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## Does 1 Cor. 7:15 give the right to remarry?

*Question: Does 1 Cor. 7:15 give a Christian the liberty to remarry after divorce if the first marriage was to an unbeliever?*

Answer: Literally volumes have been written on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It would be impossible to comprehend the pros and cons of the various positions taken in the short space we have here. But your question poses a relatively new argument which has been advanced by some brethren to justify remarriage of a Christian who has divorced for causes other than fornication. The belief of some is that if a Christian has been married to a non-Christian and the marriage does not work out, then divorce and remarriage can be justified for the Christian. The passage reads: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15).

### Remarriage Is Not Discussed

A careful study of the context would prove the apostle does not even hint at the subject of remarriage of a divorced person. We must be careful that we never add to any text what the Bible itself does not say! This rule applies for any subject under consideration. The only time the subject of remarriage is mentioned is in the previous verses where he is enforcing God's law of marriage till death. "Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10-11). He specifically forbids the notion of remarriage to someone other than their first husband or wife. This is enforced by God's law of marriage (Rom. 7:2-3; Matt. 5:32).

### A Special Situation Existed

Also a study of the context would show this is a chapter with special situation application. For example:

- v.1 - "It is good for a man not to touch a woman (yet the Lord made woman for man's good, (Gen. 2:28); and the bed is undefiled in marriage (Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:2-5).
- v.8 - "It is good for them (unmarried) to abide even as I" (yet Paul urged marriage in other letters, 1 Tim. 5:14; Eph. 5:22-23; Heb. 13:4).
- v.26 - "I suppose this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for man so to be." (The inspired advice which Paul gave in this chapter applies to a situation wherein the marriage relationship would be under a severe strain due to the persecutions against the church, cf. w. 27-33).

Now considering these two facts: (1) Paul does not give instruction about remarriage of a divorced person; and (2) The advice he presents pertains to a special situation, one is violating the text if he uses it today to justify the remarriage of a Christian based solely on the reason that he/she was divorced from a non-believer!

### What Should A Christian Do?

This question naturally arose in the minds of Christians who were married to unbelievers. If one has obeyed the gospel but the other has not, should the believer remain in this relationship? The apostle is giving answer to this question, and in so doing he gives assurance that: (1) the marriage is "sanctified" (i.e., a holy relationship recognized by God), v. 14; and (2) The believer should not seek to be released from the union just because the companion is an un-believer, w. 12-14, cf. w. 17-24; and (3) If the unbeliever departs because of the faith, "let him depart"... the Christian is not "under bondage" in such cases, v. 15.

The phrase "not under bondage" has been the pivotal thought used by some to supposedly prove a marriage no longer existed, thus each was free to remarry. But again, this is a conclusion which says much more than the text itself says. Husbands and wives hold many responsibilities toward each other in this relationship (cf; Eph. 5:22-33). A failure to fulfill these may cause one even to "defraud" the other (1 Cor. 7:2-5). However, the Christian must never deny the faith in order to fulfill marriage responsibilities! In a similar way, we must obey the law of the land, but if that law orders us to disobey God, then we are "not under bondage" to the law of the land. God must be first (Acts 5:29).

A study of the word "bondage" is essential to this text. It is interesting to note that the root word used in 1 Cor. 7:15 (doulou) is a different word from the root word translated bound" (deo) in 1 Cor. 7:27, 39; Rom. 7:2. Thayer describes the latter word (deo) as "being bound with chains...to bind, i.e., put under obligation", p. 131; whereas he describes the word in 1 Cor. 7:15 (doulou) as "to be made subject to the rule of someone," p. 158. One who is married is "bound" till death; he is compelled by the law of God to remain in that relationship. However, the law of God will not hold one guilty of failing in the marriage responsibilities if that person's mate has departed over the gospel. He/she will not be guilty of "defrauding" the other (1 Cor. 7:5) or of causing" the other to commit fornication (Matt. 5:32). He/she is "not under bondage" (subject to the rule of the other) if by doing so it would cause disobedience to God.

The only exception given in the New Testament for one who puts away his wife and marries another is "for fornication"; otherwise he "committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

-A Christian