

## 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 Marriage-Separation-Divorce-Remarriage

Having discussed the marriage relationship in view of the one-flesh ideal of Genesis 2:18-24 and the possibility of remaining single if God has so gifted, Paul now addresses the question of marital breakups and whether or not believers are free to remarry in those cases.

### Verses 10-11 Instructions to married believers

*Not I, but the Lord* – Jesus gave instructions concerning marriage during His earthly ministry in Matthew 5:27-32, Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12. The Old Testament passage on divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The background of the Pharisees' question in Matthew 19:3 was the current Rabbinical teaching on divorce. The School of Shammai said divorce could only be for adultery. The School of Hillel, the more popular view, said divorce could be for any "matter of shame". According to this School, burning your husband's dinner or no longer being attractive to him were grounds for divorce. Paul's focus here is to reinforce the main teaching of Jesus, namely, that couples should not dissolve their marriages. He does not deal with *porneia*, the one exception that Jesus allowed.

*The wife should not leave her husband* – In Judaism the wife could not divorce her husband but in the Greco-Roman world they could.

*Let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled* – If separation or divorce occurs the instruction is for the husband and wife to remain unmarried or be reconciled to each other. This is the case where two believers decide to separate when there has been no unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship.

*The husband should not send his wife away* – Divorce her. The command is for both marriage partners.

### Verses 12-16 Instructions to believers in mixed marriages

#### Verses 12-13

*I say, not the Lord* – Jesus had not spoken specifically to this subject. Paul's instructions were also divinely inspired.

*Brother has a wife who is an unbeliever* – If the unbelieving wife consented to live with her husband then he should not end the marriage.

*Woman who has an unbelieving husband* – If the unbelieving husband consented to live with his wife then she should not end the marriage.

#### Verse 14

*The unbelieving one is sanctified* – The believing partner gives the home a Christian influence that it would otherwise not have.

*Your children are unclean* – Just because one of the marriage partners became a Christian it did not annul the marriage. If they were to divorce then their children would be seen as illegitimate.

#### Verse 15

*Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave* – God wants peace to exist in marriage relationships. If an unbelieving spouse is antagonistic and refuses to live with the believing spouse then the believer may allow the relationship to end because *God has called us to peace*.

*The brother or sister is not under bondage* – Literally, "they are not enslaved". There are two ideas about what this phrase means. One is that they are not under bondage to hold the marriage together. The other is that they are not under bondage to remain unmarried. It seems in context that both ideas are true. Marvin Vincent writes:

(οὐ δεδούλωται). A strong word, indicating that Christianity has not made marriage a state of slavery to believers. Compare δέδετα *is bound*, ver. 39, a milder word. The meaning clearly is that willful desertion on the part of the unbelieving husband or wife sets the other party free. Such cases are not comprehended in Christ's words.<sup>1</sup>

#### Verse 16

*How do you know...if you will save* – Every believing spouse desires that their unbelieving spouse or ex-spouse becomes a believer. However, this cannot be viewed as the only reason to try and hold together a relationship as described in verse 15.

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<sup>1</sup>Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002), 3:219.