

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians Lesson 2

Chapter 4 ended with Paul's desire for Timothy to go to the church in Corinth to get the problems straightened up. If this could happen, when Paul arrived on his next visit, he would be able to love the church in sweet gentleness and not have to rule over them like a school master with a rod. With that said Paul gets to the heart of his letter to the Corinthians and he attacks an explosive problem first and then weaves other related teachings into the fabric of the following passages.

1 Cor. 5:¹ It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. ³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The Report of Immorality – In the letter from Chloe, it was reported that a man in the church had taken his father's wife as a wife. Now this was probably not the man's mother but rather a woman who had been in a permanent union as a concubine or mistress of some kind, but not in a formal marriage. His father may have been dead or divorced. The Mosaic Law would have called for the stoning of the man and the woman but this was a primarily Gentile church. For some reason this young church had learned to look the other direction in this matter and allowed the evil to persist. As in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul wanted the man to repent or the congregation should have nothing to do with the man.

2 Thes. 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

But the congregation had arrogantly looked the other way and allowed this to exist in the church. The hearts of the church people should have been broken and they should have mourned and wept until the situation was corrected, but this was not the case. Allowing this type of sin to exist within the church would have a ripple effect in the body! Other sins would be overlooked just as this sin was being overlooked. Paul compares it to leaven that would leaven the whole lump. It had to be dealt with quickly. The man must repent and cease the relationship or be removed from the congregation, put out into the world that is controlled by Satan so that he could see that he has been judged in the flesh, even though his spirit is safe as a believer.

1 Cor. 5:⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

The Other Letter and Judgment of Immoral People – This was not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians even though we call it his first; another letter had preceded this one. In that letter

Paul had instructed the Corinthians not to associate with immoral people. Paul is just continuing his thought about the man in the immoral relationship in the Corinthian church and using it as a platform to explain the Lord's teaching. Notice that Paul is very clear that he is not talking about the immoral people who do not have a relationship with the Lord! Paul is talking about immoral people who call themselves "Christians." The person without Christ is already doomed in judgment. Yet, that person without Christ is our mission field and we should live in that world as a representative of Christ, leading that person to Christ, overlooking the sin in their lives! We are not to judge them. On the other hand, if the sin is with a person who is within the church, then we are most definitely to judge them in their sin and do everything we can to correct the sinful situation. But in this case, with the man who has his father's wife, he is to be removed from the congregation.

1 Cor. 6:¹ Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? ⁴ If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? ⁵ I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that *your* brethren. ⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

Church Judgment Should Be in the Church - The Greeks were very fond of disputatious lawsuits with each other. Paul probably knew of some instances when the Greek Christians had brought cases before pagan judges and is using this instance to address that problem too. But in this case of the man with his father's wife, Paul wanted this to be handled within a church court and not the courts of the pagan Greeks. The pagan courts were filled with law suits of people who would not inherit the kingdom of God, but Christians were to be different from that world, set apart, sanctified as the term is used. Church courts are to be headed up by the godliest and holiest men available! However, Paul also addresses the problem of attitude when you have been wronged in this passage. Today we would just say it like this, "Let it go!"

1 Cor. 6:¹² All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH." ¹⁷ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. ¹⁸ Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Your Body and Immorality – Is it a sin to eat food? Absolutely not! The body is made for food. The body even has a stomach for that food. But one day the need for food for the stomach will be gone when you receive your life everlasting! With that said, Paul then leads into the issue of immorality. Some might say that since the body is for food and food is for the body, then likewise,

the body is for sex and sex is for the body. While that is a true statement, the Lord has some boundaries on sexual relationships when a believer is involved. Sexual immorality is a sin of a different color. As Paul states, all other sins are outside the body, but immoral sins are against the body of flesh. Notice the incredible pointed example Paul uses concerning a prostitute. A believer is not to have an immoral relationship with a prostitute. If he does he has taken the Holy Spirit who dwells within him in to that immoral relationship. The believer has been bought with the price of the shed blood of Jesus Christ and for this reason alone, he should not enter into an immoral relationship like this.

1 Cor. 7:¹Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ²But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. ⁵Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶But this I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

Responding to the Corinthian's Question about Women and Marriage – At this time, Paul is not married. We actually do not know what happened to his wife. There is no clear clue as to why he is now single, yet he is single and he considers it a gift from God. Paul, however, is very aware of the burning desire that enters into the lives of men and women for sexual relationships and he addresses them directly. It is absolutely permissible for a man to take a wife and a woman to enter into a relationship with a man, but in doing so they must understand that they are giving themselves to the other person and do not own their own bodies any longer. Like the body being made for food and food for the body, so too the body is for sexual relationships and sexual relationships are for the body. Couples should not deprive each other of those sexual moments except for times of prayer! When Paul says “lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control,” the context is that you should not deprive your partner of the sexual relationship because if you do he or she might be tempted by immoral thought with someone else. Husbands, you are your wife's moral protection in this world. Wives, you are your husband's moral protection in this world. Today Paul would have said, “Protect your spouse morally by fulfilling you sexual relationship.”

1 Cor. 7:⁸But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn. ¹⁰But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹(but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away. ¹²But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. ¹³And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. ¹⁶For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

If Unmarried, Widowed, or Married - Once again Paul implores the single or widowed to remain unmarried, but if there is that burning sexual desire, it is better to marry than burn! But this is not an excuse to divorce so you can be single. Rather Paul instructs the married wife to remain married and the married husband to remain married.

Here Paul distinguishes between the believer and the unbeliever. Make no mistake; the believer is to do everything within their possibilities to keep the marriage together. Divorce is never an option for the believer. When there is a believer in the marriage, the unbelieving spouse is in a different relationship than the rest of the world. They are set apart, or different, because of the believer's relationship with the Lord. As the non-believer lives with the believer, there is always the possibility that the non-believer will surrender their life to the Lord. If the believer is removed from the relationship, the possibility of the non-believer's salvation diminishes.

However, Paul also addressed the most difficult question concerning the desire of the non-believer for a divorce. If the non-believer wants to leave the believer, the believer may let them go. After the divorce, the believer is free to remarry without any leftover stigma whatsoever from the first marriage, within the church.

1 Cor. 7:¹⁷ Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was any man called *already* circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God. ²⁰ Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. ²² For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, let each man remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called.

Remain in the Relationship You were in When God Called You – Paul uses the Jewish / non-Jewish example of circumcision to make a point about the marriage issue for believers. Just as a Jew can not be uncircumcised when he becomes a Christian, so too the married person should not become single or seek a divorce when he becomes a Christian. Each person is to stay in the marriage relationship that they are in when they become a believer.

1 Cor. 7:²⁵ Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. ²⁹ But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; ³⁰ and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; ³¹ and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. ³² But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; ³³ but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴ and *his interests* are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵ And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.

Paul's Opinion, Remain as You Are – Paul adds his own interpretation to the instruction of the Lord in this passage, yet his focus is purely on the person's availability for the Lord. The single person is available to do the work of the Lord unhindered at any moment. The married person is duty bound to be concerned about the interests of the spouse. If you can live single in undistracted devotion to the Lord, Paul believes that this is the best life for the believer.

1 Cor. 7:³⁶But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. ³⁷But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well. ³⁸So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

The Virgin Daughter Who Wishes to Remarry or Remain Unmarried - Verse 36 is very awkward in its English translation in most of the versions. We might think that there is a problem of immorality between the father and daughter, but this is not the case in Paul's mind. Here Paul is talking about a man who has a virgin daughter who is fully of age to marry. If that daughter wants to marry, then the father is to be supportive in that daughter's decision. There is no sin on the part of the father. Likewise, if the daughter is fully of age to marry and yet she desires to remain single, the father is to support her in that decision and no sin has been done. Either way, the father who supports his daughter in her decision does well. This is a change from the protocol of the day. In that day the father made the arrangement for the daughter's marriage, with or without the daughter's approval. In this passage Paul is changing that protocol for the believer. Paul allows the daughter to decide who she will marry and who she will not marry.

1 Cor. 7:³⁹A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

When a Spouse Dies – Finally Paul addressed the issue of “When a Spouse Dies.” This is very clear. When a spouse dies, the living spouse is free to marry whoever they wish as long as they are “in the Lord,” in other words, believers. Yet Paul can not pass up the opportunity to add his own opinion. Notice how he pushes for remaining single again. Never the less, they are free to marry a believer who is single, if they wish, without any stigma from the first marriage upon them.