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1 Corinthians

...but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. 1 Corinthians 7:9

This is the second half of the previous thought to the unmarried. Paul said that it was good if they remained even as he was (meaning unmarried), "but if they cannot exercise self control, let them marry." This is obvious. If someone who is unmarried is filled with the desires that come about in such a state, they should then get married.

The surety is that desire leads to action and action in this case is sin because sex is to be between a man and a woman in the bonds of marriage. Referring back to Paul's statements in chapter 6, a Christian is "in" Christ and therefore to engage in illicit sex is to sin against Christ directly.

And so Paul goes on by saying, "For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." To understand this in a way not evident in the English, the Pulpit Commentary provides an analysis of the Greek tense of the verbs -

"The 'marry' is in the aorist - 'to marry once for all,' and live in holy married union; the 'burn' is in the present - 'to be on fire with concupiscence.' Marriage once for all is better than continuous lust; the former is permitted, the latter sinful."

Paul's words here follow on the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:27, 28 -

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The Bible teaches that intent to sin is sin. We are given a remedy for the sins we face concerning sexual desire in today's verse. However, there are instances where the physical needs cannot be met for whatever reason. In those cases, additional prayer and communion with the Lord is needed. This is no different than an alcoholic or drug addict who must learn to focus on Christ and to rely on Him. We are given our instructions and we need to strive to conduct our lives in holiness and in a manner which is honoring to the Lord.

Life application: The Bible shows us that we need to make decisions that may be difficult, but they are never unattainable. By staying in the word, walking closely with the Lord, and fellowshipping with other believers, we can be victorious over our sinful actions and desires.

Now to the married I command, *yet not I but the Lord*: A wife is not to depart from *her husband*. 1 Corinthians 7:10

So far, Paul has been addressing the unmarried and those considering marriage. He now turns to those who are married and begins with, "Now to the married I command..." This is something that is expected to be adhered to at all costs and is not up to the audience's wishes or desires. It is a set, fixed, and firm rule. And to further bolster this, he adds, "yet not I but the Lord." In other words, this is a command based on the words of Christ Jesus. Paul is taking extreme care to show that his words *are* the Lord's words. They are fixed and inviolable.

And the command from the Lord which is re-transmitted by Paul is that, "A wife is not to depart from her husband." If a person is married, they are to remain married. It is a solemn agreement to one another that was conducted in the presence of God, regardless as to whether they were believers at the time. It is also regardless of whether one or both have since called on Christ.

The reason for this instruction probably came about because of a question from Christian spouses who may have been concerned as to whether it was unlawful for them to be married to one who is a pagan. It is also possible that Paul's earlier words about it being good for individuals to remain unmarried may be misconstrued to mean that separating is acceptable and even the favorable position. But the Lord's words on this issue must stand and they are those spoken by Him in the gospels, including Mark 10:11, 12 -

"So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

The issue of divorce wasn't merely a dispensational issue (meaning under the time of the law or during the church age, etc.). Instead it is an issue which transcends dispensations and is an eternal decree. Marriages are not to be treated carelessly and married people are to remain married until death. Paul will explain why as he continues and he will also provide other pertinent information concerning marriage and divorce.

In the end, there is only one exception to the rule on divorce which is if a spouse commits adultery. In our society, we will look for any and every excuse to be disobedient to this command, but there is none other than adultery. Let us pay heed to these words and consider them carefully. The Lord has spoken and our obedience is expected.

Life application: Is it a light thing to ignore Jesus' words concerning marriage? If we are willing to violate His command on this issue, then what type of follower does that show us to be? Let us remain united to the one we chose as our spouse and never dare to ignore the commands of Christ.

But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife. 1 Corinthians 7:11

This verse follows on from the instruction in verse 10. It is another regularly neglected and abused tenet from Scripture, and yet it is clear and concise. If a woman has departed from her husband, she needs to "remain unmarried." Excuses as to "why" a woman left her husband (with the noted exception of adultery) are irrelevant. No other words are given which negate this precept and Paul's words here are not merely cultural or passing away. They are doctrine for the church. To disobey them is to disobey the Lord who inspired the words.

And so in this case, the woman is to "remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." This brings up an obvious problem though. What if the husband has gone and remarried? In this case, it would imply that the marriage bond is irretrievably broken and therefore she would be free from this constraint. However, it is not explicitly, but only implicitly to be inferred. No matter what, the stricter judgment on this matter is preferred. It is not acceptable for a woman to leave her husband and go to marry another.

But there is more. Paul then explains that "a husband is not to divorce his wife." This follows on from Jesus' words in Matthew 5:32 -

"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."

These words from the Lord, and also from Paul, show us that the marriage bond within the Christian context is to be held in the highest regard and is to be considered sacred. It is a violation of the will of the Lord for couples to divorce for any reason except adultery.

Life application: When you said, "I do" you were confining yourself before God to the bonds of a marriage that are not to be dissolved except through death.

Divorce is not an acceptable alternative to unhappiness. Having said "I do" you should always be content with the thought that "I still do."

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

1 Corinthians 7:12

Paul has addressed those who wish to remain celibate, those who are widowed, and those who are married. However, he will now discuss a new group and his words are immensely important. The reason why will be given, but it actually deals with those who are affected by the marriage as much as those who are married. The issue he will now address is that of mixed marriages, where one is a believer and one is not.

To begin, he says, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..." He is very careful to mark a distinction between the directives personally given by the Lord and those that are given by him. His words, however, have no less import than those of the Lord. This is because they are a part of the Bible which is God's word. They are given under the inspiration of the Spirit and must be considered authoritative. And so he begins with, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her."

A believing man with a non-believing spouse may not divorce her because she is an unbeliever. He got himself into the marriage and he has no right (with the previously noted exception of adultery) to terminate the marriage. The fact that he is (or became) a believer and she is a non-believer is irrelevant. He is obligated to his vows and he must stay with his wife no matter what. Again, reasons will be given for this, and they will not only affect the husband and the wife, but others as well. And it includes a reason that addresses a theological issue which goes all the way back to the fall of man.

Life application: As with the previous verses, we can clearly see that there is no reason, apart from adultery, to terminate a marriage. We cannot "excuse" our actions in divorce. And yet divorce has become as common as going to the store for groceries. The Lord cannot be pleased with the flagrant disregard of this by His people.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 1 Corinthians 7:13

This verse is the flip side of what Paul said in verse 12 - "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her." By saying this, he is confirming that there is no excuse by either spouse, if a believer, for leaving the marriage relationship. They are bound to their oath regardless if it was made before conversion or not, and even if the other spouse fails to call on Christ.

The reason for his words are coming in the next verse and they show us the immense importance of remaining married, even to an unbeliever.

Life application: We are expected to remain committed to our spouse. We are not granted "wiggle room" in this.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 1 Corinthians 7:14

Paul now states a truth about marriage that affects the children of the marriage. It is a tenet which is so remarkable that this verse should be remembered by every believer. There is a premise in the Bible which is inescapable and which goes all the way back to the fall of man. God created our first father, Adam. At this time, there was a spiritual connection between the man and his God.

However, Adam was given a warning -

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" Genesis 2:16, 17

The narrative goes on to show that Adam disobeyed God. However, he continued to live until the age of 930 years. This shows us one of two possibilities:

- 1) Either what God said wasn't true, or
- 2) The man did die, spiritually.

The second is correct and it is the premise of the Bible from that point on. Adam became a physical being with a soul, but no "spiritual" connection to God; he died spiritually. What is implied throughout the rest of Scripture is that all men are born into Adam. We are physical beings, with a soul, but no "spiritual" connection to God. We are conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5) and are spiritually dead and thus all are "condemned already" (John 3:18 & Ephesians 2:1, etc).

This is actually confirmed implicitly in the account of Cain and Abel. They brought an offering to the Lord without the Bible noting any offense committed by them before the offering was made. In essence, the implication is that they understood this spiritual disconnect existed in them. And the fact that sin reigned is evident by the actions of Cain who killed his brother. Thus Paul's words, "all have sinned" confirms that we are born in sin; it is inherited and we are born separate from God; spiritually dead.

Time and again, the Bible uses this concept of being "in" someone to remind us that we are all descendants of Adam by blood and thus we are "in" Adam. This is why there are such meticulous genealogies recorded in both Testaments of the Bible. It is to show that connection all the way back to Adam who was created by

God. When Adam sinned, we therefore sinned "in" Adam. Paul explains this in Romans 5:12 -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

Jesus came to repair this spiritual disconnect. Without Him, there is no hope for restoration to God. Only through Him can the breech be repaired. Understanding the rite of circumcision will help us comprehend this. Circumcision was given as a sign to the covenant people. It pictures "cutting away" the inherited sin, because that sin transfers through the father. Thus, by cutting the male organ, the sin is pictured to be "cut away." As it was only a picture, the covenant people waited for the Messiah who would actually fulfill that picture.

When Jesus came, He was born of a woman (thus He is fully human), but without a human father. He inherited no sin from Adam. His Father being God (thus He is fully God) meant that He was born without sin. Therefore, He was qualified to replace Adam. The four gospels are then given to provide a record of His life. He was born without sin, just as Adam was created without sin. But He still needed to live without sin. The gospels show this to be the case. He lived without sin, prevailed over the law, and He died under the law without sin. Therefore, He prevailed over sin. In Him, sin (and thus spiritual death) is defeated. The Lamb had overcome.

So what does this have to do with 1 Corinthians 7:14? Paul says, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband." This does not mean that they are "saved" through the unbelieving spouse. But it sanctifies them for a very important reason. And this reason is that, "otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy."

The inherited sin of Adam exists in all people from the moment of conception. We are conceived, born, and live separate from God until the time we call on Christ

and are spiritually regenerated (John 3:16, Romans 8, etc). If we never call on Christ, we will die "in Adam" and thus separate from God. But in His great mercy, God has allowed these children of a believer to be regarded as "holy" until the time that they are old enough to choose or reject Christ. Nothing "unclean" can ever enter into God's presence and, therefore, no child is saved - at any age - without Christ's covering.

In the case of a Christian family though, these children are set apart. However, if the marriage is dissolved by the believer, this is lost. Therefore, the sanctification of the parents is necessary to provide this set-apart state for the children.

Without it, they are no longer set-apart. This may sound like a cruel and uncaring God, but it is exactly the opposite. He allows us free-will. From Adam to us we have made our choices and we must live by them. But He has also offered us His Son and the protections which come through Him. Therefore, what we perceive as uncaring is actually a demonstration of the greatest grace and mercy imaginable!

Life application: Our earthly choices can have spiritual consequences that we don't even realize unless we study and then adhere to the Bible's precepts. Let us also never impute "wrongdoing" or a state of "uncaring" to God. Rather, let us exalt Him for His unmerited grace and mercy.

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 1 Corinthians 7:15

Jesus had said that the only reason for divorce is adultery. When saying this, He was speaking to the covenant people, Israel, and at a time which was under the law. Paul, now writing to the church for church-age doctrine, has been careful to repeat Jesus' words and note that they are, in fact, His words. After citing that, he said in verse 12, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..."

He then went on to say that a believer cannot leave a non-believing spouse and he gave a very important reason for it. Verse 15 is still a part of Paul's personal

directions and it may seem, at first, contrary to Jesus' words, but it is not. He is being carried by the Spirit and his words have become a part of God's word.

"But" begins this verse and it is in contrast to the two previous verses. "If the unbeliever departs, let him depart." This goes in either direction, whether the unbeliever is a man or a woman, but he uses the masculine for both as will be seen in a moment. Either way, if an unbeliever wants to be out of the marriage, then the believer may let them go. In fact, they probably don't have any choice in the matter in most countries and cultures anyway. If they want to go and can go, then there is nothing which mandates that they must stay.

Paul then explains this position by saying that "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." We, as believers, have been brought out from the bondage of sin to a new master. To be in a different form of bondage wouldn't suit our new position and calling, and it could only be detrimental to our walk with the Lord. Therefore, to release the unbeliever is acceptable when they wish to go. And the reason is that "God has called us to peace."

We are His and we are to live in peace under His authority. If our allegiances are skewed because of a marriage fraught with conflict and trial, then we are not living in the peace which He intends for us. And so in this verse we have the only other reason which is biblically acceptable for dissolving a marriage. Understanding this then, we need to think rationally and carefully about our marriage choices and do our utmost to adhere to the commands of the Bible.

Life application: Let us stand firm on the Bible, even through those issues which may be difficult or even displeasing. We have been called to obey the prescriptive statements made there and it is unwise and inappropriate to pick and choose which ones we will adhere to.

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? 1 Corinthians 7:16

In this verse, Paul certainly returns to the thoughts given in verses 12 and 13 which read -

"But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him."

The reason for a believer not being allowed to depart from a non-believer has especially been given in verse 14 when considering the state of the children. Paul was very careful to note that the children are considered "holy" because of the marriage bond which exists, even if one is an unbeliever. Along with that most important of reasons, Paul gives another reason for the believer to remain with the non-believer, and he does it in the form of two questions:

"For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?"

It very well may be that the non-believing husband or wife may come to salvation through the marriage by observing the conduct and witness of the believer. Our happiness or unhappiness in a marriage is of far less value than the salvation of even one person that we may no longer be in love with. Our lives are called to be witnesses to Christ, even in a marriage which is unsatisfactory.

The verse also confirms that the "sanctified" status of the non-believer which Paul spoke of in verse 14 had nothing to do with salvation, but was rather directed solely to the setting apart of the children as "holy." Also, Paul is not saying that the husband or wife could actually "save" the non-believer. Only Jesus can do this. He is implying that their actions would lead to Jesus saving them. This should be obvious, but still is worth stating.

Having noted this about the connection to verses 12 and 13, it is also likely that the thought of verse 15 is considered in this verse as well. That verse said -

"But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace."

Taking that verse and tying it to verse 16 (our verse being analyzed now), Paul may also be saying that allowing the non-believing spouse to depart is acceptable because there is no way that they could know the outcome of the marriage. If they refused to allow the non-believer to depart as they wished because they were thinking they could "save" the non-believer, it could inevitably lead to strife which is in opposition to the statement that "God has called us to peace."

So, in all situations, the onus is on the believer to

- 1) never voluntarily depart from the marriage;
- 2) to allow the non-believer to stay if they wish; and
- 3) to allow the non-believer to go if they wish. The free-will choice of the non-believer takes precedence, just as the free-will choice of an individual to accept or reject Jesus as Savior takes precedence. This free-will choice of the non-believer pictures the freedom God has given us in our marriage relationship to Him and shows implicitly that the doctrine of being "regenerated in order to believe" is false. Free-will is granted to humans concerning our relationship with Christ and free-will is granted to the non-believer to stay in the marriage or to depart from it.

Life application: God, through His word, asks us to be willing to sacrifice our own happiness for the sake of our marriage. Our choices, when self-centered, will inevitably turn out bad. But when we are obedient to God's word, there is a chance that things will turn out for both our happiness and an increase in the kingdom through the conversion of others. Let us adhere to God's word even if it is contrary to our happiness.