

## CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

### Lesson 20

### What The Apostle Paul Taught About Divorce

First Corinthians 7:12-24

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Christians are faced with tremendous pressures from the world about divorce. Non-Christian societies accept divorce as a practical solution to solving complex marital problems. Most couples today enter into marriage with the conditional thought if it doesn't work out divorce is always a viable possibility. Unfortunately, many Christians are influenced by the world and either get a divorce or seriously think about it and are miserable when they don't.
- B. In any society which stresses personal, individual rights, divorce because just another option - a life choice no better or no worse than staying unmarried. Because man are basically sinful, couples in the midst of divorce are very self-centered and the emphasis is upon my rights and what will make me happy. They reason, "If marriage stands in the way of my happiness, then I will get a divorce". They rationalize, "I owe it to myself to be happy no matter who else I may hurt in the choice to go my own independent way.
- C. These are crucial days for Christians and they must, as never before, place their beliefs on the Word of God. All doctrinal and practical beliefs must be linked to the infallible Bible so they will not be tossed about by every new teaching the unsaved world conceives. Let the world have its system of ethics but Christians must accept a Biblical ethic or they should not call themselves Christians.
- D. Christians are not exempt from marital problems. One of the big problems is how a Christian can live with a non-Christian mate. There are many cases where one partner in a marriage becomes a Christian but the other partner is not saved. It is to this kind of situation Paul writes about in I Corinthians 7.

#### II. COMMANDS TO THOSE IN A SPIRITUALLY MIXED MARRIAGE

7:12-24

- A. Paul's Additional Teaching On Divorce (12a): *"To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord)"*
  - 1. Paul is going to give marriage advice the Lord Himself never taught on. Last week we showed from Matthew 19 that Christ allowed for divorce between two Christians on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness which includes adultery, incest, prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism and bestiality. However, Christ never taught about divorce in a spiritually mixed marriage. It is the problem of one unsaved and one saved partner in a marriage.
  - 2. In the Corinthian Church, there were husbands and wives who had been gloriously saved by the grace of a sovereign God, but their mates were still rejecters of Jesus Christ.
  - 3. According to Ezra 9-10, the Israelites were told to divorce their unbelieving mates they had married while in captivity in Babylon and any other Gentile partners they had acquired from the surrounding nations. According to Haggai 2, defilement was carried through touching a dead body, and the Jew and Gentile believers interpreted this to mean defilement is communicated or transmitted.

4. The question would naturally arise, “Are Christians defiled who are married to unbelievers?” The Corinthian Christians asked the honest question, “Should I divorce my unbelieving husband or wife to keep pure and undefiled?”
  5. This section is not viewing willful, rebellious marriages where a Christian says, “I’m going to marry that unbeliever because I love him or her, and I don’t care what the Bible says!” This attitude is a whole problem in itself to be dealt with at another time. What Paul is addressing is when both husband and wife are unsaved and then one partner gets saved and the other remains a rejector of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. The Saved Partner Should Not Divorce The Unsaved Partner (12b-13):** *“If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.”*
1. This verse clearly teaches the believer in Christ is not to leave the unbeliever as long as the unbeliever chooses to stay in the marriage relationship.
  2. Christians often rationalize and say, “I was married to my mate before I became a Christian. Now that I’m a Christian I do not believe my marriage was made in heaven; therefore, it is not valid. I think I ought to be able to get a divorce and establish a Christian home.” Not so, because God acknowledges marriage as valid for unbelievers as well as believers.
  3. It may be tough to live with an unbeliever but God’s grace is sufficient. How many Christian wives there were in Corinth who had to live with unsaved husbands who would get stinking drunk and commit sexual acts with prostitutes at the Temple of Aphrodite. How many Christian husbands in Corinth had to live with unsaved wives who thought, acted and lived like thorough going pagans, scoffing at their husbands whenever they showed any interest in spiritual things. Some of these Christians were so discouraged they wanted to abandon their marriages, but Paul says, “Don’t do it! Hang in there and keep the marriage together!” Paul’s point is that the Christian is never to initiate a divorce from an unsaved partner.
- C. The Unsaved Partner And Children Are Set Apart Because Of The Saved Partner (14)** *“For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy (set apart).”*
1. This is really a parenthetical thought in the mind of the Apostle Paul, and the essence is that unbelieving mates and children are set apart in a spiritual (religious) sense (not saving sense) because of the presence of the believing partner. There is special blessing and privilege which comes to unbelievers because of one Christian mate. We will not comment on this any more because it will be dealt with in detail when we deal with “The Covenant Family.”
- D. If the Unsaved Partner Files for Divorce, Let Him or Her Leave (15a):** *“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so.”*
1. If the unbeliever willfully deserts, walks out and refuses to stay, then the Christian is to let the unbelieving partner go. The Christian is not under obligation to plead, to beg, to bargain or to force the non-Christian to remain.
  2. If the unsaved partner becomes intolerant of the Christian and says, “I can’t put up living with this Christian one minute longer,” then the Christian is to let him or her leave. Notice carefully, it is the non-Christian who initiates this action. The unsaved partner files for divorce, not the saved partner.
- E. When The Unsaved Partner Divorces, The Saved Partner Is Free To Remarry(15b):** *“A*

*believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances”*

1. The phrase “not bound” comes from the root word *doulos* from which we get the word “slave.” Slaves were bound to their masters until they were set free, and then they were bound no longer.
  2. Paul is not talking about legal separation but divorce and the right to remarry because in 1 Corinthians 7:39 he says, “*A woman is bound (doulos) to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry another she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.*” Therefore, Paul is referring to a legitimate divorce and the right to remarry on the basis of desertion.
- F. The Saved Partner Is To Keep The Peace In A Marriage (15c): *God has called us to live in peace.”*
1. While a believing partner has a legitimate basis for divorce if the unbeliever departs, everything possible should be done by the Christian to keep the marriage together.
  2. God has called the Christian to peace. Separation or divorce would disrupt the peace of the marriage union. The Christian should stay in the marriage and seek peace. A believer is not to stir up and tear up a marriage because there is a difference of religious belief. Furthermore, a Christian does not want to have guilt feelings upon the conscience for driving an unbelieving mate away.
  3. If the non-Christian should leave and divorce, the Christian should know in the heart that he or she did all that was possible to keep the marriage together.
- G. The Saved Partner May See The Unsaved Partner Care To Christ (16): *“How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know husband, whether you will save you wife?”*
1. There is always the possibility the unsaved partner will be saved, and this is why the believing partner should “hang in there” as long as possible. The most likely instrument God will use in the salvation of the unbelieving partner is the believing partner. Sometimes the witness will only be by life and not words, but a saved mate should so live before an unsaved partner that the unsaved partner can see that Christ has made him or her a better mate.
  2. How many times I have heard unsaved husbands say, “I ‘m not saved but Christianity has made my wife a better person, a better mate, a better lover and a better mother.” Unsaved partners may argue with the truth of the gospel but they cannot argue with a changed life. Many Christians give up too easily on their unsaved mates.
- H. The Ideal Is For A Believing Partner To Stay In A Mixed Marriage (17):  
*“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down to all the churches.”*
1. What Paul taught the Corinthians about divorce, he taught to all the churches. God called each Christian to salvation, and has called the believer to stay in the place God called him to be.
  2. Paul is not saying that if a person has been a prostitute, gambler or bank robber, the person should stay in that state or environment after conversion to Christ.
  3. He is talking about social relationships and marriage in particular. For those who were called into a spiritually mixed marriage, they ought to stay in that relationship.
  4. Charles Swindoll, in his book *Divorce*, says:

Before closing the chapter, a warning must be sounded. Being human, sinful and weak, we are all equipped with remarkable ability to rationalize.

Unless we consciously guard against it, when we experience marital difficulties, we'll begin to search for a way out instead of a way through. Given sufficient time in the crucible, divorce will seem our only option, our long awaited and much deserved utopia. And we will begin to push in that direction, at times ignoring the inner voice of God's spirit and at other times violating the written principles of God's Word. Either is a grievous act."

I. God's Principle Is That A Saved Partner Should Stay In A Mixed Marriage Relationship If Possible Without Complaining. (18-24):

*"Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you -- although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedom; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to"*

1. God's basic principle is that a person should stay in that social condition or relationship he was called without complaint. If there is a possibility to move out, such as the case of slavery (and there is a biblical basis to do so), this has the approval of God.
2. However, Paul has taken these illustrations and applied them to Christian marriage. His basic principle is that Christians married to unsaved mates are to stay in that marriage without divorce and without complaint, for this is God's ideal. However, there may be biblical grounds for divorce if the unsaved partner is guilty of marital unfaithfulness or chooses to leave the relationship.

II. CONCEPTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE GETTING A DIVORCE

A. Divorce Has Devastating Effects Upon Children

1. Children suffer the most in a divorce. All children are traumatized by divorce the first two to five years and most are affected for a lifetime. The shock of seeing parents separate, the insecurity of living in a single parent bare, the tenuousness of blending into another family with a strange father or mother and children causes hurt, pain and bitterness which is intolerable.
2. The only security a child really has is his parents, and if they divorce, the child may become rebellious and dysfunctional. He or she cannot understand why this break up had to happen to him or her and may conclude that he or she was the cause for the parent's divorce which brings a lot of guilt. Many a child has sobbed himself to sleep because two adults he loves have failed miserably by getting a divorce.

My seven year old son, Mark, had a good friend his age live next door. His friend's parents decided to get a divorce and it tore that young boy up. It also scared my son. Mark one night got up on my lap and said, "Dad, will you and mom every get an avorce?" I looked him right in the eye and said, "No, son, never. Jesus put us together and we are staying together. We will never get a divorce." That young boy's reaction was amazing. He put his arms around my neck and hugged me so tight and said, "Dad, it makes me feel good that you and mom will never get an avorce!"

3. Divorce usually produces insecure and unstable children who cannot cope with life effectively. Here are some disturbing symptoms which are normal byproducts of a divorce on children:
  - a. Sadness, depression, fatigue, day dreaming. bursting into tears, withdrawing from friends, difficulty concentrating and over achieving to prove one's worth such as plunging into school work as a means of escape.
  - b. Denial.
  - c. Embarrassment which brings loss of self-esteem.
  - d. Intense anger.
  - e. Guilt because of conflict of loyalty.
  - f. Fears about being cared for even if the family is affluent.
  - g. Regression and lack of normal development.
  - h. A forcing of abnormal maturity by circumstances.
  - i. Difficulty sleeping, stomach aches, headaches, etc.

Gordon Livingston of the Columbia, Maryland, Medical Plan said, "The disillusionment that comes with the knowledge that our parents do not love each other anymore and are not going to stay together is not only a tremendous blow to a child's conception of the world as an orderly place, but it shakes his fundamental faith in everything."

4. Children of divorced parents are often afraid to make a deep commitment in marriage because they fear they will have kids and the marriage will end in divorce which brought them such hurt and pain.
5. Many in the medical field today feel children of divorced parents may do better psychologically if they are removed from the bickering and fighting of incompatible parents who are living together but show no love. This may be true, but divorce or parent squabbling are both sins and both are damaging to children. The ideal is to come to grips with problem and keep the marriage together for the good of the kids.
6. The effects of divorce are not only damaging to younger children but to older children who understand the reason for divorce in their parents.
7. I have a 35 year old friend who, when she found out her folks had divorced, literally cried for weeks and has still not completely gotten over it seven years later.

#### B. Divorce Brings Loneliness

1. Divorce brings an aching loneliness which is worse than separation from a loved one because of death. Death is final; divorce never is.
2. Many folks feel that divorce will give them a fresh start; it will free them up to pursue a happier life; more and better sex in the swinging single life; become more popular and associate with the exiting and beautiful people. These mostly are fantasies and statistics prove differently.
  - a. Divorcees have a harder time dating and remarrying.
  - b. To remarry after 35 is very difficult, especially for women.
  - c. Divorcees are often forced into a life of sexual immorality which brings temporary pleasures, boredom and a good case of guilty conscience.
  - d. To find out the hard way that the swinging single scene is not all the media has made it out to be.

Judith Wallerstein, who headed up the Research by the California Children of Divorce Project, observed an especially dismal future for women forty and over. “Even ten years after the divorce, half of the women studied at the distant point could be diagnosed as ‘clinically depressed,’ and all were moderately or severely lonely, despite the fact that 50 percent of them had initiated the divorce themselves. Exacerbating their malaise might be alarming new statistics on their chances of finding another husband—chances *Newsweek* magazine claims are so low that these women face a greater likelihood of being struck by a terrorist!”

C. Divorce Brings Guilt

1. Guilt is real and all divorcees experience it to some degree. The party who decides to split feels guilty about leaving the marriage, and the party who does not want a divorce feels guilty about failing to make the marriage work.
2. Guilt often drives divorcees into alcohol, drugs and promiscuous sex in order to drive out the horrible feelings of loneliness and guilt.

D. Divorce Effects One’s Standard Of Living

1. Divorce has tremendous financial ramifications for both men and woman. A man must pay alimony (in some cases) and child support, which could cripple his finances for years. He needs to ask whether he can afford a divorce.
2. Women are hurt most by divorce, especially in states where no fault divorce is in effect. A woman’s standard of living declines greatly in the first year of divorce. Women should consider the following before getting a divorce:
  - a. Income plummets.
  - b. Anxiety increases over making ends meet.
  - c. Friendships stagnate because a woman usually has to go to work.
  - d. Large sums of money must be paid for lawyer’s fees
3. Rarely does a woman come out of a divorce financially well off but a man usually does.

E. Divorce Hurts Others

1. Divorce hurts the person getting a divorce for it brings out selfishness, hostilities, anger and vindictiveness. It ruins one’s idealism about marriage and leaves emotional scars from which one can never be free.
2. However, divorce hurts others too. It devastates children. It hurts the in-laws by splitting the family and causing them to take sides. Friends also are forced to take sides. It hurts grandparents who want the privilege of being with their grandchildren and children desperately need grandparents for stability.
3. All this forces the divorcee to be hardened or on the defensive against people he or she once loved dearly.

F. Divorce Effects Society

1. By divorcing, a person detracts from the stability of society, adding to the rootlessness and lack of continuity or connection many people feel.
2. Each divorce further deteriorates the values of society, giving the sense of rootlessness, despair and instability. If people accept the concept, “Divorce is all right because everybody’s doing it,” they have bought the lie. If they say, “I’ll marry but conditioned on the basis of divorce if the passion and zing leave the marriage,” they again have bought the lie.
3. The truth is that marriage is best for society and it takes hard work and teamwork to

solve problems. Marriage and no divorce is best for the couple, children, family, friends and society. Marriage is statistically proven to be the best state for one's health and divorce the worst state. Marriage builds continuity and a heritage through children. And most of all, and above all, marriage and no divorce pleases God and it is Him and Him alone we all will answer to on judgment day!

G. Divorce Rarely Solves The Problem

1. Many divorcees will admit they were no better off in the single state. Most would confess that the single state brought different and more problems. Also the second marriage had many of the same problems as the first marriage. Divorcees often say that with patience and understanding they could have worked out the first marriage without divorce.
2. After a divorce, people remain the same people with the same poor problem solving skills, cloudy values and inadequate styles of relating to others. The result is they most often choose and shape new relationships into the duplication of their spoiled first marriage. The problem is the individual who is selfish and that is tough to admit.