

Principles for Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 7. We'll be reading verses 1 through 16.

! In this section of Scripture under the heading of Principles for Marriage. 1 Corinthians 7, 1 through 16.!

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

[1 : 0 7] But then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.

I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widow, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.

But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. To the married, I give this charge, not I, but the Lord.

The wife should not separate from her husband, but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not divorce his wife.

To the rest, I say, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

[2 : 1 2] If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 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. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

We've all heard of these situations before. Maybe we've lived one of these situations.

As a child, for those of us who are adults, getting stuck in something. Kids, have you ever gotten stuck in something before, and you needed help to get out?

[3 : 1 3] And I don't mean like mom and dad need to help you get out. I mean like we need to call the fire department because you are stuck. Maybe in a railing of a staircase, somehow kids find a way to get their head stuck in there.

Maybe a limb is stuck in something else. So kids, if it hasn't happened to you, at least imagine it with me. Imagine that you are stuck in the staircase, and mom and dad have called 911, and the fire department has arrived.

You think, yes, they've come to save the day. They're going to get me out of here. And the fire department comes in, and the firefighter looks at you, and he says, okay, here's my proposal.

We're just going to have to cut that arm off. How would you feel if that is what they said we should do? You would probably think, there's got to be a better solution than this. It's simple.

Well, it's going to happen quick. They don't have to go back out to their fire truck to get other tools. They're just going to take care of the business right now. But that would be a terrible proposal, wouldn't it?

[4 : 20] Just a blanket. Let's cut off the arm and be done with it. Well, the Corinthians have a terrible proposal that they make in our chapter tonight.

And Paul is going to help us see, here are principles to live by. We're not going to go with this proposal. We're going to say no to this proposal.

Let me give you instead three detailed principles. Instead of a blanket proposal, Paul is going to share detailed principles related to marriage.

So we're going to look at three of them tonight together. God gives us three principles related to marriage. Now, these principles are not just for those who are presently married.

God has a word for those of us who are married, and God has a word for us who are unmarried. So don't tune out God's word because it has something to say to all of us tonight, no matter what our condition may be.

[5 : 25] Three principles in response to one terrible proposal. So let's consider the first principle related to marriage. Marriage helps maintain purity.

Marriage helps maintain purity. Look again with me at our verses, and I'll begin reading in verse 1. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

But then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Then jump down to verse 8. To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am.

[6 : 38] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. So there's the basic principle for all of us this evening.

Marriage helps maintain purity. Or more specifically, the marriage bed helps maintain purity. Now let's remember back to chapter 6 from a couple weeks ago.

Paul in chapter 6 was addressing the sin of sexual immorality. He was telling us, flee from sexual immorality. And it seems that the Corinthians were thinking, well, perhaps the best way to do that is by just complete abstinence.

To ensure that we don't fall into sexual sin, let's abstain entirely from any kind of physical intimacy, good or evil.

Just give it up. Cut it out of our lives. We don't need it. And Paul is telling us, no, this is a gracious gift from God.

[7 : 47] It is one of the very means that God gives us to keep us from sexual immorality. So if you're married, enjoy this gift that God gives in marriage.

In depriving yourself, you are actually welcoming the temptation to defile yourself. So God has given us a good desire, and we shouldn't try to stifle that desire.

Now Paul gives some needed parameters here. Verse 2 reminds us, this is for husband and wife. There is no one else that is welcome into this sacred bond.

Each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. Marriage is to be monogamous. This is the good design that God established all the way back in Genesis chapter 2.

The two become one flesh. There are all kinds of perversions of this in our world around us. We should be repulsed by that kind of sinful behavior.

[8 : 56] The world wants to normalize all kinds of sexual immorality. May it never become normal to us. And one of the best ways to guard ourselves is to keep coming back to what God says in His Word, the good design that He lays out for us in His Word.

The two become one flesh. That's it. There's no other variations. You can't mess with how God made it to be. You can't experiment with other options.

It's just this. Two become one. This is then a reality that is expressed in physical ways. And Paul is helping us to see that these physical ways actually contribute to holiness.

The marriage bed is intended to help us to live God-honoring, God-pleasing lives. Do you see it that way? Paul does.

He says in verse 2, So husbands, you help your wives along in the Christian life in this way.

[10 : 14] And wives, you do the same help for your husbands. When we love each other in this area of our marriage, we are actually encouraging one another towards growth in grace.

We're helping each other to maintain our purity. So there's this great danger in depriving one another, in withholding our bodies from each other.

Now sometimes sinful reasons are at play for that. We're reminded of this when Paul now speaks here of our bodies not being our own. This should be fresh in our minds, still from chapter 6.

Recall there, Paul made the same point, but it was in relationship to God. Our bodies belong to Him. They are not our own. We've been bought with a price. Chapter 6, our bodies belong to Him.

Joined to Christ, our bridegroom from heaven. Well, Paul makes a similar point here about our bodies, but not in relationship to God now, but in relationship to our spouse.

[11 : 15] Our bodies are not our own because we've been joined in marriage. The two have become one flesh. So husbands, we don't have authority over our bodies any longer.

Wives, you don't have authority over your own bodies any longer either. We are, as the NIV says, to fulfill our marital duties.

And in doing that, we help each other along towards holiness. Fulfilling our marital duties helps us to maintain our purity.

Too often, though, we stop working at the full spectrum of our marital duties. We slowly stop listening to our spouse.

We slowly stop taking interest in our spouse. We can grow lazy. We can grow apathetic. We can begin to live very siloed lives.

- [12 : 18] We're both occupying the same house, but we're living separate lives and not sharing those lives in the home. And it shows very prominently then in the marriage bed.
- Selfishness takes root. And we believe the lie. My body belongs to me. And so we deprive one another. We keep records of wrong against each other.
- Well, I'm not going to give of myself tonight because you didn't give of yourself all of today. We're getting even. We're loving ourselves and not our spouse.
- And it shows as we withhold ourselves from our spouse. Now, having said that, I do want to pause and address a very sad, grievous reality.
- There are times where spouses, and I think I need to say husbands in particular, even professing Christian husbands, have abused their wives. They have made selfish demands upon their wives.
- [13 : 23] They have hurt their wives. They have failed in their God-given responsibility to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Ephesians chapter 5. They've failed to lay down their lives for their wives.
- They've failed to love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing them, and instead have only loved their own bodies.
- Perhaps even using this passage to justify themselves. This passage calls us to selflessness. This passage, if we go in that direction, that is a gross distortion to use this passage to get what we want.
- So yes, our bodies are not our own. Yes, we are not to deprive one another, but we are not to use this passage against each other either. Husbands especially.
- May we never manipulate our wives. Or strong arm our wives into doing what we want. We've been called to love our wives as Christ loved the church.
- [14 : 34] So we must remember what God has said here in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and what God has said in Ephesians chapter 5. Alright, we've considered a sinful reason that we might deprive one another by thinking, well, my body belongs to me.
- But Paul's concern about depriving one another doesn't just involve possible sinful reasons. He's concerned even about good reasons. Those good reasons could actually prove harmful to our marriage.
- Like the one that Paul gives. To devote ourselves to prayer. To give focused attention to prayer. Even in that, Paul gives two very important qualifications.
- It must be an agreement. Husband and wife both desiring this time of abstinence. And it ought to be a limited time.
- It's an agreed upon limited time. This is one of the most noble reasons we could think of and Paul is still saying, be careful. Satan will come tempting you during this season of abstinence.
- [15 : 43] And you might be surprised by how little self-control you have. So even for a good reason, maybe the best of reasons for purposes of prayer, don't deprive yourselves too long.
- Because temptation to sin can come along. This is reason for married couples to come together. This is reason for unmarried individuals to pursue marriage.
- Pragmatism isn't always best. But here, God's word is very pragmatic. Are you lacking in self-control? Getting married is part of the solution.
- Now, of course, this shouldn't be the only reason to get married. You are starting off on a terrible foundation. If you are pursuing marriage simply because you burn with passion, you should desire for marriage for many, many other good reasons.
- But this is one that God gives us. This is one valid reason. Get married if you lack self-control. Because marriage helps maintain purity.

[16 : 50] That's the first principle for marriage that God gives us this evening. Let's consider now the second principle together. Marriage is not essential to the Christian life.

Marriage is not essential to the Christian life. Look with me again at our passage beginning in verse 6. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this, I wish that all were as I myself am.

But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. So marriage is this wonderful gift from God.

So too is singleness. Singleness, Paul says. In fact, Paul wishes that everyone were single as he is. And he's going to get into the why of it later in chapter 7.

We're not going to get there tonight. He thinks singleness though is a wonderful gift from God. He loves being single. Now, hear me right here. He doesn't love being single for all the reasons that the world might love the idea of singleness.

[18 : 01] He doesn't love singleness because he can serve himself. He doesn't love singleness because he can do what he wants with his time and no one's going to tie him down.

He loves being single so he can serve the Lord. He loves being single so he can do what the Lord wants of him. And we're going to see more of that in chapter 7.

What's important to see here is that Paul esteems both marriage and singleness. Neither condition is put forward as somehow better than the other.

They are gifts from God. Both good gifts given by God. Good gifts received by us. I think sometimes because the world is so hostile and antagonistic towards the idea of marriage, we can feel this deeply rooted and rightly felt need to esteem it as good and as beautiful and as wonderfully designed by God.

Which of course it is. But sometimes we can be so enamored with lifting up and honoring marriage that we then perhaps unintentionally disparage singleness.

[19 : 18] We're so concerned with finding a spouse for a single Christian person that we fail to see the good gift that singleness is from God.

Now please don't hear me say that we shouldn't try to find a spouse for a single Christian person who desires marriage. But do hear me say that if that single Christian person doesn't desire a spouse, it may be because God has given them the gift of singleness and we should rejoice in that because marriage is not essential to the Christian life.

If it was, then how cruel would God be to withhold marriage from some and to give them singleness instead? That would be as if God were to give bad gifts to His children.

And we know that God says He only gives good gifts. If we as fathers can give good gifts, how much more so can our Heavenly Father? Only good gifts does He give.

And singleness is one of them. It's not the plan B to the plan A of marriage. Plan A for many is marriage, but plan A for others is singleness.

[20 : 33] So let's be mindful how we talk about marriage. We should prize it. We should see it and hold it up as wonderfully good and instituted by God, but we should also be quick to esteem singleness, especially when a brother or sister in Christ is single and contented in that.

What a wonderful gift from God that person has received. So let's not disparage it. Let's not wish for them that they were as we are. In fact, if anything, couldn't they take Paul's words and use those on us who are married?

I wish you were as I am. Marriage is a good gift. So to his singleness. We should thank the Lord for both. And we should praise the Lord for his wisdom in how he chooses to give each of these gifts.

Well, let's turn our attention now to the third and the final principle tonight. Marriage should be preserved and protected. Marriage should be preserved and protected.

Beginning in verse 10, let's continue to read. To the married I give this charge, not I, but the Lord. The wife should not separate from her husband.

[21 : 49] But if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife. And the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. 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. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? So Paul here is drawing on the teaching of Jesus.

We see whenever he says, not I, but the Lord, in parentheses, that's Paul's way of saying, this isn't original to me. This is what the Lord taught in his earthly ministry.

[23 : 00] And when Paul says, I, not the Lord, also in parentheses, well, that's Paul's way of saying, okay, this is an original thought to me. You won't find it in the gospel accounts when Jesus teaches on marriage.

Some have misunderstood Paul. And they've concluded that Paul is saying something about authority and inspiration here. That whenever he says, not I, but the Lord, Paul is speaking with authority and what he is writing is inspired.

But then they think whenever Paul says, I, not the Lord, now he's suddenly no longer speaking with authority and what he is writing is no longer inspired. It's just his opinion.

It carries no special weight. It shouldn't be treated like the rest of scripture. So people who are thinking this way, perhaps unintentionally, are just slicing and dicing God's word in 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

Some of it, they say, is inspired. Some of it, they say, maybe isn't. Which obviously has massive implications for us. If some of this is just opinion, well then we don't have to listen to it and live according to it.

[24 : 12] We don't have to submit ourselves to it. We can take it or leave it because it's just Paul's uninspired musings. But that entire framework is wrong.

Paul is not flipping some inspiration switch on and off as he's writing. As though some of it's authoritative for our lives and some of it is just kind of good advice maybe we should listen to.

He's simply drawing our attention to the fact that much of what he writes is grounded in the teaching of Jesus. But not all of it is.

Some of it's original to Paul. But it's still just as authoritative. The source may not be in the earthly ministry of Jesus, but there's plenty in our Bibles that doesn't find its source there.

Yet all of God's word is inspired and authoritative. So we don't have a mix here in 1 Corinthians 7. Like some of God's word and some of man's opinion and it's a really random chapter in the Bible that does that.

[25 : 15] There's no mixture. There's no hierarchy. It's the same reason that I really don't love red letter Bibles. Where the words of Jesus are in red, I don't think that publishing companies are intentionally trying to say that Jesus' words are more important than the rest of the words, but I can't tell you how often I've heard well-meaning Christians mistakenly saying something like, well, those words are in red, so, you know, we really need to listen to them because they come from Jesus.

Very important public service announcement. Those words in red that Jesus spoke are just as inspired and authoritative as the words in black that Mark wrote.

Whether Jesus is speaking or Mark is narrating, all of our Bibles inspired and authoritative. So as we're walking through 1 Corinthians 7, let's not be elevating the words of Jesus over and above the words of Paul because as Paul wrote this letter, all of this letter, he was carried along by the Holy Spirit so that what he wrote down was not just the words of men, but the very word of God.

And did you know that Paul was very self-aware of this? How do we know that? Well, listen to what he says in chapter 14, beginning in verse 37.

Chapter 14, beginning in verse 37. If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.

[26 : 54] If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So all that Paul says is binding. All that Paul writes is a command of the Lord to us.

All right, we've got that aside out of the way. So what is that command that Paul gives us beginning here in verse 10? It's a command to preserve and protect marriage.

Wives should not separate from their husbands and husbands should not divorce their wives. Now you might have noticed Paul uses different words.

Wives are not to separate. Husbands are not to divorce. Different words but same meaning. Paul is not being overly technical here.

In our society we do. Understandably, rightly so, we distinguish between separation and divorce. That's not what Paul is talking about here. He's not saying well there's certain rules for women and then there's certain rules for men as though men can separate from their wives so long as they don't get divorced but women well you can't separate or get divorced.

[28 : 05] There's not this distinction here that we should read into Paul's word choice. When Paul says separate he means divorce. Remember he's drawing on the teaching of Jesus and Jesus famously said what therefore God has joined together let not man separate.

When we say those at a wedding the preacher doesn't need to clarify for us. When I say separate I also mean like divorce. Let not man divorce.

What he means is let not man tear apart what God has brought together. Separate, divorce, render asunder, let not man separate.

It's the same point that Paul makes here. 1 Corinthians 7 what God has joined together let not man separate or divorce. So that's what Paul here is leading with.

The thrust of his charge is to preserve and protect marriage. It is a point that must be made because so often marriage is not preserved and protected.

[29 : 22] Sadly the norm in our society is to look for any and every reason to break the marriage bond. that's what the Pharisees were doing when they came to Jesus in Matthew 19 and they asked him about divorce.

They weren't asking how can we protect and preserve and safeguard marriage? They were asking how do we break it and it's still okay with God?

How will God let us do that and it's still acceptable? On what grounds will God allow for it? They wanted to talk about all of the reasons to end a marriage.

Now Jewish teaching at the time was creating acceptable reasons for divorce, particularly for a man to divorce his wife. You had the Mishnah saying things like a man may put away his wife because she is barren.

You had the school of Hillel saying a man may divorce his wife even if she has spoiled a dish for him. So you see Jesus in his teaching on divorce helps us to see that the Jewish teaching was completely misplaced in its focus.

[30 : 35] Jewish teaching wanted to talk about all of the reasons to end a marriage but that's not what Jesus wanted to talk about. Jesus wanted to talk about reasons to safeguard a marriage.

So whatever exceptions may exist, those are not the focus for Jesus and those are not the focus for Paul. The force of his charge here in 1 Corinthians 7 verses 10 and 11, it is on maintaining the bond of marriage.

Husbands, wives, don't get divorced. Like Jesus, Paul is putting the focus back in the right place because the culture all around him at the time of his writing had it backwards.

Just like in Jesus' day with the Jews in the Greco-Roman world, a husband could divorce his wife for any number of reasons. And wives could actually do the same.

Though it was less common, wives could also divorce their husbands for any number of reasons. So divorce was very common. Divorce was very acceptable. Sounds a lot like our world today, doesn't it?

[31 : 44] In fact, one funeral inscription from the first century actually said this, uncommon are marriages which last so long, brought to an end by death, not broken apart by divorce.

For it was our happy lot that it should be prolonged to the 41st year without estrangement. This couple was so surprised that their marriage lasted a lifetime that they had it noted on their tomb.

Like this is worth writing down because who actually makes it to the grave while still being married. That's such a shockingly impressive achievement to them that they said, put it on our gravestone.

Do you see how the norm was completely backwards? Just as it is today. Too often, divorce is considered the first option. It's the go-to option for our society when we don't get what we want out of marriage.

Well, this isn't fulfilling me the way that I thought it would. This is demanding more from me than I thought it would. I feel restricted and I want to be free from this person. I'm not happy so I'm seeking a divorce and then I'm going to post about it on Instagram and I'm going to celebrate it and I'm going to get everybody in the comments to celebrate it with me.

[33 : 08] Now, this is not every situation that ends in divorce, but too often, divorce is the solution when our personal needs or our hopes or our desires are not met in marriage.

This is the way out of something that we just don't want to be in any longer. Too many people treat marriage like it's just any kind of other relationship that can be ended whenever we like.

This was true of the Jewish culture in Jesus' day. This was true of Paul's culture, the Roman Greco culture of his day, and it's still just as true today.

The emphasis is sadly placed on reasons to get divorced rather than reasons to remain married. The expectation is to end up divorced rather than to endure to the end in marriage.

So Paul is course correcting. Paul is shifting our attention to the baseline principle that we should be joyfully upholding as Christians. Marriage is to be preserved and protected.

[34 : 21] So don't get divorced. That's the charge that is given. Now that being said, look at verse 11. In verse 11, Paul recognizes the reality of divorce.

He says, but if she does, meaning if a wife does divorce her husband, or the reverse, obviously, if a husband divorces his wife, if a Christian goes that route, and I think Paul here is not talking about valid exceptions, any kind of permissible reasons for divorce, we're going to get to that.

I think he's talking about wrongly getting a divorce. If a Christian does that, which we shouldn't, but if we do, what then? Well, Paul says, remain unmarried or be reconciled to your spouse.

The divorce shouldn't have happened in the first place, so we need to not compound the problem by then getting remarried. Now for the Christian who has gotten divorced for wrong reasons and then has gotten remarried, that divorce is not the unpardonable sin.

That remarriage is not the unpardonable sin. There is forgiveness available. You should not be wallowing in guilt.

[35 : 54] God gives clear instructions on what to do with our sins, even past sins from years and years ago. God gives clear, kind, helpful instructions to us.

1 John 1 7, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What a precious promise that is. But that is what we must do. That is what it means to live in obedience to God. You must confess your sins and seek that forgiveness from the Lord.

There might be a temptation for us to think, well, that was a long time ago. I never asked for forgiveness. I kind of just moved on. If that's you, don't let that thinking rule you.

It's not too late for you to come to God with a contrite heart and to receive His forgiveness for past sins, even this very evening. Don't push past sin out of your mind and leave it undealt with.

[37 : 02] Now, let me also say this, this doesn't mean that a Christian with divorce and remarriage in their past should get divorced now. That's not the solution either.

But our past sin should grieve us when we become aware of it and confession and repentance should follow. I appreciate Kevin DeYoung's thoughts on this.

He says, if you look back at your sinful divorce and remarriage and think, wow, I'm glad I didn't know all of this ten years ago, that is a dreadful sign that something is very wrong in your heart.

If the Spirit is at work, you will not think, whew, I really got away with one here. Instead, you will think, oh Lord, I am so sorry.

I was ignorant of the Scriptures. I was blind to my own sin. I have broken your law and sullied the name of Christ. Please forgive me. Have mercy on us, Lord.

[38 : 05] And you'll not only ask for the Lord's forgiveness, you'll make things right with your ex-spouse, with your kids, your parents, your in-laws. You'll make amends and ask forgiveness with anyone else you hurt by breaking your marriage vows.

That's the heart posture. We should have if sinful divorce and remarriage is in our past. And if sinful divorce alone and not remarriage is in our past, then we need to take God at His word here and we need to obey Him.

That means that we don't seek another spouse as much as we might like to. God's word says, remain unmarried or be reconciled to your spouse.

Now that reconciliation might not be possible. Your spouse may not want to be reconciled. Your spouse may have gone and gotten remarried. If so, well then you remain unmarried.

But if reconciliation is available, that is obviously the best possible outcome because marriage should be preserved and protected.

[39 : 18] even when that marriage is between a believer and an unbeliever. That's the situation Paul now addresses beginning in verse 12. And there in verse 12 we see Paul recognizes this is new information that he's giving to us.

Jesus didn't talk about this in his earthly ministry, so Paul is breaking new ground here by applying these principles for marriage that Jesus did teach on to a very specific situation.

Christians who are married to non-Christians. And we see that nothing changes in how we're to approach marriage. It is still to be preserved and protected even in this situation.

Becoming a Christian doesn't give us this license to divorce our unbelieving spouse simply because we're now a Christian. Some in the Corinthian church seem to have this false impression.

I'm a Christian now so I can ditch this unbeliever who is dragging me down. It is a marvelous thing when one comes to faith.

[40 : 25] But it can also lead to some very difficult trials. This is one of those trials. When you get saved but your spouse continues in their unbelief.

Now your marriage is almost more difficult than before. Because once you shared a worldview with your unbelieving spouse, you were both lost in the darkness of your sin together.

But now you have been brought into the light and your spouse is not. You have diametrically opposed worldviews. And that creates conflict. That creates hardship that didn't exist before.

This is a trial that some of us are enduring right now. That some of us who have endured for many, many years. if not for 1 Corinthians 7, it would be pretty easy to justify divorce in these kinds of situations.

I could do so much more for God. I could do so much more for the kingdom. If I could be free of this unbelieving spouse, I would be more content, I would have more peace, I would grow in grace if divorce was an option.

[41 : 37] Then I could really focus on living the Christian life. then I could more fully devote myself to God. It's not hard to see in a very pragmatic way how that would make sense.

But God's word here says no. God in his wisdom says remain married so long as your unbelieving spouse is willing to live with you, you live with them.

Now that might raise questions in our minds. What if my unbelieving spouse negatively influences me? What if my unbelieving spouse draws me away from the Lord?

What kind of impact can I possibly have on them? Their heart is hard. Well, Paul addresses those questions now beginning in verse 14.

Paul makes this statement that might seem really strange to our ears. He says an unbelieving spouse is made holy because of their believing spouse. And he also says that children in the family are made holy as well because of their believing parent.

[42 : 45] What do we make of that? Well, let's write off first what Paul doesn't mean. He doesn't mean that unbelieving spouses or unbelieving children are saved when the one individual in the household is saved.

As though there's this splash effect. Your salvation kind of rubs off on everyone else so that they are saved as well. That's not what Paul is saying here in verse 16.

Paul says, how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

So the hoped-for salvation of an unbelieving spouse is not guaranteed. Of course, we desire that our spouse would be saved, but we cannot know for sure that they will.

So the holiness that Paul speaks of here is not the guaranteed salvation of unbelievers in the household. That's not what Paul is getting at when he speaks of their being made holy.

[43 : 44] They are not saved necessarily, but they are absolutely influenced by the believing spouse or the believing parent. And so in that sense, they are set apart from the rest of the unbelieving world.

Not set apart as a Christian, but they are set apart in that they come under the influence of a Christian who lives with them. And so while their salvation is not guaranteed, it is more likely.

They don't know it, they may not appreciate it, but they are blessed because they live with a Christian. They are exposed to the truth of the gospel. They are exposed to a person who has been transformed by the truth of the gospel.

Some of us are in this situation. some of us have been in this situation for many years. We also have God's encouragement to us in this. God is not abandoning you.

God is not leaving you to fend for yourself in that household. God is not going to let you be overcome in an unbelieving home. Your spouse may not be saved, though we pray to that end that they are, but God will sustain you so that you are not drawn away by the unbelief of your spouse.

[45 : 07] God will sustain you so that your faith endures, and he's going to be proving yet again that light will not be overcome by darkness. God has you right where he intends for you to be.

So long as your unbelieving spouse will remain married to you, you remain committed to that marriage, trusting that God will work through your witness for the good of your spouse.

Now not every situation unfolds in this way, and that's what Paul addresses here in these verses next. Sometimes an unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage, and this is where Paul provides a second exemption for Christians to get a divorce.

The first exemption comes from Jesus' teaching, where there is sexual immorality, divorce is permissible. Now here's the second exemption, and it comes now from the teaching of Paul.

Where an unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage, divorce is permissible. If an unbelieving spouse deserts the marriage, Paul says, you as the Christian are not enslaved, meaning you don't have to fight to keep the marriage intact.

[46 : 23] If your unbelieving spouse wants to go to the civil authorities and dissolve the marriage, you do not have to dig in your heels to try to salvage it. You are not enslaved.

God has called you to peace. That means also that you shouldn't be hard on yourself about it. As though if you could have kept the marriage intact, your spouse might have eventually been saved.

Just as Paul says, verse 16, how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? So yes, we should preserve and protect marriage, but if an unbelieving spouse pursues the abandonment of the marriage, pursues divorce, you can go along with finalizing that divorce.

Now there's a complexity here that we cannot fully address. What does it mean for an unbelieving spouse to leave, as the NIV says, to desert the marriage?

Are we to understand that only in the most rigid of ways, only when an unbelieving spouse physically moves out of the house and refuses to return and specifically says that they want a divorce?

[47 : 42] Or does this include a broader understanding of the idea of abandonment? Would abuse of any kind qualify as abandonment?

I labored really hard at this part of the sermon and asked God to give much wisdom. So here is what I will say. I think we need to tread very carefully here.

I don't think we can parse this out in a sermon. I think we need wise counsel based on each case-by-case situation involving involving what might qualify as spousal abandonment.

I appreciate one commentator's perspective on this. He said, we need to take seriously both God's commitment to the preservation of marriage wherever possible and his commitment to the protection of the vulnerable.

Divorce is never something that we should be quick to encourage or resort to. Many steps can be taken that don't necessarily end in divorce but still do protect the vulnerable.

[48 : 52] We should seek to take those steps and pursue reconciliation and restoration whenever possible. That being said, we need to also recognize there are times that God's word says divorce is permissible, evil.

But we must be on guard against adopting the world's thinking on divorce as though we're all just talking about the same thing because in many ways we're not.

Too often divorce is the quick fix in our world. Too often it's the logical conclusion to conflict in a marriage. It's the result of selfish desires warring against each other.

It's often a failure to understand the commitments we make in marriage. We are not called to a flimsy, fragile, easily set aside kind of love.

We are called to a love that is patient and kind. A love that does not envy or boast. A love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

[50 : 04] love. The world does not know this kind of love. But we do in Christ. We have tasted and seen of this kind of love.

It is why divorce should so grieve us and why faithful love expressed in marriage should make our hearts sing. Because that love expressed in marriage, imperfect as it may be, it is a reminder of the perfect love of God that has been shown to us in Christ.

We rejoice in that love. We revel in that love. We rest in that love. And we marvel that such a love was shown to us. Unfaithful, rebellious, hard-hearted though we were, our bridegroom from heaven came down and he would not be deterred in his pursuit of us.

He would lay down his life to have his bride. What a faithful, strong love that has been shown to us. May that love motivate us who are married to love our spouse all the more.

What love that's been shown to us. 2 Corinthians 3 verse 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

[51 : 28] Amen. We are dismissed.