

“Not Under Bondage”

Examining 1 Corinthians 7:15

I. A LOOK AT THE CONTEXT: Following the flow of thought through 1 Corinthians 7

- A. The Corinthians had apparently questioned Paul about whether it is better for Christians to be married or single.
 1. Paul begins by saying it is **“good”** to be single (v. 1) and will explain why later in the chapter.
 2. But he is quick to say that being single is not always best, and marriage is also good (v. 2).
 3. So, there is not a hard-and-fast answer to be given to the question, “Is it better to be single or married?” (vv. 6-9).
- B. However, if you are married you need to stay married (vv. 10-11).
 1. Jesus Himself had specified, **“What God has joined together, let not man separate”** (Matt. 19:6).
 2. Jesus had also taught, **“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”** (Matt. 19:9).
 3. Therefore, if you have been married and are now divorced, you need be reconciled or remain single.
- C. But what if you are married to an unbeliever?
 1. Don’t divorce (vv. 12-14).
 2. If the unbeliever wants to end the marriage, let them depart (vv. 15-16).
- D. You can serve the Lord faithfully in whatever state you are in (Jew, Gentile, slave, free, married or unmarried; vv. 17-24).
 1. Here is Paul’s advice (vv. 25-39): Because of **“the present distress,”** stay in whatever state you are in.
 2. If married, you need to stay married because that is the Lord’s instruction.
 3. If unmarried, it may be better to stay unmarried (because you will have less concern and distraction). However, if you feel you need to marry, you are not sinning by doing so.
- E. So, is it better to marry or to be single?
 1. Being married is good, but because of **“the present distress,”** it may be easier to be single.
 2. However, one can’t disregard God’s law regarding marriage (by divorcing) or fornication (by giving into sexual temptation).

II. THE ARGUMENTS MADE FOR FREEDOM TO REMARRY

A. Some see two contrasting marriage laws presented in this passage.

1. The first marriage law applies only to the marriages of two Christians (vv. 10-11).
2. A second contrasting marriage law is given for Christians married to unbelievers (vv. 12-16).
3. The key to this conclusion is based upon the wording of verses 10 and 12.
 - a. ***“Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord”*** (v. 10a).
 - 1) This is Paul’s introduction to the marriage law that Christ legislated during His earthly ministry (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-10; Mk. 10:2-12).
 - 2) They believe this applies only to marriages involving two Christians.
 - 3) Paul makes application of what the Lord taught by saying ***“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”*** (vv. 10b-11).
 - b. ***“But to the rest I, not the Lord, say”*** (v. 12).
 - 1) They believe this statement indicates that a different category of marriage is now under consideration, one to which Jesus had not given any instructions. And since Jesus had not given them any instructions, His previous teaching must not apply to them.
 - 2) “Once one recognizes that Christ in the Gospels did not speak to, did not issue commandment to, the marriage of the unbelievers or to a mixed marriage, one cannot scripturally bind Matthew 19:9 on the deserted believer in 1 Corinthians 7:15.” (Bales, *Not Under Bondage*, p. 57)
 - 3) Paul now legislates a different marriage law for mixed married couples than what Jesus had legislated for two believers.
 - 4) ***“But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases”*** (v. 15).
4. The difference they see between these two laws:
 - a. To the marriage between two Christians: if one departed, the MARRIAGE BOND IS NOT BROKEN and the divorced could not remarry.
 - b. To the Christian in a mixed marriage: if the unbeliever departs, the MARRIAGE BOND IS BROKEN and the deserted Christian is FREE TO REMARRY.
 - c. “Different standards are applied by the Spirit to different categories of marriages.” (Bales, p. 166).

B. They also apply the same meaning to the word ***“bound”*** (vv. 27, 39; Rom. 7:2) and ***“bondage”*** (v. 15).

1. The word “bound” is used in reference to the marriage bond:
 - a. ***“Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed”*** (v. 27).

- b. *“A wife is **bound** by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord”* (v. 39).
- c. *“For the woman who has a husband is **bound** by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband”* (Romans 7:2).
- 2. Therefore *“not under bondage”* (KJV, NKJV, ASB, NASB, NAS), *“not bound”* (NIV, NET), must mean “not under the marriage bond.”
- 3. “‘Not under bondage’ means that the marriage bond is broken, and that the believer is free to remarry” (Bales, p. 45)

III. IS PAUL GIVING A DIFFERENT MARRIAGE LAW FOR MIXED MARRIAGES?

- A. In His personal ministry, Jesus had taught the binding nature of the marriage covenant, but He had not addressed how that might apply to mixed marriages between Christians and unbelievers.
 - 1. He had not stated whether such marriages were legitimate in God’s sight nor what a Christian should do if he was married to a pagan.
 - 2. These would be logical questions since the Old Testament had condemned mixed marriages between Israel and the pagans of the land (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12).
 - a. When such mixed marriages had occurred, they were considered unholy and spouses were commanded to separate (Ezra 9 & 10; Neh. 13:3).
 - b. Is such the case between a Christian and an unbeliever?
 - 3. Paul’s statement, *“I, not the Lord,”* is not a declaration of a different marriage law than what Christ had taught, but a recognition that he is addressing a situation that Jesus had not specifically addressed (the legitimacy of mixed marriages and the believer’s responsibility in such).
- B. Paul shows a Christian’s marriage to an unbeliever is a legitimate marriage bond.
 - 1. *“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy”* (v. 14).
 - 2. How do we know that mixed marriages are legitimate? Because Paul applies God’s marriage law to them.
 - a. What did Jesus teach about a legitimate marriage bond? *“What God has joined together, let not man separate”* (Matt. 19:6).
 - b. What did Paul teach about mixed marriages? *“Do not divorce”* (vv. 12-13).
- C. Paul is not giving a different marriage law from what Jesus taught; he is giving an inspired application of the Lord’s teaching regarding marriage and divorce as it applies to mixed marriages.
 - 1. Just because Paul deals with a circumstance in marriage that Jesus had not specifically addressed does not mean that Paul is legislating a different marriage law.

2. While mixed marriages may provide unique challenges, it should not be surprising to find that the Lord's will for such marriages harmonizes with what He has said about marriage in general.

IV. DOES “*NOT UNDER BONDAGE*” MEAN FREE TO REMARRY?

- A. Since Paul is dealing with the marriage bond in 1 Corinthians 7, some would say that “*not under bondage*” must refer to the marriage bond.
 1. “The only bondage this believer had ever been in to this unbeliever was the bondage of marriage” (Bales, p. 62)
 2. But neither the words Paul uses nor the context support that assumption; it is a false assumption that the marriage bond is the “*bondage*” that Paul references.
- B. Paul uses words with different meanings.
 1. The word Paul uses when speaking of the marriage bond [i.e. “*bound to a wife*” (v. 27) and “*bound by law*” (v. 39)] is the Greek word *deo* which has the idea of “to bind, to tie, to fasten.” (Strong’s)
 2. But when Paul is speaking of the deserted believer being “*not under bondage*” (v. 15), he uses *douloo* which means “to enslave, bring under subjection” (Strong’s)
 3. Several English translations reflect this meaning: “*not enslaved*” (ESV), “*not under obligation*” (ISV), “*not under slavery*” (Jubilee), “*not under servitude*” (Young’s Literal).
- C. What does Paul mean when he says that a deserted believer is not “*enslaved*”?
 1. Paul has shown the legitimacy of the Christians marriage to an unbeliever by stating the believer’s responsibly to maintain the marriage (“*do not divorce*”).
 2. But what is the Christian’s responsibility “*in such cases*” where the unbeliever is unwilling to remain married?
 - a. Are they liberated from the “bondage” of being joined by God to this person (and therefore free to remarry)?
 - b. Or are they liberated from the “bondage” of the responsibility of the now impossible task of keeping the marriage together.
 3. In the context, it is the believer’s responsibility of preserving the marriage that is under consideration, not his right to remarry.
 4. Note the contrast in the text: “*not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*”
 - a. The opposite of “*bondage*” is not freedom to remarry, but “*peace.*”
 - b. If the believer has the responsibility to preserve the marriage and the unbeliever is “*willing*” (content) to stay married, there can be “*peace.*”
 - c. But if the believer is responsible for preserving the marriage against the will of the unbeliever, there can be no “*peace.*”

- d. It truly would be **“bondage”** or **“enslavement”** to be responsible for what you cannot control.
 - e. However, if the believer **“lets”** the unbeliever depart, realizing that he is not responsible for preserving the marriage against the will of the unbeliever, then there can be **“peace”** even though the marriage is no longer intact.
 - f. **“In such cases,”** they are not **“enslaved”** to holding the marriage together.
5. **The “bondage” the deserted believer is freed from is the responsibility of preserving a marriage that is beyond his ability to preserve.**
- D. What does the text say about remarriage? Nothing.
- 1. The text is not dealing with remarriage. It is dealing with the legitimacy of the mixed marriage, the responsibility of the believer, and the limits of the believer’s responsibility in preserving the marriage.
 - 2. Remarriage would have to be assumed and could only be assumed if Paul is saying something contrary to what Jesus says – even then it would not be a necessary assumption.

CONCLUSION:

- I. 1 Corinthians 7:15 is not a different marriage law for those in mixed marriages.
 - A. Nor is it an exception to Christ’s marriage law for those deserted by an unbelieving spouse.
 - B. It is simply an application of Christ’s marriage law to one whose spouse is unwilling to dwell with him.
 - 1. Jesus taught **“what God has joined together, let not man separate”** (Matt. 19:6), therefore Paul commanded Christians (whether in a marriage between two Christians or a mixed marriage) **“do not depart...do not divorce”** (vv. 10, 12-13).
 - 2. If one is divorced (whether from a marriage with a Christian or a mixed marriage), it is still possible to serve the Lord.
 - a. The one divorced is not **“enslaved”** to preserving a marriage his spouse does not want.
 - b. He is free to **“remain unmarried”** or, if possible, **“be reconciled”** (v. 11).
 - c. In either case he is to continue in their service to the Lord in **“peace”** (v. 15).
 - 3. This brings us back to the theme of the chapter: You can serve the Lord whether single, married (to a Christian or an unbeliever), or even divorced.
 - 4. Each marital state will have its challenges and each must be in line with God’s commandments.
- II. God’s laws regarding sexual purity, fidelity, and the binding nature of marriage are the same for all.