

1 CORINTHIANS 7.1-24

Remain As You Were Called

Intro: All the matters leading up to this point in Paul's correspondence had been reported to Paul by members of Chloe's household (see 1.11). No doubt there were some things that some members of the Corinthian church wished Paul were ignorant of (their divisiveness, suing each other, fornication, etc.). However, there were some things that the Corinthians wanted to ask Paul, so they sent him a letter. Paul's responses to their questions make up the material in chapters 7-15.

SOME PRELIMINARIES:

1. This passage has been misconstrued by some to mean that celibacy is a higher, more spiritual calling than marriage. While Paul will say that he wished "all men were even as I myself," and he will show the benefits of remaining unmarried, it is exceeding the purpose of Paul's words to refer to celibacy as a higher calling.
 - » First, it is clear from Paul's writings that he had a very high view of marriage. See 1Cor 9.5; 1Tim 4.1-3; Eph. 5.22-33, etc.
 - » Second, all of Paul's words in this chapter need to be understood in the context of vs. 26, "I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is." The present distress is not described, but some current (not future) situation had arisen that would make marriage more difficult.
2. This chapter deals with God's will regarding marriage and divorce. Before looking at what this chapter has to say about the matter, it is beneficial to note that God's marriage law is uniform throughout Scripture. His intent is for one man to marry one woman and for them to remain bound together.
 - » Genesis 2:18-25. God's marriage will demonstrated in the creation account, as man and woman become "one flesh".
 - » Deut. 24:1-4 Contingency legislation. The

Jews had turned this passage into legislation allowing divorce, but a closer examination of the text reveals it to be an "if... then" statement. God was not sanctioning the divorcing of a spouse, but legislating against further abuse in these matters.

- » Malachi 2:14-16. God's hatred of divorce clearly stated.
- » Matthew 5:31-32. The unlawfulness of divorce taught by Jesus, except when the spouse was guilty of fornication.
- » Matthew 19:1-12. The same teaching as in 5.31-32, except remarriage is explicitly allowed only in cases where an unfaithful spouse was put away.
- » Mark 6:14-29 The universality of God's will as shown in John's denouncing of Herod's marriage to Herodias.
- » Mark 10:10-12 Same teaching as found in Matthew 5 and 19, except both husband and wife are addressed.
- » Luke 16:18 Same teaching as found in Matthew and Mark, save that marrying a divorced person is shown to be unlawful.
- » Romans 7:1-4 The marriage bond lasts until death.

VS. 1, A FALSE CONCEPT

1. The Corinthian's letter to Paul revealed a misguided notion regarding marriage: it is good for a man not to touch a woman.
 - » That this was not Paul's teaching is clear from vss. 3-6.
 - » I believe the ESV correctly renders this passage with quotation marks, showing that the statement belonged to the Corinthians and not to Paul.
2. "History records that there came to be a very strong element in the church that emphasized fasting, celibacy, and other forms of self denial and physical affliction (Schaff 2:174-84). A

study of 1 Corinthians 7 implies that there was a strong feeling at Corinth that celibacy was a holier state than marriage. This feeling had created these problems:

- » Contention for spiritual marriages, in which sexual activity was not practiced.
- » An argument that it would be better to dissolve marriages, especially if the marriage involved an unbeliever.
- » An argument that since celibacy was a holier state, it would be preferable not to marry.” (Bob Waldron, 1996 FC Lecture)

VS. 2-7, PAUL ADDRESSES THEIR MISGUIDED CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE:

1. At its basest level, marriage is to be allowed so that men and women will not give into sexual immorality. (vs. 2) Again, Paul is addressing this from the basest level. He has a high view of marriage, but he begins by addressing the matter from the lowest vantage point.
2. Marriage is not a place for celibacy (vss. 3-6).
 - » Because each has a duty to the other (vs. 3)
 - » Because your body belongs to your spouse (vs. 4)
 - » Celibacy should ONLY be for agreed times of spiritual devotion, but those times should be short and infrequent. And those are only a concession, not a law (vss. 5-6)
3. Paul addresses the matter of celibacy, wishing that all could be as he, but recognizing that the burden of celibacy is not for everyone (vs. 7). Again, we will see that there are spiritual benefits for celibacy, but we must take Paul’s words in light of the “present distress” in vs. 26.

VSS. 8-24, STAY AS YOU ARE

1. The overwhelming point of this passage is that the believers should remain in their present marital state. Paul will first address Christians in differing marital situations (vss. 8-16), then lay down the general principle that Christians should be content in their present circumstances (vss. 17-24). However, this general principle is laid down to emphasize how the principle

applies to marriage.

- » Before moving on it is necessary to stress that this passage DOES NOT change or amend earlier principles of God’s marriage law. Some have sought to apply the principle of “remain as you were called” to any marital relationship, saying that if one was in an adulterous marriage when they came to Christ they can remain in that marriage.
 - » However, that idea is not within the scope of Paul’s teaching in this chapter. He has already said that some of the Corinthians had been adulterers (6.9) with the implied warning about continuing in such behavior. The teachings in this passage apply to Christians in sanctioned relationships and how they should conduct themselves.
2. The unmarried and widows: remain as you are (vss. 8-9).
 - » Again, Paul’s words must be read in light of vs. 26, for in other passages Paul will counsel young widows to marry (1Tim 5.14).
 - » However, if sexual temptation is too strong, these can marry even though it might make life more difficult “in light of the present distress”
 3. To believers married to other believers: stay as you are (vss. 10-11)
 - » Don’t divorce! If a divorce does occur, don’t compound the problem by marrying again. Rather, remain unmarried.
 - » Paul will say, “not I, but the Lord,” because the instructions he gives are the exact same as spoken by the Lord in Matthew 5.31-32; 19.6,9.
 4. To believers married to unbelievers: stay as you are (vss. 12-16)
 - » You will note that the teaching in vss. 12-13 is the exact same as in vss. 10-11! Thus, when Paul begins by saying “I say, not the Lord,” he is NOT devising a new teaching, but applying the Lord’s teaching to a different situation. The Lord had addressed marriage between believers (believing Jews anyway), now applies the same teaching to marriage between believers and non-

believers.

- An important application needs to be made here: God doesn't just govern by command, He governs by principle. We sometimes hear things like, "well, God never said anything about..." This is true, there are many situations and circumstances we face that the Bible does not describe. However, God has given PRINCIPLES that apply in any and every situation.
- » Vs. 14 may seem confusing at first, but when read in light of vs. 16 it becomes clearer. Paul is NOT saying that an unbeliever is holy because he/she is married to a believer, but rather the possibility of the unbelieving spouse being converted (and thus sanctified) is greater when the marriage remains in tact.
- » Finally, some view vs. 15 as another exception to God's marriage law, that in cases of abandonment the spouse is free to remarry. A few things to consider:
 - Remarriage is never addressed, so reading remarriage into this passage would be unwise.
 - The word "bondage" in vs. 15 literally means "enslaved" and is nowhere used of the marriage bond. In fact, Paul will speak of the marriage bond (deo) in 7.39.
 - Paul's point is that the believing spouse who is put away does not need to view themselves as enslaved to the unbeliever. "they are not bound to the ruling given above about maintaining the marriage. They have wanted to dissolve such marriages. Paul has said No. But now he allows that if the pagan wants out, then one is not enslaved." (Gordon Fee)
- 5. The general principle: remain in the condition in which you are called (vss. 17-24).
 - » Paul will use circumcision and slavery as ways to illustrate the point he has been making in regards to marriage. We are all called to Christ in varying life circumstances, in differing marital status. Regardless of where we find ourselves in life, our goal should be to serve God, recognizing that we belong to Him. Everything else is secondary!
 - » "Sometimes we foolishly think that holiness is external, and that a change of circumstances - go live in a cave away from people, for example - would be bound to make us holier. Holiness is something that is in the heart and radiates out into the life (Mt. 12:34-35; cf. Prov. 4:23). The problem Paul deals with in this passage is one that confronts us constantly. We think: If only God would give me more money, then I would not worry, or, If only I could be healthy, then I would be so grateful that I would work hard for the Lord. Apparently some of the Corinthians thought: I am free in the Lord, yet I am a slave. If I could only get freed from my slavery, I could be holier, and more useful to the Lord." (Bob Waldron, 1996 FC Lecture)
 - » "Precisely because our lives are determined by God's call, not by our situation, we need to learn to continue there as those who are "before God." Paul's concern is not with change, one way or the other, but with "living out one's calling" in whatever situation one is found. There let one serve the Lord, and let the call of God sanctify to oneself the situation, whether it be mixed marriage, singleness, blue- or white-collar work, or socioeconomic condition." (Gordon Fee)