

# *Iglesia de Carne*

## Studies in First Corinthians

### Text

First Corinthians 7:10-24

### Topic

Believers in Corinth were to remain married to their nonbelieving spouses and thereby have a sanctifying influence in their homes

### Title

***“Honey, I Sanctified the Kids”***

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You might remember the 2009 case of Carl Fredricksen. Redevelopment wanted to buy his house, but he stubbornly refused to sell. You see, his beloved wife, Ellie, died just before they were going to sell their house to realize their dream of moving to Paradise Falls. Their old house was more than real estate.

The case made the news when Carl got into a fight with a construction worker named Steve over his broken mailbox.

The court labeled Carl as a public menace and ordered him to move into Shady Oaks Retirement Home.

Carl is an example of someone wanting to **remain** in their situation. I thought of him because the apostle Paul told the believers in Corinth to “**remain** with God in that state in which [you] were called” (v24). Specifically, he addressed three groups:

- To those who were married to a nonbeliever, he said “Remain.”
- To those who were uncircumcised Gentiles, he said “Remain.”
- To those who were slaves, he said “Remain.”

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Not just “remain.” Remain to *sanctify*.

In verse fourteen, for example, we read, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband...”

You might say that the Christian is to ‘remain to be seen.’ Your situation should always take a back seat to your living-out the Christian life right where you are.

I’ll organize my comments around two questions we should ask ourselves: **#1 Is Jesus Calling Me To Remain In My Social Situation?**, and **#2 Is Jesus Calling Me To Remain In My Spousal Situation?**

## **#2 - Is Jesus Calling Me To Remain In My Social Situation? (v17-24)**

### **“Squirrel!”**

Dug the talking dog in the Pixar film, *Up*, was distracted upon seeing a squirrel. In case you didn’t see it, the story I told about Carl Fredricksen is from that film.

We can get distracted reading the Bible. One way we get distracted is by focusing on something of interest to us in a passage that may not be its real point.

Marriage, remarriage, and divorce are a biblical squirrel. Any passage even remotely mentioning it attracts our immediate attention. It is certainly understandable. Almost nothing touches our lives so intimately.

When we read these verses, we tend to focus on the counsel Paul gave about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Except for two things:

1. He never once directly said *anything* about remarriage.
2. Marriage was not his primary emphasis.

The primary emphasis is “[remaining] in the same calling in which [you] were called” (v20).



That's why I want to take these verses in a different order - looking at verses seventeen through twenty-four *first*. In them Paul established the principle which guided his counsel to believers about what to do in various situations, including their marriages.

1Co 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.

In Corinth, three issues were affecting the new believers:

1. Some had become believers and were married to nonbelievers. Should they split? After all, believers ought to only marry other believers.
2. Most were Gentile believers who were being told to convert to Judaism. Maybe they ought to at the very least be circumcised.
3. Others were slaves. That can't be right; maybe they should escape.

These were sincere questions. After all, these believers did not have centuries of history and biblical commentary to guide them.

God had "called" each to salvation exactly were they were "distributed." They ought to "walk," i.e., walk with the Lord, in the situation they were in when saved.

Paul ordained this principle "in all the churches." It's for us every bit as it was for the first century. It's a general principle. Wisdom is needed to apply it. If, let's say, a Corinthian prostitute got saved, of course she or he should not "remain." Nevertheless, remaining needs to be our first goal.

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

God gave Abraham circumcision as a sign of His covenant with him and his descendants. It was an outward physical sign of the cutting away of the flesh of our hearts.



All Jewish men were circumcised. All Gentile converts to Judaism were circumcised. It was so important to the Jews that in the Bible, Jews are referred to as “the circumcision,” and Gentiles are called “the uncircumcision.”

Add to the history that there were Jews visiting the Gentile churches teaching that circumcision was still necessary for salvation, and you see the confusion in Corinth.

People do this today, but more often it’s baptism, or keeping the Sabbath, that they promote and claim is necessary in order for you to be saved.

If you were a Jew, how could you “become uncircumcised?” It’s obviously spiritual. Paul meant at least two things:

1. Theologically, you need no longer keep the rituals of the Law of Moses as a requirement of your salvation. You were free to continue to go to the Temple, and to celebrate the Feasts, etc. But you did so in the light of what they represented: The life and work of the Savior, Who fulfilled all their symbolism.
2. Practically, you could have fellowship with Gentiles. To the Gentiles, you could be a Gentile, as it were, eating their food, for example, in order to share in the fellowship of Jesus, or to share Jesus with them.

Paul exemplified this. He could be among Gentiles, and live like them, but also visit the Temple, and take a vow.

The Gentile could “become circumcised.” Not physically; spiritually.

One way was to heed the directives of the Church Council in Jerusalem, which instructed Gentiles, “that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” (Acts 15:29). Adhering to that counsel would give opportunity to preach Jesus to Jews.

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



Whether you were a Jew or a Gentile was irrelevant. What mattered was your obedience to God.

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

Your situation is irrelevant. You are to walk empowered by the Spirit, in obedience to God, in any situation you find yourself in.

This counsel was originally for the relatively new believers in Corinth who were unequally yoked in marriage, or who were Gentiles, or slaves. It still has application to anyone who receives Jesus and finds themselves in a less than ideal situation - like being married to a nonbeliever.

Not that we can never change our situation; but we should only change it as God leads. It isn't enough that our home or job isn't ideal. It isn't enough that we are having a tough time. We are to walk obediently, trusting in the Lord, until He definitely opens a new door for us.

I absolutely hated my sales job after I got saved. It seemed so unimportant. But I will readily admit that some of my greatest times of witness were right after I got saved, in that less than ideal situation.

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

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.

1Co 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. Your situation is irrelevant.



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

“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.

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. His call may not always be *upward* in society. But it will be *forward* in the Kingdom of God.

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

This was, first of all, an answer to the three specific situations the new believers in Corinth found themselves in. It serves us as a principle to not think the grass will be greener if we get out of, or away from, our current situation.

## #2 - Is Jesus Calling Me To Remain In My Spousal Situation? (v10-16)

It’s tempting to jump right in and talk about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We shouldn’t do so until we mention what Paul said in verse fourteen, “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.”

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In a nutshell, this means the presence of the believing spouse creates the atmosphere of a sanctuary within which the nonbelieving family members may get saved.

I don't think it's going too far to apply that to the other two groups - Gentiles and slaves. Remain as a witness. Remain to be seen.

Keep that in mind as we work through these verses.

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

In the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter nineteen, Jesus appealed to the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as the gold standard for marriage. One biological man, and one biological woman - heterosexuals - to remain in a monogamous relationship until the death of one spouse. I would add that a believer must only wed another believer.

The word "depart" has essentially the same meaning as "divorce." A Jewish wife had no legal recourse to divorce. If she wanted to leave her husband she simply departed the relationship. Greek wives did have legal recourse to divorce, but it wasn't necessary. Typically, they simply departed the home, and married another.

Corinthians were getting saved. They were suddenly in mixed-marriages with nonbelievers. Some had "departed." No, no, no.

The 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.

I know that I am belaboring this point, but it's important. Paul was addressing a specific situation in Corinth. Believers were departing their nonbelieving



spouses *because they felt it was spiritual and even necessary to do so*. It wasn't because they no longer loved them, or were looking for a way out. They thought it was the right thing to do.

We typically go to these verses to establish that abandonment by your nonbelieving spouse is biblical grounds for divorce and subsequent remarriage. In Corinth, it was the believers who were abandoning their marriages.

1Co 7:11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

A Corinthian believer had split from their nonbelieving spouse for what they thought were spiritual reasons.

Just the opposite is true - they should stay with the nonbeliever **for** spiritual reasons. Get back together; definitely don't get remarried to someone else.

1Co 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.

1Co 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.

1Co 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.

The non-believing spouse "is sanctified." It means simply that he or she is now set-apart by God to receive the witness of the saved spouse. **He or she suddenly has a missionary living in the home.** We don't encourage missionary dating but we do encourage missionary marriages.

The kids, too, are "holy" - same word for sanctified - in the sense of being set-apart by God to receive a witness.





If the kids are “holy,” what did Paul mean when he said, “otherwise your children would be unclean?” I’m pretty sure Judaism taught that kids under the age of accountability were saved. Regardless, I think what Paul is saying is something like this: “If you were somehow being defiled by being married to a nonbeliever, then your children would also be unclean... But they are not. They are holy.”  
BTW: We need to think more about it, but if this is a valid reading, then it gives us one more Scriptural argument that kids who die before the age of accountability go to Heaven.

In a previous study we talked about our bodies being the earthly Temple of God the Holy Spirit. The presence of the believing spouse makes the household a Temple in which the nonbelieving spouse and children are exposed to salvation.

Gordon Fee says of this, “Paul is setting forth a high view of the grace of God at work through the believer toward members of his/her own household, and for him that constitutes grounds enough for maintaining the marriage.”

The apostle Peter said the same thing, focusing on wives, “Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear” (First Peter 3:1-2).

1Co 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. Whatever else you do, “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.

1Co 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.

Let's pause briefly to discuss marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Adultery on the part of one spouse is biblical grounds for divorce and subsequent remarriage to another believer. Divorce isn't required. Reconciliation is often a better course of action.

But listen: If divorce is allowed, it doesn't make it less spiritual than reconciliation. If you choose divorce on account of your spouses adultery, you are not some second-class Christian.

The death of your spouse releases you from marriage and allows for remarriage to a believer. Remember, though, that Paul suggested you stay single, if you are able, to better serve the Lord.

Paul never really addressed remarriage after abandonment; not directly. He did say "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." We *do* interpret that to mean that the believer is not bound to the marriage - they are set free - and therefore may remarry in the Lord.

The more we desire to simplify marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the more we see that each case has its own complexities. What constitutes abandonment? If pornography constitutes adultery, how much gives the spouse grounds for divorce? More importantly - Is the believer seeking divorce and remarriage really wanting to glorify God?

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. 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.

God hates it, but He permitted divorce in this fallen world *to protect injured spouses*. We don't have time to look at it, but in the Old Testament, when Moses spoke about providing a certificate of divorce, it was to protect the innocent spouse.

**No biblical teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage should punish injured spouses.**

It was necessary to spend a little time on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. But that isn't the main point of these verses.

You are to be a sanctifying influence in your current situation. It doesn't mean you can never get out of your situation. But your situation is somewhat irrelevant to your mission of representing Jesus.

"Remain" may not be the word you want to hear... But it's a word of grace, from the Lord, Who is working in you as He works through you.

Remain to be seen, and it remains to be seen how the Lord can use you.

