

Shayla: In what way does a believer sanctify their spouse?

1 Corinthians 7:13-15 HCSB Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he is willing to live with her, she must not leave her husband. (14) For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the Christian husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. (15) But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to peace.

Midrash:

Paul commands believers to not marry unbelievers.

- **2 Corinthians 6:14-15 HCSB** Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? (15) What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

In this he agrees with the prophet Amos.

- **Amos 3:3 HCSB** Can two walk together without agreeing to meet?

In this we see a continuation of God's plan for separation of His holy people from the unholy as it was described in the Old Covenant.

- **Ezra 10:10 HCSB** Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful by marrying foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt.

And yet there is a difference between the Old Covenant and the New in this regards. In the Old, a person who had married a goy and later wanted to be right with God had to put away the goy (if they would not also convert).

- **Ezra 10:11 HCSB** Therefore, make a confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will. Separate yourselves from the surrounding peoples and *your* foreign wives."

The reason was that ritual impurity was still a matter of concern under the Old Covenant's halakhic terms. Under the New Covenant, the ritual (ceremonial) aspects of Halakha¹ are maleh². For example, we do not need to be overly concerned about ritual observation of dietary laws or holy days.

- **Romans 14:2-5 HCSB** One person believes he may eat anything, but one who is weak eats only vegetables. (3) One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat; and one who does not eat must not criticize one who does, because God has accepted him. (4) Who are you to criticize another's household slave? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And stand he will! For the Lord is able to make him stand. (5) One person considers one day to be above another day. Someone else considers every day to be the same. Each one must be fully convinced in his own mind.

For further exploration of what is and is not maleh, see the Maleh Filters. It is with this mindset that Paul says what he does. Whereas before the coming of the Messiah, it would have been required to leave a goyish spouse, the believer is not similarly obligated for their salvation extends a type of grace to their spouse and children. The Law of Freedom (James 1:25; 2:12) gives them the liberty to stay with their family and hopefully to lead them to their own personal relationship with the Lord. To better understand this grace it might be helpful to see it work in the negative sense.

¹ Biblical Law

² fulfilled and no longer required though not necessarily forbidden

- **Matthew 5:32 HCSB** But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
- **1 Corinthians 6:15-16 HCSB** Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? So should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Absolutely not! (16) Do you not know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For it says, **The two will become one flesh.**

The sins of the wicked always bear consequences and when two are joined in marriage those consequences may unfairly converge on the life of the faithful spouse. This is why Jesus made an allowance for divorce in the case of infidelity. The circumstances that allow for divorce and remarriage are an entirely different study that I will not get into here but what I want you to focus on is that as the grace of a Christian may flow to some extent to the unbeliever, so the sin of the unbeliever can at times and in a limited way flow in the other direction. Notice that in both cases the flow is limited. As all of the responsibility of sin does not spill over onto the faithful spouse but merely some of the consequences, so not all of the grace flows to the unbeliever but only some of its benefits.

No one can apply their salvation to another. Each of us dies for our own sins. Each of us lives for our decisions concerning God and righteousness.

- **Proverbs 14:32 HCSB** The wicked are thrown down by their own sin, but the righteous have a refuge when they die.
- **Ezekiel 18:20 HCSB** The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him.
- **Galatians 6:4-5 HCSB** But each person should examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting in himself alone, and not in respect to someone else. (5) For each person will have to carry his own load.

So, we should use this grace to live a sweet testimony before the unbelieving spouse so that they may hopefully take advantage of their increased exposure to the Gospel, both spoken and modeled. If they should reject that testimony, even all their lives, we should not use that as an excuse to divorce them. However, should they reject not only the Gospel but the believing spouse, and abandon them – then the believer is free of their vow and free to remarry.