

# END-TIMES ISSUES

**#119** Commandment #7 – Marriage options (4).

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

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## MARRIAGE OPTIONS

(ACCORDING TO PAUL AND THE REST OF THE BIBLE).

- **Why does it matter?**
  - ✓ Our choices affect not only ourselves, but everyone around us – even future generations. Our choices can even have *eternal* impacts on people, whether good or bad.
- **What we have seen so far:**
  - In 1 Corinthians 5-6, we looked at...
    1. Choices that are not a legitimate option.
    2. The "spiritual" dimension of the Seventh Commandment. (We plan to look more at this in the future.)
  - In 1 Corinthians 7, we looked at (so far)...
    1. Staying single (celibate) vs. marriage; marriage obligations.
    2. Options if one's spouse has died.

### ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ✓ 1. Should people marry, or remain single (i.e., celibate)? (Also: Obligations of those who are married.)
- ✓ 2. Options if one's spouse has died.
- ⇒ 3. Divorce between Christians.
- ⇒ 4. Divorce when one partner is unsaved.
5. Contentment in one's circumstances.
6. Attitude toward life (which will influence the next issue).
7. Marriage considerations for those who are betrothed/engaged.
8. Marriage considerations if one's spouse has died.

The "Foundation Focus"

**We briefly looked at the "Foundation Focus."**  
(as described in 1 Corinthians 7).

- **These two issues explain the reason for the marriage options we are given.** *They must influence our values and actions in all of life!*
  1. **When we choose to follow Jesus, normal Christian life is characterized by trials.** There are also blessings, but in this present life, there will be what we can call "the present distress." This includes not only the typical trials that anyone in the world might experience, but also the persecution *caused* by the world – which hates those who follow Jesus.
  2. **We are also living in the "last days."** Our time in this present world is coming to an end, and the world itself will "pass away" – to be replaced by a *new* earth, after Jesus returns.

This foundation is to influence not only *marriage options*, but *life itself*.

- **In the following verses, we are given TWO types of instructions.**

To the married **I give this command (not I, but the Lord):** ...  
1 Corinthians 7:10a (BSB)

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To the rest **I say this (I, not the Lord):** ...  
1 Corinthians 7:12a (BSB)

Now about virgins, **I have no command from the Lord,** ...  
1 Corinthians 7:25a (BSB)

- ✓ Some people see the above differences, and conclude that they can *ignore* anything that Paul says is "not from the Lord." But this is *not* why God put these verses in Scripture! All Paul is saying is:
  - ↳ Some of the instructions are based on *specific statements* made by Jesus.
  - ↳ Other instructions are applications of basic Christian *principles* that have a broad application to *many* issues. Paul tells us what those specific principles are.

### 3. DIVORCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS – TWO PRINCIPLES.

- **Why raise this question?**
  - ✓ **We previously mentioned that false teachers** were apparently promoting the idea that remaining celibate was "spiritual," whereas marriage wasn't. (This false teaching was being promoted in other churches – see 1 Timothy 4:3.)
  - ✓ **Such a perspective could encourage divorce.** If *not* being married were more "spiritual," then wouldn't it be *good* for married people to separate/divorce, in order to become more "spiritual"?
- **We've already seen that marriage can have value.**
  - ✓ **Both celibacy and marriage have value**, though in different ways.
  - ✓ **People who are married have specific obligations/duties** to fulfil for their spouse.
    - ↳ This includes marital duties that the false teachers would claim were "unspiritual" or "worldly" – thus making marriage a *hindrance* to spirituality!

### HERE ARE THE TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES:

A wife **must not separate** from her husband.  
But if she does, she must **remain unmarried** or else  
**be reconciled** to her husband.

And a husband **must not divorce** his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:10b-11 (BSB)

- **Basic principle #1: *Don't do it!***
  - ✓ This is a basic application of what Jesus said in Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12:
    - ↳ "What God has joined together, let no man separate."
- **Basic principle #2: *If you do it, you have two options: ① Remain unmarried, or ② be reconciled to your spouse!***
  - ↳ Jesus said that marriage after divorce constitutes adultery (except in a Jewish betrothal situation, where *fornication* was committed *prior to* "coming together" sexually).

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### SOME ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS:

A wife **must not separate** from her husband. ...  
And a husband **must not divorce** his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:10b, 11b (BSB)

- **Two different N.T. Greek words are used here to describe the divorce situation:**
  1. **The more "forceful" word**, here translated as "divorce."
    - ↳ ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) – Strong's #863
    - ↳ We could compare it to "pushing away" the other person, "You get out of here!"
  2. **The less "forceful" word**, here translated as "separate."
    - ↳ χωρίζω (chōrizō) – Strong's #5563
    - ↳ We could compare it to "walking away" by one's own choice, "I'm leaving!"

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... **remain unmarried** or else **be reconciled** ...

From 1 Corinthians 7:11a (BSB)

- **Only two options exist, if separation has occurred:**
  - ✓ It's quite possible that the influences of false teachers had already resulted in the breaking-up of some marriages.
  - ✓ Though this instruction is aimed toward the woman, it would probably apply in *both* directions. Most likely, it would be easier to return with a *separation* (which did not require a legal process) than with a *divorce* (which would have been legally documented).
  - ✓ Note that "marry someone else" is not given as an option. That would contradict what Jesus had already said!
- **But what if one's spouse is unsaved, and unwilling to obey Jesus?**
  - ✓ Jesus *did* say that divorces would happen, *because people's hearts were hard – i.e., "spiritually uncircumcised."*
  - ✓ Yet Jesus *did not* address certain issues related to this matter. God left it to the prophets and apostles to explain such things. So, as an apostle, Paul does so.

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### 4. DIVORCE WHEN ONE PARTNER IS UNSAVED - 2 PRINCIPLES.

- **Note that children may be involved.** What will the effect of a divorce have on them? What will the effect of *not* divorcing have?
- **Paul's answer will be based on:**
  - ✓ **Jesus' teaching** that divorce is not permissible, but hard-hearted people will do so, anyway.
  - ✓ **Two basic principles that are relevant to the issue:**
    1. The potential for the Christian to have a positive effect on the others in the family: God calls us to be "salt and light" in the world – Matthew 5:13-16. (This calling is not a *guarantee* that people will respond the way we desire.)
    2. Our obligation to *try* to live at peace with all people.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18 (NIV)

❖ **At no point do Paul's instructions *contradict* Jesus' instructions.**

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### PRINCIPLE #1: YOU ARE NOT TO DIVORCE THE UNSAVED SPOUSE.

To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord):  
If a brother has **an unbelieving wife** and she is willing  
to live with him, **he must not divorce her**.  
And if a woman has **an unbelieving husband** and he  
is willing to live with her, **she must not divorce him**.

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (BSB)

- **Two preliminary observations:**
  - ✓ This part of Paul's answer actually reaffirms what Jesus said. But it's also based on the principle mentioned next verse 14.
  - ✓ This passage uses the more "forceful" word (translated as "divorce"). The Christian is not to take the initiative and "push away" the other person. (The "less-forceful" word will be used later in the passage, describing the situation where the unsaved person chooses to leave – to "walk away." In this case, the Christian is still *not* "pushing them away"!)

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... **an unbelieving wife** ... **he must not divorce her**.  
... **an unbelieving husband** ... **she must not divorce him**.

From 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (BSB)

- **How did they get into such a situation?**
  - ✓ This was a new church; and there were probably many situations in which only *one* family member chose to follow Jesus.
  - ✓ In all likelihood, these marriages were not the result of sin – i.e., the actions of someone who *claims* to be saved, but who deliberately chooses to *defy* God's instructions to not be "unequally yoked." (This sin is quite common today.)
    - ↳ The Jews, who had the Old Testament, would have *already known* this (even though they often ignored it).
    - ↳ Saved Gentiles would need to be *taught* this. Paul would teach the principle in various ways (such as in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1), but he also mentions it in the last verse of this chapter (applied to widows who were considering marriage).

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If ... **an unbelieving wife ... is willing ...**  
 And if ... **an unbelieving husband ... is willing ...**  
 From 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 (BSB)

- **Who decides?**
  - ✓ The saved person is *not* to decide to separate or divorce. It all comes down to whether or not the unsaved person is willing to stay.
- **Why? There are good reasons for you (the follower of Jesus) to stay!**
  - ✓ You're obeying Jesus.
  - ✓ You may have a positive influence on the unsaved person's life.

These people were in this situation because one of them *became* saved. This is different from a situation in which a person who *claims* to be saved chooses to disobey God and marry an unsaved person. When such sin takes place, *maybe* the unsaved spouse will get saved... but statistically, *it rarely happens*.

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For the **unbelieving husband** is **sanctified** through his believing wife, and the **unbelieving wife** is **sanctified** through her believing husband. Otherwise your **children** would be unclean, but now they are **holy**.

1 Corinthians 7:14 (BSB)

- **Word definitions: "Sanctified" and "holy."**
  - ✓ These are basically the same concept. One is a noun, and the other is a verb. "Sanctified" could also be translated as "made holy."
  - ✓ Note that Paul does not claim these people (the unbelieving spouse and the children) are "saved." There is a difference. (See v. 16.)
- **Confusion, caused by the way we understand "holiness."**
  - ✓ Some people think holiness involves following specific "religious rules." Some think it involves performing wonderful "spiritual deeds" that normal people can't do. *Neither of these are accurate!*
  - ✓ Yet even if we *do* have a fairly accurate understanding of this word, we tend to associate it with salvation.
  - ✓ This word also has *other* uses; and verse 14 illustrates one of them. →

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- **How can these unsaved people be "holy"?**

- ✓ This "holiness" concept refers to being "set apart," or placed in a special position or situation. This makes it obviously a useful word, when describing the position that a saved person has in God's sight. However, *it also can be used in other contexts*.
- ✓ In this passage, it does *not* mean the people are "saved." Rather, they have been placed within the influence of *others* who are saved; and this influence will (or at least can) have a positive influence on them – and possibly even lead them to the point that they also want to follow Jesus.
- ✓ It may be helpful to realize that even *objects* can be described as "sanctified" or "holy" – though they are definitely not saved!
- ✓ There are also instances in which people *claimed* to be saved... but eventually turned away from the faith they *claimed* to follow. This shows that their "holiness" was just a matter of being under the influence of others (rather than being the result of a changed heart).

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For the **unbelieving husband** is **sanctified** through his believing wife, and the **unbelieving wife** is **sanctified** through her believing husband. Otherwise your **children** would be unclean, but now they are **holy**.

1 Corinthians 7:14 (BSB)

- **Having a "sanctifying" effect on others...**
  - ✓ Unsaved people can benefit from the influence of followers of Jesus!
  - ✓ Even if they *never* become willing to turn to Jesus, their conduct may be influenced by the saved person. Sinful thinking and conduct, though not eradicated, may be restrained!
    - ↳ This is one of the reasons that atheists have fought so hard to remove *all* Christian influence from *all* areas of life. They *hate* "Christian restraint"!
  - ✓ It would be even more wonderful, if the saved person's influence was eventually used (by God) to lead the unsaved person to salvation. We should pray for this. It's *not guaranteed* that it will happen; but it would be even worse if they *weren't* in the Christian's "sphere of influence" (especially the children).

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**PRINCIPLE #2: THE UNSAVED SPOUSE WILL DECIDE IF HE WANTS TO LEAVE.**

But **if the unbeliever leaves, let him go.**  
 The believing brother or sister is **not bound** in such cases.  
**God has called you to live in peace.**  
 1 Corinthians 7:15 (BSB)

- **The "divorce" word used here.**
  - ✓ This is the "less-forceful" word (= the one used in verse 10). They are choosing to "walk away" from the marriage. You are not "pushing them out" (= the "forceful" word, found in verse 11), because that would be sin, a violation of verses 12-13.
- **Paul is *not* quoting Jesus here.**
  - ✓ As Paul has already said, Jesus did not specifically address this situation. But Jesus (and the rest of Scripture) *does* give us principles that we can legitimately apply to this situation. In this case, the principle is that God has called us to live in peace with others, to whatever degree we are able to do so.
    - ↳ Hopefully, this principle will influence *all* areas of our lives!

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**God has called you to live in peace.**

1 Corinthians 7:15c (BSB)

- **This principle accomplishes two things related to this issue:**
  - 1. It is one of the reasons for not pursuing a divorce** (= not "pushing the unsaved spouse out"), if the spouse is willing to stay.
    - ↳ (The other reason was that your presence could have a positive ("sanctifying") effect on both spouse and children.)
  - 2. It is also the reason you should not fight it, if your spouse is determined to leave** (= "walk out" of) the marriage.
- **Jesus offers *us* peace; perhaps we could say that we are sharing Jesus' peace with them... *regardless of their response!***

**Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you**

John 14:27a (BSB)

But the **fruit of the Spirit is ... peace ...**

Galatians 5:22a (BSB)

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**IN THIS SITUATION, HOW DO WE "LIVE IN PEACE"?**

But if the unbeliever leaves, let him go.  
1 Corinthians 7:15a (BSB)

- If the unbeliever decides to leave, let him.
  - ✓ **What this does NOT mean:** It does not justify the separation or divorce. *It is still sin.* But it is a sin that we are not committing.

The believing brother or sister is **not bound** in such cases.  
1 Corinthians 7:15b (BSB)

- When is a person "bound" to the obligation to avoid divorce?
  - ✓ **As far as our own decisions are concerned:** We are bound to keep the marriage relationship intact.
  - ✓ **As far as the unsaved spouse's decisions are concerned:** We are not responsible for their choices. If they are determined to leave, we should not *encourage* it, but we should accept their "final decision" and not fight them (i.e., we should live at peace with them).

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**"BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?"**

(People tend to get more emotional about the unsaved children, than about the unsaved spouse.)

Should we *fight* to maintain a marriage that the unsaved partner *refuses* to be a part of? Especially if *they* would end up with the children?

- We are going to have to leave it in God's hands.
  - ✓ Yes, it is true that being under the influence of a saved person may have a positive effect on them (as verse 14 says).
  - ✓ But there is no guarantee that, *even if the marriage remained intact*, the spouse or the children would become followers of Jesus.

How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband?  
Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?  
1 Corinthians 7:15b (BSB)

- ✓ This verse focuses on the unsaved spouse, but the same issue would hold true for the children. *We just don't know the future.*

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**CAUTION!**

The believing brother or sister is **not bound** in such cases.  
1 Corinthians 7:15b (BSB)

- Last time, we saw how people have tried to find "permission" in this chapter, to divorce and remarry. This is another such verse.
  - ✓ In this case, they take the words "not bound," and say that it means the person who is being divorced (i.e., the believing brother or sister) is "not bound" to the previous marriage vow, and has permission to remarry. Usually, they connect it with the interpretations they have forced upon verses 8-9 (which we looked at last time).
- They say this in spite of these facts: ① The idea of divorce is not a part of the context of verses 8-9, and ② the only times Paul mentions remarriage is in the context of the *death* of a spouse (not divorce) – see also Romans 7:2-3. They may also ③ connect it with Matthew 5:32/19:9, claiming that the word "fornication" actually means "adultery" – even though: ① Matthew mentions them as *separate* concepts, and ② doing this *forces* a *genuine contradiction* into Scripture, when compared to Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 (which allow for no exceptions).

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**At this point...**

- ✓ **Some may agree** with this evaluation of marriage options (though doing so might, in some cases, cause dismay).
- ✓ **Some may disagree** (either for what they think are legitimate reasons, or because they just don't like what was said).

**BUT LOOKING FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ...**

- ✓ **Many may be wondering**, "How can I live up to such a high standard?" – This is a question we could ask for *all* of the commandments.

PAUL

will focus on this issue next.

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We may have to re-evaluate our attitude toward what "basic Christianity" is all about. Many of our struggles are related to a *false* idea of what a "Christian" is – reinforced by teachings that have "bombed" the church for quite a few years.

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**TODAY'S MISSION:**

**REMEMBER THE BASIC ISSUE.**

Today we looked at an issue that could cause a lot of distress for some. Some may be haunted by past actions. Others may have lots of questions – such as the relationship between their past and present (and perhaps the future). Others may be thinking "none of that affects me!" And many other possibilities.

**The BASIC issue** has to do with our **heart**. Jesus described divorce as being caused by a "hard" (spiritually "uncircumcised") heart. Yet such a heart can affect *any* person, in terms of *any* sin. So, *this issue applies to all of us*. **Ultimately**, have we *repented*? Have we changed our attitude and actions – and even our values? Has "following Jesus" become the desire of our hearts, in all areas of life (not just "religious" ones)?

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**WORD Definition** Near the beginning of this presentation, we mentioned the concept of "**spiritual**" / "**spirituality**" several times, without defining it. This is a word that has been greatly distorted by the world. We need to clearly understand the difference between what the Bible means, and the way the world uses those words.

**Beware the world's distortion of "spirituality."**

**1. HOW THE BIBLE DEFINES THE CONCEPT:**

When Scripture uses the word "spiritual" (or equivalent), it refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's work in a person's life, resulting in visible changes in values and conduct (i.e., how the person relates to others, to creation and to God's purposes in the world.) The focus is on the work of God, and our dependence on the Spirit.

A "spiritual" person is someone whose life has been shaped by the Holy Spirit – because of the work of God in his life (and his willingness to follow the leading of the Spirit). *Only* a Christian can be described this way.

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## 2. HOW THE WORLD DEFINES THE CONCEPT:

In contrast, the world's concept tends to focus on personal values and achievement, mystical feelings about nature, aesthetics, self-chosen religious beliefs, etc. – anything that the human spirit chooses to do. It is self-focused (rather than Holy-Spirit-induced), and is often linked to human activity and techniques.

Today, the concept has become so highly personal and privatized, that even the definition of "spiritual" has come to mean anything the person wants it to mean – anything that (in the person's mind) enhances the sense of "the sacred," promotes personal "wholeness," or gives a feeling of "meaning to life."

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## 3. HISTORICAL INFLUENCES AND INFLUENCE WITHIN THE CHURCH:

Since Scripture tends to be ignored, when developing what "spiritual" means, those with such views tend to be influenced by early Greek philosophies that promote a "matter/spirit dualism." The tendency is to emphasize the non-material (or "spirit") and downplay what is physical.

This "dualistic" type of thinking has often infiltrated Christianity, creating confusion as to what true spirituality actually is. (The church emerged in a world thoroughly shaped by Greek thought. It had to interact with people who had such views, using words influenced by those views. The problem occurred when non-Christian assumptions were – perhaps inadvertently – imported into Christian theology.)

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