**Selections in 1 Corinthians**

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**Session Three Part 2: The Structure and Meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:15 (7:12-16)**

**An Excursus on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible**

The concept of a man and woman in union (marriage) is a major theme in the Bible. The theme begins in Genesis 1-3 and continues throughout Scripture. This union becomes the basis of major metaphors ...Two become one = kinship; Israel is Yahweh’s wife; the Church is the bride of Christ. Because of the major presence of this theme, divorce has often been relegated by the Church to the worse of the worse sins. The Bible does not assign a pecking order to sins, but the biblical narrative does view this relationship as a foundational aspect of creation.

1. Biblical texts about marriage:

**Developing a Biblical Theology of Marriage and Sexual Relations**

1. Marriage is viewed as **kinship** in the Bible and is treated as such in later legal codes

(Gen 1:26-27; 2:24). It is also a contract/covenant. It is **always between a man and woman**.

2. Marriage is presented as **an answer to created needs for relationship** (Gen 2:20-25).

3. Marriage relates to the **cultural mandate** of Genesis (Gen 1:26-31).

4. The **sanctity of sexual relations** is thoroughly imaged throughout Scripture (Gen 1-3;

Gen 6; Ex 20; The Decalogue; Lev 18; Proverbs;1 Cor 7:3ff.).

5. The self-satisfaction of sexual drives (often the hidden agenda under the umbrella of relational loneliness) is not the primary criterion for decision-making, as our current culture often demands. At the same time, **sexual desire is a created category which is good and not to be ignored (1 Cor 7), even trumping so-called “spiritual exercises” at times 1 Cor 7:4-5)**.

6. Marriage provides a major relational imagery that is utilized throughout Scripture. Marriage is a covenant/contract but it is more…it is kinship.

7. **Marriage in the biblical narrative is viewed as indissoluble except for death (Rom 7:2)**. There are only three texts that are viewed as opening a way to divorce and remarriage: Matt 5:31-32; 19:5-9; 1 Cor 7:15 (Rom 7:1-3 death; incest in Deut 24 may be considered by analogy). If these texts were not in the mix, we would not be having this discussion.

2. Biblical texts about divorce:

**A Review of Passages Which Pertain to a Biblical Theology of Divorce (large inclusive overview)**

1. Genesis 2:24 Marriage is kinship (a metaphor via physical nature of sex)

2. Exodus 21:10-11 Case Law for protection of women/wives in a polygamous society

3. Leviticus 18 Unlawful sexual relations list (a grocery list of ANE problems and protection of the kinship concept)

4. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Case Law for remarriage (note its view of “incest”)

5. Ezra 9, 10 Israel and inter-marriage = a historical particularity for Israel

6. Malachi 2:10-16 Classic mistranslated text. Should read, “The man who hates and divorces his wife,…” (NIV2011; ESV agrees but makes some bad changes by substituting ‘does not love’ for “hate”. See Sprinkle, 239ff. The Jewish *Tanakh,* reads, “For I detest divorce…”

7. Mark 10:1-12 **Jesus’ absolutism** (cf. France, *Matthew*, 208ff.)

8. Luke 16:18 **Jesus’ absolutism**

9. Matthew 5:31-32; 19:5-9 **Jesus’ absolutism and Matthew’s so-called exception clause, “except for porneia”**

10. Romans 7:1-3 **Death** of a spouse (death is the dissolution of the “one flesh” and the only clear and undisputed grounds for remarriage in Scripture)

11. 1 Cor 7:10-11 Upholds dominical tradition **[why didn’t Paul mention “exception clause”?]**

12. 1 Cor 7:15 **“Not bound”** probably implies that you cannot make an unbeliever stay and therefore you don’t need to feel guilty is they choose to depart. Some claim “not bound” means one is free to remarry.

13. Also, statements for special categories that provide indirect information

1 Cor 7:39-40 Death is dissolution

1 Tim 3:2, 12 Does not address divorce but implies marital faithfulness for ministry

Titus 1:6 Parallel to 1 Tim 3

1 Tim 5:9 Enrollment of widows and linguistic parallel to 1 Tim 3 on elders

3. Biblical texts about remarriage:

**There are only 4 texts that directly address remarriage:**

**Deuteronomy 24:1-4** Case Law for remarriage (note its view of “incest.” Cf. Rom 7:2-3)

Gospels (accounts in chronological order):

**Matt 5:31-32 (Harmony Sec 68)**

**Mark 10:1-12; Matt 19:5-9 (Harmony Sec 176)**

**Romans 7:2-3**, upon the death of a spouse.

In addition, **1 Cor 7:15** is often cited as well but **is disputed**.

4. The Church on divorce and remarriage. A historical and theological overview.

Since Romans and Deuteronomy are not disputed, we really **only have 3 texts in the whole Bible to “regulate” D&RM!!**  Here is how Church history has dealt with this question.

1. **EARLY CHURCH VIEW**: "The marriage bond was seen to unite both parties until the death of one of them. When a marriage partner was guilty of unchastity, usually understood to mean adultery, the other was expected to separate but did not have the right to remarry" (many Early Church Fathers, RCC, H&W, 22; John Piper in principle). This is also claimed to be the case with desertion in 1 Cor 7:15.

2. **ERASMIAN VIEW:** Sexual infidelity (Mt 5 & 19) and desertion of a spouse (1 Cor 7:15) provide grounds

for divorce and the right to remarry is assumed for the so-called **“innocent”** spouse. This view held sway in the

Western Church (conservative branch; cf. John Murray) until recently (See Blomberg article).

This is a classic Baptist view...until recently.

3. **JESUS TAUGHT AN “IDEAL” VIEW WITHOUT EXCEPTIONS AS DIVINE INTENT**

**IF** the co-called **“exception clauses”** in Matthew **related to a special contextual understanding** not obvious to us, **then there are NO exceptions**, and we are **only left with Jesus ideal statement**, “...it was not this way from the beginning.” (Matt 19:8; note the disciples shocked response to Jesus’ teaching, 19:10-12. They were not used to a blunt “NO” to D&RM).

Scholars have written books on alternate understandings of these clauses. I only cite some views here since I do not have time to unpack them and illustrate how they fit **Matthew “exception clauses.”**

1a. Unlawful Marriages Views

1b. First Century Jewish issues view

2b. Intermarriage view

2a. Betrothal View

3a. Preteritive View (an exception to the exception...Deut 24 which Pharisees used)

4a. Historical-Critical Views

5a. Instone-Brewer’s View (creative construct from Jewish practices in the first century)

If ANY of these views is taken about Matthew, the conclusion calls for the Ideal View:

If you apply Jesus ideal statement, then there are NO grounds for divorce or remarriage. If this is it (and you are feeling like the 1st century disciples about now), then what do you do with the fact of divorce and remarriage cases? You treat them like all other sins:

Recognition and ownership of biblical view

Confession

Forgiveness

Restoration (not absolute functionally but fine except for select areas)

I personally do not view the “restored” status as “as if I never sinned.” In the human domain, there are consequences. One who has truly confessed and engaged forgiveness will be the first to accept this fact. There is full redemptive forgiveness but certain ministry offices and areas of responsibility may be debated.

**If an “Ideal View” were adopted, it would require a biblical theology document about how to deal with sinners as a guide for those who have suffered in this domain and desire to remarry and for the Church’s management of its members.**

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Note on Gen 2:23:

23 וַיֹּאמֶר֮ הָֽאָדָם֒ זֹ֣את הַפַּ֗עַם עֶ֚צֶם מֵֽעֲצָמַ֔י וּבָשָׂ֖ר מִבְּשָׂרִ֑י לְזֹאת֙ יִקָּרֵ֣א אִשָּׁ֔ה כִּ֥י מֵאִ֖ישׁ לֻֽקֳחָה־זֹּֽאת׃

“This shall be called a **woman**, for from a **man** was she taken.” The last two lines are a typical example of Hebrew naming. Despite their similarity, it is **doubtful whether there is any etymological connection** between אשׁה (*ʾiššāh*) “woman” and אישׁ (*ʾı̂š*) “man.” (But see S. Qogut, *Tarbiz* 51 [1982] 293–98 for possible link.) Frequently Hebrew folk etymologies **offer a wordplay** on the circumstances of the person’s birth (cf. 4:1, 25; 17:17, 19; 29:32–30:24, etc.). Here the first man names the first woman in a similar fashion. Though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative (3:17). [Wenham WBC]