

CHAPTER 7

In this chapter the apostle answers some cases proposed to him by the Corinthians about marriage. He,

I. Shows them that marriage was appointed as a remedy against fornication, and therefore that persons had better marry than burn (v. 1-9).

II. He gives direction to those who are married to continue together, though they might have an unbelieving relative, unless the unbeliever would part, in which case a Christian would not be in bondage (v. 10-16).

III. He shows them that becoming Christians does not change their external state; and therefore advises every one to continue, in the general, in that state in which he was called (v. 17-24).

IV. He advises them, by reason of the present distress, to keep themselves unmarried; hints the shortness of time, and how they should improve it, so as to grow dead and indifferent to the comforts of the world; and shows them how worldly cares hinder their devotions, and distract them in the service of God (v. 25-35).

V. He directs them in the disposal of their virgins (v. 36-38).

VI. And closes the chapter with advice to widows how to dispose of themselves in that state (v. 39, 40).

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-9

AGAINST FORNICATION


The apostle comes now, as a faithful and skilful casuist, to answer some cases of conscience which the Corinthians had proposed to him. Those were *things whereof they wrote to him*, v. 1. As the lips of ministers should *keep knowledge*, so the people should *ask the law at their mouths*. The apostle was as ready to resolve as they were to propose their doubts. In the former chapter, he warns them to avoid fornication; here he gives

some directions about marriage, the remedy God had appointed for it. He tells them in general,

I. That it was good, in that juncture of time at least, to abstain from marriage altogether: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman* (not to take her to wife), by good here not understanding what is so conformable to the mind and will of God as if to do otherwise were sin, an extreme into which many of the ancients have run in favour of celibacy and virginity. Should the apostle be understood in this sense, he would contradict much of the rest of his discourse. But it is good, that is, either abstracting from circumstances there are many things in which the state of celibacy has the advantage above the marriage state; or else *at this juncture*, by reason of the distress of the Christian church, it would be a convenience for Christians to keep themselves single, provided they have the gift of continency, and at the same time can keep themselves chaste. The expression also may carry in it an intimation that Christians must avoid all occasions of this sin, and flee all fleshly lusts, and incentives to them; must neither look on nor touch a woman, so as to provoke lustful inclinations. Yet,

II. He informs them that marriage, and the comforts and satisfactions of that state, are by divine wisdom prescribed for preventing fornication (v. 2), *Porneias* — *Fornications*, all sorts of lawless lust. To avoid these, *Let every man*, says he, *have his own wife, and every woman her own husband*; that is, marry, and confine themselves to their own mates. And, when they are married, let each render the other *due benevolence* (v. 3), consider the disposition and exigency of each other, and render conjugal duty, which is owing to each other. For, as the apostle argues (v. 4), in the married state neither person has power over his own body, but has delivered it into the power of the other, the wife hers into the power of the husband, the husband his into the power of the wife. Note, Polygamy, or the marriage of more persons than one, as well as adultery, must be a breach of marriage-covenants, and a violation of the partner's rights. And therefore they should not defraud one another of the use of their bodies, nor any other of the comforts of the conjugal state, appointed of God for keeping *the vessel in sanctification and honour*, and preventing the lusts of uncleanness, except it be *with mutual consent* (v. 5) and *for a time* only, while they employ themselves in some extraordinary duties of religion, *or give themselves to fasting and prayer*. Note, Seasons of deep humiliation

require abstinence from lawful pleasures. But this separation between husband and wife must not be for a continuance, lest they expose themselves to Satan's temptations, by reason of their incontinence, or inability to contain. Note, Persons expose themselves to great danger by attempting to perform what is above their strength, and at the same time not bound upon them by any law of God. If they abstain from lawful enjoyments, they may be ensnared into unlawful ones. The remedies God hath provided against sinful inclinations are certainly best.

III. The apostle limits what he had said about *every man's having his own wife*, etc. (v. 2): *I speak this by permission, not of command*. He did not lay it as an injunction upon every man to marry without exception. Any man might marry. No law of God prohibited the thing. But, on the other hand, not law bound a man to marry so that he sinned if he did not; I mean, unless his circumstances required it for preventing the lust of uncleanness. It was a thing in which men, by the laws of God, were in a great measure left at liberty. And therefore Paul did not bind every man to marry, though every man had an allowance. No, he *could wish all men were as himself* (v. 7), that is, single, and capable of living continently in that state. There were several conveniences in it, which at that season, if not at others, made it more eligible in itself. Note, It is a mark of true goodness to wish all men as happy as ourselves. But it did not answer the intentions of divine Providence as well for all men to have as much command of this appetite as Paul had. It was a gift vouchsafed to such persons as Infinite Wisdom thought proper: *Every one hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that*. Natural constitutions vary; and, where there may not be much difference in the constitution, different degrees of grace are vouchsafed, which may give some a greater victory over natural inclination than others. Note, The gifts of God, both in nature and grace, are variously distributed. Some have them after this manner and some after that. Paul could wish all men were as himself, but *all men cannot receive such a saying, save those to whom it is given*,  Matthew 19:11.

IV. He sums up his sense on this head (v. 9, 10): *I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, to those in a state of virginity or widowhood, It is good for them if they abide even as I*. There are many conveniences, and especially at this juncture, in a single state, to render it preferable to a married one. It is convenient therefore *that the unmarried abide as I*,

which plainly implies that Paul was at that time unmarried. *But, if they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.* This is God's remedy for lust. The fire may be quenched by the means he has appointed. And marriage, with all its inconveniences, is much better than to burn with impure and lustful desires. *Marriage is honourable in all;* but it is a duty in those who cannot contain nor conquer those inclinations.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-16

INVIOIABILITY OF THE MARRIAGE BOND

In this paragraph the apostle gives them direction in a case which must be very frequent in that age of the world, especially among the Jewish converts; I mean whether they were to live with heathen relatives in a married state. Moses's law permitted divorce; and there was a famous instance in the Jewish state, when the people were obliged to put away their idolatrous wives, ^{<500>}Ezra 10:3. This might move a scruple in many minds, whether converts to Christianity were not bound to put away or desert their mates, continuing infidels. Concerning this matter the apostle here gives direction. And,

I. In general, he tells them that marriage, by Christ's command, is for life; and therefore those who are married must not think of separation. The wife *must not depart from the husband* (v. 10), nor the *husband put away his wife*, v. 11. This *I command*, says the apostle; *yet not I, but the Lord.* Not that he commanded any thing of his own head, or upon his own authority. Whatever he commanded was the Lord's command, dictated by his Spirit and enjoined by his authority. But his meaning is that the Lord himself, with his own mouth, had forbidden such separations, ^{<405>}Matthew 5:32; 19:9; ^{<401>}Mark 10:11; ^{<268>}Luke 16:18. Note, Man and wife cannot separate at pleasure, nor dissolve, when they will, their matrimonial bonds and relation. They must not separate for any other cause than what Christ allows. And therefore the apostle advises that if any woman had been separated, either by a voluntary act of her own or by an act of her husband, she should continue unmarried, and seek reconciliation with her husband, that they might cohabit again. Note, Husbands and wives should not quarrel at all, or should be quickly reconciled. They are bound to each other for life. The divine law allows of no separation. They cannot throw

off the burden, and therefore should set their shoulders to it, and endeavour to make it as light to each other as they can.

II. He brings the general advice home to the case of such as had an unbelieving mate (v. 12): *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord*; that is, the Lord had not so expressly spoken to this case as to the former divorce. It does not mean that the apostle spoke without authority from the Lord, or decided this case by his own wisdom, without the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He closes this subject with a declaration to the contrary (v. 40), I think *also that I have the Spirit of God*. But, having thus prefaced his advice, we may attend,

1. To the advice itself, which is that if an unbelieving husband or wife were pleased to dwell with a Christian relative, the other should not separate. The husband should not put away an unbelieving wife, nor the wife leave an unbelieving husband, v. 12, 13. The Christian calling did not dissolve the marriage covenant, but bind it the faster, by bringing it back to the original institution, limiting it to two persons, and binding them together for life. The believer is not by faith in Christ loosed from matrimonial bonds to an unbeliever, but is at once bound and made apt to be a better relative. But, though a believing wife or husband should not separate from an unbelieving mate, yet if the unbelieving relative desert the believer, and no means can reconcile to a cohabitation, in such *a case a brother or sister is not in bondage* (v. 15), not tied up to the unreasonable humour, and bound servilely to follow or cleave to the malicious deserter, or not bound to live unmarried after all proper means for reconciliation have been tried, at least of the deserter contract another marriage or be guilty of adultery, which was a very easy supposition, because a very common instance among the heathen inhabitants of Corinth. In such a case the deserted person must be free to marry again, and it is granted on all hands. And some think that such a malicious desertion is as much a dissolution of the marriage-covenant as death itself. For how is it possible that *the two shall be one flesh* when the one is maliciously bent to part from or put away the other? Indeed, the deserter seems still bound by the matrimonial contract; and therefore the apostle says (v. 11), *If the woman depart from her husband upon the account of his infidelity, let her remain unmarried*. But the deserted party seems to be left more at liberty (I mean supposing all the proper means have been used to reclaim the deserter, and other circumstances make it necessary) to marry another person. It does not seem reasonable that they should be still

bound, when it is rendered impossible to perform conjugal duties or enjoy conjugal comforts, through the mere fault of their mate: in such a case marriage would be a state of servitude indeed. But, whatever liberty be indulged Christians in such a case as this, they are not allowed, for the mere infidelity of a husband or wife, to separate; but, if the unbeliever be willing, they should continue in the relation, and cohabit as those who are thus related. This is the apostle's general direction.

2. We have here the reasons of this advice.

(1.) Because the relation or state is sanctified by the holiness of either party: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband* (v. 14), or *hath been sanctified*. The relation itself, and the conjugal use of each other, are sanctified to the believer. *To the pure all things are pure*, ^{<4015>}Titus 1:15. Marriage is a divine institution; it is a compact for life, by God's appointment. Had converse and congress with unbelievers in that relation defiled the believer, or rendered him or her offensive to God, the ends of marriage would have been defeated, and the comforts of it in a manner destroyed, in the circumstances in which Christians then were. But the apostle tells them that, though they were yoked with unbelievers, yet, if they themselves were holy, marriage was to them a holy state, and marriage comforts, even with an unbelieving relative, were sanctified enjoyments. It was no more displeasing to God for them to continue to live as they did before, with their unbelieving or heathen relation, than if they had become converts together. If one of the relatives had become holy, nothing of the duties or lawful comforts of the married state could defile them, and render them displeasing to God, though the other were a heathen. He is sanctified for the wife's sake. She is sanctified for the husband's sake. Both are one flesh. He is to be reputed clean who is one flesh with her that is holy, and *vice versa*: *Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy* (v. 14), that is, they would be heathen, out of the pale of the church and covenant of God. They would not be of the holy seed (as the Jews are called, ^{<2013>}Isaiah 6:13), but common and unclean, in the same sense as heathens in general were styled in the apostle's vision, ^{<4018>}Acts 10:28. This way of speaking is according to the dialect of the Jews, among whom a child begotten by parents yet heathens, was said to be begotten *out of holiness*; and a child begotten by parents made proselytes was said to be begotten *intra sanctitatem* — *within the holy enclosure*. Thus Christians are called commonly *saints*; such they are by profession, separated to be a

peculiar people of God, and as such distinguished from the world; and therefore the children born to Christians, though married to unbelievers, are not to be reckoned as part of the world, but of the church, a holy, not a common and unclean seed. “Continue therefore to live even with unbelieving relatives; for, if you are holy, the relation is so, the state is so, you may make a holy use even of an unbelieving relative, in conjugal duties, and your seed will be holy too.” What a comfort is this, where both relatives are believers!

(2.) Another reason is that *God hath called Christians to peace*, v. 15. The Christian religion obliges us to act peaceably in all relations, natural and civil. We are bound, *as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men* (~~428~~Romans 12:18), and therefore surely to promote the peace and comfort of our nearest relatives, those with whom we are one flesh, nay, though they should be infidels. Note, It should be the labour and study of those who are married to make each other as easy and happy as possible.

(3.) A third reason is that it is possible for the believing relative to be an instrument of the other's salvation (v. 16): *What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband?* Note, It is the plain duty of those in so near a relation to seek the salvation of those to whom they are related. “Do not separate. There is other duty now called for. The conjugal relation calls for the most close and endeared affection; it is a contract for life. And should a Christian desert a mate, when an opportunity offers to give the most glorious proof of love? Stay, and labour heartily for the conversion of thy relative. Endeavour to save a soul. Who knows but this may be the event? It is not impossible. And, though there be no great probability, saving a soul is so good and glorious a service that the bare possibility should put one on exerting one's self.” Note, Mere possibility of success should be a sufficient motive with us to use our diligent endeavours for saving the souls of our relations. “*What know I but I may save his soul?* should move me to attempt it.”

1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

Here the apostle takes occasion to advise them to continue in the state and condition in which Christianity found them, and in which they became converts to it. And here,

I. He lays down this rule in general — *as God hath distributed to every one*. Note, Our states and circumstances in this world are distributions of divine Providence. *This fixes the bounds of men's habitations*, and orders their steps. God setteth up and pulleth down. And again, *As the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk*. Whatever his circumstances or condition was when he was converted to Christianity, let him abide therein, and suit his conversation to it. The rules of Christianity reach every condition. And in every state a man may live so as to be a credit to it. Note, It is the duty of every Christian to suit his behaviour to his condition and the rules of religion, to be content with his lot, and conduct himself in his rank and place as becomes a Christian. The apostle adds that this was a general rule, to be observed at all times and in all places; *So ordain I in all churches*.

II. He specifies particular cases; as,

1. That of circumcision. *Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not be uncircumcised. Is any man called being uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised*. It matters not whether a man be a Jew or Gentile, within the covenant of peculiarity made with Abraham or without it. He who is converted, being a Jew, has no need to give himself uneasiness upon that head, and wish himself uncircumcised. Nor, is he who is converted from Gentilism under an obligation to be circumcised: nor should he be concerned because he wants that mark of distinction which did heretofore belong to the people of God. For, as the apostle goes on, *circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God*, v. 19. In point of acceptance with God, it is neither here nor there whether men be circumcised or not. Note, It is practical religion, sincere obedience to the commands of God, on which the gospel lays stress. External observances without internal piety are as nothing. Therefore let every man abide *in the calling* (the state) *wherein he was called*, v. 20.

2. That of servitude and freedom. It was common in that age of the world for many to be in a state of slavery, bought and sold for money, and so the property of those who purchased them. "Now," says the apostle, "*art thou called being a servant? Care not for it. Be not over-solicitous about it. It is not inconsistent with thy duty, profession, or hopes, as a Christian. Yet, if thou mayest be made free, use it rather,*" v. 21. There are many conveniences in a state of freedom above that of servitude: a man has more power over himself, and more command of his time, and is not under the control of another lord; and therefore liberty is the more eligible state. But men's outward condition does neither hinder nor promote their acceptance with God. For he that is called *being a servant is the Lord's freed-man* — *apeleutheros*, as he that is called *being free is the Lord's servant*. Though he be not discharged from his master's service, he is freed from the dominion and vassalage of sin. Though he be not enslaved to Christ, yet he is bound to yield himself up wholly to his pleasure and service; and yet that service is perfect freedom. Note, Our comfort and happiness depend on what we are to Christ, not what we are in the world. The goodness of our outward condition does not discharge us from the duties of Christianity, nor the badness of it debar us from Christian privileges. He who is a slave may yet be a Christian freeman; he who is a freeman may yet be Christ's servant. He is bought with a price, and should not therefore be the servant of man. Not that he must quit the service of his master, or not take all proper measures to please him (this were to contradict the whole scope of the apostle's discourse); but he must not be so the servant of men but that Christ's will must be obeyed, and regarded, more than his master's. He has paid a much dearer price for him, and has a much fuller property in him. He is to be served and obeyed without limitation or reserve. Note, The servants of Christ should be at the absolute command of no other master besides himself, should serve no man, any further than is consistent with their duty to him. *No man can serve two masters*. Though some understand this passage of persons being bought out of slavery by the bounty and charity of fellow-Christians; and read the passage thus, *Have you been redeemed out of slavery with a price? Do not again become enslaved*; just as before he had advised that, if in slavery they had any prospect of being made free, they should choose it rather. This meaning the words will bear, but the other seems the more natural. See ~~and~~ 1 Corinthians 6:20.

III. He sums up his advice: *Let every man wherein he is called abide therein with God*, v. 24. This is to be understood of the state wherein a man is converted to Christianity. No man should make his faith or religion an argument to break through any natural or civil obligations. He should quietly and comfortably abide in the condition in which he is; and this he may well do, when he may abide therein with God. Note, The special presence and favour of God are not limited to any outward condition or performance. He may enjoy it who is circumcised; and so may he who is uncircumcised. He who is bound may have it as well as he who is free. In this respect *there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free*, ^{<467>}Colossians 3:11. The favour of God is not bound.

^{<467>}1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-35

PRUDENTIAL DIRECTIONS

The apostle here resumes his discourse, and gives directions to virgins how to act, concerning which we may take notice,

I. Of the manner wherein he introduces them: “*Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord*, v. 25. I have no express and universal law delivered by the Lord himself concerning celibacy; but *I give my judgment, as one who hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*,” namely, in the apostleship. He acted faithfully, and therefore his direction was to be regarded as a rule of Christ: for he gave judgment as one who was a faithful apostle of Christ. Though Christ had before delivered no universal law about that matter, he now gives direction by an inspired apostle, one who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. Note, Faithfulness in the ministry is owing to the grace and mercy of Christ. It is what Paul was ready to acknowledge upon all occasions: *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*, ^{<468>}1 Corinthians 15:10. And it is a great mercy which those obtain from God who prove faithful in the ministry of his word, either ordinary or extraordinary.

II. The determination he gives, which, considering the present distress, was that a state of celibacy was preferable: *It is good for a man so to be*,

that is, *to be single*. *I suppose*, says the apostle, or it is my opinion. It is worded with modesty, but delivered, notwithstanding, with apostolic authority. It is not the mere opinion of a private man, but the very determination of the Spirit of God in an apostle, though it be thus spoken. And it was thus delivered to give it the more weight. Those that were prejudiced against the apostle might have rejected this advice had it been given with a mere authoritative air. Note, Ministers do not lose their authority by prudent condescensions. They must become all things to all men, that they may do them the more good. *This is good*, says he, *for the present distress*. Christians, at the first planting of their religion, were grievously persecuted. Their enemies were very bitter against them, and treated them very cruelly. They were continually liable to be tossed and hurried by persecution. This being the then state of things, he did not think it so advisable for Christians that were single to change conditions. The married state would bring more care and cumber along with it (v. 33, 34), and would therefore make persecution more terrible, and render them less able to bear it. Note, Christians, in regulating their conduct, should not barely consider what is lawful in itself, but what may be expedient for them.

III. Notwithstanding he thus determines, he is very careful to satisfy them that he does not condemn marriage in the gross, nor declare it unlawful. And therefore, though he says, “If thou *art loosed from a wife* (in a single state, whether bachelor or widower, virgin or widow) *do not seek a wife*, do not hastily change conditions;” yet he adds, “*If thou art bound to a wife, do not seek to be loosed*. It is thy duty to continue in the married relation, and do the duties of it.” And though such, if they were called to suffer persecution, would find peculiar difficulties in it; yet, to avoid these difficulties, they must not cast off nor break through the bonds of duty. Duty must be done, and God trusted with events. But to neglect duty is the way to put ourselves out of the divine protection. He adds therefore, *I thou marry thou hast not sinned; or if a virgin marry she hath not sinned: but such shall have trouble in the flesh*. Marrying is not in itself a sin, but marrying at that time was likely to bring inconvenience upon them, and add to the calamities of the times; and therefore he thought it advisable and expedient that such as could contain should refrain from it; but adds that he would not lay celibacy on them as a yoke, nor, by seeming to urge it too far, draw them into any snare; and therefore says, *But I spare you*. Note, How opposite in this are the papist casuists to the apostle Paul! They

forbid many to marry, and entangle them with vows of celibacy, whether they can bear the yoke or no.

IV. He takes this occasion to give general rules to all Christians to carry themselves with a holy indifference towards the world, and every thing in it.

1. *As to relations:* Those that had wives must be as though they had none; that is, they must not set their hearts too much on the comforts of the relation; they must be as though they had none. They know not how soon they shall have none. This advice must be carried into every other relation. Those that have children should be as though they had none. Those that are their comfort now may prove their greatest cross. And soon may the flower of all comforts be cut down.

2. *As to afflictions:* Those that weep must be as though they wept not; that is, we must not be dejected too much with any of our afflictions, nor indulge ourselves in the sorrow of the world, but keep up a holy joy in God in the midst of all our troubles, so that even in sorrow the heart may be joyful, and the end of our grief may be gladness. *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning.* If we can but get to heaven at last, *all tears shall be wiped from our eyes;* and the prospect of it now should make us moderate our sorrows and refrain our tears.

3. *As to worldly enjoyments:* Those that rejoice should be as though they rejoiced not; that is, they should not take too great a complacency in any of their comforts. They must be moderate in their mirth, and sit loose to the enjoyments they most value. Here is not their rest, nor are these things their portion; and therefore their hearts should not be set on them, nor should they place their solace or satisfaction in them.

4. *As to worldly traffic and employment:* Those that buy must be as though they possessed not. Those that prosper in trade, increase in wealth, and purchase estates, should hold these possessions as though they held them not. It is but setting their hearts on that which is not (²³⁵Proverbs 23:5) to do otherwise. Buying and possessing should not too much engage our minds. They hinder many people altogether from minding the better part. Purchasing land and trying oxen kept the guests invited from the wedding-supper, ²⁴⁸Luke 14:18, 19. And, when they do not altogether hinder men from minding their chief business, they do very much divert

them from a close pursuit. Those are most likely to run so as to obtain the prize who ease their minds of all foreign cares and cumbrances.

5. As to all worldly concerns: *Those that use this world as not abusing it*, v. 31. The world may be used, but must not be abused. It is abused when it is not used to those purposes for which it is given, to honour God and do good to men — when, instead of being oil to the wheels of our obedience, it is made fuel to lust — when, instead of being a servant, it is made our master, our idol, and has that room in our affections which should be reserved for God. And there is great danger of abusing it in all these respects, if our hearts are too much set upon it. We must keep the world as much as may be out of our hearts, that we may not abuse it when we have it in our hands.

V. He enforces these advices with two reasons: —

1. *The time is short*, v. 29. We have but little time to continue in this world; but a short season for possessing and enjoying worldly things; *kairos synestalmenos*. It is contracted, reduced to a narrow compass. It will soon be gone. It is just ready to be wrapped up in eternity. Therefore do not set your hearts on worldly enjoyments. Do not be overwhelmed with worldly cares and troubles. Possess what you must shortly leave without suffering yourselves to be possessed by it. Why should your hearts be much set on what you must quickly resign?

2. *The fashion of this world passeth away* (v. 31), *schema* — *the habit*, figure, appearance, of the world, passeth away. It is daily changing countenance. It is in a continual flux. It is not so much a world as the appearance of one. All is show, nothing solid in it; and it is transient show too, and will quickly be gone. How proper and powerful an argument is this to enforce the former advice! How irrational is it to be affected with the images, the fading and transient images, of a dream! *Surely man walketh in a vain show* (⁴⁸⁰⁶Psalm 39:6), in an image, amidst the faint and vanishing appearances of things. And should he be deeply affected, or grievously afflicted, with such a scene?

VI. He presses his general advice by warning them against the embarrassment of worldly cares: *But I would have you without carefulness*, v. 32. Indeed to be careless is a fault; a wise concern about worldly interests is a duty; but to be careful, full of care, to have an anxious and perplexing care about them, is a sin. All that care which

disquiets the mind, and distracts it in the worship of God, is evil; for God must *be attended upon without distraction*, v. 35. The whole mind should be engaged when God is worshipped. The work ceases while it diverts to any thing else, or is hurried and drawn hither and thither by foreign affairs and concerns. Those who are engaged in divine worship should attend to this very thing, should make it their whole business. But how is this possible when the mind is swallowed up of the cares of this life? Note, It is the wisdom of a Christian so to order his outward affairs, and choose such a condition in life, as to be without distracting cares, that he may attend upon the Lord with a mind at leisure and disengaged. This is the general maxim by which the apostle would have Christians govern themselves. In the application of it Christian prudence must direct. That condition of life is best for every man which is best for his soul, and keeps him most clear of the cares and snares of the world. By this maxim the apostle solves the case put to him by the Corinthians, whether it were advisable to marry? To this he says, That, by reason of the present distress, and it may be in general, at that time, when Christians were married to infidels, and perhaps under a necessity of being so, if married at all: I say, in these circumstances, to continue unmarried would be the way to free themselves from any cares and incumbrances, and allow them more vacation for the service of God. Ordinarily, the less care we have about the world the more freedom we have for the service of God. Now the married state at that time (if not at all times) did bring most worldly care along with it. *He that is married careth for the things of the world, that he may please his wife*, v. 33. *And she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband*. But the unmarried man and woman mind the things of the Lord, that they may please the Lord, and be holy both in body and spirit, v. 32, 34. Not but the married person may be holy both in body and spirit too. Celibacy is not in itself a state of greater purity and sanctity than marriage; but the unmarried would be able to make religion more their business at that juncture, because they would have less distraction from worldly cares. Marriage is that condition of life that brings care along with it, though sometimes it brings more than at others. It is the constant care of those in that relation to please each other; though this is more difficult to do at some seasons, and in some cases, than in others. At that season, therefore, the apostle advises that those who were single should abstain from marriage, if they were under no necessity to change conditions. And, where the same reason is plain at other times, the rule is as fit to be observed. And the very same rule must determine

persons for marriage where there is the same reason, that is, if in the unmarried state persons are likely to be more distracted in the service of God than if they were married, which is a case supposable in many respects. This is the general rule, which every one's discretion must apply to his own particular case; and by it should he endeavour to determine, whether it be for marriage or against. That condition of life should be chosen by the Christian in which it is most likely he will have the best helps, and the fewest hindrances, in the service of God and the affairs of his own salvation.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:36-38

PRUDENTIAL DIRECTIONS

In this passage the apostle is commonly supposed to give advice about the disposal of children in marriage, upon the principle of his former determination. In this view the general meaning is plain. It was in that age, and those parts of the world, and especially among the Jews, reckoned a disgrace for a woman to remain unmarried past a certain number of years: it gave a suspicion of somewhat that was not for her reputation. "Now," says the apostle, "if any man thinks he behaves unhandsomely towards his daughter, and that it is not for her credit to remain unmarried, when she is of full age, and that upon this principle it is needful to dispose of her in marriage, he may use his pleasure. It is no sin in him to dispose of her to a suitable mate. But if a man has determined in himself to keep her a virgin, and stands to this determination, and is under no necessity to dispose of her in marriage, but is at liberty, with her consent, to pursue his purpose, he does well in keeping her a virgin. In short, he that gives her in marriage does well; but he that keeps her single, if she can be easy and innocent in such a state, does what is better; that is, more convenient for her in the present state of things, if not at all times and seasons." Note,

1. Children should be at the disposal of their parents, and not dispose of themselves in marriage. Yet,
2. Parents should consult their children's inclinations, both to marriage in general and to the person in particular, and not reckon they have uncontrollable power to do with them, and dictate to them, as they please.

3. It is our duty not only to consider what is lawful, but in many cases, at least, what is fit to be done, before we do it.

But I think the apostle is here continuing his former discourse, and advising unmarried persons, who are at their own disposal, what to do, the man's virgin being meant of his virginity. *Terein ten heautou parthenon* seems to be rather meant of preserving his own virginity than keeping his daughter a virgin, though it be altogether uncommon to use the word in this sense. Several other reasons may be seen in Locke and Whitby, by those who will consult them. And it was a common matter of reproach among Jews and civilized heathens, for a man to continue single beyond such a term of years, though all did not agree in limiting the single life to the same term. The general meaning of the apostle is the same, that it was no sin to marry, if a man thought there was a necessity upon, to avoid popular reproach, much less to avoid the hurrying fervours of lust. But he that was in his own power, stood firm in his purpose, and found himself under no necessity to marry, would, at that season, and in the circumstances of Christians at that time, at least, make a choice every way most for his own conveniency, ease, and advantage, as to his spiritual concerns. And it is highly expedient, if not a duty, for Christians to be guided by such a consideration.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:39-40

PRUDENTIAL DIRECTIONS

The whole is here closed up with advice to widows: *As long as the husband liveth the wife is bound by the law*, confined to one husband, and bound to continue and cohabit with him. Note, The marriage-contract is for life; death only can annul the bond. *But, the husband being dead, she is at liberty to marry whom she will.* There is no limitation by God's law to be married only for such a number of times. It is certain, from this passage, that second marriages are not unlawful; for then the widow could not be at liberty to marry whom she pleased, nor to marry a second time at all. But the apostle asserts she has such a liberty, when her husband is dead, only with a limitation that *she marry in the Lord.* In our choice of relations, and change of conditions, we should always have an eye to God. Note, Marriages are likely to have God's blessing only when they are made

in the Lord, when persons are guided by the fear of God, and the laws of God, and act in dependence on the providence of God, in the change and choice of a mate — when they can look up to God, and sincerely seek his direction, and humbly hope for his blessing upon their conduct. *But she is happier*, says the apostle, *if she so abide* (that is, continue a widow) *in my judgment; and I think I have the Spirit of God*, v. 40. At this juncture, at least, if not ordinarily, it will be much more for the peace and quiet of such, and give them less hindrance in the service of God, to continue unmarried. And this, he tells them, was by inspiration of the Spirit. “Whatever your false apostles may think of me, I think, and have reason to know, that I have the Spirit of God.” Note, Change of condition in marriage is so important a matter that it ought not to be made but upon due deliberation, after careful consideration of circumstances, and upon very probable grounds, at least, that it will be a change to advantage in our spiritual concerns.