



**his wife.”** If understood in this sense, both elements of this passage are exactly what Jesus taught—**“what God has joined together let not man separate”** (Matt. 19:6).

### Conclusion

Jesus taught only one “cause” for which a mate can “put away” his or her spouse—**“fornication”** (i.e. sexual immorality)—as taught in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9. This does not only concern the “cause” for which one may “put away” a spouse and lawfully remarry. In Matthew 19 Jesus is responding to a question about the proper “cause” of “putting away”—not just remarriage. Jesus commands man not to separate **“what God has joined together”** (Matt. 19:6), which Mark records as the climax of His answer to the Pharisees, with no reference to the exception clause (Mark 10:9). Scripture does address circumstances under which separations for a time for spiritual reasons may be acceptable (cf. Matt. 19:29; 1 Cor. 7:5). These could include personal protection, protection of one’s children, or even situations in which responsibilities towards God are compromised by any failure to separate temporarily. Even in such cases, however, while Scripture offers no specific time that limits how long such a separation can occur, the ultimate goal must be reconciliation and a return back to one’s spouse when the initial cause of the separation is resolved.



**of fornication”** (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). To act otherwise would risk *causing* a wife to commit adultery (cf. Matt. 5:32). Whether 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 describes action committed against a woman (i.e. she was “put away” against her will) or immoral action on the part of her husband that compelled her to be separated from him (i.e. she “put away” an immoral husband), both would accurately satisfy the passive sense. We should note that the instruction to the man at the end of 1 Corinthians 7:11 is not in the passive, but in the active voice—**“a husband is not to divorce** [active infinitive of *aphiemi*]

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ISSUE

16.5

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

February 2,  
2014



## Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM  
10:20 AM  
6:00 PM  
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

### Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Jeff Nunn  
Kyle Pope

### Deacons:

Dean Bowers  
Eddie Cook  
Steve Dixon  
Jack Langley  
Neil Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Lance Purcell  
Rusty Scott

### Evangelists:

Kyle Pope  
Andrew Dow

## The Meaning of “Is Not to Depart”

By Kyle Pope

Jesus’ teachings on the permanence of marriage are some of the most revolutionary elements of the gospel. When He commands, **“what God has joined together, let not man separate”** (Matt. 19:6), Jesus makes it clear that Deity intends for man to honor the covenant of marriage **“as long as he lives”** (cf. Rom. 7:2). In spite of this, some have argued that Paul’s words to the Corinthians offer a different alternative. He wrote to these brethren:

**Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife** (1 Cor. 7:10-11, NKJV).

Is Paul teaching here that a wife who no longer desires to live with a husband (regardless of the reason) can **“depart”** so long as she stays **“unmarried”**? If so, why does Paul say, **“I command, yet not I but the Lord”**? The gospels never record Jesus offering such an allowance.

The answer to this seeming contradiction rests in a nuance of the wording here that is lost in most translations. In this study we will contend that a more literal rendering of this passage would command that **“a wife is not to BE SEPARATED from her husband”** (emphasis mine) going on to offer a course of conduct **“even if she HAS BEEN SEPARATED”** (emphasis mine). In other words, Paul is not strictly addressing actions a

woman takes on her own, but circumstances imposed upon her. We will see that this not only accurately translates the original text, and harmonizes with the context and practice of ancient culture, but it also matches perfectly what the Lord taught while upon the earth.

### Contextual Evidence

We should first consider what Paul means by writing, “**Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord**” (7:10a). In one sense all things that Paul taught were “**the commandments of the Lord**” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37). In chapter seven, however, Paul contrasts things the Lord said while on earth (7:10) with things concerning which the Lord had given no previous

revelation (7:12). This is what he means in the verses that follow when he writes, “**But to the rest I, not the Lord, say**” (7:12a). Paul was not giving uninspired opinion—Jesus had not specifically addressed anything about the marriage of believers to non-believers while on earth. On that question, Paul will proclaim the Lord’s revelation on that matter to the Corinthians. In our text, however, Jesus had taught husbands and wives not to divorce. This is why Paul says “**yet not I but the Lord.**”

### Historical Evidence

In both the biblical and secular historical record there is evidence that women generally did not have the right to “put away” their husbands. We see this in the Law of Moses, which only granted to the man the right to “send away” his wife giving her a “**certificate of divorce**” (Deut. 24:1-4). There were examples in history of women “putting away” their husbands but this was not the ordinary practice. As late as the first century we have evidence that the Jews understood Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in this sense. The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that Herodias “confounded the laws” when she put away Philip in order to marry Herod Antipas (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.4). This is likely (at least part of) what John the Baptist meant in telling Herod “**it is not lawful for you to have her**” (Matt. 14:4). Even before this, Josephus records that Salome, the sister of Herod the Great, followed “the law of her authority” by doing the same thing, explaining to the reader, “with us it is lawful for a husband to do so” but the wife could not (*Antiquities of the Jews* 15.7.10). This is also reflected in the numerous ancient wedding contracts and certificates of divorce that have been preserved from ancient Jewish and Gentile sources. In the ancient world marriage and divorce were things that were viewed as being *done to* a woman, not generally what she did for herself.

### Grammatical Evidence

Finally, we must note some grammatical or linguistic evidence. We usually avoid technical analysis of Greek

grammar in Bible study because it can be confusing and misused by those who twist passages to say what they want them to say. In this case, however, some close investigation is helpful. First, we should note that the base form of the verb used in 1 Corinthians 7:10 translated “**depart**” is the Greek word *chorizo* meaning, “to separate, divide, part” (Thayer). This is the same verb Jesus used in Matthew 19:6 in commanding, “**what God has joined together let not man separate** (*chorizeto*).” In Jesus’ command, the verb is in what is identified as an active imperative form. An *imperative* is a command. Man is commanded not to *separate*.

**The Use of Different Voices.** In Greek, as in English, verbs can assume different forms known as *voices*. The voice of a verb refers to its relationship to its subject. For example, if I say “I *hit* the ball” the subject “I” is the one performing the action of the verb. “I” am the one doing the hitting. This is what is called the *active voice*. If I say, “I *am hit*,” no longer am “I” the one carrying out the action of the verb, rather I am the one receiving the action of the verb. This is called the *passive voice*. Greek also had a third voice called the *middle*. English can only express this with some type of reflexive pronoun. For example, if I said, “I *hit myself*” (or “I *hit for myself*”) the subject “I” performs the action of the verb, but also accepts (in some sense) the action of the verb. This is what would be classified in Greek as the *middle voice*, and identified by the specific form a verb takes.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 the form of the verb *chorizo* is in the passive voice in both verses. In Greek, some verb tenses have the same form in the passive or middle voice, but not in the tense used in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Why then do most translations put this “**a wife is not to depart**” (MIDDLE) rather than “**a wife is not to be separated**” (PASSIVE)? Because most assume that because he goes on to command the man “**a husband is not to divorce his wife**” (7:11b), he

must be addressing action the wife takes of her own choice. Harold K. Moulton, for example in his *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, properly identifies this form as a *passive* but claims it has a “middle significance” (441). *Is that necessarily the case?*

**A Second Century Example.** In the second century an early Christian writer named Justin wrote about a Christian woman who was married to an unbeliever who lived an immoral life. After bearing with him for a long time she finally chose to put him away because of his wickedness. When she did so, Justin (writing in Greek) used the same passive form of *chorizo* recording that “she was separated (*chorizo*) from him” giving him what the Romans called a “bill of repudiation,” i.e. a certificate of divorce (Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 2). Now in this example, she did take action for herself, but it was the man’s behavior that compelled her to do so. This would match exactly what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Jesus had taught that his people were not to divorce except for the “**cause**

