

Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor. 7:1-7a Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:1-7a, Biblicalelearning.org

Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture on 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a explores Paul's response to questions about sex and marriage raised by the Corinthian church. Meadors analyzes key phrases and interpretive challenges, including the meaning of "touch a woman" and the nature of Paul's concession regarding abstinence. He emphasizes that **marriage and sexual intimacy within it are presented as the norm**, while singleness is viewed as a **specific gift, not a universally desirable choice**. The lecture also examines **structural analyses of the chapter** and critiques certain translations, ultimately highlighting the **importance of proper interpretation** in understanding Paul's teachings on these matters.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18 – 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_Session 18.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:1-7a

Briefing Document: 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a - Paul's Response to Sex and Marriage

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Gary Meadors initiates an in-depth exploration of 1 Corinthians chapter 7, a challenging section addressing issues of sex and marriage in response to questions posed by the Corinthian community. Meadors emphasizes the complexity of the chapter, its relevance to the topic of divorce (to be covered later), and Paul's nuanced approach in providing guidance rather than strict commands in many instances. The lecture focuses specifically on 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a, examining the Corinthian slogan about sexual relations and Paul's initial response, highlighting the normative nature of marriage and sexual intimacy within it.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Context of 1 Corinthians 7:

- Chapter 7 is the third major segment in the main body of 1 Corinthians, following Paul's responses to issues raised by Chloé's household (chapters 1-4) and oral reports about sexuality and lawsuits (chapters 5-6).
- This chapter specifically addresses "the things you have written" (quoting NIV 2011), indicating Paul is responding to direct questions from the Corinthian church.
- Meadors suggests that the nature of these questions might have been somewhat adversarial, reflecting disagreements with Paul's previous teachings, rather than purely seeking clarification. He points to instances of Paul being "abused on occasion, certainly being in controversy with some of their ideas."
- The chapter covers a wide range of issues related to male-female relationships and marriage, including married couples, singles, those married to unbelievers, widows, and "virgins" (likely engaged parties).

1. Structure and Interpretation of Chapter 7:

- Meadors discusses various approaches to outlining chapter 7, referencing scholars like Charles Talbert and Garland. Talbert emphasizes chiastic structures, while Garland focuses on introductory verbs ("I say," "I commend," "I think").

- He presents his own outline, dividing the chapter into sections like "Paul responds to issues of sex and marriage (1-24)" and "Paul advises the unmarried in light of practical wisdom (25-40)."
- He stresses the importance of consulting multiple commentaries to understand different perspectives on the chapter's structure and meaning.
- Meadors highlights the use of the Greek phrase "peri-dei" ("now concerning"), which often marks a shift in subject in 1 Corinthians, including at the beginning of chapter 7.

1. **Analysis of 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a:**

- **The Corinthian Slogan:** Meadors focuses on verse 1: "Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.'" He considers whether this is Paul's assertion or a quotation of a Corinthian belief or slogan. He concludes, with the majority of scholars, that it is likely a slogan reflecting an ascetic tendency within the Corinthian community.
- **Critique of Past Translation:** Meadors strongly criticizes the original NIV translation of 7:1 as "It is good for a man not to marry," calling it "a horrible translation" and "the exact opposite of this entire chapter." He praises the 2011 revision for correcting it to "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."
- **Paul's Response and the Normative Nature of Marriage:** Paul responds to the slogan by stating, "But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband" (7:2). This emphasizes the importance of marital intimacy in light of prevalent sexual sin.
- **Mutual Conjugal Rights and Duties:** Verses 3-5 highlight the mutual obligations within marriage: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife." Meadors underscores the "mutual interdependence" in this area and Paul's condemnation of sexual abstinence within marriage unless by "mutual consent" and for a limited time for spiritual purposes.
- **Sex in Marriage as a "Deontological Principle":** Meadors emphasizes that sexual intimacy in marriage is not optional but a "marital duty" (using the Greek word

implying "ought" or "must"). He shares an anecdote about a marriage that was annulled due to non-consummation, illustrating the significance of the sexual act within the marital partnership. He also refutes the Platonic idea that sex is solely for procreation and not for pleasure within a biblical framework.

- **Paul's "Concession" (7:6):** Paul states, "I say this as a concession, not as a command." Meadors analyzes what "this" refers to, concluding that it likely refers back to the allowance for temporary abstinence by mutual consent in verse 5. Paul is not conceding the goodness of marriage itself but acknowledging that temporary abstinence is permissible under specific, mutual conditions, not a spiritual mandate.
- **Paul's Wish and the Gift of Singleness (7:7):** Paul expresses his wish that "all of you were as I am" (implying singleness), but immediately clarifies, "But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that gift." Meadors stresses that singleness, in this context, is presented as a "gift" (charisma), not a choice. He cites Stanley Morrow's view that this gift is not a matter of personal preference but a specific endowment from God, often characterized by a lack of strong natural sexual desire.
- **Marriage as the Norm:** Meadors strongly asserts that marriage is the normative state according to the Bible and the creation mandate. Choosing not to marry should not be seen as a more pious option but rather a deviation from the norm, potentially due to other reasons. He clarifies that the "gift" of singleness chooses the individual; it is not something one decides to pursue based on a desire for a more spiritual life if they still experience strong sexual desires ("If you burn, you ain't called to celibacy").

Quotes:

- "It's quite a book, isn't it? I mean, it's no small task to think through 1 Corinthians."
- "Then, chapter 7 concerns the things you have written."
- "I think there's more of an adversarial nature behind the questions than the sincere nature of them."
- "Peri-dei, now concerning, is a very important indicator."
- "The marriage mandate is given in Genesis. It's the expectation that governs creation."

- "Paul's not laying a normative demand on the readers but is advising them in light of his own wisdom."
- "In this tightly organized section of 7:25-40, which is the second part of it, the apostle has taken up the question of the unmarried raised by the Corinthians in their letter and has said that theologically there's no problem with marriage, although practically there are arguments for remaining unmarried if one has desire under control." (Quoting Talbot)
- "Paul's view of celibacy is that it is a gift and that it is not a choice." (Attributing to Stanley Morrow)
- "Now for the matters you wrote about, it's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:1)
- "The old King James translated that, it's good for a man not to touch a woman."
- "The RSV translate that, the new RSV, it is well for a man not to touch a woman."
- "But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:2)
- "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:3-4)
- "Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent, and only for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer or to other spiritual exercises, then come together so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:5)
- "I say this as a concession, not as a command." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:6)
- "I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that gift." (Quoting NIV 2011, 7:7)
- "Paul's command to have one's own wife or husband is a euphemism for sex and assumes marriage. That is the norm."
- "Paul strongly condemns sexual abstinence by marriage partners."
- "Sex in marriage is a deontological principle."

- "Sex in marriage is not dirty, and it's beautiful."
- "You do not choose your gifts, your gifts choose you."
- "Marriage isn't a gift. It's an expectation not to be married as a gift."
- "It is not an issue of personal preference or choice or a meritorious feat of self-control, but it's a gift from God." (Summarizing Garland's implication of celibacy as a gift)
- "There is no language in this text to do God's will, to find God's will. Well, the reason it isn't there is because it wouldn't be appropriate to be there because God's will is that you get married."
- "God's sovereign will is discerned in the normal course of life. So, there are no illusions about a subjective process to decide whether you're going to live burning with passion because of some self-imposed and assumed calling. You weren't called to do that. If you burn, you ain't called to celibacy. You're called to marriage."
- "Marriage is normal. It's an expectation of God, according to the bible."

Next Steps/Further Discussion:

- The lecture will continue to analyze 1 Corinthians 7:7b-24 in the subsequent segment.
- Dr. Meadors intends to provide a "rather thorough overview of the Bible and divorce" at the end of the chapter 7 lectures.
- Further study of commentaries by Fee, Hayes, and Wimbush is recommended for a deeper understanding of 1 Corinthians 7.
- The concept of "gift" (charisma) in relation to singleness warrants further theological reflection.
- The tension between the normative call to marriage and the reality of singleness due to various circumstances (including "negative providence") is an important point for pastoral consideration.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:1-7a

1 Corinthians 7:1-7a Study Guide

Quiz:

1. What was the third major segment in the main body of 1 Corinthians, and what general topics did it cover according to Dr. Meadors?
2. What was the "peri-dei" phrase, and where does it appear in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 according to the lecture? Why is this phrase significant for understanding the structure of the letter?
3. According to Dr. Meadors, what was the consensus view regarding 1 Corinthians 7:1b, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman"? Was Paul asserting this, or was he quoting the Corinthians?
4. Summarize Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 regarding sexual relations within marriage. What key principles does he emphasize for husbands and wives?
5. Explain the different interpretations of the "concession" Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 7:6. Which interpretation does Dr. Meadors seem to favor and why?
6. How did the original NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 7:1 differ significantly from more formal translations like the RSV, and why was this problematic according to Dr. Meadors?
7. What does Dr. Meadors explain about the Greek grammar of the imperative "do not deprive" in 1 Corinthians 7:5? Is it necessarily a command to stop an ongoing action?
8. According to the lecture, is singleness a gift or a choice in the context of 1 Corinthians 7? What implications does this have for understanding God's will regarding marriage?
9. What is the meaning of the Greek word "charisma" as it relates to the discussion of gifts in 1 Corinthians 7, and how does it differ from the normative expectation of marriage?
10. According to Dr. Meadors, what should be the attitude of a Christian who desires marriage but remains single due to life circumstances? Should they assume they have the "gift" of celibacy?

Quiz Answer Key:

1. The third major segment in 1 Corinthians was the response to the Corinthians' written questions, beginning in chapter 7. It generally covered issues of sex and marriage (chapter 7), food offered to idols (chapters 8-10), and church order/gender (chapter 11).
2. The "peri-dei" phrase, meaning "now concerning," appears at the beginning of several sections in 1 Corinthians, including 7:1, 20, and 25. It is a significant indicator of subject changes and suggests Paul is responding to specific questions or challenges from the Corinthian community.
3. The consensus view, according to Dr. Meadors, is that 1 Corinthians 7:1b is a slogan or statement originating from the Corinthian community, reflecting a form of asceticism. Paul is likely quoting them and then responding to this assertion.
4. Paul teaches that sexual relations within marriage are not only permissible but expected as a fulfillment of marital duty. He emphasizes mutual interdependence and states that spouses should not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a limited time, to prevent temptation.
5. There are several interpretations of the "concession" in 7:6: referring back to marriage itself, to the agreed abstinence in 7:5, or forward to Paul's wish for others to be like him in 7:7. Dr. Meadors favors the interpretation that it refers back to the mutually agreed abstinence, as sex in marriage is the norm, and the abstinence is a temporary exception.
6. The original NIV translated 1 Corinthians 7:1 as "It is good for a man not to marry," which is the opposite of the chapter's overall message and contradicts the creation mandate. More formal translations like the RSV kept the literal "not to touch a woman," leaving the interpretation of the metaphor to the reader.
7. Dr. Meadors explains that while the present imperative in Greek can sometimes indicate stopping an ongoing action, it is not an absolute grammatical principle. The context must support this interpretation, and one should be cautious about being overly dogmatic about it.
8. According to the lecture, singleness, in the sense of being free from sexual desire, is presented as a gift (charisma) from God, not merely a personal choice. God's will is generally for people to marry, and singleness as a gift is a special endowment for specific service.

9. The Greek word "charisma" refers to a spiritual endowment or gift that God generates within a person for use in the church. In the context of 1 Corinthians 7, the "gift" of celibacy is a special ability, unlike marriage, which is presented as the norm and expectation.
10. A Christian who desires marriage but remains single should recognize that their situation is due to God's providence in a fallen world, rather than assuming they have the gift of celibacy if they experience ongoing desire for marriage. They should acknowledge their desires and live according to biblical ethics in their current circumstances.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the structure of 1 Corinthians chapter 7 as presented by Dr. Meadors, incorporating the significance of the "peri-dei" phrase and the different outlines suggested by commentators like Talbert and Garland. How does understanding the chapter's structure contribute to interpreting its content?
2. Discuss the implications of interpreting 1 Corinthians 7:1b as either Paul's assertion or a quotation from the Corinthian community. How does this distinction affect our understanding of Paul's subsequent response in the rest of verses 1-7?
3. Evaluate Dr. Meadors' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:6 regarding the "concession." What are the strengths and weaknesses of his argument compared to other possible interpretations, and how does this verse inform Paul's overall teaching on sex and marriage?
4. Explore the concept of "gift" (charisma) in 1 Corinthians 7:7 in relation to marriage and singleness, according to Dr. Meadors. How does this understanding challenge or affirm contemporary views on these topics within Christian culture?
5. Critically assess Dr. Meadors' perspective on "God's will" in the context of decisions about marriage and singleness as presented in the lecture. How does his emphasis on the creation mandate and the nature of spiritual gifts inform his view, and what are the practical implications of this perspective for Christian living?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Peri-dei:** A Greek phrase meaning "now concerning," used by Paul as a marker to indicate a shift in topic, often in response to questions posed by the Corinthian church.
- **Asceticism:** A lifestyle characterized by abstinence from worldly pleasures, often for religious or spiritual reasons. Dr. Meadors suggests some ascetic tendencies were present in the Corinthian church.
- **Chiasm (Chiastic Structure):** A literary device in which parallel elements are presented in an ABCC'BA pattern, often used to highlight a central point. Dr. Meadors mentions Talbert's observation of a chiastic structure in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5.
- **Formal Equivalence:** A translation philosophy that aims to stay as close as possible to the exact wording and grammatical structure of the original language. Dr. Meadors contrasts this with dynamic equivalence.
- **Dynamic Equivalence:** A translation philosophy that focuses on conveying the meaning of the original text in a way that is natural and understandable for contemporary readers, even if it means deviating from the literal wording.
- **Deontological:** Relating to duty or obligation. Dr. Meadors uses this term to describe the marital duty for sexual intimacy in marriage according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:3.
- **Present Imperative (Greek Grammar):** A verb form in Greek that can sometimes indicate the cessation of an ongoing action when used in a prohibition (with "me"). Dr. Meadors cautions against overstating this as a rigid grammatical rule.
- **Aorist Subjunctive (Greek Grammar):** Another verb form in Greek often used for prohibitions, typically indicating not to start an action.
- **Charisma:** A Greek word meaning "gift," often used in the New Testament to refer to spiritual endowments or special abilities given by God for service in the church.
- **Eunuch (for the kingdom of heaven's sake):** A reference from the Gospels (Matthew 19:12) to those who choose to remain unmarried for the sake of serving God's kingdom. Dr. Meadors notes this is not presented as a norm.

5. FAQs on Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 18, Paul's Response to Issues of Sex, 1 Cor 7:1-7a, Biblicalelearning.org

Frequently Asked Questions on 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a

1. What is the main focus of 1 Corinthians chapter 7, particularly verses 1-7a, according to Dr. Meadors? Dr. Meadors explains that 1 Corinthians chapter 7, starting with verses 1-7a, addresses the Corinthian church's written inquiries concerning matters of sex and marriage. This section specifically delves into the realities of marriage, emphasizing both its normative and sexual aspects, while clarifying that Paul's personal lifestyle is not intended as a universal standard for others.

2. What was the nature of the questions posed by the Corinthians to Paul regarding sex and marriage? Dr. Meadors suggests that the Corinthians' questions were likely not purely for clarification but may have contained an adversarial tone, possibly challenging Paul's views on these matters. This is indicated by instances throughout 1 Corinthians where Paul seems to be in disagreement with some of their ideas.

3. How does Dr. Meadors interpret the opening statement in 1 Corinthians 7:1, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman"? Dr. Meadors, following the majority scholarly opinion, believes this statement is likely a slogan or assertion originating from the Corinthian community, reflecting a form of asceticism prevalent among them. Paul then responds to this idea in the subsequent verses, correcting potential misunderstandings.

4. What is Paul's initial response in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 to the idea that it is good to abstain from sexual relations? Paul counters this idea by stating that due to the prevalence of sexual immorality, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. He emphasizes the mutual duty and interdependence within marriage regarding sexual intimacy, asserting that spouses should not deprive each other except by mutual consent for a limited time for spiritual purposes, lest they be tempted due to a lack of self-control.

5. What is the significance of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:6, "I say this as a concession, not as a command"? Dr. Meadors explains that this concession likely refers back to the idea of temporary, mutually agreed-upon sexual abstinence mentioned in verse 5. Paul is clarifying that while such temporary abstinence is permissible by mutual agreement, it is not a command and should not be seen as a spiritually superior practice, as the norm within marriage is sexual intimacy.

6. How does Dr. Meadors interpret Paul's wish in 1 Corinthians 7:7, "I wish that all of you were as I am"? Dr. Meadors understands this wish as Paul expressing a pragmatic view related to his specific ministry context. As a single individual, he had certain freedoms and focus in his missionary work. However, he immediately follows this with the recognition that each person has their own unique gift from God, indicating that singleness is not a requirement or a norm for all.

7. What does Dr. Meadors mean when he discusses the "gift" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:7 in relation to marriage and singleness? Dr. Meadors clarifies that the "gift" (Greek: *charisma*) of being like him (presumably single and celibate) is not a matter of personal choice but a special endowment from God. He contrasts this with marriage, which he describes as the norm and an expectation according to biblical teaching. The gift of singleness, therefore, involves a lack of natural sexual drive and is intended for special service in the church, not merely for personal freedom.

8. How does Dr. Meadors address the concept of "God's will" in the context of marriage and singleness based on 1 Corinthians 7:1-7a? Dr. Meadors argues that Paul does not exhort individuals to seek God's will regarding whether to marry or remain single because marriage is presented as the normative path in Scripture. He suggests that the desire for marriage is normal, and the "gift" of singleness is an exception, characterized by a genuine lack of sexual desire. Those who desire marriage should pursue it, and singleness should not be chosen as a seemingly more pious option if one experiences sexual desires.