

(Through the Bible) 1 Corinthians 7-8

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith discusses the complexities of marriage and spiritual living in the context of the Corinthian church's challenges.

Duration: 56:17

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:1

Topics: "Through The Bible"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the brevity of time and the transient nature of worldly pursuits. He advises against getting overly involved in marital relationships, grief, or material possessions, as the fashion of this world is passing away. The speaker suggests that those who are unmarried can focus on pleasing the Lord, while those who are married should prioritize pleasing their spouse. The sermon concludes with a reminder to walk in love and build up one another in the faith.

Transcript

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to the 7th chapter of 1st Corinthians. The Corinthian church was a mess. There were just a lot of problems.

A problem with carnality. There were divisions in the church. Some saying they were of Cephas or Peter, others saying they were of Paul, some saying they were of Apollos.

They were suing each other at law, going to the earthly courts. And Paul had received the report and so he wrote to them about these things. But basically his purpose of writing was to answer a letter that they had sent to him with certain questions.

And so Paul, beginning with chapter 7, is responding now to their letter and the questions that they had asked in their letter to him. Now it is important that we understand really the background of this situation in Corinth. Corinth was an extremely pagan city.

On the Acropolis above Corinth, there was a great temple to Aphrodite. And the temple priestesses would come down into Corinth each evening. They were prostitutes.

And the worship of the goddess was supported by the earnings of the prostitutes. In this city, God had many people. For when Paul was there in Corinth, the Lord encouraged him and said, I have many people in this city.

And so Paul established the church there. But as I say, the church was a mess. They had a lot of weird kind of teachings, doctrines that had spread.

They felt that the body was completely evil. And so that left a two-fold kind of an attitude. First, there were those who said because the body is totally evil, it doesn't matter what you do with your body.

Your body doesn't count. It's your spirit that counts. So you can do with your body whatever you want.

It doesn't matter. You can use your body for fornication or whatever you desire. The body is totally evil anyhow, so it doesn't matter what you do with your body.

Others, coming from that same base that the body is totally evil, said you shouldn't then do any of those natural things in the body. Even if you're married, you should restrain from relations with your wife because everything of the body is evil. All of the urges or desires or whatever are evil.

And so there was the second tendency towards asceticism. And so Paul is dealing here, beginning in chapter 7, with this concept of whether or not as a Christian I should be married or if I am married, I should have intimate relationships with my wife. And so he begins the seventh chapter by saying, Now concerning the things whereof you wrote unto me, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband. Trying to live a celibate life is unnatural and Paul recognizes it as such. Good if you can not to touch a woman.

But yet, that is an unnatural condition. Therefore, every man should have a wife and every wife should have a husband. It is interesting that nothing is ever said in the Scripture about Paul being married.

But I feel that he obviously was. Number one, he was a rabbi. And according to Jewish law, every man should be married and have children because God said, Be fruitful and multiply.

And they felt that that was a divine injunction that every man should fulfill. And that if you did not have children, you were killing actually your progeny. So being a rabbi and as he said concerning the righteousness of the law, I was blameless, he no doubt was married.

Also, it is indicated that he was a member of the Sanhedrin and a requirement of the Sanhedrin who was a judge of sorts was that he be married because they figured if a man is married, he is more merciful. I think he at least has greater understanding. Now, the question arises what happened to Paul's wife and there are two speculations, one that she died.

But the other, which is probably more correct, is that when Paul embraced Christianity, she left him. That's the general tradition that is carried through the church. Now, the seventh chapter here is written with an overlying thought, which he brings out in verse 29 and that is time is short.

Paul felt that the Lord was coming very, very soon. And so because time is short, he is giving these instructions concerning marriage. It would seem to be that he is discouraging getting married, but if so, it is only because of his concept that time is so very short, we really don't have time to get married.

But to avoid fornication, every man should have his own wife, every woman should have her own husband, especially in the conditions that existed there in Corinth. And let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence and likewise also the wife unto the husband. For the wife has not power of her own

body, but the husband, and likewise also the husband has not the power of his own body, but the wife.

Therefore, do not withhold the sexual rights from each other unless it be with consent for a time that you might give yourselves to fasting and prayer, but then come together again that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. So Paul is here declaring that the sexual relationships within marriage are proper and that the wife should seek to satisfy the husband, the husband should seek to satisfy the wife, and that you should not withhold from each other unless it be by a mutual consent and then only in a specified period of time as you're giving yourself to fasting and praying because the temptations are apt to be too great, the pressures too great on each other. He says, but I speak this by permission and not by commandment.

For I would that all men were even as myself, but every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that. So I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it's good for them if they abide even as I. Now Paul, of course, at this point was unmarried and he is advocating his status of not being married, but he recognizes that there is a gift of God in a sense for this position. Now Jesus talked about those who were eunuchs by birth, some were called of God for this, others became such for the kingdom of God's sake.

But Paul having that gift and recognizing that it was something that God had done because the normal natural physical drives promote marriage. It is not natural not to have a sex drive. It's the fourth strongest drive that we have following the air thirst and hunger.

It ranks right there near the top. And if a person doesn't have a strong sex drive, it means that perhaps God has taken it away in order that this person might be a special instrument for God, freed from the, well, as Paul said, from the cares that come upon a person when they get married. Marriage does present a whole different situation.

Before I was married, I could travel freely across the United States. All I needed was a sack of apricots and I could go. I only stopped at service stations for gasoline, never stopped at restaurants.

And I, when I was going, I liked to just get there. After I got married, it became different. We were coming home from Phoenix and my wife says, Honey, I'd like to have a cup of coffee.

And I kept going past the coffee shops. I said, Honey, I'd like to have a cup of coffee. Sure, of course.

Who wouldn't, you know? And I went by another coffee shop and boy, I felt her foot go on the floor like had she had a break there, I would have been thrown through the windshield. I got the message. We stopped at a coffee shop, but that's a waste of time.

But as Paul said, if you're married, you don't really care so much for the things of the Lord anymore. You care for your wife. You're going to please her.

You got to live with her and thus you want to please her. Proper, that's correct. So Paul says, Look, if you have the gift, it's good.

Live like I do. For the unmarried, the widows, stay like I am. But, if you don't have this gift, that it's better that you marry than to have a burning compassion or a burning lust.

Than to burn with lust. Now unto the married, I command, and yet not I but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband. But, and if she depart, let her remain unmarried.

Or be reconciled to her husband. And let not the husband put away his wife. This, of course, was the teaching of Jesus Christ.

So, Paul said, This is not my command, it's the Lord's. But to the rest, I will speak. Now, the Lord didn't speak specifically in these issues, so now Paul speaks as an apostle.

But to the rest, I speak and not the Lord, dealing now with the special situations. If a brother has a wife that does not believe, and she's content to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And if the woman which has a husband that believes not, and if he is pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy. So, either the husband or the wife believing, bring into the home a holy environment by which the children are covered.

Therefore, many times I am questioned as to the fate of children who die. Or, more often, the question arises, if the church is raptured, or when the church is raptured, will the little children all go up in the rapture? I can speak for surety on the children of a saved parent, either one or both, that they are protected and covered by the believing parent. I do not have that same surety where the parents are unbelievers.

I personally feel that because they are not at an age of responsibility, God will be gracious and merciful unto them. And I believe strongly in the justice and the fairness of God. Though I do not have a sound scriptural base.

I do not have any scripture that says, yes, all children are going to go up in the rapture, or all children who die are saved. We do know that it is so if there is a believing husband or wife. Now, my feeling is, why live under the cloud of a question? Why even worry about it? Just receive the Lord and know.

But, we do know, as far as a believing parent, the house is sanctified by either one being a believer. But, if the unbelieving depart, let them depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.

God has called us to peace. So, if on your receiving Jesus Christ, your husband or your wife just can't handle you anymore, they say, look, I didn't bargain for this. I can't stand you.

I can't live with you like this. Then, let them depart. You're not under bondage.

You're not under the bondage to remain with them in such cases. Let them depart. God has called us to peace, not to warfare in marriage.

For what? Knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how do you know, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But, as God has distributed to every man, as the Lord has called everyone, so let him walk. And so, I ordain in all of the churches. Now, he deals with, what condition were you in when God called you? Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised.

Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing. And uncircumcision is nothing but the keeping of the commandments of God.

Therefore, let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. When God saved you, were you an uncircumcised Gentile? Well, then don't bother about going through the Jewish rite of circumcision. Remain as you were when God called you.

Now, if you were a servant when God called you, don't worry about it. If you can be free, then use your freedom rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's free man.

Now, you may still be a servant as far as man is concerned, but as far... you're free now and you're God's free man. Also, he that is called being free becomes Christ's servant. So, the calling wherein I was called.

Abide in that calling. Don't try to change things radically after you become a Christian unless the life that you were living, the occupation that you had is so totally antagonistic towards Christian principles that you've got to get out. You were bought with a price, therefore, don't be the servants of man.

Even if you are a servant of man, realize that you are a servant of Jesus Christ. And so, that basically is where we all are. Servants of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God. Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I give my judgment as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. Now, we are dealing with an interesting area here and there are three possible interpretations.

There are those that say that Paul is talking now to the fathers who have daughters who are virgins and that he's dealing with the situation of whether or not you allow your daughter to get married. There is the second that again takes in the cultural aspects. There were those people who were living together and even sleeping in the same bed, but not having conjugal relationship.

And even they were just sort of, you know, the trial marriage kind of thing, but without the sex aspect of it. Seeing if you get along living together, and yet not entering into a physical relationship. And this was a common practice in those days there in Corinth.

The third thought is that there were also those who were married, who did get married, but felt it was more spiritual not to have sex, even in marriage. And I personally feel that Paul is probably referring to this third category. The language sort of precludes a father having a daughter and giving her, who is a virgin, and giving her in marriage.

The language sort of precludes that. I think that it probably is referring to this third concept of we are more spiritual because we don't have sex. Yes, we're married, but my wife is still a virgin.

Weird. I couldn't handle that. But this is what I feel was the issue that Paul was addressing in this part.

Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I'll give my judgment as one who has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose, therefore, that this is good for the present distress. I say, it's good for a man so to be.

Are you bound unto a wife? Don't then seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Then don't seek a wife. Now, again, Paul is saying this under the whole umbrella of time is so short.

Later on, when he wrote to the church of Ephesus realizing that the coming of Jesus evidently wasn't going to be immediate, he used the marriage relationship as a beautiful example of the deep relationship that exists between Christ and His church and uses it in one of the most beautiful illustrations of relationship that can exist. So, are you married? Don't seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Don't seek a wife.

But, and if you marry, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh and I would just spare you.

He is saying, hey, marriage isn't always what it's trumped up to be. You can have difficulties in marriage. This I say, brethren, that time is short.

And so, it remains that both they that have wives be as though they had none. Now, that has to be interpreted in the context. For in the context, he said, he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

He that is not married actually just seeks to please God. So, when he says they that are married should be as though they were not married, he is just saying, you should be concerned in pleasing God. That should be your primary concern.

They that weep as though they wept not. They that rejoice as though they rejoice not. They that buy as though they possess not.

They that use the world as not abusing it for the fashion of this world passes away. Time is short. He is actually saying, we don't have time really to get involved in marital relationships.

We don't have time to indulge in grief or sorrow. We don't have time for partying and revelry. We don't have time to amass possessions.

We are in the world, but let's not abuse it. Let's use it. We've got to live.

We've got to eat. So, do what you have to, but don't get overly involved for the fashion of the world is passing away or is rapidly passing away. So, as Paul was looking at the situation in his day, at the deterioration of the whole social scene of things that were taking place, he gives these warnings.

Time is short. Things are rapidly passing away. We really don't have time for the extraneous.

But I would have you without this care, carefulness or full of care is a better way. We understand that better. I would keep you freed from that fullness of care, worry.

He that is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But he that is married cares for the things that are of this world, how he may please his wife. And there's difference also between a wife and a virgin.

The unmarried woman cares for the things of 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 own profit, not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, that you may attend upon the Lord without distractions.

So, he is just saying that in giving yourself completely to serving the Lord, a wife can be an encumbrance, can be a hindrance. You have to now take her into consideration and your real interest is pleasing her. And that's proper.

We should be concerned, fellas, in how to please our wives. And you wives should be concerned in how to please your husbands. And we need to take careful consideration of these things.

It's proper, it's right. Now, I think that, again, a man has to be gifted to live a single life. And that if God hasn't gifted you, as the Scripture said, he who has found a wife has found a good thing in favor of the Lord.

Paul is talking out of the concept that time is so short, we don't have time for these things now. And it could be that we are approaching that kind of a situation again as we come to the end of the age. However, the Bible does not speak disparagingly of marriage, but does hold it up as God's plan, God's purpose for man.

It's the natural thing. It's unnatural not to be married. Now, if a man thinks that he is behaving himself uncomely towards his virgin, and she's past the flower of her age, and needs so require, let him do what he will.

He sins not, let them marry. Nevertheless, he that stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, and that having no necessity is an important clause, but have power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, he does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he that gives her not in marriage does better.

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives. But if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abides after my judgment.

And I think also that I have the Spirit of God. Now, in my judgment, she'd be happier to remain unmarried. It's an interesting situation.

It must be looked at in the light of the conditions in Corinth, and in the light of Paul's concept that time was short. It was almost over. Now, the second issue.

As touching the things offered unto idols, we know that we have all knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Contrast between knowledge and love.

We know we have all knowledge. Now, there was a problem in those days because idolatry was so prevalent. Most of the meat that you would buy in the marketplace had first a portion of it been offered unto the idols, to the pagan gods.

When they would butcher their meat, they would take portions of it and offer it as a burnt offering unto their gods. And then the priest would get his part and the rest of it would be given back to the person and oftentimes it would be taken to the market and sold in the market. Now, many Christians had great difficulty with their own conscience in eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god.

This really troubled them. But there were others in Corinth who boasted of their knowledge. Well, that's nothing.

That's just a stone. It's not a god and so it doesn't make any difference. I have enough knowledge to realize that that's nothing at all and therefore I can eat the meat without, you know, being troubled in my conscience over it.

Now, Paul is sort of addressing himself to these who are taking that liberty because of their knowledge and offending the weaker brethren. So, touching those things offered to idols, we know that we have all knowledge. We know that the idol is nothing but knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

One is filled with the air, the other has something solid. And if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing, yet as he ought to know. And this is so true.

The man who thinks he knows the most usually knows the least because the more you know, the more you know you don't know. Shakespeare said, Man, poor man, so ignorant in that which he knows best. What do you know best? What area of knowledge are you most proficient in? Sciences? Mathematics? Linguistics? Say your area of proficiency is the area of science.

How much of all that can be known in science do you know? Say your proficiency is mathematics. Of all that can be known in mathematics, how much do you know? My proficiency is the Bible, but I'll tell you what, there's much more about the Bible that I don't know than I do know. I know enough to know that I don't know.

I know enough to know that there's so much to be known, I'll never know it all. Now the person who comes along and sort of puffs up and says, Hey, I'm an expert, you know, I can give you all the answers. He knows the least.

If any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing, as he ought to know it. Because if you really know, you know you don't know. So if you think you know, it's a pretty good indication you don't know very much about it.

Man, poor man, so ignorant in that which he knows best. But if any man loves God, remember knowledge puffs up, love builds up. If any man loves God, the same is known of him.

Now as concerning, therefore, the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice and the idols, we know that the idol is nothing in the world and that there is none other God but One. For though there be many that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many and lords many, to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him. So we know that these idols are nothing, all of these idols.

We know that there is only one true living God, one Lord. How be it? There is not in every man and this knowledge. For some with consciousness of the idol, unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Now, coming in Corinth, growing up in Corinth, you grew up in a pagan situation, you grew up worshipping this idol. You grew up eating meat in the temple of the idol, for they would have restaurants there and they would offer the meat in this ceremony and sacrifice to the idol, and then they would roast it and you would go in and eat the meat in the temple, fellowship or worship the idol or the god. Now you've embraced Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, but having come out of the pagan practice of eating the meat offered in sacrifice to these idols, you have great difficulty continuing that because so long you did eat it thinking that you were eating in worship to this particular idol, so that as a Christian now, it offends your conscience, it bothers you to do it.

Ooh, you know, doing this, ooh, you know, it would get your conscience. So, Paul said, unto this time there are those that are having trouble with this in their conscience, and because their conscience is weak, they are defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we any the better, neither if we eat not are we any the worse.

Eating meat or not eating meat has absolutely nothing to do with my spirituality or my relationship with God. And we can carry this further. But let us take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those that are weak.

For if any man sees thee which has knowledge, sitting at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols? Now let us say that I felt that there was absolutely nothing wrong with my having a occasional martini. Now that's a hypothesis because I do feel there's something wrong even with an occasional. For me, very wrong.

My conscience would wipe me out. I have a weak conscience in that regard. But let us say that I had a... Hey, you know it's not what goes in that defiles a man, it's what comes out.

And so I felt that I could drink and unfortunately there are many prominent ministers that do feel this. They have the liberty to drink if they so desire. But let us say that I was one of those fellows and I felt a great liberty to drink if I so desired.

And here is a fellow who has been an alcoholic, has accepted Christ, has been delivered from his alcoholism. And he walks down or he goes into a restaurant and there sitting at the bar is Chuck drinking. Hey, he's my pastor.

And if he can drink, then I guess it's alright for me to drink. But yet, he knows it's wrong because he knows the problem that he has with it, but he's emboldened to go ahead and do it because he sees my liberty. And yet when he does it, he has this conscience that's just tormenting him.

And I say, well, I have superior spiritual knowledge. I understand the Scriptures and I understand all this. And I go on and say, look, you know, I have the freedom to do it if I so desire.

I could actually be an instrument to destroy this weaker brother because of my exercising of my knowledge or liberty that I had. And through thy knowledge, Paul said, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? Now when you sin so against the brethren and wound their weak consciences, you are actually sinning against Christ. Wherefore, if meat makes my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I would be an offense to my brother.

Now that's love and that's walking in love and love seeks to build up. Knowledge puffs up. And here were these Corinthians and it was that kind of a situation.

They said, hey, the idol is nothing and they were going into the idol's temples and they usually had good prices and good barbecue. And so they were saying, hey, the idol is nothing, so what? You know, it's nothing. We can go in there and eat.

And they were going in and eating. But the weak brothers who were really troubled over this issue would see them sitting there in the idols eating the meat and it would bother them, but they thought, well, hey, he's the deacon in the church or he's an elder in the church. If he can do it, I guess I can do it.

But they couldn't. They couldn't do it. This thing called conscience, you really can't violate it.

I don't care what a person may tell you. To him that esteems a thing to be wrong, to him it is wrong. And you better obey that conscience that you have.

Because if you don't, it can get you into serious trouble. The psychologists are mistaken when they think that they can talk a person out of a particular conviction. I do not seek to talk people out of their honest convictions.

I'll sometimes seek to determine whether or not it's an honest conviction of their own or something someone else has put on them. If it is an honest conviction of their own, though it be weird, I will not try and talk them out of it. I won't say, hey, that's stupid, that's weird.

Nothing wrong with that. If a person has a true conscience against doing something, then they better not do it. Because you cannot violate your conscience without paying the consequences.

And thus, I should not flaunt my liberties emboldening other people to do the same thing because they saw him do it. And yet, as they do it, they do it and it bothers their conscience and drives them away from the Lord. And I am really destroying this weaker brother because of my insistence of exercising my great freedom and liberty in Jesus.

That's not walking in love. And as Paul said, the loving thing is not to even eat meat as long as the world stands if it causes a weaker brother to be offended. So in walking in love, I seek not to offend.

Now, there are limitations to this. Some people are offended with the fact that there is mixed bathing at the beach. And they feel that it's a sin to go down to the beach because of the mixed bathing there.

And they have a strong conscience against it. Now, does that mean then that I should never go surfing because there are people who get offended? No, it means that they shouldn't go there if it bothers them and then they'll never see me there. But the thing is that open flaunting of your liberty, that's not walking in love.

The deliberate flaunting of that freedom. Paul said, Do you have freedom? Have it to yourself. You know, don't use it as a stumbling block to a weak brother.

Walk in love. Knowledge is good to have. It's good to know.

It's good to be free. But knowledge can puff up. We should seek to build up.

Love builds up. Seek to build up one another in the love of Jesus Christ. So, next week we'll continue on into chapters 9 and 10 as we continue through this first epistle of the Corinthians.

Let's pray. Father, we ask your help that we might walk in love in consideration for those who are weaker in the faith. That we would seek, Lord, to help one another, to build up one another.

And so, Lord, help us to put into practice the injunctions given to us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Don't forget to pick up your calendars in the office if you haven't picked up one yet. May the Lord be with you and bless and keep you in His love. Fill you with His Spirit.

Guide you with His counsels. Strengthen you in your walk and in your fellowship with Him. May you go in the love and in the power of the Spirit to do His work this week knowing that we are all servants of Jesus Christ.

May we render unto Him pleasing service.

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