

Singleness and Marriage

7:7-16

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² 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. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 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. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

As you know, the Corinthian church had mixed and unbiblical views on marriage. In 1 Cor 7 Paul is providing them with a Christian view of marriage in which it reflects Jesus and his love for the church. Let me give you an example.

We have been saying that what we do with our bodies is important because they will resemble the resurrected body of Jesus. Jesus will forever have a physical body. It resembles his incarnated body but is enhanced. (Reconciliation = to restore, with more).

Hebrews 10:5 - ...when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;

And in his incarnation, Jesus didn't do with his body as he pleased. Instead, he offered to the Father and to us.

In the same way, when we become Christians, we are called to give our bodies to the Lord.

Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Christ gave his body for us.
We give our bodies to him.

v 4 - For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

As such, every aspect of marriage reflects Christ, his love for the church and the church's love for him.

But, as John 3:16 models, the point of marriage is 'giving,' and not 'taking.'

As Christ serves us, we serve one another, and marriage reflects that service

But, you may ask, what about singleness? The Jewish Christians in Corinth thought marriage was required. After all, it wasn't good for Adam to be alone (Gen 2:18) and how else can you obey the creation mandate to "increase and multiply and fill the earth..." (Gen 1:28)

First: Singleness is to be Celebrated. 6-9

- a) Paul is not commanding people to be single. 6
- b) Paul was single. 7a
- c) Singleness is to be celebrated (as is marriage). 7b

"gift" = same word in 1 Cor 12 for "spiritual gifts"

- d) If you're single, that's good. 8
- e) But, marriage will help you with self-control

Singleness and marriage are both gifts but no one is "gifted" for sexual immorality. Single people must live faithfully to the Lord (no sex) and married people must live faithfully to the Lord (serving one another)

Second: Marriage is to be Celebrated

"Now to the married".... Paul is writing this chapter to answer questions from the Corinthians about marriage. This phrase, "Now to the married" indicates that he's moving on to another question.

- a) A Christian wife should not depart from her husband

Again, many Corinthians Christians thought it would be better to be single.

7:1 - *"It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."*

As a result, they contemplated leaving their marriages to devote all their time and effort to God and to improve their holiness.

Paul responds, *"Absolutely not!"*

He emphasizes his point by saying, *"not I, but the Lord"*. Since marriage is intended to reflect Jesus's love for the church, then marital longevity reflects God's faithfulness to the church.
11 - (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband)

Marriage is so important to God's plan that if you get divorced, you should either remain single or reconcile with your husband.

God does recognize divorce for sexual immorality (Matt 19:3-9) and abandonment (1 Cor 7:15) and in those cases, God allows remarriage.

But God does not endorse this idea of divorce for 'higher spirituality.' If you get divorced for nonbiblical reasons, don't get married again, only to do that again. Stay unmarried or reconcile with your husband. Don't become a serial divorcee.

11b - *and the husband should not divorce his wife.*

IMP: Jesus did not command divorce for sexual immorality or abandonment. In these cases, a husband should remain faithful to his wife and not allow his heart to be hardened toward her (Matt 19:8)

Third: Marriage to an Unbeliever. 12-16

I wonder at this point if Paul is not exhausted with this issue. He is literally 'spelling it out' for the Corinthians and trying to cover every base with them.

"But to the rest..." shifts the focus from marriages where both people are Christians to marriage with a nonChristian.

"...I, not the Lord" does not indicate this is not inspired by the Holy Spirit but that Jesus never discussed this issue. "*I, not Jesus, am saying this because Jesus never spoke to this like he spoke to marriage and adultery*" in Matthew 19:3-9.

a) The Corinthians thought they couldn't glorify God with marriage to an unbeliever

Let's be clear: we are not supposed to marry unbelievers –

2 Corinthians 6:14 - *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*

But being married to an unbeliever is not a reason to get divorced.

V 12-13 - *...if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.*

But what does this mean? – v 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.*

Well, we know for a fact that we can't save anyone, and that people aren't saved by association with other people. So, it can't mean that an unbelieving spouse can get into Heaven on their Christian spouse's faith.

Saving faith cannot be borrowed, inherited, or willed to someone else. There are no surrogates, stand-ins, replacements, or substitutes. We must each meet Jesus personally. (Matthew 10:34–36; 1 Corinthians 3:13; Galatians 6:3–5).

And, Paul writes in verse 16 that an unbeliever might be saved through the witness of a Christian spouse. – *“For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife.”*

That, in and of itself, proves that simply being married to a believer does not automatically mean salvation to a non-Christian.

So, this can't mean that an unbelieving spouse can get into Heaven on their Christian spouse's faith.

But *'holy'* means, *'separated,'* or *'set apart'* and so the thought is that the unbeliever's life can be influenced by the believing spouse because they are *'separated'* or *'set apart'* from unbelievers and living with a believer.

Basically, marriage sets an unbeliever apart with a believer. Otherwise, they might be totally cut off from any godly influence. The hope is that the unbeliever will be positively influenced living in that environment.

“the unbelieving husband or wife is relatively set apart through his or her believing partner, and abiding in the natural union instead of breaking it by leaving, receives a spiritual influence holding the possibility of actual conversion.”

W.E. Vine

The point is that a believer is *not less* for being married to an unbeliever, but an unbeliever is *blessed* by being married to a Christian.

And the same thing is true for the children of a believer -

V 14c – *Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

A child's chance of knowing Jesus is enhanced by a believing parent or parents.

(I know you were looking for something more dramatic or deeper than that, but that's what it means).

And, at this point, let's talk about verse 16 - *For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

(I know that I earlier said that one person can't save another. This is an instance where you must read what the Bible says and know what it means)

Two examples:

1 – Husbands

Acts 16:31-34 - *And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*

2 – Wives

1 Peter 3:1-6 – *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

The hope, not the guarantee, but the hope, in both Acts 16 and 1 Peter 3, that believing husbands and wives can influence their spouses for Christ.

And now, the caveat – v 15 - *But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved.*

There are no guarantees. An unbelieving partner may weary with the influence of the believer and choose to leave. In that case, let the unbeliever go.

1 - 15b - *In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved.*

2 – 15c - *God has called you to peace.*

Your faith in God, even in the face of singleness, will do more for you, and for your unbelieving spouse, than arguing and fighting.

On that basis, how should a Christian behave in a divorce setting?

Isaiah 42:2 - *He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street*

Isaiah 53:7 - *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

Conclusion:

May I say this? *"A lot of this is just common sense, which the Corinthians seemed to lack."*

But selfishness can disable our common sense, our best sense, our sense of right and wrong, beautiful, and ugly, good, and evil.

Singleness and marriage are to be celebrated. Each has its blessings, and each has its burdens. In the end, v 17 - *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.*

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read the text
- 2 – From your own perspective, what are some advantages to singleness?
- 3 – From your own perspective, what are some advantages to marriage?
- 4 – How does marriage help with self-control?
- 5 – Why should a Christian wife not depart from her husband?
- 6 – How does divorce hurt our Christian witness?
- 7– On what biblical grounds can a couple divorce?
- 8 – Should believers not marry unbelievers?
- 9 – How might a Christian spouse influence her/his unbelieving spouse?
- 10 – What are some of the complexities you can think of about Christians being married to nonChristians?
- 11 – How might a Christian spouse influence his/her children?
- 12 – Read Acts 16:31-34 and 1 Peter 3:1-6 and exegete how the believer did or might influence a nonbelieving spouse toward Christ?
- 13 – Why should a Christian not fight a nonChristian who wants a divorce?
- 14 – How should the Christian act/react during that time?
- 15 – What does v 17 call us to in marriage, divorce or singleness?