



Conducted by
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“Please explain 1st Corinthians 7:14, ‘For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her (believing) husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy’”.

To understand 1 Cor. 7:14, one must first look at the entire 7th chapter. In other words, the verse needs to be seen in proper context. That 7th chapter of 1st Corinthians presents us with a concise summary of Christian teaching on marriage, especially as it applied to the various groups which existed within the Church at Corinth.

It is evident that the Corinthians themselves had raised the subject of marriage in their communication with Paul and had asked, not one question, but a series of questions. Now, we all know what happens when a topic is raised in group-discussion! The consideration of one aspect of the subject leads to another, and, quite quickly, other issues rise to the surface! This is what happens in this chapter.

In this case, however, Paul does not attempt to give exhaustive answers to the queries posed by his brethren in Corinth. As we see when we read the entire chapter, his replies are relatively concise and, for convenience, made by summaries in the following sections.

1. In vv. 1-7, he lays down the principle that **marriage is both right and proper**, and

that it brings **mutual responsibilities**.

2. In vv. 8-9, he turns his attention to the situation of the **unmarried believers and the widows in the Church**.
3. Then, in vv. 10-11, he addresses **married believers** - (i.e., believers who are married to believers) - on the matter of **divorce and separation**,
4. In vv. 12-16, he turns his attention "to others" who are faced with the **problem of being married to pagans, or 'unbelievers'**.
5. Next, in vv. 17-24, he lays down a principle which amounts to this; **"Live the life of a Christian in whatever circumstances you find yourself, and in whatever circumstances God found you!"** (And notice that he says that this is the rule in *all* the Churches.)
6. There follows, in vv. 25-28, a long section for **"unmarried ones"; i.e. single believers**.
7. Finally, in vv. 39-40 we have a concluding statement in which he **re-emphasises the permanent nature of the married relationship**.

Look at the verse 14.

In verses 10-11, Paul refers his readers to teaching already given by the Lord Himself, found in Matt. 5:31-32 and Mark 10:2-12, etc. This means that he does not deal with the general and fundamental grounds for divorce. Instead, in verses 12-16, he deals with a problem which *could not have arisen* during the Lord's earthly ministry, but only after the Christian dispensation had begun, and he deals with it on the basis of his apostolic authority; that is, his authority to speak in the name of Christ and for Christ.

He discusses the case of **one who has become a Christian, but now finds himself/herself married to someone who is still a pagan**. (Remember we are discussing the contents of a letter sent to the Church surrounded by the pagan city of Corinth.)

The question which has evidently been put to the apostle is this; **Ought a person - a Christian - to divorce the non-Christian partner?**

The verse to which we refer gives Paul's inspired, apostolic answer.

Speaking on behalf of the Lord and, remember, with apostolic authority, he says that the believing partner should *not* forsake the unbelieving partner. He realises that, if a Christian had the right to 'leave' - i.e., 'divorce' - a marriage-partner, solely on the grounds that he or she is *not* a Christian, there could well be a tremendous influx of unconverted people into the Church because of this possibility of easy divorce! Therefore, the principle he lays down is, that if anyone leaves, it must not be the believer! If the relationship is broken and the marriage abandoned, the break must come from the pagan - not from the Christian (v13).

Furthermore, Paul obviously realises that there is always the possibility that the *pagan* may not wish to remain married to the Christian and decide to leave, and in such circumstances there is little that the Christian can do (v.15).

However, if the two are able to live together, they should by all means do so, because, as Paul implies, the situation is never completely hopeless. There is always the possibility that the unbelieving partner may be won for Christ by the Christian's behaviour (v.16).

This is precisely what Peter says in 1st Peter 3:1-3.

Now let's take a closer look at the verse which has caused problems; v. 14, and notice two things which Paul is *not* teaching!

1. **He does not say that the unbelieving husband is *saved* because of the faith of**

his wife. He says that the husband is '*consecrated*', which means '*is made acceptable*', and is referring to the Old Testament principle, laid down in Exodus 29:37, of 'consecration by association', which states that "*Whatever touches the altar shall become holy*".

Such was the sanctity of the altar that if anything came into contact with it, that thing was deemed acceptable and fit for service.

Paul makes this point because it is evident that there were those in Corinth who were arguing that, for a Christian wife to remain married to a partner who was still a pagan, affected her holiness; claiming that she was, in some way, contaminated by the relationship.

He declares, therefore, that the Christian wife is not defiled, or made unclean, by her association with her unbelieving husband, because to think that would be to say that uncleanness is more powerful than holiness. It would imply that the husband's paganism is more powerful than the wife's holy Christian life. And that cannot be true. On the contrary, their relationship will benefit from the grace of God which the wife has experienced and which is revealed in her manner of life.

2. **Nor does the relationship between a partner who has become a Christian and a pagan partner affect the legitimacy of their offspring**, as would be the case if the marriage was considered invalid (v. 14). In the eyes of God, any child born to that marriage will be perfectly legitimate.
3. Notice, again, that he is *not* saying that the child is saved, or regarded as a Christian, because of the faith of the mother. **The passage says nothing about the salvation of either father or child**, for that is not the issue here. The question is merely one of **legitimacy**.
4. And, remember, also, that **this is the case of one who has become a Christian, but whose partner is a pagan**.

It does *not* justify a Christian deliberately choosing to marry 'an unbeliever'. We see that, when writing about the widows here in Corinth, Paul makes it plain that a Christian widow is free to marry again, '*but only in the Lord*' (v. 39).

According to the teaching of this passage, therefore, it is clearly wrong, for a Christian to *choose deliberately and wilfully* to become "*yoked together with an unbeliever*" in marriage.

Of course, it may be reasonably argued that this applies to *more* than the marriage relationship - a fact which is frequently ignored. But it certainly does apply to marriage. Read 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18.

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NO ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

In one of the largest Australian newspapers we read this interesting item recently:

"*The End* - My attention has been drawn to this advertisement by a car manufacturer: 'The car I now bring out is pretty close to finality. I do not believe that a car materially better will ever be built.' The year of the advertisement was 1912!"