



When Hearts Harden and Hope Diminishes
1 Corinthians 7:12-16
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I. Introduction

A. Christians and the Question of Divorce/Remarriage

1. Many godly Christians disagree on this difficult issue:

- a. No divorce/no remarriage under any circumstances – James Montgomery Boice; John Piper
- b. Divorce under biblical grounds/no remarriage under any circumstances – Gordon Wenham
- c. Divorce/remarriage permissible on biblical grounds – Most evangelicals: Carson, Kostenberger
 - 1). Biblical grounds – marital unfaithfulness (immorality)/abandonment by unbeliever

2. Individually, each must hold his/her own convictions; to go against them is sin (Romans 14).

3. Corporately, we must be able to function in an orderly and God-honoring manner under the leadership of the elders – our majority position – divorce/remarriage on biblical grounds.

B. Context: The “spiritual” in Corinth were admonishing celibacy, including within marriage (7:1; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-5).

1. Key: Certain Corinthians wanted “to pursue a more perfect, sexless spirituality” (Kostenberger, 248).
2. So, the context of 1 Corinthians 7 is celibacy, not adultery!

C. Paul’s Response:

1. **It is good to remain single if you have the gift of celibacy (7:8-9), for celibacy allows for undivided devotion to Christ (7:32-35).**
2. **However, if you don’t have the gift of celibacy, then it is good to marry so that you don’t fall into sexual temptation and sin (7:2), for marriage is THE place to satisfy sexual longings (7:3-5).**
 - a. It is not sin for the unmarrieds (7:8-9), the betrothed (7:25-38), or the widows (7:39-40) to marry.
3. **If you are married, fulfill your marital obligations to satisfy your spouse sexually (7:3-6), and do not seek to be free from your spouse (7:10-16).**

- a. “Remain as you are” (7:17-24)! Only death legitimately breaks the marital bond (7:39-40).

II. Proposition

- A. If you are a believers married to an unbeliever, then you should fight for your marriage and seek to be a witness.

III. Exposition

A. **Believers: Fight for your marriage; always pursue reconciliation (7:10-11; cf. Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9).**

1. Divorce is the result of hard hearts-hearts too hard to desire reconciliation (Matthew 19:8).
 - a. John Murray (*Divorce*, 99): “When spouses are divorced without proper cause they are still man and wife in the sight of God” and that is why remarriage is adultery.
2. The only exception our Lord allows for divorce and remarriage is sexual immorality (Matt. 19:9).
 - a. Though sexual immorality breaks the marital bond, reconciliation, even in the midst of adultery, displays the gospel.

B. **Believer married to unbeliever: Fight for your marriage; bless your spouse and provide a witness (7:12-16).**

1. Paul is NOT advocating mixed marriages (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14!)
 - a. Singles – consider how you will marry! Explain principles!
 - b. Church – consider how we uphold marriage through premarital approach! Explain process!
2. The issue is one where both were unbelievers and one came to faith in Christ.
 - a. Marriage is a creation ordinance, not only for believers: priority and permanent (Gen. 2:18ff).
 - b. The unbeliever does not defile the believer or the children (7:14).
 - 1). You should NOT withhold having children!
 - c. On the contrary, the Christian blesses the unbeliever and provides a witness (7:14).
 - 1). Explain how . . . Example: Bruce, others . . . (influence)!
 - 2). Are you blessing your unbelieving spouse and providing a witness or not?
3. However, if the unbeliever desires to leave the marriage as a result of your faith, let him/her leave (7:15).
 - a. You don’t know whether your spouse will be saved (7:16).
 - 1). Example: Two Muslims, one comes to faith in Christ
 - b. You are free – free from the marriage bond and free to remarry (7:15; cf. 7:39).
 - 1). BUT always pursue and patiently wait for reconciliation.

IV. LIMITATIONS (John Murray, *Divorce*) so that the Pauline Privilege is not abused:

A. **Paul is dealing with spiritually mixed marriages, not two believers (77).**

B. **Paul is dealing with WILLFUL separation on the part of the unbeliever NOT the believer (77).**

1. Believer – are you pushing your spouse away?

- a. Men: through lack of leadership, protection, provision/neglect of basic needs, physical, emotional?
- b. Women: through unwillingness to follow/neglect of physical, emotional needs/nagging, pride, etc.?

C. The separation is rooted in RELIGIOUS differences and conflicts, not incompatibility (77).

- 1. Women – 1 Peter 3:1-6; Men – 1 Peter 3:7

V. Conclusion

A. Are you divorced but not remarried?

- 1. On biblical grounds – you are free of guilt and shame.
 - a. If your former spouse is not remarried, would you pursue reconciliation?
- 2. On unbiblical grounds
 - a. If you are the one whose hardness of heart brought about the divorce, repent and confess.
 - 1). If your former spouse is not remarried you are to confess and pursue reconciliation.
 - a). Also, you are to remain unmarried in hope of reconciliation.
 - 2). If your former spouse has remarried, you have forced them to commit adultery.
 - a). Confess and repent to him/her.
 - b. If you are the “innocent” victim of divorce . . .
 - 1). If your former spouse is not married, remain unmarried and seek reconciliation.
 - a). What might this look like?
 - 2). If your former spouse is not married and you have married, you have been forced into adultery.
 - a). Confess your sin to all involved (former and present spouse) and be free of guilt and shame.
 - 3). If your former spouse has remarried, he/she has committed adultery, you are free to remarry.

B. Are you remarried?

- 1. On biblical grounds – you are free of guilt and shame.
- 2. On unbiblical grounds – repent and confess, if you have not done so already, and be free of guilt and shame.

C. Are you in a difficult marriage; are you looking for an “out” of your marriage?

- 1. Cling to hope of reconciliation; do not let your heart grow hard!
 - a. Remember what brought you together in the first place.
 - b. Look at your own heart – how have you contributed to the breakdown of this marriage?
 - c. Confess YOUR sin – “I” am the chief of sinners.
- 2. Seek help! NOT separation.
- 3. Fight and persevere through suffering.

a. Abraham Lincoln

D. Are you in an abusive marriage?

1. Find help immediately! Austin SafePlace
2. If your life (or the life of your children) is in danger, find a safe place and seek help!

F. For all who are married –

1. We must fight (of faith) for our marriages, loving one another, picturing Christ and the gospel!
2. Let us fight and persevere even in the midst of suffering and bless those who curse us and provide a witness!

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