is the target of the slanders of those who show their disgust at responsible marriage and attribute the processes of birth to the devil? Scripture does not merely refer to “a god.” By application of the definite article it indicates the almighty ruler of the universe.

[82.1] The Apostle’s added reference to their “coming together again because of Satan”<sup>19</sup> is designed to anticipate and cut at the roots of any possibility of turning aside to other love affairs. The temporary agreement serves to negate natural desires but does not cut them out root and branch. These are why he reintroduces the marriage bond, not for uncontrolled behavior or sexual immorality or the operations of the devil, but to prevent him from falling under their sway.<sup>20</sup> [2] Tatian makes a distinction between the old man<sup>21</sup> and the new, but it is not ours. We agree

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<sup>15</sup> Tatian was a well educated Assyrian who converted to Christianity some time after A.D. 150: author of a defense of Christianity [*Address of Tatian to the Greeks*], and of a harmony of the Gospels (*Diatessaron*), something of a freethinker and [self appointed] Gnostic [sectarian], he may have been founder of the ascetic Encratites; the orthodox rejected him, but his memory was alive in Syria.

<sup>16</sup> The title echoes Luke 6:40; Ephesians 4:12.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 6:24.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 4:25.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:5.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. with Tatian’s assertion that a husband and wife are “serving...sexual immorality, and the devil” when they engage in sexual intercourse within the marriage bond. (Stromateis 7.12.81.2)

<sup>21</sup> FOTC 85 — “humanity”; Gk. “ἄνθρωπος” (Lemma: “ἄνθρωπος”).

## Commentary On 1 Corinthians 7

with him in that we too say that the old man<sup>22</sup> is the Law, the new is the gospel.<sup>23</sup> But we do not agree with his desire to abolish the Law as being the work of a different god. <sup>[3]</sup> It is the same man, the same Lord who makes old things new.<sup>24</sup> He no longer approves of polygamy (at that time God required it because of the need for increased numbers). He introduces monogamy for the production of children and the need to look after the home. Woman was offered as a “partner” in this.<sup>25</sup> <sup>[4]</sup> And if a man cannot control himself and is burning with passion so that the Apostle “out of sympathy” offers him a second marriage,<sup>26</sup> then he is not committing sin according to the Covenant, since it is not forbidden by the Law, but neither is he fulfilling the highest pitch of the gospel ethic. <sup>[5]</sup> He is acquiring heavenly glory for himself, if he remains single and keeps immaculate the union which has been broken by death<sup>27</sup> and cheerfully obeys what God has in store for him, becoming “undistracted”<sup>28</sup> from the Lord’s service. <sup>[6]</sup> In the past, a man coming from marital intercourse was required to wash.<sup>29</sup> It cannot be too strongly said that the Providence of God revealed through the Lord no longer makes this demand. The Lord eliminates washing after intercourse as unnecessary since he has cleansed believers by one single baptism for every such encounter, just as he takes in the many washings prescribed by Moses by one single baptism.

※ Clement of Alexandria — *Stromateis*, Book 7, Chapter 11, §63-64<sup>30</sup> ※

<sup>[§63]</sup> As one then who would force his way to the pinnacle of knowledge,<sup>31</sup> orderly in character, sober in bearing, he possesses all the advantages which mark

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<sup>22</sup> FOTC 85 — “humanity”; Gk. “ἄνδρα” (Lemma: “ἄνθρωπος”).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Romans 7:2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Genesis 2:18.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 36.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Stromateis* 3.1.4.3. When Clement mentions “second marriages” (3.1.4.3) he refers to marriages that succeed a prior marriage “union which has been broken by death” (3.12.82.5). Polygamy is prohibited by the “gospel” (3.12.82.2-3).

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:35.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Leviticus 15:18.

<sup>30</sup> Ch. & § numbers per Hort & Mayor, which follow the standard Gk. mss.

<sup>31</sup> Gk. “γνώσεως.”

the true gnostic,<sup>32</sup> fixing his eyes on noble models,<sup>33</sup> on the many patriarchs who have fought their fight before him, on a still greater multitude of prophets, on angels beyond our power to number, on the Lord who is over all, who taught him, and made it possible for him to attain that crowning life. For this reason he loves none of the fair things that the world holds out to him, fearing lest they should tie him to the ground; but he loves the things which are hoped for, or rather are already known, but whose possession is hoped for. Thus he endures his labours and tortures and afflictions, not, like the brave men whom the philosophers talk of, from hope that the present evils will cease, and that he will again have a share of pleasures; no, knowledge has begotten in him a persuasion, surer than any hope, of the reaping of rewards to come. Wherefore he despises not only the persecutions, but also all the pleasures of this world. So we are told that the blessed Peter,<sup>34</sup> when he beheld his wife on her way to execution, rejoiced on account of her call and her homeward journey,<sup>35</sup> and addressed her by name with words of exhortation and good cheer, bidding her ‘remember the Lord.’

[§64] Such was the marriage of those blessed ones and such their perfect control over their feelings even in the dearest relations of life. So too the Apostle says *Let him that marrieth be as though he married not*,<sup>36</sup> requiring that marriage should not be enslaved to passion *nor distracted from the love to the Lord*,<sup>37</sup> to which love the wife, when departing from this life to the Lord,<sup>38</sup> was exhorted to cling by him who showed himself a husband indeed. Was not the faith in the hope after death clearly manifested by those who, even in the very height of persecution, could return thanks to God? The reason, I suppose, was the steadfastness of their faith, which was accompanied by acts of corresponding faithfulness. So in every difficulty the soul of the gnostic proves its strength, being in first-rate condition and vigour, like the body of the athlete. For it is well-advised in the affairs of men, measuring what has to be done by the rule of justice, <having received> its principles from God in the first instance, and having attained to moderation in the

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<sup>32</sup> I.e. A mature Christian, “he who knows God” (Stromateis 7.7.47; cf. Ephesians 4:13), at times in contrast to “ordinary believers” (Stromateis 7.7.49, cf. 7.14.84, 7.16.95) or “mere children in faith” (Stromateis 7.11.67). Clement is not referring to the sects who are typically called “Gnostics.” Clement refused to refer to these sects by the title they gave themselves (Stromateis 4.4 [¶4 ANF 2.412] & 7.7.41).

<sup>33</sup> Per ANF; Hort & Mayor — “images”; Gk. “εἰκόνας” (lemma “εἰκὼν”); Could be transliterated as “icons.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Stromateis 7.12.70.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:6-7.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:35.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:6-7.

## Commentary On 1 Corinthians 7

pleasures and pains of the body, in accordance with the divine likeness: thus he rises up against his fears with good courage, putting his trust in God. Accordingly the gnostic soul is just an earthly image of the divine Power, adorned with perfect virtue, built up by the combined action of nature, discipline, and reason. The soul thus beautified becomes *a temple of the Holy Spirit*,<sup>39</sup> when it has acquired a temper of mind corresponding to the Gospel in every relation of life.

※ Clement of Alexandria — *Stromateis*, Book 7, Chapter 12, §70<sup>40</sup> ※

[§70] Thus the gnostic<sup>41</sup> never departs from his own set habit in any emergency. For the scientific possession of good is fixed and unchangeable, being the science of things divine and human.<sup>42</sup> Knowledge therefore never becomes ignorance, nor does good change to evil. Hence with him eating and drinking and marrying are not the main objects of life, but as necessary.<sup>43</sup> I speak of marriage sanctioned by the Word<sup>44</sup> and in accordance with right: for being made perfect he has the Apostles as his patterns.<sup>45</sup> And true manhood is shown not in the choice of a celibate life: on the contrary the prize in the contest of men is won by him who has trained himself by the discharge of the duties of husband and father and by the supervision of a household, regardless of pleasure and pain,—by him, I say, who in the midst of his solicitude for his family shows himself inseparable from the love of God and rises superior to every temptation which assails him through children and wife and servants and possessions. On the other hand he who has no family is in most respects untried. In any case, as he takes thought only for himself, he is inferior to one who falls short of him as regards his own salvation, but who has the advantage in the conduct of life, in as much as he actually preserves a faint image of the true Providence.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19.

<sup>40</sup> Ch. & § numbers per Hort & Mayor, which follow the standard Gk. mss.

<sup>41</sup> I.e. A mature Christian, “he who knows God” (*Stromateis* 7.7.47; cf. Ephesians 4:13), at times in contrast to “ordinary believers” (*Stromateis* 7.7.49, cf. 7.14.84, 7.16.95) or “mere children in faith” (*Stromateis* 7.11.67). Clement is not referring to the sects who are typically called “Gnostics.” Clement refused to refer to these sects by the title they gave themselves (*Stromateis* 4.4 [¶4 ANF 2.412] & 7.7.41).

<sup>42</sup> Stoic definition of wisdom.

<sup>43</sup> Per ANF; Hort & Mayor — “...,though they are its necessary conditions.”

<sup>44</sup> Per ANF; Hort & Mayor — “reason”; Gk. “λόγος.”

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; *Stromateis* 7.11.63-64.

<sup>46</sup> ANF — “But he that has no family is in a great degree free of temptation. Caring, then, for himself alone, he is surpassed by him who is inferior, as far as his own personal salvation is concerned, but who is superior in the conduct of life, preserving certainly, in his care for the truth, a minute image.”

# Abbreviations

A.H. — Against Heresies (Irenaeus)  
ACW — Ancient Christian Writings  
AFAT — The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation<sup>47</sup>  
DECB — A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs  
Hort & Mayor — Miscellanies Book VII: The Greek Text...Indices<sup>48</sup>  
LCC — Loeb Classical Library  
FOFC — The Fathers of the Church<sup>49</sup>  
LCL — Loeb Classical Library  
LES — The Lexham English Septuagint  
LXX — The Septuagint Old Testament  
MT — The Masoretic Old Testament  
NT — New Testament  
NETS — A New English Translation of the Septuagint  
OT — Old Testament  
OSB — The Orthodox Study Bible  
PG — Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca (Patrologia Graeca)  
TAF — The Apostolic Father (Holmes)

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<sup>47</sup> Citation 3.

<sup>48</sup> Citation 1.

<sup>49</sup> FOCT 85 corresponds to citation 2.

## Citations

1. Clement of Alexandria. *Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies Book VII: The Greek Text with Introduction, Translation, Notes, Dissertations and Indices*, edited by Fenton John Anthony Hort and Joseph Bickersteth Mayor. Cambridge Library Collection - Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
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3. Goodspeed, Edgar J. *the Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation*. London, England: Independent Press LTD, 1950.