

"But I Say To The Unmarried ..."

"... and to widows, it is good for them to abide even as I. But if they have not continence, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. But unto the married I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife" (1 Cor. 7:8-11).

Instructions in these verses have given rise to a number of questions, three of which needs be dealt with. Understand that since in the chapter the apostle distinguished between "*unmarried*," "*widows*," and "*virgins*," that while virgins had never been married, both the "*unmarried*" and "*widows*" had been, except that the widow's mate was dead, the "*unmarried*" person's mate was yet alive; the unmarried was divorced.

Does the command, "*If they have not continence, let them marry* (the unmarried and the widows): *for it better to marry than to burn*," allow complete latitude about marrying, no matter what either their state or their prospective mates' marital state is? Some say "Yes." Such a conception renders "legal adultery" better than simply "adultery." By "legal adultery" we mean the parties are married to each other but their state would be regarded as adulterous according to Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage, as per Matthew 5:31f; 19:8f. To regard Paul's words here as allowing divorced persons to marry with no restrictions would make Paul more "liberal" regarding marriage than even Moses' law! One does violence to God's word when he places an interpretation on any passage which interpretation directly contradicts another passage. The "*unmarried*" of the Corinthian text is limited by the charges which follow such a concession: "*that the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart) let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.*" Liberty to marry, in vss. 8-9, must be qualified by the apostle's additional writings: to the unmarried, remain unmarried or else be reconciled to their mate (verse 9); to the widow, free to marry, "*only in the Lord*" (vs. 39).

A second question is posed regarding Paul's words "*to the married ... that the wife is not to depart from her husband but should she depart, let he remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband.*" What is the meaning of this word "*depart*" in the two times it is found in Paul's instructions: does it mean "only separated" or does it mean "divorce"? To those who consider the wife is "only separated", the argument is that "she still has a husband, if she was divorced she would not have one." There are problems with this interpretation. The major issue is that the word "*depart*" in the text is the

word *chorizo*, the same Greek word found in Matthew 19:6. There Jesus commanded man not to put asunder that which God has joined together. The meaning in Matthew's text is divorce. Moreover, in the Corinthian text the word "*depart*" is found in vs. 15: "*if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.*" That passage means divorce. Furthermore, the word "*unmarried*" is found four times in the chapter: vss. 8, 11, 32, 34. In the other occurrences of "*unmarried*" the word means a person without a mate, not just separated. The unmarried wife of vs. 11 is to remain unmarried or else "*be reconciled*" to her husband; the "*unmarried*" of vs. 8, if they have not continence are to "*marry*". Marry equals reconcile. The wife who departs from her husband is to remain "*unmarried*" -- divorced or else be reconciled -- remarried -- to her husband.

The third question from our test is, "Is the husband of vs. 11, the 'husband' of the wife of vs. 10?" No. The apostle gives instructions to Christian wives, then to Christian husbands married, but not married to each other. Parallel to this order is vss. 12-13. There the apostle addresses a believing husband with an unbelieving wife; then he turns to a believing wife with an unbelieving husband. The mates of two separate unions are addressed both in vss. 10-11 and 12-13.

Jim McDonald