

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:7-14

Session 26: Marriage Instructions, Part 2

Widowers and Widows

1 Corinthians 7:8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

Paul says it is good for widows to “abide” as he, celibate. Who are the “unmarried” in the verse? I do not think Paul is referring to everyone who is unmarried, like young people who have never been married.

I believe he is talking to widowers, men who have lost their spouse. For if Paul meant to refer to all unmarried people, why does he include “and widows?” They would already been included in the “unmarried.” It makes sense to me that Paul is talking about widowers.

When Paul says that it is good for them to “abide even as I,” this may be an indication that Paul is a widower. We have already talked about whether Paul was married and if he was, what might have happened to his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

Paul is giving permission for widowers and widows to remarry. Many commentators use this verse to advise all unmarried people who are “burning” with passion to get married. As we demonstrated back in sessions 23-24, not only is that a terrible reason for anyone to get married, but it is also an incorrect use of the verse. No one should get married to satisfy their lusts.

The correct interpretation is to understand that Paul is talking to widowers (unmarried) and widows who have already legitimately enjoyed the pleasures of sexual love, and since their spouse has died, they are eligible to remarry.

Christian Marriages

1 Corinthians 7:10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: ¹¹ But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.

This is pretty straightforward; the Lord is permitting, but not commanding, separation, with a view toward reconciliation.

Mixed Marriages

1 Corinthians 7:12 **But to the rest speak I, not the Lord:** If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

The opening phrase of vs. 12 is one of several statements that the apostle Paul makes which are a bit puzzling. What does he mean “to the rest speak I, not the Lord”?

Are we to take vv. 12-13 as the word of God, or is Paul just giving us his opinion? The answer is, “Both!” The personal thoughts which Paul records are the word of God. He will explain this later in chapter 14.

By saying it this way, Paul is distinguishing between those things which were specifically revealed to him by Christ as opposed to the things he writes with apostolic authority.

1 Corinthians 7:12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. ¹³ And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

Husbands and wives of unbelievers should remain with their unsaved partners.

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

Verse 14 uses the words “sanctified” and “holy” in a way we may not have anticipated. Therefore there are more ideas about vs. 14 than we can address in this study. Therefore, we will concentrate mostly on what I understand Paul is saying and why he is saying it.

By the context, we know that Paul is giving a reason for a believer to remain married to an unbeliever. Why would anyone even wonder about this? Perhaps because prior to Paul (and the doctrines which attend grace), all anyone knew was the instruction of the law as it pertained to Israelites.

In Israel, if a Jewish man were married to a pagan, he had to put her away, or divorce her, as she was “unclean” in the sight of God. What does it mean for a person to be “unclean?” It means they are unacceptable in the sight of God. Let me show you just one example of this in practice in Israel’s program.

Look with me in the book of Ezra. This is taking place after a remnant of the Babylonian captives have returned to the land to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

(We studied this in detail in the School of Biblical Studies (SBS) Level 3.)

To get our bearings: On the timeline, this is the 2nd installment of the 5th CoP and it pertains to the “7 weeks” (49 years) portion of the schedule of weeks, in Daniel’s prophecy.

We studied this in detail in the SBS: Level 4 where we studied the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

If you recall, those years were indeed “troublous times” as the people attempted to rebuild, with extreme hardship and dangers lurking on every side, by night and day. This is the time they worked with a tool in one hand and a sword in the other.

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. ² For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. ³ And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

Ezra 10:1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

² And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. ³ Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God **to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them**, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. ⁴ Arise; for *this* matter *belongeth* unto thee: we also *will be* with thee: be of good courage, and do *it*. ⁵ Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

Under the law, things which were “unclean” polluted things which were clean, and there was a “putting away” of the unclean thing. Things were “unclean” by association.

Haggai 2:12 If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. ¹³ Then said Haggai, If *one that is* unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. ¹⁴ Then answered Haggai, and said, So *is* this people, and so *is* this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so *is* every work of their hands; and that which they offer there *is* unclean.

As you can see from the passage, being in contact with that which is unclean makes whatever it touches unclean.

This may have led the believing Corinthians who were married to unbelievers to wonder if they should continue in their marriages, and if not, what about their children?

But under grace, this is not the case. Paul, speaking only to the believers, says not to dissolve the marriage over the issue of one spouse being an unbeliever. In fact, he says that the unbelieving spouse is “sanctified” by the believing spouse.

But what does Paul mean when he says that the believing spouse sanctifies the unbelieving spouse?

The usual meaning of the word “sanctify” is, to make holy; to set apart to a sacred use; to cleanse, to consecrate. Sanctification for the believer consists of him becoming more like Christ and less attached to the world and more attached to those things which are unseen and eternal.

But the expression “sanctified by the husband/wife” cannot mean:

(1.) An unbelieving spouse would become holy, (in the sense of being a Christian) *by the mere fact of being married to a believer in Jesus.*

(2.) **That the unbeliever husband would (as though it is a promise) eventually be inclined to Christianity**, by observing its effects on his wife. Though this could happen, this is not what Paul is talking about because 1) this is far from a promise of future salvation, and 2) children are not holy right now just because one day their father or mother will be saved.

The point here is that even so, in 1 Corinthians 7:14, neither God nor Paul is promising an unbelieving spouse will be saved. But Paul is looking at that prospect; the salvation of the unbelieving spouse.

The 3rd misinterpretation is very similar to the one we just covered.

(3.) **That the unbelieving husband might more easily be sanctified, or become a Christian**, by being married to a Christian wife. As true as this may, or may not be, this cannot be what Paul is talking about because 1) he is speaking of something in the marriage which made their children holy, and 2) he is not using the word “sanctified” as a synonym for “justified” or “being saved.”

Words are always to be taken in their immediate context. If we are going to understand what Paul is saying when he is talking about an “unjustified” person being “sanctified,” then we will need to understand two things: 1) What is the context in these verses, and 2) in what way does he mean “sanctified?”

So, what is the context? The subject under discussion is the question as to whether it is proper for a believer and an unbeliever, to remain married. Paul says they should remain married because the unbelieving spouse is “sanctified” by the believing spouse.

So, here is our 2nd question: In what way is the unbeliever sanctified? In the sense of what happens when a person trusts Christ as their Savior? No.

Paul is talking about sanctification with regard to their marriage, not to their inner man. This is why the subject under discussion (the immediate context) is about whether, when one of them becomes a believer, is it proper for them to continue the marriage, or should the believer leave the unbeliever? In other words, has the union now become unholy in the eyes of God? Is the believer’s marriage now tainted, unclean or forfeit, seeing as how the believer is now joined to an “enemy of God?” Should the believer “come out” from this “unholy” union, just as they came out from the world and its ungodly practices? Again the answer is “No.”

So, the thing we need to do now is to identify the meaning of the sanctification that Paul is referring to in vs. 14, which will help us identify just what he means when he says that the children are holy.