

A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION
OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

by

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PREFACE

The writer of this paper believes that every man who intends to serve God in "full time" Christian service needs to take a definite stand on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage; for he will be asked to give advice in such matters. This particular verse was brought to my attention while taking the Christian Home and Family class given by Dr. Paul Fick. It was in this course that God's blueprint for marriage was illustrated. However, this verse gave me some problems. At first it seemed to teach that a Christian could remarry after divorce, and this didn't harmonize with the blueprint which had been given.

PREFACE

After careful examination of the Greek text and other related material the writer arrived at a clearer understanding of the verse. Acknowledgment is made of the great help received from the above sources. The help of Dr. James L. Boyer has been greatly appreciated. The help that my wife offered was invaluable. Her assistance in the typing and many suggestions were extremely helpful to me.

The writer would like to thank the manuscript committee for granting permission to write on this verse. It has helped me to solidify my own thinking on a very important subject so relevant for today.

The basic objective of the writer has been to find the meaning of the verse for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and to find its application for present day believers.

Unless otherwise indicated all Scripture references are from the Revised King James Version, New Scofield Reference Edition.

PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce is shaking the very foundations of the home today. Many Christians and non-Christians alike are looking on with alarm at this problem. The increase in divorce, together with the ignorance, the misinformation and the differences in opinion which presently exist among Christians have added much confusion to the situation.

Basically, within Christianity, there are three schools of thought on the subject of divorce. (1) We have those who believe a Christian has the right to divorce and re-marry. (2) We have those who believe that the Christian has the right to divorce but not to re-marry. (3) We have those who believe the Christian has no Scriptural right to divorce.

INTRODUCTION

The big problem facing us today is the fact that everyone of these schools of thought have their claims on the Word of God. This adds to the confusion.

The verse under consideration in this pamphlet will, by the various interpretations given to it, fit into any one of these three schools of thought. However, we need to look at the whole Bible and see which interpretation given to 1 Corinthians 7:10 is Scripturally consistent with God's total revelation, and our view of it.

It is the opinion of this writer that God's Word has something definite to say to the believer who desires to divorce and re-marry.

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is shaking the very foundations of the home today. Many homes, Christian and non-christian alike, are having to face this problem of divorce. The increase in divorces, together with the ignorance, the misinformation and the differences in opinions which presently exist among Christians have added much confusion to the situation.

Basically, within Christendom, there are three schools of thought on the subject of divorce. (1) We have those who believe a Christian has the right to divorce and remarry; (2) We have those who believe that the Christian has the right to divorce but not to remarry; (3) We have those who believe the Christian has no Scriptural right to divorce.

The big problem facing us today is the fact that everyone of these schools of thought base their claims on the Word of God. This only adds to the confusion.

The verse under consideration in this monograph could, by the various interpretations given to it, fit under any one of these three schools of thought. However, we need to look at the whole Bible and see which interpretation given to 1 Corinthians 7:15 is Biblically consistent with God's total revelation, and not part of it.

It is the opinion of this writer that God's Word has something definite to say to the believer with regard to divorce and remarriage.

GREEK TEXT

ROMANS 1:15

ἐγὼ οὖν ὡς ἔχω χάρις καὶ ἐξουσία
 τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
 καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς
 ἡμῶν, πάντας τοὺς ἑθνικοὺς
 ἐν εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ
 ἀναγγεῖλαι θέλω, ὥστε ἡ
 ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν
 ὡς ἐν ἑθνεσίν, ὡς ἐν ἑσέτι
 ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν ἑσέτι
 ὡς ἐν ἑσέτι.

GREEK TEXT

GREEK TEXT

1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω.
οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ
ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις· ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ
κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός.¹

ENGLISH VERSIONS

¹Kurt Aland and others, ed., The Greek New Testament, United Bible Societies (Stuttgart: Wurttemberg Bible Society, 1968), p. 592.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

1 Corinthians 7:15

King James Version

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace.

American Standard Version, 1901

If the unbelieving departeth, let him depart; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in

New American Standard Version, 1960

But if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to

ENGLISH VERSIONS

Contemporary Translation by Montgomery

But if the unbelieving partner be determined to leave, separation is required. In such cases the believing husband or wife is not under bondage. Live into peace that God has called us.

Revised Standard Version, 1952

But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to

The J. B. Phillips Translation, 1958

But if the unbelieving partner decides to separate, then let there be separation. The Christian partner need not consider himself bound in such a case. Yet God has called us to live in peace.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

1 Corinthians 7:15

King James Version

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace.

American Standard Version, 1901

Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace.

New American Standard Version, 1960

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Centenary Translation by Montgomery

But if the unbelieving partner be determined to leave, separation let it be. In such cases the believing husband or wife is not under bondage. But it is into peace that God has called us.

Revised Standard Version, 1952

But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace.

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Major Problem: Do the words "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart," give a cause for divorce and remarriage?

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CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

The city of Corinth was a major center of commerce and transportation.

It was the only city in the region that had a harbor and a connection to the Aegean Sea. It was also the only city in the region that had a connection to the Adriatic Sea.¹

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CONTEXT OF I CORINTHIANS 7:15

Historical Background of Corinth

Corinth a city of Greece, was located on the narrow neck of land between the Corinthian Gulf and the Saronic Gulf. Because of its location the land traffic between the peninsula and the mainland was obliged to pass through the town. Also, because of this much of the commerce between Asia and the west was brought to its harbors. Dr. James L. Boyer had this to say concerning the location of Corinth:

Its location made it a natural center of commerce and transportation. It had two ports, Cenchrea six miles to the east on the Aegean Sea (Rom. 16:1), and Lechaenum a little over two miles straight north, a port on the Corinthian Gulf which opened westward to the Adriatic Sea.¹

The Phoenician settlers were early attracted to the city of Corinth. It was they who introduced many profitable manufactures and established the impure worship of the Phoenician deities. Also it was they who probably changed the name of the city to Corinth.

Dr. Merrill C. Tenney points out the fact that during the Roman times Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury and immorality. He stated "It had no rivals as a city of vice. 'To live like a Corinthian' meant to live a life of profligacy and debauchery."²

Corinth, at the height of its power, probably had a free population of 200,000 plus a half million slaves. Its residents consisted of Romans,

¹James L. Boyer, For A World Like Ours, Studies in I Corinthians (Winona Lake: Brethren Missionary Herald Books, 1971), p. 13.

²Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 183.

who were descendants of the Roman colonists who had settled there in 46 B.C., a large Greek population, and many others of different nationalities who had been attracted to the city. It was in this last group that we find a considerable body of Jews and some Gentiles who had been brought under the influence of Judaism.

The city to which Paul came to preach the gospel was a very cosmopolitan place. It was an important city. It was intellectually alert. It was materially prosperous. And it was morally corrupt. One writer pointed out the fact that it was the evil side of Corinth that induced Paul to preach there. A city so corrupt needed the purifying influence of the gospel. However, it was also stated that the overriding consideration was the city's geographical situation. Leon Morris stated it this way:

It was a centre from which the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding districts. There was a large floating population. Merchants and travellers would stay a few days and be on their way. Anything preached in Corinth could be sure of a wide dissemination.¹

Paul's first visit to Corinth is recorded for us in Acts 18. Here we learn that it was on his second missionary journey that Paul visited the city. At his first arrival he became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, who were Christians and like Paul tent makers.

It was Paul's custom on every Sabbath to preach in the synagogue. Before long, however, he met with strong opposition from the Jews. Because of this, he turned from them and for the rest of his stay in Corinth he preached to the Gentiles. As a result of Paul's preaching many turned to Christ. After Paul's departure, Apollos continued the work. Paul later sent letters to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:9). The Corinthian church was

¹Leon Morris, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Vol. 7 of the Tyndale Bible Commentaries, New Testament Series, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 17.

made up of some Jews, but mostly Gentiles. Most of the converts were from a lower class of society, probably slaves and craftsmen. There were a few men of prominence and some of the converts had even come from lives of gross immorality.

Paul's next contact with the Corinthian church was made with certain Corinthians. The household of Chloe brought him news of cliques in the church (1 Cor. 1:11). An official letter was sent to him from the church (1 Cor. 7:1), seeking his advice on problems they were having in the church.

Biblical Background

The immediate occasion of the Epistle was the letter which Paul had received from the Corinthian church. Paul sought to answer their questions; questions about marriage and celibacy, about food offered to idols, and probably about public worship and spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church had difficulties and Paul wrote to resolve those difficulties.

It is evident that Paul penned the Epistle because of several important reasons. The most obvious purpose was to answer the questions the Corinthians had addressed to him concerning problems in their church (1 Cor. 7:1; cf. 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). These problems, in one form or another, are still prevalent today.

One of the biggest problems of the Corinthian church was its views of marriage. Many were advocating various views concerning marriage.

Because of certain statements made by Paul in this chapter, gross misunderstandings have arisen. Some have pictured Paul as being a narrow ascetic, a warped and twisted man who hated women and despised marriage. Such a conclusion is unwarranted. Two facts need to be kept clearly in mind as we look at this chapter and particularly verse 15. First, Paul

is not dealing with the subject of marriage in general, but is specifically answering questions which had been addressed to him. These questions pertained to local problems with which we are not thoroughly familiar at the present time. Secondly, it must further be considered that the instructions Paul gives in this chapter were in the light of special conditions existing at that time and place. It is in this context that 1 Corinthians 7:15 must be understood if it is to be understood correctly.

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

There are six principal passages of Scripture in the New Testament from which any theory of marriage and/or divorce can be formulated. The passages are: 1. by our Lord Himself, Matthew 19:31, 32; 19:3-12; 2. by the Lord Jesus Christ, as spoken by the Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Ephesians 5:31-32. Four of these passages make no mention of divorce, while the other two appear to make such an allowance. The following is a summary and contrast of these six cardinal passages of New Testament teaching on marriage and divorce.

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

By Our Lord

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery. (Mt. 19:1-12)

The following observations were made by the writer concerning the above passage:

- (1) The book of Matthew was written with the Jewish reader in mind.
- (2) The passage is part of what is called the Sermon on the Mount which is Christ's teaching concerning the Kingdom He offered to the Jewish nation.
- (3) Christ, while mentioning the writing of divorcement, referred to the law of Moses which had been given to them under the law of Moses. (Deut. 24:1-4)
- (4) Adultery is the consequence of divorce. (Mt. 19:32)

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

There are six cardinal passages of Scripture in the New Testament upon which any treatment of marriage and/or divorce can be formulated: those passages spoken by the Lord Himself, Matthew 5:31,32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18; and those spoken by the Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 7:15 and Romans 7:1-3. Four of these passages make no mention of an allowance for divorce while the other two appear to make such an allowance. The following is a comparison and contrast of these six cardinal passages of New Testament Scripture.

Those Spoken By Our Lord

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement; But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Mt. 5:31,32)

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- (3) Christ, when He mentioned the writing of divorcement, referred to a bill of divorcement which had been given to them under the Law of Moses. (Deut. 24:1-4)
- (4) Adultery is the consequence of divorce. (Mt. 5:32)

- (5) Marriage to a divorced person constitutes adultery. (Mt. 5:32) No
- (6) Three schools of thought and practice existed in Israel concerning the above verses:
- a. The "Old School" believed and practiced divorce according to the letter of the law - only on the grounds of the sin of fornication. (Deut. 24:1-4)
 - b. The Shammai School believed that adultery committed in the established marriage relation was a grounds for divorce and remarriage.
 - c. The Hillel School believed that divorce could be obtained for any cause whatsoever.
- (7) Christ, in His answer to the Pharisees, gave the statute of divorce its true interpretation and proper design; namely, that divorce under the law is strictly limited to one cause - fornication. No

The Pharisees also came unto Him, testing Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female; And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they (two) shall be one flesh? Wherefore, they are no more (two), but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, (permitted) you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery. (Mt. 19:3-9)

The following observations were made by the writer concerning the above passage:

- (1) The book of Matthew was written to the Jews presenting Jesus as the Messiah - King of Israel.
- (2) The passage was directed to the Pharisees who had asked Jesus a question. It was in answer to their question. (Mt. 19:3, ff.)
- (3) Christ, when he mentioned the writing of divorcement, referred to a bill of divorcement which had been given to them under the Law of Moses. (Deut. 24:1-4)
- (4) The bill of divorcement had been given because of the hardness of the hearts of the people. (Mt. 19:8)

- (5) Christ reminded them that God's original intention of marriage was one man and one woman. (Mt. 19:4-6; Gen. 1:27; 2:24; 5:2) Monogamy is God's standard.
- (6) Adultery is the consequence of divorce. (Mt. 19:9)
- (7) Marriage to a divorced person constitutes adultery. (Mt. 19:9)

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? (testing) him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses (permitted) a man to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept; But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they (two) shall be one flesh' so then they are no more (two), but one flesh. What, therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. (Mark 10:2-12)

The following observations were made by the writer concerning the above passage:

- (1) Mark's Gospel was written to Gentiles.
- (2) The passage was directed to the Pharisees who had asked Jesus a question about divorce. (Mk. 10:2)
- (3) Christ, when he mentioned the writing of divorcement, referred to a bill of divorcement which had been given to them under the Law of Moses. (Mk. 10:4; Deut. 24:1-4)
- (4) The bill of divorcement had been given because of the hard hearts of the people. (Mk. 10:5)
- (5) God's original intention of marriage was one man and one woman. (Mk. 10:6-8; Gen. 1:27; 2:24; 5:2) Monogamy is God's standard.
- (6) Adultery is the consequence of divorce. (Mk. 10:11)
- (7) Marriage to a divorced person constitutes adultery. (Mk. 10:11,12)
- (8) Mark does not mention the exception clause found in Matthew 5:31,32; 19:3-9)

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery. (Luke 16:18)

The following observations were made by the writer concerning the above passage:

- (1) Luke's Gospel was written to a Gentile by the name of Theophilus. (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1)
- (2) The exception clause which is found in Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, is not included in Luke's writing.
- (3) Adultery is a consequence of divorce. (Luke 16:18)
- (4) Marriage to a divorced person constitutes adultery. (Luke 16:18)

Having looked at these four passages spoken by the Lord Himself there are several things that stand out. They are as follows:

- (1) God's original constitution and design of marriage was one man and one woman, to be dissolved only by death. (Mt. 9:5,6; Gen. 1:27; 2:18, 21-24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39).
- (2) Under the Law of Moses, divorce was permitted because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, and was not part of God's original plan. (Mt. 9:8,9; Gen. 2:18, 21-24)
- (3) The bill of divorcement does not apply to the church today but to those under the Law of Moses.
- (4) Adultery is the consequence of divorce.
- (5) Marriage to a divorced person constitutes adultery.

W. Fisher-Hunter in his work The Divorce Problem listed nine reasons why Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not apply to the Christian. They are both interesting and provocative. They are as follows:

- (1) Because the concession of divorce was given by Moses, and he never legislated for the church...
- (2) Because the Mosaic statute of divorce is properly only suitable and tenable to marriage as practiced by the Jews in ancient days...
- (3) Because 'hardness of heart' is associated with the giving of divorce...

- (4) Because the privilege of divorce given by Moses and restated and properly interpreted by the Lord Jesus belonged only to the male sex... *No - Mark*
- (5) Because the term 'fornication' does not mean adultery but rather premarital unchastity... *No*
- (6) Because Mark when recording the second utterance of the Lord (Mark 10:3-9) omits the words which permit divorce for the cause of fornication. (Mt. 19:9)... *No*
- (7) Because Paul the Apostle when writing to the church at Corinth on matters pertaining to divorce never used the words of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, but rather did he quote the Lord's command which prohibited divorce. (1 Cor. 7:10,11)... *No*
- (8) Because for a Christian to base his authority to divorce on Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is to cause contention, create confusion and make void other parts of Scripture that deal with divorce and which are at complete variance with the Matthew passage... *No*
- (9) My final reason for denying the Christian the right to use Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is when these passages in Matthew are interpreted by the rule of, last mention, it will be found their teaching is abrogated for the Christian and superseded by the words of 1 Corinthians 7:10,11...¹

Those Spoken By the Apostle Paul

In 1 Corinthians seven the Apostle Paul discusses the relationship and responsibilities of a husband and wife and gives instruction for marital divisions.

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband; But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord, If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman who hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart,

¹W. Fisher-Hunter, The Divorce Problem (Waynesboro, Pa.: MacNeish Publishers, 1952), pp. 85-86.

let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife. (1 Cor. 7:10-16)

The following observations were made by the writer concerning the above passage:

- (1) Paul is talking to Christian believers at Corinth. (1 Cor. 1:2)
- (2) Paul makes it clear that he is quoting the Lord's words here and not his own. (7:10)
- (3) Paul sets forth two principles which apply to Christians who have separated. They are to remain unmarried or to be reconciled to the departed mate. (7:11)
- (4) Paul states that the marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is holy before God. (7:14)
- (5) Paul states that the spiritual condition of mate is no grounds for a divorce.
- (6) With regard to mixed marriages the passage does not say when one of the partners became a believer.

Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), now that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman who hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So, then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth the fruit unto God. (Rom. 7:1-4)

The following observations can be made from Romans 7:1-4.

- (1) The epistle was written to Gentiles.
- (2) The context is showing us that the Mosaic Law is obsolete in relation to the Christian.
- (3) The discussion of a husband, wife, and adultery is an illustration of this fact.
- (4) Death of one of the partners is required for one not to be classified as an adulterer when married to another.

(5) The marriage bond is for life.

The observation of these two passages spoken by the Apostle Paul leads to two conclusions in regard to marriage and divorce; divorce and remarriage is not part of God's program for the Christian and that the marriage relationship is for life. (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39)

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

The Roman Catholic Church places the onus of the Church to be faithful upon the husband.

The Roman Catholic Church is based on two main principles: (1) that the Church is a visible institution, but only in the sense of a visible organization from which and to which (2) that no one can be a member of the Church but only by the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament, and thus the marriage of either party, if dissolved, is invalid.

The Roman Catholic Church also teaches divorce and remarriage. Their

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that when Christ was here He instituted

the sacrament of marriage and it is His will. They also teach that three

conditions must be fulfilled in order to constitute a sacrament. First, it must be an outward

sign, secondly, it must be instituted by Christ; and thirdly, it must be

done in accordance with the will of God.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that all of these basic

conditions must be fulfilled in order to constitute a sacrament.

The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that the Roman Catholic

Church is the only true Church, and thus it is the only Church which

1. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 2. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 3. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 4. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 5. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 6. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 7. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 8. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 9. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100. 10. "The Roman Catholic Church," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 11, p. 100.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

Roman Catholic View

The Roman Catholic Church places the dogma of the Church to be of greater importance than the Scriptures.

The Canon law of the Roman Church is based on two main principles: (1) that there could be no divorce a vinculo matrimonii, but only a mensa et thoro, i.e., separation from board and bed; (2) that no divorce could be had at the will of the parties but only by the sentence of an ecclesiastical court.¹

From a practical standpoint the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is no ground for divorce, and none for remarriage of either party. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 7:15 does not teach divorce and remarriage. Their basic reason for being opposed to divorce is the fact that marriage constitutes a sacrament. They teach that when Christ was here He instituted seven sacraments, and marriage was one of them. They also teach that three elements are necessary to institute a sacrament: first, it must be an outward sign; secondly, it must be instituted by Christ; and thirdly, it must be an instrument of grace. The writer believes that all of these basic elements can be refuted from Scripture.

Lorraine Boettner points out the fact that "the Roman Catholic Church boasts of her strictness regarding divorce and seeks to create the impression that divorces are proportionately much less among Roman Catholics

¹Pierre L'Huillier, "Divorce--Canon Law of," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968, p. 514, quoted in Ross G. Weidman, "A Biblical and Historical Interpretation of Matthew 5:32," Unpublished Critical Monograph, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1972, p. 64.

than among Protestants."¹ He went on to say that:

In order to understand her claim it is necessary to distinguish between the different classifications for marriage made by that Church, as legitimate, ratum, and consummatum.

A marriage between Protestants, or between those who profess no religion, performed by a Protestant minister or official of the State is called legitimate. A marriage between Roman Catholics performed by a priest is called ratum. And a marriage between those validly married by a priest is called consummatum when they have exercised their marital rights.²

Mr. Boettner continues by saying that:

On the basis of the so-called 'Pauline privilege' set forth in 1 Corinthians 7:15, the Roman Church teaches that a marriage between Protestants, or between unbelievers, can be dissolved when one member is converted to Catholicism.³

They call this an "annulment" not a divorce. Therefore, they uphold their traditional view of divorce and remarriage.

It can be clearly demonstrated that the Roman Catholic Church in its official policy and practice places its Canon Law as being more important than biblical exegesis. To the writer this form of "exegesis" should not stand. Therefore, we must look at 1 Corinthians 7:15 in light of God's revealed Word and not tradition. Therefore, this view must be rejected as being purely a Roman Catholic dogma.

¹Lorraine Boettner, Divorce (San Francisco: San Francisco Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960), p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 34.

³Ibid., p. 35.

Separate Living View

Some who see no grounds for divorce in the Scripture view this verse as teaching separate living. According to this view, the Christian is not under bondage to provide for, nor to consider, the unbeliever who has separated himself. This view prohibits divorce but permits separate living.

The argument for holding such a view is twofold: (1) they say that the word used for "depart" $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\omega$ does not mean to divorce but to separate oneself from someone else, and (2) that the word used does not mean divorce but separate living. In answer to this the writer looked up the usage of the word for depart. The following was a result of that investigation: the word "depart" $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\omega$ in verses 10 and 11 signifies divorce, not separate living. The standard Greek lexicons define $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\omega$ as: "to leave a husband or wife; of divorce, 1 Corinthians 7:11, 15."¹ F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich define as follows: "Depart. $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\omega$, divorce. Oft. in marriage contracts in the papyri... 1 Corinthians 7:1, 11, 15."²

Upon closer examination of the passage it can be seen that the believer is a passive party in what transpired. The departing was not to be done by the believer and the context clearly shows that it was the unbeliever who left, not the believer. The believer has no control over the actions of the unbeliever.

¹Henry Thayer, Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 674.

²Arndt, F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 898.

Complete Freedom View

This view is held by many within the Protestant circles and states that "malicious desertion" constitutes a Scriptural ground for divorce. And since it is a Scriptural ground, the parties may remarry if they desire. This is in addition to the exception clause found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

This view, which basically states that the believer may seek a divorce because of "malicious desertion," must be denied, primarily because the context of the passage in 1 Corinthians 7:15 does not support it. The believer is told to continue the marriage relationship as long as the unbeliever is willing to remain. Secondly, the divorce action is not the action of the Christian but the action of the unbeliever. And thirdly, the principles stated by the Apostle Paul in verse 10 and 11 would apply to the Christian here as well, that being to remain unmarried or be reconciled.

This view is held officially by both the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church and by such men as Luther and Lenski.

Limited Divorce - Free Remarriage View

Those who hold to this view say that the believer cannot seek a divorce but will consent to such divorce if the unbeliever desires it. Once this divorce has been secured, then the believer is at complete freedom to remarry.

Basically, there are two arguments which are used to support such a view. First the passage clearly shows that the Christian is not to seek the divorce. And secondly, the passage clearly says that if an

unbeliever wants to leave let him leave. However, there are two arguments which can be used against this view. One, is that the passage does not clearly teach that the believer has the right to remarry. And secondly, the principle laid down in verses 10 and 11 would apply to the believer in this situation.

Limited Divorce - Limited Remarriage View

This states that the believer cannot seek a divorce but will consent to such divorce if the unbeliever desires it. But as far as remarriage is concerned, they feel that Christ's words in Matthew 19:9 teach divorce and remarriage for adultery only.

Two arguments are set forth in support of this view. One, the passage clearly states that the believer cannot seek a divorce and secondly, the passage clearly states that if the unbeliever wants to depart, the believer is to let him do so.

The writer rejects this view for the following reasons: first, Matthew 19:9 is not directed to the church but to the Pharisees who were under the Mosaic economy. Secondly, the principles laid down in verses 10 and 11 would apply to the believer here just as well.

The Limited Divorce - No Remarriage View

This view holds to the fact that the believer cannot seek divorce but will consent to divorce if the unbeliever desires it. As far as remarriage is concerned they feel that 1 Corinthians 7:15 does not clearly answer the question. However, those who hold this view say that remarriage is forbidden. This view is held by such men as Alford, Plummer, Ironside, and DeHaan along with many others.

The arguments used in support of this view are twofold. One, the passage does teach that the believer is not to seek a divorce. And two, the passage clearly states that it is the unbeliever who takes the action.

The writer of this monograph is inclined to accept this view but with a few modifications which will be explained later in greater detail.

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

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Having researched the background material of the context, many parallel passages of Scripture, and various interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:15, the writer will now seek to interpret the text based on his investigation and the hermeneutical principles of interpretation. The writer's objective is to find out what Paul was saying to the Christian believers at Corinth with regard to marriage.

One of the first rules in hermeneutics is to investigate the immediate context of a particular verse. In doing this we find that Paul is answering some questions which have been put to him in regard to married believers. We can see that Paul's teaching on separation, divorce and remarriage is in two parts - one which applies to couples that are both believers, and the other dealing with mixed marriages where one of the partners is an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:10-17). It is then within this context that 1 Corinthians 7:15 occurs.

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

Paul first addressed his remarks to those where both partners are believers. This is brought out in the following verses:

And unto the married I command; yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband; but as the church depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife. (1 Cor. 7:10-11)

He set forth in these verses some regulations that were of primary concern to the believers at Corinth and to us today. In Paul's use of the words, "I command" *ἐπετάξαμι*, yet not I, but the Lord, Paul is telling us that he is quoting the Lord in this matter.

WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

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Paul first addressed his remarks to those where both partners were believers. This is brought out in the following verses:

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband; But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife. (1 Cor. 7:10-11)

He set forth in these verses some regulations that were of primary concern to the believers at Corinth and to us today. In Paul's use of the words, "I command *παρὰ γὰρ ἐγὼ λέω*, yet not I, but the Lord," Paul is telling us that he is quoting the Lord in this matter.

The Lord had given some specific commands or instructions along these lines and Paul is now quoting these words. The instructions given are in the form of a prohibition of divorce. The wife is specifically instructed not to separate herself from her husband. The believing wife is bound by two prohibitions: one in regard to separation and the other to remarriage. This is brought out in the words *μὴ χωρισθῆναι*. The word used here comes from the word *χωρίζω*, which the standard Greek lexicons define as "a. to leave a husband or wife: of divorce. 1 Corinthians 7:11, 15."¹ Paul goes on to say that if a divorce does occur there are two principles that the believer must follow. These principles are not mere suggestions on Paul's part but are explicit commands given by him. Paul says, "But and if she depart *εἰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῇ*, let her remain *μὲνέτω* unmarried or be reconciled *καταλλαγῇτω* to her husband." Paul goes on to instruct the husband in a similar manner, "let not the husband put away *μὴ ἀφαιέναι* his wife." Paul in these two verses does not say that divorce is permitted for the believer but denies it on the basis of instructions which had been given by Christ in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18. The above words suppose a case of actual separation, contrary to Christ's command.

In the next few verses Paul takes up another situation which existed in Corinth. Some believers were married to unbelievers.

But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman who hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be please to dwell with her let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your

¹Henry Thayer, Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 674.

children unclean, but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace. (1 Cor. 7:12-15)

In these verses Paul used a phrase that has caused many problems. That is, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord..." Here Paul is stating that he is not quoting the direct words of the Lord on this subject. The Lord had not spoken in regard to this situation which existed at Corinth. However, this does not mean that Paul's words were any less inspired. Paul, in his apostolic office under the authority of the Holy Spirit makes these comments.

These verses are dealing with marriage where one of the partners is a believer and the other an unbeliever. The context does not say when the one partner became a believer. However, such a circumstance must not be a ground per se of separation. Paul again addresses himself to both the wife and the husband saying that if either have an unbelieving mate and they (the unbelieving) agree *συνευδοκεῖ* to live *οἰκεῖν* with them (the believer), don't leave *μὴ ἀφίστω*. The prohibition against divorce is given. In verse 14, we see that such a marriage is holy before God just like a marriage between believers.

Verse 15 deals with a new problem that had developed in Corinth. When Corinthians became Christians, in some cases, the unbelieving mate would desert or divorce the believer because of his/her faith in Christ. "In such cases," what does the believer do?

The Greek word for "depart" *χωρίζω* in verse 15 signifies divorce just as in verses 10 and 11. However, it must be pointed out that it is the unbeliever who obtained the divorce. If the believer had done so it would be in direct violation of the previous command given to them

in verses 10 and 11, where the believer is instructed to remain unmarried or be reconciled to his/her mate. The principle which Paul had laid down in verses 10 and 11 apply to the believer here just as well.

Paul also stated that "in such cases" the brother or sister was not under bondage οὐ δεδούλωται . What did Paul mean by the phrase "not under bondage?" Expositors are divided on the interpretation of this phrase. Some say that it means the dissolution of marriage, while others say it doesn't mean that at all. Those who say that this verse teaches remarriage of the ground of desertion put a great stress on the above mentioned phrase.

When the word for bondage is considered in other passages of Scripture, it can be demonstrated that the word for bondage has nothing to do with the bond formed by marriage. The Greek word δουλώω , translated "bondage" means to "enslave." It occurs only eight times in the New Testament and is translated four times "bondage" three times "servant" and once "given." It is first used in Acts 7:6 in connection with the nation of Israel being in "bondage" in Egypt and it is used in Romans 6:18, 22 where it denotes the state of the believer, who is now the "servant"

δουλώω of God. Many have supposed that this means that the believer would be at liberty to marry again when the unbelieving wife or husband departed. However, it must be kept in mind that this is contrary to Paul's argument. Prohibition against divorce on the part of the believer is clearly in view here. The sense of the expression "is not bound" is that if such a separation takes place the believer is not bound by the marriage tie to make provision for the one who has departed. This word by the Apostle frees the believer from any marital responsibility to the mate

who has departed, but does not leave the believer free to remarry. If the believer were to remarry he/she would be doing so in direct violation of the principles laid down in verses 10 and 11.

The Greek word used to denote the marriage bond is $\delta\epsilon\omega$ which literally means "to be bound by tying a knot." It is used by the Apostle Paul three times when making mention of the marriage union (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27,39). In these Scriptures it is clearly pointed out that the marriage bond $\delta\epsilon\omega$ is for life.

God has called us to a life of peace and we are not to seek to destroy the condition in which we were called. We are to remain in our place of calling. Paul illustrated the principle with the use of circumcision and slavery in 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24.

The great truth of marriage for the believer is that God's Word does not allow for divorce and remarriage (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39).

CONCLUSION

The writer's main objective in writing this monograph was to point out what Paul was saying to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:15. In the immediate context of the passage, we found that God prohibits divorce. If one part of the believing couple, the unbeliever separates himself, the believing spouse is not under obligation to the law.

The writer also found that the Bible-ordained institution which has been clearly laid out in God's Word and that God's Word clearly teaches that for the believing spouse, divorce is not an alternative. Every believer should follow every commandment to protect the marriage relationship. However, if divorce occurs, the Christian has two alternatives, either to remain unmarried or to seek reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The writer's main objective in writing this monograph was to find out what Paul was saying to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:15. In the immediate context of the verse we found that God prohibits divorce on the part of the believer and if the unbeliever separates himself, the believer is not under obligation to follow.

The writer views marriage as a God-ordained institution which has been clearly laid out for us in God's Word and that God's Word clearly teaches that for the believer divorce is not an alternative. Every believer should follow every means available to protect the marriage relationship. However, if divorce should occur, the Christian has two alternatives, either to remain unmarried or to seek reconciliation.

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

1 Cor 7:15

But if the unbelieving one departs because of his/her mate's unbelief, let him depart. The believer is not to depart but is to let the unbeliever go if he/she so wishes.

The brother or sister whose mate is not obligated to follow the unbeliever but is to remain unmarried or be reconciled if possible.

This does not grant permission for the believer to divorce his/her unbelieving mate. For God's Word clearly teaches that a believer bound by the marriage bond and to seek a divorce would be a direct violation of God's written Word. Also it would destroy the peace in which God has called us.

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

1 Corinthians 7:15

But if the unbelieving one departs because of his/her mate's conversion, let him depart. The believer is not to depart but is to let the unbeliever go if he/she desires.

The brother or sister in such cases is not obligated to follow after the unbeliever but is either to remain unmarried or be reconciled if possible.

This does not grant permission for the believer to divorce his/her unbelieving mate. For God's Word clearly teaches that a believer is bound by the marriage bond until death. And to seek a divorce would be in direct violation of God's written Word. Also it would destroy the peace in which God has called us.

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