



Silverdale Baptist

VICTORY IN CHAOS ~ Marriage ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16 ~ 02/25-26/2023

Main Idea

The sexual relationship belongs within marriage. And, within marriage, one partner should not deprive the other of sexual relations. The gift of celibacy or singleness is not for everyone, and it is not for people who are married. Christians married to an unbeliever should stay in the marriage. They may be partly responsible for their spouse coming to know the Lord.

Getting Started

Christ-followers married to Christ-deniers. This is a relationship that could get complicated.

Have you ever been, or known someone, in a marriage relationship with someone who had the opposite view of Christ? How did it work out?

Have you or do you know someone who came to know Jesus because of the influence of their spouse? Tell us about it.

Marriage can be complicated. The church at Corinth knew that, and they had questions for Paul. So in chapter 7, Paul begins answering questions the church asked, and the first one was about sex, marriage, and divorcing an unbelieving spouse.

Learn

Leader: *This chapter marks a turning point in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul has been addressing what he knew about the Corinthians and what had been reported to him. But now, starting in chapter 7, Paul begins answering the Corinthians' questions.*

In this week's lesson, it is important to note that Paul does not give a comprehensive Biblical teaching on marriage and divorce in this passage. He is instead answering specific questions asked by the church. A complete understanding of the Biblical teachings on marriage would require studying multiple passages in the Bible, starting with Genesis 1. As important as it is to understand precisely what this passage says, it is equally important to understand this is part of the larger biblical teaching on marriage.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16

What is the main idea in this passage?

How does this chapter begin?

What does Paul say about sex in the first five verses?

From what you have read, within what context is a sexual relationship acceptable?

Under what circumstances is withholding sex from your spouse okay?

In this passage, Paul addresses two things connected to the marriage relationship. First, Paul talks about sexual relations within marriage in verses 1-9. In this context, he also talks about celibacy and singleness in verses 6-9. Last, Paul addresses being married to an unbeliever.

What does Paul teach about singleness in verses 6-8?

What is Paul saying about singleness and celibacy?

For most of us, we would probably agree with everything we have read and discussed in these first nine verses. But the next topic, divorce, can be pretty controversial. All of us in this chaotic society have been impacted by divorce. And we often choose sides when a marriage is struggling. Please don't let your emotions or your pain dictate your understanding of the Word of God. Instead, let the Word of God dictate how you respond to your pain or emotions. With that said, let's discuss exactly what Paul says about divorcing an unbelieving spouse.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER RE-READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-17.

In the context of being married to an unbeliever, what is Paul's basic teaching on divorce and remarriage?

Why does he say what he says?

What if the unbelieving spouse refuses to live with a Christian spouse?

The Bible never shies away from addressing the hard issues in life. The questions for us are:

- Will we accept the God's answers to the difficult problems in life?
- How do we apply the truths to our lives?

Apply

What is God's ideal for marriage?

How do you measure up to God's ideal?

Are you married to an unbeliever? How should we respond to them?

How do we show an unbelieving spouse the love of Christ?

What is God saying to you in this passage?

What will you do about what He is telling you?

Pray

Lord, give us the faith and courage to live our lives by Your standard. Help us to reflect Your love to the people around us, especially our spouses. May Your name be lifted up and glorified in our lives. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Dig Deeper

Christians Married to Christians (1 Cor. 7:1–11)

Apparently one of the questions the church asked was, "Is celibacy [remaining unmarried] more spiritual than marriage?" Paul replied that it is good for a man or a woman to have the gift of celibacy, but the celibate state is not better than marriage, nor is it the best state for everybody. Dr. Kenneth Wuest translates Paul's reply, "It is perfectly proper, honorable, morally befitting for a man to live in strict celibacy."

First Corinthians 7:6 makes it clear that celibacy is permitted, but it is not commanded; and 1 Corinthians 7:7 informs us that not everybody has the gift of remaining celibate. This ties in with our Lord's teaching in Matthew 19:10–12, where "eunuchs" refers to those who abstain from marriage. "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18) is generally true for most people; but some have been called to a life of singleness for one reason or another. Their singleness is not "subspiritual" or "superspiritual." It all depends on the will of God.

One purpose for marriage is "to avoid fornication." First Corinthians 7:2 makes it clear that God does not approve either of polygamy or homosexual "marriages." One man married to one woman has been God's pattern from the first. However, the husband and wife must not abuse the privilege of sexual love that is a normal part of marriage. The wife's body belongs to the husband, and the husband's body to

the wife; and each must be considerate of the other. Sexual love is a beautiful tool to build with, not a weapon to fight with. To refuse each other is to commit robbery (see 1 Thes. 4:6) and to invite Satan to tempt the partners to seek their satisfaction elsewhere.

As in all things, the spiritual must govern the physical; for our bodies are God's temples. The husband and wife may abstain in order to devote their full interest to prayer and fasting (1 Cor. 7:5); but they must not use this as an excuse for prolonged separation. Paul is encouraging Christian partners to be "in tune" with each other in matters both spiritual and physical.

In 1 Corinthians 7:8–9, Paul applied the principle stated in 1 Corinthians 7:1 to single believers and widows: If you cannot control yourself, then marry.

Not only did the church ask about celibacy, but they also asked Paul about divorce. Since Jesus had dealt with this question, Paul cited His teaching: Husbands and wives are not to divorce each other (see also 1 Cor. 7:39). If divorce does occur, the parties should remain unmarried or seek reconciliation.

This is, of course, the ideal for marriage. Jesus did make one exception: If one party was guilty of fornication, this could be grounds for divorce. Far better that there be confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation; but if these are out of the question, then the innocent party may get a divorce. However, divorce is the last option; first, every means available should be used to restore the marriage.

It has been my experience as a pastor that when a husband and wife are yielded to the Lord, and when they seek to please each other in the marriage relationship, the marriage will be so satisfying that neither partner would think of looking elsewhere for fulfillment. "There are no sex problems in marriage," a Christian counselor once told me, "only personality problems with sex as one of the symptoms." The present frightening trend of increased divorces among Christians (and even among the clergy) must break the heart of God.

Christians Married to Non-Christians (1 Cor. 7:12–24)

Some of the members of the Corinthian church were saved after they had been married, but their mates had not yet been converted. No doubt, some of these believers were having a difficult time at home; and they asked Paul, "Must we remain married to unsaved partners? Doesn't our conversion alter things?"

Paul replied that they were to remain with their unconverted mates so long as their mates were willing to live with them. Salvation does not alter the marriage state; if anything, it ought to enhance the marriage relationship. (Note Peter's counsel to wives with unsaved husbands in 1 Peter 3:1–6.) Since marriage is basically a physical relationship ("they shall be one flesh"—Gen. 2:24), it can only be broken by a physical cause. Adultery and death would be two such causes (1 Cor. 7:39).

It is an act of disobedience for a Christian knowingly to marry an unsaved person (note "only in the Lord" in 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14). But if a person becomes a Christian after marriage, he should not use that as an excuse to break up the marriage just to avoid problems. In fact, Paul emphasized the fact that the Christian partner could have a spiritual influence on the unsaved mate. First Corinthians 7:14 does not teach that the unsaved partner is *saved* because of the believing mate, since each person must individually decide for Christ. Rather, it means that the believer exerts a spiritual influence in the home that can lead to the salvation of the lost partner.

What about the children? Again, the emphasis is on the influence of the godly partner. The believing husband or wife must not give up. In my own ministry, I have seen devoted Christians live for Christ in divided homes and eventually see their loved ones trust the Saviour.

Salvation does not change the marriage state. If the wife's becoming a Christian annulled the marriage, then the children in the home would become illegitimate ("unclean" in 1 Cor. 7:14). Instead, these children may one day be saved if the Christian mate is faithful to the Lord.

It is difficult for us who are "accustomed" to the Christian faith to realize the impact that this new doctrine had on the Roman world. Here was a teaching for every person, regardless of race or social status. The church was perhaps the only assembly in the Roman Empire where slaves and freemen, men and women, rich and poor, could fellowship on an equal basis (Gal. 3:28). However, this new equality also brought with it some misunderstandings and problems; and some of these Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24.

The principle that Paul laid down was this: Even though Christians are all one in Christ, each believer should remain in the same calling he was in when the Lord saved him. Jewish believers should not try to become Gentiles (by erasing the physical mark of the covenant), and Gentiles should not try to become Jews (by being circumcised). Slaves should not *demand* freedom from their Christian masters, just because of their equality in Christ. However, Paul *did* advise Christian slaves to secure their freedom if at all possible, probably by purchase. This same principle would apply to Christians married to unsaved mates.

But suppose the unsaved mate leaves the home? First Corinthians 7:15 gives the answer: the Christian partner is not obligated to keep the home together. We are called to peace, and we should do all we can to live in peace (Rom. 12:18); but there comes a time in some situations where peace is impossible. If the unsaved mate separates from his or her partner, there is little the Christian can do except to pray and continue faithful to the Lord.

Does separation then give the Christian mate the right to divorce and remarriage? Paul did not say so. What if the unconverted mate ends up living with another partner? That would constitute adultery and give grounds for divorce. But even then, 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 would encourage forgiveness and restoration. Paul did not deal with every possible situation. He laid down spiritual principles, not a list of rules.

We are prone to think that a change in circumstances is always the answer to a problem. But the problem is usually *within* us and not *around* us. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart. I have watched couples go through divorce and seek happiness in new circumstances, only to discover that they carried their problems with them. A Christian lawyer once told me, "About the only people who profit from divorces are the attorneys!"¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 590–592.