

Week of July 15-21

“I DO” OR “I DON’T”

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Corinthians 7

Last weekend, I had the privilege of officiating at the wedding of a young lady whom I have known for 15 years. The joy expressed as they pledged their lives together was contagious. Did this couple, however, choose a lesser good by their willingness to say “I do” to each other instead of choosing singleness and service to God? I raise this question because of what Paul has to say in verse 1: *“It is good for a man not to marry.”* What? Good not to marry? How do we reconcile that with the teaching of Genesis 2:18? To complicate matters, even when Paul allows for marriage, he seems to do so grudgingly (see verses 8-9, 38). So, is marriage a second-class option, only for those who can’t control themselves? Is “I don’t” better than “I do”?

To make sense of Paul’s teaching in this chapter, it’s important to read what he writes in context; both in the context of 1 Corinthians and in the context of the whole of Scripture. When we do so, what do we discover?

1. Marriage is the norm for this present age (Gen 2:18; Matt 22:30), although some folks, like Paul, had the gift of celibacy and were called to singleness.
2. In crisis times, though (such as the Corinthians were or were about to go through), marriage may not be the most practical option as it can lead to anxiety and/or divided loyalties, but this does not mean that it’s sinful to marry (1 Cor 7:26-28).
3. Sexual relations are the norm within the marriage relationship and should not be withheld except by mutual consent and only for a limited period to devote oneself to prayer (1 Cor 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4). Apparently, there were some in the Corinthian church who were advocating for spiritual marriages where the couple refrained from sex permanently. Paul contends this is not biblical.
4. Marriage is to be for life (1 Cor 7:10-11). Some couples were divorcing after they became Christians because they evidently thought marriage and sex were sinful. Still others were leaving their unbelieving spouses after they became believers out of fear that remaining married to an unbeliever would somehow taint them or their kids. Paul strongly counters this false belief and provides godly counsel (1 Cor 7:12-16).
5. Regardless of whether they chose to say “I do” or “I don’t” they were to practice divine contentment and serve the Lord wholeheartedly (1 Cor 7:17-31).
6. Paul’s ultimate concern was that the Corinthian believers have the right focus and the right attitude towards life, including marriage. He wanted them to have undivided loyalty to the Lord and a lack of anxiety whether they were married or single. Paul wanted the church to live on earth in light of eternity; to not get so tightly connected to this world that they failed to live in light of the world to come.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: If you said “I do,” are you biblically loving your spouse on earth while living in light of eternity? If you said “I don’t,” are you living for yourself as a single or in wholehearted commitment to the Lord? Depending on your answer, ask the Lord to develop an eternity-based contentment and an undivided loyalty within your heart to serve the Lord while we wait for His return.

Take-a-way: *Whether you say “I do” or “I don’t”, do all to the glory of God.*