

# The Future-oriented, Hope-filled, Gospel-saturated Covenant of Marriage – *1 Corinthians 7:10-16*

**Introduction** - Marriage is a sexual union between a man and a woman with such powerful intimacy that it must be protected with covenant vows to one another, before God and the society in which it will exist. Those covenant vows declare a union created and defined by God with attendant blessings and curses. We mess with marriage, individually or as a culture, to our great peril. In Christ, we can give ourselves to our marriage vows with great gospel hope. Paul demands clear-headedness to covenant vows while revealing the fertile soil for gospel blessing that is the covenant of marriage.

**Exegetical Tangent** – Some have confused Paul’s language, “not I, but the Lord,” and “I, not the Lord,” (vv10, 12) as though he were claiming that part of this letter is uninspired. But look carefully and you will see that actually he is distinguishing the direct teaching from Jesus (v10, cf. Mark 10:6-10), and inspired apostolic teaching on issues Jesus hadn’t addressed directly (vv12ff).

**To the Married: Stay Married!** (vv10-11) – Paul begins with what Jesus taught, addressing two covenant members, that is, two believers. They are to remain married, and if there is an improper divorce, they must remain unmarried or seek to be reconciled. Of course, this has direct application for our times as well. Many otherwise so-called Bible-believing Christians (and counselors) believe that one can simply come to a point of “irreconcilable differences” in a broken marriage. But this is the whole point of taking public vows before God and men. This covenant bond provides our emotions and actions with the foundation, security and accountability by which we can always reconcile and cultivate that which marriage is intended to provide and declare. Harmony in marriage is not due to natural compatibility (you just happened to marry the right person....or not); it is always the result of Christ-centered sanctification (dying to self, rejoicing always, letting the peace of God guard your heart and mind).

**The Pursuit of Happiness** – Here is where we trip up, showing forth our idolatries. We have no right to marital happiness. We do have the grace and privilege of joy in the Lord, but that is given and commanded amid whatever Providence has brought. This is the wisdom of Job (Job 1:20-21). Whatever trials God brings, He is not wronging us. And in many marriages, the failure to recognize this fosters more and more discontent, bitterness and strife. What we so often fail to see is that God is tearing down our idols and revealing that we refuse to turn to Him and find our pleasures in Him (Matt 6:33, Psalm 16:11).

**Mixed Marriages** (vv12-16) – As the gospel spread in the Gentile world, many times one spouse would be converted, and so here Paul addresses this difficult issue. The Gentile believer had been told to not sleep with a harlot (6:16) but what about with an unbelieving spouse? Christians are not allowed to marry unbelievers (v39, 2 Cor 6:14), but if a Christian is married to an unbeliever, he or she should not separate – at least not on that basis. And here the potential power of the marriage covenant is brought out by Paul.

**Here’s What I Meant by My Sermon Title** – The covenant of marriage places people in a relationship that is future-oriented because it is the place that brings forth the next generations, it is the first human community instructed to take dominion over God’s creation, and it proclaims the union of Christ to His sanctified and being glorified bride. It is hope-filled because following the pattern of Christ’s sacrificial love for His bride, we can look to God to do the same as we fulfill our roles in the marriage covenant. The husband does this as he loves his wife, laying his life down for her (Eph 5:25-28) and the wife does this as she respects and submits to her husband (1 Pet 3:1-2). It is gospel-saturated because all of this is only accomplished by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone in the work of His Holy Spirit through us.

**Holiness is Contagious** – The effect of just one believer in a marriage is that the rest of the family is sanctified. This is an amazing reversal of the New Covenant. Where before, touching a ceremonially unclean thing defiled you (i.e. Hag 2:10-14), we see Jesus touching lepers and infecting them with new life. In the same way, the holiness of the new believer has more potential power upon the unbelieving spouse than the other way around (1 John 4:4). Therefore, “if she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her” (vv12-13).

**Sanctified but not Saved?** – The point is that the unbelieving spouse is made holy in his or her relationship with the believer and the believer will not be defiled. It is not a promise that the unbeliever will be saved, but it does place them in a sphere in which God's transforming power may operate. Nevertheless, "*if the unbeliever departs, let him depart*" (v15), and the believer is not under bondage, which I take to mean that he or she is free to remarry, "*but only in the Lord*" (v39). The question of v16 is ambiguous in the Greek and can be taken pessimistically (referring only to v15) or optimistically (referring to all of vv12-15).

**Transformative Applications** – We have seen unbelievers in mixed marriages come to Christ, but for most of us, we are married to believers. We should argue from this passage, "*how much more...*"

**High View of Grace** – Believe in the power of God at work in you, as you love and obey Him first, to bring transformative blessing to the members of your household.

**Called to Peace** – Everything is broken and in need of repair in this fallen world and it affects every relationship. In the long commitment of a marriage covenant, you are called to peace – and it is the peace of God that guards our hearts and minds, not our hearts and minds that guard God's peace (Phil 4:7). This is the life of faith in what is yet unseen (Heb 11:1).

**Fundamental Loyalties** – A believer's first and fundamental loyalty is to the family of God. If an unbeliever wants to leave the marriage, you stay faithful to Christ; you don't convert back or to something else.

**The Living Gospel** – Out of you shines the light of the good news of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That affects people; that affects relationships. The life in you and in your family spills over to cleanse and purify those around you for you are a chosen vessel of purification to the world. Who knows who might be saved because they came into contact with you?

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## Notes for Little Saints

As children, it is important for you to see now the gift of marriage and family. With very few exceptions, God tells married people to stay married. Sometimes this is hard for a husband and a wife. But one of the reasons they are to stay married is because of you. God made us to grow up in families with a dad and a mom – and we are to protect what God has given us.

It is probably hard for you to understand all that Paul is talking about in the passage this morning. Here is one big idea: God thinks marriage is a big deal and that in a family, in your family, He is going to use the faith of even one person to have a big impact on the other people in that family.

And one application for you is to look to the faith that your father and mother have and to imitate that faith in Jesus – that is going to change you in many wonderful ways in the years ahead.

*"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"* – 1 John 4:4