

**Author of Good, To Thee We Come***James Merrick (1720–1769)*

Author of Good, to thee we come;  
 Thy ever wakeful eye  
 Alone can all our wants discern,  
 Thy hand alone supply.

O let thy fear within us dwell,  
 Thy love our footsteps guide;  
 That love shall vainer love expel;  
 That fear, all fears beside.

And since, by error's force subdued,  
 Too oft the stubborn will  
 Mistaken shuns the latent good,  
 And grasps the specious ill;

Not to our wish, but to our want,  
 Do thou thy gifts apply;  
 Unask'd, what good thou knowest, grant;  
 What ill, tho' ask'd, deny.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ***In the Nick of Time***I, Not the Lord***Kevin T. Bauder*

The Bible's claim for itself is that all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16–17) and that Scripture originated in men of God being carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21). These words imply that inspiration extends to the words of Scripture (verbal inspiration) as well as to Scripture in all its parts (plenary inspiration) as originally written. Whatever the Bible affirms, God affirms, and God can neither deceive nor make mistakes. Consequently, Scripture is inerrant.

The objection has been raised, however, that some verses in the Bible disavow their own inspiration. One of these passages is supposed to be 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12. The contrast between these two verses is noteworthy. In verse 10, Paul states that the commandment that he is about to issue does not come from him, but from the Lord. In verse 12, however, he specifically says that in the following verses *he* is speaking, but *not* the Lord. Is Paul suggesting that part of his message is divinely inspired, but part of it is just his own good advice? Is he disavowing the inspiration of what he writes from verse 12 onward?

The answer to this question lies in the overall context of Paul's argument. The believers at Corinth had evidently written to Paul, asking for his instruction about certain matters. Before answering their questions, Paul took advantage of the opportunity to offer a series of admonitions and instructions concerning issues that he saw within the Corinthian congregation. Only at 1 Corinthians 7:1 did he begin to respond to the questions from the church.

The first of those questions involved the value of singleness and the mutual duties between husbands and wives within the marriage relationship (7:1–9). The second question involved the permissibility of divorce and marital separation, particularly in a situation where a believer was married to an unbelieving spouse. The question that Paul was answering probably did not envision believers deliberately marrying unbelievers, but more likely addressed the problems that would arise when one marriage partner came to Christ but the other did not.



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.  
 Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu  
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Paul's answer to this question is divided into two parts. The first part lays out general instruction concerning divorces and separations (7:10–11). The second part addresses specifically the question of how a believer who is in a mixed marriage should behave (7:12–16).

For the first part of his answer (dealing with divorce and separation), Paul did not really say anything new. He surely recognized that the Scriptures already addressed this situation in unambiguous terms. The Old Testament clearly declared that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). Furthermore, this was a question that Jesus had personally answered on multiple occasions during His earthly ministry (Matt 5:21; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18). According to Jesus, even the Old Testament procedure for divorce (Deut 24:1–4) was only a concession to the hardness of human hearts.

When introducing this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul used the formula, "I command, yet not I, but the Lord" (7:10). What he was doing was drawing attention to the fact that divorce and remarriage *in general* was already a matter of settled teaching. Paul did not have to command anything new. All he had to do was to point to the teachings of Jesus, "the Lord." These teachings were sufficient to decide the issue. Leaving aside the possibility of exceptions (as in Matthew's version of Jesus' teaching, "except for sexual immorality"), the general rule could be summarized as "no divorce, no remarriage."

Nevertheless, the general teaching of Jesus on divorce and separation did not fully anticipate the situation in which the Corinthians now found themselves. In at least some instances, one spouse in a marriage had believed on Christ, while the other had not. Furthermore, in at least some of these cases, the unbelieving spouse was overtly hostile to the gospel, perhaps to the point of forbidding the believer to fulfill Christian duties. This was the real question for the Corinthians. This was the real problem that they needed to solve.

Here Paul could not quote a specific teaching that Jesus ("the Lord") had offered during His earthly ministry. But that did not prevent Paul from articulating an answer. On the contrary, he offered a very specific answer, the gist of which was that the believing spouse must remain with the unbeliever as long as the unbeliever was willing to allow it (7:12–13). In this way the believer could have a sanctifying influence both upon the unbeliever and upon any children born to the union (7:14, 16). Nevertheless, if the unbeliever abandoned the believing spouse, the believer was not obligated to pursue the unbeliever (7:15).

In these verses Paul was speaking new truth into a new situation. In doing so, he made it clear that his message was not part of Jesus's earthly teaching but was being delivered from Paul in his apostolic capacity (7:12). Even though the answer was not directly from Jesus, it was nevertheless authori-

tative. Paul was issuing commands, and he expected his readers to obey what he wrote.

In other words, the apostle Paul was putting his own teaching on the same level of authority as the teaching of Jesus. In effect he was saying, "Here is what Jesus taught; now do this. And here is what I teach; do this too." Far from minimizing the authority of his words, Paul is maximizing that authority.

Paul's answer in 1 Corinthians 7:12–16 stands as part of Scripture. Even though it is not based on the earthly words of Jesus, it is nevertheless God-breathed. When Paul wrote it, he was being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Verse 12 does not disavow the inspiration of the text. All it does is to distinguish the earthly words of Jesus from the words of the apostles who were His representatives. Clearly, however, the scriptural words of the apostles are as divinely inspired and authoritative as the words of Jesus Himself.



---

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---