

Married for God, Divorced for Good?

1 Corinthians 7:10–16 | 07.10. 2016 | Body Life @OBC

This week has to be one of the saddest weeks in recent memory, and not because of one event but several:

First was the tragic death of Alton Sterling . . . an African-American man, a father of five, who was killed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Then, two days later, another video showed Philando Castille, a black man in Minneapolis, shot and left to bleed to death on Facebook.

Then on Thursday night, if that wasn't enough, protesters in Dallas took to the streets. When shots opened up, the police escorts went to protect these crowds, only to find that 'snipers' were targeting police officers.

So we come this morning – with a national sense of grief, pain, and brokenness.

Fifty years after the Civil Rights movement, race relations are far from resolved.

Equal rights under the law doesn't translate to equal rights on the street.

And America continues to bleed . . .

Closer to home . . . we find the same sort of pain and division.

Children estranged from parents . . .

Spouses constantly fighting with one another . . . wondering if divorce is imminent

Friendship broken because of lies, accusations, or broken promises

Families suffering because of abuse, abandonment, or combination of the two.

How true were God's words to Adam . . . If you eat of this tree . . . you will surely die!

These events – national and local – are the death rattle of a fallen world.

They remind us how creation groans and mankind is by nature God's enemy;

As Jesus said in Mark 7: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (vv 21–22)

Or Jesus half-brother James: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. . . . (James 4:1–2)

This is who we are . . . a people alienated from God and /∴ at war with one another:

Apart from the intervening grace of God . . . violence and bloodshed are our path.

Oh but if you do know God's grace . . . it changes everything.

It is with this combination of SORROW + HOPE I ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians 7.

And what we find in these verses are instructions about marriage and divorce.

Instructions to Xians + mixed marriages

Instructions that commend the goodness of marriage . . .

Instructions that also answer questions about divorce and remarriage.

So . . . like the news which grieved us this week . . .

We must read **1 Cor 7** with sorrow in our hearts . . . for this subject of mixed marriages, broken marriages, divorce . . . touches each of us

As adamantly as God opposes divorce . . . he offers of holy compassion and tender healing to the brokenhearted who cry for mercy. **We ought to be as well.**

READ vv. 10 – 16

Two points to consider today – one a clear assertion; the other a question, a statement needing clarification:

1. **Christian Marriage is For God** . . . meaning we who are bought with a price and who are no longer our own . . . enter into marriage not for ourselves, but for God.
2. **Christians Who Divorce Should Do It For Good** . . . and when I say “good” I don’t mean “forever” . . . I’m not saying if you divorce, remarriage is impossible.

We’ll need to see what Paul says . . .

What I mean is that divorce should aim for good . . . not evil.

It must submit itself to God’s Word,

. . . follow wise counsel, and

. . . aim for good as the outcome.

Is that possible?

I think so . . . but first let’s consider how Xian marriages are FOR GOD.

Married for God

A # of years ago, I took up a project of reading every book on marriage I could find.

Two shelves of books bear the marks of that study . . . but 1 book stands out

A little book called *Married for God* . . . by Christopher Ash

In it he makes the case the main goal of marriage is NOT sexual purity, self-fulfillment, companionship, nor even children.

Rather, he argues the main point of marriage is to glorify God.

We saw this truth in **1 Cor 6:19** . . . and it continues to hang over all **ch .7**.

Now, if that was all he said, it wouldn't be all that revolutionary. . . .

But what he argued was God made us in his image to glorify him

. . . by rightly ruling over creation . . .

and that marriage . . . the coupling of a man and woman, with the ensuing gift of children . . . was the necessary means to subdue and rule over all creation.

IOW, through marriage the mission of mankind would be to cover the earth with God's glory – namely image-bearers who would be doing God's will.

So marriage in its very essence came with a mission . . .

To bear children who would bear God's image

And to work together to increase human flourishing

And as Eph 5 would later teach . . . to display the union of Christ and church

In all these ways . . .

God intends marriage to be about more than the two people therein.

Marriage is for God . . . And those who know God thru Christ are called to live out their marriage differently as a result.

Which brings us to Paul's first instruction to married people in **vv. 10 – 11**.

In **verse 10 – 11** he addresses the married

And more specifically, he is speaking to a marriage comprised of two believers.

He says, “**I give this charge . . . (and not I, but the Lord).**”

He makes this clarification to press the Corinthians back to the Jesus’ Teaching.

And he calls to mind what Jesus said about marriage and divorce.

What did Jesus say?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus answer to question about divorce.

Luke 16:18 - Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Jesus in Matthew 19 citing Deuteronomy 24, says: whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Some . . . argued **Matthew** adds this “exception clause”; Jesus didn’t actually say it.

This is problematic, because it pits M. against Jesus and M. against M + L

Others . . . believe Matthew adds this clause to exonerate Joseph, who planned to divorce Mary . . . when it seemed she was guilty of sexual immorality

This may be. . . but it can’t limit Jesus teaching to that situation alone

Altogether Paul points to Jesus, not because his words are lack authority,

But BC He wants to show how his statements find agreement w/ God’s original design.

Paul appeals to Jesus who rooted his teaching about marriage in Genesis itself.

Namely: **Marriage is for Life!**

Marriage is not a temporary contract for convenience or a pliable agreement for pleasure. It is a covenant bond . . . that can only be broken by death

Or as we will see by . . . as a departure from God himself.

So Paul's straightforward instruction about marriage for 2 Christians is . . .

For the wife . . . she should not separate from her husband

For the husband . . . he should not divorce his wife.

The reason for the differing words (separation vs. divorce) is not a

Result of two kinds of separation

Rather . . . it probably refers to the fact that, at this time, men owned their homes

So if a woman divorced her husband, she would have to leave = **separate**.

More importantly, v. 11 speaks of what happens *if* . . . Xian W leaves her Xian H

And Paul says . . . "if she does [separate], she should remain unmarried . . .

While the Majority View among Protestants has permitted biblically divorced Christians to remarry . . .

This verse has been one of the strongest verses for arguing the Minority View – that divorce and remarriage is never permissible.

How should we answer this verse?

→ → TWO OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE

1. **This call to reconcile is set amidst four calls for unity and longevity in marriage.**

- v. 10 – the wife should not separate from her husband
- v. 11 – the husband should not divorce his wife
- v. 12 – to the Christian man married to an unbeliever, he should not leave her . . .
- v. 13 – to the Christian wife married to an unbeliever, she should remain with him

Paul's overarching message is clear . . . **if you are married, do not leave!**

Keep your vows. Honor the Lord with your faithfulness.

As hard as it gets, divorce between Christians is harder.

Press into God . . . Love your spouse as a ministry unto them from God!

You're not married for you . . . or even for her/him . . . but for God.

So cling to Christ and abide in your marriage.

2. ATST, because Paul stresses the goodness of singleness, he doesn't believe separated people NEED to get married.

This flies in the face of our current culture . . . which attaches a premium on marriage.

The LGBT comm. esp. has captured this when they say,

"By limiting marriage to heterosexuals, you deny me the ability to be happy, fulfilled . . . etc."

"If God made me with SSA . . . why would he imprison me in celibacy?"

I hope you feel the weight of these questions.

They are the same sort of questions a divorced man or woman might ask.

But these arguments only stand ... if we believe human marriage is life's ultimate goal

Which is the point Paul is arguing against . . . Christ is our ultimate goal.

Marriage to X is the real thing . . . don't abandon J in pursuit of sexual immorality.

So . . . with Jesus' command for husband and wives to remain married
and with the goodness of singleness **in the background** . . .

Paul says to 2 Xians . . . worst case scenario: If you must separate

Remain unmarried OR Seek reconciliation.

And of course . . . the impact of this teaching is to awaken Christians from their slumber

If you are a Xian today . . . you have ears to hear the voice of your Shepherd.

What he is saying . . . is if you are married to another Christian . . .

Don't seek divorce . . . don't seek another relationship.

Why? Because there is fundamental difference between Xian marriages / non-X

What is it? Christ is present! And the power of his grace can forgive all sin.

Therefore, the two Xians in that marriage are not enemies . . .

If you have been reconciled to God . . . there are resources to be reconciled to OA

If both of you are Christians . . . you have tasted and seen God's power.

You know the horrors of your sin and glory of his grace.

You are a recipient of reconciliation . . .

therefore, in your marriage . . . you can be an instrument of reconciliation.

This is what Paul is calling all Christian marriages to do . . .

And if every Xian were married to another Christian, he might not say more.

But b/c not every marriage in the church is comprised of 2 Christians, he goes on

. . . And what we find are 5 verses that press for unity in marriage with cautious permission for divorce (and remarriage) . . .

Divorce for Good??

In verse 12, Paul addresses the “rest.”

From what he says in vv 12 – 14, it is clear that he has mixed marriages in view.

That is to say When the gospel came to Corinth it created mixed marriages.

When one spouse believed the gospel, it automatically created a situation where the marriage was other than designed.

We know from 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14, God intends for Christians to only marry other Christians.

At our church, we elders won’t marry a member to a non-Xian.

But that raises the question . . .

If a married woman comes to faith in Christ, should she divorce her husband?

That’s what Paul addresses here.

And he does so as someone inspired by God and trustworthy to give good counsel.

It might seem from v. 12 the Lord is not giving these commands, only Paul.

But that misunderstands his point:

Jesus never spoke of mixed marriages and thus Paul as an apostle is giving his inspired counsel on the matter.

And what does he say?

Simply that if a Xian is married to and non-Xian and the non-Xian is willing to stay in the marriage, she or he should remain.

READ verses 12 – 13

Paul is not minimizing the difficulty of this . . .

But he respects the covenant made before the one spouse was converted.

In this we see, that marriage is something of a creation covenant.

Even when two non-Christians marry they are entering into a covenant as defined in Genesis 2.

And thus, when the gospel comes to save one of the spouses, God does not require the Christian to leave the marriage.

Now it should be observed

This is different than what happened in **Ezra and Nehemiah**.

In those two books the men of Israel unlawfully married foreign women.

When Neh. learned of this . . . he beat these men + commanded them to separate.

Out of fear of breaking covenant with God . . . they divorced their wives.

This shows the difference between the Old Covenant and the New.

Our relationship with God is based on the Spirit and not the flesh;

Therefore despite all the difficulty of a Christian being married to a non-Christian.
. . . The Non-Christian cannot spiritually pollute the born-again Christian.

In fact, what Paul says just the opposite: **READ v. 14**

Now in our translation “made holy” might better be rendered: sanctified.

Meaning that a single Christian spouse in non-Christian home has the calling to make known the holy Lord . . . to a spiritually dead family.

He’s not saying a wife can save her husband or a father save his children – **v. 16**

He is saying that as the Holy Spirit abides in you . . . and you abide in your marriage . . . you can present a way of living that sanctifies the home

Countless are the testimonies of family members leading their family to X.

But again, Paul is a realist . . . he's not offering romantic notion of life w/ an unbeliever.

Especially in Corinth, where there was no Judeo-Christian ethic shaping culture.

He understood the chances of a marriage surviving the gospel were not great.

As Jesus predicted, the gospel is a sword that divides families.

Luke 12:51 – 53: Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵²For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Now, . . . Jesus didn't speak about H and W's being divided by the gospel, but that is the implication that Paul is driving at.

If you live for Christ . . . you will experience hostility.

So don't be surprised when that hostility comes upon you from within your family

You should expect it . . . and if you find yourself in this situation where you came to faith after marrying your spouse . . . **maybe you should even feel sorry for your spouse . . .**

Here's why:

The spouse who married you married someone else; they didn't bargain to marry a Christian . . . and now that you are one . . . well, you're not the same!

By God's grace a new creature in Christ. This is wonderful . . . and awful for the spouse who flees at the mention of Jesus.

At the same time . . . if you are betrothed to Christ . . . you have brought another man into the home . . . and while he is invisible . . . he is real and he is present.

Can you see why X's presence might make things hard for your non-X spouse?

These were the sorts of things going on in Corinth

They continue to go on today . . . and they cause tension in marriage

Even as they give opportunities for fallible Xians to point family to an infallible God

But still . . . the question lingers: **What about divorce? What about remarriage?**

Paul gets to this in v. 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.

More literal is the **NASB**: Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave.

The word for separate (χωρίζω) is repeated twice. The second time it is a passive command: **If the unbelievers separates; let him separate.**

The **passive** voice: indicates the abandoned spouse is not to seek the divorce. . . . But the **command** means he/she is not held as a slave to the departed spouse.

Of course, Paul's counsel is not the first option.

It comes after four other rounds of "Stay. Don't divorce. Don't separate. Abide."

But now he concedes, if the unbeliever won't stay . . . let him go! You are free.

Paul says if the unbelieving spouse leaves **"the bro/sis is not enslaved."**

The alternative would be a never-ending battle to regain the marriage . . .

Which is not something God promises to give . . .

Rather . . . Paul says to the believer: **You are called to peace.**

This an interesting use of the word καλέω . . . b/c it is such a theologically-rich term

Remember in ch. 1 – Paul says you were **called** as saints (v. 2)
. . . **called** into fellowship of his Son (v. 9) . . .

And 7:17–24 . . . Paul uses *kaleo* 9x in 8 verses . . . speaking about the vocation of each believer.

So I take it here Paul is emphasizing the primary calling of every Xian is not marriage or singleness . . . **but to be in Christ**

Just as marriage doesn't define you . . . neither does divorce
If you're in Christ . . . Christ defines you . . . not your past / performance - HIM
If you're not in Christ . . . but in the throes of divorce . . . he invites you to find rest
For all he offers you peace . . . and calls you to be peace-maker . . .

Now . . . it would be one-sided, if I didn't say there have been some very faithful interpreters who've read this verse in this way:

"Yes . . . the believing spouse is free to divorce, if her spouse leaves . . . but they are not free to remarry."

This is the Minority view, not the Majority view, but I feel the weight of their arguments because of how carefully they read the Scripture . . .

Still, in the end, I think those who permit divorce, but deny remarriage . . . fail to let the whole Bible inform their view . . .

Instead, they depend on a few verses from Matthew and Paul . . . rather than taking in the whole counsel of God.

So . . . let me make four observations to help clarify our vision on this matter:

1. Neither Paul nor Jesus are giving a full-orbed manual for sexual ethics.

Which means, we cannot derive our views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage from them alone. Instead, we need to follow their teaching back to the OT.

Only then will we get a full biblical portrait of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

2. The Old Testament taught that divorce was permitted in some instances . . . and when it was . . . remarriage was also permitted.

(1) **Gen 2 and Mal 2** teach marriage is a covenant that should be protected at all costs . . . BUT the marriage covenant could be broken by adultery or abandonment . . . and I would say with caution . . . violence or physical abuse.

(2) **Deut 24** says, in such cases, God permitted a certificate of divorce. This was not God's design/desire, but in a fallen world . . . it was permitted.

(3) And then . . . from Deut 24 and the Scripture-shaped culture of Israel, when a divorce was permitted, remarriage was also permitted.

(4) In fact, the language Paul uses of freedom in v. 15 copies language of the day.

Craig Keener writes: In the context of divorce, 'free' meant precisely that the woman was free to marry, and meant nothing else than this. [Therefore], *If Paul meant that remarriage was not permitted, he said precisely the opposite of what he meant.* (*And Marries Another*, 61 – 62).

So when we go back to the OT . . . and find that Jesus and Paul did not overturn the OT, we come to see that remarriage is biblically permissible when divorce is legitimate.

3. That being said . . . remarriage may not be advisable, even if it is permissible

Consider how often Paul speaks of the goodness of singleness in ch. 7.

Imagine that he was counseling with a recent divorcee, what would he say?

I think with his views on singleness, he'd persuade us to consider the single life.

For Paul . . . marriage is filled with anxieties and difficulties and threat of separation.

And so to the divorced . . . I think he'd press us to embrace a spouse who will never leave us, abuse us, or cheat on us . . . **He would press us to hold fast to Christ.**

All that to say Paul teaches us remarriage permissible,
but that does not mean it is necessarily advisable.

4. If you are contemplating divorce . . . don't rely on your own wisdom.

It is impossible to think clearly when you are in the middle of a marriage crisis.

Thankfully, if you are a member of the church . . . you have a spiritual family who loves you . . . and has biblical wisdom to help you.

Remember . . . I said divorce, if it is to glorify God, should be pursued for GOOD.

If you are a Christian, divorce cannot be a way to retaliate or to merely escape.

You were married for God . . . and even if you discover that the spouse you thought was a believer is in fact not a Christian . . . and a divorce is looming.

. . . You need the church's help to make that decision!

Goodness is not a subjective experience.

G. must match God's revealed will . . . it must cohere with God's Word.

Which means to walk with God in goodness,

. . . You need to cling to his Word and cling to his people.

Even more, all of this points to this fact . . .

. . . all horizontal peace is purchased by Christ which brings us back to **Eph 2.**