

1 Corinthians 7:12-16

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. You've probably noticed I am not Dave Helm, who, despite how we scheduled things, was on spring break this week.
- CPS just wouldn't go with our preaching schedule as we laid it out earlier in the year. Why don't you pray with me? Heavenly Father, thank you for this morning and thank you for your word.
- Lord, open our eyes, open our ears, that we may hear your voice in it. In your son's name we pray. Amen. We saw last week a principle in 1 Corinthians 7, verse 7.
- It went something like this. Marriage is a gift. Singleness is a gift. And we saw three applications of it. If you have the gift of being married, don't act like you're not and withhold sex from each other.
- If you have the gift of being single, that's a good thing, too. Protect yourself from sexual immorality as much as you can. Three, if you have the gift of marriage, but for reasons less than the one exception, for reasons less than the one exception, you are separated or divorced, then your only real option is reconciliation.
- [1 : 2 9] Three applications which betray a misunderstanding, a false dichotomy, if you will, between godly, marital sexual relations and sexual immorality in Corinth.
- There's a misunderstanding about these things, particularly the sexual immorality or porneia, which is the word that Paul's been using since the beginning of chapter 5 to describe it.
- So, in other words, sex with anyone while you are single, sex with anyone who you remarry when your first divorce was not legitimate, and even withholding sex in a marriage are all forms of sexual immorality.
- With our passage today, if you want to open your Bibles to verses 12 through 16 in 1 Corinthians 7, we come to a fourth topic within this complex of misunderstandings about sex and sexual immorality.
- Specifically, he's going to address a group of people who, for whatever reason, find themselves married. As Christians, they find themselves married to unbelieving non-Christians.
- [2 : 5 0] This subject, naturally, raised a lot of questions in Corinth, and I think probably raises some questions for us as well. And his first point to this group is, I think, strikingly simple.
- If your unbelieving spouse isn't forcing it, and he's actually going to talk about this exception in verse 15, if your unbelieving spouse isn't forcing the marriage to end by leaving, then don't get divorced.
- He begins in verses 12 through 13. To the rest I say, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.
- If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. Notice how he begins.
- To the rest I say, I, not the Lord. Seems as though Paul is trying to locate what he's saying here in the realm of friendly advice rather than apostolic exhortation.

[4 : 00] But, and this is, I think, important, that's not a very good understanding of what he's saying. We have the reciprocal statement back in verse 10. Look with me. To the married I give this charge, not I, but the Lord.

Which demonstrated that Paul was locating his charge in the specific words or commands of Jesus. Here in verse 12, he is simply saying that he's moving back into his exhortations and no longer has a specific command from Jesus.

This in no way implies any disunity with the words of Jesus, nor does it, and this is important, nor does it somehow mean what he's saying is not apostolic exhortation that comes with it the inerrancy and sufficiency of our doctrine of scripture.

It's right here in our Bibles. It's a binding word from Paul. Secondly, this exception for Paul on dissolving marriage is abandonment, which, again, is a word he's going to use in verse 15.

Believers who, for whatever reason, find themselves married to an unbeliever, and if the unbelieving spouse is willing to keep the marriage, then the Christian should not be looking for a way out.

[5 : 18] That's his point. So, how does one end up in such a marriage? Historically, in places of massive evangelistic efforts, like Corinth, it makes sense that some will convert, and they will convert having already been married, and their partner may not convert.

So, I mean, when Paul spent his year and a half in Corinth, he evangelized, and a lot of people came to faith. Because, naturally, some were going to be married to people who were not Christians.

But notice, he's not actually that specific. He actually takes a step back and phrases it in such a way that it's broader.

Look at 1 Corinthians 7 here, again, 12 through 13. If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

It's broader, which opens it up to some other options. What if a Christian couple, married, finds themselves in a situation where one of them rejects the faith, actually leaves Christianity?

[6 : 35] We have the situation, as Paul describes it here, a Christian married to a non-Christian. What if, you know, there's a third option, I think.

What if, what if, what if, I have to take a step back on that one. I mean, what a terrible position to find yourself in.

married, and your partner rejects the faith. But, it seems natural to want out in that situation.

It seems like this isn't God's plan. And it's understandable, I think, to want to reject it. I need to move on.

When you get into that situation, Paul comes back to this, this simple first point. Do not get divorced.

[7 : 50] It comes, I think, out of this question of why. Why? He gets to this in verse 14. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. Made holy how? Because that's, that's the reason. That's where he grounds this exhortation to not get divorced.

How? Notice the language. It's a, it's revolving around this idea of holiness. And in fact, he, at the end there, brings this word unclean into it.

This points us back to temple practices. This is important. It actually, I think, raises the view of marriage. Whenever Paul talks about marriage, he references back to Genesis, how the two become one flesh.

And this, in some way, anticipates what goes on in the temple. And so it, it makes sense in some way that when two become one flesh, the sacred institution would show in some other way this other sacred institution of the temple.

[9 : 07] But it goes deeper. The, the Christian faith of the believing spouse actually has an effect on the unbelieving spouse. The unbelieving spouse and children are both described as holy.

What does holy mean? It means set apart. And that's a, that's an apt description here. But it also, I think there's another way of translating this idea, and that is consecrated. Given the temple language in chapter six and the pairing of holy and unclean here in 714, as well as the purity concerns that are going to come up in the next chapter, I wonder if that is also a helpful way of thinking about it.

Consecrate. The unbelieving spouse and the children are consecrated by the marriage. In Exodus 28 to 30, Aaron is told to consecrate himself, the priests, the altar, the bull.

I mean, he actually is told to consecrate just about everything, including the tent of meeting itself. This act of consecrating was a preparatory act. That's important.

It's a preparatory act that made everything ready for the sacrifice, for salvation. They were not, I repeat, they were not the same thing as the guilt offering, this consecrating idea.

[10 : 21] It was preparatory for the guilt offering. So when Paul talks about an unbelieving spouse and children of an unbelieving married couple, he's saying that they have the same status.

He's not saying that they have the same status before the Lord. He's saying that they have, though, a special status. He's not saying that they are saved, and he makes that point very clear in verse 16.

But he's saying that they have an advantage. I mean, this makes sense. I mean, nothing is more preparatory for salvation than being married to a faithful Christian.

Notice in particular the transfer of holiness. It comes from the believing spouse to the unbelieving spouse. Their concern about purity in the next chapter is anticipated.

Their concern about purity when laying with prostitutes in the last chapter is referenced here. The unbelieving spouse does not make the believing spouse impure.

[11 : 34] Rather, the purity is transferred from the believing spouse or purity is probably the wrong word here again, but it's the consecration is transferred from the believing spouse to the unbelieving spouse.

That's his rationale for don't get divorced. The gospel is not destructive or against marriage.

It's not against family. It's actually willing to wait quietly and to put up with the faithlessness of a spouse out of a hope for salvation.

And that's precisely the point he lands on in verse 16. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

The believing spouse and the consecration that comes from being in a marriage with a believing spouse narrows the gap on conversion. So, let me conclude here.

[12 : 38] I want to summarize a little bit. Paul makes two points for those who are believers who find themselves given to a marriage with an unbeliever. First, don't get divorced. The sacred institution of marriage transcends that disunity.

If the unbelieving spouse consents to stay married, then Paul's application is clear. Stay married. His second point addresses this question of why. Christian faith of a believing spouse actually has a profound ability to prepare an unbelieving spouse, to consecrate them, to soften the grounds of their heart, for the planting of the gospel.

These applications, I think, are straightforward enough. But there's something, I think, even deeper here. Whether you are divorced already, going through a divorce, married and thinking about it, and I have to believe anybody who's married has thought about it at one point or another.

We are sinners. There's an echo of a greater marriage here. The relationship of God to his people is frequently in Scripture portrayed in the language of marriage.

And we learn something about God. Whether we are believers or unbelievers, whether we lose our faith even, God is unrelentingly!! God is unrelentingly faithful and untiringly pursues his bride.

[14 : 07] And because of that love, we are consecrated. Maybe not yet saved, maybe never saved, but we are consecrated for the complete and final sacrifice that we have in his Son.

So let me pray. Our Father in Heaven, we marvel at the way you loved us and prepared us, even before we came to faith in your Son.

we marvel at the way you brought us to your Son and his sacrifice, celebrated in the table we are about to partake. Give us the same faithfulness to stand by our spouses, stand by each other in this church, even when we lack faith.

I pray this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.