

1 Corinthians 7:1-24: Stay in Your Marriage

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1 Corinthians / 1 Corinthians 7:1–24

Introduction

- Luke bigger than me - People tend to make a big deal about it. Not a big accomplishment - I'm only 5'6" - Likewise, we make a big deal out of couples that have been married for years, almost like we are surprised that couples are able to stay married for 50 or 60 years.
- We're shocked that people stay married for 50 or 60 years because the divorce rate in our country is so high. According to the American Psychological Association, 40-50% of first marriages end in divorce. The average age of couples going through a first divorce is 30, and the average length of a first marriage that ends in divorce is 8 years.
- Further, marriage not valued in our culture like it once was. Cohabitation on the rise - According to Pew Research, 59% of all couples cohabitate before marriage. And, people waiting longer to get married. Average age of men for first marriage: 30 years old. Women: 28 years old.
- Our culture has a problem with marriage. However, the Bible shows us that marriage by God's design is beautiful, joyous, fulfilling, and Christ-exalting.
- Simple from this passage: Stay in your marriage. Some marriages in this room struggling for various reasons. Some marriages simply not as healthy as they could be. You long for a healthy marriage. For some, a spouse is ready to walk out the door. Why should you stay in your marriage? How can you stay in your marriage?
- Three ways to stay in your marriage:

Enjoy the gift God has given you.

- [1 Corinthians 7](#) - a strong word to both married people and single people. For Paul, a single man, both marriage and singleness a gift from God. This week, we look at the gift of marriage. Next week, the gift of singleness.
- Sexual sin plagued the church at Corinth. Married men still struggling with finding sexual satisfaction outside. Prevailing attitude of men: sex inside of marriage for procreation. Sex outside of marriage for satisfaction/pleasure.
- vs. 1 - Paul responding to correspondence they already had with him. Sexual sin was rampant in the church and in culture, so apparently a group within the church had an opposite opinion of those in the church that said, "My body, my choice" (dualism). This group chose no sex at all - abstinence - most likely this is people a group of people who are already married choosing to withhold sex from their spouses. This is wrong.
- vs. 2-3 - Sexual intimacy should be a regular part of marriage. From Paul's perspective, regular, mutual sexual intimacy a way to safeguard from sexual immorality. BUT safeguarding marriage about more than sex. What safeguards a marriage is engaging the whole person - an actual relationship with your spouse.
- vs. 4 - To a modern ear, sounds oppressive, but not when you understand God's design for marriage. [Gen. 2:24](#) - In a one-flesh relationship, husband and wives give of themselves to each other - mutual submission and total commitment: I belong to my wife, and she belongs to me. To an ancient ear, this would have been shocking to husbands. Many viewed their wives as belonging to them, but didn't view themselves as belonging to their wives.

- vs. 5 - Do not deprive - sexual intimacy a regular part of marriage. It's abnormal when it's not a regular part of marriage. Times when husbands and wives, in agreement, may abstain to focus on prayer, but come together again quickly because Satan is a tempter who will exploit our lack of self-control.
- vs. 6-9 - Paul takes a turn in his argument. He's a single man, and he sees the advantage of singleness. We have a tendency to think that marriage and sex is the ultimate gift from God. So much so that we tend to idolize marriage and think our lives are not complete unless we are married. But for Paul, singleness is just as much a gift from God as marriage. However, it's not a gift for everyone. (More on this in a couple of weeks.)
- How do you stay in your marriage? Enjoy the gift that God has given you. Enjoy your spouse.
- **Communicate regularly** - You are one flesh. Physical intimacy issues most likely stem from relational issues. If sex engages the whole person, then you must engage the whole person. For some struggling, new communication habits need to form for the physical intimacy to follow. It takes work, and you are conducting your marriage in a fallen world. Don't expect perfection in this area, but do expect progress as you work together to build a healthy marriage.
- **Cultivate intimacy** - What takes your attention off of your spouse? (phone, job, etc.) How can you make you marriage a priority? How can you cultivate more time for each other? Don't beat yourself if you struggle in these areas, but do strive to put in the work.

Engage your marriage with Gospel hope.

- Problem in church: some coming to faith in Christ, but their spouses were not. Question some were asking: "Should I leave my spouse? He/she is not a believer."

- vs. 10-11 “I give this charge (not I, but the Lord). Paul thinking of Jesus’ words about divorce ([Matthew 19:1-10](#), [Mark 10:2-12](#)). Jesus taught only reason for divorce was sexual immorality.
- For Paul, if you are married to an unbeliever, that’s not a reason for divorce. Instead, hold on to hope. Vs. 10 - Apparently some had already separated or divorced their husbands. Maybe some women didn’t see how they could live with their unbelieving husbands. Paul’s instruction: either stay unmarried or go back and reconcile with your husbands. Likewise, a husband should not divorce his wife.
- vs. 12-14 - “I say, not the Lord...” Doesn’t mean that what Paul says is not inspired by God. Rather, Jesus didn’t talk about this in [Matthew 19](#) or [Mark 10](#). If married to an unbeliever (or someone who is not walking well with the Lord), stay in the marriage. By doing so, your husband AND children are made holy. NOT that they are saved because you are saved. Holy = set apart. Husband and children are set apart from the rest of the world by being in a home where they are exposed to the Gospel through the faithful witness of a godly mom or godly dad.
- Don’t underestimate your Gospel influence over your spouse or your children. Doesn’t guarantee they will come to faith, but much better for them to be under your influence than the influence of an unbeliever. If you leave your spouse just because your spouse is not a follower of Jesus you drastically reduce your spouse’s exposure to the Gospel.
- vs. 15-16 - If your unbelieving spouse chooses to separate from you, let it be so. You are not enslaved to your marriage if your unbelieving spouse chooses to divorce you. This is a case of abandonment. Let your spouse go. You are free to remarry. However, if your spouse stays, who knows? God might use you to bring your spouse to salvation.
- Paul’s instruction is clear: stay in your marriage even when it’s hard, and it will be hard. Only acceptable reason for divorce is adultery, or abandonment based on Paul’s words here, or abuse, which is an

abandonment of the wedding vows. If you are in danger of physical harm get out.

- Some of you relate to what Paul says. You have a spouse who is not a believer. Or, you have a spouse that is very immature in the faith. It's a struggle. Perhaps you think life would be easier if you weren't married to your spouse. You dream about being free from your spouse and finding someone who is on the same page with you theologically.
- If your marriage is struggling because your spouse is not following Jesus, how do you engage your marriage with Gospel hope?
- **Realize that there is purpose.** Your marriage may be hard, but God knows. Just because it is hard doesn't mean that there's no purpose. God knows how He is using you in the life of your spouse.
- **See the impact you are making.** Especially if you have children - they are seeing a parent who is committed to the Lord and to his/her spouse. You're bringing your children to church. They see your commitment. They're hearing the Gospel. Your faithfulness to your spouse and children will drastically affect their lives.
- **Get support.** You're in a tough spot in your marriage. Get support. Surround yourself with people who will pray with you and encourage. Get Christian counseling if necessary. Have someone you can talk to that will help you to persevere.
- **Trust that God's grace is sufficient.** Truth is that your marriage may never be what you want it to be. You may never have the marriage of your dreams. You should pray for that and pursue it. However, if you never have the marriage you want, you always have something better: God Himself.

Embrace where God has you.

- vs. 17 - Live the life assigned to you and called you to. God knows where you are. You may not be able to change your circumstances. They are ordained by God, but you can change the way you live in the circumstances.
- Circumcised? Can't change that... Uncircumcised? Don't change that. That's not the mark of your salvation. Keeping the commands of God is the mark of salvation (vs. 19). Live for God whatever your circumstances.
- vs. 20 - Instead of being so quick to want to change your circumstances, embrace where God has you. To slaves: if you can gain freedom, great, but if not, embrace where God has you. God is at work through you even in unpleasant circumstances.
- Single? Married? Wherever God has you, embrace it. In God's time, He may change your circumstances.
- vs. 23 - Don't make yourself a bondservant. In a culture where people voluntarily went into slavery to pay off debt, Paul discourages it.
- Paul's point: Embrace the life God has given you now. Live for God in your present circumstances more than you long for your circumstances to change.
- This is good advice for whatever situation you find yourself, but especially your marriage. How can you embrace the life that God has given you right now instead of being overly focused on getting out of your circumstances?
- **Don't look around as much as you look up.** Quit comparing your marriage/life circumstances to others. You are where God has you. Look to Him and ask Him to help you and sustain you in your present circumstances.

- **See opportunity more than you see opposition.** You may feel like your spouse is against you, or that the world is against you. Maybe you feel like God is against you. He's not. He is for you, and He's sovereign over your circumstances. What you see as opposition, God sees as an opportunity for you to live on His mission for His glory.
- **Desire holiness if you really want happiness.** For some, you just want to be happy. However, real happiness and joy comes when you deeply abide in Christ and live out His will. Your circumstances might be difficult, but that doesn't mean you can't possess joy.
- [Hebrews 12:2](#): Jesus embraced His circumstances: a life of suffering and death for the joy set before Him. Jesus found joy in accomplishing the will of the Father - coming to this earth to die in your place and rise again from the dead for your salvation. This morning, find your joy in a relationship with Him. Repent of your sins and turn to Him by faith.