

Is There a Second “Exception” for Divorce and Remarriage?

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Many grievously misunderstand the nature of revelation/inspiration. Some aver that only the words of Jesus (those in red letters in some Bibles) are authoritative, and the remainder of the writers reflect their personal human opinions. The 1970s militant feminists labeled Paul’s doctrine relating to the God-given respective roles of men and women (e.g., Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23; 1 Tim. 2:11–12; et al.) as the mere opinionated rantings of a disillusioned, male-chauvinist, woman-hating bachelor – unworthy of credibility; he was not Jesus!

Some brethren are not far behind the aforementioned attitude toward revelation/inspiration, though for different reasons. Years ago, a brother where I preached made a Wednesday night “talk” in which he commented on various expressions in 1 Corinthians 7. He alleged that Paul’s statement, “To the rest say I, not the Lord” (v. 12), was uninspired human opinion, which we could choose to ignore. It fell my lot to correct his error before the assembly was dismissed. I did so by pointing out as gently as possible that all Paul was saying was that the Lord had not **specifically addressed** the situations, which he was about to address (vv. 12–15), but that Paul’s words on the subject were nonetheless inspired.

Other brethren view Paul’s words here (particularly v. 15) not as mere opinion, but as “expanded revelation” relative to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19:9 regarding divorce and remarriage. Whereas He gave **one** – and **only** one – Divinely allowable cause for divorce and remarriage (viz., fornication on the part of one’s spouse), Paul allegedly allowed desertion by an unbelieving spouse as a second cause, thus an “exception to Jesus’ exception.” While Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would give them additional revelation (John 16:13, et al.), He could not have had in mind **contradictory** revelation.

Paul wrote: “Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us in peace” (1 Cor. 7:15, ASV). Such brethren argue that *not under bondage* refers to the “marriage bond,” which – since one is no longer “in bondage” to it – desertion gives one the Scriptural right to remarry, whether or not the deserting spouse had/has committed fornication. Let me demonstrate that this is not the case:

1. By employing *whosoever* in giving His **one** – and **only** one – exception (i.e., fornication [Mat. 19:9]), that grants the right of divorce and remarriage to the innocent spouse, the Lord included **all** marriages, whether between two Christians, a Christian and a non-Christian, or two non-Christians.
2. *Bondage* (1 Cor. 7:15) is from a cognate of *duoloo*, which appears 133 times in the New Testament. It is the common word for slavery, bond servitude (e.g., vv. 21–23, ASV). Inspired

writers **never** used this word in reference to marriage, unless verse 15 is the one exception out of 133—a very rare probability.

3. Paul twice refers to marriage as a “bond” in the context (viz., “...bound unto a wife” [v. 27], “a wife is bound to her husband...” [v. 39]). Significantly, however, *bound* is from a completely different word (*deo*), meaning to bind, tie, or confine—literally or by obligation. This word **has nothing to do** with slavery and its bondage.
4. The “bondage” the deserted spouse is **not** under (v. 15) is a “slavery” the spouse **was not then** and **had never been** under (as the perfect tense of *duoloo* [*bondage*] demands). Since the one deserted and the deserter were married, but the one deserted **was not** and **never had been** under the “bondage” of verse 15, said “bondage” **could not** refer to marriage itself.
5. The “bondage” to which Paul refers is one that an uninformed Christian might **believe** existed, requiring him or her to remain with the anti-Christian deserter, even at the cost of one’s soul. No such obligation exists, said Paul.

This passage contains no so-called “Pauline privilege” that grants a second Scriptural ground for divorce and remarriage. Jesus teaches that when a marriage dissolves apart from the cause of fornication, neither party has the right to remarry unless and until the one abandoning the marriage has committed or commits fornication (Mat. 19:9). In such a case, **only the innocent** spouse has that Scriptural right. There remains **one**—and **only one**—Scriptural ground for divorce and remarriage—fornication on the part of one’s spouse. Neither desertion nor any other cause of the dissolution of a God-ordained marriage (Mat. 19:6) constitutes an additional Divinely ordained ground for remarriage.

Paul was **not** merely offering an uninspired optional “opinion” in 1 Corinthians 7:12–15, nor was he extending an additional exception to Jesus words (Mat. 19:9). **All** of the New Testament (as is the Old) is God’s revelation via inspired men. Thus the words of Paul, John, Peter, and the other New Testament writers are as authoritative as the words of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, Whom the Lord Jesus told the apostles He would send upon them from the Father, supplied those words (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:10, 13; 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21; 3:15–16; et al.).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, August 10, 2014, of which I was editor.]

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