

DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES
OF
EBMC

2.2.3 Divorce and Remarriage

INTRO: In the first message we gave a brief view of the OT and marriage. I said that Genesis 2:21-25 was the most important passage in the OT on this subject and that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was the most used, and Malachi 2:13-16 was a most significant passage on this subject. Genesis 2 is a clear passage on this subject. Deuteronomy 24 is a very unclear passage, and Malachi is a most instructive passage. God hates divorce! And God makes two people one in marriage in order to produce godly offspring. That is most important.

Then we looked at the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus in the NT. And although it may be hard to prove that John held to a 'no divorce' view, it is not that hard to show that that was Jesus view. It must be conceded by all students of the Word of God, that no view is as important as the view of the Lord Jesus, for He is the Creator of man and woman!

This morning we want to look at the view of the apostle Paul on the matter of divorce and remarriage, and we find it most clearly in two very important passages, Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7.

C. Paul

1. As expressed in Romans 7:1-3

(Read Romans 7:1-3) Though I will not deal much with Romans 7:1-3, let us take a brief look at it (read). Here is a very plain passage, and the teaching is also very plain. It is 'no divorce'. Anyone who divorces and marries another is an adulterer. That is exactly what Jesus taught! I believe that is what John the Baptist taught as well.

What do those who allow for divorce on the ground of unfaithfulness say to such a plain passage? Well, I cannot quote a greater writer on the book of Romans, in my estimation, than LEM. Here is what he said, "Before entering upon our study of

this illustration, we should note that Paul is not here discussing the much disputed question about the Scriptural ground for divorce. It would not suit his purpose here to bring in for discussion the case of divorce due to infidelity" (Romans course Book 1, page 262).

But if there are exceptions to Paul's teaching on divorce here, then there are exceptions to the illustration that he is making, and that would ruin what he is trying to prove by this illustration! Later Maxwell quotes Bishop Moule who said, "Prove him living and you prove her his". That is correct without exception!

I do not feel it necessary to spend time on Romans 7, because it could not be much plainer in meaning. It is simply this: Anyone who divorces his or her partner and marries another while the first is alive is an adulterer or adulteress. So we go to 1 Corinthians 7, for here we have an entire chapter on the subject of marriage, and one which many wrest to their own destruction, as Peter says they do to other Scriptures as well (2 Pet. 3:16).

2. As expressed in 1 Corinthians 7

I want to first set the chapter in its context. In chapters 1-6, Paul deals with divisions in the church and seeks to set things right. Then in 7-16, he deals with various problems they have written to ask about. I want you to notice that in 7:1 (read). So in chapter 7 he deals with marriage; in 8-10 he deals with Christian rights; in 11 he deals with two ordinances; in 12-14 he deals with spiritual gifts; in 15 he deals with the resurrection and in chapter 16, with various concluding matters.

So let me now outline chapter 7 for us. In 7:1-9 he deals with whether a person should get married or not. Then in 7:10-23, he deals with the subject of leaving one's partner. In 7:25-28, he deals with remaining a virgin. In 7:29-40 he deals with matters relating to both married and

singles. In 7:39-40, he deals with certain matters relating to married women.

The most misunderstood section relating to divorce and remarriage is 7:10-28. Let me mention one thing further. This chapter, in the original, nowhere mentions divorce! The NKJV uses the word 'divorce' in verses 11, 12 and 13. It is the Greek word *aphieemi*. It can be translated 'to put away,' but a very common translation of this word is 'to leave' (read 11-12 with word as 'leave').

The passages that have caused the greatest confusion with regard to divorce and remarriage are 7:10-24, where Paul deals with the subject of leaving one's partner and 7:25-28, where he deals with the subject of remaining single by those who have never been married.

Our discussion will begin at verse 10, but let me quote from my Bible course notes on Corinthians on verses 8-9 first, for those who may have questions on whom these verses are speaking about. So I quote: "These verses form the conclusion to this particular question. It is addressed to the *unmarried* and *widows*. The question is, who are the *unmarried*? They appear to be different from the virgins that he deals with in 25ff. Dr. Gordon Fee believes this is a reference to widowers, not the unmarried in general. He gives several reasons. He writes, 'First, since being 'widowed' in antiquity created special problems for women, most cultures had a word for widows; however, they did not always have a word for the male counterpart. Greek has such a word, but it appears seldom to have been used, and never in the koine period, in which *agamos* served in its place. Second, since throughout the entire passage Paul deals with husbands and wives in mutuality (12 times in all), it would seem to fit naturally into the total argument to see that pattern here as well. After all, if *agamois* refers to all the unmarried, then why add widows? Third, this word appears again in v. 11 for a woman separated from her husband, and in v. 34 in contrast to the 'virgin' (one who was never before married),

indicating that in his regular usage it denotes not the 'unmarried' in general, but the 'demarried,' those formerly but not now married. On balance, 'widower' seems to be the best understanding of the word here. That would also help to explain the presence of these verses in this context, where all of the cases in vv. 1-16 deal with those presently or formerly married, while vv. 25-38 take up the issue of the never-before married."

All of that to say this: Verse 8 should read, "But I say to the widowers and widows..." It is good, Paul indicates, for widowers and widows to remain unmarried but if you cannot exercise self control get married (imperative). If you have not the self control do not remain unmarried and suffer the continual burning of passion. Most of us need little explanation regarding this burning.

a. The matter of leaving one's partner (7:10-24)

1) Marriage of two believers (7:10-11)

Verses 10-11 deal with the marriage of two believers as verse 12 indicates where he begins to deal with a believer married to an unbeliever. Now in teaching on this, Paul had the advantage of having had Jesus' teaching on this subject. So he says, "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord." So what does Paul believe on this subject of divorce and remarriage? Here it is: A wife is not to depart from her husband. Very simply, it is this: No divorce!

Now let us take one moment to observe that Paul, in giving the teaching of the Lord Jesus did not understand Jesus to teach that the exception clause was valid for unfaithfulness. If he had understood that from Jesus, verse 10 should read, "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband, except it be for fornication."

Since Paul does not use that exception here, I understand that he did not understand Jesus to teach that divorce was acceptable even in cases of unfaithfulness.

Then in verse 11 he makes a very important point. If a woman does leave, and this leaving is not considered divorce, because he says, "...let her remain unmarried..." The clear teaching here is that if a woman cannot live with her man, she may come to the point of leaving him, but not remarrying. Then Paul goes on to teach that if she does not want to remain unmarried, she is to be reconciled to her husband. Those are the two options from Paul: Separation may become a part of life, but never divorce. Someone who does not want to live alone, must be reconciled to their partner.

Then Paul goes on like this, "And a husband is not to leave his wife." I understand now that though he is not to leave her, if he cannot live with her, then he too must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her.

2) Marriage of believer and unbeliever (7:12-24)

Paul then comes to a more thorny issue (read verse 12). Now let me just point out that he is not talking about people who have disobediently married unbelievers. He is talking to people who had not even heard of Christ when they got married. They were both unbelievers when they married. Then Paul came with the Gospel, they heard his preaching, and only one partner got saved. That is who he is talking about.

Now let me just mention that when Paul says, "To the rest I, not the Lord, say..." he does not mean that his teaching is not

biblical. The Lord nowhere addressed such a situation, so he gives his teaching, which became part of God's inspired word (see 1 Cor. 14:37).

So he says, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let her not 'leave' (not divorce) him." Then in verse 13 we find that the same thing holds true for both partners.

Now let me ask a question: Why would the Corinthians have wondered if a believer should remain together with an unbelieving partner? Well, verse 14 gives the answer. It is because of the question of sanctification or holiness that this question is raised.

Let me read to you from Haggai 2:11-13, to understand the principle in view here:
"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests *concerning the law*, saying, "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?'" Then the priests answered and said, "No." And Haggai said, "If one *who is unclean because of a dead body* touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean."

The principle is this: When something holy touches something unholy, the holy does not make the unholy clean. When something unholy touches something holy, it makes the holy unholy. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she becomes holy, a saint. Therefore, if a Christian has an unbelieving partner, then does not the Christian become contaminated or unclean?

Paul then says, If a man becomes a Christian and his wife does not, let him not leave her. And if a woman becomes a

Christian and her husband does not, let her not leave him. Now notice the almost unbelievable words of verse 14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified, or made holy, by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the believing husband." So powerful is the husband/wife bond, that in this case the law of holiness is reversed! Rather than the believer being defiled by the unbeliever, the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer!

Then Paul argues like this: If this were not the case, then your children would not be sanctified. They would be unclean. But now, since either husband or wife are believers, the children are sanctified as well. Now from this, some have gathered that children of at least one Christian parent are safe at death because of this sanctification, but children of unbelievers are lost when they die. However, that is not in view here for the husband is also said to be sanctified and thus he too should be saved.

So let me explain what it means that the unbelieving husband and the children are sanctified by the believer. When a couple has a child outside of marriage, that child is stigmatized as illegitimate. What of a child born of a couple where one becomes a believer and the other does not? Is that child stigmatized? Answer: No, the child, rather than being stigmatized by the unbeliever, is sanctified by the believer. This is simply incredible. This is the power of the bond of marriage, even in unbelievers!

So what is the conclusion regarding marriages where one partner becomes a believer and the other does not? They are married. They should not leave their spouse.

Now let us go to one more very misunderstood part of this section. It is verse 15 (read). The word that has caused some misunderstanding is the word 'bondage'. A very serious error occurs here when this word bondage, in verse 15, is viewed as the same as the word bondage in verse 39 and Romans 7:1-3.

Some years ago I spoke with a certain principle of a Bible school, and we were discussing divorce and remarriage. And I said that in our churches we had a 'no divorce' policy. And he said, "Phil, I do not believe in man-made rules." He viewed a no divorce policy as a man-made rule.

Then he said, "Did you know that the word 'bondage' in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the same as that in Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39?" And I said, "No, it's not the same." And he said, "Oh yes it is." And I said, "Oh no it isn't." We continued that a while and when he saw that I was very sure of myself he finally said, "It looks like I better recheck that." He sent me some material I had requested and on the envelope was this little note, "Phil, you were right."

Now the word *bondage* in 7:15 is the perfect, passive indicative of the word *doulōw*, to enslave, but it is made negative by the 'not'. In this verse the perfect tense of enslavement is negated by the word 'not'. In a marriage, both partners are bound together and thus obligated to fulfill certain things. In marriage, each partner is to serve the other. There are many areas in which each partner serves. The wife is to serve by such things as food preparation, rearing children, washing the clothes etc... The husband serves by taking care of financial needs, a house, a vehicle etc... Besides, they serve each other in conjugal needs. These are not options in marriage, they

are obligations. They are enslaved to each other in these things.

But in this passage the perfect tense bondage is negated by the word 'not'. A person is bound, perfect tense, but not in certain cases, and here is one such case.

However, in Romans 7:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39, another bondage is spoken of. It is the life-long bond of marriage, spoken of in the perfect tense and never negated. It is the bondage created when God makes them one in marriage. This word for bondage is not formed from *doulow*, as in verse 15, but from *dew*; to bind, to tie. This bond can never be broken, even in separation (v. 11). This bondage holds as long as both live. If either partner divorces and remarries, they are now adulterers or adulteresses. There are no exceptions.

So, in marriage there are at least two bondages. One to faithful service to each other and the other to the one flesh union. The first may be broken in some cases, the second, never!

b) The matter of remaining a virgin (7:25-28)

The last passage that I think is often misunderstood is verse 27-28 (read). Now it is very easy to read verse 27 as speaking about divorce, and verse 28 as saying that it is OK to remarry after divorce (read 27-28 together).

It is very important to first notice what the context is (see v. 25). We are now talking about those who have never been married. And Paul is going to instruct these unmarried persons now on another matter where He does not have specific instruction from the life of the Lord Jesus. So in verse 26 he recommends that they remain single. Now that is not Paul's usual advice (see 7:1-2). But he is giving this advice here as he explains in the

verse, "because of the present distress..." There were circumstances at that time that caused him to encourage them to refrain from marriage for a time.

Then, having encouraged them not to marry, and lest some of the married get the idea of leaving their wives because of this, he quickly adds verse 27. Now verse 27, I believe, is an interjection. Paul has been talking to virgins, and now, lest some of these married people getting ideas of leaving their wives because of the present distress, now he inserts this verse in order to instruct the married.

Now let me show you what this passage is like if you leave the interjection out (read 26 and then 28). There is the intent of the passage.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, let us briefly recap what we have covered this morning. First, in Romans 7:1-3 we found that Paul taught that anyone who married another while the first spouse was living, was committing adultery.

Then in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 Paul taught that two believers who were married were to remain together, and if they simply could not live together, they might separate. But if they found separation unbearable, they were to go back to their marriage partner. If one partner in a marriage became a Christian, he or she was not to leave his or her partner. The marriage bond is so powerful that the believer sanctifies the unbeliever so that the unbeliever does not render the believer unholy. 7:17-24 then go on to show that if one is called to salvation married to an unbeliever, he or she is to remain in that calling. However, if the unbeliever left his or her partner, the partner was not obligated to maintain normal marriage duties as is required if they remain together.

We then explained the difficulty of verses 25-28, by showing that verse 27 is an interjection, and thus these verses in no wise support divorce and remarriage.

I would now simply like us to note in closing verse 39 (read). This word bondage is different from the bondage of verse 15. This bondage has to do with God making husband

and wife one for as long as they both live. This falls exactly in line with the teaching of Romans 7:1-3.

So, I close by saying that to remarry while one's first partner is alive is active adultery. It is a major sin, which if persisted in without repentance will deny the participants entrance to glory (1 Cor. 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21). What should persons do who are divorced and remarried? The same thing an alcoholic or druggie should do. Leave it immediately. It is a major sin. And what should a church do, where this happens? Sins of such magnitude must be met with excommunication in order to seek to bring them to repentance.