

**Practical Implications of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 for  
Christian Married Couples  
in the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believer's Church**

By

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Every single culture in the world has its own set of rules concerning marriage, sex and family. From the beginning marriage was established by God Himself in the Garden of Eden before any other human institutions and cultures (Gen 2:24-25). Primarily it looks as if was established for the benefit of the partners, so that they might partner with one another. After the fall one to one lifetime marriage partnership was followed by conflicts, bitterness, divorce and polygamy.

According to News from the UK, August 31, 2004; out of 546 divorces 27 percent said that their sexless relationship drove them apart (Non-US divorce Rates, Statistics Collection: [www. divorcere.org/nonus.html](http://www.divorcere.org/nonus.html)). Similarly, in Ethiopia, issues of immorality and marriage relational problems are highly evident rising higher and higher from time to time. According to Negash, the main cause for marital conflicts, sexual relationship problems and divorce seem to be lack of good communication (Negash 2001:6-7).

Based on the preliminary enquiry and observation of leaders of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church, marital problems are unexpectedly increasing. Some married couples, in the church, are separated because their marriage partner has gone to another country for a long time. As a result, their relationship is blocked and the ones left at home are tempted to form a relationship with another person. Even some ministers and leaders of the church, who often say "my former marriage was not from God, so I will look for someone who is from God" are being divorced and married to others.

Because of such marital problems, EFGBC couples are facing challenges. Hence, my decision to work on I Corinthians 7:1-16, concerning marital issues, is timely.

Accordingly, the following questions are very crucial. What are the main marital problems mentioned in I Corinthians 7:1-16? Why are some leaders and ministers of the church facing marital problems? Why do some ministers and believers divorce their marriage partner and go to others? How can such problems be cured? These and other related problems will be dealt within this thesis.

First I would like to give a little information about the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers Church (EFGBC) which is the epicenter of all the process of our research.

### **Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is a republic, officially the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia situated in northeastern Africa. It is bordered on the northeast by Eritrea and Djibouti, on the east and southeast by Somalia, on the southwest by Kenya, and on the west and northwest by Sudan. A high plateau capped with rugged mountains covers much of Ethiopia; lowland deserts surround the plateau region. Agriculture, the country's chief economic activity, is carried out in the fertile plateau area. Ethiopia has a diverse population, with more than 70 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups (Keller 2008).

The Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church here after mentioned as "the EFGBC" is the largest indigenous Pentecostal church in Ethiopia. The church which was begun as a result of a revival amongst high school and University students and it was spread all over the nation in 1965/66. According to reports from Englesviken the church has gone through severe persecution, yet its growth was remarkable (Englesviken 1975:18, 33)<sup>1</sup>. According to a report of

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<sup>1</sup> Tormod Englesviken was a missionary to Ethiopia for the Norwegian Lutheran Mission from 1971 to 1973. He was instructor of Systematic Theology at the Mekane Eyesus Seminary in Addis Ababa. With the request of Pentecostal Christians who were suffering under heavy persecution in September, 1972, Tormod Englesviken was appointed to prepare

August 2007, at the general assembly of the church, presently the Church has 950 self supporting local churches and around 2 million members nationally.

## **1.2. Aim**

The main aim of this thesis is to do an extensive study on 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 investigating the main problems of the Corinthian church, in relation to marital relationships, and analyze the implication of the suggested solutions presented by the author of the book to our context. An exegetical work on 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 will lead to outline main principles that can be used as suggested strategies to Christian married couples and church leaders. This is the expected outcome at the end of the research.

This thesis also aims to encourage and stimulate two target groups in the EFGBC. Firstly, the leaders of the church will possibly be able to establish marriage related ministry in their church, to teach, visit, counsel the married couples, and also empower those who have such ministry to work on it more effectively. Second, marriage partners will possibly be able to examine the state of their relationship. Those whose intimacy is facing problems will be encouraged to evaluate it in accordance with the biblical standards and restore it, and those who are in a good relationship to strengthen it more, for a better life that pleases the Lord.

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research are:

- 1.3.1. To reconstruct the marital issues that occasioned Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16.
- 1.3.2. To determine the marital principles Paul laid down in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16.
- 1.3.3. To apply the significance of the passage to the context of the EFGBC.

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a documentary report of the event about the Full Gospel Church and its persecution. The report was 150 pages and the source documents are deposited in the Norwegian Library of Oslo. This copy is also available in the library of the Mekane Eyesus Seminary and in the Ethiopian Full Gospel Theological College Library.

#### **1.4. Limitations/Delimitations**

Fee (1987:269; 2001:92) and Kistemaker (1993:208) have similarly commented that 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 encourages the already married to have regular and mutual sexual relationship within the context of marriage. And the unmarried mentioned in (vv. 8, 9) are the widows/widowers whose marriages have been dissolved by death. Barrett (1996:154) has also suggested that the first part of the chapter (vv. 1-16) has counsel to husbands and wives on how they can sustain their marital intimacy. Mare (1984:229) and Lowery (1984:518) commented that 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9 speak about the divorced, bachelors or the celibate and widowers.

The purpose of this thesis is not to give detailed analysis on the unmarried and the celibate; however, this issue might be touched at least on a survey level so as to highlight its influence in the Corinthian Church.

Thus, believing that 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 deals with marital issues, the researcher will try to pick out valuable instructions applicable to the experiences of the EFGBC Christian married couples. Therefore, my focus will be limited to 1 Corinthians 7:1-16.

#### **1.5. Methodology**

This thesis will follow Stuart's exegetical method which calls for investigating and identifying the historical, literary and biblical context; form, structure, grammar and application of a selected passage. Furthermore, using various commentaries and reading recent information, a thorough study on the selected passage will be used for the research process. Data will also be gathered from selected ministers and married couples of the EFGBC for the significance part of the thesis.

Chapter 1 will focus on the introduction that covers background, aim of the thesis, research objectives, limitations and delimitations, research methodology and abbreviations. I shall also use journal articles and recent books written on marriage related issues.



In Chapter 2, the exegetical guidelines will be drawn from the various scholarly works on how to interpret New Testament epistles.

Chapter 3 will focus on the context of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. The study here will be based on a variety of English translations, especially the NIV, NKJV, Greek-English New Testament, and commentaries.

Chapter 4 will be a detailed analysis of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16. I shall start by examining textual differences looking at different views. Then, I will try to deal with the structure of the passage and lastly examine the essentials to sustaining a good marital intimacy. My primary biblical text will be the NIV, but I shall also use NKJV, Greek-English New Testament, the Amharic Bible and major technical commentaries. Theological Dictionary of the NT and New International Dictionary of the NT will also be used for word studies.

Chapter 5 will start with a short description of the contextual problems with respect to marital problems in EFGBC. The description will be based on interviews with carefully selected married couples and church leaders of EFGBC. Then I will try to analyze and evaluate the data gathered through the interview process. Finally, I strongly hope that the process will naturally lead us to the solutions.

Chapter 6 will emphasize on the review of the logical argument and the conclusions reached through the process of the research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Guidelines for Interpreting Pauline Epistles**

Under this chapter I will try to see important guidelines in which the Pauline Epistles may be interpreted; because understanding the guidelines may help much in the process of interpreting the other epistles.

Principles drawn by Stuart (1984); Grasmick (1976); Kaiser (1981); Schreiner (1990) and Fee with Stuart (2003), are very important in interpreting the Pauline Epistles. Similarly, the selected passage in this thesis, 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, will also be expounded using the principles applied by the above scholars.

#### **2.1. Understanding the Nature of Epistles**

The English word “epistle” is generally used among Christians to designate certain books in the New Testament. It comes from the Greek noun “*epistole*” and means a letter or a message sent to someone or a form of written communication between two persons or parties (Lown 1982:122). Older translations of the Bible such as (KJV) use the word “epistle,” while the newer ones (NIV) simply say “letter”.

Understanding the nature of the Pauline epistles helps us to approach them in a very special and systematic way, without confusing them with the other genres, because they have distinctive features, occasional in nature, when compared with the other books of the Bible’s literary types.

Current day scholars who commented on New Testament letters refer back to Adolf Deissman who made a distinction between letters and epistles.

## Chapter 2: Guidelines for Interpreting Pauline Epistles

Deissman argued that Pauline letters are occasional and private documents written only to solve specific situations. Deissman continued saying that epistles are not similar to letters for they are artistically written for a wider public and intended to continue to function authoritatively in the next generation (Schreiner 1990:24-25).

On the other hand Fee and Stuart argued against Deissman as follows:

“Romans and Philemon differ from one another not only in content but also to the degree that one is far more personal than the other. And in contrast to any of Paul’s letters, 2 Peter and 1 John are far more like epistles.” With this therefore, they ascertain that all Paul’s writings are letters, and the distinction whether they are letters or epistles is not the valid one, rather noting how the form of writing in the ancient letters can be helpful to understand them (Fee and Stuart 2003:56).

Some recent scholars have argued that the Pauline letters are patterned after Greek rhetoric, asserting that the letters are literary products, which are occasional in nature. They also show evidences of being carefully written compositions as epistles. Furthermore, they are artistically written for a wider public and planned for future generations (Schreiner 1990:24).

Deissman’s argument about the occasional nature of Pauline epistles is right, because they are real and occasional letters sent to solve specific problems of a specific people group. On the other hand, Deissman’s claim is not right, when he says Pauline letters are not artistically written for a wider public and intended to continue to function authoritatively in the next generation. Because though occasional, they are not ordinary letters, for they are the written word of God primarily sent to original believers, and later considered as part of the New Testament canon. Furthermore, epistles carry timeless truths to all successive generations of believers, crossing the centuries with applications to life situations.

Even today Pauline letters are influencing generations because the Word of God is living, active and applicable to change lives and used as solutions for many problems in the Christian community. It is also evident in our lives that

they are messages from God to change our lives and used as guiding principles in our life and ministry.

In addition, when Paul wrote some of his letters, he was also expecting them to be read and obeyed by other believers, as we may see in many of his texts (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:14; Col. 4:16). In fact, there is a gap in time, culture and language that should be bridged from the “then and there” to the “here and now”.

Moreover, Schreiner (1990:25-30) and Fee and Stuart (2003:56-57) states that Paul’s letters follow the design of most of the Greco-Roman letters of his day which contains an opening, the body, and the closing. The opening contains the name of the author or sender of the letter, the address of the letter, the salutation, thanksgiving and prayer. The body part often begins with certain formulaic phrases, such as: disclosure formulas, request formulas, and expression of astonishment. Furthermore, the closing of Pauline letters varies from book to book and includes the following things: travel plans, commendation of fellow workers, prayer, greetings, final instructions, exhortations and benediction.

In general, understanding the nature of Pauline letters and analyzing their structure is helpful for a proper interpretation.

Here after, this research will use the word letter rather than/or epistle as need arises.

## **2.2. Single-Meaning**

It is necessary for us to comprehend the Scriptures correctly and teach from them accurately. This requires interpretation that means understanding the meaning of the Scriptures correctly. Yet, we must attempt to discover the author’s intended single meaning as expressed in the text.

Thomas (2002, 145-149) informs us that some scholars who oppose the single meaning as follows:

“Daniel Wallace suggested that single meaning eliminates possibility of intentional ambiguity. With him Grant Osborne claims finding double meaning where it was never intended. Mikel Neumann has also suggested that context of the contemporary interpreter and his audience overshadows grammatical-historical interpretation. Furthermore, Gordon Fee has said that contemporary application yields meaning different from grammatical-historical meaning, confusing contemporary application with interpretation, as some call it “contextualization” that leads to multiple meaning for a single passage. Similarly, Clark Pinnock said that meaning of the Bible is constantly changing and, recently, some evangelicals proposed a new approach which almost violates the single meaning principle and developed possible multiple meanings for a single passage.

Clement of Rome has also said that any passage from the Bible may have up to five meanings: historical, doctrinal with moral and theological, prophetic, philosophical and mystical (in Zuck 1984:35-36). Similarly, Bollnow claimed that the text has multiple meanings because interpretation must be always in balance between the psychological, technical and grammatical side of interpretation (in Kaiser 1981:34).

On the contrary, Thomas (2002:141-142) has suggested that a single passage in the Bible has one meaning and the meaning of the biblical text is fixed and unchanging. Thomas continued saying that the single meaning principle is a long-established principle of biblical interpretation, though there are violations of this principle and many have insisted to claim many meanings for a text. So the Pauline letters should be interpreted based on the single meaning principle. Because Paul’s intended meaning, when he wrote his letters, was one in which his audience understands it clearly.

I agree with what Thomas has said that the single-meaning principle is basically important in our understanding of God’s communication with mankind. Firstly, as God was speaking to the ancient generation, He also speaks to us through His word according to our context. Secondly, God’s word has the right to tell us the truth and has authority in our own lives and in

the lives of those to whom we minister. Thirdly, if the text has many meanings it will be difficult to have standard principle that can work for all the Christian community in succeeding generations. So accepting the argument that the text has one meaning is right and honors the text as the word of God for all generations. Furthermore, the Bible is written as special revelation of God, and it is surely relevant since it is God's word, living, active and applicable in our time and context, for today's generation.

In fact, though a text has one meaning, it might have many applications for the one intended meaning. Hence, it is necessary for us to understand what the Scripture says to the original audience correctly.

### **2.3. Context of the Passage**

Kaiser describes the meaning of context as follows:

The word context is composed of two Latin elements, *con* ("together") and *textus* ("woven"). Hence, context talks about the connection of thought that runs through a passage into one piece (Kaiser 1981:71).

In order to identify the purpose and plan of a given scripture passage, knowing its context is necessary, because disregarding the context of a passage creates a problem in the process of interpretation. Moreover, knowing the context helps us to understand the right message to the first audience and its application for today. Tate (1991:27) stated that every text is created within some context, though the text does not change as language and culture do.

Zuck elaborates context as follows:

Context includes the immediate verse(s), before and after a passage, and the paragraph and book in which the verses occur, the dispensation in which the book was written, the message of the entire Bible and the historical-cultural environment of the time (Zuck 1991:77)

Based on how Kaiser (1981:71) and Zuck (1991:77) and Tate (1991:27) described context, understanding the context of Pauline letters is helpful to interpreting them in a proper way and understanding the right message.

Context of the passage includes immediate context, book context, historical context and cultural context.

### **2.3.1. Immediate context**

Immediate context is the writer's flow of thought directly before and after a text. For the text does not stand alone, what is going on around a text helps to understand what is going on within a text. Immediate context includes verses or passages before and after the passage needing to be interpreted. Immediate context is crucial to interpretation because if a text is taken out of its immediate context, it is easily misunderstood. As a result, the author's intended meaning will be lost. Furthermore, the investigation of the context of a paragraph can be the finding point of how the various sections of a book relate to one another (Kaiser 1981:83-85).

Therefore, knowing that the immediate context is important in the process of interpretation of the text, the interpreter has to analyze the immediate context to get the flow of thought and understand the right message.

### **2.3.2. Book Context**

William Arp defined "book" as follows:

A book is a literary unit in which the author joins all his thoughts together. As a result, a meaning for a particular which does not fit to the meaning of the whole is not correct (Arp 2000:46).

To interpret Pauline letters book context is necessary because it includes verses, passages, sections and finally the book. The author's intended meaning is expressed in the meaning of the whole book because what the book is all about provides the framework for the meaning of the verses, passages, and sections.

Some books of the Bible such as Ecclesiastes (Eccles. 12:13), Luke (Lk 1:1-4), and the Gospel of John (Jn 20:30-31) give an explicit and stated goal by which to judge their total progress as the sections unfold. Other books, where the purpose is not stated, such as the book of Hebrews, the overall purpose of

the book must be determined by the contents and the transitions from section to section and paragraph to paragraph (Kaiser 1981:77-78).

All the books in the Bible are not written in the same way; for some clearly state the purpose they are written for, while others do not state it. So the interpreter has to know the context of the book and try to identify the overall purpose of the book.

### **2.3.3. Historical Context**

Historical context has to do with the time and culture of the author and his audience, as well as the occasion which prompted the author to write. The political system, the social setting and religious conditions when the author and the audience were living are also important to know the right meaning of the text. Similarly, an understanding of the historical context of Pauline letters that comes from the world of his time is important in the process of exegesis. (Arp 2000:45).

To understand the historical context of the letters, reconstruction of the situation about which the author is speaking should be considered. Important questions that help our understanding the historical context of the letters are as follows: What caused the author to write the letter? How does he know the situation of his audience? What attitudes do the author and audience reflect? Do political circumstances influence a text's meaning? Are religious parties involved in a text's meaning? (Fee and Stuart 2003:59).

To answer the above questions the interpreter has to read and reread the whole letter and try to jot down brief notes in consultation with Bible dictionaries or commentaries.

### **2.3.4. Cultural Context**

Webster (1979:179) defines Culture as the ideas, skills, arts, tools and way of life of a certain people in a certain time. Zuck has also defined culture as follows:



Culture as the total pattern of human behavior, includes thought, speech, action; and as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits. Thus culture includes what people think, believe, say, do and make. Moreover, cultural context includes customs of people, such as: marriage, hospitality, weapons, tools, food, money and clothing the people use. Culture has four categories: thought and beliefs, speech, action, and artifacts (Zuck 1991: 79-80).

Since a cultural gap exists between our day and Bible times, knowing the culture of the writer and his audience helps the interpreter in the process of exegesis. In fact, the goal in Biblical interpretation is to discover the original meaning of the Scriptures when they were first written, and try to apply them for today. Hence, the interpreter has to make a note of the cultural background of the writing, so that he/she may understand what that document meant to the people who first read it.

#### **2.4. Lexical Study**

Kaiser elaborates “word” as follows:

Words are the most basic of all the linguistic building-blocks of meaning. Usually the particular meaning a word has in particular situation is clearly specified by the grammatical constructions in which it occurs (Kaiser 1981:105).

The need for lexical study is initiated because of the gap between the language of the original audiences and today’s audience. For instance, *koine* Greek in which the New Testament was written is no longer used as a language for communication. Therefore, in order for us to know the meaning of a passage as the author intended it to mean for the first audience, lexical study is needed (Kaiser 1981:105).

The Pauline letters contain many words but the interpreter should select words that are crucial and helpful in the process of interpretation. Schreiner (1990:134) has suggested that selection of words can be done in the following ways:

- a. Studying theological words in the contexts in which Paul used them
- b. Studying words that occur often in a passage and contribute to major themes
- c. Studying words with debated meanings

Furthermore, the right meaning of a word as the author intended it has to be explained based on the immediate attachment of some defining expressions; such as: the custom and general usage when the author used it, its grammatical construction and contextual contrasts (Kaiser 1981:107).

## **2.5. Tracing the Argument**

Grasmick defined argument as follows:

The argument of a book is the logical development of thought the author uses to achieve his purpose. It is the relation of the “why” and the “what” (Grasmick 1976:60).

Schreiner has also elaborated tracing the argument as follows:

The key to tracing the argument in Pauline letters is by understanding the relationship between different propositions in the text. Because the building blocks of his reasoning are found in his propositions and proposition is a statement about something (Schreiner 1990:98-99).

Similarly Grasmick (1976:60) suggested that tracing the argument can be understood by carefully tracing the thought processes of the author as he proceeds through the book.

Grasmick and Schreiner argued that tracing the argument is necessary in the process of interpreting a text, because it deals with the development of thought designed by the author to achieve his goal. In fact, tracing the argument may demand steps that can lead us to understand the relationship between ideas. Tracing the argument starts with reconstructing the argument used by Paul. So therefore, we need to ask questions about the function of different propositions in the text until we can see how the entire paragraph or letter fits together. Focusing on the relationship between propositions also helps the interpreter to understand the argument better (Schreiner 1990:100).

## **2.6. Application**

The aim of exegesis is to understand the intended meaning of the author and then to apply it to the present audience.

There is no disagreement among scholars on the purpose of exegesis towards determining the meaning of a passage. However, some exegetes

insist that the goal of exegesis is simply for the determination of the meaning of a passage to its original audience. However, they are neglecting what the passage says to modern reader who desires to understand and benefit from the word of God (Stuart 1984:688).

In fact, there are two wrong ideas in relation to application; the first is interpretation is enough; that is; bible study is complete when a passage has been interpreted. The second is to move toward application before fully and accurately interpreting the passage (Zuck 1984:279).

Many scholars agree with Stuart (1984:688) and Zuck (1984:279) that application should be after the passage is interpreted properly and accurately, for the exegete should know first the author's intended meaning of the passage and then apply it to his/her audience. Without understanding the right meaning of the text it is not easy to apply the text to our audience, because exegesis should be done before trying to make an application. Understanding the real situation of the audience, their relationship with the author and his reason for writing that letter help to realize the right meaning of the text.

Therefore, in interpreting the Pauline epistles, first of all the interpreter has to understand that epistles are the word of God to an audience of that time and similarly God can use them to speak to us today. Secondly, he/she has to comprehend that a text has one meaning though it might have multiple applications. Thirdly, he/she has to understand the context of the book, tracing the flow of thought, studying words to understand the message intended by the author and finally apply it to his/her life and the life of others.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Context of the passage**

This chapter deals with the general background, historical context and literary context of 1 Corinthians.

#### **3.1. General background**

General background of the book of 1 Corinthians covers authorship, date and audience.

##### **3.1.1. Authorship**

Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians is uncontested. It is generally acknowledged that Paul was the author (Mare 1976:179). Datiri (2006:1377) has also said that the character, style, and language of 1 Corinthians are all consistent with what we know of Paul's letters. Furthermore, Keener (1993:45) said all scholars accept 1 Corinthians as Pauline. Morris (1985:28) has also informed us that 1 Corinthians is cited in 1 Clement 47:1, as the first New Testament document with its author Paul.

According to Kistemaker (1993:23-24), this epistle has both internal and external credentials as being Pauline, and mentioned out as follows:

##### **3.1.1.1. Internal evidences**

- a. Paul refers to himself in many places of the letter itself (1:1, 12, 13; 3:4, 5, 22; 16:21).
- b. The salutation, address, blessing, and thanksgiving at the beginning and the greetings and doxology at the conclusion are similar to those in Paul's other epistles.
- c. Cross reference to Acts and Pauline epistles in several places match up with names and topics that are discussed in this letter (1Cor 1:1 with Acts 18:17; 1Cor 1:14 with Acts 18:8 and 1Cor 16:19 with Acts 18:2-3).

### **3.1.1.2. External evidences**

Morris (1985:28) says that both the external and internal evidences for the Pauline authorship are strong. Early external evidences have also confirmed this conclusion, such as Clement of Rome, to the Corinthians (Ch 47); Polycarp, to the Philippians (Ch 11); Irenaeus, against heresies (4, 27, and 45) (Mare 1976:179).

Kistemaker has mentioned external evidences as:

”Toward the end of the first century, Clement of Rome appeals to 1 Corinthians as “the letter to the blessed Paul, the apostle”. .... During the second century, the authenticity of this epistle was well established. Justin Martyr quotes directly from 11:19 in Chapter 35 of his dialogue with Trypho. Marcion has also incorporated 1 Corinthians in his canon. In the last quarter of the second century, the Muratorian canon ascribes the Corinthian letters to Paul. Furthermore, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian quoted from this epistle many times (Kistemaker 1993: 23-24).

The above mentioned scholars agree that the author is Paul. Literary style of Paul’s writings in the other epistles is also similar to 1 Corinthians in its salutation, thanksgiving at the beginning, address, blessing, and doxology at the conclusion.

### **3.1.2. Date and Place of writing**

Marsh argued on the date and place of writing as follows:

While it is impossible to date the letter with certainty, if we allow time for the writing of the first letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, it seems that Paul wrote this letter towards the end of his three years ministry in Ephesus, probably around AD 55 (Marsh 1979:1348).

Morris (1985:30), Datiri (2006:1377) and Theiselton (2000:32) have also stated that the place of origin is indicated by Paul’s statement, “I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost (16: 8) probably during his long stay there on his third missionary journey. Acts 18:12, reveals that Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, was in Corinth during Paul’s stay around AD 52. From this, we learn that the letter was probably written around AD 55 (Marsh1979:1348).

All the scholars mentioned above agree on the date and place of writing of 1 Corinthians that it was written around AD 55. Furthermore, Paul's own words in 1 Corinthians 16:8 indicate that the origin of the letter was Ephesus.

## **3.2. Literary and historical context of the book**

### **3.2.1. Occasion and Purpose**

#### **3.2.1.1. Occasion**

The occasion of the epistle was that Paul had received information about the Corinthian Church in different ways. Some members of the household of Chloe had notified him of the divisions (1:11) in which the Corinthians were connecting themselves to the names Paul, Peter, Apollos and even that of Christ. There were also individuals such as Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who had come to assist Paul in his ministry (1 Cor 16:17), though we do not know whether these were the ones from Chloe's household (Morris 1985:25).

According to Metz (1968:300) some of those who had come to Paul, though not known in name, brought information with reference to moral irregularities in the church (5-6). Other Corinthian visitors had also brought a letter from the church that requested counsel on several subjects (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Fee (1987:7) suggested that the information was brought to Paul by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Archiacus (16:15-17).

Morris (1985:27) stated that the occasion for writing the epistle to the Corinthians was as follows:

- a. Chloe's people (1:11)
- b. News of the situation coming as a result of a visit of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus to Ephesus (16:17).
- c. The most direct news coming from the church itself

Theiselton (2000:32-33) has also argued that there are four distinct occasions of writing to which Paul responds:

- a. The oral report brought to Paul by “Chloe’s people (1:11), who were business agents or responsible manager slaves acting on Chloe’s behalf.
- b. There is also clear and explicit evidence that Christians in Corinth had written a letter of inquiry as a response to the earlier letter (7:1).
- c. A number of Christians at Corinth wanted to receive a further visit from Apollos.
- d. Better news may have come through Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17-18).

Almost all the scholars agree that the main reason for writing the letter to the Corinthians was the information Paul received from several sources concerning the conditions existing in the church at Corinth. It is mentioned in the book itself, some of those who had come from Chloe’s people brought information about moral problems and divisions (1:11). The other source of information to Paul was that some Christians, probably the people who visited and supplied Paul what was lacking (16:17), brought a letter from the church that demanded a response (7:1).

#### **3.2.1.2. Purpose**

1 Corinthians is a letter concerned with the reformation of conduct. Having dealt with these problems, Paul turns to the matters mentioned in the letter written to him, questions about marriage, about celibacy, food offered to idols, about public worship and spiritual gifts (Morris 1985:26).

Furthermore, Morris (1985:26) says that some recent scholars, notably W. Schmithals (Abington, 1972), have argued that the epistle must be seen against a background of Gnosticism at Corinth. Similarly, Willi Marxsen regards 1 Corinthians as polemic against Gnosticism (Introduction, 72).

On the contrary, Conzelman (1975:15) denies that there are any traces of a Gnostic myth in Corinth. He finds only isolated traces of the beginnings of the formation which later presented themselves as Gnosticism. Similarly, Bruce

(1971:21) suggests that it is not right to call the Corinthians Gnostics. Morris (1985:26) also says that Gnosticism as a system does not seem to be attested until the second century A.D. In fact, some of its ideas were in existence in the first century. It may be that the Corinthians held to some ideas similar to the teachings of the Gnostics, but this does not make them Gnostics.

I agree with what Conzelman, Bruce and Morris say about Gnosticism in relation to the Corinthians. Because in the first century although there was no teaching called Gnosticism there might be traces of its ideas. Wilson (1973:74) suggests that at Corinth, there might be uncertain beginnings of what was later to develop into full-scale Gnosticism; and warns that careless and indiscriminate use of terms like Gnostic and Gnosticism in this connection is dangerous and misleading.

Morris stated that (1985:27) Paul's purpose is principally:

- a. To set right problems which the Corinthians took lightly but which he saw as grave sins,
- b. To answer questions asked by the Corinthians,
- c. To give doctrinal teaching.

Similarly, Mare (1995:1774) says that Paul's purposes for writing 1 Corinthians were:

- a. To instruct and restore the church in areas such as: division (1:10-4:21), immorality (5; 6:12-20), litigation in pagan courts (6:1-8), abuse of the Lord's supper (11:17-34).
- b. To correct false teaching concerning the resurrection (15).
- c. To answer questions addressed to Paul in the letter that had been brought to him.

Mare has also says that Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians is as follows:

"Paul's purpose was to correct certain serious doctrinal errors, moral failures and irregularities of Christian living including disorderly conduct in worship. These also include false views of resurrection of Christ and the body (1 Co 15), incest, adultery and sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5),



court (1 Cor. 6), misuse of Christian liberty (1 Cor. 5 and 10), disorders in observing the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34), and disorders in the worship service (1 Cor. 12- 14). Finally, Paul wanted the Corinthians to participate in the offering he was taking for Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4)" (Mare 1976:180).

Lowery (1983:506) also suggests that Paul has directed his message along three lines:

- a. The first six chapters were an attempt to correct the disputes in the church brought to his attention by Chloe's servants (1:11), and to bring about unity in perspective and practice.
- b. Beginning in Chapter 7 Paul addressed certain questions about marital issues (7:1), liberty and responsibility (8:1), spiritual gifts and church order (12:1).
- c. He reaffirmed and defended the doctrine of resurrection which some denied (15).

First Corinthians is an occasional letter directed to the immediate local needs of Paul's converts. The suggestions of the above mentioned scholars, Morris, Mare, and Lowery, are similar and their conclusions are that: Paul wrote this letter to instruct the Corinthians and restore their spiritual corruptions such as: division, immorality, litigation in pagan courts and abuse of the Lord's Supper. In addition he sought to correct false teaching concerning the resurrection, to answer questions addressed to Paul in the letter and to motivate them, so that they might participate in the offerings he was taking for Christians in Jerusalem.

### **3.2.2. Structure and Argument**

According to Keener (456:1993) the overall structure of 1 Corinthians is as follows: Chapters 1-4 deals with division in the church caused by people giving a higher status to rhetorically skilled speakers. Some higher status members may have justified sexual offenses (Chs 5-7). There were also conflicts over higher and lower status views of meat and communal meals (Chs 8-11), high and low status views of head coverings (Chs 11:2-16) and

possibly, higher status to philosophical/ mystical currents (Chs 12-14), and views of the body and immorality (Ch 15).

Morris has also structured (1985:32-34) 1 Corinthians as follows: introduction (1 Cor. 1:1-9), division in the church (1 Cor. 1:10-5:21), moral laxity in the church (Chs 5:1-6:20), marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-40), meat sacrifice to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1), disorders in public worship (1 Cor. 11:2-14:40), the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-58), and conclusion (1 Cor. 16:1-24).

Datiri (2006:1398) structured it as: Introduction (1 Cor. 1:1-9), the church divided (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21), issues of morality in the church (1 Cor. 5:1-6:20), issues concerning social relationships (1 Cor. 7:1-11:1), issues concerning public worship (1 Cor. 11:2-14:40), questions about the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-58), and conclusion (1 Cor. 16:1-24). Furthermore, Lowery (1983:506-507) has structured first Corinthians as: Introduction (1 Cor. 1:1-9), division in the church (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21), disorders in the church (1 Cor. 5:1-6:20), difficulties in the church (1 Cor. 7:1-16:12), conclusion (1 Cor. 16:13-24).

Fee (1987:21-23), has also his own suggestion:

- a. Introduction (Ch 1:1-9)
- b. In response to reports (Chs 1:10-6:20), division (Chs 1:10-4:20) and immorality and litigation (Chs 5:1-6:20)
- c. In response to Corinthian letter (Chs 7:1-16:12) which is divided as marriage and related matters (Ch 7:1-40), food sacrificed to idols (Chs 8:1-11:1), women and men in worship (Ch 11:2-16), abuse of the Lord's supper (Ch 11:17-34), spiritual gifts and spiritual people (Chs 12:1-14:40), the resurrection of believers (Ch 15:1-58), about the collection (Ch 16:1-11), about the coming of Apollos (Ch 16:12)
- d. Concluding matters (Ch 16:13-24).

All the scholars mentioned above use similar structures though they use slight differences in labeling some sections of the selected passage. Fee's way of structuring is best for it is more detailed than others and seems helpful to

interpret and to understand the epistle. Similarly, the particular portion for my research (1 Cor 7:1-16) is independently well structured by Fee as follows:

To the married (or formerly married) stay as you are (7:1-16)

- a. No abstinence within marriage (7:1-7)
- b. Either singleness or marriage for the “unmarried” and widows (7:8-9)
- c. No divorce for Christian partners (7:10-11)
- d. No divorce for mixed marriages (7:12-16)

### **3.2.3. Themes and Motifs**

We may say that the major theme in the book of 1 Corinthians is unity because there was division in the church.

Mare (1976:181) contended that several theological emphasis stand out in 1 Corinthians and are related to the daily living of Christians as well as to the corporate testimony of the worshipping church. Then he mentioned all the themes as follows:

- a. Resurrection (Ch.15)
- b. Condemning sexual immorality (Chs 5 and 6)
- c. Marriage (Ch. 7)
- d. Responsibility of a Christian brother (Chs 8 and 10)
- e. Spiritual gifts (Chs 12-14)

Similarly, Scott (1993:178) states the following themes:

- a. The Church of God is the most important theme (1:1), the temple of God (3:16-17,14:24-25) and the body of Christ (6:17, 10:17, 11:29, 12:12-16,27)
- b. Ethics (5:7-8, 6:1-6, 7:29-31, 10:11)
- c. Faith and Obedience framed by the cross (1:10-4:21)
- d. The resurrection of Christ (15)

From Barrett's (1968:17) point of view the themes are as follows:

- a. Christology – Christ is the wisdom of God
- b. Anthropology – Paul argued based on analogy of human functions

On the other hand, Fee tries to relate every theme with eschatology saying that “as much as in any of his writings, the essentially eschatological framework of Paul’s theological thinking stands out in bold relief in this letter” (1987:16-19). Furthermore, though Fee (1987:16-19) mentions eschatological affairs in each theme, for the reason that he tries to look at all of them in the light of eschatology.

The major themes according to Fee are:

- a. Eschatology (15:49-53) – Though we live in bodies subject to decay (15:49-53), there is yet a future coming of the Lord (15:23), with the subsequent resurrection (11:26, 15:23).
- b. The Gospel and the Ethical life (7:1-9, 9:21, 5:7-8, 6:14-17). The pattern for all believers is Christ Himself (11:1).
- c. The Church – As God’s temple and the body of Christ (3:16-17, 10:17, 11:29, 12:12-26)

I agree with what Mare, Stott and Barrette, who at least mention similar themes of 1 Corinthians. But the way Fee tries to state the themes, relating them to eschatology, is some what overstated because the letter rotates around the themes related to Christian conduct, and Paul touched many essential issues in the process of discussing their problems. Therefore, the theological themes of first Corinthians are related to the Church as the temple of God and as the body of Christ (3:16-17, 6:17, 10:17, 11:29, 12:12-16, 27:14:24-25), Christ as the wisdom of God (Ch 1-2), Ethics (7:1-9, 9:21, 5:7-8, 6:14-17), Marriage (7:1-40), Spiritual gifts (Ch 12- 14) and Resurrection (15).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Meaning of the passage**

#### **4.1. Preliminary Analysis**

This section deals with a detailed analysis of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, which contains boundaries, literary analysis and exegetical synthesis.

##### **4.1.1. Boundaries**

Lowery (1983:518) has suggested that 1 Corinthians 7:1-24 deals with marital issues and tried to divide them this way: 7:1-9 deals with marriage and celibacy and 7:10-24, with marriage and divorce. Similarly, Bruce (1978:965) divides Chapter 7 as: 7:1-11, for marriage relation and 7:12-24 for mixed marriages.

On the other hand, Kistemaker (1993:206), Keener (2000:465–46), Prior (1985:114), Morris (1985:33) and Fee (1987:268), argued in a similar way that the idea that starts from 7:1 ends with verse 16 of the same chapter.

The second suggestion seems more convincing because chapter 7:1-16 deals with those who are already married and/or formerly married, but whose marriages have been dissolved, most probably by death. Issues in relation to virgins start in verses 25, where Paul began with a new topic, because the term virgin *parthenos* in Greek refers to a young woman who is not yet married, and this group is not mentioned in the preceding verses of the chapter (Fee 2001:92).

The best structure of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, is therefore the way Fee divided the passage. Fee sees 7:1-7, as addressed to the married telling them to

“stay married with full conjugal rights” verses 8-9, addresses the unmarried and widows encouraging them to remain unmarried, Verses 10-11 – speak to “the married”, where both partners are believers, commanding them to remain married, in verses 12-16, Paul addresses those with an unbelieving spouse.

The whole passage seems to speak about one issue, which is ‘sexual intimacy and relationship’, with Paul’s response to the Corinthians letter, which came out of their slogan: “it is not good for a man to touch a woman”. Paul uses the phrase “now concerning” (Greek *peri-de*), which is a clue of starting another subject; such as in 7:1 in relation to sex within marriage; another in 7:25 in relation to virginity. In addition, in 8:1 in relation to food idolatry; another in 12:1 for spiritual gifts; another in 16:1 in relation to offering; and in 12:16 in relation to Apollos (Fee 1987:267-68).

#### **4.1.2. Analysis and Synthesis**

Paul has spoken about the dangers of sexuality outside of marriage in chapter 6, and then in chapter 7, he turns to the duty of sexuality with in marriage. In chapter 7, Paul starts his argument with the words “it is good ....”.

Bruce (1971:66) argues that the slogan “it is good ...” was from the Corinthians for there were ascetics who claim Christians who were unmarried should henceforth live as though they were unmarried, and those who were unmarried should remain so. Horton (1999:68) also argues that Paul quotes the words “it is good ...” from the letter of the Corinthians. Kistemeker (1993:209) informed that the words “it is good ...” in 1 Corinthians 7:1 is a slogan of the Corinthians. Theiselton (2000:494, 501) also contends that verse 1b is best understood as of quotation from Corinth with which Paul does not agree. Similarly, Rulef (1977:53), BLomberg (1994:1332), Fee (1987:270), and Hays (1976:113) argued that the words “it is good...” are quotations from what the Corinthians letter, because Paul could not have advocated celibacy for everyone.

On the other hand, Laurin (1987:85) comments that Paul says that in view of the conditions prevailing in their time (i.e. the present distress of the church),

to remain unmarried was a good thing. Hodge (1994:108) has also argued that Paul says “it is good for a man not to marry” does not mean that marriage is morally evil as compared with celibacy. Similarly, Mare (1976:227) says that the phrase “it is good ...” is Paul’s suggestion specifically for Corinth because of some present crisis there.

I agree with the scholars who argued that the words “it is good...” are quoted from the Corinthians slogan, because, Paul quotes from the Corinthian slogan on marriage relations, mentioned in their letter to him, which actually speaks about sexual relations in marriage. Paul argues by rejecting the Corinthians advancement of marital celibacy to refute their wrong understandings. Since Paul could not have supported celibacy for everyone, otherwise he would be contradicting God’s utterance, “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). In the selected passage, 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, Paul mentions three groups: the married and the formerly married, widowers and widows, and those whose spouse is an unbeliever.

Paul says that all the married and the formerly married should not change their status but rather stay as they are. The words: ‘each man/woman should have his/her husband/wife’ (vv. 2-3); or ‘do not deprive’ (v. 5); ‘each man has his own gift from God’ (v. 7); or ‘stay unmarried’ (v. 8); and he/ she must not divorce her/him’ (vv. 12-13) shows clearly that Paul is commanding all the four groups to stay as they are. From Paul’s argument we can understand that the Corinthians’ position in relation to sexual relations in marriage was not right, for it seems that they were influenced by a sort of dualistic philosophy, saying matter is evil and spirit is good, (Fee 1987:269).

Hays (1989:114) has also suggested that some of the Christians may have concluded that sexuality was part of a “fleshly”, unspiritual existence, so as far as being holy in the body and spirit one ought to give up sexual relations. In fact, this type of asceticism was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean culture. As a result, some encourage any one to do everything with his/her

body he/she wants and others tend towards celibacy for they thought asceticism is spirituality.

## **4.2. Arguments**

Before we proceed to deal with the detailed arguments of the selected passage, it will be helpful to draw a block diagram.

### **4.2.1. Block diagram of 1 Corinthians 7:1-16**

The block diagram I am going to use below is a format model taken from (Kaiser 1981:99-103; 165-181).

Kaiser elaborates block diagramming as follows:

Block diagramming focuses on the total flow and thread of meaning throughout the whole paragraph rather than on isolated abstractions of individual words or phrases. Which is helpful to see what is the theme proposition and what is the subordinate. Block diagramming attempts to analyze all the sentences in a paragraph and to put them in a graphic design so as to show how they function together as a paragraph. In order that the interrelationships of whole sentences, clauses and phrases might be visually apparent at a glance.

Grasmick also defines diagramming as:

A diagram of a sentence is a graphic portrayal of the inter-relationships of its component parts. Diagramming is a grammatical visual aid. When the exegete has the words laid out visually, he is able to wrestle with their meaning with greater ease and proficiency (Grasmick 1974:81).

Block diagramming helps us by tracing the argument. Schreiner elaborated tracing the argument as follows:

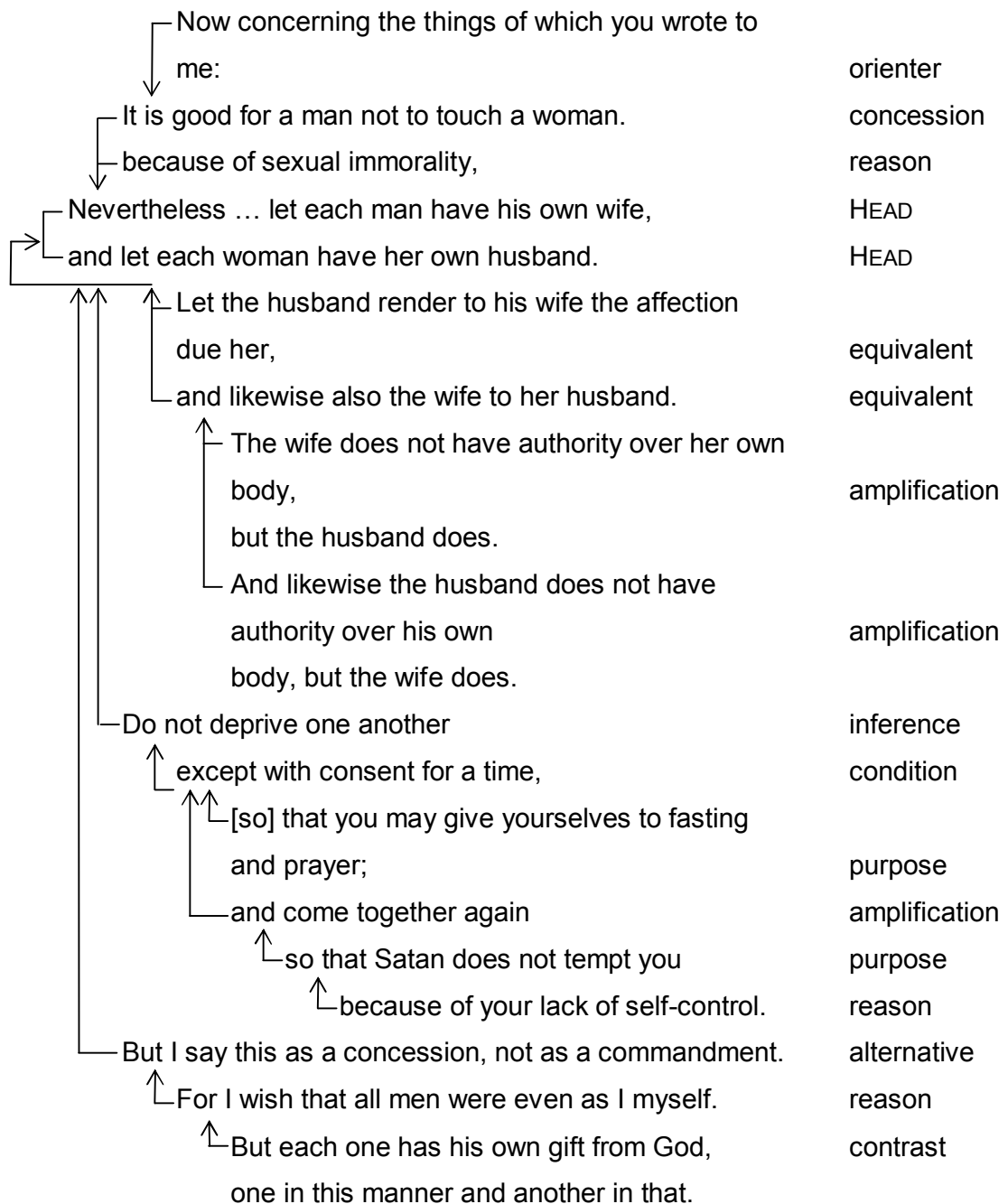
Tracing the argument involves isolating different propositions, trace the argument schematically and explaining the main and supporting points in the text (Schreiner 1990:113).

Tracing the argument is helpful in the process of interpreting a text and to understand the right meaning of the text as the author intended. The block diagram used for the selected passage (1 Cor. 7:1-16) is a format model taken from Kaiser, which I think includes the ideas of Schreiner's (1990:113) and Grasmick's (1974:81) about diagramming and tracing the argument. In the process of diagramming a text; each proposition, clause, and phrase has



to be written in the natural order of the text. And the order and link between the sentences should be based on the idea that the theme proposition in a paragraph is to be brought out to the left-hand margin. Then the syntactical units which directly qualify the theme proposition be slightly indented, and units subordinate to the theme are indented one step further. Then finally link them using arrows (Kaiser 1981:99-100).

### 1 Corinthians 7:1-7



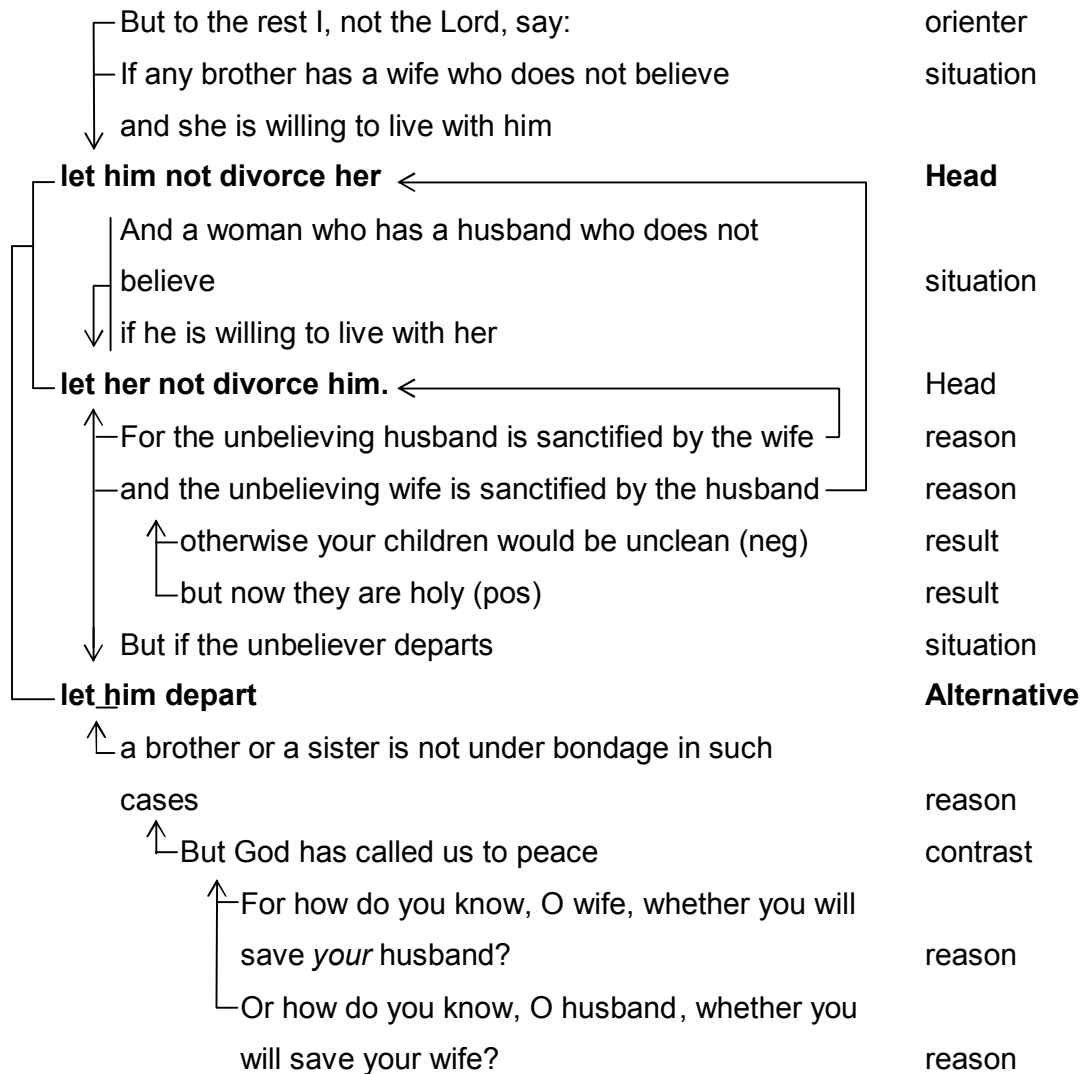
**1 Corinthians 7:8-9**

<p>               But I say to the unmarried and to the widows:              It is good for them if they remain even as I am;              but ... let them marry.                  ↑ if they cannot exercise self-control                      ↑ For it is better to marry than to burn with                          passion.         </p>	<p>orienter</p> <p>HEAD</p> <p>concession</p> <p>situation</p> <p>reason</p>
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**1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

<p>               Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord:              A wife is not to depart from her husband.                  ↑ even if she does depart,                      ↓ But ... let her remain unmarried                      or be reconciled to her husband.              And a husband is not to divorce his wife.         </p>	<p>orienter</p> <p>HEAD</p> <p>situation</p> <p>contrast</p> <p>alternative</p> <p>HEAD</p>
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**1 Corinthians 7:12-16**



**4.2.2. Detail Arguments**

**4.2.2.1. To the Married (7:1-7)**

Paul tells the married to stay married having the conjugal rights. No prolonged sexual abstinence is allowed within marriage (7:1-7).

Paul starts his argument with the phrase “now concerning”, which shows a beginning of a new idea. In the previous chapters Paul has responded to the Corinthians based on the report or information he got from Chloe’s family (1:10-12; 5:1). But from 7:1 to 16 Paul is answering specific questions asked

by the Corinthians in their letter to him, the first of which is marriage, where 7:1a says "... for the matters you wrote about".

To comprehend the meaning of verse 1b in the context of verses 2-16, it is better to understand the meaning of the phrase 'to touch a woman' as in KJV, and "to marry" as in NIV. Fee and Stuart (Fee and Stuart 2003:46) comment that "to touch a woman" is better than "to marry". Because in every other case in antiquity 'to touch a woman' means to have sexual intercourse with a woman and never means anything close to the phrase "to marry". Fee and Stuart continued saying that NAB has also used equivalent euphemism by saying "... having relations with a woman". But the TNIV eliminated the euphemism altogether saying "... to have sexual relations with a woman".

Similarly, Hays (1989:113) indicated that "to touch a woman" is a common euphemism. This means that to have sexual intercourse with a woman and this expression is never used to mean "to marry" as the NIV misleadingly translates it. Theiselton (2000:500) also argues that in the middle voice with the genitive meaning to touch or to take hold of occurs widely in Greek literature as a euphemism for to have sexual intercourse with someone. Actually, the Bible uses the verb "to touch" as a euphemism for sexual intercourse as we see in Genesis 20:6 and Proverbs 6:29. The same way in most of the Northern rural Ethiopia, such as: Gondar, Gojam and Tigray "to touch a woman" means to have sexual intercourse with her<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, the conjunction 'but' in verse 2 shows the flow of thought, between verse 1 and verse 2, and Paul's negation of the slogan of the Corinthians. It may be clear if we comprehend verse 1a by understanding verse 2 which speaks about the husband to have his wife and the wife to have her husband, rather than marriage. Hays (1989:113) has said that the verb "to have" does not mean those who are unmarried should find spouses, but in this context, it means "to enjoy sexual possession of another person", rather than saying to marry, for Paul clearly says husband and wife. Quite the

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Leweyehu Sinishaw. OI on March 14, 2007, at 9am.

opposite, Datiri (2007:1384) says that verse 2 shows the monogamous type of marriage that Paul was commanding. Similarly, Morris (1985:102) argues that Paul is saying in the face of such temptation each should be married and have his own wife and vice-versa, which is monogamy.

Nevertheless, Paul's intention was not to encourage the unmarried to get married; rather, to reject the very idea of those who advocate abstinence from sexual relations within marriage. Furthermore, Paul encourages the husband and wife to continue in good sexual relations. Abstinence will lead to temptations such as adultery. The verb "to have" in the passage clearly means to have sexual relations within marriage and this is because of uncontrolled sexual immoralities.

Fee (1987:278) commented that Paul mentioned sexual immoralities he is referring to extramarital sexual intercourse, with direct reference to 6:12-20; where most probably married men were going to the temple prostitutes. Likewise, the phrase in 7:5, "because of your lack of self control" is a similar concept because it speaks about those who are already married.

Verses 3-5 are added as an explanation of verse 2, and speak about the character of marriage and mutual submission within marriage, stressing on giving oneself rather than getting. Verse 5 seems to be the main point within the boundary of 3-5. Because Paul is arguing that married partners should "not deprive" (NIV, NKJV); which is mentioned in other translations as follows: defraud ye not (ASV, KJV); stop depriving (NAS, NASB); not refuse one another (RSV); not refuse these rights (TLB) (v. 5), rather to fulfill his/her marital duty (v. 3) that is "not to forbid sex to one another". The wife possesses her husband's body in the same way as the husband possesses his wife's body (v. 4). However, in the case of devoted prayer and fasting, they can abstain from sexual relations by mutual agreement for a short period of time.

Verse 5 shows the connection between the temptation and the reason for that temptation. Paul meant that they can abstain for a short period of time but they have to return to the proper sexual relations after the agreed days are finished. Otherwise, they can be tempted by Satan to commit adultery.

Fee (1987:279) commented that in Corinth one partner was depriving the other of sexual relations, probably for spiritual reasons. That is why Paul mentioned that sexual relations should be due within marriage (v. 3) because the body is not one's free possession but also belongs to one's spouse (v. 4). Theiselton (2000:507) also informed that a significant number at Corinth were already claiming that spiritual priorities took precedence over physical intimacy. Lowery (1983:517) has also suggested that some in Corinth were trying to practice celibacy within marriage, and such practices some times lead to immorality on the part of the other mate (v. 2; v. 5b).

Moreover, Hale (1996:424) comments that in many of the cultures, in Paul's time and similarly today, the wife is considered to be the property of her husband. In such societies all authority and all rights belong to the husband. The wife only has the right to honor, obey and serve her husband and she is considered a slave.

I agree with the similar ideas suggested by Fee, Theiselton, Lowery and Hale that in the church in Corinth marriage partners were depriving each other for the spiritual reason.

Finally, Paul concluded this paragraph (vv. 1-7) by mentioning that abstinence for the time being is his special concession but not the Lord's, which seems to be his personal preference, a sort of compromise, so that, every one may be like him (vv. 6-7).

Barrett considers that "this" in verse 6 refers to verse 2, and Paul means that, I am not commanding you to marry, when I say 'let each man have his own wife ...', but merely granting that, you may marry. Mare (1976:229); Hodge

(1974:110-11); and Findlay (1961:824) agree with Barrett. On the other hand, Morris (1985:107) and Conzelmann (1975:118) state that 'this' in v. 6 refers to vv 2-5, and means that Paul is not commanding the Corinthians not to marry, but giving them a special concession that they may marry. Orr and Walter (1976:11), also argued differently that 'this' in v 6 refers to the next paragraph through v. 9 and it points forward as often in Paul.

But Fee (1987:279) replies that whether it refers to v. 2 or to vv. 2-5 together, the real concession is not to marriage, rather to their resultant sexual immoralities. Lowery (1983:517) also comments that 'this' refers to the possibility for temporary abstention from sexual intercourse in marriage.

What Fee and Lowery say is convincing, because whether 'this' in v. 6 refers to v. 2 or to vv. 2-5, or to v.5, makes no difference at all, for the passage in general speaks about one issue, sexual practices within marriage. Paul means that abstinence is not necessarily to be desired. In fact, 'this' does not refer to the next paragraph through v. 9, as Orr commented, because vv. 8-9 deals with another group, the unmarried and widows, it starts with 'now to ...' which shows a start for another group.

Paul's own preference was that 'everyone should be like him' v.7 but he added that this should be based on the gift God may give, for one has a gift to marry and another has a gift to be in the celibate state. Paul meant that the married are not to be in the state of celibacy, because celibacy is for the celibate not for the married. This means that, sex in marriage should not be abused by advocating celibacy, for married partners should have good sexual relations through self sacrifice. And if there is abstinence, it should be by mutual agreement for a short period of time. On the other hand, Paul was showing the Corinthians that his celibacy is a gift from God. So, anyone who wants to live in the state of celibacy should be gifted and at the same time unmarried or single. Fee (2001:95) adds that true celibacy does not mean simply singleness, rather to be free from any need of sexual fulfillment, and celibacy of this kind is a gift.

#### **4.2.2.2. *The unmarried and widows***

Paul continued to give more detailed instructions to the unmarried and widows, still referring to the Corinthians slogan 'it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman'.

It is necessary to know who the unmarried are in order to understand what Paul tried to say in verses 8 and 9. According to Barrett (1968:160) the Greek word for the 'unmarried' is masculine, but probably intended to cover both sexes. Lowery (1983:518) says that the 'unmarried' are those who are single but sexually experienced and includes divorced persons of both sexes as well as widowers. Similarly, Morris (1985:104) argued that the 'unmarried' (Greek: *agamois*), is a broad term including all who are not bound in a marriage contract.

But Hays (1989:118) says that the word unmarried is used here to refer to widowers, excluding all those who are not married. Fee (1987:287-88) states that in antiquity most cultures had a word for widows; yet, they did not always have a word for the male counterpart. Greek has such a word, but it appears seldom to have been used, and never in the *koine* period in which *agamois* served in its place.

Fee continued by saying that:

Throughout the entire passage Paul deals with husbands and wives in mutuality, 12 times in all; it would seem to fit naturally into the total argument and to see that pattern as well. So, widowers seem to be the best understanding of the word here (Fee 1987:288).

Theiselton (2000:517) argues that the unmarried mentioned here are a class of people that includes widowers and both men and women who are single, separated, or divorced.

The word unmarried seems to refer to the widowers, who were formerly married but are now single due to the death of their spouse. This is because, in the entire passage Paul argues, using both genders mutually. Secondly, if the word refers to all the unmarried, there is no need to mention the widows here, for it would be an unnecessary repetition. Thirdly, since v. 25 deals with



the virgins, it seems that there is no need to mention the virgins with the group in v. 8. In fact, though not correctly, the RSV has translated the word unmarried in v.8 and the virgins in v. 25 as “unmarried”.

Fee (1987:289) comments that the widows and widowers were practicing sexual immorality as in 6:12-20, but verses 8 and 9 say nothing about such practice. Theiselton (2000:518-19) suggests that Paul’s idea in (vv. 8-9) is that if the widows and widowers do not have power over their passions, they have to marry. I prefer Theiselton’s idea because Paul started his argument saying that it is good for them to stay unmarried as I am (v. 8), but this can be applicable only for those who have the gift from God. Otherwise, those without the gift may be tempted to commit sexual immorality (v. 9).

#### **4.2.2.3. To those Married (7:10-11)**

Paul continued his discussion of marriages, where both partners are Christians. Paul advised the widowers and widows to stay single in vv.8-9, the same directive is given in verses 10-11, where the married couple should stay together permanently but if a divorce happened they should stay single. He started by saying ‘this command is from the Lord (not I, but the Lord)’: meaning that this command is a command from the Lord Jesus Himself (Mt 5:32, 19:3-9; Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18). The command is that ‘a wife must not separate from her husband’ (v.10) and ‘a husband must not divorce his wife’ (v.11).

The two verses, 10 and 11, are connected with the conjunction ‘but’ which implies an idea opposite to the command. If the marriage went on against the ideal expectation, meaning if divorce happened, the other option which is a less evil preference is singleness. That is, ‘if she does separate’ breaking the command of the Lord, then she must stay unmarried or should be reconciled to her husband. Fee (1987:291) comments that, probably those who were advocating celibacy to all were also encouraging divorce for the sake of abstinence from sex.

Paul addresses both men and women all through the chapter, verses 10-11, refer to the Christian married partners, for verses 12-16 starts with 'the rest' whom that context defines as believers married to unbelievers (Fee 1987:290). Similarly, Keener (1993:446); Lowery (1983:518); Morris (1985:105); Barrett (1968:160) and Bruce (1971:68) equally share this idea.

Fee stands a little radical saying that:

The order of Paul's concern, which is addressed first and primarily to the women, leads credence to the suggestion that the problem stems basically from some "eschatological women" who were using their slogan (v. 1b) to reject sexual relations with their husbands (v. 5), and arguing for divorce if it came to that (Fee 1987:290).

On the other hand, Findlay (1900:825); Datiri (2006:1384) and Theiselton (2000:520) comment that at that time it was usually the husband who divorced his wife. And similarly in Corinth, the ascetic husband divorced his wife. Paul's word in (vv. 10-11) to the wife was that she should resist the divorce, and not remarry, but push towards reconciliation. Be it the husband or wife, whoever is ascetic, the issue Paul mentioned here, in verses 10-11, is prohibition of separation. If separation happened, staying single is the option or else reconciliation. In fact, Fee's suggestion (1987:290) that the problem stems from some women, seems convincing because of the statement added in 7:11 which refers only to the woman.

Furthermore, as Findlay (1900:825) and Datiri (2006:1384) comment, at that time the husband divorces his wife, as in the section (vv.10-11) Paul says a woman should not separate from her husband. In fact, the practice in the Greco Roman culture is worth considering here; namely that a woman could divorce her husband, contrary to the Jewish culture. Probably an actual case was occurring at the church in Corinth and Paul was dealing with a direct practical counsel to the specific individuals with the problem (Fee 1987:294).

Barrett (1968:162) also argues that Paul's use of different words 'separate', for the wife, and divorce, for the husband, (vv.10-11) may reflect the fact that in Judaism only the husband had the right to divorce; yet the use of both

words is the same. Similarly, Keener (1993:466), Hale (1996:425), Lowery (1983:815); assert that the terms leave and send away (NASV) and separate and divorce in (NIV) have the same meaning.

Our conclusion with Barrett and Keener is that the words translated depart and put away in (KJV); depart and leave in (ASV); leave and divorce in (NASU) and separate and divorce in (NIV) are all words dealing with the same issue and have the same meaning which is 'divorce'. The word used is the same word that is used in the expression 'no divorce' as commanded for believers.

#### **4.2.2.4. *Mixed Marriages (7:12-16)***

Paul continued his teaching on in relation to married couples where one partner is Christian and the other pagan. Paul's answer is consistent with what he has said in vv. 10-11, that is 'stay as you are'. The only exception (v. 14) is if the unbeliever initiates divorce and prefers to leave, the believer is not bond to maintain the marriage (v. 15). But the believer should never initiate divorce (vv. 12-13).

According to Fee (1987:298) the Corinthians with the famous slogan in v.1b, have not only argued for the suspension of sexual relations by divorce, but most likely added the ground that the pagan partner contaminated the marriage bond. To the contrary, Paul argues that mixed marriages are essentially Christian marriages. Bruce (1971:69) has suggested that the question may have been raised in the Corinthians letter: should not the believing partner separate from the other? Rather than be with an unbeliever? Lowery (1983:518) comments that probably some divorces in the Corinthian church may have been initiated because of the command of Ezra (Ezra 10:11) to dissolve themselves from pagan spouses. Probably the issue of those who encourage celibacy to all has also affected mixed marriages.

We may agree with what Fee and Lowery have said. The Corinthians were saying that if your marriage partner is not a believer no doubt you have to

divorce, for they thought it is defiling to live with a pagan partner. But what ever they say Paul's answer to them was: a big "no". If the unbeliever prefers to continue living with the believer, let the marriage continue as before.

Paul starts his argument with 'to the rest', that is those who are not categorized with verse 8 and verse 10. Bruce (1971:69) contends that 'to the rest' in verse 12 shows that the group in (vv. 12-14) are married couples, who are not mentioned in verses 8 and 10, in which one partner has become a Christian and the other remained an unbeliever. Similarly, Barrett (1968:163); Lowery (1983:518); Winter (1994:1171) and Morris (1985:106) suggested 'to the rest' shows married partners whose spouse is an unbeliever.

Therefore, 'to the rest' must mean to those whose marriage partner is an unbeliever, because cases apart from this group have been dealt with. Furthermore, the passage clearly speaks about married partners in which their spouse is an unbeliever. It seems that some were married before they became Christians and/or later one of the partners became a believer.

Paul continues to say 'I say this not the Lord' (v. 12) which seems opposite to what he said in v. 10, 'not I but the Lord'.

Barrett (1968:163) says that Paul is not saying that his words have no authority or less authority than those of v. 10, rather it is because Jesus in his earthly ministry did not have occasion to deal with mixed marriages between the people of God and unbelievers. Morris (1985:105) also says that when Paul says I, not the Lord, he did not mean that this is contrary to what the Lord has directed. Similarly, Hale (1996:425) adds that the reason for Paul saying this is because there is no written teaching of Jesus on such specific subject. In agreement with what Barrett, Morris and Hale say, I would like to add that what Paul said under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not with less authority.

Paul then says that if the unbelieving partner is willing to live with the believer, then the believer must remain with his/her partner. This is because the command 'no divorce' always works in the life of the believer. Therefore, the decision of whether or not to remain married should be left with the unbelieving partner, because the believer has no option but to obey the command 'no divorce' (vv. 12-13). This applies whether the believer is married to another believer or to an unbeliever.

Paul continues to mention his reason why the believer must stay with the unbelieving partner, starting with the conjunction 'for' (v. 14). The reason is that the unbelieving partner can be sanctified and children are holy through the believing partner. In order to understand what Paul is saying here, it is necessary to know the meaning of the words "sanctified" and "holy" translated "sanctified" in (NIV, NASB, and KJV) and consecrated in RSV, and uses "holy" in relation to children in all the translations.

Morris (1985:117) argues that, sanctified and holy are speaking about a person's relation to God, not of the person's righteousness. Paul means that the blessings from God to the believer can be extended to the unbeliever. In the same way, the parents' holiness extends to the child. There are examples in Scripture of blessings which were extended to others (Gen 15:18, 17:7, 18:26f; 1 Kings 15:4; Isa 37:4). Lowery (1983:518) and Hale (1996:425) also say that the words sanctified and holy, in this passage, refer to the blessings of God, which come to Christians. And then the blessings affect the family as a whole, such as: Jacob in Laban's household (Gen 30:27) and Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:5).

Similarly, Fee (1987:300) argues that when Paul tells the Corinthians not to have close association with immoral people (5:9-11), they might have misunderstood him. And they start to argue that such an association, with a pagan partner, 'defiles' the believing spouse. Paul then argues, it is not the believer who is defiled but the unbeliever who is sanctified. This means that, if the marriage is maintained the potential to realize salvation remains.

Theiselton (2000:530) has also suggested that, the terms sanctified and holy refer to the believers' spiritual influence upon the unbelieving spouse and their children. This spiritual influence can be true, if the unbeliever is willing to continue in relationship and the believing spouse lives an exemplary life of witness and prayer. As a result, the unbelieving spouse and their children may respond to the good news and accept Christ as their personal savior.

Morris, Lowery, Hale, Fee and Theiselton have suggested similar ideas. When Paul uses the words 'holy' and 'sanctified' he does not mean that the unbelieving spouse and their children will receive salvation because of the faith of the believing partner. Rather he means that God can use the believing partner as a channel and influence to bring his spouse to salvation.

Similarly, in relation to children until the child is old enough to take the responsibility upon himself, the child of a believing partner is to be regarded as a Christian (Morris 1985:107). The spiritual blessings which God gives to the believing spouse to some extent will also come upon the unbelieving spouse and their children. In this sense, the unbelieving spouse is sanctified and the children are holy.

The conjunction connecting the idea of verses 14 and 15 is "but" showing an exception for what Paul has said "stay as you are". This exception is not on the side of the believer for the command "no divorce" is already given to him, whether his partner is believer or not. If a pagan spouse seeks to be separated, then the believer can allow the divorce. Paul is essentially repeating his first sentence that the believer is not bound to maintain the marriage if the pagan partner opts out. Fee (1987: 302-03) argued that "called ... to peace" can be either living in peace, if the unbelieving partner is willing to live with the believer or that one should let the separation occur as peacefully as possible, with out creating any disturbance.

Morris (1985:108) comments that "not bound" means that the deserted partner is free to remarry. He continues to suggest in relation to "called ... to

peace” that this shows accepting the pagan partner’s decision that the marriage is at an end and it should be resolved in peace. Similarly, Hale (1996:425) comments on both “not bound” and “called ... to peace” together saying that, if the unbelieving spouse is always quarreling with the believing spouse, then let the marriage end. Hale says that the main reason for this type of separation is that, God is not pleased with a marriage full of strife.

Fee, Morris and Hale together affirm that “not bound” shows that if the unbelieving marriage partner is not willing to stay, the believer is not under obligation to continue living with the unbeliever. Rather, to agree with the resolution initiated by the unbeliever. But what Morris added saying that “not bound” means the believer is free to remarry, does not seem right because verses 15-16 say nothing about remarriage. Paul has mentioned another reason in (v. 16), second to (v.14), as to why a believer should stay with the unbelieving spouse.

Bruce (1971:69) contends that verse 16 speaks about the believing partner. “If you do not dissolve your marriage with the unbelieving partner, who is willing to remain, perhaps you will be the means to his/her salvation”. Morris (1985:108) has also commented that verse 16 shows probability because it is uncertain whether a believer will succeed in saving an unbelieving spouse, if the marriage continues, but it should be kept in the hope of conversion.

What Bruce and Morris say seems very reasonable. In (v. 16) Paul is saying that if the unbelieving partner is willing to stay, the believing spouse must continue to live together with the unbelieving spouse in the hope that he/she will become a Christian and be saved (1 Pet 3:1-2). “Save” is here used in the sense of bringing someone to Christ, so that he/she can believe and be saved. Moreover, the believer is responsible for saving his/her unbelieving marriage partner, for God can use him/her as a channel to reach the unsaved spouse.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Significance of the Passage**

1 Corinthians 7:1-16 had strong message to the Corinthians, because Paul had a precise meaning in mind when he wrote this letter to them. Furthermore, this passage has also an important thing to say to our contemporary life, for we consider it as God's word.

Paul has a message to the Corinthian Church, the married, widows and widowers that is "to stay as they are", with a special advice to the married, on how they should relate with each other. Before we proceed to its message and see the details, it is better to draw principles from the selected passage.

Principles that can be drawn from the passage are:

- 5.1. Do not stop having sexual relations within marriage; otherwise your marriage partners can be tempted into adultery (1 Cor. 7:5).
- 5.2. True married life is based on self-giving to a partner, not gaining from that partner (1 Cor. 7:3-4).
- 5.3. Divorce is prohibited to Christians, even if the marriage partner is an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:10-11, 12-13).
- 5.4. Widowers and widows should live according to their gift from God, whether they marry or stay in the celibate state (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

In general, the significance of the selected passage (1 Cor. 7:1-16) centers on the married, the widowers and widows.

Next the principles drawn above will be discussed in the context of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church, giving more attention to theological and practical applications. Data gathered through written interview of 81



carefully selected married couples, church leaders and other ministers from 50 churches of EFGBC and extra data gathered from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's books, priests and monks (Oral Interview) will be discussed here.

### **5.1. Do not stop sexual relations within the context of marriage**

According to the passage, the married are divided into two groups, believers whose spouses are believers (vv. 10-11) and believers whose spouses are unbelievers (vv. 12-16). However, it will be good to start with general principles to all the married, before looking at those groups.

Paul has started his argument by quoting what the Corinthians were advocating, that is "celibacy to all", which probably stems from an ascetic influence, which might have led them to conflicts in marriage and finally towards divorce (1 Cor. 7:1-7). Then Paul continues to argue giving general principles for the married partners, not to deprive one another. This is because they can be exposed to temptations of extramarital sex (v. 2). Paul tells them that if they are married they are not to live in a celibate life, for every one must live according to his/her gift from God, either to marry or to live in celibacy (v. 7).

In Ethiopia, though there are no exact similarities with the Corinthians experience of advocating celibacy to all and even to the married ones, abstinence in sexual relations with in marriage is common. The asceticism in the Corinthian church is similar to monastic cultures and practices in Ethiopia. Furthermore, there are also other related issues that hinder good marital intimacy. The major ones are outlined as follows:-

#### **5.1.1. Monasticism**

Monasticism in Ethiopia has begun as an extension of monastic influences from Syria and Egypt around the middle of fifth century. There were nine saints who came to Ethiopia due to the persecution by Byzantine rulers as a result of their Monophysite teaching. They ended up establishing monasteries;

engaged in translations and teaching their Monophysite theology, which had a long lasted influence upon the EOC teaching and liturgy (Metzger 1977:221) <sup>3</sup>.

There are still monasteries in Northern Ethiopia, named after the names of the nine saints with many people living there<sup>4</sup>.

For a large portion of Christians the monastic way seems to be the road through which to pursue the perfect Christian life and to attain the goal of the salvation of one's soul. However, practices of monasticism may differ from place to place, from time to time and from church to church (Latourette, 2003:443).

Those who advocate monasticism in Ethiopia believe that; if some one abstains from sexual relations he/she will be more righteous in the sight of God. Such practice is basically implemented in the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches and in the Ethiopian Catholic Churches, for they advocate that people can be dedicated fully by becoming monks and nuns. Even the married members of those churches practice abstinence, especially when they want to go to church on Sunday and take the Lord's Supper. Because they believe that if they have sexual relations with their spouse, before they go to church and/or take the Lord's Supper, they will be defiled and God may be annoyed<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, as mentioned in the EOC's publication on the teachings of doctrines and ethics (Fitha Negest 1998:150-151), there are seven periods of fasting in a year.

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<sup>3</sup> Some Monophysites, monks, nuns, priests and hermits, who have been condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, were persecuted by Byzantine rulers. Finally, they found refuge in Ethiopia, which remained unaffected by the religious controversies that were raging elsewhere. Among the immigrants, who came from Egypt and Syria, there were nine celebrated monks who were accorded the status of sainthood because of their missionary activity around Northern part of the Aksumite kingdom and reputation for piety in Ethiopia. Those monks founded monasteries and propagated Monophysite theology and as Arthur Voobus confirmed, they had a variety of details bearing on their religio-ascetic ideas and habits (Metzger 1977:221).

<sup>4</sup> Aba Tesfaye, OI. December 27, 2008; at 4:00 am.

<sup>5</sup> Aba Meleake Birhan OI. On December 30, 2008; at 11 am.

- a. Fasting of Jesus and Moses (40 days) and for the King of the Country (15 days) - 55 days, February – March
- b. Fasting of the Apostles – 25-35 days (Number of days vary from time to time but this fasting is held May-June)
- c. Fasting of Marry (Mother of Jesus), called Filseta – 16 days, in August
- d. Fasting of the prophets – 40 days, November – December
- e. Fasting of Nineveh – 3 days, in January and sometimes in February
- f. Fasting related to Jesus' baptism, called Gihad which means "revealed" for this was the day assumed to be the time when Jesus was publicly seen – 1 day, in January
- g. Fasting every Wednesday and Friday, for the whole year, considering that Wednesday as the day of Jesus' arrest and Friday as the day of His crucifixion.
- h. At the end of the list of fast days, there are strong indications that any one who fasts more than he/she is commanded, by his/her church, is great in faith and will be rewarded by God, more than anyone else. Furthermore, in addition to the above mentioned seven times of fasting, there are also other times of fasting recorded in the Egyptian Coptic Church and are recommended to be used by the EOC.

On the above mentioned fasting days, marriage partners are not allowed to have sexual relations with their spouse, especially those who faithfully and conservatively fast and pray. In fact, those who are not fasting and praying due to any reason are also commanded not to have sexual intercourse during those days. If they have sex, they will not be considered as genuine Christians, because it is considered as a transgression of the law of the EOC.

Furthermore, if any one who has sexual intercourse with his wife during fasting days "woe! to him" for it is a great sin because salvation and forgiveness of sin is through fasting (Fitha Negest 1998:155).

Moreover, having sexual intercourse with your marriage partner in every Saturday night and Sunday is forbidden, because they think that Saturday mid-night to Sunday 6 pm is holy day consecrated to God. Any one, who has

sexual intercourse with his marriage partner during this time, being a member of that church, will be punished by the priest of the church. The punishment can be as follows:

- To bow on the ground 150-300 times
- To pay some amount of money (3-10 Eth. birr)
- To sleep on the floor of his/her house, without mattress, for a set number of days<sup>6</sup>

If the person who has sexual intercourse with his/her marriage partner is a priest or a deacon he will not serve in the church for 30-40 days, which is 4-5 Sunday's worship time<sup>7</sup>.

As many believers in EFGBC have come from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church background, their understanding about sexual relations is greatly influenced by the teachings of the Church. As a result, many married members and ministers of EFGBC, very often do practice abstinence in sexual relations.

According to the replies given by 31 percent of the respondents some of the main tangible practices in relation to sexual relations are as follows:

- a. If a minister is going to deliver a message on Sunday morning worship, he/she should abstain from sexual relations with his/her spouse on the Saturday night immediately before the Sunday worship. Most ministers have a feeling that if they have sexual relations with their spouse before they serve the Lord, they will be defiled and God will be displeased.
- b. When ministers and believers as a whole prepare themselves to take the Lord's Supper, they do not have sexual relations with their spouse because the Lord's Supper is holy and should not be defiled by sexual practices, which many ministers consider to be unholy.

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<sup>6</sup> Aba Tesfaye, OI. on December 27, 2008 at 4:00 AM

<sup>7</sup> Aba Mesfin, OI. November 15, 2008, at 11 am. Aba Mesfin was a monk and chief leader of the Southern Ethiopian Orthodox monasteries, until he accepted Christ as his personal savior in 1990. Now he is a minister of the word, serving as a pastor and leader in an evangelistic outreach ministry for monks.

Hughes (1983:140) says that during the Middle Ages the church went to great extremes downgrading sexual relationships in marriage, saying that complete abstinence from sexual relations had to be maintained, five days out of seven. The five days are stated as follows:-

- Thursdays - in memory of the arrest of our Lord
- Fridays - in honor of His death
- Saturdays - in honor of the virgin Mary
- Sundays - in honor of the resurrection
- Mondays - in honor of the faithful departed

The remaining two days will be the only days in which married couples could enjoy sexual relationships. The two days could be even difficult to use them for sexual relations, due to various reasons such as: sickness, fatigue, menstrual cycle and devoted prayer (Hughes 1983:140).

However, the scripture clearly teaches that the physical and emotional pleasures resulting from a faithful marriage relationship are ordained, blessed by God and understood in honor of God Himself. This is because God is the one who initiated marriage and gave sexual relations as a blessing from the very beginning of creation (Gen 1:27-28, 2:24-25). What displeases God is the transgression of His law (Ex 20:14), through wrong sexual practices such as:

- a. Adultery or extra-marital sex (Pr. 5:3,8,18; Heb. 13:4)
- b. Fornication (Pr. 6:25-26; 1 Thes. 4:4-5) - sex before marriage.

Knowing that sexual relations within marriage are good and accepted by God, married believers may continue to enjoy sex with their spouse and also thank God for it. Depriving your marriage partner can open a door to temptations to commit adultery.

### **5.1.2. Bitterness and unforgiving spirit**

Out of 81 respondents 31 people said that more than 60 percent of marriage partners in church do not solve their conflicts on time. As a result, many

married couples suffer from bitterness and become powerless to forgive their marriage partner. Some of them are thereby exposed to extramarital sex.

A pastor, in one of the Full Gospel's local Churches in Addis Ababa, has related the occasion when one married couple (leaders in the Church) came to him to settle a conflict. He told them to get reconciled because he considered them to be mature ministers. Unfortunately the wife said: "It is better to go to hell than to be reconciled with this man". The husband on his part also said: "I too, do not want to be reconciled with her". This shows that they were embittered to the degree that they were unable to forgive each other.

Forgiving is very important in daily family living. Married partners must forgive any offense as the Lord has forgiven them (Col. 3:12-13). When conflicts take place between a husband and a wife, they have to be sure to resolve differences and hurts as soon as possible in order to restore peace and love in the family. Otherwise, bitterness will surface in one of the marriage partner's heart and this naturally hinders sexual relations.

Most often the main reason for an unforgiving spirit is a refusal to say "sorry!" when one of the partners commits a mistake. An inflexible spirit, a tendency to hold on to a grievance and bitterness are also hindrances to good sexual relations within marriage (Collins 1995:227).

Hughes (1983:137) suggests that many married couples say "I can forgive but I cannot forget". This, however, is only another way of saying, "I will not forgive". Forgiveness ought to be like a canceled note, torn and burned up, so that it may never be brought up again. When married partners persist in an unforgiving spirit, God will be surely displeased and good sexual relations will be hindered. If this continues untreated, it can lead to divorce. Married partners have to recognize their mistakes and be reconciled with each other, because the Bible instructs all believers to forgive one another (Eph 4:32).

### 5.1.3. Ignorance

Grunlan (1984:171) contended that many people are informed wrongly about sex. Women especially have been taught from their childhood that sex is basically evil or that it is a man's pleasure and a woman's duty. Girls who enjoy sex are bad girls, for good girls never enjoy it. On the other hand, some men are also wrongly informed that sex is something you do to a woman instead of with a woman. This shows that men are taught to satisfy themselves. Such ideas rob women of the sexual pleasure God intended for them. Paul (1 Cor. 7:3-4) calls on both, the husband and wife, to pay what is due, stressing the importance of giving rather than getting, for marriage is the giving of oneself to another. In these verses the important point mentioned is the putting of the sexes on an absolute equality.

Paul stresses in verses 3-4 the equality of male and female with respect to marital union, though Paul elsewhere teaches that the husband is the head of the wife (11:3; Eph 5:23). Here he plainly declares that with respect to the sexuality of husband and wife, there is complete equality. Each partner has authority over the body of his/her spouse and both submit themselves to one another (Klstemaker 1993:212). According to Mare (1976:288) in the Corinthian church there was ascetism that forbids sexual relations within marriage, which is not biblical. Therefore, Paul argues against a forced ascetism by strengthening the biblical ideal of sexual relations by encouraging of normal sexual relations within marriage. Lack of understanding the biblical ideal of sexual relations may cause marital problems that may end with separation or divorce, because marriage without sex is not only unnatural, it is expressly forbidden (Mal 2:16).

Similarly, in Ethiopia, open talk about sex is considered taboo and also sin especially in the Northern part of the country. For instance, when they want to use the word "sperm cell" they use the word "sin" instead, for it is considered taboo to say sperm cell, especially among many EOC followers. Open and detailed teaching about sex makes the hearers feel bad and they will not be willing to listen again. More than thirty Christian married couples in South

Ethiopia denounced any open reference to issues of sex because of their cultural taboos.<sup>8</sup>

Of the 81 respondents 20 people said that wrong perceptions or lack of knowledge about sexual relations can be a hindrance to good sexual relations within marriage. Their responses are summarized as follows:

- a. Lack of knowledge of the differences between male's and female's sexual feelings and orgasm: For instance, the husband's sexual feeling can easily be raised and reach to orgasm in a very short period of time but the wife's sexual feeling takes time for orgasm to take place. Thus, if the married partners are not conscious of such natural differences they cannot enjoy mutually satisfying intimacy.
- b. Lack of knowledge of what to do before going to bed. It is common in Ethiopia that sex only takes place in bed with the light off. "Sex with the light off, with eyes closed and in bed not on the bed" is a common saying about sex in Ethiopia. As a result, there is no need of preparation before, and no need to give any thought to the partner. Just rush in to satisfy yourself without considering the needs of your partner.
- c. Lack of knowledge on gender equality in relation to sexual relations. The concept of gender is a real problem in the EOC. Women's place during worship in the church is different from that of men; men are allowed to worship in the front and women always at the back<sup>9</sup>. And during the Lord's Supper, women are allowed to partake only after all the men have partaken (Fitha Negest 1990:141). This implies that women are not equal with men. As a result, women cannot express their feelings freely. This naturally causes inferiority complex, which surely is one of the hindrances to intimacy.

Of the 81 respondents 35 people suggested that most Ethiopians believe that the husband is the only one who can decide when to have sex, without

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<sup>8</sup> Teaching session for more than thirty married couples, Eastern Ethiopia: Nazareth, by the researcher, May 2008, Sunday afternoon.

<sup>9</sup> Aba Tesfay, Ol. on December 27, 2008 at 4:00 AM



considering the wife's interest, emotion and will. What will happen if she asked her husband to have sexual intercourse with her any time? That is crazy and no one should even think about it. Though there are biological and psychological differences between men and women, wives have God given physical needs just as husbands do (1 Cor 7:3-4).

In general, wrong misconceptions about sexual relations and gender can lead married partners, especially wives, to feel that they are neglected. Most of the time wives do not enjoy satisfying sexual relations. As a result, their marriage is at stake. Therefore, married partners should be open to learn and discuss marriage related issues in detail, knowing that sexual relation is not originated by man's will, rather by God who ordained it in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:28, 2:22-25).

## **5.2. True Marriage Life is self giving**

Paul argued with the Corinthians, who promoted celibacy in marriage, saying that the Corinthians ought to live for their partner in a self giving manner. His reasoning is that the husband's body does not only belong to him, rather to his wife and the same is true of the wife (1 Cor. 7: 3-4).

Similarly in Ethiopia, it is commonly known that a wife is considered as an instrument for the husband's sexual satisfaction. For instance, if the wife is sick for long period of time, many people encourage the husband to marry another person. On the contrary, if the husband is sick for long period of time, everyone says she must wait; she must be faithful because she is wife not a husband. Even if the husband neglects his wife and has sexual relations with another woman, people say she has to stay faithful because men are subject to temptation to commit adultery. Such practice would be shameful and evil for the wife to do<sup>10</sup>.

Of the respondents in our interview, 37 percent suggested that married partners in EFGBC are also culturally influenced in a similar way. For

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<sup>10</sup> Aba Meleake Birhan O.I. December 30, 2008; at 11 am.

instance, if a woman and a man have committed adultery no doubt that many believers and ministers of the church will say; it is natural for a man to commit adultery but for the woman they will surely say; “what a shameful woman!” Furthermore, because a wife is considered as an instrument for husband’s satisfaction, some times when her husband presses her to make love with her, she starts to give lots of reasons for resisting.

France explains equality of the sexes in marriage saying that:

The words ἐπὶ αὐτήν might conceivably be understood with reference to the new wife (‘with her’, literally ‘upon her’), but are more naturally taken of the original wife (‘against her’; cf. the uses of ἐπὶ with the accusative in 3:24–26; 13:8, 12). In that case Jesus here recognizes that the wife has rights over her husband’s behavior as well as vice versa. The divorce and remarriage is an offence not only against God’s purpose for marriage but against the wife who is thereby wronged. In the Jewish world a man could be said to commit adultery against the husband of the woman concerned, or a woman against her own husband, but the idea of adultery against the wife is a remarkable development towards equality of the sexes (France 2002:393)

Here are some suggested possible corrective measures to be applied in marriage relationships.

### **5.2.1. Equal in the sight of God**

In Ethiopian culture, especially in the EOC, the husband is considered as having full authority to ask his wife to make love when ever he wishes. This is similar to the Jewish culture. Therefore, the wife can never ask her husband for sexual relations; if she does, it will be shocking and the husband may consider her worthless<sup>11</sup>.

The Bible clearly teaches us that both male and female are equal (Gal 3:28). Furthermore, though scriptures say the husband is the head of his wife (Eph 5:23), it does not mean he can enslave her to do what ever he likes her to do, with out considering her freedom and feelings. Though there should be a role distinction between male and female, each is designed on the divine pattern

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<sup>11</sup> Aba Tesfaye, Ol. on December 27, 2008 at 4:00 AM

(Gen 1:27; Gal 3:28), and all are equally joint heirs (1 Pet 3:8). Therefore, Christian marriage partners should understand, help, and bear one another's burden, for marriage is a partnership; and good partners help each other gently and in love. Otherwise, good sexual relations are impossible.

### **5.2.2. Equal and natural right to enjoy**

Both the husband and wife have sexual needs bestowed by God, which should be met in marriage. Their sexual relationship should bring pleasure to the other partner rather than self gratification only (1Cor. 7:3). Both partners have to help each other for their sexual satisfaction, and this can take place if they openly discuss on sexual matters and try to work for the best satisfaction of the other.

### **5.2.3. Equal shares of thoughts, feelings and decisions**

When married couples freely share their thoughts, feelings and decisions, they create a suitable environment for a mutually satisfying intimate life. To make this effective they have to practice transparency, pray together, discuss important issues, understand one another's natural differences and each other's feelings, and share genuine love.

Furthermore, if one of the marriage partners wants to abstain from sexual relations, for the purpose of devoted prayer, this should be in mutual agreement, and for only a short period of time (1 Cor. 7:5). There is no contradiction between the process of living a devout Christian life, and the process of achieving and enjoying good sexual adjustments. In addition to this, sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage partnership and is approved and blessed by God only in that state. The husband and wife become one flesh through marriage (Gen 2:24-25).

Of the 81 respondents 49 of them suggested that married couples in EFGBC, especially wives, do not consider their marriage partner when they decide not to have sexual relations. For instance, if a wife wants to pray and fast for six to ten consecutive days, within the church, she just tells her husband the decision made with her friends or church leaders. If her husband says no, she

will say I have already decided and I have to give priority to serve God. This time, it will be difficult for the husband to say anything against her decision. If he does, those who serve with her may say he is a carnal Christian. So he prefers to say yes or keep quite. But abstaining form sexual relations without his agreement can lead him to temptations.

The Bible however clearly teaches that marriage partners do not have to deprive one another except by mutual consent and for a time (1 Cor. 7:5). Knowing this, marriage partners should live faithfully with their spouse in self giving and mutual agreement.

### **5.3. Divorce is prohibited**

The Corinthians, who advocated celibacy, also encouraged divorce for the sake of abstinence from sexual relations. Paul then argued against them saying: "Divorce is forbidden by the Lord". Therefore, divorce is not an option for Christians. Paul continues saying that if one of the marriage partners wants to divorce, breaking the command of the Lord, he/she must either stay single or be reconciled to her/his marriage partner.

Those whose marriage partners are unbelievers are also commanded not to divorce their unbelieving spouse. If one partner is an unbeliever the believer is expected to persevere in love, praying for the unbeliever, so that God may save him/her. If the unbeliever wants to leave, he/she is free to leave and the believer will be free.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, divorce is permitted in many cases. Some of the reasons mentioned in Fitha Negest (1998:233 - 239) are:-

- a. If both marriage partners decided to be monk and nun.
- b. If relationship between the marriage partners is getting worse than before.
- c. Frigidity - if the wife is frigid the husband should be patient for about three years and if there is no improvement he can divorce her.

- d. If the woman is epileptic and no improvement is seen for long period of time he can divorce her.
- e. If the wife went outside of her house with another man to drink beverage or alcohol, or even laugh with another man and pass the night outside of her house without the knowledge or permission of her husband. First of all, she must be warned by the husband not to act in the same way but if there is no improvement he can divorce her.
- f. If a wife tries to murder her husband or act in cooperation with other people who want to kill him, first of all he must warn her but if there is no improvement he can divorce her.
- g. If a wife commits adultery and her husband knew nothing about it, the priest should encourage her to repent and let her continue to live with her husband. If her husband knew her transgression and allowed her to stay with him, the priest should tell him to divorce or be separated from her, for there is no need to return to the place of honor of marriage. But when a husband commits adultery he should be punished with a rod 12 times. Nothing is said about divorce. This might be due to the people's misconception about women.

Similarly, in the EFGBC, the above mentioned reasons for divorce have influenced the members of the church, for most of the believers came from the EOC background. As a result, some influential church leaders and ministers have been involved in sever divorce proceedings. Following those leaders many ministers and believers are doing the same thing and they re-marry others.

According to the report gathered from interviews which have taken place over the past two years with 81 key members of the EFGBC, there is strong evidence of conflict in many of their marriages. Some of them ended their marriage in divorce, others stopped having sexual relationship with their spouse and some have been involved in court cases. The precise numbers mentioned in the written report of the 81 respondents are as follows:

- a. 63 people have divorced and most of them are leaders and ministers of the church, and more than 90 percent of them have remarried another person.
- b. 175 people are living in one room yet do not have sexual relationships for a long period of time due to conflicts and disagreements.
- c. About 213 people live in conflict, and some of the cases are going to court.

Kasech, a court case applications secretary says that more than ten married couples, from the evangelical churches circle, came to the court for divorce every month.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, most of the influential church leaders and ministers who divorced, try to give reasons for divorce which are similar to the reasons used by the EOC. The only difference is that the EOC's reasons for divorce are written in their published book *Fitha Negest*; while the evangelical church leaders' reasons for divorce are not written in any document.

The influential church leaders and ministers who practiced divorce justify their action in two ways. 1/ From Practice and 2/ From the Bible (Mamo S. 2008: 7:8-9, 18-19, 24).

Both arguments, from practice and from the Bible are discussed as follows:

#### 1. Argument From Practice

The following are some of the problems or reasons for divorce, from practice:

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<sup>12</sup> Kasech G. Hiwot, O.I. January 25, 2009, at 4:00 AM.

Kasech G. Hiwot is one of the board members of the Abyssinia Mission Association. She owns a stationary shop and in addition to selling stationary materials, she uses that shop for writing application letters for court cases coming before the Higher Justice Office. She says that more than ten married couple, from the evangelical churches comes every month for divorce. Furthermore, she has told me that one of the judges working in the Higher Justice Office has asked her what she thinks is the reason for the increasing number of married couples from the evangelical churches, who come for divorce.

- a. If there are repeated disagreements between the marriage partners on any issues and quarreling over a long period of time.
- b. If one of the marriage partners wants to kill the other partner or tries to cooperate with others who want to hurt one's partner.
- c. If one partner is always despising the other partner and no improvement is seen in this area.
- d. If one of the partners is impotent and the other partner is being tempted to commit adultery.
- e. If one marriage partner goes abroad and stayed there for a long period of time without communicating with his marriage partner.

However, even if all the above reasons are valid, the final authority on the question of divorce must be the Bible. Jesus left only the case of adultery as a possible reason (Matthew 19:9). Our cases show that most of the leaders and ministers of the church, who divorced their wives, did so with a preplanned decision to remarry another woman.

Even where the relationship between a Christian husband and his Christian wife is extremely bad and where living together appears impossible, it is far better to be patient and persist in prayer, and to ask others for counseling, in order that they remain faithful to their marriage vows.

An evangelist divorced his wife two years ago. His justification was, "if marriage partners agree to divorce in any case as I did two years before, there will be no prohibition at all". He continued saying that "if married partners are not able to live together, it is better to be separated peacefully, than to live with someone whom they do not want to live with and suffer"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The evangelist's reason for his action was that he said: first of all, she came to Christ from Muslim background. Hence I have spiritual warfare and secondly, she is not willing to have a child with me. For instance, she was once pregnant but she aborted it after five months for she was not interested in having a child with me. So I decided to divorce her. But when she was asked by the church leaders, if what her husband said about her is right or not, she said what he has said is a lie. Because for many times he told me as if I am not good to him and is planning to marry another woman who is better than me in education, physical appearance and wealth. Then the church has said nothing except warning him not to marry another woman. A year later he said that I got a wife from the Lord and asked the church leaders to agree with him in his wedding ceremony. The church leaders refused his request and he

According to the Jewish tradition one of the four reasons for divorce that were possible on the basis of rabbinical law was mutual agreement of the partners. The other three reasons are: divorce enforced upon the wife on the petition of the husband, divorce enforced upon the husband on the petition of the wife and divorce enforced by court, without petition of either of the parties (Tenny 1976:98).

Though divorce by mutual agreement was permitted by rabbinical law, the Scripture never allows separation, in any kind of agreement of the married partners. Even if marriage starts with the agreement of both married partners their agreement to divorce is never biblically legalized.

## 2. Argument From the Bible

The EOC exegesis is based on Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9 and Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

The term used by our Lord Jesus in Matthew 19:9 '*Pornea*' in Greek has a very general meaning. Zodhiates has defined '*pornea*' as adultery, incest and every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse or unlawful lust (Zodhiates 1991:59). According to Cornes (1998:51) in the standard dictionary of the New Testament Greek '*pornea*' is defined as adultery and also includes homosexual practices. Similarly, the term '*pornea*' is translated into English as "*marital unfaithfulness*" which could take several different forms. Based on the above definition of the term '*pornea*' those who argue for divorce claimed that divorce can be permitted even in cases other than adultery.

Carson (1984:414) agrees with Mahoney (in his book *A New Look at a Divorce clauses in Mt. 5:32 and 19, 1968:29-38*) who argues that the term adultery ('*pornea*' in Greek), mentioned in Matthew 19:9 refers to spiritual harlotry, a metaphor often adopted by the Old Testament prophets. He

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married another woman outside the church. The church leaders decided to stop him ministering in the church for six months, with out stopping his salary. After six months in October 2008, the church leaders allowed him to serve the Lord in the church. Now he is serving in the church and living with his second wife. When his former wife heard that he had married another woman, she turned from her faith and went back to live with her Muslim families who had been against her when she was a Christian.



continues by saying that adultery refers to a Jew marrying to a Gentile or a believer marrying an unbeliever, and links it with Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:12-14), which speaks about mixed marriages

The way Mahoney treats the passage seems deficient in objectivity. First of all, Matthew 19 does not speak about spiritual harlotry, since the Pharisees challenge Jesus by quoting Deuteronomy 24:1-4, a passage which speaks directly about the issue of marriage. Secondly, there is no indication to suggest that either Deuteronomy 24:1-4 or Matthew 19 are speaking about the Jews and Gentiles marriage. Thirdly, even Paul never encourages divorce, even in the case of mixed marriages.

Some influential church leaders and ministers, who have been involved in a divorce, claim that the term *pornea or marital unfaithfulness* in English does not only mean "adultery" but it can also be any kind of problem that hinders good relationships. They say that we should treat each marital problem on a case by case basis, looking at the individual circumstances of each case, rather than simply making one rule which is applied rigidly to every situation.

Jesus' divorce discussion, in Matthew 19:9, was not because He chose to raise the subject but rather to answer the question of the Pharisees. Jesus' answer starts with God's original purpose in creation: saying marriage should be forever, He then continues saying that Moses did not command divorce but permitted it because of the hardness of men's hearts.

During Jesus' ministry on earth, there were two schools of thought when considering Deuteronomy 24:1-4. They were led respectively by Rabbi Shamai and Rabbi Hillel. Rabbi Hillel believes that if a woman displeases her husband in any way whatsoever, he has to divorce her and remarriage is allowed to him. But Rabbi Shamai believes that only if a wife commits adultery can the husband divorce her and in which case remarriage is allowed to him (Keener 1991:39).

Wenham and Heth (1984:45) argued that the school of Shamai was more predominant in Jesus' day; the school of Hillel became more predominant by the end of the first century. Wenham and Heth go on to say that Jesus' answer to the Pharisees (Mt 19:3-9) ignored both rabbi Hillel's and rabbi Shamai's, and even Moses' teaching about divorce. He went back to the ideal picture of marriage in the creation account (Gen 1:27; 2:24), because He wants to restore God's plan for marriage that declares marriage is indissoluble. Jesus' conclusion is that divorce is prohibited except for the case of adultery. Neither here nor elsewhere in the Old Testament is divorce explicitly approved.

60 percent of my respondents suggest that "when marriage partners are facing problems and where the problems are getting worse, it is better to allow them to separate than to force them to suffer." Justifications forwarded are;

- They might have been married before they were spiritually mature; therefore they may be separated and marry to the right partner who is from God.
- Too much conflict within marriage is a sign that the marriage is not from God.

Based on the data gathered from 81 respondents, some of the problems mentioned as main causes for unhealthy marriage ending with divorce are as follows:

A. Continual quarrels and fighting

1. This might have been caused by the mishandling of money by one of the marriage partners.

Of the 81 respondents 40 people say that money related problems mostly arise if one of the marriage partners is helping his/her parents without the knowledge of his/her spouse. Moreover, spending money unnecessarily and/or putting money in his/her personal bank account without informing his/her marriage partner can cause problems. Such problems cause mistrust

by the other marriage partner and naturally makes him/her unable to yield self emotionally, psychologically and physically (Negash 2001).

2. When families (parents, brothers, sisters or relatives) or friends of one of the marriage partners therefore in the life activities of the marriage partners. Of the 81 respondents 31 people believed that relatives of one of the marriage partners try to decisions, favor their son or daughter, pressurize, and even tell them how they should lead their married life. Such suggestions result in division, strife on the offended side and very often end up with divorce. In fact, listening to parents, relatives and friends constructive advice is fine, but the final decision should be made based on the agreement of both married partners.

3. When one or both of them are extremely sensitive and easily angered and are unable or unwilling to change.

Of the 81 respondents 32 people report that marriage partners who are extremely sensitive and easily angered argue frequently, with most of them ending up in divorce. Anger is very natural to everybody but this must be controlled and last only for short period of time. Then the partners have to try to solve the problem and be reconciled.

4. If the husband hits his wife repeatedly;

Of the 81 respondents 20 of them say that in Ethiopia, though there is improvement now, many husbands including believers do not discuss their problems with their wives in order to seek a solution. Rather they try to solve their problems through fighting and beating their wives. A close friend of mine once said: "if you want to change the character of your wife you have to beat her because a child and a woman are the same and both need beating".

Christian married partners should at least know that beating a partner is a sin and displeasing to God. Problems or conflicts should be solved through discussions not through fighting and beating.

5. Power struggle

Of the 81 respondents 28 of them say that Ethiopian culture encourages a husband to feel superior to his wife. As a result, the wife, who is suffering because of the husband's attitude, starts to claim equality by defending herself. If the husband rejects her, she tries to defend herself with the so called democratic right. Such notions are becoming a real problem in the Ethiopia.

One EFGBC pastor in Addis recalls that, during the communist Derg government of Ethiopia, women were encouraged to divorce their husbands in the name of democracy. As a result, many marriages collapsed and their children became street boys.

6. If one of them is not feeling loved and appreciated by his/her spouse, the partners will loose a sense of closeness.

Of the 81 respondents 20 of them say that if one of the marriage partners is feeling unloved by his/her spouse and the problem is not solved quickly their relationship will break down. Ultimately, their marriage might end in divorce. Love is important in married life. If one of the marriage partners feels unloved he/she loses the sense of closeness and comfort. Therefore, married partners must appreciate and show love to each other.

B. Barrenness

Of the 81 respondents 16 of them say that in Ethiopia, people culturally believe that barrenness is from the woman side and considered to be a curse from God. As a result, the husband's family encourages divorce, pressurizing the husband to reject his wife.

The Bible clearly says that children are gifts from God. Marriage without a child does not show incompleteness, for marriage is simply the union of a husband and wife, not of a husband, a wife and a child. Having a child is secondary, so marriage partners have to love each other and persevere with

their situation whether God gives them a child or not<sup>14</sup>. Greater priority should be given to the divine institution ordained by God.

### C. Lack of transparency

Of the 81 respondents 56 people indicated that lack of transparency is a serious cause of divorce in the church.

For instance, if one of the marriage partners already has a child, born before his/her present marriage, and this is kept secret from the marriage partner then this secret may become known at a later date, resulting in divorce. Unfortunately, some such cases are ministers in the church<sup>15</sup>.

Such cases mostly end in divorce because the offended person lacks the trust to live with his/her spouse. Therefore, married believers have to be transparent about major issues with their spouse beforehand, and if such problems do occur they have to be compassionate to forgive and to accept.

Saving money without the knowledge of his/her marriage partner is also a problem of transparency<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, after I was married to my wife God did not give us a child for four years. At this time, many believers and ministers in the church condemned us saying that probably there might be a hidden sin in our life or a curse passed from our parents. In addition to this, my parents and relatives pressurized me to divorce her if she could not give birth to a child. Others, neighbors and friends of my parents, came and spoke to me saying, "Please, for the sake of your parents! Try to get a child even from another woman". But I and my wife decided to love each other till the end of our life, whether God answers our prayer or not, and to persevere in prayer and in giving thanks to the Lord in any situation. Finally, God is so good, after four years, in answer to our prayer, He gave us a son.

<sup>15</sup> A minister in one of the evangelical churches divorced his wife because of such case. Even when his friends, who are church leaders, told him that he was not right, he said before our wedding she told me that she did not have any children, but two years later I discovered that she has two sons. Then when I asked her, if that is right, she was not willing to tell me. But later she said: "Yes, they are my children". So it was difficult for me to continue marriage life with her. Finally, he divorced her and married another woman. He is convinced that this is God's will.

<sup>16</sup> A friend of mine, who works in one of the government offices, has deposited more than 10 thousand birr without the knowledge of his wife. Then when she knew that he had deposited the money, she said: 'You hide from me such a large amount of money that it is difficult for me to trust you as my husband from now on' and she left the house, also leaving her child who was 8 years old. His marriage risked ending in divorce, but the church tried to resolve the problem and, God is so good, He restored their marriage.

Sometimes a woman might lie before she is married saying that she is a virgin, when she is not. In rural Ethiopia such cases result in automatic divorce (Datan 1998:46). In Ethiopian culture, if a woman 'cheats' a man in this way it results in a high degree of shame. Of the 81 respondents 25 leaders, from different rural areas of the country, report that in some towns and villages when believers face such issues they automatically condemn the girl as 'a bad girl' who has brought shame on her parents. Society encourages the man to divorce such a woman (Negash 2001). However, believers have to be merciful even when they face such issues, knowing that women are joint heirs in the Kingdom.

#### D. Impotence

Of the 81 respondents 15 of them say that when one of the marriage partners is unable to have sexual intercourse with his/her spouse, his/her marriage partner will be offended. As a result, the offended person starts to look for another means to satisfy his/her sexual desire and begins to consider divorce. In fact, inability to have intercourse is very rare in Ethiopia, and the EFGBC, but if it does occur, the relationship usually ends in divorce.

Except in the case of a damaged of sexual organ, other problems related to impotence might be able to be solved clinically. So marriage partners have to sit together, discuss and try to solve their problems by seeking the help of doctors and/or marriage counselors. If this does not solve the problem, I would advise that they pray to the Lord, who is able, and continue loving each other and keeping their vows to the end of their lives.

In general, as reported by the respondents, continual quarreling and fighting, lack of transparency, childlessness and impotence are marriage related problems that lead to divorce. But before problems get worse and the marriage ends in divorce, marriage partners need to deal patiently with the problems in accordance with biblical truths and with prayer.

The Bible clearly teaches that divorce is the breaking of the covenant made before God with the marriage partner, and we may not simply divorce our

partner for any reason that we choose. God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) and both our Lord Jesus (Mk 10:1-9) and Paul the apostle (1 Cor 7:10-16) condemn divorce. In general, divorce is not God's ideal design for marriage, for it destroys God's plan of marriage which is a monogamous and lifetime commitment (Mt 19:6; Rom 7:2). Moreover, divorce is sin, breaking a vow before God and the marriage partner (Pr. 2:17; Eccles. 5:5; Mal 2:14). Therefore, married partners have to know that marriage should be honored by all people and divorce is not biblical.

In fact, though divorce is not permissible in any case, there are only two exceptional reasons for divorce so far as our biblical exegesis tells us:

- If one of the marriage partners is unfaithful in marital relations or commits adultery (Mt 5:32). It is still better not to go for divorce, provided that there is real repentance (Jer 3:11; 14; 22). A good marriage is a union of two people who are willing to forgive each other. Therefore if the innocent partner forgives the unfaithful partner, there is no reason for divorce to take place. The unfaithful partner must of course be counseled commit the same sin again.
- If the marriage partner is an unbeliever and wants to be separated (1 Cor. 7:15) the believer will be free from the marriage bond, though this does not give him license to marry another. However, the believer should not initiate divorce, but persist in prayer. By the believing partner living exemplary life, God is able to save the unbeliever and their children's future life will be secured.

#### **5.4. Widowers and widows should live according to their gift**

The Christian understanding of marriage in Corinth was seriously influenced by ascetic teaching. It is this which may have caused the leaders of the Church to encourage widows and widowers to remain single. Paul's reply was to say: 'yes, I wish all men were as I am' in the celibate state, but this is not for all because one person has the gift of celibacy whereas the other

needs to marry. Everyone should live according to the gift bestowed on him by God.

Was Paul against marriage? No! His teaching in relation to marriage is clearly outlined in his letters to different churches (Eph 5: 22-33; Col 3:18-19). Hence, he is not against marriage for he mentions how marriage partners should live in love quoting from Genesis 2:24. It is clearly seen in that in the whole chapter (1Cor.7) Paul has encouraged celibacy for only the following reasons:-

- a. The present crisis, which may have referred to the persecution, which was then taking place. Married people are responsible for their spouse and their children (1 Cor 7:26-28).
- b. The time is short (7:29-31), which most probably refers to Christ's return therefore there is a need to be detached from temporal matters. This is what all believers must do, but it was more complex for the married (Mk 13:12).
- c. To serve the Lord devotedly or to have spirit of undivided devotion (7:36-38).

Although there are no similarities between the culture and teaching of Corinth and those of Ethiopia, nevertheless in the EOC celibacy is always considered as holier than marriage (Fitha Negest 1998:103)<sup>17</sup>. As a result, most of the priests encourage widowers and widows to stay unmarried for they believe that this is what is most pleasing to God. On the other hand, if they meet a widower, a man whose wife has died, they encourage that man to remarry, for a man should not live alone. They do, however, require him to wait for a year or two, after the wife's death<sup>18</sup>.

There are members of the EOC who, in a desire to live a life totally devoted to God, commit themselves to celibacy and join a monastery. Yet within a short

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<sup>17</sup> Fitha Negest, page 103, defines monk and nun as follows: monks and Nun are an earthly angels and heavenly human beings. This definition shows us that monks and nun are holier than the married, for in the same page of the book it also says "do you want to be perfect? Be monk or Nun!"

<sup>18</sup> Aba Tesfaye, Ol. On December 27, 2008 at 4:00 am.



period of time they fall into temptation and sexual immorality with somebody who lives in the same monastery<sup>19</sup>. As Paul said, a celibate state demands a gift from God.

Of the 81 respondents 20 leaders said that in the EFGBC, there were some pastors and evangelists who choose to live a life of celibacy. Some quickly change their mind so quick whereas others have remained celibate for more than thirty years. There are, however, those who have entered marriage many years later, at the age of 65 or 70.

Widowers and widows should clearly know whether or not they have the gift of celibacy. Otherwise, if they decide to live a celibate state without having that gift, they may be tempted and exposed to commit sexual immorality. It is better to marry if they are not gifted to live a celibate state. Celibacy is not just something that a believer chooses for him or herself, but is a gift from God. Not all have that gift. For most believers God's will for them is that they marry.

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<sup>19</sup> Aba Meleake Birhan OI. On December 30, 2008; at 11 am.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **6.1. Conclusive Summary**

Sexual relations in marriage are holy and honored in the sight of God, because God Himself created our sexual organs and our need for sexual relations, satisfaction and so on. Yet the Corinthian believers were practicing abstinence from sexual relations within marriage and also put pressure on widows and widowers not to marry. Furthermore, they were encouraging married believers to divorce their partners which is against the will of God, for the scripture says "I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel" (Mal 2:16). In response to the letter sent by the Corinthians, Paul responds saying that abstinence in marriage is wrong, that widows and widowers who want to marry may do so, and that divorce is prohibited for all Christians.

As is shown in my exegesis based on a biblical scenario, Paul's intention for the Corinthians was that the married and the widows and widowers were "to stay as they are". God who spoke to the Corinthians is similarly speaking to our generation. Though there are lots of complicated issues and problems in married life, which are difficult to solve, every situation must be managed in accordance with the biblical principle.

To the married: marriage partners have to know that a husband should live to satisfy his wife and similarly the wife to satisfy her husband. They are to live in love by giving themselves to their spouse. Furthermore, though there are many marital problems which can cause a great deal of hurt married partners should live for the other partner, because their body belongs to their partner. In short the husband should live for his wife spouse and the wife should live for her husband.

In the Ethiopian culture, sex is considered as something unclean even for the legally married. Based on the evidence from the interviews which I conducted, in the EFGBC many married couples are practicing abstinence for reasons such as when they fast and want to take the Lord's Supper. Such abstinence can be the cause of conflict and if continued could end up in separation or divorce. Therefore, married partners should enjoy sex with their spouse avoiding those obstacles which might hinder good sexual relations, and close the door on the possibility of temptation.

A friend of mine, a marriage counselor, has told me that most Christian married partners, who face sex related problems, never discuss the real problem. They tell no one that they are having problems, but simply stop sleeping in the same bed as their partner. When the problem gets serious and they decide to officially separate or to divorce, this is the moment when one of them exposes the real problem. Therefore, married partners need to discuss sexual matters openly with one another and understand that enjoying sexual relations within marriage is from God.

Though many people try to justify divorce, divorce is always prohibited by God. Christians who are separated from their marriage partners are often heard to claim that their marriage was not God's will, and that they are now looking for another person. This is against the teaching of the Bible, which says that marriage is a lifetime partnership. Whatever problems may arise in a marriage, relational or otherwise divorce is prohibited by God. Divorce not only hurts the married partners but also their children, the church and society as a whole.

Celibate life is also possible but only for those who that it is his/her gift and should be for the sake of service for the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32-33). Widows and widowers can also stay as they are if it is their gift to live a celibate life. Otherwise, it is better to marry than to burn with strong feelings.

Therefore, the EFGBC leaders need to work hard in teaching and counseling married couples in the church. By doing so they will be defending the truth and restoring broken marriages and marriages that are in conflict. Moreover, they need to establish a marriage counseling ministry in every local church in order to provide practical advice and support for the married, the unmarried, the widows and the widowers.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

Within the Church there are many marriages that are struggling with serious problems. Some have already ended up in divorce, others are at present going before the divorce courts and people are suffering as a result. Hence, the church has to give more focus and work hard to resolve such serious and urgent problems.

Some helpful recommendations to resolve marriage problems within the church are:-

6.2.1. The church must firmly stand on the biblical truths in relation to marriage related problems.

As discussed above many ministers and leaders divorced and married another person; yet the church has failed to speak out against this practice. The church's stand should be stated clearly especially to those who claim 'divorce is possible occasionally'. Otherwise, many leaders, ministers and members of the church will be encouraged to do the same. Unless the Church takes this stand it will be failing to honor marriage as an institution established by God Himself.

6.2.2. The church has to teach biblical truths about marriage very frequently, to all married and unmarried.

The church has to teach married partners the biblical truths in relation to marriage. The teaching needs to be on the meaning of marriage, how they should live with one another and show mutual respect for one another. It also needs to explain the responsibilities of a husband and of a wife and how they

should rear their children. If not, marriage life can be an obstacle to the church's evangelistic mission accomplishments. Furthermore, it will be difficult to have godly believers and leaders of the church in the coming generation.

Furthermore, the church has to teach unmarried members the biblical meaning of marriage, how to choose a marriage partner and on how to keep their life pure before marriage. Such teachings will surely help the unmarried to prepare for marriage and enable them to honor God in their marriage life.

### 6.2.3. Counseling and visiting married partners

The church has to establish a ministry department that deals with family issues, especially in relation to marriage. This department may serve married partners in counseling, visiting, praying, reconciling those who are facing problems and providing an atmosphere for teaching on marriage related topics.

The department would also need to provide training for some of its married members, who have the gift and burden to serve other married couples. The training would need to be in areas of counseling and teaching for the married and unmarried. Moreover, the church can help those who have the gift and burden by providing teaching materials. Encouraging the ministry groups and all married couples through regular fellowship meeting is also important in helping marriage partners to keep their marriage healthy and intact.

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