

## **The Vow: Part Two**

*1 Corinthians 7:10-17*

**1. Believers' marriage.**

- *1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Matthew 5:32, 19:9; Mark 10:11-12;  
Luke 16:18; 2 Corinthians 6:14*

**2. Contented mixed marriage.**

- *1 Corinthians 7:12-13*

**3. Discontented mixed marriage.**

- *1 Corinthians 7:15*

**4. Consecrated marriage.**

- *2 Peter 3:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 7:14, 16;  
Galatians 5:22; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 9:22*

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



## The Vow: Part 2

All of us have heard of the great physicist and genius, Albert Einstein, who lived in the late 1800's and the first half of the 1900s. He is considered to be one of the greatest and most influential physicists of all time. Einstein is best known for developing the theory of relativity, but he also made important contributions to the development of the theory of quantum mechanics.<sup>1</sup> I'd tell you more about him, but I don't even understand what I just told you! Einstein is widely revered and respected to this day, and probably for generations to come.

What most people don't know is that there is a collection of Einstein's letters written in 1914 that were auctioned off in 1996, and contained in those letters is a list of expectations that Einstein had for his wife, Maliva Maric. Some of the things the list includes are: daily laundry "kept in good order," "three meals regularly *in my room*," a desk maintained neatly "*for my use only*," and the demand that she quit talking or leave the room "if I request it." Guess what happened? The marriage ended in divorce. No surprise there; Einstein may have been a physics genius, but he was a marriage failure. Hopefully we can do better.

We are on the second of our four-Sunday series called, "The Vow," learning about marriage from stories and instruction found in Scripture. Now, I know: if you are single, you are probably rolling your eyes right now, because you think I'm going to suggest you should be married. But before you decide to stop listening, please hear me say this: if you stay with me, you will learn faith and relational principles that apply to your life and relationships, married or not. And, if you do get married, well, this series will be helpful to you at that point, too.

For those of us who are married, I want to encourage you not only to take good notes, but also to consider attending our marriage conference at the end of the month. You heard the announcements about it, and you can go to the Ministry Center to learn more and sign up, or contact us in the church office. I think we've got over 15 couples already signed up. You'll want to do it soon, because the deadline to sign up is coming up.

Let's just admit that marriage is hard, isn't it? You may have started out your marriage optimistically starry-eyed and love-struck, but it is hard work – especially these days when there are so many demands and distractions – even for Christian marriages.

Last week we looked at the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, and were challenged to step out in faith and make Christ the center of our marriages. Today I want us to look at a passage of Scripture found in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. As I said already, marriage is hard, even for Christian couples. But it can be even more challenging when one person in the marriage is a Christian and the other is not. It is a big enough issue that it is addressed in the New Testament.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Einstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Einstein)

As a Christian, a person's entire life is devoted completely to Christ; everything he or she does, says, and thinks is based on their relationship with Christ and their identity in Christ. Do you agree? Of course, that is not the same priority and identity for someone who is not a Christian. There are significant differences in life priorities between a Christian and a non-Christian, right? So what do we do in a marriage where one person is a Christian and the other is not? Maintaining that kind of marriage is enough of a challenge that the Apostle Paul wrote on the issue in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Let's look at the passage:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): 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.

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. 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. 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.

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

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. (1 Corinthians 7:10-17, niv)

Phew. Okay – there are some challenging statements in that passage. Is the Bible really saying that it is okay to divorce? Or that you have to stay with a non-believer no matter how bad things get? We're going to take some time to understand this, and as we do, it can actually serve to *strengthen* your marriage – whether both of you are believers or only one of you is.

There are several types of marriages that Paul addresses in this passage, starting with the...

### 1. ***Believers'*** marriage.

In the marriage between a husband and a wife where both are believers in Jesus, Paul speaks with authority from God, because he quotes directly from the teachings of Jesus Himself. Let me just remind you what Paul says:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): 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 7:10-11, niv)

Paul can say this with confidence because he knows what Jesus had to say about it. In Matthew 5:32 and again in Matthew 19:9, Jesus said:

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery...I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32, 19:9, niv)

Jesus also said:

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18, niv)

These are very hard statements, especially these days when divorce is so common. But believe it or not, the culture was worse in Corinth in the first century than it is today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Divorce, adultery, and all the problems and aberrations of marriages were more rampant then even today.

This might lead you to ask the question, “Is there any other instance, then, besides adultery, that it is appropriate to get divorced?” That is a very good question that deserves an entire sermon to answer. I’ll have to save it for another time. But for today, we are simply trying to answer the question about an unbelieving spouse, and I’m giving you this first point to put the answer in context. The point of this first one is that a married couple, when both are believers in Jesus, should be so devoted to loving and serving each other that divorce is never an option. Does divorce happen in Christian marriages? Yes. Should they? No – not when both are fully devoted to Jesus and fully loving and serving each other.

That stands to reason, doesn’t it? If two people are completely devoted to Christ first, they are going to do what Christ tells them to do. And we know that Christ tells them to be humble and to give honor and preference toward each other. That means they are not going to mistreat or disrespect each other or cheat on each other. So divorce isn’t even in the picture; it is not an option for fully devoted followers of Jesus.

But also the Scripture describes what to do in a relationship in which, *after* two unbelievers have gotten married, one of them becomes a Christian. In Paul’s mind, it would have been unthinkable for a believer in Jesus to knowingly get married to an unbeliever; after all, how could they be married when they have two totally different world views, two totally different loyalties, two totally different identities. Paul addresses this issue in his second letter to the same church:

Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14, gnt)

The problem was though, from that line of thinking, people were then drawing a wrong conclusion. They assumed that if a believer and unbeliever should not *get* married, then if after a couple gets married and one of them becomes a believer, then they should not *stay* married. They should get divorced. But Paul also knows that that line of thinking is not in line with Christ’s commands.

Still, when one person in the marriage had become a Christian and the other one was not, it caused problems. In society at that time, Christians were accused of breaking up marriages and families and were blamed for a whole host of problems in Corinthian and Roman societies. Christians were actually charged with breaking the law by “tampering with

domestic relationships.” There is record from the first century, for example, that husbands were mad because their Christian wives were spending more time with the poor, the needy, and with other believers than they were with their husbands, leaving the husbands to do the domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, and housekeeping. There was a great deal of tension in homes when one spouse became a Christian and the other did not.

Are you following all of this so far? Stay with me – this will all come together soon. So then, Paul addresses a second state of marriage, and that is a...

## 2. ***Contented*** mixed marriage.

In the case of this and the next kind of marriage that we’re going to look at, Paul is not quoting directly from Jesus or the Old Testament, so he is speaking from his authority as an Apostle, and his enlightened, Holy Spirit led understanding of Scripture (which is why this letter is part of our New Testament Scripture. So even though it wasn’t Scripture *yet* for Paul’s readers, it soon became part of the New Testament Scriptures). You can see this in what Paul says next:

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. 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. (1 Corinthians 7:12-13, niv)

This means that in the situation when one person in the marriage is a believer and the other is not, but they are both committed to each other in the marriage, then by all means they should stay married.

Paul is correcting the wrong thinking that said that, once one person in the marriage has become a Christian, then that person should divorce the non-believer. Nowhere does Scripture even hint that this would be a good idea. But Scripture *does* tell us clearly that the sanctity of marriage must be preserved, because God created marriage, and it can still be a good thing even if the people in it are not believers. But in this passage, Paul is stating clearly what the believer’s commitment to the marriage should be. Got that? Even in the case of a marriage when neither spouses are Christians, God wants their marriage to be healthy and life-giving, as best as it can be, without Christ, anyway. There are *still* relational ground rules and blessings that God has put in place for marriages, even if they aren’t Christians. So this is especially true for the believer.

Still, Paul knows that there is the possibility of a state in which the believer and the unbeliever are married, but they are in a...

## 3. ***Discontented*** mixed marriage.

In this case, Paul gives some interesting instructions:

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. (1 Corinthians 7:15, niv)

This is a very interesting statement, because it gives a condition in which divorce is

acceptable. But pay close attention to who it is who leaves the marriage – who does the leaving – the believer or the non-believer? The Bible is still not giving the believer permission to divorce the non-believer; but if the non-believer chooses to leave, the believer should honor their decision and let them go. Do you follow that?

Now here's the reason that Paul says it's okay to allow the unbeliever to leave: because God has called us to live in peace. His point is that, if the believer were to try to force the unbeliever to stay with him or her, there would be no peace in the home. Things would turn really bad, especially if there are kids involved. So, Paul says, let the unbeliever leave if that is what they are determined to do. *You* don't leave, but you can't keep them from leaving.

The only conditions that the Bible tells us are appropriate for divorce are in the case of adultery (and only then when there is no possibility of reconciliation), and when the unbeliever chooses to leave – and again, only if there is no possibility for reconciliation. I would also add that there is a solid case from the wisdom of Scripture that if there is abuse or domestic violence, the spouse should never submit herself or himself to that – especially when there are children involved. So please, don't ever think that I or the Scriptures are telling you that you have to remain under the same roof with a violent or abusive spouse. We'll talk more about that in another message.

But the point is this: when you have a choice about divorce, God says, "Don't!" God says so, and interestingly enough, so does a study by the University of Chicago. It showed couples that stay in an unhappy marriage and endure it are more likely be happy five years later than those who decide to divorce. The study noted that even if no work is done on the marriage, ongoing problems were often viewed with a new perspective over time. And when both spouses worked on the marriage, many problems were solved, and communication improved. Finally, if only one spouse worked on the marriage, *even then* there was improved happiness, at least for the one spouse working on it – even if the marriage itself was mediocre. In another study, Linda Waite, a professor in sociology, showed that divorce does not make unhappily married people any happier. She and five colleagues analyzed data from the University of Wisconsin's National Survey of Family and Households. When the adults who said they were unhappily married were interviewed again five years later, those who had divorced were on average still unhappy or even *less* happy, while those who stayed in their marriages on average had moved past the bad times and were at a happier stage.<sup>2</sup> Staying married pays off, eventually, in most cases.

Now, in the middle of that passage that we read, there is another interesting motivation for staying married, and in fact it is the *primary reason*, Paul says. Paul is talking about the...

#### 4. **Consecrated marriage.**

Paul makes a statement that even the Apostle Peter admitted is hard to understand – Peter wrote about this in his second letter:

Some of his (*Paul's*) comments are hard to understand, and those who are

---

<sup>2</sup> Linda Waite, Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially* Doubleday, 2000

ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture. And this will result in their destruction. (2 Peter 3:16, nlt)

Yes, this is a bit tricky to understand, so let's make sure we don't miss it or twist it, because it is the key to this whole thing about marriages where one is a believer and the other is not. Ready? The believer in Jesus is to live wholeheartedly, totally committed to and submitted to Jesus Christ. Yes? In fact, in the beginning of Paul's letter he calls believers:

"Those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy..." (1 Corinthians 1:2, niv)

What does *that* mean? To be sanctified means to be totally committed to Christ, set apart to Christ for his purposes entirely. And, it means that the believer has the Holy Spirit filling them, making them holy, or like Jesus, in everything they do. So in this passage that we are looking at, Paul says that in a mixed marriage, the presence of the sanctified believer actually sanctifies the *unbeliever*. Look at what he writes and then we'll figure it out:

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...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 7:14, 16, niv)

So let me explain: Paul is *not* saying that the unbeliever is saved or is like Jesus through some kind of spiritual osmosis from the believing spouse. He is not saying that living with the believer automatically makes the unbeliever a Christian. Have I confused you yet?

When Paul is using the word "sanctified" or "consecrated" in reference to the unbeliever, he's using it in a ceremonial sense, not an ethical, moral, or spiritual sense. So, for example, if a piece of meat is offered in Old Testament sacrificial worship, the meat isn't suddenly holy; it's still just meat. But it is being ceremonially sanctified – set apart – in worship. To be sanctified or consecrated means to be set apart. So what Paul is saying is that, if you are a believer, and your spouse is not, then your spouse, and even your children, are set apart to get a "front row seat" to see how the grace of God can transform a life, and how the Holy Spirit can change a heart to be one that loves everyone – even unbelievers, and even their enemies. The unbeliever gets to see, up close and personal, in the believer's life, what a Christian is, moment by moment, day by day, in good times and stressful times and bad times. In other words, if you are a believer and your spouse is not, as you live for Christ and love your spouse and family in unconditional ways, even forgiving them (whether they ask for it or not) – you are showing them Christ. Your life is a demonstration of the fruit, or the result of the Holy Spirit in your life – something that no unbeliever has. The Bible says that the fruit, or the evidence of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life is:

"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22, niv)

The unbeliever will see the character and nature of Christ *in your life*. They will see that Christianity is true and real.

Listen to me now: there ought to be something infectious about a sanctified Christian's life, for those who come into contact with it. A spouse who is married to a Christian, and a child

that is born into a Christian home – even if only one parent is a Christian – are set apart for an eye-witness experience that other unbelievers don't get to see. Some Christians wrongly think that if they are around non-Christians that they are made unholy – it's the opposite! The unholy gets set apart by the holy! You don't become unclean around them, but they sure get the chance to become clean around you! The unbelieving spouse – or the unbelieving friend – is brought into contact with a grace-filled, Christ-filled, Spirit-filled life. It doesn't mean a believer should marry an unbeliever. But the believer can set apart the unbeliever – especially if it's a spouse – to see God's love in action 24/7!

And not only that, the unbelieving spouse and children are now loved not just by you, but by the family of God – the church! That's you and me! The unbeliever gets to see how Christians love each other, and they benefit from being loved that way too. Jesus said:

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”  
(John 13:35, niv)

That means – church – that if someone in this church is married to an unbeliever, *you don't judge them, you don't condemn them, you don't bad mouth or gossip about them. You love and accept that unbeliever as if they were your own Christian brother, sister, or child.* I don't care HOW sinful they are – I don't care if they are atheist or agnostic, it doesn't matter how they behave. YOU love and accept them as if they were the best Christian you know. By doing that, you are potentially saving a marriage, and even potentially helping in saving someone from eternity in hell apart from God forever. That's exactly why Paul said:

“Don't you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you?  
And don't you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?” (1 Corinthians 7:16, nlt)

If you are married to an unbeliever, you are facing the same situations that believers in the very first church faced. Scripture is encouraging you! You face an amazing opportunity to live out the life of Christ in a very special way – for your spouse and family.

And if you are single, this applies to your relationships with unbelievers, too. Your friendship and love is giving them a front row seat to see how Christ can change your life. To Paul, this was THE most important task that every believer has – whether married or not. Paul said:

“So that by all possible means I might save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:22, niv)

Got it? Your marriage matters, and there's more at stake here than happiness.

So take a moment and identify your marriage according to these instructions from the Bible. Is yours a believers' marriage? Are you both sanctified Christians, fully submitted to Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and loving and serving each other? If you are Christians and it is not like that, you've got some prayer and changing to do.

Or is your marriage a contented but mixed marriage? Is one of you a believer and one is not, but you still love and serve each other? Or, be honest, is your marriage a discontented mixed marriage – one of you is a believer, but the marriage is not healthy and committed? And which one in these marriages are you? If you would say you are a Christian in the marriage, whether your spouse is a Christian or not: are you totally submitted to Christ?



Have you surrendered to Him and allowed His Holy Spirit to fill you? Here's a clue: if you find yourself wanting to win arguments, it's not the Holy Spirit that is leading your life. If you are getting irritated in the marriage or arguing over petty stuff, it's not the Holy Spirit leading your life. You may call yourself a Christian, but you need to surrender to Christ and the Holy Spirit and start loving and serving your spouse. Whether your spouse is a believer or not, you are responsible for your own response to Christ. Start praying about that now!

If you are single, are you submitted to Christ? Are you letting the Holy Spirit lead your life? Whether you ever get married or not, you are living below the quality of life God intends for you. Your relationships will never be what God wills and wants them to be if YOU are not submitted to Christ. You need to pray.

While they are praying and working things out with God, let's talk about you. If you are not a believer in Jesus, why not? You are willfully missing out on the abundant life and marriage that God has for you. Maybe your spouse hasn't been the best example of a Christian for you...so what? Quit making excuses. I don't care if your spouse is Atila the Hun. The only person keeping you from being a Christian is YOU. I'll say it again, your life and marriage will never be what God wants and wills for you, in all of his abundance and blessing. Not to mention that you will spend eternity in hell, apart from God and his love, and apart your Christian spouse, I might add. You need to start talking to God about this. Quit making excuses.

Let's take a few moments, I'm going to stop talking, and I'm going to let you pray and talk to God about this.

*Allow a few moments*

Let's all help each other pray by repeating after me, would you? And if you need it, you mean it. Let's pray together after me:

God,

I need you to save me from my sins

Make me brand new.

My life is no longer my own.

I surrender my life to you.

I don't want to live for myself

I want to live for you.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit

That I may be like Christ

In my life

In my relationships

In my marriage.

Give me faith to always follow you

Thank you for new life

Thank you for Spirit filled life

I give you all my life

In Jesus' name I pray

Amen.

Now listen: whether you are married or not: if you are a Christian, your job in ALL of your relationships is to give people a front row seat to see how God can change a life. You are to be an example to *every* person in your life. As a Christian, your priority is to introduce people to Jesus, and the best way to do that is to let them see Christ in you. You can NEVER go wrong, married or not, if you live your life as a showcase for Christ. In that way, every relationship is consecrated, and you are setting people apart for Christ!

*Pastor Jason:*

*May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. (Romans 15:5-7, nlt)*