

Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor. 7:7b-40 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:7b-40, Biblicalelearning.org

In his nineteenth lecture on 1 Corinthians, Dr. Gary Meadors provides an in-depth analysis of Paul's response to questions regarding sex and marriage found in chapter 7, verses 7b through 40. **Meadors examines various topics, including the significance of remaining in one's present state (married or unmarried), Paul's distinction between his own advice and the direct commands of the Lord, and the complexities surrounding marriage with unbelievers. He addresses the nuances of divorce, particularly in cases involving non-believing spouses, and explores the debated meaning of "not bound" in such situations. The lecture also considers Paul's counsel to virgins and the betrothed in light of a perceived "present crisis," emphasizing that while marriage is permissible, singleness might be functionally better. Ultimately, Meadors stresses the sacredness of marriage while navigating the practical challenges and diverse interpretations of this pivotal chapter, preparing for a subsequent lecture focused on marriage and divorce throughout the Bible.**

2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → 1 Corinthians).



Meadors_1Cor_Session19.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:7b-40

Briefing Document: 1 Corinthians 7:7b-40 - Paul's Response to Issues of Sex and Marriage

Overview: This briefing document summarizes Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture on 1 Corinthians 7:7b-40, focusing on Paul's response to questions regarding sex and marriage within the early Corinthian church. Meadors emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context, the nuances of Paul's language, and the key themes of "remaining as you are," the sanctity of marriage, and Paul's advice regarding the unmarried and betrothed. He cautions against using this chapter as a simplistic proof text for celibacy's superiority and highlights the pragmatic nature of some of Paul's counsel.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Paul's Personal Gift and the Variety of Gifts (7:7b):

- Paul expresses his wish that everyone were as he is (unmarried), but acknowledges that each person has their own unique gift from God.
- **Quote:** "I wish that you all were as I am, but each of you has his own gift from God. One has this gift, another that gift." (Page 1)
- Meadors clarifies that Paul's personal gifting is not normative for all Christians.

2. The Sanctity of Marriage (7:8-16):

- **Advice to the Unmarried and Widows (7:8-9):** Paul suggests it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain as he is, but if they cannot control their passions, they should marry.
- **Quote:** "Now to the unmarried and widows, I say it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do, but if they cannot control themselves, in other words, if they burn with passion... They should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." (Page 2)
- Meadors notes that "unmarried" (agamois) likely includes male widowers in this context.

- **The "Remain As You Are" Principle:** This theme emerges throughout verses 8-16, suggesting a pragmatic ease in maintaining one's current marital status, particularly after widowhood. This is presented as functionally good, not necessarily morally imperative.
- **Marriage is Permanent (Dominical Tradition - 7:10-11):** Paul invokes Jesus' direct command against divorce.
- **Quote:** "To the married, I give this command, not I but the Lord: A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." (Page 6)
- Meadors highlights the absence of the Matthaean exception clause (except for sexual immorality) in Paul's quotation here, suggesting a focus on the absolute nature of Jesus' teaching in Mark and Luke.
- **Marriage in Mixed Relationships (Pauline Explanation - 7:12-16):** Paul addresses marriages between believers and unbelievers, stating that the believer should not divorce the unbeliever if the latter is willing to stay.
- **Quote:** "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him." (Page 7-8)
- The unbelieving spouse and children are "sanctified" (set apart, in a privileged position) through the believing spouse, emphasizing an environmental influence, not automatic salvation.
- **The Unbeliever Leaving (7:15):** If the unbeliever chooses to leave, the believer is "not bound" (not under obligation to force them to stay, and should live in peace). Meadors strongly cautions against interpreting "not bound" as automatic permission to remarry within this specific context.
- **Quote:** "But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to live in peace." (Page 8)

3. Advice to the Unmarried (Virgins/Betrothed) Due to the "Present Crisis" (7:25-38):

- Paul states he has no direct command from the Lord regarding "virgins" (parthenos), which could refer to never-married individuals, engaged couples, or daughters under their father's care.

- **Quote:** "Now about virgins, I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who is trustworthy by the Lord's mercy." (Page 16)
- The "present crisis" is a key factor influencing Paul's advice. Meadors suggests this likely refers to Paul's eschatological view of the imminent return of Christ.
- Due to this crisis, Paul believes it is "good" for individuals to remain as they are (unmarried). This is presented as pragmatic advice, not a universal command.
- **Quote:** "Because of the present crisis, I think that it's good for a man to remain as he is." (Page 16)
- Marriage is still permissible, and those who marry do not sin, but they will face "many troubles in this life" that Paul wishes to spare them from due to the short time remaining.
- **The Issue of Betrothed Virgins (7:36-38):** This section deals with the practicalities of engaged couples in light of the present crisis and potential concerns about acting honorably or struggling with passions.
- Paul suggests that the one who marries his virgin does "right," but the one who refrains from marrying her does "better" – not morally superior, but functionally better given the current circumstances.
- **Quote:** "So then he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better." (Page 21)

4. Advice to Widows (7:39-40):

- A widow is free to remarry after her husband's death, but only "in the Lord" (to a believer).
- **Quote:** "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." (Page 22)
- Paul offers his judgment that a widow would be "happier" if she remains as she is, based on his own perspective and belief that he has the Spirit of God. However, this is not presented as a binding rule.

Key Takeaways and Cautions:

- **Context is Crucial:** Understanding the specific issues in the Corinthian church and Paul's eschatological perspective is vital for interpreting this chapter correctly.
- **Pragmatism vs. Prescription:** Some of Paul's advice, particularly regarding remaining unmarried due to the present crisis, is presented as pragmatically good rather than a universally binding moral law.
- **Marriage as the Norm:** Despite the advice regarding remaining single, Meadors emphasizes that marriage is the created norm.
- **Avoid Proof Texting:** 1 Corinthians 7 should not be used as a simplistic proof text to assert the superiority of celibacy.
- **"Not Bound" in 7:15:** This phrase in the context of an unbeliever leaving primarily addresses the believer's lack of obligation to force the spouse to stay and does not automatically imply freedom to remarry.
- **Nuance in Interpretation:** The meaning of terms like "virgins" and the application of Paul's advice to contemporary situations require careful consideration and humility.
- **Counseling Mixed Marriages:** Pastors should prioritize supporting and strengthening mixed marriages, recognizing the potential for the unbelieving spouse to come to faith through the believer's godly life.

Further Discussion (Mentioned but not detailed in this excerpt):

- The third part of Dr. Meadors' series on 1 Corinthians 7 will focus on the broader biblical teachings on marriage and divorce.

This briefing document provides a summary of Dr. Meadors' lecture, highlighting the key themes and interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:7b-40. It serves as a foundation for further study and reflection on this complex and important passage.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:7b-40

1 Corinthians 7:7b-40 Study Guide

Key Themes:

- **Marriage and Singleness:** Paul addresses various marital statuses (married, unmarried, widowed, betrothed) and the relative advantages and disadvantages of each in light of the "present crisis."
- **The "Remain As You Are" Principle:** Paul repeatedly advises believers to remain in their current state (marital status, social standing) upon conversion. This is presented as a principle of pragmatic wisdom, not a strict command.
- **Sanctity of Marriage:** Paul upholds the permanence of marriage, even in mixed-faith unions, stating that believers should not initiate divorce from unbelieving spouses who are willing to stay.
- **Dominical vs. Pauline Teaching:** Paul distinguishes between commands he attributes directly to the Lord (Jesus' teachings) and his own apostolic advice, clarifying the basis of his authority for each.
- **Divorce and Separation:** Paul addresses the issue of separation within marriage, particularly in the context of mixed-faith unions, and the implications for remarriage.
- **The "Present Crisis" and Eschatological Urgency:** Paul's advice, particularly regarding marriage for virgins and the betrothed, is heavily influenced by his sense of an imminent eschaton and the practical challenges this would present.
- **Gifting:** Paul acknowledges that individuals have different "gifts" from God, including the gift of celibacy, which influences their capacity for and calling to marriage or singleness.

Quiz:

1. According to Meadors, what is the primary theme that emerges throughout 1 Corinthians 7:8-16?
2. What distinction does Paul draw between his commands and the commands of the Lord in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, and how should this distinction be understood regarding authority?

3. In the context of a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, what is Paul's instruction regarding divorce if the unbeliever is willing to stay in the marriage?
4. Explain Meadors' interpretation of the phrase "not bound" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 when an unbelieving spouse leaves the marriage.
5. What is the "remain as you are" principle discussed by Paul in this passage, and how does Meadors characterize it (e.g., as a law or a principle)?
6. According to Meadors, what is the likely meaning of the "present crisis" that influences Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35?
7. What are some of the interpretations of the "virgins" Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 7:25, and why is this term debated?
8. In 1 Corinthians 7:38, Paul states that the one who marries does right, but the one who does not marries does better. According to Meadors, is this comparison based on a moral or functional basis? Explain.
9. What does Paul say about a widow's ability to remarry in 1 Corinthians 7:39, and what qualification does he add?
10. How does Meadors suggest a pastor should counsel an unbelieving spouse who is upset about their believing spouse's church attendance affecting their business?

Quiz Answer Key:

1. The primary theme that emerges throughout 1 Corinthians 7:8-16 is the "remain as you are" principle, which suggests that believers should generally continue in their current marital status upon conversion, as it is often pragmatically easier.
2. Paul's distinction between "not I but the Lord" and "I, not the Lord" refers to whether he is quoting a direct teaching of Jesus (Dominical tradition) or offering his own apostolic advice. Meadors clarifies that this does not diminish the authority of Paul's teaching; it simply indicates the source of the instruction.
3. Paul instructs the believing spouse not to divorce the unbelieving spouse if the unbeliever is willing to live with them. There are no spiritual grounds for the believer to initiate a divorce in such a situation, according to Paul.
4. Meadors interprets "not bound" in this context to mean that the believer is not obligated to force the unbeliever to stay in the marriage and should not feel guilty for the dissolution of the marriage caused by the unbeliever's departure. He argues it does not automatically imply freedom to remarry.

5. The "remain as you are" principle is Paul's repeated advice for believers to generally stay in their current state upon conversion. Meadors characterizes it as a principle of pragmatic wisdom and functional benefit, rather than a strict law or command.
6. According to Meadors, the "present crisis" that influences Paul's advice is most likely Paul's eschatological view that the return of Jesus is imminent, leading to practical concerns about the challenges of marriage and raising children in a short timeframe.
7. Interpretations of "virgins" in 1 Corinthians 7:25 include unmarried women, engaged/betrothed women, a father's virgin daughter, or even those in a "spiritual marriage." This term is debated due to the lack of a clear definition in the immediate context and its varied use in ancient texts.
8. According to Meadors, the comparison between marrying and not marrying in 1 Corinthians 7:38 (right vs. better) is based on a functional basis, not a moral one. "Better" refers to the pragmatic advantages of remaining single due to the "present crisis" and potential troubles of marriage.
9. Paul states that a widow is free to marry anyone she wishes after her husband dies, but with the qualification that she must marry "in the Lord," meaning a fellow believer.
10. Meadors suggests the pastor should first be friendly and understanding with the unbelieving husband, then speak privately with the wife, potentially advising her to honor her husband's occasional requests. The goal is to promote the marriage and create a better environment for the unbeliever to encounter Christ.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of Paul's distinction between "not I but the Lord" and "I, not the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. How does this impact the interpretation and application of his instructions regarding marriage and divorce?
2. Discuss the "remain as you are" principle in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. What are the potential benefits and challenges of applying this principle in contemporary contexts, considering the differences between Paul's time and today?

3. Evaluate the role of Paul's eschatological expectations (the "present crisis") in shaping his advice on marriage and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35. How should modern readers interpret and apply this advice given the delayed return of Christ?
4. Compare and contrast Paul's instructions regarding divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (Dominical tradition) and 7:12-16 (Pauline explanation). What are the key differences, and how do they address different marital situations?
5. Explore the complexities surrounding the interpretation of "virgins" in 1 Corinthians 7:25 and 7:36-38. Why is this term so debated, and what are the implications of the different interpretations for understanding Paul's advice?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Celibacy (Gift of):** A special ability or disposition given by God to remain unmarried and content in singleness, without undue sexual desire or loneliness.
- **Chiasm:** A literary structure in which parallel elements are presented in an AB...BA pattern. Talbert suggests a chiastic structure for 1 Corinthians 7.
- **Dominical Tradition:** Teachings or commands directly attributed to Jesus Christ, often found in the Gospels.
- **Eschaton:** The end times or the final age of history, often associated with the return of Christ and the consummation of God's kingdom.
- **Halachic:** Relating to Jewish law and legal interpretation. Meadors describes Paul's argument regarding mixed marriages as having a halachic element.
- **Hermeneutical Ventriloquism:** The practice of interpreting a text in a way that reflects one's own preconceived notions or desires, rather than the author's intended meaning.
- **Matthaean Exception Clause:** The phrase found in Matthew's Gospel ("except for sexual immorality") that some interpret as providing an exception to the absolute prohibition of divorce found in Mark and Luke. Paul does not mention this clause in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.
- **Pauline Explanation:** Instructions or advice given by the Apostle Paul based on his apostolic authority and wisdom, as distinguished from direct commands of the Lord.

- **Present Crisis:** The challenging circumstances or imminent expectation of the eschaton that Paul believed his readers were facing, which influenced his advice in 1 Corinthians 7.
- **Remain As You Are Principle:** Paul's repeated advice for believers to generally continue in their current state (marital status, social standing) upon conversion.
- **Sanctified (in context of marriage):** In 1 Corinthians 7:14, refers to the idea that the unbelieving spouse and children in a mixed-faith marriage are brought into a sphere of influence where they are more likely to encounter and be open to God, though not automatically saved ("environmental, not forensic").
- **Unequal Yoke:** A metaphor often used to describe a mismatch or incompatibility, particularly in the context of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. Paul advises against entering such unions but does not permit dissolving existing ones if the unbeliever is willing to stay.
- **Virgins (Parthenos):** In the context of 1 Corinthians 7, this term is debated, potentially referring to unmarried women, engaged/betrothed women, or even a father's virgin daughter. The specific meaning influences the interpretation of Paul's advice regarding marriage.

5. FAQs on Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 19, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:7b-40, Biblicalelearning.org

Frequently Asked Questions on 1 Corinthians 7:7b-40 (Dr. Gary Meadors' Interpretation)

1. What is the main theme Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 7:7b-40?

Paul primarily addresses issues related to sex and marriage, specifically in response to questions or concerns raised by the Corinthian church. He discusses the place of marriage and singleness, remarriage for widows and widowers, and guidance for those in existing marriages, including those with unbelieving spouses.

2. What is Paul's perspective on the gift of celibacy and its implications for marriage?

Paul acknowledges that each person has their own unique gift from God, which includes the possibility of a gift of celibacy. He states that it is good for the unmarried and widows to remain as he is (unmarried) if they possess this gift of self-control. However, he also emphasizes that if they lack this gift and "burn with passion," they should marry, as it is better to marry than to struggle with uncontrolled desires. He clarifies that the desire itself is not sinful but a created thing.

3. What does Paul mean by the "remain as you are" principle in this passage, and how should it be understood?

The "remain as you are" principle, which emerges throughout 1 Corinthians 7, particularly verses 8-16 and later in 17-24, suggests that individuals should generally continue in the state in which they were when they became believers, especially concerning their marital status. Paul presents this as a pragmatically good approach, suggesting it often leads to fewer complications. However, it is crucial to understand this as a principle, not a strict law. It is a concession acknowledging the norm of marriage, and not everyone can or should remain unmarried, particularly if they lack the gift of celibacy.

4. How does Paul address the situation of believers married to unbelievers?

Paul provides specific guidance for those in "unequally yoked" marriages. He states that if a believer has an unbelieving spouse who is willing to live with them, the believer should not divorce them. He emphasizes the sanctity of the marriage bond even in such situations, asserting that the unbelieving spouse and even their children are, in a sense, "sanctified" through the believing partner, meaning they are in a privileged position to encounter God. The believer should remain in the marriage and strive to live a godly life, hoping for the salvation of their spouse. Divorce should not be initiated by the believer simply because their spouse is not a believer.

5. What is Paul's teaching on divorce and separation for those who are already married?

Paul draws upon the "dominical tradition," the teachings of Jesus, to address married couples. He states unequivocally that a wife should not separate from her husband, and if she does, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled. Similarly, a husband should not divorce his wife. Paul emphasizes the absolute nature of this teaching, as presented in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, notably omitting the Matthean exception clause for sexual immorality in this context. He further clarifies that if a separation does occur, remarriage is not permitted according to this tradition.

6. What does Paul say about the scenario where an unbelieving spouse chooses to leave a marriage with a believer?

Paul addresses the situation where an unbelieving spouse initiates separation or divorce. In such cases, he states that the believing brother or sister "is not bound" (or "not enslaved") in such circumstances and should "let it be so." Dr. Meadors interprets "not bound" primarily to mean that the believer is not obligated to force the unbeliever to stay or to feel guilty for the dissolution of the marriage. He cautions against interpreting this phrase as an automatic permission for the believer to remarry, as the immediate context focuses on the departure of the unbeliever, not the subsequent actions of the believer.

7. How does Paul's eschatological perspective ("present crisis," "time is short") influence his advice on marriage and singleness in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 7?

Paul's strong expectation of the imminent return of Christ significantly shapes his counsel in verses 25-35, particularly regarding the unmarried and betrothed. He suggests that due to the "present crisis" (likely referring to the perceived nearness of the eschaton and the potential hardships associated with it), it is "good" for individuals to remain as they are – unmarried or betrothed. He emphasizes that those who marry during this time will face "many troubles" and that he wishes to spare them. However, he clarifies that marrying is not sinful. Dr. Meadors notes that while Paul's eschatological urgency was real for him, Christians today must balance this with the practical realities of life and the continuation of normative life events.

8. What guidance does Paul offer specifically to widows regarding remarriage?

Paul addresses widows in verses 39-40, stating that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, with the crucial condition that she must marry "in the Lord" (i.e., a believer). While Paul offers his "judgment" that a widow would be "happier" if she remains as she is, he does not impose this as a requirement. He recognizes that younger widows may remarry and likely should. For older widows, he suggests careful consideration of the pragmatic issues involved but affirms that remarriage is permissible and does not make them spiritually inferior.