

LESSON THREE: MARRIAGE DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE I CORINTHIANS 7

(by Jerry Fite)

INTRODUCTION:

The study of I Corinthians 7 is essential because some see another scriptural reason for remarriage- the desertion of an unbeliever (7:15). Some infer from the “I, not the Lord” statement (7:12) that Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 only was directed to believers – those who are in a covenant relationship with God through Christ. Some see the statement of “remain unmarried” (7:11) as indicating there must be some reasons for God allowing divorce, but only one reason (fornication) which allows the innocent party to remarry. Since lesson four will deal with the non-Christian, and his amenability to God’s marriage law, we try in this lesson to establish Paul’s teaching in context. Also, in this lesson we take note of the kind of separation under consideration, which God allows (7:5).

I. CHAPTER 7 IN ITS CONTEXT.

- A. Paul’s inspired response to certain questions: “now concerning the things whereof ye wrote...” Specific questions must have been presented to Paul for his authoritative guidance.
 - 1. Matters concerning abstinence and self-control (v.1-9)
 - 2. Matters concerning divorce (v. 10-16)
 - 3. Matters concerning the Christians’ calling in connection with marriage (v. 17-24)
 - 4. Matters of judgment regarding marriage in light of present difficulties for the Christian (v. 25-40)
 - a. Paul’s judgment is inspired judgment (v. 40).
- B. Times of “distress” or conflicts testing the faith of the Christian were present (v. 26). Context limits the application of statements regarding marriage.
 - 1. *“It is good for a man not to touch a woman.(in the present times of distress- context jbf.) But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband”* (v. 1-2)
 - 2. *“It is good for a man to be as he is ...Art thou loosed from a wife, seek not a wife”* (v. 26-27) (in the present times of distress – context jfb).
 - 3. *“...she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord, but she is happier if she abide as she is...”* (v. 39-40) (in the present times of distress – context jbf).

II. I CORINTHIANS 7:5 – SEXUAL SEPARATION

- A. The sexual relationship between a husband and his wife is under consideration.
 - 1. Avoiding fornication (v.2)
 - 2. Each mate render to the other their “due” (v.3).

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3. Husband or wife have not power over their own body – for the benefit of the other (v.4)
4. “Defraud not...” (v. 5)
- B. Conditions for sexual abstinence or sexual separation:
 1. “by consent”
 2. “for a season”... “come back together again” to avoid sexual temptation.
 3. Purpose: “give yourselves to prayer”.
- C. Paul is addressing the sexual abstinence in marriage, not the separation of a marriage

III. I CORINTHIANS 7:10-11

- A. Divorce is under consideration: (CHORIZO).
 1. “*depart*” in verse 10, (CHORISTHANAI) – same word as “*put asunder*” in Matthew 19:6 (CHORIDZETO) AND “*depart*” in I Cor. 7:15 (CHORIDZETAI).
 2. Woman is now “unmarried” after separating herself in the divorce from her husband.
- B. “Unto the married...not I but the Lord” (v. 10).
 1. Paul’s statements consistent with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:3-6)
 - a. “that the wife depart from her husband...and the husband leave not his wife”
 - b. Let not man put asunder – separate – divorce (Matthew 19:6). “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (Matthew 19:3)
 - c. Jesus was answering the question regarding divorce
- C. Paul’s statement addresses what the individual should do when such sin occurs:
 1. The individual must continue to remain unmarried – for the next sexual relationship with another would be the sin of adultery (cf. Matt. 5:32, Matthew 19:9).
 2. Contingency legislation – not approval of an act that is sinful (cf. I Jn. 2:1).
 - a. “*but if ye bite and devour one another...(Gal. 5:15)* does not teach that such action is not sinful.
 3. Don’t add “adultery” to your sin of “divorce”.
- D. Unsubstantiated claims of those who teach that “remain unmarried” means one could divorce and the action be not sinful:
 1. For “the kingdom’s sake” – “Christ’s sake” (Luke 18:29)
 - a. “Leave (aphieemi) wife” – word used for divorce in I Cor. 7:11,12,13).

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- b. The context of Luke 18:29 denotes action that is not sinful but less than divorce for Peter included himself in “leaving all” but was not divorced (I Cor. 9:5).
 - c. Must be proven that divorce is under consideration for one could leave a wife or family as Peter did for a time when following Jesus and therefore fulfill Luke 18:29 without divorcing – different from taking this passage out of its context (Luke 18:28-29) and applying it to an action (divorce) which in the prior verse God says not to do it (I Cor. 7:10).
2. One is of necessity having to divorce due to the hostility created by another.
- a. I Corinthians 7:10-11 does not allow for such application, as seen in the word “reconcile”.
 - (1). KATALASSO – is always used in the N.T. indicating a hostility created by the one who needs to be reconciled to the one who has not caused such hostility. (*Example: “Be ye reconciled to God” 2 Cor. 5:20, Rom. 5:10, etc.*).
 - b. Vine quotes Lightfoot in Vine’s Expository Dictionary making the following distinction between KATALASSO and DIALASSO: “When the writers of the N.T. speak upon the subject of the wrath of God, ‘the hostility is represented not as on the part of God, but of man. And this is the reason why the Apostle never uses *dialasso* [a word use only in Matthew 5:24, in the N.T.] in this connection, but always *katallasso* because the former word denotes mutual concession after mutual hostility [frequently exemplified in the Sept.], an idea absent from *katalasso*” (Vines, p. 261, Lightfoot, Notes on the Epistles of Paul, p. 288).
 - c. The only hostility seen in verses 10-11 is the unlawful action of the wife divorcing herself from her husband, and therefore if they are to renew their marriage, she (the one creating the hostility- sin) will be reconciled to the innocent one.
 - d. This passage is being applied by some who say the hostility is being created by the one from whom the wife is departing. Such guilt is not revealed in this passage and is contrary to the distinctive use of the Greek word

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KATALLASSO translated “*reconciled*”. As Vine informs us another word is used in Scripture to depict mutual concession – DIALASSO (cf. Matt. 5:24).

3. If the unbeliever is content to dwell with the Christian, the Christian is not to leave, BUT IF HE OR SHE IS NOT CONTENT...
 - a. Then some say the believer can leave (divorce) without the right to marry another.
 - b. The context helps us determine why the believer is thinking about leaving the unbeliever: it is regarding the sanctity of the marriage- Is it a holy union – not because the discontent of the unbeliever is making it impossible for me to live as a Christian . (cf. I Cor. 7:14).
 - c. Paul tells us of the action involved when the unbeliever is discontent: He or she will depart (I Cor. 7:15)
 - d. There is no authority given in these passages for the Christian to divorce the discontented unbeliever.
 - e. We can have unity by honoring the context for we know why the Christian is contemplating leaving the unbelieving spouse: Is the relationship holy, - not he or she is making it impossible for me to live as a Christian.

IV. I CORINTHAINS 7:12-15

A. *“To the rest say I, not the Lord”*

1. Paul addresses specific questions regarding the state of the marriage relationship between believers (Christians) and unbelievers(non-Christians).
2. Paul is dealing with questions Jesus did not address specifically in his personal ministry – a specific application of the one law of marriage for all mankind.
 - (a). In light of Jewish background, should one remain married to an unbeliever? Is it clean?
 - (b). Paul’s answers are consistent with Jesus’ law – do not divorce (v. 12-14).
 - (1). If the unbeliever is content to dwell – let not the believer divorce the unbeliever (I Pet. 3:1-4).
 - (2). The unbeliever is sanctified in the believer – though not sanctified from sins as when one becomes a Christian, the unbeliever is separated from much of

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the impiety in the world due to living in marriage
with a Christian.

- B. *“Not under bondage”*
1. What should a Christian do when the unbeliever wants to depart due to the Christian’s faith?
 2. The word *“deo”* consistently used to emphasize the “bond” in marriage IS NOT USED in v. 15.
 - a. Romans 7:2-3 – “bound by law to the husband...”
 - b. I Corinthians 7:27, 39 “bound to a wife...a wife is bound”
 - c. “bound” under obligation – restriction of law – to mate for life.
 - d. If the inspired Paul wanted to teach the “bond” in marriage is broken when the unbeliever deserts, he would have used the word that conveys “obligation” and “duty” as he does in verses 27 and 39.
 3. The word *“douloo”* is used in verse 15.
 - a. Servitude rendered as a slave.
 - b. One may be forced into “bondage” against will (Acts 7:6).
 - c. One may voluntarily place himself in such a position (Rom. 6:18, 22).
 - d. Other places the word is found: I Cor. 9:19, Gal. 4:3, Titus 2:3, 2 Pet. 2:19.
 - e. The perfect tense is emphasizing that one was never in bondage in “such cases” – to give up Christ to please the unbelieving mate.
 4. Further attempts to save the unbelieving mate would cause needless trouble, *“God has called us to peace.”*
 - a. Who knows whether you will save your husband or wife? (v 16).
 - b. “ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men” (v. 23).
- C, One must conclude the “mixed” marriages (believer/unbeliever) are subject to the same marriage laws as others (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:3-12, Romans 7:2-3)

QUESTIONS:

1. What four matters does Paul cover in I Cor. 7 in response to specific questions?

2. Paul’s “judgment” offered in I Cor. 7 is of Paul, not the Holy Spirit. (T) (F)

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3. What must one establish first in Chapter 7 in order for Paul's statements to harmonize with other revealed N.T. teaching?
4. What kind of separation is under consideration in I Cor. 7?
5. In I Cor. 7:10, Paul is speaking of (a) divorce, or (b) separation without divorce.
6. How is Paul's statement in verse 10 consistent with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19?
7. Why do people believe verse 10 is permitting divorce without the action being a sin?
 - a. Why should one not assume that verse 10 is permitting divorce *without sin being involved*?
8. Why does Paul command the person who has divorced her mate to "*remain unmarried*"?
9. Why is the believer contemplating leaving or divorcing the unbelieving mate:
 - (a). The unbeliever is not content with the relationship
 - (b). The believer is questioning whether or not being married to an unbeliever is a holy relationship.
 - (c). The unbeliever is not content and making it impossible for the believer to live as a Christian.
10. Discuss the meaning: "*The unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother*".

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11. In I Corinthians 7:15, “*not under bondage*” is referring to the “bond” that governs and through Divine law restricts two people to one another as husband and wife.
(T) (F)
12. God gives the believer the right to remarry if deserted by an unbeliever. (T) (F).
13. Give examples from Scripture that helps us understand the meaning of “*bondage*” in I Corinthians 7:15: