



Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Part 2 (1 Cor. 7:12-16)

In the previous lesson we discussed the only reason given by Paul or Jesus for divorce among Christians was marital unfaithfulness. Paul said: *“Don’t separate, but if you do then reconcile.”* His statement is clear and concise. God wants the door held open for any possibility of reconciliation with one’s spouse. Sometimes a relationship that appears to be damaged beyond any hope of repair is healed and restoration comes.

In the previous lesson in verses **7-11** of **1 Cor. 7** Paul addressed his comments to the unmarried; particularly widows and widowers. The teaching was to stay unmarried if you can, but if you cannot then marry. People who have never been married, and those whose spouse has died are free to marry any Christian.

In the situation of Christians who are married to Christians Paul gave no permission for divorce and remarriage, though Jesus added permission in Matthew 19 for those whose spouse was unfaithful. Neither Jesus or Paul demands divorce when adultery has taken place. If the sinning spouse is willing to repent, and the offended spouse is willing to forgive; reconciliation is possible; however the innocent spouse is permitted to divorce and even remarry. In verses **12-16** Paul moves on to discuss marriage between Christians and unbelievers and when divorce is permitted.

I. Marriages Outside of Christ are Still Valid Marriages

All marriages are legal and binding in the eyes of God whether they are among Christians, or non-Christians, or in a union between Christians and non-Christians. The admonition for intimacy is still binding in all marriages. The demand for faithfulness in marriage is still binding. The call to love and honour one another is still present in all marriages. The Hebrew writer says in **Hebrews 13:4**, *“Let marriage be held in honour among all . . .”*



Apparently some new Christians were concluding that since they were married to unbelievers they were free to leave. Paul wants them to realise that marriages are valid and binding whether they are with Christians or unbelievers.

II. A Marriage Between a Christian and an Unbeliever Who Desires to Remain Married

Marriages between Christians and non-Christians often work and sometimes work well, but they do have additional obstacles. Since Christians are advised not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers in 2 Cor. 6:14 we can conclude that no Christian should marry a non-Christian. Paul addresses the situation where one partner within an existing marriage becomes a Christian while the other does not. While this is not the ideal marriage it is possible to make it work and if the unbeliever desires for the marriage to continue, the Scripture teaches not to divorce.

1. What stresses are placed on a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever?
2. How should a Christian spouse respond to the stresses place on their marriage to an unbeliever?

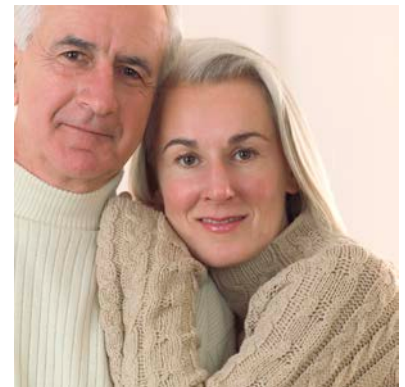
To the Christian married to an unbeliever, Paul gives the advise in verses 12-13 to not divorce their spouse if the unbeliever is willing to remain married. This should convince us of the high regard that the Lord has for marriage.

Corinth was a wicked pagan city. Idols were worshipped along with a myriad of pagan gods. Many of the Christians would have spouses who were involved with these false religions, yet Paul says if they will live with you then do not divorce. In other words, “Don’t initiate a divorce.

Verse 14 we have a most interesting verse. *“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.”*

What is Paul teaching in verse 14? Is he saying that an unbelieving spouse becomes a Christian through a Christian spouse? Certainly not. What Paul is saying is this: The unbeliever and children in a home where one member is a Christian are in a far better situation than people who have no Christian witness in the home. The unbeliever does not automatically become a Christian because the spouse is a Christian, but the loving daily witness of Christ may lead that unbeliever to Christ.

A great number of husbands or wives have come to Christ because of the patient love of a concerned Christian spouse. The children as well have a witness to Christ in the home. Many times children will become Christians and stay Christians when only one of their parents provided a Christian witness in the home. Any home with even one Christian within its walls is different and it is blessed.



3. What steps might a Christian take to win an unbelieving spouse?
4. How should a Christian handle the situation where their spouse never becomes a Christian, but wants to stay in the marriage?

Another point that Paul wants to impress upon the Christian is that an unbelieving spouse does not defile the Christian. In chapter six Paul had written that when a person joins their bodies with a prostitute they become one with the prostitute. Some in Corinth evidently thought a Christian would be defiled by an unbelieving spouse, but Paul says the opposite is true. The Christian serves to sanctify the non-Christian spouse and their children. Paul clearly teaches that when a Christian is married to an unbeliever they should not divorce a spouse who is willing to remain with them.

5. List some reasons why a Christian should remain married to an unbelieving spouse.

III. A Marriage Between a Christian and an Unbeliever Who Desires to Depart

Paul next moves on to a marriage where one spouse becomes a Christian and the other does not and the unbeliever does not want to stay in the marriage. (These verses do not speak the situation where a Christian marries an unbeliever which would contradict biblical teaching.)



1 Cor. 7:15 says, *“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.”* The person who becomes a Christian should allow their unbelieving spouse to leave if that is their desire. They should not initiate the divorce, but should put no barrier in the way of the unbeliever who wants to leave the marriage.

6. What part does peace play in divorce in 1 Cor. 7:15?

The word for separates in the Greek refers to divorce and Paul says the believer is not “enslaved” or “bound” in such situations. This phraseology means that the Christian whose spouse departs is freed from the marriage bond and is free to remarry. God allows remarriage in this case of desertion. Paul tells us that God does not bind the Christian in such a marriage because He has called us to live in peace.

7. What might be the results (for the Christian, unbeliever, and any children) if the Christian refused to allow the unbeliever to depart the marriage?

Being unequally yoked in marriage with an unbeliever can be very difficult for both parties. The Christian desires to share their faith with their spouse and have them respond to the gospel while the sinful lifestyle of the unbeliever discourages and distresses the Christian spouse. The unbeliever is angered when they see that they are no longer the focal point of the life of their spouse.

If a non-Christian marriage partner desires to leave it may be impossible to hold on to them anyway and in this case the Christian’s influence is gone. That is why Paul writes in **verse 16**, *“For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”* As much as a Christian desires to see their spouse become a Christian, it is largely outside of their control.

IV. A Recap of New Testament Teaching on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

1. Single Christians may remain unmarried if they are able to resist the temptation to be involved in sexual activity. This is a gift and is not given to all.
2. Christians who have never been married are free to marry another Christian.
3. Widows and widowers are free to remain single or to marry another Christian. Remaining single may be preferable for some, but marriage is acceptable and is necessary if sexual temptation would lead to sin.



4. Christians who are married to other Christians must not divorce. In cases of separation, the Christian must remain single so that future reconciliation is possible.
5. Christians may divorce and remarry if their spouse has been involved in adultery. Divorce is not required, but is permitted.
6. If a person becomes a Christian and their spouse remains an unbeliever, but desires to stay in the marriage, the Christian is to remain in the marriage. The Christian must not leave the person and must not initiate a divorce.
7. If a person becomes a Christian and their spouse remains an unbeliever, but wants to leave the marriage, then they should be allowed to leave freely. In this case the Christian is not enslaved or bound. They are free to divorce and remarry.

God views marriage as a sacred commitment. Because of this, Christians must only marry other Christians. One who becomes a Christian after marriage should stay with their spouse if possible.

Only three reasons are given for remarriage in the New Testament. All of them are for extremely severe situations. They include: the death of a spouse, adultery, and desertion.

Here are a few other pertinent thoughts: Those who have divorced can and must be productive in the church. Any who would stand back and cast stones must be very careful. Even when sin has taken place we must be willing to forgive even as Christ would forgive.

When people have divorced and remarried apart from God's teaching we must understand that forgiveness is offered and restoration can take place. When a person remarries without a valid scriptural reason they have sinned, but they do not live in adultery forever. This sin can be forgiven as any sin and their second marriage is still recognised by God. Remember that Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4 that she has had five husbands. This indicates that each one was a valid marriage.

Divorce is a painful experience. We want to avoid it in the church. We want to build strong families. However we acknowledge that remarriage is possible in some cases and forgiveness and restoration is possible in every case.