

THE THEME OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7

By Keith Greer

Paul, in his first letter to the church at Corinth, addressed many problems that church was having: following men, carnal mindedness, divisions, putting up with sin in the church, abuse of the Lord's Supper, and **questions concerning marriage**. It is this later subject which I want to study in this article.

1 Corinthians seven has been a source of much controversy for many years among brethren. Why is this so? Is this chapter that difficult to understand? Personally speaking, I believe it is not.

One of the ways that will make this chapter easier to understand is knowing the theme of the chapter. "I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress; that it is good for a man to remain as he is." (1 Corinthians 7:26) What is this "**present distress**"?

At the time that this letter was written, the church was being persecuted by the empire of Rome. It was a difficult period for the Christian. He was filled with much uncertainty and anxiety. Men who were married had even more to worry about. How would this persecution effect the family?

"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 ... 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) The one married had to care for his family. Whereas the one not married could focus all his energy completely on the Lord.

Paul is just making men face the reality of the times. Yet, he also tells them if they do marry, "**they have not sinned**". This was a personal decision each must make for himself. And the same is true today.

What was Paul's advice to those who were married? **STAY TOGETHER!** Listen carefully to his words.

"Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband but even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife." (1 Corinthians 7: 10,11) Paul's instructions are quite clear. Who has trouble seeing where the emphasis is placed?

"But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband, who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him." (1 Corinthians 7: 12,13) Do we have any problem in understanding what the believer should do with an unbelieving mate?

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39) How long should a marriage last? Until death! Please read Matthew 19:4-8.

Some brethren try to teach that in verse fifteen Paul changes his course about **STAYING TOGETHER**. "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace." (1 Corinthians 7: 15) The believer cannot fulfill their duties in the marriage relationship if one desires to leave them and depart. Can the believer be the one that "departs?" No, this is discussing what the believer does if the "unbelieving mate" departs. Suffice to say, this chapter is not about remarriage or divorce. **NOT ONE WORD ABOUT REMARRIAGE!** It is about staying married!

Let me remind all of you of one other point. Whatever conclusions reached about the teaching of 1 Corinthians 7, must be reconciled with all the other passages God's word teaches on the marriage relationship. Paul's letter to the Corinthians changes none of the Bible's earlier teachings. ***