

#3

#4

#2

#1

Background:

As counselors, we began to face more and more situations in which we had to try to determine when a spouse had fallen into the place where he or she was “not pleased to live with” the other spouse as the Apostle Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. For the longest time, this determination was based exclusively on the location of one of the spouses, i.e one spouse physically left the house. However, as we counseled more and more couples, it became very apparent that there were times when one spouse was not pleased to live with the other spouse, yet they also had no intention of leaving the physical home that the married couple shared. This presented a new problem for us to deal with, namely, how are we going to respond to a spouse who is no longer pleased to live with his or her spouse and yet that same spouse refuses to file divorce papers AND will not leave the home. We came to the conclusion that this spouse could either *explicitly* state that they are not pleased to live with their spouse through a direct statement, or they could *implicitly* state that they were no longer pleased to live with their spouse by intentionally refusing to fulfill any of their marital vows. In either case, this 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 condition would need to be confirmed by the elder board and not one or two counselors.

Understanding the Diagram:

* **The Home** – This is the physical dwelling place of both the husband, wife, and children (if the couple has children).
* **The Circle** – This represents the marital covenant that was made before God and witnesses on the day of their wedding. While it may include the specific promises that were made during the ceremony, it definitely includes all of the biblical mandates that are given to husbands and wives with regard to caring for one another.
* **#1** – This number represents the spouse that is outside the home and outside of the marital covenant. He or she has decided to cease fulfilling any and all of the biblical mandates of being a husband or a wife. Usually, this person has moved all of their belongings out of the house and has made it known through their words and/or actions that they are not coming back. In this case, the elders would declare that the spouse in position #1 is not pleased to live with the other spouse; therefore, the spouse who has remained faithful should let the unbeliever go.[[1]](#footnote-1) A divorce would be biblical in such a case.
* **#2** – This number represents the spouse that is outside of the home but is still inside the marital covenant. Those who might fall into this category would be: soldiers on deployment, criminals in jail, illegal immigrants who have been deported, missionaries, as well as others. In this case, while the one spouse is not living in the home, he or she is still committed to the promises made during the marriage ceremony. In this case, regardless of a profession of faith or not, the elders would declare that the spouse in position #2 is pleased to live with his or her spouse. A divorce would not be biblically in such a case.
* **#3** – This number represents the spouse that is inside the physical residence and is faithful to the marital vows given during the marriage ceremony. This is the ideal biblical situation. In this case, regardless of a profession of faith or not, the elders would declare that the spouse in position #3 is pleased to live with his or her spouse. A divorce would not be biblical in such a case.
* **#4 –** This number represents the spouse that is inside the physical residence but is not faithful to the marital vows that were given during the marriage ceremony. He or she has decided to cease fulfilling any and all of the biblical mandates of being a husband or a wife AND they have decided that they are NOT going to move out of the home. This person has made it known through their words and/or actions that they are not going to follow Scripture and are not moving out of the physical residence. Once given sufficient evidence, the elders would declare that the spouse in position #4 is not pleased to live with the other spouse; therefore, the faithful spouse should let the unbeliever go. A divorce would be biblical in such a case.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. It should be noted that the fruit of the spouse who left are evidence that salvation does not exist. This lack of fruit, then, becomes the evidence that the spouse who left is an unbeliever. There have been some cases where the spouse who left had made a verbal confession of faith. That verbal confession became a stumbling block when trying to apply 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The elders have the responsibility for this declaration as stated in Matthew 18:18-20. This declaration would be reserved for extreme situations of unrepentant sexual immorality and abuse. Marriages that are difficult or disappointing would NOT be considered examples of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)