*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 27 – February 1

*First Corinthians Chapter Seven*

**Monday, January 27 1 Corinthians 7:1-7**

*“Each person has a special gift from God”*

 In verse one Paul reluctantly and with qualification endorses a Corinthian slogan or position, namely that it is good to abstain from sexual intercourse (the Greek word translated “touch” refers to physical contact prior to and during sexual intercourse). In verse two Paul offers his qualification: sexual abstinence is, for the most part, inappropriate for wedded couples.

 Verses three through seven unpack this first application of Paul’s response to the pro-celibacy faction in the Corinthian church. They advocated complete refraining from sex within marriage, but Paul can imagine only a very limited role for such abstinence. A husband and wife should have sex often enough so that neither is frustrated or tempted to cheat on the other. Verse seven offers the first hint of what verse eight will make explicit. Paul is currently single, and he likes it that way. He wishes all could share his enjoyment of singleness but realizes that only some have that particular gift, while others are gifted for marriage. The bottom line, then, is to live faithfully according to the gift, singleness or marriage, that God has given.

*You give gifts to different believers, Father, that result in equal goodness. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 28 1 Corinthians 7:8-9**

*“To the unmarried and widows . . .”*

 Paul turns from the currently married to the previously married, both male and female (“unmarried” is a masculine plural, just as “widows” is a feminine plural). Given that verses 25-38 will address those who have never married, we understand the “unmarried” here to refer to men whose wives had died. The celibacy faction in the church would of course be telling widowers and widows never to remarry. Paul again affirms that this may be a good course of action but not if it leads to sexual immorality.

 These verses also make it clear that Paul is currently single. Still, he could have been married previously. If that were the case and his wife had died, he would be one of the “unmarried.” Members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (ruling council) had to be married, and if that had been Paul’s position before his conversion to Christianity he would certainly have been married. So, it may be likely that Paul was once married, and sees his current singleness as being preferable for accomplishing the ministry that God had for him, but we simply cannot be sure.

*Whether single or married, Lord, may our sexual behavior be righteous. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 29 1 Corinthians 7:10-16**

*“For those who are married . . .”*

 Paul returns to address those who are married, but this time in light of a different proposal by the pro-celibacy faction. They encouraged people to get divorced if they could not live with a spouse without engaging in sex. At this point Paul’s ability to side with this faction is drastically curtailed. Only when an unbelieving partner walks out on a Christian spouse can Paul permit such a rupture (verses 15-16). Verses 10-11, therefore, seem to be directed to marriages in which both partners are believers.

 In verses 12-16, however, Paul addresses the members of mixed marriages. With all the new converts in Corinth, there were no doubt many couples in which only one of the two had become a Christian. Some believers seem to have feared that sexual relations with an unbelieving spouse would defile them. Paul disagrees and insists that if the unbelieving partner is content to stay, the believer must not initiate divorce. The rationale for this is the spin-off blessings for the non-Christian spouse and children.

*Bless our marriages, Lord, that they may reflect your love for us. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 27 – February 1

*First Corinthians Chapter Seven*

**Thursday, January 30 1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

*“Remain as you were when God called you”*

 The main point of this section is stated at the beginning (verse 17), middle (verse 20), and end (verse 24) of the paragraph and can be paraphrased as, “Do not be in a hurry to change the external circumstances of your life simply because you have become a Christian.” Verses 18-19 illustrate this principle with the example of circumcision versus uncircumcision. Judaizers sought to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised, while many Jews who sought acceptance in the Greco-Roman world underwent a minor surgical procedure to make themselves appear to be uncircumcised.

 Verses 21-23 give a second illustration of the theme “remain as you are.” Here Paul contrasts the experience of Roman slaves and freedmen. Neither state makes serving the Lord inherently easier than the other, and there are spiritual senses in which literal slaves are free in Christ and literal freedmen slaves to Christ. Yet, Paul encourages slaves to take advantage of any opportunity for freedom, for physical slavery is a form of oppression that displeases God.

*Help me to be at peace, Lord, with my social status. Amen.*

**Friday, January 31 1 Corinthians 7:25-31**

*“Regarding those who have never married”*

 For those who have never married, Paul repeats the theme of “remain as you are.” Because these young people are single, like the widows and widowers of verses 8-9, Paul can be more enthusiastic about celibacy. But he quickly reminds them that his enthusiasm for abstinence does not carry over to the married and, against those in Corinth teaching that sex and marriage were inherently sinful, he affirms that “if you do marry, you have not sinned.”

 Paul speaks of “the present crisis” as a reason for his advice. Paul knows that after Christ’s first coming, his second coming could take place very soon. This does not mean that Paul had set any dates or necessarily expected the Lord to return within his lifetime. Rather, he believed that it could occur at any moment. All Christians should therefore sense an urgency to serve the Lord caused by the uncertainty of the time of the end, after which point it will no longer be possible to win any more people to Christ or to disciple them to maturity. Paul is well aware that the commitments of marriage may temper this urgency.

*May the cares of this world, Lord, take a back seat to your Kingdom priorities. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 1 1 Corinthians 7:32-40**

*“Be free from the concerns of this life”*

 Paul gives a second rationale for encouraging those who have never married to stay single. Even if Christ does not come back right away, attending to the concerns of spouse and children takes time away from ministering to the needs of others in both church and world. Yet once again Paul refuses to absolutize his preferences or endorse without qualification the stance of the pro-celibacy faction. Verse 35 supplies the most crucial clue in the whole chapter for determining when marriage is or is not appropriate. Whichever state enables one to “do whatever will help you serve the Lord best” is preferable.

 Verses 39-40 round out the chapter by reaffirming monogamy as a lifelong commitment. These verses also contain the only explicit reference to remarriage in this chapter. Christian widows and, by implication, widowers are free to remarry, so long as they marry fellow believers. As in verse 8, Paul reiterates his preference for the single life but will not absolutize it.

*In every decision I will consider the question, “How may I best serve the Lord?” Amen.*