

**Report of the Study Committee on the
Pauline Exception for Divorce**

1 Corinthians 7:10-16

10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. 12 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. 16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Introduction

The committee met several times since Conference charged us with the task of studying whether or not Paul indeed wrote about an exception for divorce. We wrote several study papers which we exchanged within the committee. Our findings are contained in this report and the position papers in the attached appendices.

Conference asked us to examine the passage in First Corinthians to determine if Paul did in fact give an exception for divorce to add to Christ's exception in the Gospels. The Bible Fellowship Church's current statement on divorce in the Biblical Principles for Living does recognize the words of our Lord as a biblically permissible allowance for divorce. However, we do not currently recognize the words of Paul as such. Conference commissioned an in-depth study of the passage so that it could prayerfully render a decision on whether the BPLs should be amended. We interacted with the previous 1987 Study Committee report and greatly respect the work of that committee 30 years ago.

In General, Divorce is Not Biblically Permissible

It is too common in this day for people to hear an exception to a rule and turn the exception into the rule. Our Lord in both Testaments expresses His deep desire that husbands and wives work out their tensions and find restored fellowship and intimacy as a married couple. Today, divorce is simply an easy way out of unresolved marital tensions. Instead of doing hard work of conflict resolution, many find it easier to move on and file for divorce. People find it hard to confront those they disagree with and so marital intimacy drifts into a coolness towards one another. God certainly does not envision a biblical marriage to function in this way. He wants marriages to be laboratories of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. A biblical marriage demonstrates the power of redemption to an audience of a lost world.

Christians must not read the Gospels or Epistles and conclude that since there are exceptions that permit divorce, therefore they can seek a divorce for any reason.

Jesus Taught that Divorce is Permissible for the Victim of Adultery

Adultery is never acceptable to God; it is sin and it causes a break in fellowship with God and with one's spouse. Additionally, it causes immense pain to the offender, the adulterous partner, the spousal victim, the families of both offenders, as well as to the community. By the grace of God demonstrated at Christ's cross, healing and restored fellowship are possible. Jesus does not require or desire that an innocent victim of adultery initiate a divorce. However, He teaches us that the victim may initiate divorce after their spouse's unfaithfulness. Additionally, He holds the victim innocent of the sin of divorce even if they initiate the divorce in this singular scenario. The guilt of the divorce is solely on the adulterous spouse (and in some measure, on their adulterous partner).

Jesus speaks about divorce in the three synoptic Gospels. In three passages, He teaches the universal code for His followers that divorce and remarriage are both sins (Matthew 5:31-32, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18). Then only in one passage, Matthew 19, He gives one exception to His general code. "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). This exception makes it plain that if one initiates divorce for any reason and remarries, this one has committed adultery. The converse of this is, if one initiates a divorce due to their spouse's adultery, the remarriage of the innocent spouse is not adultery.

Our Biblical Principles for Living currently reflect this teaching in 103-5.1 when we write "It is not permitted for any reason other than adultery (Matt 5:32, Rom 7:2), and should be considered only after careful and prayerful attempts for forgiveness and reconciliation (Mark 10:6-9, 1 Cor 7:10-11). Scripture permits but never requires that a person divorce a marriage partner who has committed adultery (Matt 19:9)."

Paul Taught that Divorce is Biblically Permissible for the Believer whose Unbelieving Partner Initiates the Divorce

While Jesus addressed a rare exception to His universal rule on divorce, Paul finds himself sadly addressing an even rarer exception to the rule which nonetheless needs a word from God. Converts to the Faith were being divorced by their unbelieving spouses, likely for the very reason that the one had converted. Paul comforts those who were being rejected by their nonbelieving loved ones: the Church loves you, the Lord accepts you, you are not guilty for the divorce you did not seek.

Interestingly, this scenario is only written about in the letter to Corinth. Paul does not address this scenario with any of his other churches. His teaching on sexuality and marriage extends from 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:40. Narrowly, our section of interest is 7:12-15. His hope and ours is that a believer finding themselves married to a nonbeliever can enjoy a happy, united, and intimate union. Paul writes that the believer should not pursue the dissolution of the marriage (v12b, 13b). Rather, he writes in v14 that the believer should seek the spiritual growth of their unbelieving loved one. This is the goal of every marriage: a husband laying himself down for the spiritual good of his wife (Eph 5:25-27), a wife surrendering her own aspirations in order to win her husband over to the Word (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Paul recognizes that while the believing spouse may do all they can to contribute to the health of the marriage, the unbeliever may not want a godly home and the sanctifying work of the Spirit through their believing spouse. Concisely, the unbeliever may want to leave the marriage. Paul says now in verse 15,

“But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.” This verb “separates” (chorizo) does mean the formal, legal act of divorce. Paul’s instruction to the believer is that the believer ought to let the divorce occur; do not stand in the way; accept that the marriage has ended. He goes on in the next sentences “In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.” This is both a comfort to the believer in such a scenario and further instruction. This peace for the believer is an inner solace from the Lord that He accepts you through this painful ordeal. He gives you the peace to let go; your conscience is free because you are not guilty of the sin of divorce. Additionally, this peace is provided from God since divorce is an emotionally painful process and the subsequent emotional and spiritual healing process is lengthy. During the span of your grief, you may be susceptible to lashing out. God has called you to peace, so initiate peaceful conversation with your unbelieving spouse / former spouse. Be a bridge builder, not a bridge burner. Contribute health to the relationship even while your spouse is seeking an end to the relationship. In this way, you act like Christ who “while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” (1 Peter 2:23).

In the midst of his instructions to the believer, Paul gives a word of encouragement “In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved” (v15). This word “enslaved” (dedoulotai) indicates that the believing recipient of a divorce initiated by an unbeliever is no longer bound to the marriage. Thematically in the entire passage (6:9-7:40), Paul is using multiple words to paint this picture of free vs bound, unattached vs under obligation. This polar dichotomy Paul weaves throughout the passage shows us that believers in such a scenario are not guilty of the sin of divorce and are not enslaved, freeing them to remarry, “only in the Lord,” as he expresses to believing widows (7:39).

Conclusion of Paul’s Exception for Divorce

In summary of Paul’s address to spiritually-blended marriages, the Christian is to seek the health of the marriage and the salvation of the unbeliever. The Christian may never initiate divorce (except in the case of adultery by the spouse, as Christ taught). The hope is that the unbeliever will remain in the marriage. If the unbeliever initiates a divorce, the Christian should pray for and pursue reconciliation but ultimately is not bound to the marriage after the divorce has finalized. The Christian who is the recipient of a divorce initiated by an unbelieving spouse is free to remarry a believer.

Proposed Legislative Changes

We propose to the 134th BFC Conference, the amending of Article 103-5 to reflect the findings of our committee’s biblical study.

Current

Article 103-5 - Divorce

103-5.1 Divorce is the breaking of the marriage covenant instituted and ordained of God. God hates it because it is inconsistent with His purpose¹ and creates problems for all those associated with it. It is not permitted for any reason other than adultery,² and should be

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103-5.2 Divorce may only be initiated after a partner has committed adultery². In case of adultery, divorce should be considered only after careful and prayerful attempts for forgiveness and reconciliation.³ Scripture permits but never requires divorce in this instance.⁴ In the case of adultery, the Lord places the guilt of the divorce on the unfaithful spouse even if the innocent spouse initiates the divorce.

103-5.3 In the event that an unbelieving spouse initiates divorce against the innocent believing spouse, the recipient of the divorce is not guilty for the sin of divorce, but rather the initiator is. The believer in this case is not enslaved to the bounds of the marriage and may remarry.⁵

103-5.2 People divorced for reasons other than that allowed by Scripture ought not marry another, but be reconciled, and seek God's resolution for the breakdown of the marriage.⁵ Divorced persons must seek forgiveness for any sin that led to, or is associated with, their divorce. They should seek the grace of God for their spiritual growth and healing.⁶

103-5.4 People divorced for reasons other than that allowed by Scripture ought not marry another, but be reconciled, and seek God's resolution for the breakdown of the marriage.⁶ Divorced persons must seek forgiveness for any sin that **may have** led to, or is associated with, their divorce. They should seek the grace of God for their spiritual growth and healing.⁷

...

Renumber existing 103-5.3 to be 103-5.5
Renumber existing 103-5.4 to be 103-5.6

103-5.5 The church should counsel those considering divorce to seek other solutions to the problems in their relationships. There are times when a church is called upon to exercise discipline towards those who are seeking or who have obtained a divorce. There are also times when a church is called upon to exercise discipline towards those who are seeking to remarry, or who have already remarried. Remarriage is permissible for those who have been legitimately divorced or whose return to the former partner is determined by the elders, as they study the Scriptures, to be impossible.¹¹

103-5.7 The church should counsel those considering divorce to seek other solutions to the problems in their relationships. There are times when a church is called upon to exercise discipline towards those who are seeking or who have obtained a divorce. There are also times when a church is called upon to exercise discipline towards those who are seeking to remarry, or who have already remarried. Remarriage is permissible for those who **are divorced due to adultery, believers divorced by their unbelieving spouse,** ~~have been legitimately divorced~~ or whose return to the former partner is

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determined by the elders, as they study the Scriptures, to be impossible.¹² Individuals involved in these circumstances must submit themselves to the Word of God in their present situation.¹³

Renumber existing 103-5.6 to be 103-5.8

Footnotes

¹ Gen.2:24; Pro.2:17; Mal.2:14-16

² Mat.5:32; Rom.7:2

³ Mark 10:6-9; 1Cor.7:10,11

⁴ Mat.19:9

⁵ **1Cor.7:12-15**

... remainder are unchanged except renumbered

Conclusion

Given the findings of the 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 passage, we urge the amendment of BPL 103-5 to reflect the Pauline exception for divorce. We encourage you to read the attached position papers in the appendices of our committee report. Prayerfully consider our proposed amendments in the weeks leading up to the 2017 Conference. It has been a privilege to serve Conference this past year.

Study Committee on the Pauline Exception for Divorce

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Appendices

1. "Study on the Meanings of "Chorizō" and "Mē Dedoulōtai" in 1 Cor. 7" by Timothy Bertolet
2. "Does Paul's 'exception clause' for divorce in 1 Cor. 7:15 allow for remarriage?" by Joshua Miller
3. "The Context of 'Not Under Bondage' in 1 Corinthians 7" by Timothy Schmoyer
4. "Flowchart on Handling Divorce Cases" by Timothy Gibson
5. "Dealing with Issues of Divorce and Remarriage" by Daniel Williams
6. "An Annotated Bibliography" compiled by Joshua Miller

Appendix One

“Study on the Meanings of “Chorizō” and “Mē Dedoulōtai” in 1 Cor. 7”

Timothy Bertolet

1 Cor. 7:10-11

The verb “χωρίζω” can have a range of meanings. According BDAG, it can in some context connote spatial separation or division.¹ In Acts 1:4, the believers are not to depart from Jerusalem “ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων μὴ χωρίζεσθαι.” In Acts 18:1,2 Paul is described as leaving Athens, and Aquila and Priscilla had left Rome at Claudius’ edict. In this instance, there are clear indicators that geography is involved. In Philemon 15, Onesimus the slave who ran away is described as “separating” for a while. Again, context is determinative for the meaning and these instances clearly indicate spatial movement on the part of an individual. On each of these occasions where it indicates separation by some kind of departure, it is clear that there are geographical features described or movement of some is clarified by the context.

It is used to describe division or being made apart from Christ in Rom. 8:38,39. Likewise in Heb. 7:26 Christ is “separated from sinners” indicating the purpose and in it is also used this way in LXX Wisdom of Solomon 1:3 “σκολιοὶ γὰρ λογισμοὶ χωρίζουσιν ἀπὸ θεοῦ” “for bent/crooked reasoning separates from God.” Notice here the use of the preposition ἀπὸ to mark the delineation of the separation so that the spatial becomes a metaphor describing departure from God. We also have it used to describe division in Phil *Legum* 2.96 “χωρίζει τὰ ἀθάνατα ἀπὸ τῶν θνητῶν” “the immortal separated from the mortal.” Here again, we see the aspect of departure and being marked with “ἀπὸ” something.

Χωρίζω can also be used to describe separating from someone in terms of divorce (BDAG #2a) and context is larger determinative of this meaning. This is most clear in the usage in Matt. 19:6 and Mark 10:9. Jesus is quoting Genesis 2:24 regarding the marital union where the man and wife become one flesh. God joins the man and woman together and therefore they are not to be separated: “do not let man separate ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω.” In this case, ‘separation’ does not mean abandonment or movement in physical space but separating and destroying of the marital bond of ‘one flesh union’, tearing apart.

In 1 Cor. 7 the verb χωρίζω takes on this same meaning. It is clear for two primary reasons: (1) there is no designation of spatial movement; (2) it is mutually defined in context by divorce. Consider the following:

1Cor. 7:10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband

1Cor. 7:10 Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλ’ ὁ κύριος, γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι,

1Cor. 7:11 (but if she does [literally “if she departs”], she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

1Cor. 7:11 ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγήτω, καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι.

First notice that in 7:10 the phrase “the wife should not separate from her husband γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι” is parallel to “the husband should not divorce his wife ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι.” The latter clause uses ἀφίημι, translated “divorce.” Paul is giving instruction to the married, first to the married woman and then to the married man. He uses ‘χωρισθῆναι’ and ‘ἀφιέναι’ in synonymous fashion. Thus, the separation in view with the woman “separating” is divorce not merely a leaving or moving out.

¹ “χωρίζω,” BDAG, 1095.

The second indicator that we have is the instruction that *if the woman separates* “ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ” she is instructed to remain unmarried (μενέτω ἄγαμος). Paul clearly has in view here that her separation is not merely leaving or abandonment but formally dissolving the marriage. She must then remain in the is unmarried state. Separation then is used in this instance the same way that it is used in Matt. 19:6 and Mark 10:9.

In this passage, it does not say why the man or woman divorced or initiated the divorce. However, in the case where the believing woman initiated the divorce her only two options are to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. It is possible that Paul is dealing with a scenario where a believer divorced their spouse before his instruction came. In this situation where the believer initiated, they are still bound in some sense and must not remarry lest they fall into the sin of further adultery per Jesus’ instruction in Matt. 19.

1 Cor. 7:12-13,15

Here Paul turns his attention to a situation where a believer in Jesus Christ is married to an unbeliever. The most likely scenario for this to have arisen is that two unbelievers were married and then one person becomes converted to Jesus Christ. Since they are now unequally yoked, should the believer divorce the unbeliever? Paul’s instruction is that the believer should stay married to the unbeliever.

1Cor. 7:12 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

1Cor. 7:13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

It does not matter to Paul whether or not the believer is the husband or the wife. If a “brother” in Christ has a “wife who is an unbeliever,” he is not to divorce her. If the woman has a husband who is not a believer, she is not to divorce him. In both these conditions, Paul presumes the consent of the unbelieving spouse. Here the word consent is “συνευδοκέω” which means to consent, agree, or approve.² It signifies that the unbelieving spouse is fully willing to remain in the marriage knowing full well that their spouse is a believer in the Lord. The unbeliever, though not knowing the Lord savingly, is willing to maintain the vow of marriage they have taken. Therefore, the believer must not divorce.

Paul briefly discusses the holiness that the believer can bring to the marriage in relationship to their spouse. The union is considered honorable and holy before the Lord because of the believer. This may even speak to the positive influence the husband or wife may have on their unbelieving spouse.

1 Corinthians 7:15 picks back up with Paul’s thought from vv.12-13. What happens if the unbeliever does not consent to remaining in the marriage? Paul states “if the unbeliever separates εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται”. We must keep in mind how Paul has clearly used χωρίζω in the context. It is the separation of a divorce, acting to dissolve the one flesh union of marriage. So in vv.12-13 the believer (husband or wife) must not divorce, but what if the unbeliever divorces, i.e. separates?

Paul’s command is “let them depart χωρίζεσθω.” The verb is imperative and passive. If the unbeliever takes action to dissolve the marriage, the believer is allowed to let them go. The believer has not separated/divorced. The act of separation/divorce has been carried out by the unbeliever; the action was done toward the believer. But the imperative is that the believer is allowed to let the unbeliever take the action since the unbeliever is not consenting to remain in the marriage.

First, ‘ἄπιστος’ in this passage is consistently used to speak of an unsaved person in this passage. It is not someone who is a brother or sister in the Lord, which is how Paul consistently refers to the believers. *The passage is not taking about someone who professed to be a believer but is now walking*

² “συνευδοκέω,” BDAG, 970.

unfaithfully. It only speaks to a situation where someone who has now become a believer finds themselves in a marriage with someone who has not converted to Christianity. Therefore, there is no warrant for applying this passage to two Christians where one or both parties wish to seek divorce.

Second, there is no discussion here of the so-called “abandonment” exception. Paul is not speaking about a scenario where one spouse simply leaves another spouse (whether physically, emotionally, or with respect to fulfilling normal marital duties). Rather Paul is dealing with a very narrow specific instance: an unbeliever wishes to separate *by divorce* from their spouse who is a believer, most likely a new believer.

Under these very narrow and specific set of circumstances Paul is clearly dealing with in the context, if an unbeliever divorces the believer, the believer is not guilty before God by allowing the unbeliever to enact the divorce. The believer should never be the one to initiate the divorce but in this very specific and narrow circumstance, the believer is not at fault if the marriage cannot continue. While the believer should encourage the unbelieving spouse that it is possible for the marriage to continue and work, there may come a point where the unbeliever is so revolted by Christ or the new moral commitments the believer has to Christ that they take the step to divorce.

“not enslaved οὐ δεδούλωται.”

In these hard but difficult circumstance, the believer is no longer bound to the marriage union. They are, as Paul says “not enslaved οὐ δεδούλωται.” In 1987 Divorce study committee argued that δουλώ in 7:15 is not synonymous with δέω, which is used in Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Cor. 7:39.³ They reject seeing parallels between the two words. Second, the previous study committee placed a strong emphasis on the fact that 7:15 does not use the word freedom, ἐλευθέρα.⁴ They conclude, “the bond of slavery (*douloo*) here spoken of is the moral obligation to fulfill the requirements of marriage, namely cohabitation, the fulfilling of one another’s sexual needs, procreation, children-rearing, mutual support, financial obligation, etc.”⁵

First, this does not fit within the context of 1 Corinthians 7. “Slavery” and “Freedom” are automatic opposites. If one is in slavery one does not have free rights or obligations. To be “not enslaved” is to be free *by the very meaning of the words*. The slave is allowed to seek if freedom if he can, which means to no longer be enslaved:

1Cor. 7:21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθης, μή σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μᾶλλον χρῆσαι.

1Cor. 7:21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)

Similarly, elsewhere Paul contrasts freedom and slavery. In 1 Cor. 9:19, Paul describes himself as free but one who willingly enslaves himself. He gives up one category to enter into another. In 1 Cor. 12:31, the categories “free and slave” are opposite contrasts “εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι.” Just as one is either a Jew or Gentile, one is either free or slave (cf. also Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Rev. 6:17, 13:18, 19:18⁶). In Galatians 4:23, 30, 31 the son of the slave (Ishmael) is contrasted with the son of the free (Isaac). Finally in John 8:33, freedom and slavery are contrasted. The fact that the Pharisees claim they have never been enslaved is seen as contradictory to Jesus’ proclamation “you will become free.”

³ *Bible Fellowship Church Yearbook 1987*, pp.142-45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶ In these latter verses in Revelation, free and slave is specifically used as two categories that all people fall under.

Likewise in the LXX when one is not a slave one is by default a free person (cf. Deut. 15:12, 18).

We find that the previous study committee conclusion that when 1 Cor. 7:15 says “οὐ δεδούλωται” it does not mean the person is free since *eleuthera* is not used to be a false dichotomy. The absence of the word *eleuthera* is not absence of the concept. As we have demonstrated to be “not enslaved” is to be free.

Second, we find it as misleading confusing of word and concept to conclude that there is a strong difference *δουλόω* and *δέω*. General ‘δέω’ to bind and is often used on physical bondage. However, it can be used to speak of being under obligation, a state of bondage or enslavement from which one must be released in the same way one would be released from slavery. For example in Romans 6:6 there is a releasing from the body of sin so that we might not be enslaved. Here *καταργέω* is to release one from slavery and in Rom. 7:2, it is the same as being released from ‘the bondage of/by law.’

There is one instance in the LXX where being made a slave is synonymous with being in bondage. It is a type of poetic parallelism where they are made slaves by being bound:

Isa. 45:14b And the lofty men of Seboin shall come over to you, and they shall be your slaves; they shall follow behind you bound in handcuffs. “καὶ σοὶ ἔσονται δοῦλοι καὶ ὀπίσω σου ἀκολουθήσουσιν δεδεμένοι χειροπέδαις”

In Romans 7, Paul shows that *δέω* and *δουλόω* are in fact, part of the same synonymous terms that denote slavery, bondage, and obligation which contrasts with freedom and being released.

Rom. 7:2 ἡ γὰρ ὑπανδρος γυνὴ τῷ ζῶντι ἀνδρὶ δέδετα νόμῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, κατήρηται ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ἀνδρός.

Rom. 7:3 ἄρα οὖν ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνδρός μοιχαλὶς χρηματίζει ἐὰν γένηται ἀνδρὶ ἐτέρῳ· ἐὰν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, τοῦ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὴν μοιχαλίδα γενομένην ἀνδρὶ ἐτέρῳ.

Rom. 7:4 ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ἐτέρῳ, τῷ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγερθέντι, ἵνα καρποφορήσωμεν τῷ θεῷ...

Rom. 7:6 νυνὶ δὲ κατηργήθημεν ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἀποθανόντες ἐν ᾧ κατειχόμεθα, ὥστε δουλεύειν ἡμᾶς ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος καὶ οὐ παλαιότητι γράμματος.

Rom. 7:2 For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.

Rom. 7:3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Rom. 7:4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Rom. 7:6 But now we are released (κατηργήθημεν) from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve (δουλεύειν)⁷ in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

In this passage being “not bound” means you are free to belong to another. Belonging to another is to become enslaved to another. This extends the analogy from chapter 6 that we were slaves to sin and dying to Christ set us free (Rom. 6:16-18). Part of this is that we are not under the Law (and its

⁷ *δουλεύω* (to be a slave) is the same root as *δουλόω* (to make someone a slave). The point remains that slavery is a form of subjugation and bondage.

condemnation) because we have died to the Law. Just like in marriage one is released from bounds (7:2) upon death, so in Christ one is released from enslavement (Rom. 6:6,7). Sin does not have dominion in terms of enslaving power because the believer is not under Law but grace (6:14). One can speak of being released from slavery and being released from bondage because Paul is using the binding under martial obligations as a near synonym for slavery where one is not their own but compelled by something else.

The argument is thus: you are bound in marriage until death. Upon death you are free to remarry. Paul then compares it: when you are released from the Law which brought condemnation,⁸ you are free *to become enslaved to Christ and the Holy Spirit*. The point is *'not being bound' to one spouse allows you to be bound (7:2-3) or enslaved (7:6) to another*. If you are released and not bound, you are free to become enslaved again to something different.

The parallel is thus:

First Marriage	Second Marriage
(7:2) Bound until released	Released free to Remarry (be bound)
(7:6) <u>Released</u> from Law	Become <u>slave</u> to Spirit

Returning again to 1 Cor. 7:15, we conclude that if the believer is “not enslaved” then they are not bound by marital obligations of *any kind* but would be permitted to enter the bonds of marriage again. The nature of “not enslaved” entails freedom. In 1 Cor. 7:11, Paul does not tell us the person is “not enslaved” in fact there only options are remain unmarried or return to their spouse. In 1 Cor. 7:15, the “not enslaved” is not a bondservant (δοῦλος) to the marriage which entails freedom, including freedom to become enslaved to another (Rom. 7:6).

Paul calls all believers to, as much as it depends upon them, to live at peace with all people (Rom. 12:18), including an unbelieving spouse. However, if the unbeliever refuses to consent to live in their marriage to the believer, and reasonable attempts have been made upon the part of the believer to reconcile and show that it would be possible, there may come a point where the most peaceable thing the believer can do is let the unbeliever leave in their rebellion and sin. The believer then is allowed to let the unbeliever go because ‘God has called the believer to peace’ (ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός). It must be again stressed, that divorce is not to be permitted or allowed between two believers for between two believers it is not keeping the peace that they are to have in Christ and before Christ if they divorce. Two believers are *never* allowed to claim “we would be more peaceable if we divorced” because this would be in rebellion against Christ, and therefore not truly peaceable. Such pragmatism in the name of pseudo-peace is sin, transgression against God’s Word, and open rebellion.

⁸ Note that in Romans 6:6, being released from the body of sin is the same as being no longer enslaved. In Rom. 7, being released is the same as not being bound. Thus being released, not being bound, and not being enslaved are all *synonymous concepts*.

Appendix Two

“Does Paul’s ‘exception clause’ for divorce in 1 Cor. 7:15 allow for remarriage?”

Joshua Miller

1 Cor. 7:15 “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.”

An examination of 1 Cor. 7:15 yields a number of interpretive questions that must first be answered before we can arrive at a conclusion to our lead question.

- 1) Does the verb “separates” (χωρίζεται) carry the same meaning as divorce?
- 2) What is Paul referring to when he says that the believing spouse is “not enslaved” (οὐ δεδούλωται)?
- 3) How does the truth “God has called you to peace” (ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός) relate to Paul’s instruction regarding separation?
- 4) If “separates” carries the same meaning as “divorce” (ἀφιέναι) in 1 Cor. 7:11 is the believing partner free to remarry? If one argues that the believing partner is free to remarry how do they account for Paul’s instruction given in verse 11, where Paul explicitly instructs the separated spouse not to remarry but to be reunited with their spouse?

The term “separates” is from the Greek verb *cwrizw* and can mean both a spatial separation (Acts 1:4; Philemon 15) and a relational separation (Romans 8:35, 39). In Matt. 19:6 and Mark 10:9 Jesus uses this term in His command concerning marriage, “What therefore God has joined together let not man separate.” The word became associated with the dissolution of a marriage as early as the fourth century B. C.⁹ Arndt and Gingrich record that the term is even found in marriage contracts in the papyri as early as the second century B. C.¹⁰

When one considers the immediate context of 1 Cor. 7:10-11 it becomes even clearer that the term means the official dissolution of the marriage contract. In 1 Cor. 7:10 Paul’s instruction to the believer who has separated (*cwrizw*) is to decide between one of two options, remain as you are [unmarried] or be reconciled to your husband. It would seem certain that Paul is not simply referring to the spatial separation of ‘bed and board’ but the official relational separation of divorce.

In 1 Cor. 7:15 Paul presents a case study of an unbeliever married to a believer in which the unbeliever desires and pursues separation from the believer. The verb “separates” is in the present tense and uses a middle voice indicating that the desire to separate and the act of separation are entirely the work of the unbeliever. This is also brought out by the fact that “the unbeliever” (ὁ ἄπιστος) is syntactically placed in the emphatic position of the sentence.

Paul’s instruction to the believing spouse is, “let the separation happen” (χωριζέσθω). This passive imperative instructs the believing spouse to allow the unbeliever to carry out their desire to dissolve the marriage. This is quite shocking counsel when one considers Paul’s previous instruction on the

⁹ R. L. ROBERTS, “The Meaning of *χωρίζω* and *δουλόω* in 1 Cor 7:10–17,” *Restoration Quarterly* 8 (1965) 179–84.

¹⁰ W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). Art. “*cwrizw*.”

seriousness of the marriage bond in 7:1-5, on the permanence of marriage in 7:10-11, and on the spiritual benefit marriage dispenses upon the unbelieving spouse in 7:12-14.

Because of this shocking counsel Paul finds it necessary to explain his reasons with two supporting premises. The first premise is, "In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved." But this sentence brings with it a necessary follow-up question – "not enslaved to what?" The three most legitimate proposals are as follows.

- 1) When Paul speaks of the believer no longer being enslaved he is referring to the marriage itself.
- 2) He is referring to the marital obligations mentioned in (7:2-5).
- 3) He is referring to the believing spouse's enslaved conscience to prevent the divorce and salvage the marriage contract at any cost.

It is the contention of this author that Paul is releasing the believing spouse from the obligation of salvaging the marriage at any cost. His arguments regarding the seriousness, permanence, and spiritual benefit of marriage would have bound the conscience of the believing spouse to preserve the marriage at any cost. Paul is saying that to live this way is enslavement and your conscience is set free from this obligation.

The second premise, "(but) God has called you to peace" logically flows from the above understanding of the first premise. What is often overlooked is the contrasting δὲ in Paul's closing phrase δὲ εἰρήνη κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός. What exactly is the contrast Paul is making? Is peace being contrasted with interpersonal turmoil with the unbelieving spouse? Is Paul in a sense saying, "just let them have what they want and there will be a measure of peace between you?" Surely this is not the peace God has called us to as believers. Is peace being contrasted with the idea of divorce? Of course not, as Paul has already permitted the believing spouse to let the unbeliever separate. Or is peace being contrasted with a believer who has enslaved their conscience to preserve a marriage that they have no obligation or ability to preserve? Indeed, this is exactly what Paul is talking about. God is not holding you in a state of perpetual sin because you cannot preserve of marriage you are not bound to preserve. Your conscience is free before the Lord.

So, back to our original question. Does 1 Cor. 7:15 permit the divorced believer to remarry? Although this verse does not speak directly to the issue of remarriage it follows from the conclusions reached throughout this paper that the believing spouse is free to remarry. The conscience of the believer is not bound (enslaved) as it is in the case presented in 1 Cor. 7:11 where two believing spouses have divorced.

That being said, it is necessary to qualify this conclusion with the instructions given throughout the remainder of the chapter. First Corinthians 7:26-27 delivers Paul's overarching pastoral counsel concerning the matter - "I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife." Apparently, the current social, spiritual, and political climate was of a certain intensity that Paul counsels them to limit any additional worldly distress so as not to divide their affection and their devotion between the things of this world, namely marriage, and the Lord (7:28-29, 32-35, 40). However, he stops short of binding their conscience on the matter and allows any who are single and betrothed to marry if they so desire (7:28, 36, 39). I believe that our believing subject from 7:15 falls into this category and is free to remarry although Paul advises against it.

Appendix Three

“The Context of ‘Not Under Bondage’ in 1 Corinthians 7”

Timothy Schmoyer

1 Corinthians 7:15 reads “but if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace” (ESV). In order to consider whether Paul truly gives an exception for divorce, we need to understand this phrase “is not enslaved”. NASB renders it “not under bondage”. Let’s look at the context of the entire passage and look for clues about the meaning of bondage/enslavement.

Introduction to the Chapter (v1a)

Beginning in 7:1, Paul changes direction from the preceding chapters with this phrase “now concerning the matters about which you wrote.” He is moving away from things on his agenda and moves on to the topics of which they are requesting his counsel. We are not sure what the entire range of their request is, but they are interested in his views regarding marriage and singleness, sexual intimacy and celibacy within marriage. Whether Paul restricts himself to the issues they wrote about, or whether he ranges past their specific request is unknown.

It is unclear if the remainder of verse one is his statement or his quotation of their statement from the letter they sent to him. ESV puts it in quotes, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” In this way, ESV is indicating that this was the premise offered by the Corinthians to Paul for his comments. He quotes their premise and then verse 2 and following contain his counsel regarding their statement. Conversely, NASB reads as if Paul is making his own introductory statement on the subject of sex and marriage. Either way, the section is on the topic of marriage, singleness, sexual intimacy, and celibacy.

Paul Introduces His Counsel to the Married and Single (v1b-9)

Paul in verses 2 through 9 covers the topic of singleness, with a significant departure into the topic of marriage. His personal wish is that Christians remain single. He immediately recognizes the propensity humans have to desire sexual intimacy and therefore commends marriage as the wholesome alternative to sexual immorality (ie sexual activity outside the marriage covenant).

His immediate departure from singleness to teach a bit on sex within marriage uncovers our first observation of the theme of freedom and obligation as it pertains to marriage. He agrees with the Corinthians that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (ie remain single) in verse 1, “but because of immorality let each take a spouse” in verse 2. Now within marriage, let each fulfill their duty to the other in verse 3, because each does not have authority over their own body, but their spouse does in verse 4. The language of verses 3 and 4 show the reader something about marriage that is not the case for unmarried persons, namely that married persons have a duty to their spouse, that their spouse has authority over them.

Verse 3 begins a description of the way spouses are bound to one another.

NASB: “The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.”

ESV: “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.”

GNT: τη γυναικι ο ανηρ την οφειλην αποδιδτω ομοιως δε και η γυνη τω ανδρι.

The imperative αποδιδτω shows the direction Paul gives to the married. We who are married are commanded to give to our spouse την οφειλην (what is owed, cf Rom 13:7 re taxes). Contextually, what Paul’s Greek simply calls “the thing owed” is what ESV explicitly identifies as “conjugal rights.” The imperative mood puts a binding onto a married person. You are bound to your spouse to give them

their conjugal rights. The rhythms of how each married couple applies these duties and rights is up to them, but Paul would have us recognize that we are bound in this way.

Verse 4 emphasizes this principle of binding even more decisively.

NASB: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."

ESV: "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."

GNT: η γυνη του ιδιου συματος ουκ εξουσιαει αλλα ο ανηρ, ομοιος δε και ο ανηρ του ιδιου σωματος ου εξουσιαζει αλλα η γυνη

Neither a married man nor a married woman may exercise authority over their own body, but the spouse does. She does not exercise authority ουκ εξουσιαει over her body. He does not exercise authority ουκ εξουσιαει over his body. The "likewise" in the center screams into the patriarchal civilization of Paul's day that each one of us are not our own, but are bought with a price (6:19-20). First, we are under the authority of the Lord as to what we do with our bodies (6:19-20), and now the same theme of "not your own" continues with those married. You are not your own, not free, not exercising authority over yourself. We who are married are under the subjection of our spouse. To husbands in a patriarchal civilization, this observation is most subversive. We husbands do not only subject our wives, but they in turn subject us. At the very least as it pertains to the marriage bed and the rhythms of our intimacy, but Paul has more in mind than merely romantic intimacy..

What does this observation from verses 3-4 show us as we consider the context of "not under bondage" in verse 15? It has huge import. During the time that the believer of verse 15 was married to the unbeliever, the believer was duty-bound and under the authority of their unbelieving spouse, likewise the unbeliever was under the authority of their believing spouse. Now that the unbeliever χωριζεται (is separated), the believer is no longer under authority but has their authority return to them. The single has authority over their own body (6:12). When a single is married, they give their authority to their partner as God joins the two together as one. This giving (αποδοτω) is observed in 7:3-4. Thematically, the act of divorce returns authority over one's self to the believing recipient of divorce, as Paul tells them they are not under bondage (7:15).

After verse 5, Paul returns from conjugal marriage to his original topic, which is the ideal of celibate singleness, which is outside the scope of this project. He then returns to his counsel to the married.

Paul's Counsel to the Married: Stay Married, Work to Strengthen the Marriage (v10-16)

Paul has two movements within his counsel to the married. First, "to the married... not I, but the Lord" in verses 10-11. Second, "to the rest I say, not the Lord" in verses 12-16.

Movement One: To Two Believers Married Together (v10-11)

First, Paul echoes the words of the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry regarding the permanence of marriage and the impossibility of divorce. Likely he is citing Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9 since the command is constructed the same way.

Verse 10 commands a wife to "not separate from her husband." The Lord Jesus commanded in Matthew 19:6 "what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (ESV).

In this allusion to Christ's words, Paul is teaching his congregation to stay married for multiple reasons. First, it is not I but the Lord Jesus instructing you to do this. Second, God has joined you together, therefore He is not disappointed in you for your marriage bond. Many early ascetics were teaching married believers to either divorce their believing spouses so as to be celibate (v10), or remain married but not engage in sexual intimacy with the partner (v5). God is not impressed with this behavior. He joined the two as one and is pleased for them to be, in all ways, marriage partners.

Thirdly, believing marriages distinguish themselves from nonbelieving marriages in that they are committed and do not casually break bonds with each other.

What if a believer does initiate divorce with their believing spouse? Paul's guidance to the errant divorcee is that they may not marry another, but to either remain unmarried or return to the spouse they left. He explicitly says this to the wife who initiates a divorce. Though he does not explicitly command a husband in the same way, it is implied by the *καί* which joins the instruction to wives with the instruction to husbands. The heart behind this guidance is that a divorce initiated by a believer for reasons other than the Lord's exception (Matthew 5:32, 19:9) does not unbound the marriage partners in the Lord's eyes. Later in verse 15, a believing recipient of divorce is not bound, but here in verse 11, this initiator is still bound to the marriage obligations. Society and Law may see you as unbound, but the Lord considers you bound still, for He joined the two together as one, let no one separate this union.

Movement Two: A Believer Married to a Non-Believer (v12-16)

Interestingly, Paul begins this section with the words "to the rest", as if to say that, the marriage of two believers (v10-11) is different than the rest who are believers married to non-believers (v12-16). It is different in one major way – we cannot expect the non-believer to act like a believer. Believers are bound to each other both by their own words (vows) and their subjection to Christ's commands. Nonbelievers do not subject themselves to Christ.

Paul also begins this section with "I say, not the Lord" (v12). This should not be taken to mean that Paul is not writing under the inspiration of the Spirit at this moment, but rather one should understand this phrase as meaning "I am not quoting the Lord here, I am giving you a unique situation that Jesus in His earthly ministry never spoke about." Paul is bringing up a unique instance in two ways. First Jesus spoke of believer-to-believer, never believer-to-unbeliever. Second, Jesus spoke of initiator, Paul now brings up the new case of recipient.

Paul begins where Jesus does, with the scenario of the initiator of divorce. In verses 12-13, Paul instructs believers to never initiate a divorce with their unbelieving spouse. In this way, he does have the Lord on this since Jesus also taught believers to not initiate divorce (Mt 5:32, 19:9, Mk 10:11-12, Lk 16:18). Both Jesus and Paul direct us believers not to initiate divorce. Unique to Paul here is the instance of marriage to a non-believer. Even in this difficult scenario, believers do not initiate a divorce. Paul's summary of the movement is this: "How do you know, o wife (o husband), whether you will save your husband (wife)?" in verse 16. By initiating divorce, a believer is abandoning his or her divine mandate to seek the salvation of the spouse and thereby to strengthen the marriage.

Having dealt with the issue of initiative, Paul now considers the scenario of the recipient of a divorce initiated by the non-believing spouse. In verse 15, he turns from the ideal of doing all you can to positively strengthen the marriage, with the words "yet if". This is the exact construction earlier in v11. You are striving for the ideal, but when the ideal doesn't work, what then? This is the pattern of Paul's argument in both segments v10-11 and v14-15.

When the non-believer initiates a divorce with their believing spouse, as long as the believer was not previously guilty of *πορνείας* sexual immorality (Mt 5:32) and as long as the believer was striving to preserve and strengthen the marriage (v12-13), then the guilt of the divorce lays entirely with the initiator. Such a recipient is not guilty before God.

Paul goes to lengths here to describe the guiltlessness of the recipient. He writes:
ESV: "let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace."
NASB: "let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."

GNT: χωριζεσθω ου δεδουλωται ο αδελφος η η αδελφη εν τοις τοιοτοις εν δε ειρηνη κεκληκεν ημας ο θεος

This first piece of the quote shows the helplessness and therefore guiltlessness of the recipient. Χωριζεσθω, rendered “let him leave” or “let it be so,” is third person singular present passive imperative. Instead of reading it as if the recipient is permitting it to be done, it should better be understood as “the initiator must be separated/divorced”. The recipient had nothing to do with the act of the divorce or therefore the guilt of it.

The second piece of the quote comforts the believer, whether a brother or sister, in that God does not consider them to be enslaved/under bondage. Whereas the married person is under a covenantal duty and under the authority of their spouse (v3-4), the believer who is a recipient of a divorce is not enslaved by these things any longer. The authority over their body that they once held as a single in their own volition, they gave to their marriage partner during their wedding vows, now this authority returns to them since they were the innocent recipient of divorce.

They are free insofar as they are not under bondage. Paul plays with these two poles of enslaved and free in the following section of the chapter (v17-24). Particularly in v21-23 to be enslaved is to not be free and to be free is to be unenslaved. In this polar relationship, the unenslaved divorcee is free to remarry just as the widow is (v39)

Paul’s Counsel to Be Content regardless of Status: Parable for Marriage and Singleness (17-24)

Paul uses the issues of circumcision and uncircumcision, freedom and slavery, to illustrate our need to be content in our marital status. The overarching principle in these analogies is found in v17, “as God called each, in this manner let him walk.” In the same way, remain married to that non-believer if God saved you while married to them. If you were single when first saved, remain that way (v8, 26, et al). Are you married to a believer, certainly remain that way (v10-11). So this theme of “remain” pervades the whole chapter as it does in this section.

Each of the analogies line up with one another and are analogous to one pole of the married/single dichotomy. He cements the connection of these analogies with the same sentence structure down in verse 27 “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife” (NASB) as we find here in verses 18 and 21. Notice in verse 18, 21, and 27 Paul asks a yes or no question and then gives a command.

Related to the Law	Related to Economics	Its Analog in Marital Status
Circumcision	Slavery	Marriage
Uncircumcision	Freedom	Singleness

Circumcision is very much analogous to Slavery in Paul’s mind. One can simply read Galatians to note this connection in his thinking (Gal 5:1-3). Then uncircumcision is analogous to Freedom as the polar opposites of circumcision and slavery. Paul isn’t forgetting which letter he’s writing as he switches from a chapter on marriage to the finer points of freedom from the Law. He is using the commonly accepted Christian message of freedom from Law to discuss our satisfaction with our marital status. Just as an uncircumcised Christian should not become circumcised, so a single Christian should remain content as he is. Just as a slave should not worry about his slavery, so a spouse should not worry that they are married (“under authority” in verse 4).

In this chart, the recipient of divorce as described in Paul’s previous passage line-ups with the freedman. Do not fret that you are unfettered from this enslavement, God has freed you so be content about your new status (v21b = v15).

Paul’s Counsel to the Unmarried: Stay Single, Marry if You Must (v25-40)

He asks in verse 27 if anyone is bound to a wife. We notice this mounting theme in the chapter of being bound. He follows up at the end of that verse with the opposite question “is anyone released from a wife?”

Continuing the theme of free and bound, he encourages the unmarried in verse 32 that they are free from concern because the married one (v33) is concerned with how to please his wife. He calls this person ἀγαμος unmarried. This is the same word in v11 for the hard-hearted believer who divorces their spouse and remains ἀγαμος unmarried. If the hard-hearted initiator of divorce in verse 10 can be free from concern about how to please their spouse in verse 32, then certainly the humble believing recipient of divorce can be as free from concern, if not more so.

Verse 37 echoes the earlier sentiments about the unmarried “having authority over his own will” (6:12) as opposed to the married “not having authority over his own body, but his wife does” (7:4). Paul advises the unmarried to keep that self-authority for the purposes of undistracted service to the Lord (v32, 34, 35). He concedes though that the unmarried are free to give that authority to a spouse (v38). The believing recipient of divorce is unbound and is ἀγαμος unmarried. It seems natural that such a one, who has had their self-authority return to them in the reception of a divorce, is free like the virgin (v38) and the widow (v39) to give their self-authority to a spouse.

Finally, the apostle writes that the widow is bound while the spouse lives, but at death of the spouse, the widow is free to be married in the Lord (v39). Here, he uses both poles of the analogy. She was δεδεσται bound, but is now ελευθερα free. The recipient of divorce was bound, is now ου δεδουλωται unbound (v15). However, the analogy is not bipolar in verse 15.

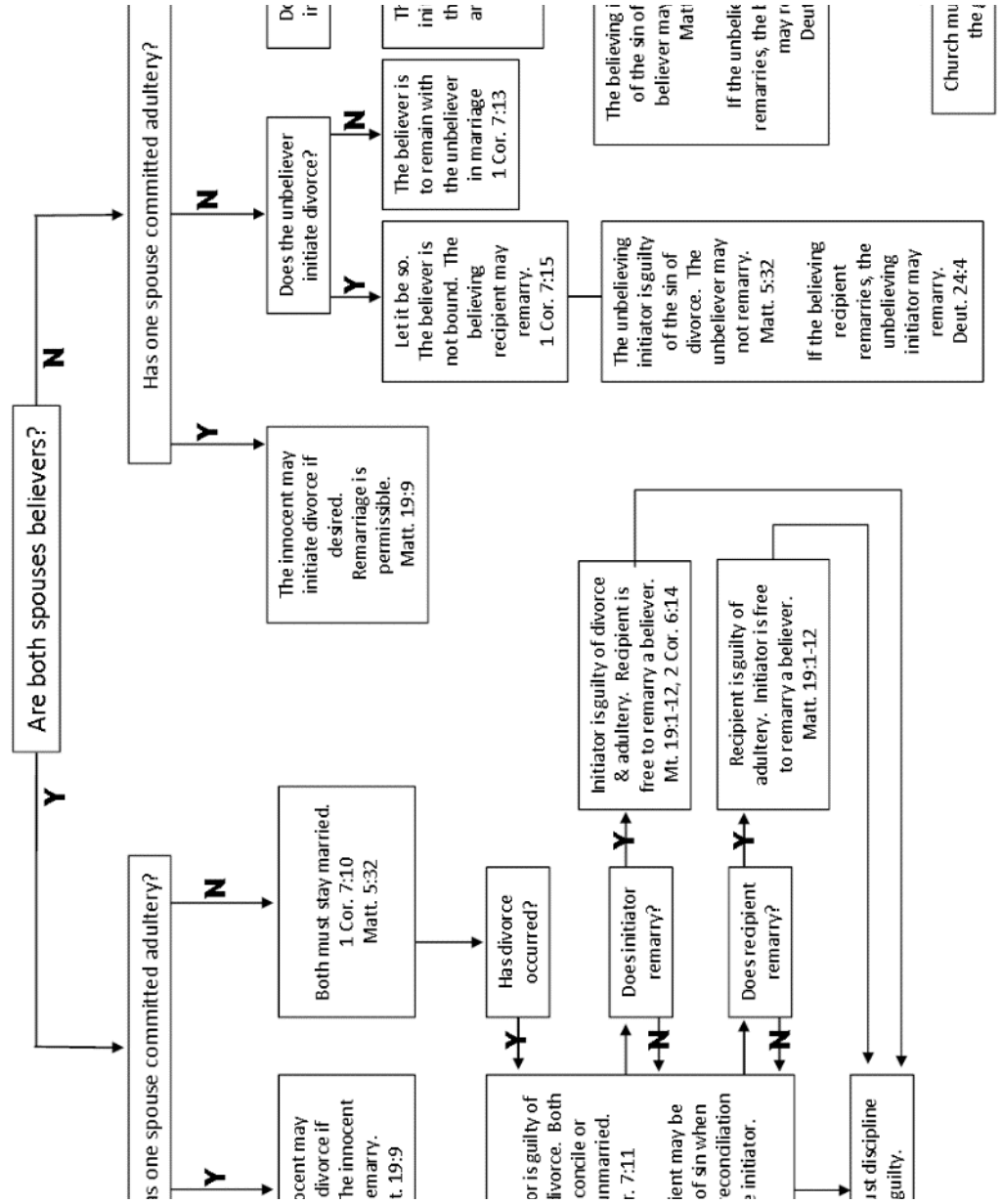
Conclusion: “Unbound” in verse 15 thematically equals “Free” in verse 27 and 39

The question for us is this: is “not bound” equal to “free”. The answer is from a grammatical perspective is obviously yes. But we pause because he certainly could have used “free” in v15 and he chose not to. We pause because we do not want to go beyond what the text says. In any other topic than marriage, we would certainly say that someone unbound is free. Someone free is unbound. Bound and free are polar opposites, grammatically speaking.

Now we return to verse 15. When a nonbeliever initiates a divorce, the innocent believing recipient is not bound to the marriage, but instead is free in all the ways a single is. Such a recipient could remain single, which is Paul’s preference for all. Alternately, the recipient is free to marry “in the Lord” as any single believer is free to do.

Appendix Four "Flowchart on Handling Divorce Cases" Timothy Gibson

Flowchart on Handling Divorce



Appendix Five

“Dealing with Issues of Divorce and Remarriage”

Daniel Williams

Some Personal Considerations for Pastoral Ministry

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.”
1 Peter 5:2a

“Sheep stink.” This was the brutally honest opening statement from a fellow pastor on the other end of a telephone call that I took some years ago. My colleague and good friend was probably looking for a safe place to vent more than he was looking for reassurance or godly counsel. And, while the issue that he was calling about had nothing to do with matters of divorce and remarriage, our conversation that day simply reminded me that life as a shepherd, on the front lines of pastoral ministry, is a messy and challenging place.

Still, granted that the realities of remaining sin which continue to dirty our wedding dress as the bride of Jesus Christ in a present, practical sense today, what are some bits of advice that might prove genuinely helpful for us as pastors and leaders with regard to issues of divorce and remarriage in our culture and context? How can we best faithfully shepherd the flock of God that is among us in this particular area? What can we practically do to help people who are coming through or consider a change in their marital situation?

First, I think we can appreciate the complexity of this subject. In most cases, walking with our people through matters of separation, divorce, and/or remarriage is highly complex. Appreciating this reality—without compromising biblical integrity—is key to being faithful both to God’s word and to those to whom we minister. Oftentimes the complicated nuances of life muddy up out simplistic “decision flow charts.” The tragic end of a marriage is almost always the consequence of poor choices and sin by both marriage partners. Simply listening carefully, and critically, to how an individual or couple has arrived at such a dark place can shed important light on how best to counsel our people. Resist, when appropriate, any “one-size-fits-all” responses to this—one of life’s most sorrowful situations—dilemma.

Another often overlooked point by pastors is preaching on the subject of God’s plan for a holy marriage. A pastoral staff can so often feel like a small-town fire brigade—moving from scene to scene putting out small fires. However, due to the decline of public respect for the institution of legitimate (biblical) marriage and the promotion of all manners of alternative ideologies in our culture, our people need—perhaps more than ever—a clear and trustworthy defense of God’s will for human sexuality and marriage (cf. 1 Thess. 4:3, et. al.). We need to preach boldly that marriage is to be held in honor among all, and that the marriage bed should be kept undefiled, or else (Hebrews 13:4)! Instead of taking a “wait-and-see” approach, the wise pastor will proactively direct his flock’s attention on such crucial matters to what God’s word so clearly states. You can be assured, every church has people who are presently in need of wise, biblical instruction on this important subject.

Related to the previous point, as pastors and elders in the church, we need to be clear and consistent in both the interpretation and application of biblical truth with regard to questions of the validity of divorce and/or remarriage. That is, where God’s word is crystal clear, we ought to be equally so (cf. Matthew 19:9). On the other hand, we should also be careful not to be unduly dogmatic in circumstances that are less obvious. An example of this is in 1 Corinthians 7 and the issue of Paul’s “exception” of divorce for a believer whose unbelieving spouse desires to separate from him or her. A

faithful shepherd needs to examine carefully the circumstances in such situations and allow the word of God to dictate one's conclusion. However, this principle also reminds us that, in terms of local church ministry, an elder board needs to follow through with consistency without showing prejudice or partiality based upon the particular parties involved. This would be displeasing to the Lord (cf. James 2:1ff).

The final piece of advice should go without saying (but, I'll say it anyway). As with all issues of sin, remember that the Good News is the ultimate solution. No, that is not an oversimplification or copout. Again, the possible scenarios which carry our people through our doors shell-shocked and in tears are endless. But, the hope that we can provide them is always the same. Jesus Christ died to pay for sins like the ones we are addressing here. And more than that, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and grants us his own precious spirit in order that we might walk in newness of life with him (cf. Romans 6:4). May it never be said of us that we comfort or counsel any person for any reason without beginning and ending with the Good News of Jesus Christ. What other comfort is there? What better counsel for feuding spouses than to model the grace of Christ's own ability to forgive offenses (cf. Colossians 3:13). Always remember, the gospel is both a message to be believed and a way of life to pursue.

The New Testament instructs us in places like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 regarding the godly character of those who are qualified to serve as shepherds for the flock of God. One reason why God's under shepherds are to be prayerful, Spirit-filled men is because life has a way of presenting varied and complex issues for us as church leaders. God did not choose to give us a codex with the answers to every possible scenario that we might face in life. Instead, God gave us an infallible and sufficient story—a story in which we see God himself starring as the hero—to illumine our journey. May we look to God and His holy book, not only for the answers to sensitive dilemmas but also for the proper attitude and grace to help our people trust what God's word has to say.

Appendix Six “An Annotated Bibliography” compiled by Joshua Miller

Views on the ‘Pauline privilege’ in 1 Cor. 7:15:

Does the phrase “not enslaved” mean the woman is not in slavery to the former spouse, not in bondage to the marriage bond which would prevent freedom to remarry, or is there a third way to understand this phrase?

- 1) Gordon Fee in his commentary on 1 Corinthians forcefully argues against any freedom to remarry. i) the general thrust of the chapter is against remarriage, it would be strange for Paul to make change course with a what is essentially a throw away line. ii) *to enslave* is not a usual way of describing marriage. iii) 7:39 indicates that only death can dissolve the marriage bond. iv) 7:11 disallows remarriage v) the general argument in chapter 7 is to remain as one is without actively seeking a change in status.
 - Ben Witherington in *Women in the Earliest Churches* supports Gordon Fee’s view

- 2) John Murray in *Divorce* (pp. 72-78) unhelpfully presents both uses of *dedoulotai* “as legitimate.” Before expounding on Paul’s use of *dedoulotai*, Murray attempts (pp. 70-72) to reconcile Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 7:15 with Jesus teaching in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9.
 - i. Jesus was dealing with the question of putting away. Paul is not dealing with putting away but with willful desertion on the part of the unbeliever.
 - ii. From v. 12 Paul is obviously dealing with cases that did not come within the purview of our Lord’s teaching.
 - iii. It is a feasible assumption that our Lord was dealing with cases in which both spouses are believers by profession and covenant relationship.
 - iv. There is a striking difference between the terms Paul uses and the injunctions he gives in verses 10 and 11, when the separation of two believing spouses is in view, and the terms and injunctions of vers 15, when desertion on the part of an unbeliever is envisaged.

Following his concession that *dedoulotai* implies the dissolution of marriage and thus the freedom to remarry, Murray details that the following limitations must be observed.

1. Paul is dealing with mixed marriages and not with marriages between two Christians
 2. Paul is dealing with the willful separation on the part of the unbeliever. The Christian must not separate or take any initiative in parting from or putting away the unbeliever.
 3. The separation in view must be conceived of as finding its root in fundamental religious discordance, not simply disagreement respecting certain aspects of the Christian faith and practice but discordance between the Christian faith and its antithesis.
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- 3) R. L. Roberts, “The Meaning of *χωρίζω* and *δουλώ* in 1 Cor 7:10–17,” *Restoration Quarterly* 8 (1965) 179–84.

This important article shares many of the concerns articulated by Gordon Fee concerning the popular understanding of the term *dedoulotai* in 1 Cor. 7:15. However, this article reaches a radically different conclusion, arguing that the Christian spouse who has been divorced by their unbelieving spouse should no longer ‘enslave’ their conscience by bearing the burden and guilt of a divorced marriage.

4) Works of import by W. A. Heth

- *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus*, co-authored by Gordon Wenham
 - o Argues that a reformation exegesis which follows Erasmus distorts the absoluteness which Jesus ascribes to the marriage bond.
- "Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion" in *Remarriage After Divorce Today's Church: 3 Views*, eds. Mark L. Strauss and Paul Engle
- "Another Look at the Erasmian View of Divorce and Remarriage." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (September 1982): 263–72.
- "The Changing Basis for Permitting Remarriage After Divorce for Adultery: The Influence of R. H. Charles." *Trinity Journal* 11 (Fall 1990): 143–59.
- "A Critique of the Evangelical Protestant View of Divorce and Remarriage." *Studia Theologica et Apologia* 1 (1981): 11–39.
- "Divorce and Remarriage: The Search for an Evangelical Hermeneutic." *Trinity Journal* 16 (Spring 1995): 63–100.
- "Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed." *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6 (Spring 2002): 4–29.
- "The Meaning of Divorce in Matthew 19:3–9." *Churchman* 98 (1984): 136–52.
- "Remarriage: Two Views: Why Remarriage Is Wrong." *Christianity Today*, 14 December 1992, p. 34.

5) Works by David Instone-Brewer.

- Instone-Brewer, David. "1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri." *Tyndale Bulletin* 52 (2001): 225–43.
- *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- "Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Origin of the Jewish Divorce Certificate." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 49 (Autumn 1998): 230–43.
- "Jewish Women Divorcing Their Husbands in Early Judaism: The Background to Papyrus Se'elim 13" *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (July 1999): 349–57.

6) Danker, Frederick, W. F. Arndt, Walter Bauer, and F. W. Gingrich. "Χωρίζω" and "συνευδοκέω" *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print.

7) Brown, Colin, "Separate: Divorce, Separation and Remarriage" in *NIDNTT*, 3:535-43 (in abridged edition pp. 616-618).