

## **Marriage, Divorce, And Remarriage: An Exegetical Examination Of The Themes With A Focus On 1 Corinthians 7:10–16**

Philip Kimiti

A Master of Divinity (Biblical Studies) student at Africa International University; he serves as a Student Pastor at the Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM- Woodley, Nairobi) Kenya.

Email: [kimitiphilip@gmail.com](mailto:kimitiphilip@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

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According to the New Testament teachings, and specifically in Paul's letters, some passages like 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 present some hermeneutical challenges to the reader. This specific biblical passage, within its context, teaches about marriage, celibacy, divorce, and remarriage. The Apostle Paul developed his understanding of these themes from biblical theology and offered additional instructions that have presented a major interpretive challenge. These themes remain relevant in every generation; hence a balanced interpretation of these passages is necessary. The present study focused on the exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 to situate Paul's concept of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Further, the research sought to determine Paul's grounds for consideration of divorce and remarriage. This study uses an exegetical method to interpret the selected Bible passage. The research demonstrated that Paul's teaching vastly was against divorce and affirmed the life-long idea of marriage. The study also enlightens on how in isolated cases, believers can biblically handle divorce and remarriage in the body of Christ.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Divorce, husband, wife, Remarriage, Pauline Epistles, sanctified.

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### **Introduction**

Over the past few years, the institution of marriage has been under attack. The challenge of dysfunctional marriages, divorce, remarriage has become a significant concern in society and even in church contexts. Divorce rates have been on an upward trajectory.<sup>1</sup> Usually, the prevalent cultures offer popular remedies to these challenges, but the Scriptures should guide the

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<sup>1</sup> Priscilla Magara Omoro, "Investigating the Causes and Possible Solutions of Divorce in Nairobi City County, Kenya," (Master's Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2018), x.

body of Christ on how to handle this matter in a godly way. The Bible provides God's design of marriage, the reality of the fallenness of humankind, and redemption through Christ, which encompasses the institution of marriage. It is critical for believers in Christ to comprehend God's plan for and through the institution of marriage. Specifically, this paper discusses at the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage as taught in "1 Corinthians 7:10–16. The study employs exegetical method to elucidate the meaning of the text.

At this point, basic background knowledge of the ancient world and the epistle would be informative. History places the city of Corinth into two colonies; first, as a Greek city during and before 5<sup>th</sup> BC<sup>2</sup> and later Roman city in 146 BC.<sup>3</sup> According to Luke's narrative in Acts 18:1–17, Paul arrived at Corinth while on his second evangelistic journey at the time of proconsul Gallio in the province of Achaia. Lüdemann estimates this time to be AD 51/52 as per Delphi letters from Emperor Claudius of Rome.<sup>4</sup> Paul wrote this letter around AD 57 during his third missionary journey and temporary stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10). His *ad hoc* letter was to respond to several problems facing the church in Corinth.

First, he wrote in response to reports from Chloe's household on disputes threatening the church's unity (1:11, 5:1, 11:18).<sup>5</sup> In addition, news had reached Paul concerning immorality that had become prevalent in the church (5:1).<sup>6</sup> Second, Paul wrote in response to a variety of concerns he had received from the church of Corinth.<sup>7</sup> The portion under examination falls under the latter reason, dealing with marriage, divorce, and remarriage issues. In verses 1–7, Paul instructs the married, and in verses 8–9, his target audience is the unmarried and widows. The paper first exegetes the text (1 Cor. 7:10-16); then summarizes the biblical principles on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The application of the biblical text will follow then a conclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1987), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pausanias and William H. S. Jones, *Description of Greece. 1: Books I and II*, Reprinted, The Loeb Classical Library 93 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 249.

<sup>4</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 163.

<sup>5</sup> The New International Version: "1 Corinthians 1:11" states, "some of Chloe's family have informed me..." (5:1), "it is actually reported that" (1:18), "in the first place I hear that." These clearly, shows that Paul had received enough report that demanded his response.

<sup>6</sup> No mention of source of the information to this complete the sentence. Further reports with no mention of sender had reached to him on divisions during celebrating the Lords table and he affirms that he believes the report as true (11:18).

<sup>7</sup> "Περι δε ὧν ἐγράφατε" - "now about the things you wrote" (perfect Aorist- ἐγράφατε)

## Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7:10–16

### Address to the Married Believers (vv.10–11)

*Verse 10: τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος, γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι 11 – ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῇ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγήτω – καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιένει*<sup>8</sup>

**Translation:** “Now, to the married, I command – not I but the Lord – a wife should not separate from (her) husband, 11 – but if she separates, she must remain unmarried, or she must be reconciled to her husband – and a husband should not send her away.”<sup>9</sup>

Apostle Paul commences the discourse with an address to his primary audience *τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν* (Now to the married). Explicitly, he uses the Greek durative present *παραγγέλλω* (I command) to issue a directive to the married. To accentuate his instruction, he reminds them *οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος* (not I but the Lord ). Here, by the phrase *ὁ κύριος* (the Lord), the apostle refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though there are portions of texts in the gospels that record Christ’s teaching on the subject, we cannot explicitly place a finger on the particular text. There are three possibilities on the meaning of the statement “Not I but the Lord.” First, he may have been referring to some orally available information taught by Jesus. Second, Paul may have used the title “Lord” in a general sense, referring to the Old Testament teachings about God’s plan for marriage. Third, apostle Paul might have been led to instruct on the subject under the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

In the second part of verse 10, apostle Paul elaborates Christ’s specific demands to each believing party within the marriage institution beginning with the wife, in saying “*γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς μὴ χωρισθῆναι*,” (a wife should not separate from her husband).” The aorist infinitive passive *χωρισθῆναι*, which is deponent (passive in form but active in meaning), is interpreted to mean one-time action rather than progressive aspect. The interpretation implies a divorce instigated by the wife. Roman culture permitted either wife or husband to initiate divorce.<sup>10</sup> However, Paul says that Christ’s command prohibited a believing married wife from divorcing her husband.

<sup>8</sup> “Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, fifth revised edition, 2018,” 563. Throughout the paper this was the primary Greek text used.

<sup>9</sup> This is my own translation and even the subsequent verse-verse translations.

<sup>10</sup> Richard C. H. Lenski. *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1963) 287.

### Christ's Imperatives to the Divorced or Separated Wife/Woman (Verse 11)

The phrase *ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῇ* (but if she separates) is a subjunctive conditional clause because of the construction of *ἐὰν* with a subjunctive. As a conditional sentence, the premise is not certain but probable; this asserts the possibility of divorce. To such a wife who has cut herself from the union, apostle Paul issues two imperatives from Christ's instruction. First, he instructs *μενέτω ἄγαμος* "let her remain unmarried." The subject nominative noun *ἄγαμος* and the active voice used in the command adds to the idea that it's the wife who departed from the union. Also, the present imperative verb *μενέτω* communicates a durative sense with an implication that, from the time she severed her relationship with the husband from now on, she should remain in that separated state. Of note is that this imperative mood, in this case expressing command, outlaws any possible remarriage to a different person. In summary, the imperative implies that the bond of marriage still applied even in the separated state. Thus, in Romans 7:2–3, Paul writes that the wife is still bound to the marriage covenant as long as the husband is alive.

Second, as an alternative, Paul writes about the woman "*ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγήτω – καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι*" (or she must be reconciled to her husband – and a husband should not send her away). Separation among believers does not mean total marriage breakup but rather a window to allow healing to occur. It completely prohibits remarriage to a different person. Lenski, similarly, argues that, though in a separated state, they are married in the sight of God and the church.<sup>11</sup> The verb *καταλλαγήτω* (imperative aorist passive) appears "six times in Pauline Epistles."<sup>12</sup> Among the six instances, it only occurs of human relationships in this passage, the other five appearances by Paul are in God-human relationship. The verb conveys the idea of "exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship"<sup>13</sup> or reestablishing a friendly relationship with someone. Paul's use of the verb *καταλλαγήτω* here in its passive voice implies that, since she is the one who cut off herself from the husband, then she should subject herself to a reconciliation process. Christ's charge here assumes remarriage to the same separated spouse.

In the third part of the verse, Paul now turns to the husband and gives a similar prohibition; *καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι* (and a husband should not send her away). In what

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>12</sup> Five times used in God-human relationship (twice in Romans 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18,19,20), and once of human relationship.

<sup>13</sup> The aorist verb "*καταλλαγήτω*" "denotes exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship" as cited from "Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.

seems like an afterthought, it lacks the exceptions in the woman's case, which could hint that the problem did not lie much on men in the Corinthian church. The reasons that could prompt a wife to leave her husband, and a fellow believer, are not stated. Lenski proposes asceticism which viewed sexual intercourse in marriage as a hindrance to gaining "greater devotion to the Lord."<sup>14</sup> Fee identifies a "spiritualized eschatology"<sup>15</sup> movement that had held sway the Corinthian women. It taught that they had attained resurrection from the dead and were living in spiritual realms.<sup>16</sup> Hence, marriage being an earthly affair was not desirable. There could have been many other reasons; however, it is hard to identify the exact cause(s). It is also possible that the phrase *καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι* communicates Paul's expectation to the husband in response to the reconciliation efforts by the wife. If this was the case, the command expected the husband to accept and not refuse the wife's offer of reconciliation.

Paul here generally reiterates God's monogamous life-long plan for marriage as recorded in Genesis 1—2 and as echoed by Jesus Christ in Mathew 19:8. But, more evidently and specifically, verses 10–11 uphold the sanctity of marriage- one cannot walk in and out of marriage as they wish. This instruction must have been a 'harsh' command to the Corinthian multiethnic community where divorce cases were prevalent, and permanence of marriage was "exceedingly becoming uncertain"<sup>17</sup> even among the believers. The same is true even in our modern-day age when laws and regulations against God's wish on the permanence of marriage become the norm.

### Paul's Instruction on the Union Between a Believer and Unbeliever (Verses 12–13)

*12 Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγώ, οὐχ ὁ κύριος· εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον, καὶ αὕτη συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν· 13 καὶ γυνὴ εἴ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἄπιστον, καὶ οὗτος συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφιέτω τὸν ἄνδρα*

**Translation:** Moreover, to the rest, I say, (I) not the Lord: If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to continue dwelling with him, let him not send her away; 13 and if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he consents to continue dwelling with her, let her not send him away.

Paul's use of the adversative conjunction *δὲ* (v. 12) denotes a shift to a different audience category he refers to as *Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς* (to the rest). This is a category of unions between believers and unbelievers. From the onset, Paul distinguishes between *τοῖς γεγαμηκόσιν* (v. 10)

<sup>14</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 289.

<sup>15</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1987, 269.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>17</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 288.

and τοῖς λοιποῖς. To such marriages, Paul on his use of the phrase, “λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος” “I say, (I) not the Lord,” admits to having no direct divine command from the Lord as he had τοῖς γεγαμηκόσιν (to the married believers in verse 10). On this phrase, Godet remarks that Paul was clearly putting a line between Jesus’ commands which were, and still are, for all church ages, and his commands which were only binding primarily to the churches he founded and directly subject to his apostleship.<sup>18</sup> Godet also adds that Paul’s command here was only to the Corinthian church and not the entire body of Christ. The researcher finds this view both incorrect and inconsistent with the teaching of the Scripture; because if this view is adopted, then it would mean all other instructions from Paul are not binding to the whole body of Christ. Contrary to Godet’s argument, Christ’s teachings through Apostle Paul are for all believers of all ages.

The Greek construction of the conditional particle εἴ (if) with the present indicative verb ἔχει in the phrase εἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἄπιστον (if any brother has an unbelieving wife) is a Greek construction that treats the premise as a fact. Indeed, there were believers in Corinth who were married to unbelieving spouses. Paul calls them brother(s) (definitely in Christ); he writes to them as an apostle but intimately as brothers in the household of God. He instructs that if the wife συνενδοκεῖ, (consents) and is committed to carrying out marriage obligation as they οἰκεῖν<sup>19</sup> μετ’ αὐτοῦ (to continue dwelling with him). Then the believing brother is commanded not to divorce her. The grammatical construction μὴ ἀφιέτω αὐτήν (he must not divorce her) is a strong expression of prohibition of an action;<sup>20</sup> the husband must not divorce a wife who consents to live with him. In verse 13, a similar command in verse 12 is offered to the believing wife; she is required not to divorce an unbelieving husband who is willing to continue living with her.

### Reasons for Continuing the Mixed Marriages (Verse 14)

*Verse 14: ἡγίασται γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ὁ ἄπιστος ἐν τῇ γυναίκί, καὶ ἡγίασται ἡ γυνὴ ἡ ἄπιστος ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ· ἐπεὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐστιν, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστιν.*

<sup>18</sup> Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 333.

<sup>19</sup> This is present active infinitive of οἰκεῖν which means to live. NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, REB have translated the word to mean ‘to continue living’.

<sup>20</sup> In Greek, the conjugation of μὴ plus present imperative expresses a demand to stop an action already in progress. Apostle Paul is asking the believing party to refrain from divorcing their unbelieving spouses who are willing to live with them. According to Paul, this should stop.

**Translation:** For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through the (believing) wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through the (believing) brother. Otherwise then, your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

In verse 14, the coordinating conjunction *γὰρ* has the idea of reason or cause.<sup>21</sup> Paul highlighted two reasons in favor of the indissolubility of mixed marriages. First, Paul argued that the believer *ἡγιάσται* ( has been sanctified) by the unbeliever. The dative preposition *ἐν* introduces the believer as the agent through which the unbeliever becomes sanctified. Sanctification is a continuous regeneration work of the indwelling Holy Spirit leading to a new person.<sup>22</sup> By no means was Paul arguing that spouses could make each other holy. His statement then must be understood from God's vantage. This idea points to the believer's influence towards the unbelieving spouse, which encompassed moral, spiritual, and mental aspects as they continued to live together.<sup>23</sup>

Alford gives a similar interpretation that, in the gospel teachings, holiness is a result of a life dedicated to God and a life owned by God.<sup>24</sup> This argument does not necessarily connote that the unbeliever has attained salvation by being associated with a believer. On the contrary, this implies that the believer sets the unbeliever on a pedestal for transformation.

The second reason that Paul validates the mixed union is that children from such a union have been sanctified. He argues *νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐστίν* (but now they are holy); the Greek shade of *ἐστίν* is static and highlights the focus on the present state. The believing spouse not only impacts the unbelieving partner morally and spiritually but he/she also confers holiness to their children. The children's reference as being holy is hereby taken to mean the moral and spiritual influence the believing partner has on them. Customarily, children acquire values primarily through observing the character of their parents. Thus, the assumption was that the believing party would do justice in modeling Christlikeness in the lives of their offspring.

Hodge rightly argues that this conferred holiness is due to the children born in the confines of God's family, the church, just as Israelite children received holiness for being born

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<sup>21</sup> "Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 189".

<sup>22</sup> Sanctification is a biblical idea taught in numerous texts such as: 2 Thessalonians. 2:13; Acts 26:18.

<sup>23</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 135.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. II (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 524.

in the commonwealth of Israel.<sup>25</sup> So, such children, for being born in God's "theocracy," are acceptable to God in the sense that there is a high chance for their salvation. Fee similarly argues that Paul uses a Jewish concept of holiness for being born "within God's covenant." Thus, children born by Jewish proselytes were considered to be Jews and, for that matter, set apart for God.<sup>26</sup> The children born in mixed marriages are holy courtesy of the believing spouse.

In both scenarios, Paul raises the stake high on God's grace working through the believer's life to his/her family. What the Corinthians viewed as ground sufficient to annul the marriage, Paul viewed it from a different vantage, as reason enough to maintain the union. He viewed the believer as an agent through which God's purpose can be fulfilled in the unbelieving partner's life and their offsprings.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Paul affirms mixed marriages in Corinth as legally contracted marriages in which participants are accountable to God. He emphatically stated that a union with a non-believer in itself was not a defilement, and children resulting from the union were holy since they also came from a holy marriage.

### **If the Unbeliever Leaves, the Believer is not Bound (Verse 15a)**

*Vesrse15: εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωριζέσθω· οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις· ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός.*

**Translation:** However, if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister in such (circumstances) is not bound; because God has called you (to live) in peace.

Even after recognizing mixed marriages, Paul gives further direction just in case the non-believer chooses to leave. He informed the Corinthian church, in verse 15, that, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave." Paul's use of present indicative verb *χωρίζεται* (leaves, separates) which is deponent (passive in form but active in meaning), is interpreted to mean a continuous wishful desire to cut oneself from the union. The interpretation implies a divorce instigated by the unbelieving spouse. Here Paul implores the believing party to accept the wish of the unbelieving party and *χωριζέσθω*, (let him leave). The use of present imperative in the middle voice denotes consent or rather to accept the choice of the unbeliever.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 115.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1987), 301–2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 301–2.

Paul argued that “in such circumstances, the brother or the sister is not bound upon the unbeliever leaving the marriage union.” Paul’s use of ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις (in such circumstances) is essential in understanding this text. It is unclear whether Paul was giving out a general rule even for future situations or only meant the rule to apply in the situation at Corinth. Conzelmann argues that Paul “expresses himself in such general terms because the principle is generally valid, even for every possible future case.”<sup>28</sup> Just like his other admonitions were not limited to the Corinthian church, Paul deals with principles that are transferable to similar situations within the larger body of Christ across time.

The question that begs a response from interpreters on this text is, “To what extent are the believers free?” or rather, “What did Paul intend to communicate by saying that the believer is not bound?” The perfect indicative passive third-person singular verb, δεδούλωται, is a derivative of the Greek verb δουλόω which means, “I enslave” or “I make a slave” or “I bind.” In the context of 7:15 the intensive idea highlights the state of the brother or sister as οὐ δεδούλωται (not being bound) by the requirement of a marriage covenant. The verb δεδούλωται is figuratively used to mean the divorced believer is no longer enslaved (or no longer held under any marriage obligation) by the unbeliever as his wife or husband. Christ’s rule demands the believer to keep the union, but when the dissolution comes from a heathen party, the obligation to maintain the marriage union is thus annulled.

Keener convincingly argues that the verb “not bound” meant that the believer was not only released from the marriage covenant with the unbeliever, but it also gave him/her rights to remarry. Istone-Brewer voices the same sentiments when he argues that “the only freedom that makes sense in this context is the freedom to remarry.”<sup>29</sup> Both Keener and Istone-Brewer, quoting from Jewish laws on divorce and remarriage, argue that “freedom” in the divorce context meant freedom to remarry for a woman and that Corinthians possibly understood this context.<sup>30</sup> The mention of the lady in the Jewish context is because divorce could only result from the husband, except in rare cases where it could result from the wife’s decision.<sup>31</sup> One interacting

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 121.

<sup>29</sup> David Istone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 202.

<sup>30</sup> Craig S. Keener And *Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 120.

with Keener's and Istone-Brewer's interpretations here would easily assume that Paul addressed Jewish believers in Corinth alone, which was not the case. Thus it is most likely that the assertions of these two scholars might have been alien to non-Jewish communities in Corinth. Such a position is not tenable unless other supporting evidence showing a general understanding of the phrase among the Corinthians is availed.

Hanson adds a fresh thought in saying are some extant epitaphs in the Graeco-Roman world honor "women who had remained married to one husband all their life or when widowed"<sup>32</sup> and never remarried. Meeks voices similar sentiments in saying that, "in Greek romances of the Roman world, there existed many Epitaphs praising women who were *μνοδορός*."<sup>33</sup> This background information indicates that Keener's position might not have been the case during Paul's day.

Cornes argues that the verb "not bound" denotes that the believer is free to accept the divorce thrust against their wish. He/she should not feel "enslaved" to fight the divorce contracted against their will but allow.<sup>34</sup> He also asserts that the believer is bound by the general rule of the Lord Jesus on divorce. According to Cornes, 'the marriage bond can only be broken by death,' not separation, and, even in accepting divorce, they are still enslaved by the marriage vows.<sup>35</sup>

Heth and Wenham interpret the phrase "not bound" to mean that Paul was exempting the believer from the responsibility of divorce filed against him/her by the unbelieving party.<sup>36</sup> He is simply admonishing the believer to accept the unbeliever's insistent demand and not necessarily giving the believer leeway to remarry. According to them, Paul wished to communicate that the believer should not be guilty of this act by the unbelieving party. Heth and Wenham reject the idea of remarriage entirely after divorce, stating that "Marriage is a creation ordinance that is binding, regardless of one's faith or even the lack of it."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, New Century Bible Commentary" (Grand Rapids : London: Wm.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. ; Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), 77.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 228.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 259.

<sup>35</sup> Cornes, 59.

<sup>36</sup> William A Heth and Gordon J Wenham, *Jesus, and Divorce: Towards an Evang. Understanding of New Testament Teaching* (London u.a.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 142–43.

<sup>37</sup> Heth and Wenham, 140.

Fee, interpreting the phrase “not bound,” alludes that it exempts the believer from maintaining the marriage obligations in which the other partner is unwilling to remain.<sup>38</sup> Fee rejects what he termed as “Pauline privilege” of a believer being free to remarry. He says remarriage wasn’t an issue in the context where Corinthians were concerned with the dissolution of mixed marriage, and this would be the least Paul would talk about in such a situation.<sup>39</sup> In conclusion, he says Paul does not intend to free the believer to contract a new union, but he meant that the believer wasn’t accountable for the marriage breakup which the unbeliever desired.

Concerning the use of *δουλόω*, Paul views it as bondage or, rather, hard labor to keep a non-believing party who has expressed their unrelenting desire to leave. Paul wished to free the unbeliever from unnecessary tension (brought by different loyalties), which might result from forcing the unbeliever to remain. It is not explicit from the Scripture what trajectory the believer’s life would take after the dissolution, but, in summary, two views suffice.

First, Paul likely meant that the believer should assume celibacy and remain in that state, perhaps, until the other partner died. Second, he likely meant the believer was free to remarry, but now to marry a fellow believer. However, this view is not explicit in the text. The researcher observes that both options might have been viable, with the former position, “assuming chastity,” being his intended meaning since Paul personally preferred the widows/widowers<sup>40</sup> to remain celibate in (1 Cor 7:8).<sup>41</sup>

### **Believers Call to Live in Peace (Verse 15b)**

At the end of verse 7:15, Paul says, “ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός” (Because God has called you to peace). According to Paul, God κέκληκεν “has called” believers to live in peace. As an extensive perfect the verb, κέκληκεν, highlights the action of the calling of to peace. Peace denotes a state of believers’ well-being,<sup>42</sup> as Danker *et al.* state. Lenski adds that the perfect tense connotes an enduring state or rather “lasting state” of believers as God’s people

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<sup>38</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1987, 302.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Widower’ is not explicitly recorded in the scripture, but it is undoubtful that there were also some men in Corinth whose wives had died.

<sup>41</sup> If Paul wished widows to remain celibate, then one wonders how more could he have wished for the deserted believers? For sure we cannot be conclusive here.

<sup>42</sup> Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 287.

who are now living under His grace.<sup>43</sup> The unbeliever can leave without unnecessary disturbance since forcing them to stay in the marriage, a state of peace would not be possible.

Apostle Paul, by all means, discouraged the believer from instigating divorce. However, he advises them to accept divorce thrust to them from the unbelieving party even though against their wish. He did not see the need or reason for the believers trying to hold on to unbelieving parties who have already decided to forsake the union. God has called his own to peace.

**Verse 16:** *τί γὰρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ τὸν ἄνδρα σώσεις; ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνερ, εἰ τὴν γυναῖκα σώσεις;*”

**Translation:** For how do you know, O wife, if you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, if you will save your wife?

Paul culminates the pericope with two rhetorical questions which leaned neither to “No” nor to “Yes” response. The context determines the expected answer as “no.” The perfect indicative active verb, *οἶδας*,<sup>44</sup> denotes an extensive idea. The rhetoric questions would prompt the believing party to ponder through the divine possibility that their spouses can get saved through their conduct, influence, and words. They would perhaps influence them to salvation but cannot save them. The verb *σώσεις* is a predictive future; it is beyond the obvious to think that a believing person can bring one’s spouse to salvation. Also, Paul raises these hypothetical statements, possibly, to call believers to make their own discernment on whether insisting to keep the unbelieving party when they had already decided to leave would bring any difference, or rather, it would result in salvation.

### Summary of the Exegetical Findings

1 Corinthians 7:10–16 has highlighted numerous principles regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. For married believers, Paul emphatically stated that Christ’s command prohibited divorce. However, separation pending reconciliation is allowed. Thus, according to the passage, separation does not equal marriage breakup, as some scholars have argued.

For mixed marriages, Paul advised believers not to instigate divorce against their unbelieving partners. Although not explicitly citing from any written command from the Lord, but entirely under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he argued against dissolubility of such

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<sup>43</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 297.

<sup>44</sup> *οἶδας* is a verb that is in perfect tense form but with present meaning.

marriages. However, he further advised that a believer can accept divorce thrust against their will by their unbelieving partner who has refused to continue staying with him/her. Paul clearly stated that this would set the believer free, although this nature of freedom poses some interpretive challenges, as earlier discussed.

First, it could mean that the believer was not bound to keep marriage obligations with a deserted spouse and was entreated to remain celibate. Second, other scholars have interpreted it to mean that the believer was free both from the marriage obligations and free to remarry, in this case, a fellow believer.

Paul also viewed mixed marriages as legitimate holy unions, just as believers' marriages. He stated that the matrimonies were holy because of the believer, and also, the children born in such unions are to be considered sanctified. Again Paul, reminded the believers that their state of peace called by God was much more important than trying to force an unbeliever who had relentlessly chosen to leave the marriage to remain. Finally, Paul argued that 'there is no guarantee' that 'the unbeliever' who remains would be eventually come to faith.

### **Application of the Study**

Paul shares some instructions in the passage that when lived out in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church can bring hope to a broken world, especially on divorce and remarriage becoming prevalent.<sup>45</sup>

First, on the sanctity of marriage, Paul vehemently argued on this glorious virtue among married believers and in a relationship where only one was a believer. The thought that marriage is holy and God-ordained should serve to help spouses approach it with reverence. Those who plan to marry should do so carefully and with adequate preparation since it is a life-long commitment. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to comprehend no less than what Christ demands for today's church. Christ's anti-divorce charge is for all ages. Spouses who consider marriage as God's ordained and holy ought to focus on building each other just as Christ builds and nourishes His own Church. This conclusion does not in any way mean that marriages of two fallen human beings are immune to challenges. Neither does it qualify conflicts as a ground enough to annul the union. If anything, hurdles of life should cause the spouse to cleave to each other even more.

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<sup>45</sup> "Omoro, Investigating the Causes and Possible Solutions of Divorce in Nairobi City County," Kenya, 2-3.

Second, on reconciliation, Paul didn't state that separation equaled to complete nullification of marriage bond for believers in Christ. Neither did he explicitly qualify dissolution by a non-believer as a ground for remarriage. Whenever conflicts arise, temporary separation can be considered instead of completely breaking the marriage covenant. In this case, the separation window is expected to bring healing and eventually restoration of the marriage. Paul's message of reconciliation is construed to mean that if the spouse who had separated initiated reconciliation, the other spouse should be willing to forgive and not refuse the other. Where reconciliation fails, the church should resist treating divorce as a weightier sin and dehumanizing those involved. This is because divorce is a result of sin and fallenness of humanity and forgivable upon one's repentance. If anything, the church should be mainly involved in bringing peace and re-establishing relationship. The message is much applicable to marital challenges witnessed in the modern ecclesiastical contexts. Reconciliation and healing can be and should be the theme among ailing relationships.

Third, on godly offspring, after God established marriage institutions as the fundamental unit of society (Gen 1:27-28), He blessed man and his wife and mandated them "fill the earth and subdue it." Godly marriage provides the rich soil upon which godly children grow. In cases where divorce occurs, the environment upon which these godly offspring becomes distorted. Thus, divorce should always be discouraged since it distorts God's plan for marriage.

Fourth, one of the blessing children of God enjoy is intra-peace, whether married, divorced, or unmarried. This peace is a gift given by God to all who bear His image (John:14:27). Paul reminds Corinthian believers of their call by God to a state of peace regardless of their condition. When believers pursue this virtue in their marriage contexts, other virtues like reconciliation would easily be cultivated, thus reducing divorce cases.

### **Conclusion**

This article looked at Paul's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10–16. By and large, the text upholds the sanctity of marriage among believers in Christ. Even in exempt cases where separation occurs, believers should still pursue reconciliation. Paul urges the believing party to remain married in mixed marriages if the unbelieving party is willing to continue with the marriage. He argues that the believing party plays a pivotal role in bringing sanctification to the unbelieving spouse and the children. However, this faith is not a saving

faith. Further, in a situation where the unbelieving party is unwilling to remain, the believing party is not bound. The believer can accept divorce instigated against their wish since they have been called to peace. Forcing the unbeliever to remain would make the believer forfeit their God-given gift of peace, at the same time, remaining in such a union does not guarantee salvation for the unbeliever.

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