

Divorce (Part 1)

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Date: 11 August 2010

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[0:00] Well, all right, we are going to deal with an interesting subject, one that quite frankly, I'd rather answer some deep, difficult theological question than to answer this question tonight.

And primarily, and I say that smiling, but I don't really mean to make light of it because it is a very important subject in our day based upon a lot of things that we're seeing in our culture, not just the culture or society of America, but I mean the Christian culture in America on this subject of divorce. And so the question is, just as you have it there printed for you, what is Paul's teaching concerning divorce in 1 Corinthians chapter 7?

Well, the entire chapter, of course, does not deal with marriage and divorce and that subject. It deals with several other subjects. They all do tie together.

He deals with singleness and he deals with sexuality, these kinds of things within the context of marriage and outside marriage.

[1:25] And then he deals really primarily or specifically deals with marriage starting with verse 10. And so I am going to make this a two-part thing because there's a lot to cover here.

And if I don't get after it, we won't even get the first part done. But verses 10 through 16 is the text, the larger text we're going to look at.

But tonight we'll just focus on verses 10 and 11. And the reason why I've divided it that way will become clear as we go along or become clear here pretty soon. But I have given to you on your study sheet a paragraph from John MacArthur who taught, I guess he's taught through every book of the Bible now or at least every New Testament book of the Bible.

And he does primarily focus on New Testament. But this is from a sermon of his and he is giving a, I take that back, this is out of his commentary in 1 Corinthians.

And he's giving a kind of a synopsis of the context. And I think it's important for us to know that on the front end. And so you've got it there before you, but I want to go ahead and read it so you can just kind of follow along as I read it.

[2:41] The Corinthian Christians were confused because some were saying it was better to remain single to be more spiritual. They had a growing fascination with celibacy and thought that if they remained single, they would be able to give a higher devotion to God.

They assumed that would move them to a higher plane of spirituality and even went so far as to say any kind of sex was wrong.

That caused many Christians to divorce their spouses for so-called spiritual reasons or to remain married but withdraw from any physical contact to devote themselves totally to God.

The Jewish leaders, on the other hand, had propagated their belief that you had to be married to be godly and that if you weren't married, you were out of God's will and excluded from heaven. And I think he does capture pretty well what the issue is here.

And that, I think, and you may have to go back and read that again if you're really interested in understanding what Paul's point is, what his main points are throughout the chapter.

[3:51] It would be good to go back and read that again and just get kind of an idea of what was going on in the church and why he needed to address them in the way that he did. So, that gives you kind of the context.

And then we move from there to Paul's instructions. But before I do that, I intended to go ahead and read the text. So, let me do that. Verses 10-16. Now, chapter 7, by the way, if you didn't pick that up.

Now, to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, a wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

And the husband is not to divorce his wife. And I'll go ahead and read the other verses there that we'll deal with this next week. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say, if any brother has a wife who does not believe and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.

[5:01] Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? So, just reading the text brings up some questions as to what Paul is talking about.

The first thing we need to do, and I'm going through some preliminary considerations, and there are several of them, without really yet getting into the meat of the text itself. The first one is the context. The second one is, Paul's instructions, we need to understand here, Paul's instructions come from two authoritative sources. That's the first thing we need to consider about this text.

There is some confusion, obviously, when you read that. And just on the face of it, here's Paul saying, I command, but not I, the Lord.

[6:05] And then next he says to the rest of you, I, not the Lord, command, or so to speak. And so there's some confusion about that. And so some have thought that maybe Paul was saying, this part's the inspired part, and this part's not the inspired part, and so forth.

And that's not at all what he's talking about. He's citing two authoritative sources. And the first one, there in verses 10 and 11, we have the teachings of the Lord Jesus.

Did I say the Jesus on there? The line? I'm sorry, I may have made a mistake. The teachings of Jesus. Alright? You can just scratch out the there. Or if you want to put the Lord Jesus.

How about that? That'll work. So in verses 10 and 11, he's citing direct teachings of the Lord Jesus while he was on this earth during his public ministry.

And Jesus taught on a number of subjects. And he taught on the subject of marriage and divorce and remarriage. And so Paul is just saying what I'm about to tell you in these verses comes straight from him.

[7:13] And this is what he taught while he was here on the earth. That's what he means when he says, Now to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. When he's talking about the Lord, he's talking about the Lord Jesus. This is what he taught.

Other examples, by the way, and I don't know if I gave this to you. Did I give a parenthesis there? There are some other examples. 1 Corinthians 9.14 You can jot these down and look at them later. Where Paul does the same thing. Where he references the direct teachings of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 9.14 Chapter 11, verse 23 And in 1 Corinthians And then 1 Timothy 5.18 You can go back and look at those.

So, two authoritative sources. Number one, the teachings of the Lord Jesus. Number two, Paul's own apostolic authority. His own apostolic authority, verses 12-16 Represent the teachings that are coming directly from Paul.

Now, they are still inspired, still authoritative, because he's an apostle. And so, they carry the same weight as the teachings there in verses 10 and 11.

[8:26] And so, when he says there in verse 12, But to the rest, I, not the Lord, say. He's not suggesting that what he's about to say is not something Jesus said, or would say, Or that this didn't come from him.

He's just saying that Jesus didn't teach on this subject. He didn't deal with this. And so, I, according to my apostolic authority, am dealing with this issue here.

Alright, so there's the second preliminary consideration we need to make. Third, the instructions found in these passages come in the form of commands. Commands from both Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

These are commands. And the reason why I make a point about that is that different translations use different words to translate the one Greek word.

And so, in the New King James Version, which I read a moment ago, it says command. In the ESV, I think it says charge. Charge there.

[9:33] Which is, I think you would take that as, equate that with a command. The New American Standard uses the word instructions. And I don't know about you, but instructions don't sound the same as commands to me.

You know. And it's primarily because that's just the way we use the word in our day. But the word can be translated instructions.

But it is usually translated command. Command. And it is a Greek word that means literally, and you can just jot this down, to transmit an authoritative message.

If you want to jot that down. And that's the literal meaning of perangelo is the Greek word. And who cares about that? But it just means to transmit an authoritative message.

Angelo. Angelo. That's the word for angel. We have a translated angel usually in the Bible. And it just simply means messenger. But in this sense, it is an authoritative message that's being given.

[10:38] In the New Testament, the word is primarily used in the sense of giving strict orders. I want to make this clear because Paul is not suggesting some things here.

He's not saying this is what Jesus suggested or just simply his instructions on maybe the best way to do things. This is in the form of a command.

And Paul, when he's speaking according to his apostolic authorities, he's not making suggestions. These are commands. And it's important for us to understand that.

And I'll give you an example in Acts 5.28. And I can read it to you because I have it printed right here. Acts 5.28. By the way, this is the Sadducees, the council, you know, speaking to Peter and who else?

Anyway, Acts 5.20. Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? Now, the word strictly, words strictly command is not a case where we have two English words translating one Greek word.

[11:52] It is literally the same Greek word repeated twice, just different forms. It's perangelo twice. And so to add force, these Sadducees, these Jewish leaders and the high priest, they were saying we strictly command you not to teach.

Now, I'm just adding that or giving that out to you because I want to reinforce the reality that what Paul is citing that Jesus taught and what Paul is saying now as an apostle, I'm going to teach you or command you.

These are forceful commands. And so what he says about marriage and divorce and remarriage, and a little bit later when he talks about believing wives and unbelieving husbands and all of that information are given in the form of strict commands.

Fourthly, the objective of the commands in this passage is the permanence of marriage. Folks, there's just no other way to interpret it.

The idea here, not only with 1 Corinthians 7, but a little later when we look at Jesus' actual teachings in Matthew 5 and again in Matthew 19, there's just no other way to interpret it than to say the bottom line is God believes in the permanence of marriage.

[13:25] All right? We can't dispute that. Number five, the commands given in the passage apply to Christians in these marriages. Christians, both wives and husbands.

Paul does not leave them out, doesn't give commands for the husband that he doesn't give to the wife. But we're not talking about just people in general. These are commands given to Christians. Paul never issued any commands to unbelievers. And think about it, that makes sense because unbelievers have no capacity to obey. Not only to understand, but to actually obey the commands of the Lord.

And so, these are to Christians. Paul spoke, number six, to marriages where both partners are believers. That's what we have in verses 10 and 11. We have Christian marriages.

Both partners are believers. And he also spoke to those who were one, where one is a believer, most likely coming to Christ after marriage. And the other, an unbeliever.

[14:30] And that's what we have in verses 12 through 16. Okay, now I want to say something about that little parenthesis that I just mentioned there, number six.

Most likely coming to Christ after marriage. Based upon the context and the abuse of marriage in the name of spirituality that was going on there in the Corinthian church.

It's very likely that we're not talking so much about marriages that began unequally yoked. But marriages where both were unbelievers and then through the sharing of the gospel, through Paul's ministry and the ministry of the church.

There were people who came to Christ. And a wife, say, came to Christ and her husband is still an unbeliever. And vice versa. And so I think that's what he's primarily talking about here.

Four basic views of divorce and remarriage. Number one, God does not sanction divorce under any circumstances. Under any circumstances.

[15 : 38] This is the most extreme, most rigid view, of course. And therefore, remarriage is adultery. Alright, that's one view. On one extreme.

I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm just saying that is the most strict view. Secondly, divorce is allowed only under certain circumstances.

But remarriage is adultery. That's the second view. Number three, both divorce and remarriage are allowed under certain circumstances.

I mean, these are just pretty logical. And those who hold to these views, each one, they go to Scripture and support their views.

The fourth one would be the strict or extreme view to the other end. Divorce and remarriage are permissible for any reason. Or for no reason at all. And that was pretty much the view of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

[16 : 43] And in fact, in the course today too. But when we look at Matthew 19, it is that problem or that view that Jesus is addressing.

And we'll get to that later. So those are the four views. Listen, let me just give you a note here. Something to think about. The blame for any confusion about the scriptural teaching about marriage, divorce, remarriage.

The blame for any confusion about that or any conflict, conflicting views concerning that, about what the Bible teaches about this issue, whether it's marriage, divorce, remarriage.

The blame rests with man and not God. I won't throw that out to you because you may think that goes without saying, but it doesn't, not in our day.

There's confusion. There's conflict about the issue of marriage, remarriage, divorce. The problem is not with God's Word. The problem is with man.

[17 : 48] The Bible, in my estimation, is very clear on the subject. Very clear. And the confusion comes from sin because we are sinful creatures.

It comes from sin. It comes from, more specifically, self-centeredness. A lot of the directions people have gone over the issue of marriage and divorce and remarriage, they have formed their decisions based upon self-centeredness and not on the clear teaching of God's Word.

I would also add to that sensuality is another reason why there's confusion. When I say sensuality, I mean a lot of things, but we might just sum it up this way.

Some people make their conclusions about what to do, what's right or wrong concerning marriage and divorce and remarriage. They make those conclusions based upon what would make them happy. Seriously, that's just the bottom line.

You know, what would make me happy? And certainly God wants me to be happy. And He doesn't want me to be in a difficult situation. And whatever would make me feel good. And you can just kind of lump the whole spectrum of sensuality issues based upon that.

[19 : 12] Alright, let's move on. The commands of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning divorce and remarriage within the context of Christian marriages. This is what we want to look at first. I don't know that we'll make it.

And this is what He said again, if you look there at verse 10. Now to the married I command. Alright, so He's speaking to married couples. Alright. And I think the context informs us that He's talking to Christian couples.

Alright. Because He's going to go next after this to mixed marriages. Saved, unsaved marriages. So, here He's talking to Christians. And this is the command.

A wife is not to depart from her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. Now I skipped a little chunk there. And some of your translations may have little parentheses there.

There is a parenthetical statement made there. Again, I'll remind you of it if you have it there in front of you. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried and be reconciled to her husband.

[20 : 24] And so even if she does depart, and why He just singled out wife there, I do not know. But it's a parenthesis.

And even if she does, without any qualification about why she might leave, or whether there was adultery involved, or what the deal is. He's not saying that if she does, she's in God's will.

He's just clearly saying that if she does leave, she's not to remarry. Alright. And that's just a parenthesis. And then it ends there, verse 11, and the husband is not to divorce his wife. So there's the command. And Paul is saying that Jesus commanded this. That's what he means when he says, not I, but the Lord. And he did, by the way.

Jesus did give these commands. And he gave us clear commands. Did I tell you, verse 1, the two verses represent, or number 1 there, the two verses represent a summary statement of Jesus' teachings recorded in the Gospels.

[21:28] I'm sorry. Make sure you're able to fill in your blank, because it's so much fun to do that. Besides, I'm going to gather them up and grade them. Oh, no.

The second one under that bullet. Jesus gave us clear commands as to the permanence of marriage, in parentheses, the prohibition of divorce and the adultery of remarriage.

He gave clear commands on those issues, and he did so in a couple of places in Matthew. And there's a parallel passage in Mark, but let's look at Matthew chapter 5.

Maybe we can just say a few things about it, and we'll finish it up tonight and continue this next time. Matthew chapter 5, verse 31.

Furthermore, it has been said... By the way, what important sermon are we looking at here?

[22:35] Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

That is, maybe we could paraphrase that and say, let him make sure it's legal. Legal. Some certificate of divorce. And by the way, that is a reference to Deuteronomy 24, verses 1 through 4. And God allowed that, I think primarily, first because of the hardness of their hearts and for the protection of the woman. And so, but, he said, this is what you say, but this is what I say to you, that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. And why would that be? Because God does not recognize the divorce.

If you take the exception clause here. This is an exception clause. Next Wednesday, we'll talk about that exception clause.

[23:50] And give you some other possible understandings of that. And then you'll just have to make up your own mind. But if we take the exception clause there, except for sexual immorality, take that to mean adultery or marital unfaithfulness, then Jesus is saying there that if there is a divorce for any other reason, then God does not recognize that divorce.

And so that's why he can then say if there's a remarriage, then in God's eyes, because he still recognizes the first marriage, in God's eyes, it's adultery.

Now, don't throw stones at the preacher. I'm just the messenger. The Bible is the message.

And it's God who's speaking here. And it's Jesus with all of his authority. By the way, it's in red here. That means Jesus said this. I'm trying to be a little lighthearted to a point, but there's a serious issue in our day.

And I'm telling you, in my time as a pastor, I have had some encounters with some people really up in arms about the teaching of Scripture.

[25:12] And though I don't say it this way to them, I would never be so rude. I want to say, just take it up with the Lord.

Just take it up with Him, if you don't agree with it, because it could not be more clear. The only unclear portion of that text, and I'll explain this next time, ironically, the only unclear part of it is what Jesus meant by sexual immorality.

He did not use the word that is normally the word for adultery. And so that's perplexing, and we'll have to deal with that next time.

But the clear statement or clear command of Jesus, He says, this is what you have said. And without any qualification, what the divorce is based upon, you have said that it's going to be alright as long as you give a certificate of divorce, as long as you make this thing legal.

But I say to you, He said, that whosoever divorces his wife for any reason, except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery.

[26:24] And whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. And so there's the clear teaching of Jesus. Now next time we'll come back and look at Matthew 19, where he teaches primarily the same thing.

It's not a parallel passage. He's dealing with a different issue. In fact, he's dealing with a question from the Pharisees. And we'll deal with that next time and talk a little bit about this exception clause.