

Series: *Marriage?*

Message Title: What is Your Status?

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6 and 7

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Introduction

March 17, 2004, was my mom and dad's 50th wedding anniversary. My mom passed away on July 18, 2004, and so much changed in that moment. Dad lived another 13 years. I will never forget when my dad got an iPhone and my kids encouraged their "papa" to use Facebook in order to see their photos, etc. I also will not forget the call I received from my kids saying their papa had listed his relationship status on Facebook as "Complicated".

I'm not sure what my dad meant, but that is the kind of world we live in—a world of complications, especially in the area of relationships. Sadly, many relationship experiences are those of brokenness, but God speaks to us through His Word to help us know how to be healthy and whole—regardless of our relationship status.

The church at Corinth was full of complicated and corrupted relationships. Not only immorality, but incest had rocked the church.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife” (1 Corinthians 5:1 ESV).

Why? Because the Corinthians lived in a society filled with the predominance of sexual exploitation and confusion. Corinth was a place of widespread drunkenness and extreme indulgence.

In the context of all the confusion and frustration surrounding believers seeking to honor Christ and mature in discipleship, there was a great need to try to address the issues of sexuality and relationship-status.

When you open the pages of Scripture to 1 Corinthians 6 and 7, you read a series of discussions and instructions regarding relationship status. The Apostle Paul writes to address issues of sexuality, immorality, singles, marrieds, widows, divorced, virgins and well, “complications”.

I want you to be clear. This text is a written response to questions members of the Corinthian church had only observed, but had written Paul to ask for wisdom and counsel: sex and marriage, food to idols, spiritual gifts, giving.

In this text, we observe the Apostle Paul providing spiritual guidance for the many relational-status concerns of those he was addressing. Should believers get married at all, and what about celibacy? Paul clarifies, correlates and builds on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ on morality and marriage, and he even expresses his own opinions and concessions in this passage. If Facebook provides place and space to address your "status," why not God's Word? What is your status?

"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the

wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:1-8 ESV).

Paul jumps into the matters of concern involving sexual relations and personal status.

Given the cultural norms of the day—permissive, indulgent promiscuity, and perversion—Paul says, "It is good to abstain from sexual relations." Not saying it is *bad* to have such relations in the context of marriage, but *good*—not to be given to a life consumed by desire and dominated by sexual immorality. Marriage is desirable, but celibacy is acceptable because marriage is not mandatory.

It may be easy to read into this and think Paul is promoting some spirituality based on a total life of abstinence, but this is not so. Paul is advocating a guard against *porneia*.

However, this is a statement of address based upon the instructions that precede this. Here we find the first topic of discussion when it comes to our life status—for every believer whether married, single, divorced, engaged, under-aged, unequally-yoked and widowed. The number one governing concern? What is your status?



Align with God's Standard for Holiness

"...The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two

will become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:13b-17 ESV).

The primary relational-status and union of every believer is to the Lord. We belong to Christ.

No longer is your life relational-status defined by how you are involved with others. The overarching and dominating concern for every believer is to know and understand you belong to the Lord.

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20 ESV).

Urgent awareness and response—“Flee”. This is both affective and destructive to you.

You can’t disregard this matter as a follower of Christ. Why? Your body belongs to Christ!

Everything in this section of Scripture has to do with those who belong to the Lord.

We are not our own; we belong to Christ. The union of marriage physically is a picture of the union of believers with Christ spiritually. We belong to Christ and all of life is defined and lived in the domain of the Lordship of Christ.

God has called His people to honor Him with their bodies and in their sexuality. Sexuality is not "Play Dough" (modeling clay) to be used to shape according to our own appetites, preferences and designs. "Designer Sexuality" is the rage of our day, but Scripture clearly refutes our attempts to substitute our own designs for God's.

"...that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor... For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 7-8 ESV).

God's way, not my way.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 14:12 ESV).

“The most dangerous and deceitful thing any believer can do is to trivialize the value and usefulness of their body for the glory of God.”

Paul is addressing every form of sexual expression and deviation from God’s established pattern—the union of one man and one woman in holy matrimony.

Appreciate the Goodness of Singleness

One of the very interesting and curious parts of this passage is Paul’s emphasis on the value, virtue and goodness of singleness. It is easy when we speak of marriage or do a series on marriage to make a large portion of our congregation feel as if they are auditing the class, rather than being students.

Paul says clearly that when you talk about relationship-status, singleness is neither sub-spiritual or super-spiritual. Understand the value and virtue of singleness. Singleness is

NOT a second class status. To the contrary, it has benefits (not what you think).

“Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another... I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that... I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:6-8, 26-28, 32, 35 ESV).

“Celibacy is a gift to be celebrated and directed for God’s glory.”

See 1 Corinthians 7:7.

It is very important for us, as a community, to learn to honor and appreciate the single adult as a viable and valuable member of this body apart from their marital status or intentions.

Too often, single adults hear, "Who are you dating? When are you getting married?" It can be easy to feel slighted, scorned and condemned.

Yet, Paul is appealing to the church to understand that there needs to be a lack of pressure and a greater sense of security and identity in Christ.

While the Bible depicts the design and desire of marriage as God's plan for our lives, it also recognizes and affirms the role of single adults in both the church and society.

Curiously, it was Christianity that delivered and sanctified the role of the single adult in society in the first century, even as it did for the dignity of marriage and the partners out of the predominant thoughts of paganism.

"Why did the early church have this attitude?

“The Christian gospel and hope of the future kingdom de-idolized marriage. There was no more radical act in that day and time than to live a life that did not produce heirs. Having children was the main way to achieve significance for an adult, since children would remember you. They also gave you security, since they would care for you in old age. Christians who remained single, then, were making the statement that our future is not guaranteed by the family but by God.”
—Timothy Keller

No family? = No future? The examples and lives of our Lord Jesus Christ and Apostle Paul made it evident that single adults were not less formed or less valued peoples without mates and children. Instead, the church validated singleness by affirming its goodness.

To this end, the church did not pressure people to marry, but provided for widows left without marriage so they were not dependent upon marriages to sustain and survive. Singleness was not “God’s Plan B” for life. Single adults are not in a perpetual state of deprivation or not yet fully formed

because they are unmarried. Rather, they are sustained and secured in the Lord and in His goodness.

Celibacy for a believer is not for self-realization, but for greater service and devotion to Christ—not uncommitted, but committed to Christ and His companionship. Love yourself enough to *leave* anything that makes you feel less in life. Give yourself in love when you are ready, not when you are lonely!

Yet Paul declares that singleness brings greater freedom and greater fidelity for Christ—but this is not for all.

Affirm the Provision of Marriage

“Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”
(1 Corinthians 7:5 ESV).

Marriage is not a corruption of holiness; it is an important matter provided to complete

and compliment the needs of men and women. Choosing to get married, having sexual relations and raising a family are not signs of weakness or wickedness.

“Marriage is the God-designed and God-ordained institution defining the physical and intimate relationship between man and woman with a view to not only provide physical fulfillment, but taking the responsibility for a future family.”

Marriage is not to be feared or avoided. Neither is it to be forsaken for the Lord.

See 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

God commands and commends marital intimacy, but it is always within the parameters of the spiritual, relational and physical union of marriage.

We don't have to apologize to the world for Scriptures teaching on human sexuality because the world, flesh and devil have made sex a disaster. We have the answers through Scripture! The world has twisted, corrupted, distorted and devalued the

beauty and intimacy of sexual relations within marriage, but we must hold marriage in honor according to Scripture, whether single or married.

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled...” (Hebrews 13:4a ESV).

“To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace” (1 Corinthians 7:12-15 ESV).

You are not urged to abandon an unbelieving spouse, but if the unbelieving spouse does separate, a believer is not under obligation.

While marriage has its duties (and this must be understood), marriage is not a duty.

Applications for Those Affected by Loss and Brokenness

Paul addresses two different status: unmarried and widows.

“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9 ESV).

Obviously for those widowed, there is an understanding that they have loved and endured loss, and they may want to refocus life on remaining single.

But later in this chapter, it says:

“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 7:39-40 ESV).

What about the unmarried (*a-gamos monogamy*)? This text is not referring to virgins or to those engaged. It is talking about those who have had a husband or wife who have walked away: before Christ, adultery, abuse, abandonment. The instruction is clear:

“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am... Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches” (1 Corinthians 7:8, 17 ESV).

What is not acceptable is using your single status as a divorcee or widow as a means for sexual immorality. Get married. Marry in the Lord. Don't live out a life of immorality and multiple partnerships.

There is only One who can redeem our brokenness—Jesus.

We have covered some major ground in relationship-status, but in all of this, there is the recognition, honor, place and role of marriage. So back to our original question:

Marriage? Why does it matter? Because the will and plan of God for your life matters. You matter and all the matters of life that touch you come out of your view of God and His plan for you.

“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches... I want you to be free from anxieties... Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 7:17, 32a, 40 ESV).

“Gratitude is what you feel when you believe God is for you and not against you. It’s what you feel when you believe that He gives you only what is good for you and withholds no good thing (single or married). It’s what you feel when you trust Him, that the tragedies of your life are not evidences of His meanness or His incompetence; but rather that they are the discipline of a loving Father who values your holiness above your fleeting worldly happiness.” —John Piper

