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1 CORINTHIANS VII.  
(Part I)

AN ADDRESS BY MR. P. W. HEWARD,

AT 61, UPTON LANE, FOREST GATE, E.

11th November, 1915.

1 CORINTHIANS 7.

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In the two wondrous inspired epistles to Corinthians believers, God brings before us His own infinite tenderness, and much instruction for His people, to this very day. Scripture is NEVER out of date. Believers should be, in a deeply spiritual sense, conformed to the words of God and not conformed to this age. There were evidently various "parties" at Corinth, and the development of this party spirit affected everything, consequently there were some who were much opposed to God's servant Paul, others were strongly "in favour of him", but in a manner which he would not have sought, for he desired that the Lord's Name, and will, alone should be honoured. However, there were real Christians at Corinth, and real Christians in comparatively large numbers. But many were influenced, or shall I not say, damaged by those around them, whom, at least, were not adorning the doctrine of God, and as to whose salvation God's servant himself, was, in measure, doubtful. Yet some desired to know how to please the Lord with respect to their homes, and with this desire, it would seem, they wrote to the apostle. In chapter 1 he gives a general introduction regarding what he had heard about the Corinthians. In the second chapter he deals with the deep things of God, though unable to explain them fully while sin was not fully judged. In the third and fourth chapters he speaks further to the rebuking of the carnal spirit manifest among them. In the fifth chapter he cuts at the root of "liberty" so-called, which was actually licentiousness. In the sixth chapter he explains the iniquity of going to law with brethren, and marks out the true attitude of believers with respect to their bodies. Those bodies were to be viewed as belonging to the Lord, and therefore in the matter of food and all else that concerns the body they were to realise themselves bought with a price. FLESHLY indulgence was totally out of place in those who had received a gracious salvation, and this is the root of the Divine testimony in ch. 5. It is on the background of chapters

5 and 6 that chapter 7 goes forth. Fleshly indulgence and selfishness grieve God's Holy Spirit! Apparently there were those at Corinth who were very troubled as to their position with respect to heathen partners. The believer's position is quite clear regarding business matters. He can buy of an ungodly one, and sell to an ungodly one, and be employed by an ungodly one, But he must not share a business with an ungodly one. These things are on the surface of Scripture. But the home presented and presents, problems. With many at Corinth, when it was commenced, both were heathen. Grace had laid hold of the husband here, or the wife there, and the other remained a heathen, frequenting heathen temples. Some at Corinth felt this was unbearable, and that they could not live in the same house, <sup>and</sup> sit at the same table with an idol worshipper. Others said an idol was nothing, and even went to the idol house. Doubtless, this alarmed those concerned yet more. What were they to do? The apostle does not deal with this aspect of the matter first, but takes the wider question respecting marriage and its accompaniments. Thus has the Lord often overruled ignorance and failure of others, to give us MUCH teaching. May we be those who learn MUCH.

Several times over in this chapter we have the expression "It is good". Verses 1, 8, 26; and the term "good" here, is rather "manifestly good", - "beautiful" - that which will give a testimony before a ruined world, for Paul was always concerned that there should be a witness for Christ. A similar expression to "it is good" occurs in verse 38. In fact we may say that, from one end of the chapter to the other, God's servant longs that the Lord may be glorified. In this passage moreover, we have two distinct things; first - commandments, secondly - advice. We must not confuse the two. In one verse we notice the apostle puts it thus. Verse 10 - Unto the married, I command, yet not I, but the Lord. How about verse 12? There we read, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord. Is there in THESE two verses the contrast between command and opinion? No, there is the contrast between the direct command of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel, and

and the inspired command of His servant who was very humble in the way he put it, but who nevertheless was led by the Spirit of God. Where then is the contrast between command and opinion. It is always CLEARLY stated. In verse 6 the apostle looking back says, I speak this by permission, and not of commandment, and the word "permission" is literally "according to an opinion together", a personal opinion. Now the opinion of a godly man is very important, but Paul, being inspired, is careful to let us know when he simply declares the opinion of a godly man. This lays a greater stress on the inspiration when such a limit is NOT given, and further it would bring before us God's appointed way of dealing with certain circumstances. You cannot always say, This thing is the will of the Lord, inasmuch as it is not universally the will of the Lord. It is the will of the Lord for THIS brother, ~~that~~<sup>yet</sup> not for THAT brother. In such cases Paul gave his opinion, that godly ones might in the power of the Spirit of God apply the will of God to their own particular case. Commandments are oftentimes more universal. Nevertheless, godly opinions are important. I was impressed by the way in which this very epistle begins with the statement (ch. 1. 10) "I beseech you, brethren, ... that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind (that is one aspect - the recognition of truth) and in the same OPINION (that is the other). Notice the mark of the intense fellowship among the evil kings of Rev. 17 with Antichrist: they have one OPINION, and give their authority to the beast, (the same word is used). The apostle would therefore have us distinguish between commandments which were, and are, binding; and opinions. I regret that this word "opinion" is variously rendered. For example it comes in verse 25, I have not a commandment, but I give an opinion, and in verse 40 "But she is happier if she so abide, after (according to) my opinion". Now the opinion of one who had received mercy from the Lord to be faithful was very important, but it was NOT universally binding, nor intended to be. There were exceptions, there were special circumstances, yet to lightly esteem the opinion and suggestion of a godly man like Paul would be a grievous

error. Let us carefully distinguish, therefore, from one end of the chapter to the other, that which is a commandment, and that which is an opinion. Among commandments we have the definite statement that the point regarding which the Corinthians wrote was to be settled by the unbelieving partner being allowed to remain. There was to be NO severance of marriage ties because one remained unsaved. <sup>This is of course quite distinct from the thought of marrying one unsaved.</sup> The apostle distinctly said that when marriage was contemplated, it was not only to be in Christ, but a stronger expression is used, "In the Lord", not only to a fellow-believer, but in harmony with the will of the Lord, to the one whom the Lord has marked out, walking in obedience unto Him. But when any were saved after they were married, the marriage union was not broken, by the wondrous change taking place in one of the lives. Hence the command of verse 10, Let not the wife depart from her husband. But suppose she had departed, for the tense in verse 11 implies this, "But, and if she have departed" - the apostle was clear, the possible courses were open to the different believing wives who had taken this unwise step, "Let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband". The Lord would direct in each case. Grace, and a new creation in Christ Jesus, the fact that a believer had died to sin and risen again in the person of his or her Lord, did not untie natural relationships which existed before. This is an important decision that goes far further than marriage. If a child of God has obligations which date back to his or her unconverted days, it is important to seek to fulfil these obligations in one's converted days. A new life alters everything concerning our past sins AS TO THE LORD, but it does not alter our position as to the world with respect to fulfilling obligations, and undoing whatever evil we can. Here then is a command which the apostle emphasizes by further commands in verse 12 and 13, for please notice that though we read here, "I speak, not the Lord", there is no suggestion this is merely an opinion. The thought is Christ did not speak on this subject in the record of the Gospel. He did speak on the other. But the Holy Spirit now applies instruction through the apostle. If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not

put her away. Incidentally this gives us a very helpful thought. It shows us that believers should be VERY CAREFUL as to any seeming fellowship with unbelievers. If the apostle marked out that the dwelling together, and the sitting at the same table, were allowable with regard to those who were so closely related, because of marriage, he implied it was not desirable in ~~any~~ other cases. He implied that it was out of place for a child of God to find enjoyment in sitting at a meal table with an ungodly man. It was, and is, out of place for a child of God to have a home fellowship with those who know not His Master. There are only two exceptions here mentioned, that of husband and wife, and of parents and children. (Babies, I should say, because the Holy Spirit does not hint any approval of their growing up unsaved.)

Another problem would come up for solution in connection with the difficulty at Corinth. Suppose that the unbelieving partner went away himself, or herself. The believer was not to depart, the believer was not to put away, but if the unbeliever departed (verse 15) - God deals with every possible circumstance - "If the unbelieving depart, let him depart." A brother or a sister has not been enslaved in such cases, but God hath called us in peace". In other words, if the ungodly husband went away and said, I will not live with my believing wife, the believing wife was not to force this, but to quietly wait and to leave it with the Lord, she was to be perfectly clear it was not her seeking or her arranging, but THEN she could leave it with the Lord. She was not enslaved in this matter, God had called in peace, and He would give peace. The added words in verse 16 were to comfort in such a circumstance. "For why knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or why knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" In other words, if the unbeliever departs, you are not to seek to FORCE a hindrance of this departing, for you cannot be sure you will lead the unbelieving husband, or wife, as the case may be, unto the Lord, and therefore do not force your way to compel the home when it is possible you will not lead that one to the Lord, but only be hindered by that which you are now seeking as fellowship. You are free in such a case. Here then we have Divine commandments.

Now let us notice holy opinions. The apostle plainly suggests at the very beginning of the chapter and indicates more definitely in verse 7 that there were certain advantages for those who remained unmarried. I would that all men were even as I myself. This in the context seems fairly clear, for he says to the unmarried and widows, - It is good for them that they abide even as I. Evidently therefore, Paul was unmarried, or a widower, but as he desired that all should be as himself, it seems hardly likely that he was a widower. Scripture would seem to confirm the thought that he was unmarried. This then he expresses as a desire which he had, "I wish all men to be as myself" - a desire which he felt when he stood before Agrippa. He was never a mournful servant of God. If he wanted to encourage anyone he would encourage them in terms of himself, I do not mean "self-consciously" in the proud meaning of this word. There are some believers who could not say "I wish you were as I am myself", it would be almost unkind to express this. But he meant that he was free from distraction to devote every energy to the Lord, and his desire was that others might have the same freedom. There was nothing wrong in marriage. Appointed by God in the first, it was approved by God ever afterwards, and the same apostle has said that forbidding to marry is a serious sin. The Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 19 emphasized the very thoughts which Paul gives here. I mean that he emphasized marriage as arranged from the beginning. He emphasized an interest in children; but at the same time he speaks of those who could attend to the things of the kingdom of heaven without distraction, who would have no home ties or claims to occupy their time. That seems the special thought of this passage. For you will notice further on we read, (verse 26) "I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress (or necessity) that it is good for a man so to be, - Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife". There was no sin in marriage, verse 28 quickly adds this thought, but there was necessarily tribulation, for the word "trouble" is "tribulation" in verse 28. Hence the added statement in verse 29 "But this I say, brethren, that the time is short", and because of the necessity

and the shortness of time, and the dangers of worldliness, the apostle was alarmed at the stress upon marriage which often took the mind off the things of the Lord. He knew very well that a godly emphasis on this danger would not hinder GODLY marriage, but would help to check every tendency to be occupied with the things of earth, and to be occupied with thoughts in this direction instead of being occupied with the Lord. Hence the added statement in verse 32, "I would have you.." This "I would have" is the same expression as in verse 7, "I would have you without carefulness" - that is, without anxiety. "He that is unmarried careth for (is anxious for) the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord". In other words, he is like Timothy of whom we read, "I have no man likeminded who will naturally be anxious on behalf of you". That is in the very epistle which says, "Be anxious for nothing", but I suppose believers will see no contradiction. There must be no anxiety as to the things of the world. But the apostle distinctly says that when there is marriage, there is usually a distraction which takes away from the attraction of the Lord. And why a distraction? Let verse 34 make it clear. One cares for the things of the Lord, but another cares for (is anxious for) the things of the world, how she may please her husband. "And this I speak for your profit". Now this word "profit" is practically the same as that elsewhere rendered "expedient". "All things are lawful (within authority) but all things are not expedient". Marriage was lawful even among the Corinthian believers at that time of necessity and strain. It was never forbidden, and is never to be forbidden, but the apostle was dealing with that which was profitable, that which was expedient, in the old sense of the word, - literally, "bringing together". May I render it thus, - "This I speak toward the bringing together of you yourselves, not that I may cast a snare upon you! The word "snare" is almost a "strangling snare". We think of the parable where the cares of this world choke the seed. The apostle was longing that the believers might not have the will of God and devotion to the Lord choked by any settling down in the world. "Not that I may have cast upon you a strangling snare, but with a view to that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord".

literally "That ye may have a seat well at the side of the Lord, without dragging around". I have not any doubt that this alludes in the Holy Spirit's wisdom, to Luke 10. Martha is brought before us as the type of one who is married, and occupied with the things of the home. Mary has a seat well toward, and at the side of, the Lord, and attends to Him without the dragging round about of Martha who is hurrying about that house, getting things ready. "Mary has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her" is the Lord's own statement. Indeed there are perhaps, few more striking illustrations of the two positions in 1 Cor. 7 than Martha and Mary, and here is the Lord's warning, and the Lord's guidance to His people, that they may be without distraction. I need hardly say this puts a tremendous responsibility upon unmarried believers. They are to be very definitely occupied with the things of the Lord. Do not misunderstand me. I have no thought that when one marries, he or she has a liberty to get colder regarding love to the Lord. These words are not approving of coldness, but warning against coldness if any are married. But the thought on my mind is this, that if a child of God has no home responsibilities of the tremendous comprehensiveness which marriage involves, though few realise this, and few, even when in them, live up to these responsibilities, - if any believer is free from the tremendous time-taking responsibilities for the bringing up of a godly home, that believer should fill up the vacuum, not with selfishness, but with much concentrated devotion unto the Lord. I believe the thought applies in everything. If a child of God at the present time definitely takes the attitude that he cannot take a share in the world's government or the world's arrangements, that he belongs to a heavenly city and a heavenly calling, it is mere trifling, or soon degenerates into mere trifling, and causes the world to give a taunt for hypocrisy, unless that child of God will put himself out as much for the things of the Lord as men of the world put themselves out for duties of national defence. If a believer takes it easier because he is a Christian, that believer only invites the charge of hypocrisy against children of God. It is

encumbent upon every believer who at the present time is approached by men of the world as to enlisting in the army, it is encumbent upon him to throw aside everything and to devote his energies unsparingly to spiritual things; otherwise he stands convicted before the world, and can have no possibility of bringing much glory to the Lord amid this solemn crisis. The land NATURALLY demands all the strength of the younger men within it, and unless we can conscientiously say that before God we are doing that which is of GREATER importance, EVEN FOR THE LAND ITSELF; we are only dragging down the professed Name of the Lord Jesus, and dragging ~~his~~ down the holiest principles in a way which must dishonour Him, and disgrace His Name. These are perilous times and it is not without reason that we shall shortly see 1 Cor. 7 deals with this very point, and solves the whole question for a child of God, solving, moreover, all his business relationships, and dealing with everything of business, even as with everything of the home.

But to return to the question of marriage. Marriage, we have seen, when it has been consummated involves responsibilities from which there is no escape. That is the argument of various verses. It involves responsibilities, for Scripture makes clear that it will take much time to look after the godly arrangement of a home. I need not say, I am not speaking of the furniture, that is a mere detail. To spend one's time on its adornment and decoration is a trivial waste, and a fleshly conformity to this age. I am speaking now of the home, in its moral and spiritual aspect; to look after it to the glory of God is most difficult and most dangerous, for this passage shows that if there is pleasing God in the home, if there is honouring Him, there will be tribulation in the flesh, so that the strain of a godly home will be almost overpowering. Indeed both parts of life are set before us, whether of the married or the unmarried, as involving opportunities and duties which are overwhelming unless we can cast our care upon the Lord, and claim His gracious enabling and the inworking of His Holy Spirit. But while the believer who is married is distinctly told his or her responsibilities, let me not forget to remind you of the words of verse 29. "Because the time is short,

it remaineth both that they that have wives be as though they had none". I do not mean by this to imply that there is a selfish disregard. Verse 5 makes clear the Lord's will otherwise, but that same verse shows that dealings with the Lord must come first, and that though it is sinful to be selfish in the home, even for spiritual work, by godly arrangement He must come first, and there must not be worldliness under the guise of love to a wife or husband. (I may say that the expression "Defraud not" has a generalised, as well as a specialised meaning, being the Holy Spirit's translation of the commandment "Thou shalt not covet" in one Scripture, and therefore implying everything ~~and~~ anything ~~of~~ of self-centering). Let me repeat it:- The child of God ~~is~~ who is married is to be most unselfish in all his or her dealings. Much confusion is brought about in the home by little trivialities, they may seem, of selfishness. And while speaking of the individual prayer of verse 5, let me remind you that the united prayer of husband and wife is shown in 1 Peter 3, and that such prayers must not be hindered. But to return; in verse 29, those who have wives be as those who have none. In other words while there is to be the avoidance of personal selfishness, and ~~correct~~ <sup>earnest</sup> looking after the one committed to special care, there is not to be what I may call "home-selfishness" and forgetfulness of the fellowship of the Lord's people. It is serious to be wrapped up in one's self, it is almost as serious to be wrapped up in one's home. In view of the solemnities of the day, children of God must put aside all theories of foolish miscalled "affection", and devote their minds to the Lord, and the things of the Lord, and they will find that all else is in its right place. I hope, though we are somewhat overdue with this subject, to finish it, and also to speak on the child of God and daily business as seen in this passage of Scripture, when the Lord brings us together next time (Jas. 4. 15).