

HARD SAYINGS

SESSION #13: “I, Not the Lord.” (1 Cor. 7:10-15)

Text

1. What does it actually say?
2. Is it descriptive or prescriptive? Genre?
3. What is hard about this passage?
4. What are we looking to understand about this passage as we begin to examine it?

Historical Context

“First Corinthians is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church... The writing of this second letter (1 Corinthians) was prompted by oral reports from Chloe’s household about factional strife within the church (1:11)... Apparently as he was writing the letter, he received a letter from the Corinthians asking his opinion on various issues (7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).” –Blum and Howard, HCSB Study Bible Notes

Literary Context:

1 Corinthians

OUTLINE (from ESV Study Bible)

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| I. Epistolary Introduction to the Letter’s Main Themes (1:1-9) | B. The betrothed and widows (7:25-40) |
| II. Divisions over Christian Preachers (1:10-4:21) | C. Food offered to idols (8:1-11:1) |
| III. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Legal Wranglings (5:1-6:20) | V. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40) |
| IV. Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter (7:1-11:1) | VI. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1-58) |
| A. Marriage, divorce, and unchangeable circumstances (7:1-24) | VII. The Collection for the Saints and Travel Plans (16:1-12) |
| | VIII. Closing Admonitions and Greetings (16:13-24) |

Apostolic Authority In Paul's Letters (*non-exhaustive list*)

- 1 Cor. 14:36-37
- Galatians 1:1, 11-12
- Romans 1:1-6
- 1 Timothy 1:1

Paul's Letters as Scripture? Peter says yes.

2 Peter 3:15-16 ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Intertextual/Verbal Context (*from Hard Sayings by R.C. Sproul*)

"The term Apostle translates the Greek apostolos, which means "one who is sent." It is not that anybody who is sent is necessarily an Apostle. If I send my child to the grocery store for a loaf of bread, I don't therefore confer Apostolic status upon my child. In the Greek world, however, an Apostle functioned as an emissary for a king or for the government and had the vested authority to speak on behalf of the king or for the nation. We find this concept in the New Testament with respect to those men whom Christ selected to be His representatives. We are accustomed to speaking of disciples and Apostles as though the term disciple and the term Apostle were synonyms, but they are not. The word disciple means "learner," and Jesus had many disciples who were students in His rabbinic school."

Trusted Interpreters

Westminster Confession of Faith (16th c. AD):

WCF Chapter 1 : Of the Holy Scripture

1.4 The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

From Sound Interpretation to Useful Application

1. What do we learn about God?
2. How does this passage shape our hearts to glorify God?
3. What do we learn about people?
4. How does this passage change how we live as citizens of God's Kingdom? How can we live in its light today?

Resources

WCF Chapter 1 : Of the Holy Scripture

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New American Commentary (Mark Taylor)

In 7:12–16, Paul addresses yet another category of married couples, those believers married to unbelievers. Paul has no grounds to command anything to the unbeliever (5:12), yet he instructs the believer not to dissolve the marriage on the condition of the mutual consent of the unbeliever. The words “I say, not the Lord,” does not imply that Paul’s instructions [Vol 28: 1 Cor, p. 174] lack authority, or that he merely offers his opinion (cf. 7:25,40) since he provides a theological rationale for his directives (7:14). Rather, he is distinguishing his own words from the words of Jesus. Jesus had not spoken on this particular issue as he had spoken on the matter of divorce (7:10–11). Furthermore, Jesus’ instructions regarding divorce were directed toward those within Israel. Paul’s Gentile mission surely resulted in a different kind of situation for many believers. Sometimes whole households converted to Christ, but such was not always the case. Apparently situations existed in Corinth where one spouse converted to Christianity and the other remained unevangelized. This circumstance would have raised legitimate theological questions. Should the believer separate from the unbeliever in light of Paul’s injunctions in his previous letter not to associate with the immoral (5:9–10)? Was it their Christian duty to dissolve the marriage and seek a believing spouse? Was marriage to a pagan somehow defiling based on the biblical teaching of the one-flesh union (6:16; cf. also Ezra 10:3,19)? If Paul is horrified by the prospect of a believer joined to a prostitute (6:15), what about the believer who is united in marriage to an unbeliever, who, like the prostitute, belongs to the realm of this world? Paul instructs that in a mixed marriage the Christian is not to initiate a divorce. Whether or not the marriage holds together hinges on the decision of the pagan partner (7:12–13).

Tyndale Commentary (Leon Morris)

12–13. It is noteworthy that Paul gives these directions under the heading, I, not the Lord. He does not, of course, mean that this is contrary to what the Lord would have directed. But, whereas in v. 10 he could cite an express command of Christ, here he has no such express command and he makes the situation clear. But that does not mean that what he says lacks authority; he believes that he has the Spirit of God (v. 40). Moffatt points out that Paul’s careful discrimination between a saying of the Lord and his own injunction tells strongly against those who maintain that the early church was in the habit of producing the sayings it needed and then ascribing them to Christ: ‘It is historically of high importance that he did not feel at liberty to create a saying of Jesus, even when, as here, it would have been highly convenient in order to settle a disputed point of Christian behaviour.’

Holman Bible Commentary (Richard L. Pratt Jr.)

7:10–11. Paul began by addressing divorce between two believers. He introduced his command with the notation that Jesus himself authorized his viewpoint. As an apostle, Paul had the responsibility to establish moral guidelines for the church. He did not need to appeal to Jesus (not I, but the Lord), but he did so here to give his words extra weight. The most relevant teaching of Christ on this subject appears in Mark 10:11–12 (see also Matt. 19:9).

Paul first stated the general policy to be followed: a wife must not separate from her husband. He followed with similar instructions to men: a husband must not divorce his wife. The terms separate and divorce were not distinguished in Paul's day as they are in many cultures today. To separate was to divorce. Jesus made fornication a legitimate grounds for divorce (Matt. 19:9). Paul argued that desertion was also grounds for divorce (7:15). With these exemptions in mind, Paul stated plainly that believers must not practice divorce.

Paul was realistic enough to know that illegitimate divorces happen among believers. For cases of illegitimate divorces, he offered two choices: remain unmarried or be reconciled to the original spouse. Paul did not comment on what to do if attempts to reconcile are rebuffed. The rest of Scripture and prudence must guide believers in such situations.

7:12–13. Paul then addressed the rest, that is, believers married to unbelievers. In contrast with his previous directives, Paul admitted that this teaching was his own, not from the Lord. This qualification does not lessen the authority of the teaching because as an apostle Paul spoke on behalf of the Lord (14:37). Paul meant that, to his knowledge, Jesus had not spoken about marriages between believers and unbelievers during his earthly ministry.

Paul taught that believers should not divorce their unbelieving spouses if the unbelievers are willing to live with the believing spouses. This rule applies equally to men and women. Often religious differences between spouses will lead to serious tensions in the home, but Paul plainly stated that religious differences per se are not legitimate grounds for divorce.