

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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“I SAY, NOT THE LORD”

By Andrew Dow

In the course of answering the Corinthian’s questions concerning marriage (cf. 1 Cor 7:1) Paul makes a peculiar statement: **“to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her”** (v. 12). Many readers have determined Paul’s statement—**“I say, not the Lord”**—to be some kind of concession that what follows is not really a divine instruction but is merely the apostle’s opinion. Is this true?

To understand this phrase (like any phrase in the Bible or in any other written or oral communication) we must read it in its context. Paul writes to the trouble-ridden church in Corinth to address various issues and questions. In 1 Corinthians 7 he begins a section on marriage: **“Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband”** (vv. 1–2). Throughout this chapter Paul addresses widows (vv. 8f), the married (vv. 10ff), and those not yet married (vv. 25ff).

Paul’s statement, which sounds as if he is offering a mere opinion, is preceded by a strikingly similar statement. A few verses prior Paul wrote, **“to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should**

not leave her husband” (v. 10). In this statement Paul states that the following instruction is not from Him, but is an instruction from the Lord. The similarity and proximity of these statements appear to indicate that Paul is intending a contrast between these two commands—namely, a contrast in the source of the statement. The instructions in vv. 10–11 given by the Lord (not Paul) whereas the instructions in vv. 12–16 are not given by the Lord (but Paul).

Perhaps it will be helpful to identify two things about these sources of authority (i.e., Paul and the Lord). First, who is the Lord? This is more specific than an allusion to deity or the Godhead. In 1 Corinthians—as throughout his letters—Paul most frequently uses “Lord” to designate Jesus (see 1:2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc.). Therefore, when Paul says, **“not I, but the Lord”** (7:10) or **“I say, not the Lord”** (7:12), he is most likely referring to the teaching of Jesus. Second, what does Paul think about his own teaching? Earlier in this letter Paul claimed that the things he taught were given to him by God (2:6–16; cf. Gal 1:11–12). Therefore, when Paul says, **“not I, but the Lord”** (7:10) or **“I say, not the Lord”** (7:12), he does not see his teaching as contradictory or inferior to Jesus’s teaching.

So, what is the solution? At first Paul states that he is giving instructions that are from the Lord (v. 10a). He goes on to explain that those who are married should remain married and, if a divorce occurs, they must remain unmarried—a teaching that the Lord Jesus gave during his earthly ministry (see Matt 19:6, 9; Mark 10:11–12). However, as Paul continues he offers instructions that are not from the Lord (v. 12a). Here he addresses marriages between believers and unbelievers—a subject matter that Jesus

does not (as far as we have record of) speak on during his earthly ministry. When Paul says “I say, not the Lord” he does not mean that he is speaking his opinion, rather he is distinguishing between what was revealed to him by God and what Jesus taught while on earth.

WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN A CHURCH?

By Andrew Dow

Most Christians realize that they need to be members of a church. Far too many, however, do not seem to grasp the real reason for being a part of a church family. At times it seems that most people look for a local church based on what it can do for them. Some even refuse to associate with a church based on whether or not the preaching or singing was enjoyable, whether there was a vibrant peer group, or whether people were nice to them. These things are good, but they should not be our primary concern.

The primary goal of the local church is God’s glory (Eph 3:21; 2 Thess 1:12). If you find a church that is striving to glorify God, you have found a good thing. Seek to glorify God with them. The secondary goal of the local church is to serve one another (Heb 10:24–25). This means that as a member of a local church I have the responsibility to serve everyone else in my church family—regardless of whether I am being served. As Jesus said, **“it is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35).

The local church is a place to glorify God and serve others. How a church can serve you is tertiary. In fact, when we properly prioritize what we look for in a church, we will likely find our new church family serving us in ways that we never expected or never knew we needed!

RIGHTEOUS VS. WICKED: MEMORABLE WORDS

By Andrew Dow

Solomon continues to contrast the righteous and the wicked with this cluster of proverbs (10:7–11):

**The memory of the righteous is blessed,
But the name of the wicked will rot.**

**The wise of heart will receive commands,
But a babbling fool will be ruined.**

**He who walks in integrity walks securely,
But he who perverts his ways will be found out.**

**He who winks the eye causes trouble,
And a babbling fool will be ruined.**

**The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”**

These proverbs begin with an observation: after death the righteous are missed, but the wicked are forgotten. One way to make sure you are missed after death is to use your words carefully. In these proverbs the fool is a babbling, perverse liar. However, the righteous listen, obey, and speak words that produce life. Which person are you more likely to remember after they die? Be that kind of person!

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:

The Assembled
Church

PM LESSON:

by James Cost

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**