

Divorce and 1 Corinthians 7:15

Written by K B Napier
Wednesday, 03 November 2010 10:41

(Introduction is similar to [O-172 'Divorce and Matthew 5:32'](#) , because it addresses the same error)

Divorce is never satisfactory; on the other hand, it is neither commended nor rejected in scripture. Rather, it is a concession given by God, and He allows only two reasons for divorce (see separate articles). This article deals with one of those reasons: an unbeliever leaving the matrimonial home. Also see [O-172 'Divorce and Matthew 5:32'](#) for the other reason.

Those who teach that divorce is not possible, do so by omitting this text. This is not ignorance, but misrepresentation of scripture to uphold a personalised interpretation of doctrine that is untenable. To insist that no person may be divorced is, in essence, to act as a false prophet. To teach others the same on websites or in other literature, is worthy only of denunciation. Divorce is not my personal view, nor is it commended by me... it is just a Biblical fact... and some have no option!

1 Corinthians 7:10-15

1.

And unto the married I command, [yet] not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from [her] husband:

2.

But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to [her] husband: and let not the husband put away [his] wife.

3.

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.

4.

And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

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5.

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.

6.

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.

In this article we will look at 1 Corinthians 7:15.

One critic, with incredible audacity and arrogance tried to tell me that this text cannot be true because Paul said something else a few verses before it! He did not stop to think that BOTH verses were true. Indeed, they HAD to be because it was Paul who said them. I shudder to think how many people this critic influences with his website!

In verses 10 and 11, Paul says that the wife shall not leave her husband. This is an interesting allusion not to the Jewish law (where a man can divorce his wife) but to Greek and Roman custom (where a wife could divorce her husband). As Paul was writing to the Corinthians, it explains why he spoke of the Roman/Greek custom.

However, Paul then shows us that what applies to the wife also applies to the husband: neither can divorce. If the wife leaves she may not remarry. Or, she can return to her husband without penalty. The husband, too, may not divorce ("put away" was a common term for divorce) his wife. That is the general rule. However, Paul then addresses the problem of divorce again, by applying his Christian theological sense. As this is given in God's word, we can accept it as from God.

There are others, says Paul, who may have unbelieving spouses. This was quite normal in Greek/Roman cities and areas, because the Greeks and Romans who became Christians might have spouses who did not become saved. So, they were unequally yoked, but not deliberately.

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Normally, a Christian should not marry someone other than a fellow Christian. But, where a spouse is saved, and the other is not, it creates a tension. So, there can potentially be big problems – as we see in today’s marriages where one spouse is unsaved.

In verse 12 we see that where there is no real problem, or, for as long as it is possible, the saved spouse must accept that he or she is married for life. Paul says that if the unsaved spouse wishes to stay, then the counsel to the saved spouse is: “let him not put her away” and “let her not leave him”. So, being unsaved is not in itself a reason to divorce. The reason is that the unsaved spouse no longer wishes to stay, because he or she cannot tolerate the other’s new Christian life and ways.

Verse 14 is greatly misunderstood and badly preached about! It says the unsaved spouse is “sanctified” by the saved spouse, and that any children from this unbalanced marriage are “holy”. This does NOT mean they are counted to be ‘saved’ because of the saved spouse or parent! Sanctified often means hallowed or consecrated to God, but, not in this case. Here, it simply means ‘to acknowledge’. And any children of the ‘mixed’ marriage are said to be ‘holy’.

Normally, holy means a most holy thing, or a saint. But, this cannot apply to unsaved children, because only salvation makes a person (of any age) holy. One has to look deeper into the meaning. The meaning has to encapsulate the meaning of being clean, because the opposite (unclean: used in the ceremonial sense) was used of the children of fully unsaved parents. That is, God calls them acceptable (in the everyday sense) because of the saved parent. They will continue to be unworthy *spiritually* until and if they are themselves saved, but they are not treated as vile by God. It refers to a ‘sacred person’ who is not necessarily holy as well. This is similar to the ‘sacred’ persons who are priests in churches but who are unsaved.

There is a great deal more we could discuss about this meaning of ‘holy’ in the text, but the above should suffice... needless to say the Greek meanings can be extremely varied. But, the major consideration is a simple one – no person of any age can be considered ‘holy’ in the sense of saved, unless he *is* saved. So, a parent’s salvation does not somehow ‘cover’ his child. The child must, as did his parent, be saved as an individual, in his own right. From this fact alone we know without doubt that no child can be ‘holy’ in the saved sense because of a parent.

The term only means that God does not judge the child or the unsaved spouse as ceremonially unworthy, but allows them to remain under the same roof as the saved spouse/parent, as a

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divine favour, because the man or woman did not *deliberately* marry an unbeliever. This explains the following verse 16.

If, however, the unsaved spouse wants to leave, he or she may do so. In which case the one who is left “is not under bondage in such cases”. Bondage means to be a slave of something or someone, or, to the rules of marriage. The one who is left is therefore free to remarry and is not adulterous. The root *deo* explains this, for it means to be bound or tied to a wife/husband. Some try to say this is a translation from the NIV, so is wrong. But, this is an error – it is an AV translation from the original sources... the NIV does not make use of actual translations of its own.

We see, then, that an unbelieving spouse can leave a saved spouse, and because of that the saved spouse is free to remarry and will not be thought of as adulterous.

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