

“The Powerful Witness of Changed Lives”

1 Corinthians 7:10-24

2 Pet. 1:3 says

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

“Our knowledge of Him” is the source for needing to live a God-honouring life. Being “called” is one way the Bible refers to our salvation. God works in our hearts through His Spirit by His words in the Bible, whereby we are convicted of our sins, seeing our inability to save ourselves and receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour because He died in our place for our sins. In short order, as we begin to grow we realize that our decision of faith was also God’s calling of us to be saved.

When God saves us is His divine choosing and He does it in the middle of our everyday lives. With this as the context of 1 Cor. 7:10-24, Paul begins to address the Corinthians' questions about whether they should change their situation in life now that God has saved them. I got saved but my spouse isn't – should I leave that marriage? I'm a Jew now a Christian; should I lose my Jewishness and all that's entailed with that life? I'm a Christian now, the adopted child of God but I'm still working at a minimum-wage job, surrounded by godless people. Should I look for another job?

The Bible gives us everything we need for a godly life, but not everything we want. And we want black-and-white answers to our 'but what about my situation' questions. As Paul answers these three questions, he gives biblical guidance as to how to navigate some of life's tricky situations now that we are a disciple of Jesus. Paul's answers are proactive, not reactive. In vv.10-11 he addresses married believers and in vv.12-16 he discusses couples where only one has come to faith in Christ. Instead of giving us a list of reasons to leave that relationship, Paul says

God Desires that Couples Remain Together **Doing Everything Possible to Reconcile** **(7:11-12)**

¹⁰ *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.*

Paul says the Lord spoke to this issue (Matt. 19) and said that Moses made a concession for divorce in Deut. 24 because we are all sinners, and have hard hearts, it's bound to happen. Paul affirms Jesus' stance on this. It's interesting to note Paul says if **she** wants out of the marriage; women could end a marriage as well. Instead of giving us reasons for divorce Paul says God and Jesus don't want to see divorce. God desires marriages not to be broken because the damage has so many ripple effects, and it lasts for the rest of your life. It never goes away. Almost all of us can affirm that since we have experienced the consequences of divorced parents, siblings, friends or even your kids. Both Jesus and Paul admit it happens but the emphasis here is do everything you can to reconcile. He says and affirms he is getting this from Jesus,

A wife must not separate from her husband.

And a husband must not divorce his wife.

In our day separation and divorce do not mean the same thing, but not here. This was written in the Middle East 2000 years ago, not in 21st-century North America. Separate here means to divorce. While there are legitimate reasons for permitting divorce, some Christians divorce for non-biblical reasons. And we don't have time today to explore every scenario. I am just focusing on Paul's words here to do all that you can to reconcile because that's what God commands.

Commands are not suggestions to ignore or loopholes to find excuses (v.11)

This is a command from the Lord. Yet some Christians divorce for the same reasons those outside the church divorce. "We fell out of love; we don't have the same connection we once had". Those are not marriage covenant violations. There are ministries committed to helping couples in these situations. Ellel Ministries has marriage restoration weeks and weekends. Focus on the Family has a Hope Restored Ministry north of Toronto. And there are other options. If you and your spouse need help, and finances are a problem, please talk to me. We want to help you have a strong and lasting marriage.

While Jesus allows for divorce because of sexual immorality it doesn't mean that in the power and grace of God, He can't work and bring reconciliation if it happens. Our God can do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine if we humble ourselves and are willing to obey His Word (Eph. 3:20). Christian couples have sought the Lord, got the counselling they needed and saved their marriages. And this is the grace of God.

Sadly, I've heard spouses use the sexual immorality (which encompasses more than just adultery) clause as a loophole so they can divorce their spouse. 'If he/she ever does that, I'm getting a divorce'; almost hoping they do it so they have an excuse to get out of a marriage they are not willing to work on. 'I won't forgive him/her'. Forgiveness and consequences are not the same. We are commanded to forgive because if we don't we are the ones who get bitter. We're commanded in 1 Pet. 2:1 to

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Bitterness affects all your relationships. It eats away at you. It scars your children and those closest to you. Divorce does happen, and it happens for biblical reasons but Paul is encouraging us to do all we can first to reconcile because

When we pursue reconciliation we model the ministry of Christ (v. 12)

"Be reconciled". This is the heart of God. This is what God is committed to doing with you and me and expects us to do with others.

¹⁵ *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

¹⁶ *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of*

reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Is our reconciliation ministry only restricted to evangelism? Christians need to reconcile with other Christians too. Sometimes it's with your spouse. We are called to love God and our neighbour. To forgive those who hurt us. To accept each other by grace because we're all in Christ saved by grace. We are to regard our spouse as a new creation in Christ. We are committed to the ministry of reconciliation, not counting their sins against us. When we reach out to our spouse in gracious love, we act like the Lord, appealing to them to be reconciled to us because we all need to reconcile with Christ. When we sin – and we do – we need to ask forgiveness of our sins and He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Are we willing to let Christ shine through us and do the same for each other? To forgive their sins and experience cleansing together?

Paul now moves to the situation where one partner has gotten saved and the other has yet to be saved. And then he expands the same principle to your social setting and your work environment. Again, Paul doesn't take a reactive approach – which most of us do about these issues – he takes a proactive approach and states

God Commends Believers Who Persevere in Relationships with the Unsaved (7:13-24)

Notice the repetition:

¹⁷ Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.

²⁰ Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.

²⁴ Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

Why? His underlying thought here is if you change your situation soon after you're saved, how can the people you have lived with worked with and hung around with see the changes in you that God has done? Don't you care about their salvation? Paul doesn't mean staying forever in these situations necessarily as we'll see. Rather, he says don't be rash by chucking your relationships with unsaved people now that you're saved. Stay for a while. Remain in the life situation God has called you to. Remember, God saved you and me at a specific time and place so that the people with whom we were living, working and hanging around will see the change in our lives and be drawn to Christ.

Even if my spouse hasn't accepted Christ yet? Paul says, yes, persevere in your relationship with your unsaved

Spouses who are blessed through you (vv.12-17)

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 him do so. A believing man or woman 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?

¹⁷ Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

When Paul says 'I, not the Lord', it doesn't mean he has less authority. It simply means Jesus never addressed this issue but now Paul is by the leading of the Spirit of God (7:40). Paul is saying there are spiritual benefits for the unsaved spouse and children if there's a believer in the home. When he says they 'sanctified' or 'made holy', he doesn't mean they are saved by osmosis. We are saved by faith and faith alone. What he is saying is that the unbelievers in the house benefit from whatever blessing God gives to the believer. They are witnesses to answered prayers, a changed life, changed habits in life. Before they used to be critical, now far less so. Perhaps they were unwise with their money, now far more so. Friction is reduced because of a less argumentative spirit. Not that new tensions aren't there when the unsaved spouse wants to do something with the children that keeps them away from church; a harsh reality.

But Paul commends the believer to remain married unless the unsaved spouse wants out or has violated the marriage covenant.

¹⁶ How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

The desire for the saved spouse is always to see their partner get saved. If you leave without reason, what kind of witness is that?

Then Paul addresses the Jew and Gentile division, which was a real issue in his day. Again Paul encourages perseverance in your relationships with the unsaved in your

Social setting where you live (vv.18-20)

When we read Acts, we know that Jewish believers initially demanded that Gentile converts be circumcised. But the church met and decided that was no longer necessary. Faith in Christ saves you and faith alone. Circumcision does not make one a member of the covenant. God saves us in real time. What I mean by that is, over time we develop life habits and practices in social and religious settings and develop many friendships in those. Sometimes, when we accept Christ, those relationships are abandoned immediately because we want to be with believers. Understandable. Paul was saying, just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you abandon all your Jewish relationships and connections. Again, won't our changed life communicate a powerful testimony if we're able (if possible) to maintain our life connections in our social setting? Some changes may need to be made obviously. But Paul was encouraging Jews not to abandon their Jewishness nor Gentiles to become something you're not. Hang in there. Help them see the difference Christ makes. Again, don't be rash to change your life now that you're saved. Help them to see you're still a friend, you still share common interests even though you have given your life to Jesus. Use those common connections to build new relationships helping them find Christ.

And the same goes with work. Paul encourages believers to persevere in their relationships with unsaved

Co-workers and employers who need to see Christ modelled in you (vv.21-24)

We need to understand that 'slavery' in Rome was mostly not the slavery of 19th and 20th century North America. One third of the population of Rome were slaves. Many of whom were adopted into the family in which they served. Some slaves were teachers and childcare providers as well as laborers. And you could buy your freedom in time but freedom also meant you were on your own. Slavery meant you had food and lodging, a job and many times a family. So Paul says again, don't be quick to change your station in life now that you are saved. Especially right away. It probably will change in time. But if you think being a Christian makes you better than those you work around, they will soon see our arrogance and want nothing to do with our faith. The goal in all these is to remain in these relationships as God grows you so that those around you will see the power of a changed life.

In vv.20-24 I counted seven times where Paul refers to our salvation as God's calling us. And another reminder that we were bought with a price. We cannot save ourselves; salvation is by the grace of God alone.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We are saved by God's grace but grace doesn't stop there. We are to model God's grace to our family, our unsaved spouses and children, our social network, and co-workers. In our marriages extend God's loving and forgiving grace to our partners who don't always model Christ like we should, so we can grow stronger together and be a powerful testimony of God's grace to those who know us.

Extend God's forgiving and loving grace to our unsaved friends and co-workers so that they too might see the difference Jesus makes, accept Christ and become called of God as we are. 2 Pet. 3:18 commands to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The more knowledge we have about how God calls us and works in our life, the more humbled we should be and extend that to our spouses and the lost around us. *How do you know, wife [husband, brother, friend, teammate, co-worker if you persevere by grace], whether you will save [them]?*

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