

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

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Introduction: There was correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian Church about which we have no record. Apparently, in a letter which we do not have, the Corinthians had written to Paul asking him to address certain concerns. In Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul begins to answer the questions the Corinthian Elders had addressed to him as an Apostle. The second of these concerns marriage and divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Verses 10-11

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

- “Not I, but the Lord.” Paul is quoting Jesus (see Matthew 5:32, 19:3-9, Mark 10:2-12, and Luke 16:18).
- The rule laid down is that divorce is not allowed. The wife, according to Hebrew law, had no legal right to divorce her husband. The husband, according to Hebrew law, could divorce his wife for any reason. But Jesus said this was not allowed. There should be no divorce among Christians.

Verses 12-16

¹² To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ 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. 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.

¹⁵ But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶ How do you know,

wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

- “I, not the Lord.” Paul is now saying that Jesus did not specifically say what he is about to write. However, we believe that “all scripture is inspired and God breathed” (see 2 Timothy 3:16). When Paul wrote these words, they did not have the weight of Scripture behind him. He thought he was writing a letter to the Corinthians. However, with the passage of time, this letter has been accorded the weight of Scripture.
- The rule here is that if a Christian is married to a person who does not believe in Jesus, they should not seek to leave that person or divorce them for this reason.
- The reason for this is the hope/trust that the believer in the marriage will have positive influence over the unbeliever, perhaps even bringing the unbelieving spouse into a saving relationship with the Savior.
- The children of the union between a believer and a nonbeliever are blessed because of the godly influence of the believing parent.
- If the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the believing one, the believer should not seek to stop him or her.

Verses 17-24

¹⁷ Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. ²⁰ Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. ²¹ Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. ²² For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. ²⁴ Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

- In these verses, Paul addresses the general principle which binds us. “Each person should remain in the situation in which he finds himself,” assuming that this is God’s plan for him. If he was a Jew before coming to Christ, he should not renounce his Judaism. If he was a slave before coming to Christ,

he should not try to renounce that fact. If he was married to an unbeliever, he should not leave the marriage. In every situation, a Christian is committed to honor God above all things and in all things. Circumstances do not change this obligation.

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