

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

VII. The Believer In Issues Of Marriage And Divorce

(1 Corinthians 7:10-16)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. Having dealt with the believer's duty of sexuality within marriage, Paul shifted to concerns about marriage and divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, what we study for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. The Believer In Issues Of Marriage And Divorce, 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

- A. Paul reported that God Himself strongly directs that believers are not to get divorced, 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11b.
- B. However, if believers do divorce, they should remain unmarried or be reconciled to one another, 1 Cor. 7:11a.
- C. If a believer is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever is willing to stay married to the believer, the believer should not divorce the unbeliever, 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. This "sets the home apart and gives it a Christian influence it would not otherwise have," *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to 1 Corinthians 7:14.
- D. However, if an unbeliever wants to divorce a believer, the believer must allow the divorce to occur, v. 15a.
- E. Paul then added a sentence that has led to much debate among evangelicals when he wrote: "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*," 1 Cor. 7:15b KJV. We address this debate as follows:
 - 1. Some claim that the "not under bondage" phrase means that a believer who was divorced by an unbeliever is free to remarry another party who is a believer, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 518 with 1 Cor. 7:39b.
 - 2. However, others claim that the "not under bondage" clause means one is not bound by the marital bond when the unbelieving spouse wants to divorce the believer, and the Greek text supports this view:
 - a. In 1 Corinthians 7:16, Paul added a comment to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:15, making it important for us to understand toward perceiving what he meant by "not under bondage" in 1 Corinthians 7:15.
 - b. In viewing verse 16, we note that both appearances of the word "whether" (KJV) in the verse translate the Greek conditional particle *ei*, meaning "if," and the verb "save," *sozo* that follows *ei* in both cases is in the indicative mood (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 592; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 396; *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 217-219).
 - c. The particle *ei* used before a verb in the indicative mood always indicates the assumption of the reality of the premise that is presented, a "first class condition" (Dana & Mantey, A Man. Gram. of the Grk. N. T., 1957, p. 289). Paul thus assumed that the believing spouse would likely lead his unsaved spouse to Christ.
 - d. If Paul had meant that it was hopeless, more likely, or less likely that the unsaved spouse would be saved, what *might* be said to free a believer to marry another, his grammatical constructions would have differed:
 - i. Had Paul meant that the unbeliever would **never** be saved, he would have used *ei* in the "if" clause (protasis) with the particle *an* likely occurring in the "then" clause (apodosis) but only with the past tenses of the indicative mood for the verbs involved, *Ibid.*, p. 289. ("second class condition")
 - ii. Had Paul meant that the unbeliever would be **more likely** to be saved, he would have used the particle *ean* in the "if" clause (protasis) with the subjunctive mood, and almost any form of the verb in the "then" clause (apodosis), *Ibid.*, p. 290. ("third class condition")
 - iii. Had Paul meant that the unbeliever would be **less likely** to be saved, he would have used *ei* with the verb in the optative mood in the "if" clause (protasis) and *an* with the optative mood in the "then" clause (apodosis), *Ibid.* ("fourth class condition")
 - 3. Thus, Paul did **not** let a believer marry another party after the unbeliever divorced him, but he told the believer to let the unbeliever depart in expectation that he would trust in Christ, resulting in reconciliation!

Lesson: *Married believers are not to get divorced. However, if they do divorce, they must remain unmarried or be reconciled. If an unbelieving spouse wants to divorce a believer, the believer must not contest the divorce in hope of leading the unsaved spouse to trust in Christ, resulting in the reconciliation of their initial marital union.*

Application: *May we heed God's directives on marriage and divorce as taught in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.*