

1 Cor 7:10-16 - "Those God Has Brought Together"

Opener: Is there now or has there ever been a couple whose marriage you've really admired?

Read Matthew 5:31-32

Q. What do you suppose is Jesus' point about divorce here?

A. In the context of adultery/lust that Jesus has just pointed out to the crowd listening to his sermon, I think that this passage is more about the heart behind their actions. But at the very least he's saying that sexual immorality is THE reason that anyone could divorce.

Read Matthew 19:3-9

Q. Is Jesus saying anything new about divorce here that he hasn't already said in Ch 5?

A. Probably not. He's addressing a specific issue, "any cause divorce" - that a man can divorce a woman for "any cause". It was basically a cheap and quick divorce and could be done because the husband was bored of this wife and wanted another. Jesus' point is that it isn't valid and therefore in fact the two are still married and the husband, in marrying another woman, is an adulterer!

Read 1 Cor 7:10-11

Q. Is Paul adding anything new?

A. Not really, he's quoting from the Jesus tradition (the well understood sayings of Jesus that became the gospels) but he's adding a bit of information about separation and reconciliation.

Read 1 Cor 7:12-16

Q. What's the issue that Paul's dealing with here (remember this isn't written TO us)?

A. It's almost certainly that in the early church, as people became believers their marriage took on a new light which wasn't always shared amongst the couple. One would be "holy" and the other "unholy" (profane).

Q. What happens to the unbelieving spouse in a relationship and why?

A. v14 says that they are made holy so that the children are holy.

Q. With this in mind and in light of v16 does it sound like Paul is saying that an unbelieving spouse will receive salvation through the believing spouse? How does that fit with the "whole counsel of Scripture"?

A. Yes, it sounds like that's exactly what Paul's saying but it can't be because the rest of Scripture requires belief from each individual (John 3:16; Eph 2:8, etc). 1 Peter 3:1 suggests a wife could convince her husband of the faith through her conduct. James says something similar about covering a multitude of sins (v20). It's much more likely that Paul is talking about convincing a spouse of the truth of who Jesus is that will lead to their salvation.

This whole chapter is addressing what to do as far as marriage is concerned when you become a believer which is why Paul says what he says in v17.

Read 1 Cor 7:17-24.

Q. To what does Paul compare marriage in this passage?

A. Slavery! It might not immediately be obvious but to a Greek speaking crowd the terms for 'marriage' and 'divorce' are similar to 'bound' and 'free'!

Q. If we were to write a theology of divorce what would we say (note also verse 39)?

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A. Scripturally it would seem that death and adultery are the two releases from the marriage covenant. Even though the Pharisees quite rightly said that "Moses allowed divorce upon presentation of a certificate" it doesn't seem to fit into Jesus' plan. He says, "That may be so but it wasn't so from the beginning."

Divorce is never God's plan - it wasn't part of his original design but as a result of the fall we're not capable of perfect communion with God so we're not capable of mirroring that in our marriages. As a result many marriages fail.

BUT as always this doesn't come as a surprise to God, and divorce is no greater sin than any other even though the fallout affects many people - especially those closest. Anyone who has been through a divorce should leave it as a past event which Jesus' death and resurrection has dealt with. There is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Why not close by praying for marriages and relationships in your group?

[Disclaimer: This was never intended to include all aspects of divorce and separation, and anybody in an abusive relationship should leave and seek help immediately. Despite "sexual immorality" being a Scriptural "allowance" for divorce, there is always restitution available - again, help is advised.]