

Exegesis on First Corinthians 7 vs. 10-16

Introduction: In the seventh chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul expounds the rules of marriage that pertained among the various groups in the Christian congregation at Corinth. After introducing his subject and giving his inspired advice with regard to the physical relations of married people, ^{in verses 1-7} the apostle directs his words to three special groups within the Corinthian congregation; First to the unmarried and the widows, ^{in verses 8+9} Secondly: to the married people both of whom were Christians, ^{in verses 10+11} Thirdly: to the married people one of whom was a Christian and the other an unbeliever, ^{in verses 12-16} This paper will deal only with the second and third groups, because the rules which St. Paul outlines for them have a direct bearing on the question of marital desertion and its consequences. Because First Cor. 7, 10-16 is the primary proof passage on which the church fathers base their stand that malicious desertion is a scriptural ground for divorce, this passage calls for a special study and application to marriage problems ^{of} today.

To begin, ^{then} we mark the difference in the authority which St. Paul cites for his words to these two groups of married people in the congregation at Corinth. Addressing himself in verse 10 to the couples in which both parties were Christians, he says "τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, οὐκ ἑγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος" "and unto the married I command yet not I, but the Lord"; then in verse 12 turning to those couples in which either the husband or the wife was an unbeliever

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he says, "Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς λέγω ἐγώ, οὐχ ὁ κύριος.

"but to the rest speak I, not the Lord." From this it might appear that St. Paul meant to speak of Christ and himself as the greater and lesser authority, that he did not regard his own words as ~~as~~ ^{so} binding as the words of Christ. Luther goes so far as to say that what St. Paul here speaks on his own authority is merely advice, whereas what he speaks with Christ's authority is a command. Luther writes in his commentary on First Cor. "Weil hier Paulus bezeugt, dies Stück rede nicht der Herr, sondern er, gibter zuverstehn, dass es nicht von Gott geboten, sondern frei sei, sonst oder so zu tun.

Denn er unterscheidet seine Worte von dem Worte des Herrn, dass des Herrn Wort soll Gebot, sein Wort aber soll Rat sein." ^{VIII 1057} St. Louis, ~~VIII 1057~~

It is an unwarranted conclusion on Luther's part to call St. Paul's words in verses 12-16 simply words of advice, which may or may not be binding. Certainly St. Paul is here writing by divine inspiration, therefore his words also have divine authority and leave no room for a choice between obeying them and not obeying them. Lenski upholds this view. In his commentary on First Cor. he says, "Divine inspiration applies to what he (St. Paul) now records as his own apostolic statement just as fully as it did to what he records in restating the Lord's logion in its application to the Corinthians. No matter how the divine command comes to us, whether from the Lord's own lips, or from the pen of the Lord's apostle, the command has equal binding power." Thus the question still confronts us: Why does St. Paul distinguish between the authority of Christ's words and the authority of his own words?

The answer is: Because marital conditions in Corinth when St. Paul wrote his letter were not the same as the conditions under which Christ spoke regarding marriage. Jesus had no occasion to lay down any rules regarding mixed marriages, because there were none during his public life and ministry that required his attention. ^{ep. Schwabermann in Strass-Zeitung Kommentar under 1 Cor. 7.} What ^{Christ} He said about marriage applied to marriages in which both parties were ^{believers} Christians. For marriages in which both parties were ^{believers} ~~believers~~ Christ had laid down rules that were familiar to the congregation at Corinth, namely, Matthew 5 vs. 32 "whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" and Matthew 19, vs. 9 "whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Because Christ had spoken thus and because that saying was known to the Corinthians, therefore, St. Paul could say to the first group, "I command, yet not I, but the Lord." Regarding the mixed marriages at Corinth, however, St Paul could quote no saying of Jesus that was applicable; therefore he had to give instructions to these on his own authority and say, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord." But still he certainly meant his inspired words to be just as authoritative and binding as Christ's words. **---

Now let us look at St. Paul's instructions to those married people, both of whom were Christians. To them he says

χωρίζω - to separate, divide, part, part remainder.

middle: χωρίζομαι 1. Aorist pass. ἔχωρίσθη = to separate oneself from, to depart.

ἀφίημι (2nd. ἀφίεναι) = send away, bid go away or depart.

in verses 10 and 11 γυναῖκα ἀπὸ ἄνδρος μὴ χωρίσθηναι - καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφίεναι "Let not the wife depart from her husband, and let not the husband put away his wife." With these words St. Paul reminds the Corinthians of Christ's explicit commands in Matt, 5, 32; 19, 9 regarding the permanency and ⁱⁿdisolubility of marriage. Paul does not even mention the one exception which Christ mentioned, namely, fornication. He simply says, "Let not the one depart from the other, period." Does he mean to say that even fornication does not dissolve the marriage? Such a position would be at variance with the clear words of Christ. ^{Schneidersmann suggests that} Either a separation of Christians that was caused by fornication had not occurred in Corinth, or ^{no mention had been made of it,} ~~it had not come to~~ ~~St. Paul's attention,~~ or St. Paul did not want to increase the marital dangers of the Corinthian ~~by even mentioning it,~~ ^{Christians by citing it.} ~~fornication in this connection.~~ Therefore, he says, "where Christians are married to Christians, there Christ has told you very clearly, that the one should not depart from the other."

But even as St. Paul was writing, "Let not the wife depart from her husband," it occurred to him that perhaps that very thing had happened at Corinth, that a Christian wife had departed from her Christian husband. Therefore he inserted a parenthetical statement to cover such a possibility, namely, ^{ἔάν τις καὶ χωρισθῆ, μείτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ καταλλαγῆτω} "but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." The Authorized translation of ^{"but and if she depart"} ~~ἔάν τις καὶ χωρισθῆ~~ does not convey the correct tense, if one of the German commentators be correct. Writing in Theodor Zahns

καταλλάσσω - to change 2. To change from unity of friendship, reconcile.

Kommentar zum neuen Testament; Prof. Bachmann of Erlangen points out that εἰ with the aorist subjunctive expresses a condition that is not bound to any tense; with the καὶ inserted before χωρισθῆναι, however, the condition becomes of the past tense and the καὶ is to be rendered as "really, actually," so that Bachmann translates, "sollte sie sich aber wirklich getrennt haben". → If that be correct, then St. Paul's meaning would be, "but if the believing wife really have departed (despite Christ's command to the contrary), then let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." In verse 10 then, as Bachmann points out, St/ Paul reckoned with the possibility that a Christian wife was contemplating a separation from her Christian husband: to prevent such a separation, St. Paul quoted Christ's command and said, "let not the wife depart from her husband!" In verse 11 St. Paul reckoned with the possibility that a Christian wife could already have separated herself from her Christian husband; in that case, ^{St. Paul said} the departing wife would have to do either of two things: remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

Prof. Blume holds that the καὶ does not alter the tense, but he agrees that it should be rendered "really, actually". He prefers to translate, "If she (really) do depart, let her remain" etc.

What does St. Paul say of the Christian husband and the Christian wife who have been forsaken, deserted by their Christian spouse? He says nothing. He does not even by implication give them the right to marry again. Still Luther is very free in interpreting this passage. He says, "Wie? wenn eins nicht wollte sich mit dem anderen versoeenen und schlechts abgesondert bleiben, und das andere koennte nicht halten, und muesste ein Gemahl haben; was sollte dasselbe tun? Ob sichs moechte veraendern? Antwort: Ja, ohne Zweifel. Denn weil ihm nicht geboten ist, keusch zu leben, und hat auch die Gnade nicht, und sein Gemahl will nicht zu ihm, und nimmt ihm also den Leib, des er nicht entbehren kann, wird ihn Gott nicht dringen zum Unmoeglichen, um eines anderen Frevel willen und muss tun, als waere ihm sein Gemahl gestorben." St. Louis VIII, 1058.

Luther then gives the Christian husband whose Christian wife has departed from him, forsaken him, deserted him, the right to marry again. In the essayists' opinion neither verses 10-11 nor verse 15 warrant this position. Verses 10-11 forbid a Christian wife to depart from her Christian husband, they stipulate that if she do depart from him, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to him, they do not state that the forsaken or deserted Christian husband has the right to marry again. On the other hand, when St. Paul says in verse 15 that a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, that does not refer to a marriage between Christian spouses, but rather to a mixed marriage in which one spouse is a Christian, the other an unbeliever.

But let us now look at verses 12-16 in which St. Paul speaks to those married couples of which one party was a Christian, the other an unbeliever. To them he says in verses 12 and 13

Ἐἴ τις ἀδελφὸς γυναῖκα ἔχει ἀπίστον, καὶ αὕτη
 συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἀφίετω αὐτήν· καὶ γυναῖκα ἣ τις ἔχει ἄνδρα ἀπίστον,
 καὶ οὗτος συνενδοκεῖ οἰκεῖν μετ' αὐτῆς, μὴ ἀφίετω τὸν ἄνδρα.

"if any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the women which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave ^{the man} him." This passage is usually interpreted to mean that the believing party in such a marriage may not leave the unbelieving party, if the latter be pleased to dwell with him, to continue the marriage relation with him. The emphasis then would be on the fact that the believing party would have no right to leave the other under such circumstances. The imperative μὴ ἀφίετω, however, can have a different emphasis than that, as Bachmann again points out. Instead of meaning "he may not leave" these words may mean, "he does not have to leave, it is not required of him to leave". In Bachmann's opinion this latter meaning would also fit better into the background at Corinth. There were husbands there who had embraced the Christian faith, whose wives, however, had not done so; and there were wives ^{who} ~~that~~ had embraced the Christian faith, ^{but} whose husbands had not done so. These Christian husbands and wives were troubled in their conscience by this state of affairs, they were in doubt, whether it would be permissible for them to keep on living with their unbelieving partners, after they had embraced Christianity,

they feared that having such an unbelieving partner was incompatible with their Christian faith. What they wanted, then, was not permission to separate, but rather permission to stay together. Therefore, St. Paul wrote to them "you do not have to leave your unbelieving partner if he is willing to tolerate your Christian faith and live together with you". Thus in verse 10 according to Bachmann's view St. Paul declared a dissolution of marriage among Christians to be wrong and sinful, while in verses 12 and 13 he declared the dissolution of a mixed marriage to be unnecessary.

Verse 14 gives the reason why it is unnecessary for a mixed marriage under the aforementioned circumstances to be dissolved. St. Paul says ἡγιασθεὶς γὰρ ὁ ἀνόμος ὁ ἀπίστος ἐν τῇ γυναίκί, καὶ ἡγιασθεὶς ἡ γυναῖς ἡ ἀπίστος ἐν τῷ ἀσεβῶν. Ἐπειὶ ἄρα τὰ τέκνα ἱμῶν ἀκάθαρτά ἐσσι, νῦν δὲ ἅγια ἐσσι.

"for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by ^{the brother} her husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." The apostle does not mean that the unbeliever is sanctified, ^{holy,} ~~wholly~~ in his own person, for his unbelief would prevent that; rather he means that the unbeliever is as a sanctified one for the believing partner. Luther quotes Titus 1, 15 in this connection; "Den Reinen ist alles Rein." As Paul says Titus 1, 15 "unto the pure all things are pure" so it also applies here "unto the pure husband even the unbelieving wife is pure." Bachmann asserts that there is nothing unclean or unholy about the unbeliever, which would make a continuation of his marriage with the believer impossible. If there were,

then the children also that were born to this couple would be unclean, they would not be fit to be raised by a Christian mother or father. That, however, would be an absurd conclusion, for to a Christian parent all children that are born in wedlock are a holy gift of God. That such children are holy is so self evident to St. Paul that he does not even ~~adduce~~ ^{adduce} a reason or proof for this statement, as Bachmann points out. In commenting on verse 14 Luther also emphasizes that it was unnecessary for reasons of faith to dissolve such a mixed marriage. He says, "Wenn der Unchristliche Gemahl seinen Christlichen Gemahl nicht ~~wert~~ ^{wehrt}, Christlich zu leben, so ist der Glaube so ein ~~wichtig~~ ^{wichtig} Ding, dass ihm nicht schadet, bei Unchristen zu sein....Was den Glauben bleiben lässt, dass wird durch den selben Glauben unschaedlich, rein, heilig, ~~nützlich~~ ^{nützlich} und heilsam, dass der Gläubige mag damit umgehen, und dabei bleiben, ohne alle ~~verlichkeit~~ ^{Fährlichkeit}. Also sind die Kinder ~~also~~ ^{auch} heilig; nicht sind sie heilig an ihrer eignen Person, sondern dir sind sie heilig, dass deine Heiligkeit mit ihnen kann umgehen." St. Louis VIII, 1061.

In verses 15 and 16 St. Paul deals with the final phase of the problem that confronted those Christians in Corinth who were united in mixed marriages. Suppose a Christian woman is married to an unbeliever, who, instead of being pleased to dwell with her, forsakes her, deserts her, ~~is~~ ^{is} such a separation permissible? May such a separation be reconciled with a Christian's faith? St. Paul answers in verse 15, a. εἰ δὲ ὁ ἀπίστος χωρίσεται, χωρίσθητω· ὃν δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς "but if the ἢ ἢ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις."

unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases." These words indicate that it is permissible for the believing wife to let her unbelieving husband depart, ~~if~~ ^{if} he so desire; as a Christian she is not under bondage in such a case. As Bachmann states, a person who is under bondage, a δεσυνόμενος, is one who has been deprived of an independent way of living. A Christian wife who has been deserted by her unbelieving husband should not thereby be deprived of her independent way of life. According to Bachmann this may mean on the one hand that the Christian wife is not bound to run after her husband, to follow him when he has deserted her, and to insist that he come back. On the other hand it may mean that she is no longer bound to her marriage with him, that her marital obligations ^{toward} ~~with~~ him cease. The important question, however, is this: Does οὐ δεσυνεται "not under bondage" mean that she is freed from her husband in the sense that she may marry again? Here the opinions vary. Schnedermann of Leipzig writing in ^{the} Strack-Zoekler Kommentar, says, "Da gegen muss eine ~~Weiderverheiratung~~ ^{Wiederverheiratung} des Christlichen Teiles ausser bei Bruch der Ehe auf der anderen Seite ausgeschlossen sein." In support of this position he cites First Cor. 7, 39 "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth, but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will." Luther, on the other hand, maintains that the deserted Christian wife is free to marry again. He says, "Hier spricht der Apostel das Christliche Gemahl los und frei, wo sein unchristlich Gemahl sich von ihm scheidet, oder nicht vergoennen will, dass es Christlich lebe, und gibt ihm Macht und Recht, wiederum zu freien ein ander Gemahl....Da

ists nicht gefangen noch verbunden, an ihm zu hangen. Ists aber nicht gefangen, so ist frei und los; ist frei und los, so mag sich verändern, gleich als ^{wäre} ~~were~~ sein Gemahl gestorben....Möchte denn ein Mann also zehn oder mehr Weiber haben, die noch lebten, und von ihm gelaufen wären? Antwort: Wir können St. Paul sein ~~Mund~~ nicht stopfen, so mögen wir auch denen nicht ~~wären~~ ^{wehren}, die seiner Lehre wollen brauchen, wie oft sie wollen....Der Papst hat wider diesen Text St. Pauli das eine Gemahl gedrungen und gezwungen, bei Verlust ^{Seele} der ~~Seel~~ und ~~Schlichkeit~~ ^{Freiheit} sich nicht zu verändern, sondern des entlaufenen Gemahls warten, oder seines Todes ^{erharren} ~~erwarten~~....Was aber von einem heidnischen Gemahl ^{hier} ~~heir~~ St. Paulus redet, ist auch zu verstehen von einem falschen Christen." St. Louis VIII 1061 ff.

Finally in verse 15, b. and 16 St. Paul advances two reasons for the statement that a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. First, ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός "God hath called you to peace." If the believing wife would continue to run after her unbelieving husband who had deserted her, and would continue insisting upon her marital rights, such a procedure could eventually create animosity and enmity and thus disrupt the peace to which God has called the Christians. On the other hand, if the brethren ^{γὰρ} would insist that such a deserted Christian woman be bound to her unbelieving husband, that too could destroy her peace of mind and heart, as Bachmann points out.

Secondly, Paul asks the Christian wife who feels that she

should run after her unbelieving husband or cling to him, because she hopes to win him for the Christian faith, Paul asks such a Christian wife: *τί γὰρ οἶδας, γυναῖκα, εἰ τον ἄνδρα σώσεις,* ἢ τί οἶδας, ἄνδρ, εἰ τήν γυναῖκα σώσεις "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" The wife may hope that her unbelieving husband may be saved, as many Christian wives do; but she can not know that definitely, she can not rely on such an eventuality. Therefore, for lack of any definite assurance that she will save her unbelieving husband by clinging to him, the Christian wife should let him go if he deserts her.

In conclusion, it surely must be granted that *οὐ δεδούλωται* "she is not under bondage" is a general statement. It has been understood to mean that the deserted wife is free to marry again, and that she is not free to do so. The text does not state either in so many words. Do we have a right, then, to say that this passage gives a deserted husband or wife the right to marry again? And if we have that right, shall we give a deserted partner ^{the} a right to marry again only in the case of a mixed marriage, only when the deserting partner is an unbeliever? Certainly that is the case which St. Paul here has in mind! According to Paul's words the deserted spouse is free from bondage only if the one who left her is an unbeliever, not if he is a Christian. In commenting on the word "unbeliever" Lenski says, "*Ὁ ἀνήρ, ὁ ἀπίστος*" , by adding the adjective with a second article, emphasizes the adjective: the husband, the unbelieving one, and thus makes it evident that it is his

unbelief which causes him to abandon his believing wife, thus ending his marriage with ~~her~~ ^{her}."

Therefore in the essayist's opinion verses 12 to 16, and with them the entire thesis that malicious desertion is a scriptural ground for divorce, are applicable not among marriages between Lutherans and Lutherans, not among Lutherans and ~~S~~ectarians, not among Lutherans and Catholics, but ~~solely~~ ^{solely} among marriages between Christians and unbelievers. In all other marriages in which both parties are Christians the Savior's Words in Matthew 5, 32 and Matthew 19, 9 and St. Paul's words in verses 10 and 11 apply: "Let not the wife depart from her husband and let not the husband put away his wife. But if either ~~really have~~ ^{do} departed, let him or her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to the husband or wife."

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A. v. P. S.
Alfred von Rohr Sauer

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