

May 26, 2013  
Port Gardner Church  
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**1 Corinthians Part 16**  
**Paul Talks about Marriage and Divorce**  
**1Corinthians 7.10-24; 39-40**

**1 Corinthians 7:10-24** [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?*

[17] *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. [18] Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. [19] For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. [20] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. [21] Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) [22] For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. [23] You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. [24] So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

**1 Corinthians 7:39-40** [39] *A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. [40] Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.*

Introduction: Ideal vs. Reality

Chapter 7 gives us some straightforward teaching for all adults. Paul addresses the married, single and the widowed. This chapter has also been a foundation for much of the church's teaching on divorce and remarriage. Many folks would like a "one size fits all" theology for marriage and divorce but this is not what Paul is doing here. Any pastor will tell you that this stuff can be really messy while trying to determine the "right" answer. We cannot be too hasty in making judgments. It is a very difficult challenge to apply God's ideal in very real situations.

God's ideal for marriage is a lifelong commitment to your spouse. Period. [39] *A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord*

As long as my wife is alive, I am to fulfill my covenant promise to her. (no you can't kill her and then get out of it... that's cheating)

And here is a side note: I did not write in any exception clauses to my marriage vows. Not regarding my wife's health, her weight, her attitude or even her faithfulness to me. My commitment to her is not based on her faithfulness to me, but my own faithfulness to her and to God.

In the Old Testament, divorce was allowed in some cases. But Jesus made it clear that this was not God's ideal, but an accommodation for sinful men.

**Matthew 19:3-9** [3] *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"* [4] *He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,* [5] *and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* [6] *So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* [7] *They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"* [8] *He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. [9] And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

Jesus says we are not supposed to divorce for any reason except sexual immorality. This does not mean that the act of divorce is in and of itself... sinful. What it does mean is that the actions which cause a lawful or even an unlawful divorce are sin.

In WA there is only one legal reason for divorce. "irretrievable breakdown of marriage"... which can mean just about anything. WA is also a "no fault" divorce state meaning that no evidence is required to prove that one spouse is responsible for the failure of the marriage... even if there is adultery, abuse or desertion involved. You can literally marry who you want, divorce who you want or remarry who you want at any time for any reason. Washingtonians are very Corinthian in how we approach marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Side note: 70% of divorces are initiated by women.

## **THE COMMAND REGARDING BELIEVERS AND DIVORCE**

The situation in Corinth is that believing wives are "separating" from their husband for spiritual reasons. To combat this, Paul first addresses married believers to whom he gives a COMMAND. Then he writes to believers married to non-believers, to whom he gives an OPINION. And finally, to all believers to whom he gives a RULE.

*[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.*

### **The Command**

Paul begins by addressing married believers. In Jewish culture, women did not have the legal right to divorce. But Paul is writing to a Roman church where "any-cause" for divorce is the societal norm. Most likely a situation has arisen whereby a believing woman has legally initiated a divorce from her believing husband. (Here we have a believer that is employing the ways of the world in order to resolve a problem). **In response, Paul does not give his opinion; he repeats the command of the Lord—a believer must not divorce a believer.**

Paul does not take the time to repeat what Jesus taught. Because of this we can safely assume that Jewish Jesus' position on divorce was commonly known throughout the church, including the exception. **Sadly, we cannot assume the same today about the church.** The person and teachings of Jesus Christ are no longer authoritative in the life of everyone who claims faith in Jesus;

Jesus is a good teacher, Jesus is a humble servant, Jesus is even savior, but **he is not Lord.** And because He is not my Lord and Master, we have "Christians" deciding which parts of Jesus teaching they will follow to and which they will reject—usually according to their own experience or situation.

**More than that, like the Corinthians, many will even pursue what is unbiblical in the name of spirituality.** The whole issue is settled for Paul by what the Word of the Lord says about divorce. The Lord forbids it in this situation. Pursuit of

spirituality or righteousness **begins with obedience**; God's Word governing decision-making. It does not begin with a gut feeling, a vision, or anything else other than God's Word. **And any claim toward deeper spirituality that ignores the clear commands of the Lord is straight from the devil.**

### **The Exception**

In verse 11, Paul seems to imply that a separation may have already occurred, so ends with instructions about what to do next. His hope is always for reconciliation.

**Separation is never an ideal situation, but because of sin, it is sometimes a real and necessary one.** Separation is not the result of a broken relationship, but broken people.

### **THE OPINION REGARDING UNBELIEVERS AND MARRIAGE**

Paul then gives his opinion to THE REST, those believers who are married to non-believers and are considering separation. It is not the command of the Lord, in that, Paul does not repeat something Jesus taught while on earth. But Jesus is speaking here, through Paul, by the Holy Spirit

*[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?*

### **The trouble of a marriage to a non-believer**

God loves marriage. In calling a husband or a wife to salvation, but not the other, God did not intend to create division with marriages. **It seems that after their marriage, Jesus saved some wives, and now they are wondering if they should divorce.**

Because the Old Testament is constantly condemning intermarriage, **as a protection against idolatry**, it follows that the Corinthians begin to ask questions about marriage to unbelievers. **Salvation in one spouse introduces a new kind of tension into the marriage. Immediately, there are two people, who have become one flesh, coming from two completely different worldviews, with different perspectives, and different authorities.**

These two people who live together approach the world completely differently. How will they make unified decisions about their lives and families together? The Corinthians are considering divorcing their unbelieving spouses in order to resolve these tensions. Paul states quite plainly, the believer should not initiate a divorce from the nonbeliever, as long as the nonbeliever gives consent to live with them.

### **The blessing in a marriage to a non-believer**

The non-believing spouse's willingness to remain married determined whether the marriage would continue. **Religious incompatibility is certainly a biblical reason to NOT GET married, but it IS NOT a biblical reason to GET divorced.**

God can save anyone; but don't expect to move His hand through disobedience to His commands. In other words, **we should not hope to PUT ourselves in a mixed-marriage, but we must not be hopeless if we FIND ourselves in one.**

Part of the wives' fear was that their mixed marriage would defile them, especially if they were obligated to allow a pagan man lead and have power over their bodies. Paul indicates quite the opposite. **He says that non-believing spouse and the children are "made holy" or "sanctified" by the presence of the believer. As God's temple, your sanctification does not stop with you; it extends to the person with whom you share one flesh.**

This does not mean that through marriage, these people are saved. Paul's larger concern is to quell any anxiety about possible "spiritual contamination."

John Calvin says, "The godliness of the one does more to sanctify the marriage than the ungodliness of the other to make it unclean." The gospel-centered life of the Christian spouse permeates the home and has a purifying influence on the family. Your presence brings a invincible light, and your absence only allows the darkness that is there to dominate.

### **The motivation FOR remaining in a marriage to a non-believer**

At the same time, your unfaithful presence is the same as your absence in how it affects the home. Your negative influence is equally powerful if you preach lies about Jesus by how you love and live.

Sometimes, a divorce is out of the Christian's hands and is initiated by the spouse no matter what. Paul says, if that happens, the believing spouse is freed from responsibility for we are called to peace. By peace, Paul does not mean we should not fight for our marriage; but he does mean that at times we must surrender and entrust ourselves to God. We do not know what means God will use to save our spouse. **The motivation to remain married, or submit to a request for divorce, is not to procure their obedience or secure their salvation, but to demonstrate yours.** You cannot ever control whether or not your spouse, believer or not, will love Jesus or honor the Lord in your marriage. You can only control whether or not you will, and how you respond to them when they won't.

### **THE RULE FOR ALL CHURCHES AND LIFE**

Paul first addressed married believers to whom he gave a **command**. Then he addressed believers married to non-believers, to whom he gave an **opinion**. And finally, to all believers he gives a **rule** for all of us regardless of status. *[17] Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. [18] Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. [19] For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. [20] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. [21] Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) [22] For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.*

### **LEAD the life that the Lord has assigned**

Paul's rule is one for all of the churches. From an answer about marriage, Paul addresses the larger question of **contentment in whatever state God has called one to**. In God's sovereignty, when Jesus calls an individual to follow Him, they drop everything respond. Jesus knows who is calling, where He is calling them, and when He is calling.

### **Jesus Calls all Kinds:**

And as we saw lived out in the life of disciples who were uneducated fisherman, educated doctors, despised tax collectors, married and single, Jesus calls all kinds. Paul wants people to remain in the condition in which we were called. In other words, he does not want them to abandon or ignore their station in order to pursue one deemed more spiritual.

**We don't need more people filling spiritual roles; we need more people viewing their current roles as spiritual.  
Becoming a Christian means bringing what ONE IS into the service of God.**

**Our conditions, marital statuses, and vocations are assigned by the Lord.** God changes WHO we are spiritually, but he does not necessarily change WHAT YOU ARE materially. WHAT you are just becomes a Jesus-powered version. **The believer no longer asks how can I find fulfillment for myself, but how does God give me fulfillment where I find myself.**

God has created you, called, you and placed you in a context with a mission. The mission is to reflect God's glory by demonstrating the love of Christ, working as unto Christ, and honoring in Christ at every opportunity wherever you find yourself in His story.

**LIVE the life that the Lord has assigned**

You have the choice to force a change in your situation (painful remove circumcision), tolerate your situation (lifeless), or live in your situation (hope-filled joy).

**Stop dreaming about the calling you don't have and embrace the calling that you do have. Your current circumstances do not hinder your calling as a Christian. You are where God has called you to be. He has called you to be his ambassador...where you are.**

Make use of every opportunity Where has God assigned you? Who has God brought into your life? How are you reflecting Jesus to the family members that only you have? What you are preaching right now to the neighbors that only you live next to? What about the coworkers that only you work with? What about the unbelieving spouse that only you are married to? How is your presence in their lives pointing them toward Jesus? How would your absence change the lives of those around you? Paul says we are to live in the moment God has given us and not in the one he hasn't. God has given some of us some very difficult situations. **But don't let getting out of it your situation so dominate your thinking that your mission is paralyzed.**

**Conclusion: Remain with God**

*[23] You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. [24] So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

Jesus BOUGHT you and named you His Son or Daughter. **He didn't buy the "who you are not" you, He bought the "who you are, what you are, and where you are YOU!"**

**Our lives are determined by our call not our circumstances. So, remain with God where you are, for He put you there, and no one else is exactly where you are for Him.**