

Don't Leave (Part 4)
1 Corinthians 7:12-16

1. Review

a. Foundational Question:

- i. Now that we are Christians, how should we practice our devotion to Christ in our most intimate relationship?
- ii. Should we who are married avoid the pleasures of our sexual relationship in order to be more spiritual and more holy before God?

b. Paul's Response

- i. No! Marriage, the lifelong covenant commitment to exclusive faithfulness between one biological man and one biological woman, is God's ordained context for sexual practice and satisfaction.
- ii. There may be occasions when a wife and husband agree together to abstain for a time in order to focus on spiritual discipline and development but
 - (1) It must be by mutual agreement
 - (2) It must be specifically for spiritual enrichment and prayer
 - (3) It must be for a limited time

c. Paul's Expansion of Application

- i. After providing his initial answer to their question, Paul expands the principle to other potential relational scenarios.
- ii. **Single people:**
 - (1) In regards to the development of personal holiness and spiritual devotion, it is good for single persons to remain single.
 - (2) However, singleness, while it is good, is not required.
- iii. **Widows and Widowers:**
 - (1) if their personal need and desire for intimate companionship is substantial and poses a vulnerability to sexual temptation, they should marry.
 - (2) Don't let sexual need or desire be the foothold the enemy uses to gain access to your life!
- iv. **Married people:**
 - (1) In regards to increasing devotion and spiritual development: **DO NOT DIVORCE!**
 - (2) And if there is some need for a Christian wife to separate from a Christian husband, then reconciliation, not remarriage, is the goal.

2. Another application: Christians married to unbelievers

a. The modified question is now:

- i. How am I, as a Christian, to practice my life devotion to Jesus if I am married to an unbelieving spouse?
- ii. Should I divorce them? (With the idea of removing worldliness from my life)

b. If they are content to stay: DO NOT DIVORCE

- i. The choice is left to the unbelieving spouse.
- ii. **Paul is never going to offer divorce and remarriage as a Christian response**

to the difficulty of marriage.

(1) Divorce denies both God's commands and God's intent for marriage, and Paul will not offer the denial of God's self-revelation as a solution to Christian life dilemmas.

(2) Not even when adultery is involved.

3. Jesus and Divorce: The Exemption Clause

a. Many think that Jesus allowed divorce in the case of adultery. He did not.

i. **Matthew 5:31-32 (ESV)** ³¹ *"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'* ³² *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

b. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus corrects sin-distorted applications of God's principles as outlined in the Law of Moses.

i. "Everyone who divorces his wife. . ."

(1) Easiest for Jewish men to divorce wives with fewer consequences than for a wife her husband.

(a) OT did not regard infidelity by a husband as adultery against

(b) But if a wife committed adultery she was to be stoned

(2) Jesus addresses not only divorce but the ungodly attitude of male privilege and superiority where the role of leader/protector/uplifter had degenerated into a policy of ownership

(3) Jesus elevates women to genuine personhood in the eyes of his Jewish audience and restores them to God's creational equality.

(a) **Genesis 1:27-28 (ESV)** ²⁷ *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* ²⁸ *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

(b) Man = male and female

(c) God blessed them

(d) God gave them a single task together:

(i) fill the earth

(ii) Fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord!

(4) Means

(a) not only can we not treat our wives as property, we Christians, cannot close our eyes to the horrors of **human sex trafficking** which treats women and others as mere property to be bought and sold and used at the hands of others as though they had no real value in and of themselves.

- (b) that we cannot accept or use pornography as a harmless stimulant since this too relegates real people with real lives and eternal souls to mere objects to be consumed for one's personal pleasure.
- ii. "except on the ground of sexual immorality"
 - (1) Sexual immorality within the bonds of marriage is called "adultery."
 - (2) Notice the context:
 - (a) Jesus has just quoted the Law in verse 27, "You shall not commit adultery."
 - (i) **Matthew 5:27-30 (ESV) ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.**
 - (ii) he redefines adultery as not merely an act of the body but as even a thought of the mind or lustful interest of the heart.
 - 1) You shall not commit adultery with your body
 - 2) You shall not commit adultery with your heart
 - (b) By implication:
 - (i) you shall not cause others to be guilty of what you are commanded to not be guilty of.
 - (ii) **You sin when you cause others to sin and it is better to lose a body part than to commit sin that will commit you to hell!**
 - (c) In other words, you may not cause someone else to commit adultery.
 - (3) So, "if a man divorces his wife . . . he makes her commit adultery"
 - (a) A man who divorces his wife is guilty of lawbreaking because he forces her to commit a sin he is commanded not to commit.
 - (b) Except if she is already an adulterer ("except on the ground of sexual immorality")
 - (i) The only time a man who divorces a wife does not cause her to commit adultery is if she is already an adulterer.

- (ii) You cannot make someone something they already are.
 - (4) Jesus is not making an exception, an allowance, or granting permission: he is simply stating the obvious, if a woman is already guilty of adultery she is made an adulterer by her own actions not the actions of her husband in divorce.
 - (a) This passage is not primarily a teaching on divorce as much as a teaching on adultery because adultery is the legal notion Jesus is addressing at this point in the Sermon.
 - (b) There is no exception clause here, there is only the clarification of what guilt is incurred when one divorces.
- iii. “And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Why?
 - (1) Because God does not accept divorce, even when legally accepted, as having the power to dissolve the bond by which he has united a man and woman in marriage.
 - (2) **No act of human law has the power to overrule or undo the will and work of God!**
 - (3) The courts and law and hard hearts of human beings cannot undo what God has done.
- iv. Therefore
 - (1) Therefore, enter into marriage only with great and careful consideration of the lifelong implications of the commitment you are making.
 - (2) Therefore, remain steadfast in your marriage, exulting in the joys and working through the difficulties, counting on God and calling on God to meet the challenges with you.
 - (3) Therefore, honor marriage not as a cheap, easy means for personal satisfaction, but as a God-given privilege to know Him and serve Him as you love selflessly another person just as God has loved you.

4. A necessary perspective: Why does God take such a fervent opposition to divorce and remarriage?

a. What is the point of God’s revelation here?

- i. Is God merely pushing His authoritarian, sovereign agenda onto those unable to withstand Him, a divine tyrant unwilling to understand the complexities and sorrows of complicated human relationships?
- ii. Is God merely baiting our rebellion, pushing us in our brokenness to see how far we will go before we lose heart and abandon faith to fend for ourselves?
- iii. Is God curtailing our freedom, our right to choose for ourselves, our autonomy and independence?
- iv. Or, is God, being Who He is—all grace, all glory, all good, all love, all wise, all righteous, all just—is this God who cannot and will not betray the reality of Who He is in Himself doing something greater, grander, more good and more gracious, and more praiseworthy than we might first

imagine?

b. To know God is eternal life

i. **John 17:3 (ESV) *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***

ii. To know God (to be aware of His self-revelation, own it as true and embrace it as life changing Truth for ourselves)

(1) To cherish God's revelatory purpose in marriage

(2) To maintain His purpose in our marriages

(3) Is a means to know Him and thereby participate more fully in the eternal life granted us through faith in Jesus as revealed in the gospel

iii. Understanding and loving God's perspective and proclamation regarding marriage is gospel work

(1) for it causes us to love and cling more fervently to the One Who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us

(2) For it causes us to love less fervently the sinful, selfish self that needs such salvation and such a Savior in the first place.

c. God's point is not to trap you, limit you, or hurt your feelings.

i. God's point is to release you from enslavement to your own selfishness

ii. God's point is to release you in love into love that will free you to love as you were created and redeemed from sin to love.

iii. **God's point is love of the type and character of God Himself.**