

Stay Married [Slide 1] 1 Corinthians 7:10-24, 39-40

This morning I am probably going to disturb your peace. I'm going to say some things that might make you feel uncomfortable. I will give you the Biblical reasons for what I say, point by point so that you can evaluate my words as to whether they are Biblically accurate or not. Since our topic does not cover any of the EFCA Statement of Faith, you are free to disagree and believe whatever you want, but whatever you believe, you will have to give an account to God for it. In our passage today, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to stay married, but in the discussion he also mentions divorce. The Bible teaches a radically different understanding of the marriage covenant and divorce than what is common in our culture.

I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 beginning at verse 10. 1 Corinthians is the seventh book in the New Testament past the four Gospels, Acts, and Romans. I have listed the main idea of this passage on your sermon outline and you will want that outline handy because we will cover many passages outside of 1 Corinthians. The main idea is this: Stay married even to unbelievers, if possible, because salvation does not eliminate our social responsibilities and the marriage bond lasts for life.

[Slide 2] Paul begins in verses 10-11 by saying the married should stay together. Read verses 10-11. Paul says, "not I, but the Lord," because Jesus spoke on this topic in the Gospels. We will look at what he said later in the sermon. The wife should not leave her husband. If she does, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. In other words, she is not to marry someone else. And the husband is not to send his wife away or divorce her. Very simply, those who are married should stay together.

But what about the case when your spouse is not a believer? What do you do if your spouse does not believe in Jesus and maybe even hinders you from following the Lord? This was a legitimate question in the early church. Should you stay married?

[Slide 3] Paul writes in verses 12-13: Read. Jesus did not specifically address the issue of an unbelieving spouse, so Paul did. If your unbelieving spouse consents to live with you, then do not send them away. Do not divorce them.

[Slide 4] Paul allays the believing partner's fears in verse 14. Read. The unbelieving spouse is sanctified or consecrated by the believing spouse. The word does not mean saved. You can see that in verse 16 where Paul says that you don't know whether the unbelieving spouse will be saved.

What does Paul mean by saying the unbelieving partner is sanctified and the children are holy? Let's think in terms of covenant and covenant blessing. Think about the nation of Israel in the OT. Within that nation there were true believers in God and those who were not true believers or not really saved. However, the whole nation was sanctified to God or set apart to God as part of the Abrahamic Covenant. When God blessed the nation with rain or peace or material prosperity, everyone enjoyed the blessing of the covenant whether they were a true believer or not. They could even be quite wicked, but because they were part of a covenant, set apart or sanctified to God, they could enjoy the blessing and privileges of that covenant.

That is the point Paul is making. The marriage is a covenant with God. Even if only one spouse is a believer, the unbelieving spouse and children will receive covenant blessings because of the believing spouse. This does not mean that unbelievers won't eventually have to face

God's judgment for their sins, but due to the covenant, they are now treated as clean or holy and able to receive God's blessings.

If you are here today and you are not a believer in Jesus but your spouse is, you are the beneficiary of their faith. You and your children are receiving God's blessing, which you don't deserve, but are receiving because of your spouse.

If you are a believer and you have an unbelieving spouse, don't worry. God will take care of you and your children because of the covenant. Stay committed to your spouse and pray for his or her salvation.

[Slide 5] However, if they leave, let them go. Read verse 15. You are not under bondage to them. I want to take a moment to explain what this Greek word means that is translated under bondage. It is the Greek verb *douloō*. The noun form is *doulos* which is the common word for slave or servant. I have provided you with the times that the word is used in the NT on your sermon outline. The word means "to be a slave to or servant to." When it refers to people, the word refers to the obligations and duties that one person has to another.

The marriage covenant has obligations. You vowed or promised certain things to your spouse when you married them, including meeting their needs. If an unbelieving spouse leaves, you are no longer obligated to fulfill your covenant obligations to them. You are not obligated to provide for them, protect them, support them, feed them, or provide intimacy. When they leave you, you are no longer obligated to serve them in any way. This word in this verse is not the same word used in 1 Corinthians 7:39 or Romans 7:2-3 where it says the woman is bound to her husband as long as she lives. We will get to that word in a little bit.

[Slide 6] God has called us to peace so don't fight them leaving. Just let them go. Don't hold onto them out of a misguided belief that your presence will cause them to be saved. Read verse 16. If your relationship with your spouse is such that they want to leave, it's not likely that you are going to be God's instrument to them getting saved. Let them go.

[Slide 7] Paul now derives a general principle that applies to marriage as well as to other relationships. Remain in the state in which you were saved. Salvation does not eliminate our social responsibilities. Let me read verses 17-24 and then talk about them. Read verses 17-24.

God has assigned each of us a station in life or a calling. Normally, our conversion does not immediately change that calling. It certainly doesn't cancel out the marriage covenant. One of the arguments I occasionally hear for remarriage is for a person who got a divorce for unbiblical reasons and then later got saved. They might argue that since God has forgiven them for their divorce, which he has, now they are free to remarry. Not true. Salvation pays the penalty for our sins, it does not obliterate our previous marriage or eliminate any covenants we have. The reason why remarriage is wrong is not because of the divorce, it is because you're still married to your first spouse. I'll make that point clearer later.

Verse 18. Was anyone saved as a Jew, as a circumcised person, let him not try to become a Gentile, an uncircumcised person. Paul is using the terms as figures. If you were saved as a Jew, you don't have to become a Gentile. If you were saved as a Gentile, you don't have to become a Jew. A lot of Jewish Christians actually thought the Gentile believers had to become Jews, but that was a distortion of the Gospel as Paul explained in the book of Galatians. You can be a Christ follower as either a Jew or a Gentile. You don't have to change your religious heritage.

Paul repeats the principle in verse 20 that you should remain in the condition in which you were called or saved.

Paul then introduces the condition of slavery. Don't think of American slavery when you hear these verses. Most slaves in Biblical times sold themselves into slavery for a period of time to work off their debts. Getting saved doesn't cancel your debts or obligations. You still need to pay back what you owe. The ultimate goal still was to pay off your debts and become free, so Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to remain as a bondsman when they could regain their freedom. The modern day application for most of us is not to voluntarily get into a lot of debt so that you aren't enslaved to someone else but also to pay off that debt.

For the third time in verse 24 Paul reiterates the statement that you remain in the situation in which you were saved. Salvation does not immediately change your social responsibilities. I can't use my new conversion as a means of getting out of my social obligations.

So the general theme is stay married, even to unbelievers, if they will let you. Your conversion does not change your covenant obligations or your social responsibilities.

Now I want to delve deeper into the meaning of the marriage covenant which explains why Paul was adamant that you stay married. I have asserted that marriage is a covenant, now let me prove it.

[Slide 8] Here are three passages that establish that marriage is a covenant between husband, wife and God. First, Genesis 2:24 defines marriage as a man leaving his father and mother, being joined to his wife, and them becoming one flesh. The Hebrew word that is translated as "be joined" was a technical term used in the Old Testament to refer to the covenant between God and Israel. It was used in that sense in the following verses: Deut. 10:20; 11:22; Deut. 13:4; 30:19-20; Joshua 22:5; 23:8.

[Slide 9] Second, in Malachi 2:14 God speaks against divorce because it is dealing treacherously with your wife by covenant.

[Slide 10] Finally in Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus says that God joins together the man and the woman. Read verse 6. God is intimately involved in the formation of the covenant and indeed, when you make your marriage vows, you are making them both to your spouse and to God. God puts the couple together. So, marriage is a covenant between husband, wife and God.

[Slide 11] Now, for the shocker. Divorce does not break the marriage covenant. Look at Matthew 5:32 and Mark 10:11-12 on your sermon outline. Notice the sin committed if you remarry. It is the sin of adultery. You can only commit adultery if you are married or if you have sex with someone who is married. If remarriage constitutes adultery, which is what Jesus clearly says, that means the prior divorce did not break the marriage covenant. Here is the million dollar question: If marriage is a covenant made with God, then when does God break the covenant? It is clear from Jesus' words that a human court of law or a human judge does not have the right or authority to break or nullify a divine covenant. Think about that. If God forms the marriage covenant, then only he has the right to break or nullify it. No human judge can overrule God. The key question is: When does God break the marriage covenant?

[Slide 12] Before I answer that question, let me answer this question: What is the purpose of divorce from God's perspective? If divorce does not break the marriage covenant and therefore does not free you to remarry, what exactly is its purpose because we know from Matthew 19 that Jesus did allow for divorce in the case of adultery.

The best way to see what God means by divorce is to see how he used the term. In both Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 God says he divorced his people Israel. If you study the context of both those passages you will discover that God allowed the nation of Israel to be defeated by the Assyrians and taken into captivity to Assyria because of their repeated spiritual adultery or idolatry. This was his divorce of Israel. Part of God's covenant with Israel was that if they were

faithful to him he would protect them from all their enemies but if they went after false gods or false lovers, he would allow their enemies to conquer them. God's divorce of Israel was his judgment on them for their sin. It was his way of punishing them for their infidelity, to what purpose?

Did God end his covenant with Israel when the Assyrians conquered them? Was he done with Israel? The purpose of the divorce was to bring pressure upon them so that they would repent and return to him. In fact, God has never forsaken his covenant with Israel. He restored his people to the land after captivity and, in our recent past, God brought Israel back into the land of Promise again. The purpose of God's divorce of Israel was not to break his covenant with Israel, but to remove the blessings and protection of the covenant as a means of bringing about repentance so that the Jews would return to the covenant. I believe that is the only legitimate purpose of divorce when there has been adultery: to pressure the sinning partner to repent.

[Slide 13] What then breaks the marriage covenant? The first, and most obvious, thing is death. Look at 1 Corinthians 7:39. Read. The wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. When he dies she is free to be married again. The Greek word for bound in verse 39 is the word *deo*. It refers to a legal obligation enforced by God. The word appears in Romans 7:2-3 where Paul again says that the wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. Death breaks the marriage covenant.

[Slide 14] From my study of the Bible I believe there is one other situation where God breaks the marriage covenant and that is when a new marriage covenant is formed. God considers the forming of that new marriage covenant to be an adulterous act as we have already seen in Matthew 5:32 and Mark 10:11-12, but he allows that new covenant to stand and to replace the old one, an act of mercy I believe. What is my evidence for this idea?

[Slide 15] The first piece of evidence comes from OT case law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 on your outline. Read. In this particular case God says that if a man divorces his wife and she marries another man and he either dies or divorces her, she is not allowed to come back to her first husband. Why not? He was her first husband. My conclusion is that she can't come back to her first husband because she was married to her second husband. The second marriage covenant dissolved the first marriage covenant.

[Slide 16] The second piece of evidence comes from the analogy of the New Covenant replacing the old Mosaic Covenant. See what Hebrews says in Hebrews 8:8-13. A new divine covenant supercedes an old divine covenant. I believe this principle is illustrated in the Deuteronomy 24 passage where God accepts the second marriage covenant and it annuls the first marriage covenant.

[Slide 17] My third line of reasoning is admittedly weak but it goes like this: If a new marriage covenant does not annul the former marriage covenant and the couple now realizes this, then the couple is now in a place of no escape. They are in a continuing state of adultery because the former covenant still exists and their only recourse is to break their vows to one another and "divorce" again, but according to Deuteronomy 24, they can't go back to their first marriage anyway, and so they have no way to escape sin. This seems contrary to God's promise of God that with the temptation to sin there is always a way of escape.

Sin always complicates things. Righteousness is pretty simple. Once you are married, stay married for life. That's righteousness. Pretty simple. We get into all these complicated "what if" scenarios because of sin.

[Slide 18] Let me close with some practical, pastoral considerations. First, I will only remarry people whose former spouse has either died or has already remarried. That is my

personal conviction. You can find many pastors who do not agree with me. I don't even require the staff to agree with me, although I wouldn't be above challenging them to Biblically defend their view.

[Slide 19] Second, I am called to support whatever marriage covenants that currently exist. I'm not really interested in delving into people's past histories. If you want my counsel on how to redeem the past or how to minimize the effects of past mistakes, I'll certainly be glad to offer my help. You don't need to worry about what I think of you if you are divorced or divorced and remarried. I love you and I want to help you to faithfully follow God. That's what I care about. The only times a person's past marital history becomes an issue to me is if they ask me to marry them or if we are considering them to be an elder in the church. One requirement of an elder is that he be a one-woman man and I personally believe that means not divorced and remarried.

[Slide 20] We can't change the past, but we can live obediently now and in the future.

[Slide 21] You may personally disagree with me on this issue. That's quite alright. I have given you my reasons and the Biblical evidence for what I believe. Good and honest people do disagree on this issue. You can decide if my interpretation is sound or not. Just remember, we all have to answer to God for what we believe and do. Truth is important and this type of truth does affect people's lives. It affects families and children. We don't want to be sloppy or haphazard with this kind of truth.

God gave us marriage. He knows how it's supposed to work. The world doesn't know how it's supposed to work. The more you follow God's guidelines and principles, the richer, the fuller, the healthier, and the more joyful your life will be. Let's pray.