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# THE MARRIAGE OF UNBELIEVERS

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## **1 Corinthians 7:8-16**

8 But I say **to the unmarried and to the widows**: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;

9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

10 Now **to the married** I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

12 But **to the rest** I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

14 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.

15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

This passage is a source of great controversy, not only among our brethren, but also among churches outside of our fellowship.

## **THE GROUPS ENVISIONED**

First, notice the three distinct groups that are being addressed in this chapter.

**GROUP #1: The unmarried and widows**

## **1 Corinthians 7:8**

8 I say to **the unmarried** and to the widows ...

### **GROUP #2: The married**

## **1 Corinthians 7:10**

10 Now to **the married** I command, yet not I but the Lord ...

This group called "**the married**" does not mean all married people in all the world.

We know this because in v12 another group of married people called "**the rest.**"

This group called "**the married**" is a special group of married people. What kind of married people is this group? To answer this it will help to look at the next group of people.

### **GROUP #3: The rest**

## **1 Corinthians 7:12**

12 But to **the rest** I, not the Lord, say: ...

What makes this third group different from the second group called "the married"? This third group called "the rest" is what we call a "***mixed marriage***" – not racially mixed, but ***religiously mixed***.

## **1 Corinthians 7:12**

12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

**Q:** What do we know about these last two groups?

**"the rest"** (v12) = Christians married to unbelievers

**"the married"** (v10) = two Christians married to each other

## **SUMMARY**

So here are the groups that are instructed in 1 Cor 7.

- Each group has its own instructions.
- It would be wrong to apply the same instructions to each group. (Why lump the rules together since the apostle separated the rules to each group?)
- Notice in the third group (v12) – only the Christian is given instructions.
- No instructions were given to alien sinners – neither in this passage nor any other passage.

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**NOTE:** Aliens have marriage laws, but the divorce laws of the NT were never given to aliens. (This will be very important.)

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**FOR EMPHASIS:** There are clearly two different rules for married Christians:

**vv10-11** – tell Christians what to do when they are married to a fellow Christian.

**vv12-15** – tell Christians what to do when they are married to an unbeliever.

**The rules in vv10-11 do not apply to Christians married to unbelievers.** If they did, there would have been no need to write the rules found in vv12-15.

## THE LORD'S EARTHLY MINISTRY

Go back and notice what is said in:

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

10 Now to the married **I command, yet not I but the Lord**: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

**"I command, yet not I but the Lord"** – this means that **Jesus, during His earthly ministry**, directed His instructions towards two Christians married to each other.

Matthew 5:32 – applies to two Christians married to each other.

Matthew 19:9 – applies to two Christians married to each other.

Mark 10:11-12 – applies to two Christians married to each other.

Luke 16:18 – applies to two Christians married to each other.

We are not having to guess about this. An inspired apostle is telling us in 1 Cor 7:10 that the instructions of the Lord, while He was on earth, applies to two Christians married to each other.

### **1 Corinthians 7:12-13**

12 But **to the rest I, not the Lord, say**: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

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**NOTE**: Some unbelievers and unlearned brethren think that, "To the rest, I speak, not the Lord," means Paul was simply giving his opinion about these matters. This isn't what it means at all.

Paul is merely saying that he is now going to speak on a subject which the Lord never spoke about when He was on the earth! So then:

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**"I, not the Lord, say"** – means Jesus, *during His earthly ministry*, never gave instructions regarding Christians married to unbelievers.

Paul, as an inspired apostle, is now giving ***new legislation*** concerning matters the Lord never spoke on during His earthly ministry.

- Jesus legislated concerning two Christians married to each other.
- The apostles legislated concerning a Christian married to unbelievers.
- No one legislated divorce laws to two alien sinners married to each other!

It is ***wrong*** to take the teaching about divorce in the gospels and try to apply them to alien sinners. The divorce laws of the NT apply only to Christians.

## **"ISRAEL"**

Let us demonstrate this point.

### **Matthew 5:31 (KJV)**

31 It hath been said, **Whosoever** shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

Moses said this in Dt. 24:1-4.

The word ***"whosoever"*** does not mean everyone in the entire world, but everyone in the nation of Israel. These commandments did not apply to people outside of Israel:

### **Deuteronomy 5:1-3**

1 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them.

2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb.

3 The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.

## SPIRITUAL "ISRAEL"

Now look at what Jesus said:

### **Matthew 5:32 (KJV)**

32 But I say unto you, That **whosoever** shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

**"Whosoever"** does not mean everyone in the entire world, but everyone in the group being discussed.

1 Cor 7:10 explains that the Lord was discussing two Christians married to each other.

v 31 – "whosoever" meant physical Israel

v 32 – "whosoever" meant spiritual Israel – the church

## WHAT JESUS SAID

The Lord's instructions regarding divorce, which He gave while alive on the earth, were directed towards two Christians married to each other.

**Q:** What were those instructions?

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

Here are the Lord's instructions for two Christians married to each other.

**"Depart"** (χωρίζω) – this same word is translated **"put asunder"** in other passages:

**Matthew 19:6**

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man **separate** (χωρίζω – **"put asunder" KJV**)."

**"Depart"** means to divorce, not just "separate."

Notice when the wife "departed" **she became unmarried** and she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

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No such things as:

- "Not married in the eyes of men" but
- "Married in the eyes of God"

Paul said they are "unmarried."

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The Lord is telling Christian women they are not to divorce their Christian husbands. But sometimes people don't always do what they're supposed to do. The Lord realized this, so He gave these further instructions:

**"but even if she does depart, let her remain UNMARRIED, or be reconciled to her husband"** – because the English word **"husband"** is used here, some have concluded this couple was not really divorced.

- **FIRST:** Paul said they are **"unmarried."** Let's not argue to the contrary!
- **SECOND:** The word "husband" is used because the woman being instructed is still married at the time Paul wrote these instructions. **Be reconciled to the husband you have right now.**

So the wife should not have divorced her husband in the first place, but if she does, she has only two options to choose from:

- **Remain** unmarried, or
- Be reconciled

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**NOTE: The "waiting game" is wrong.** A wife cannot divorce a faithful husband and wait for him to "become unfaithful" and then divorce him for fornication. The wife became "unmarried" when she divorced the faithful husband. An "unmarried" woman cannot divorce anyone.

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The Lord gave a single exception to this rule for Christians married to Christians:

**Matthew 19:9**

9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

The only time a Christian can divorce his/her spouse and marry another without committing adultery is if (s)he divorces a sexually immoral spouse.

These are the rules for marriage which Jesus gave to two Christians married to each other.

**WHAT PAUL TAUGHT**

When Jesus was alive on the earth, He did not fully elaborate on every Bible subject. His disciples were not ready to be taught everything. However, Jesus promised they would later be guided into all truth:

**John 16:12-13**

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth ...



Therefore, we should not be surprised if the apostles reveal new truth about marriage and divorce which Jesus did not discuss during His earthly ministry.

**Q:** Since Jesus legislated for Christians married to other Christians, what should "**the rest**" do who are not married to Christians?

### **1 Corinthians 7:12-13**

12 But **to the rest I, not the Lord, say:** If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.

**"to the rest I, not the Lord, say"** – Paul is now speaking to a group of people the Lord did not address during His earthly ministry. He is revealing new truth just as the Lord promised in Jn 16:12-13.

## **THE NEW RULE**

**Q:** What, then, is the new rule for Christians married to unbelievers?

### **1 Corinthians 7:15**

15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is **not under bondage** in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

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**NOTE:** The bondage the believer is not under when the unbeliever departs is the same bondage the believer is under if the unbeliever remains.

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The "**bondage**" here is the marriage bond:

### **1 Corinthians 7:27**

27 Are you **bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. ...

## **1 Corinthians 7:39**

39 A wife is **bound** by law as long as her husband lives ...

**"in such cases"** – When the unbeliever stays and is willing to live faithfully and peaceably with the Christian, the Christian is **bound** and may not seek to dissolve the union.

In cases when the unbeliever is unwilling and departs the Christian is no longer bound.

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**NOTE:** Some argue the Greek word for "**bondage**" (δεδούλωται) is never used in reference to marriage. Furthermore, it is argued the Christian was NEVER in such a bondage as implied by this Greek word.

Yet Paul plainly stated "in such cases." The phrase "in such cases" explicitly states that married Christians ARE under "**bondage**" (δεδούλωται) "in such cases." The "cases" being considered are "marriage" cases. Clearly the "bondage" is a reference to marriage bonds.

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## **TWO UNBELIEVERS**

Summary:

- **Jesus** regulated divorce between two Christians married to each other.
- **Paul** regulated divorce for Christians married to unbelievers.
- **No one** regulated divorce between two alien sinners.

The standards which God imposes upon Christians He does not impose upon alien sinners.

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**ILL:** I expect more from my own children than from children in the neighborhood who have not been taught.

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God expects more and imposes more upon Christians than upon alien sinners.

- **Christians may not divorce and remarry for trivial reasons.** When they do, Jesus said they are committing adultery (Mt 19:9; 5:32). Those adulterous unions must be dissolved before they can be forgiven.
- **Alien sinners are not restricted by the same divorce laws Christians have.** They certainly have marriage and divorce regulations, but they are not as stringent and rigorous as those imposed upon Christians.

## **THE JEWS ON PENTECOST**

Consider the Jews on the day of Pentecost.

The OT had divorce regulations that were less stringent and rigorous than NT. Jews living under the OT were allowed to divorce for trivial reasons.

### **Exodus 21:7-8**

7 "And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do.

8 "**If she does not please her master**, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since **he has dealt deceitfully with her**.

When Jews divorced for trivial reasons and remarried, they were not committing adultery under the law that governed them.

- Had they lived under the NT law their second marriages would have been adulterous.
- But under the OT law they were not adulterous.
- Because their second marriages were not adulterous to begin with, they did not have to "*give up those marriages*" to obey the gospel.

## **THE GENTILES**

The Gentiles lived under a law that was even more lax than the Jewish OT law.

### **Romans 2:14-15**

14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,  
15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

When Gentiles divorced for trivial reasons and remarried, they were not committing adultery under the law that governed them.

- Had they lived under the NT law their second marriages would have been adulterous.
- But under God's moral law governing Gentiles they were not adulterous.
- Because their second marriages were **not** adulterous to begin with, they did not have to "*give up those marriages*" to obey the gospel.

### **1 Corinthians 7**

20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Here Christians are specifically told what to do when they obey the gospel! What right do we have to say men must divorce their second wives before they can obey the gospel?

## **THE "CAR THIEF" ARGUMENT**

This brings us to the "car thief" argument.

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**ARGUMENT:** Can a car thief keep the stolen car after he's baptized? Of course not. If the thief must give back the car he stole, then a divorced person must "give up" the adulterous marriage they are in when they get baptized.

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This illustration begins with an assumption: **Second marriages of alien sinners are like a stolen car** (i.e. second marriages of alien sinners are adulterous).

But this is the very point that needs to be proven! It must first be proven that second marriages of aliens are illegal under the moral law they live under.

- If they are illegal, then they will indeed remain illegal after baptism.
- But if they are legitimate under the law they live under, they will remain legitimate after baptism.

Remember what we just said about Jews who divorced for trivial reasons under the OT law. Their second marriages were not adulterous and therefore, on Pentecost, they did not have to divorce and remain unmarried to obey the gospel.

We have already shown:

- The regulations of **Jesus** that would have made second marriages adulterous were directed towards two Christians.
- The regulations of the apostles regarding divorce were directed towards Christians in mixed marriages.
- No regulations in the Bible restricting divorce were given to aliens.

What might have been an adulterous marriage for Christians is not adulterous for aliens because they are not living under the NT laws until they obey the gospel.

## **REMARRIAGE?**

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**ARGUMENT:** Okay ... the Christian is "**not under bondage**" if the unbeliever departs, but do they have the right to remarry?

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### **1 Corinthians 7:27-28**

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

**"Do not seek to be loosed"** – (listen carefully) – if the only way to be loosed from a wife is death, then "*Do not seek to be loosed*" means "*do not seek to kill your wife.*"

But there are other ways to be loosed:

- If the wife is a guilty fornicator (Mt 19:9).
- If the wife is an unbeliever and departs (v15).

Once one is freed from marriage, they should not seek another spouse because of the "*present distress*":

### **1 Corinthians 7:26**

26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the **present distress** — that it is good for a man to remain as he is:

**"present distress"** – persecution.

But some people cannot live life without a spouse:

### **1 Corinthians 7**

1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;

9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For **it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

So ... because of persecution it would be better to not marry. But some cannot live holy lives without being married.

The Christian who is forsaken by an unbeliever is "*not under bondage*" (v15). They are specifically told they may remarry if they cannot control their desires.

Listen again:

### **1 Corinthians 7:28**

28 But even **if you do marry, you have not sinned**; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

Let us be careful not to become more strict than Jesus Christ Himself was!

## **CONCLUSION**

It is becoming more difficult to find couples in the world who have not divorced and remarried. It is not necessary for one to become Dick Tracy or Lieutenant Columbo before he baptizes someone into Christ.

- We have no authority to break up marriages of alien sinners.
- We have no authority to treat these people as "*second class citizens*" (Lk 15:1-2).
- They are in fact commanded to "remain in the calling in which they were called" (1 Cor 7:20,24).

In our zeal for God, let us be careful lest we end up *"putting asunder what God has joined together."*

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## THE MARRIAGE OF UNBELIEVERS

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### QUESTIONS:

- 1) What three classes of people are mentioned in 1 Cor 7?
- 2) Who are the *"married"* in 1 Cor 7:10?
- 3) Who gave legislation to the *"married"* and when was it given?
- 4) What is meant by the phrase, *"To the rest I, not the Lord say"*? Does this mean Paul was merely giving his opinion?
- 5) Does the word *"whosoever"* always mean everyone in the whole world or can it mean everyone in a certain group?
- 6) What does the word *"depart"* mean in 1 Cor 7:10?
- 7) According to 1 Cor 7:11, when Christians divorce for trivial reasons, are they still *"married in the eyes of God"* or are they actually unmarried?
- 8) If a Jew divorced and remarried for a trivial reason under the OT law, when the day of Pentecost came, would his second marriage (which had been acceptable) now become adulterous?