



DIVORCE: DISTORTING BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

OPENING COMMENT

Divorce is a difficult reality in our world today. We would like to think of it as a problem in the wider culture, but the reality remains its prevalence is equal in the church. Since the biblical witness is incredibly consistent and clear on how the church ought to understand divorce, the issue of maintaining healthy relationships must fall to a different problem, namely, our understanding of biblical marriage. It is only when we understand this foundation that the directives Paul gives to the Corinthian church becomes palatable.

READ THE TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.¹² 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. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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. 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?



UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. There are two groups of people that Paul is addressing here. Who are they and what differentiates them?
2. Paul says nothing about the validity of the divorce described in verse 10, yet makes a clear indication of what the disposition of the unmarried person should be. What is that position?
3. What factor is used to decide whether a believing person should stay with their unbelieving spouse? (vs. 12, 13)
4. What are the two influences the believing spouse has on their family? (Vs. 14)
5. What is the overriding principle to determine how one should act toward their unbelieving spouse? (vs. 15)
6. What does Paul see as the number one concern for the relationship? (vs. 16)

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. How might Paul's directive to the divorced spouse to "remain unmarried or else be reconciled" motivate investment in the marriage prior to divorce?
2. Paul assumes that the influence of the believing spouse will override the influence of the unbelieving spouse (the children and unbeliever are made holy). How might this perspective inform our interactions in the world in general and more specifically in our marriages?
3. Do you think there is the possibility of migration from the "marrieds" group to the "rest" group? How might that occur?
4. How might we apply Matthew 18:15-20 to prevent a change in relationship dynamics (ie. from two believing spouses to one believing spouse)? How might this also help discern the appropriateness of divorce?
5. How might the gospel inform our attitudes towards our marriage relationship?
6. How does a biblical view of divorce speak to the larger culture? How might it act as a gospel witness to those around us?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Genesis 2:18-25 - God indicates that loneliness is not good and the solution is a "one flesh" union.
2. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 - text for dispute about limits on divorce
3. Jeremiah 3:8 - God divorces his people



4. Malachi 2:16 - A man does violence to the one he should protect.
5. Matthew 5:31-32 - Sermon on the mount text on divorce.
6. Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18 - Jesus teaching on divorce.
7. 1 Peter 3:1-4 - a wife conduct has the possibility of converting their unbelieving husband.

CONCLUSION

Paul's directive to the church in Corinth is incredibly clear. He is convinced that if you are both believers you ought to remain together and strive to understand marriage as God intended (Ephesians 5:11-22). He simply points to Jesus' teaching on the subject in an effort to show that divorce is not an option because it is God who orchestrated it. Secondly, Paul shows that those who live with an unbelieving spouse are governed by a different law. The motivation here is to see the gospel lived out in such a compelling manner that the unbelieving spouse would find it irresistible. Yet, when we look closely at the directives of both parties we can see that Paul is most concerned about the marriages in Corinth being a picture of the gospel of Christ. This is so that those who would see the good works of the marriages of the church would glorify their Father in heaven.

SHARE & PRAY

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

