



# gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture  
Title: A Call to Remain

Date: April 14, 2024  
Passage: 1 Corinthians 7:8-17

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:8-24

Today we are talking once again about matters of marriage, but especially how to think and act as divorced people. Then next Sunday we will finish the chapter and talk about living as single people. Just as a disclaimer today's message is not going to cover every teaching the Bible has about divorce. Paul is addressing some specific situations that are happening in the church in Corinth and the biggest question the people seem to have revolved around what to do if a person became a believer in Jesus but their spouse did not.

I recognize that any time we discuss a topic like divorce there is a chance to offend. And perhaps you've already experienced hurt within the church because of the role divorce has played in your life. Many of us have been impacted by divorce either personally or within close circles. We are people who stand at the crossroads of the culture and the Kingdom of God and unfortunately this is another area where the prevailing thinking of the culture has impacted Christians more than the clear teachings of the Bible. As we go through this passage today there may be questions this raises for you that I don't touch on today. If that is the case, myself, or some of our leaders, would be happy to get together with you and try to navigate questions and issues that you are dealing with from a biblical perspective.

Last week we saw the opening lines of Chapter 7 and the question the people in Corinth are writing Paul about:

**:: 1 Corinthians 7:1**

**1 Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."**

The people knew that Corinth was a carnal place and that sexual immorality was widespread. In order to follow Jesus, the thought became maybe they should just take sex off the table altogether. The problem is that just led to more sexual immorality! It turns out our desire for sex is pretty strong! So last week we looked at Paul's teaching at the beginning of chapter 7 that each man should have his own wife and each wife her own husband and they should enjoy one another and take care of one another's sexual desires.

That leads us to today's passage where Paul turns his attention to the question of those who have been divorced or are considering divorce. Again, this is not an exhaustive look at the Bible's teaching on these topics, but it helps address a few important things.

**:: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16**

**<sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.**

**<sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

**<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.**

**<sup>11</sup> But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.**

**<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.**

**<sup>13</sup> And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.**

**<sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.**

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

**<sup>15</sup> But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.**

**<sup>16</sup> 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 just hearing that passage read puts some of you on edge. Others of us are simply ignorant to the teachings of the Bible when it comes to this topic and we've made decisions in our lives without Biblical direction. What I hope to do this morning is guide us to understand what the Bible says about this topic and what it means for us and the relationships we have.

Before we look at the text again let me give you a basic summary of Paul's teaching here:

And here's the biggest question we all have to wrestle with in our lives following God: **Is Jesus Enough?**

If I find myself in a relationship status that I am discouraged by, "Is Jesus enough for me? If I find myself in a social status I am discouraged by, "Is Jesus enough for me?" Remember that Paul himself had a thorn in the flesh he was discouraged by and multiple times asked God to remove it, or to change his circumstances, and God's answer to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you."

In fact, when we get to verse 17 Paul is going to say to Christians everywhere: “Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.”

The ultimate calling in our life is to follow Jesus.

- Are you married? Live as a believer in your marriage with the goal to honor Jesus as your highest priority.
- Are you divorced? Live as a believer with the goal to honor Jesus as your highest priority.
- Are you single? Live as a believer in your singleness with the goal to honor Jesus as your highest priority.

Let’s go back and break this down and look at some of the different things Paul is addressing as he writes to the church

### **:: 1 Corinthians 7:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do.**

**<sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

Unmarried and widows- two categories of formerly married people. Later in the chapter he is going to put the word “unmarried” beside “virgins,” so we know this is not the same thing. These are people who have been formerly married but now find themselves single due to divorce or death of a spouse.

Paul’s counsel:

- It’s good to stay unmarried.
- However, if they find themselves struggling with sexual temptation, it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

I want to make a few statements here that I hope will encourage and challenge many of you.

- Getting married out of a lustful appetite is not a good idea! If you’re only impulse or connection to a person is sexual that marriage is probably not going to have a strong foundation for a lifetime together. There is so much more to intimacy in a marriage than sexual intimacy.
- Secondly, I’ve talked to people who in their singleness have turned to pornography as a way to curb their sexual appetite and then think when they get married one day they will turn that form of lustful behavior off and simply enjoy their spouse. That’s not typically how that works! If you are lustful and engage in sexual immorality through pornography before you are married, marriage is not a magic bullet to get rid of your lustful appetites. You need to seek God about your lust and walk with Him to a place of purity in your life, doing the hard work of ridding yourself of the temptations that

constantly call to you and that use to fill the perceived void in your life.

- With that in mind, if you have a burning passion to be married and to enjoy that level of intimacy, then by all means pursue a spouse for yourself. But if you don't pursue purity first, impurity has a habit of following you into marriage where it can cause all kinds of destructive issues between you and your spouse.

Now Paul's going to turn his attention to those who are married but have the mindset that after becoming a Christian they should step away from their marriage in order to pursue Jesus.

**:: 1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

**<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.**

**<sup>11</sup> But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.**

Paul tells us this a direct teaching he is taking from the ministry of Jesus. In Matthew 19 Jesus addresses issues of divorce and marriage because the Pharisees asked Him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason- a prevailing thought in that day among Jewish teachers. Jesus points back to Adam and Eve in the garden and says...

**:: Matthew 19:4-12**

**<sup>4</sup> "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'**

**<sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?**

**<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."**

**<sup>7</sup> "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"**

**<sup>8</sup> Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.**

**<sup>9</sup> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

**<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."**

**<sup>11</sup> Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.**

**<sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live**

**like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”**

A couple big things here to pay attention to:

- a. Just because someone gets a divorce from their spouse that is legal in the eyes of man, doesn't make it legal in the eyes of God. What He joins together, let no man separate.

Illustration: Yellow and Blue Playdoh- When you mix these together they become green. You can no longer separate out the blue and the yellow.

- b. Jesus does make a concession to this- in the case of sexual immorality there is a place granted to step away from the relationship. That is permitted, not commanded. Some people find a way to make their marriage work after one spouse cheats. So what does Jesus mean by sexual immorality? What does that entail?
  - a. The book of Leviticus outlines in detail things that are not permitted in a lifestyle of holiness for those pursuing God and each of them seems to fall into the category of the sexual immorality Jesus is describing.
    - i. A spouse committing adultery
    - ii. A spouse who engages in homosexual sex
    - iii. A spouse who commits incest
    - iv. A spouse who engages in bestiality
  - b. What about abuse?
    - i. While the Bible doesn't apply abuse directly to grounds for divorce it does say plenty that we can draw good conclusions from. Abuse is a sin.
      - 1. In 1 Timothy 6 we are commanded to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness.
      - 2. 1 Peter 3 tells husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way showing honor to the woman. We are to be gentle towards our wives, therefore, all forms of physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse is forbidden.
      - 3. It's worth pointing out that in 1 Timothy 3 Paul disqualifies men from active roles of leadership if they are abusive- we are commanded not to be violent but gentle. The Greek word literally means "not a striker." (This isn't only meant for Elders and Deacons, but also for all who follow Jesus- saved people do not abuse others!)
        - \* In all these cases, the immediate response can be separation without moving straight to divorce. In our world it's so easy to be wronged and move right to an immediate ending of relationships. Depending on the

situation, if there is a way to put some space between you and the person who has wronged you and yet work toward reconciliation, there are powerful things God may have for you on the other side of the hurt. I've seen God restore marriages and do miraculous things after incredibly difficult seasons. The gospel opens a door for reconciliation when both people are willing to do the hard work of seeking God together and letting Him bring healing and hope.

That brings us back to the text in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul addresses one other area of divorce for believers to understand.

**:: 1 Corinthians 7:12-16**

**12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.**

**13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.**

**14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.**

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

**15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.**

**16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?**

Paul acknowledges Jesus didn't address this issue in His ministry because at the time no one was a Christian! There was no such thing as two believers being married or one believer and one non-believer. Paul, speaking with the authority of the Holy Spirit, addresses an issue the Corinthians were facing: If I become a follower of Jesus and my spouse doesn't take the same path, should I divorce them? Paul's emphatic answer to that would be, "No!"

- If you are a believer and your unbelieving spouse is willing to stay in the relationship with you, then stay.
  - o In our day and age, let me speak to those who are single and looking to be married in the future- look for a believing spouse! Having the same convictions and the same worldview brings a lot less difficulty into your life! Marriage is hard enough without trying to figure out how to do life with a spouse who doesn't believe the same way you do.
  - o **:: 2 Corinthians 6:14**

**14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?**

- Why would Paul encourage you to remain in this relationship? Because through your faith, your spouse and children have been sanctified. That doesn't mean that they are saved- it just means with your in their life they have the best chance of finding a saving faith. You bring the peace, love, hope and joy of God into your home.
  - o The call of a Christian is to go to the lost. Share the gospel in your home- you are a conduit of God's grace to your family. Peter specifically addressed women about this issue- presumably because women were becoming followers of Jesus more frequently, or prior to, their husbands. Here's what Peter says...
  - o 1 Peter 3:1-4
    - <sup>1</sup> Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,
    - <sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
    - <sup>3</sup> Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.
    - <sup>4</sup> Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

When it comes to our faith in Jesus and the way we live that out in our homes with an unbelieving spouse, we live to honor Jesus and show love and value to your spouse in the hopes that they will trust Christ. When we talk about loving and serving where we live, work and play, this is the epicenter of that activity! But even if your spouse or children never follow Jesus, you have been faithful to your calling to remain in that relationship and be salt and light in every possible way in your marriage and your parenting.

Let's end by once again looking at verse 17:

**:: 1 Corinthians 7:17**

**<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.**

I understand that there are some difficult things to wade through when it comes to a conversation on divorce. And I understand we didn't cover all the bases or answer all the questions that exist around this topic. But I think here's where Paul helps us carry forward no matter what situation we find ourselves in currently: live as a believer and fall into grace. Make Jesus your highest priority and seek to honor Him while understanding that His grace is sufficient for you.

Close:

If you are single and want to be married, are you preaching the gospel to yourself that Jesus is enough?

If you are married and you wonder if you're supposed to stay in the marriage- are you approaching this through the gospel that Jesus is enough?

If you are divorced, and not sure what the future holds for you where marriage is concerned, are you preaching the gospel to yourself in this season that Jesus is enough?

- Pray

Life Group Discussion Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-17

Leaders: Divorce has touched all our lives in some form or fashion. Remind your group as you talk tonight that all of us have had different experiences with the issue of divorce. The goal of our conversation tonight is not to "fix" but to explore the Bible's teaching on this topic and to see where we are in regards to faithfulness to Jesus and relationship with Jesus where the topic of divorce is concerned.

1. In this chapter Paul has laid out the idea that being married is a good thing and being unmarried is a good thing. What are some of the positives of both those positions?
2. What stands out to you in this passage as a clear teaching?
3. What things do you see as unclear or unanswered when it comes to marriage and divorce? (Leaders, remind your group this wasn't an exhaustive study on the topic of divorce, but it is Paul addressing a specific issue. In the message this weekend we did look at Leviticus 20:10-21, 1 Timothy 6:11 and 1 Peter 3:7 to gain other perspective on what is or is not permissible/acceptable in a Christian marriage.)
4. What does it look like for you to live as a believer in the situation you currently find yourself in?
5. Where in life are you struggling with something that you need to preach the gospel to yourself that Jesus is enough for you in all your circumstances? (Leaders, this doesn't have to be a marriage issue.)
6. Thinking back to this passage, what do we learn about the heart of God? What do we learn about ourselves?