



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 7:10-24

Topic

The apostle Paul tells the believers at Corinth to remain in the circumstances in which they found themselves when they got saved

Title

“The Main Thing is to Keep the Remain Thing the Main Thing”

Introduction

People were getting saved in the first century city of Corinth. After the altar call they returned to their daily lives. They had questions, important questions, about how being a Christian affected their relationships both at home and out in the world:

- “What should I do if I am married to a nonbeliever?”
- “What should I do if I am an uncircumcised Gentile?”
- “What should I do if I am a slave?”

If you happen to be a person who got saved later in life you might remember wondering just how your relationship with Jesus was going to affect you at home and out in the world.

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Or let's say that someone you know gets saved. One of the first things they need to know is how being a Christian should affect their relationship with their spouse and society.

We are given a general principle to follow in verse twenty-four.

1 Corinthians 7:24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

In as much as it is possible we are to "remain" in the spousal or social "state" in which we were "called." In context it is a principle for those recently saved. But in general it's an exhortation to live-out biblical Christianity in the midst of our current circumstances.

I'll organize my thoughts around these two points: #1 Maintain Your Spousal Status Quo So Jesus Can Work In Your Home, and #2 Maintain Your Social Status Quo So Jesus Can Work In Your World.

#1 Maintain Your Spousal Status Quo
So Jesus Can Work In Your Home
(v10-16)

If you get saved and you are married there are only two possibilities:

1. Your spouse is also saved.
2. Your spouse is unsaved, he or she is a nonbeliever.

Paul looked at both possibilities in verses ten through sixteen.

1 Corinthians 7:10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

By "married" he was referring to a marriage in which both spouses are Christians. Paul's "command" to married Christians comes directly from "the Lord's" own teaching on the subject.

“A wife is not to depart from her husband.” The word “depart” has essentially the same meaning as “divorce.” In Jewish culture a wife had no legal recourse to divorce. If she wanted to leave her husband she simply departed the relationship. Greek wives (I’m told) did have legal recourse to divorce. By using the word “depart” Paul was referring to *all* Christian women, from either a Jewish or Gentile background.

Apparently some of the Christian gals in Corinth had already departed from their believing husbands.

1 Corinthians 7:11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband...

The Christian departed wife was to “remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” The same was true for the husband:

1 Corinthians 7:11 ... And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

Don’t “divorce” your believing wife. The structure of the argument implies that if you do your options are the same: Remain unmarried or be reconciled.

Paul was appealing to Jesus’ teaching on the sanctity of marriage. When asked about divorce Jesus said,

Matthew 19:5 ... ‘A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’ ?

Matthew 19:6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Matthew 19:8 ... "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

Matthew 19:9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

That’s the bedrock teaching about marriage and divorce. Paul applied Jesus’ teaching beyond the Jewish culture to the Gentiles. Marriage is for life. The exception Jesus gave is physical adultery. It gives the offended

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spouse the right to divorce. We say it is biblical grounds for a divorce. And if you have the right to divorce it means you also have the right to remarry after the divorce.

Obviously this really hits home. Anymore almost everyone has been affected in some way by divorce. Still, the place for two believers to start resolving their marital status is by acknowledging that their marriage was intended to be a lifelong commitment; that neither the wife nor the husband ought to depart; that if one did depart and there was no physical adultery they ought to attempt to reconcile.

No one is saying that a spouse needs to stay in an abusive relationship at all costs. No one is saying there are not difficulties, complications, and unique situations. If you need help thinking through your particular circumstances I'd be happy to talk with you. **No one should leave here burdened.** Convicted maybe, but not burdened.

What if you get saved and your spouse is a nonbeliever?

1 Corinthians 7:12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

1 Corinthians 7:13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

Jesus never taught on this subject so Paul does inspired by the Holy Spirit. The same principle is applied: Remain married. A new condition is added, however: The nonbeliever must be "willing to live" with you in your newfound relationship with Jesus.

The believing spouse can have a profound affect on the home:

1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

1. First, the nonbelieving spouse "is sanctified." It means simply that he or she is now set-apart by God to receive the special witness of the saved spouse. **He or she suddenly has a missionary living in the home!**

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2. Second, any “children” in the home would be “unclean” in the sense that the departure of the believer would remove from them the daily washing of the water of the Word of God. If the believer remains in the home the kids, too, are “holy” in the sense of being set-apart by God to receive a witness.

We don't believe in 'missionary dating' but we do believe in 'missionary marriages.'

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

Your nonbelieving spouse may opt to “depart” from you. Their abandonment breaks the marriage bond. We interpret this to be a second biblical grounds for divorce that allows you to remarry. Jesus spoke of adultery. Paul added abandonment.

“God has called us to peace.” You have peace with God; you can experience the peace of God; and you are empowered to produce peace in your circumstances as a fruit of your yielding to the indwelling Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

These words counsel you on the statement “let them depart.” While it is true that the believer has a sanctifying influence in the home, that does not mean every nonbelieving spouse will get saved. If your nonbelieving spouse departs, abandons you, if they divorce you - **let them go** and let the peace of God continue to rule your life.

These verse are immensely practical. They give a sort of line-by-line understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Don't miss the underlying spiritual connotations:

- Your marriage can powerfully illustrate and communicate reconciliation. The Bible says that our relationship with God was once broken. Jesus Christ died on the Cross to reconcile us to God. It was a revelation of

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God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. When marriages are reconciled they shout-out to others that God is a reconciler.

- No matter your circumstances you are to rejoice in the peace of God. There is a sense in which peace is on display as you seek to obey the Lord's directives about marriage in your particular situation. Often we think we will achieve peace by ending a marriage when God wants us to expect and experience His supernatural peace within the marriage.

Do you want to be used by God? *Then walk with Him in your marriage!* As much as it lies with you, maintain your spousal status quo and watch God at work.

#2 Maintain Your Social Status Quo So Jesus Can Work In Your World (v17-24)

Paul goes out the door of your home and into the world, into your social status quo.

1 Corinthians 7:17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

"God has distributed to each one" reminds you that God knows where you live. He knows your situation. It's not a surprise to Him. He "called" you right where you are. *Remain there!*

Obviously there might be certain situations you cannot remain in. If, for example, you are employed in an illegal or illicit occupation, there are overriding biblical principles. But for the most part we are called upon to remain where we are called - at least until God Himself leads us out and elsewhere.

This was Paul's counsel "in all the churches." *He wasn't picking on the Corinthians!*

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As to their social status quo, they were either “circumcised” or “uncircumcised.” He wasn’t talking about the physical but rather their spiritual heritage. It meant they were either Jews or they were Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 7:18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised.

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

1 Corinthians 7:20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

- God was saving Jews. *All the first believers were Jews!* They did not renounce their Jewish heritage. They “remained” in it and learned how to walk as believers in Christ.
- God was saving Gentiles. It was a false teaching that Gentiles must convert to Judaism in order to be truly, fully saved. They were to “remain” Gentiles and learn how to walk as believers in Christ.

The other social issue in Corinth was whether or not you were a slave or a free man.

1 Corinthians 7:21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.

Amazing. If you were “called while a slave” you were to be the best slave you could. You were to be the Lord’s slave, looking past your master on earth to Jesus. If you could acquire your freedom, go for it. Otherwise don’t “be concerned about” the fact you were a slave. God knew it when He saved you.

1 Corinthians 7:22 For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.

The slave has been set free spiritually. The free man is Jesus Christ’s spiritual slave. In other words, social status has nothing to do with spiritual status. We are all equal in standing before the Lord and social status means nothing to Him. The Lord called and worked through slaves. He called and worked through free men.

1 Corinthians 7:23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

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“You” meant all of them, whether slave or free man. Jesus “bought” them all in that He paid the price on the Cross to release the human race from sin and death and set us free.

- Slaves should not “become slaves of men” by thinking their social status made them spiritually inferior.
- Free men should not “become slaves of men” by thinking their social status made them spiritually superior.

Your “call” to salvation came to you in a social setting. **A change in your social setting is spiritually irrelevant.** It won’t make you a ‘better’ Christian and, in some cases, it will hinder your spiritual progress.

Any changes in social status need to be led by the Lord, by His values and not the world’s. We live in a society that values upward mobility. **We should rather value spiritual stability!** It isn’t always a good thing spiritually to move upward socially. I’ve seen a lot of Christians become carnal as they get farther up the ladder. Remain where you are unless and until Jesus calls you to something else.

And know that His call may not always be upward in society. But it will be forward in the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Verse twenty-four is the basic, foundational principle that guides our spousal and social lives.

1 Corinthians 7:24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

As a principle it is most applicable at the time you are saved. But even long after you get saved it still speaks to you. It tells you that God’s best is for you to obey Him in your circumstances rather than seeking circumstances that are more to your liking.

“Keeping the commandments of God is what matters.”

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