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The Issue of Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:15 in the Light of the *Dominical Logion* of 7:10

Davide Sciarabba

Divorce and remarriage remains a controversial issue among Christian scholars. Although the gospels (Matt 19:1-12 and Mark 10:1-12), and Paul (1 Cor 7:10-16) present general guidelines on divorce and remarriage,¹ there is still no agreement on these matters when it comes to church discipline. While some tend to justify divorce and remarriage in certain cases, others consistently condemn these practices. According to Johnson Lim, there are currently four main Christian views on the issue of divorce and remarriage: (1) divorce and remarriage are not permitted; (2) divorce is sometimes permitted, but not remarriage; (3) divorce and remarriage are permitted on grounds of adultery or abandonment; and (4) divorce and remarriage are also permitted under other circumstances.² The theological and practical implications of 1 Cor 7:15 have been extensively debated in this controversy. Some scholars interpret this passage as permitting divorce while denying remarriage,³ whereas others view this as a “Pauline privilege” that permits divorce and remarriage in certain circumstances.⁴

This paper contains an analysis of 1 Cor 7:15 in light of the dominical logion of verse 10.⁵ Although many scholars concede that Paul is quoting a dominical

1. See also a very short statement in Luke 16:18 and Matthew 5:31-32.

2. Johnson Lim, “Divorce and Remarriage in Theological and Contemporary Perspectives,” *AJT* 20 (2006): 271. See also H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

3. For instance see Robert G. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege: Inference or Exegesis,” *Faith and Mission* 16 (1998): 96. He suggested that the interpretation of I Corinthians 7:15 as a “Pauline privilege is more an inference than correct exegesis. *Ibid.*, 94-117. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 303.

4. See for instance the Catholic interpretation of the passage by Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura* I, 299, paragraph 336, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed. (Paris/Rome: Marietti, 1953); Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch; Hermen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 123; Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962), 53.

5. The expression *Dominical Logion* refers to the teaching that Jesus gave on the life of the Christian or the church that are reported outside the Gospels. They are also called *Commands of the Lord* or *Teachings of Jesus*. See for instance David L. Dungan, *The Saying of Jesus in the Church of Paul: The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Religion of the Church Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Saying of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

logion to present his point on the issue of divorce, many others overlook the theological and practical implications of this fact. I seek to demonstrate that verse 15 must be read as an explanation and extension of the dominical logion of verse 10, which constitutes the theological background of Paul's argumentation.

To understand the pronouncement of Paul in 1 Cor 7:15, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (NIV),⁶ it is first necessary to grasp the cultural and literary context of these important statements.

Paul worked in Corinth for approximately eighteen months.⁷ At that time, the city was a flourishing cosmopolitan center of commerce.⁸ In the Corinthian harbor, as in many other harbors, the mariners spent their time and money in bars and with prostitutes.⁹ The Acrocorinth ("Upper Corinth"), or acropolis looming over ancient Corinth, housed a temple dedicated to Aphrodite. This temple was famous for its prostitution cult. Despite a good number of Jews, the lifestyle of the Corinthians clashed with Jewish culture and religion. "Old Corinth had gained such a reputation for sexual vice that Aristophanes (ca. 450-385 B.C.) coined the verb *korinthiazō* (to act like a Corinthian, i.e., to commit fornication)."¹⁰ It is understandable that Paul wrote so much about sexuality and marriage in the epistles to the Corinthians. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 is an important portion of the key passage (1 Cor. 5-7) regarding the way of life and ethics for marriage and sexuality preached by Paul to the first Christian believers in that city.¹¹

Concerning the literary context of the passage, not all scholars agree on the section of the book to which it belongs. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, much like Raymond F. Collins and Kenneth E. Bailey, included this text in the section 4:18-7:40, in which Paul condemned illicit sexual relations and sexual immorality, and affirmed sexual purity as a way of glorifying God in the body.¹²

6. In this article I will use the NIV version unless otherwise indicated.

7. Acts 18:11.

8. Corinth was located in a strategic place, in the neck dividing the Peloponnesus and the peninsula regions. The ships coming from Asia had to circumnavigate the Peloponnesus in order to bring their goods to Europe. Many ships wrecked because of the strong marine currents of the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Crete in the south part of the Peloponnesus. A safe solution was to harbor the ships at the level of the neck and to transport the goods by land from the Aegean to the Ionian Sea. This made an important contribution to the prosperity of both Corinth and its harbor. See further Charles K Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 2.

9. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1-12; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 21-24; Roy E. Ciampa, and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 2-5;

10. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1-4.

11. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 381-382, 483-484.

12. Ciampa, and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 189-367; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 203-304; Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes. Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 226. Garland reads the passage within chapter 7, which is an isolated section with respect chapters 6 and 8, dedicated to instructions about sexual relations, divorce and marriage. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 243-346. J. A. Fitzmyer and Gordon D. Fee advocated that the passage belongs to a long section starting with chapter 7 and ending with chapter 14:40 or 16:12 where Paul answered the Corinthians' letter about moral, liturgical, and other questions. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 273-538. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 266-825.

Anthony C. Thiselton read the passage in a section starting at chapter 7 and ending at chapter 11:1, where Paul replied to some questions from the Corinthians about a series of practical issues, including marriage and divorce, eating meat associated with idols, and the freedom and rights of the apostle.¹³ This paper adopts the last interpretation, which views 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 within the broader context of section 7:1-11:1. As several scholars have observed, chapter 6 is a transitional unit or hinge, and therefore, a key chapter to understanding the following chapters.¹⁴ After an initial orientation concerning celibacy and marriage in chapter 7, Paul dedicated chapter 8 to answering the Corinthians on the recommended attitude towards pagan customs in relation to meats sacrificed to idols. This is the broad context of chapter 7 and of our passage.¹⁵

Scholars have differing views on the structure of chapter 7. Ciampa and Rosner saw four sections: (1) counsels concerning various marital statuses (1-16), (2) the development of principle of “remaining as you were when called” (17-24), (3) counsels for single adults (25-38), and (4) counsels for wives and widows (39-40).¹⁶ In my opinion, the view of Garland and Thiselton seems to respect better the natural flow of the chapter’s argumentation. They detected the following parts in 1 Cor 7: the first section addresses the issues of sexual relations within marriage (7:1-5); the second section discusses celibacy and marriage for the unmarried and widows (7:6-9); and the third section presents Paul’s counsel on divorce for those married to Christians and for those married to unbelievers (7:10-16). This is the immediate context of the passage in the research. The last section is followed by some guidelines related to the principle of “remaining as you are” (7:17-24), and then different counsels on the advisability of marriage for the betrothed and for widows (7:25-40).¹⁷

The analysis of 7:10-16

Verses 10-11

Paul addressed the issue of divorce after answering the Corinthians on matters of celibacy, marriage, and sexual relationships (7:1-9). Verse 10, which starts with the phrase Τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν (“But to the married,” NASB), introduces a new issue in the topic of marriage.¹⁸ The passage starts with an order to those who are married.¹⁹ This introduction raises several questions, well formulated by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor:

13. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 493-797; *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 99-169.

14. See for instance Collins, *First Corinthians*, 239-251 and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 219-241.

15. Chapter 9 changes subject and Paul treats the question of his apostolic freedom. In chapter 10, he warns the Corinthians against idolatry once again and develops the subject of the fair usage of Christian freedom. Max-Alain Chevallier, *L'exégèse du Nouveau Testament: Initiation à la Méthode* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1985), 24.

16. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 266-366. See also Collins, *First Corinthians*, with a few variations.

17. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 242-346. See also Thiselton with a few nuances, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 483-606.

18. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 605.

19. “The perfect denotes the married state consequent on the act of marrying.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 520.

Why does Paul begin *tois de gegamêkosin parangellô*, which he then has to qualify by *ouk ego alla ho kyrios*, when it would have been easy to write *tois de gegamêkosin ho kyrios parangellei*? Why does he introduce a dominical logion? Why does he mention the wife first when the reverse order (followed in 7:12-13 and in Mark 10:11-12) would have been more natural? How is *me chôrishênai* to be translated? Why is the refusal of remarriage introduced in a parenthetical clause and apropos of the woman when the synoptic form of the dominical logion (Matt 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18) contains this element as an integral part referring to the husband? Finally, how are we to understand the relationship between the prohibition in 7:10-11 and the permission in 7:15?²⁰

The verb *παρραγγέλλω*, literally “I command, I give order,” reinforces a strong statement against divorce. Paul addressed this command first to women (v. 10) and then to men (v. 11). Even if the strength of the verb seems to imply a personal command,²¹ Paul introduced this new issue under the authority of a dominical logion, quoting what the Lord had said about divorce.²² In so doing, Paul reminded his readers that his teaching on divorce comes directly from Jesus,²³ thus differentiating it from the other teachings deduced by himself (7:12,25).²⁴ Thus, vv. 10 and 11 form a main statement that serves as the basis for understanding the rest of the text (7:12-16).

Herold Rey England interpreted 7:10-11 as a Christian *halaka* on divorce, and suggested that Christians should take these verses as a command to obey. In this case, if a divorce happens, “the believer is not to remarry another,”²⁵ leaving open the possibility of reconciliation with the spouse later on. However, if the divorce happens, the right of remarriage is offered.²⁶ The rejection of divorce formulated

20. Murphy-O'Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 601.

21. Murphy-O'Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 605.

22. For a deeper study of the saying of Jesus see David L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), xviii-xxix. In Corinthians 7:10-16 is Paul using material from the synoptic tradition? Did he know what Mark wrote in 10:1-12? The debate on the fact that Paul used Markian sources or not depends on the date given to the gospel of Mark. Murphy-O'Connor thought that Paul did not know Mark. Murphy-O'Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 605. Others date Mark around A.D. 40, see for instance James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insights from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), who recently again suggested this early dating of the book. A majority of scholars prefer dating the gospel of Mark around A.D. 70 (before or after). For a summary of the major interpretation see John S. Kloppenborg, “Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 419-450. That Paul knew Mark or not does not change very much the importance of Paul's quotation of the Dominican logion and of his command on divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthian 7:10-16. For a further study on the relationship between Paul and Mark see Oda Wischmeyer, David C. Sin, and Ian J. Elmer eds., *Paul and Mark. Comparative Essays Part I. Two Authors at the Beginnings of Christianity*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Eve-Marie Becker, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Mogens Müller eds., *Mark and Paul. Comparative Essays Part II. For and Against Pauline Influence on Mark*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

23. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2d ed. (London: SPCK, 1958), 138-139.

24. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 290.

25. Herold Rey England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 174-175.

26. Cf. *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandates IV, 1, 4-11; Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Hermen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 109-112.

by Paul seems an absolute (according to Mark 10:9-12 and Luke 16:18) that does not mention the exception of “*porneia*” admitted in Matt 5:31-32 and 19:6-9,²⁷ nor the Mosaic legislation in Deut 24:1-4.²⁸ However, claiming the authority of a dominical logion echoes Mark 10:9 and Matt 19:6, particularly because it uses the same verb (χωρίζω).²⁹

By paraphrasing the dominical saying, Paul put the question of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the light of the Lord’s logion. We assume that Paul was providing a supplementary, articulated explanation of the saying in the following verses (7:10-16) to expound upon Jesus’ thought. This allowed Paul to deal with the problem of divorce and remarriage without looking for exceptions for divorce (Matt 19:6-9) or absolute prohibitions (Mark 10:9), but recalling the seriousness and at the same time, the fragility of marriage. In light of this assumption, we are better equipped to read contextually v. 15, the focus of this article.

The main issue in v. 10 is the translation of the verb χωρισθῆναι, an aorist passive infinitive, literally translated as “a wife *must not be separated* from her husband.”³⁰ However, most English versions of the Bible³¹ translate this verse as a present infinitive, χωρίζεσθαι. This is supported by several manuscripts,³² and “is obviously a *lectio facilisans*,”³³ meaning that “a wife *should not separate* from her husband.” The first translation (aorist passive) assumes the indirect responsibility of the woman in the separation from her husband. This reading finds its counterpart in v. 11, which says: “a husband should not separate from his wife” (NASB). This implies that if it is wrong for a man to separate from his wife, it is also wrong for a wife to agree to divorce from her husband.³⁴ Conversely, the second translation implies the wife’s responsibility in separating from her husband.³⁵ This second reading relates the separation to the action of the wife.

In explaining this difference of tense in the manuscripts, Murphy-O’Connor argued that some copyists, seeing a problem with v. 13, tried to harmonize the χωρισθῆναι of v. 10 with the ἀφιέτω (present imperative) of v. 13 by transforming the former verb into a present infinitive, χωρίζεσθαι. This discrepancy

27. He probably did not know what Matthew wrote in his gospel. See J. C. Laney, “Paul and the Permanence of Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7,” *JETS* 25 (1982): 283-294.

28. It is certain Paul knew what the Mosaic Law says about marriage and divorce (Acts 22:3). See also David Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” *TynBul* 52 (2001): 225-243.

29. David E. Garland suggested that the usage of the verb χωρίζω in the dominical logion of Mark 10:9 may have influenced Paul’s usage. Fitzmyer saw clear connections between the gospels and 1 Corinthians: “Paul passes on the prohibition in indirect discourse, whereas the pronouncement in the Synoptics is presented as a dominical saying in direct discourse: “what God has Joined together, let no human being put asunder,” and “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.” This also explains the shift from Paul’s giving a command to the Lord’s giving it; Paul does not quote the dominical saying, but paraphrases it in his own words. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 290-291.

30. NJB, see also J. A. Fitzmyer, “The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence,” *TS* 37 (1976): 200, and W. F. Orr, and J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (AB 32; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 211.

31. See for instance the KJV, KJG, NAS, NIV, NIB.

32. A, D, F, G, 1881, 1945.

33. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 601.

34. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 602.

35. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11,” 601-602.

of tense induced Murphy-O'Connor to suggest that v. 10 might be read in the light of a Jewish background, in which the wife had no right to ask for a divorce, whereas v. 13 speaks to a Greco-Roman audience, in which the wife could initiate a process of divorce.³⁶ Fitzmyer observed that the aorist passive infinitive does not indicate that the wife should not allow herself to be divorced, but "that she should not be divorced (at all)," leaving no questions as to the wife's acceptance.³⁷

Murphy-O'Connor justified his position by supposing that this passage refers to a specific couple in which the husband, adopting ascetic behavior, decided to divorce his wife.³⁸ England, disagreeing with this position, concluded that 1 Cor 7:10-11 does not contain enough information to refer to a specific couple, but that Paul is referring to Mark 10:11-12 here.³⁹ Fitzmyer, along with other scholars,⁴⁰ understood that Paul was writing about divorce in general, not addressing his solution to a specific case. They suggest that Paul was using the case of a woman in Corinth as a pretext to address the general issue of divorce, thus justifying his mention of women in the first place.⁴¹ England believed that Paul mentioned women first because of the leadership and spiritual enthusiasm held by Corinthian women (1 Cor 1:11; 11:2-16; 14:33-36).⁴² According to Brooten, a Jewish woman could divorce her husband in certain cases, initiating the action of divorce herself.⁴³ However, both of these interpretations seem weak.⁴⁴

Verse 11 seems to leave only two options for those women who are separated: remain unmarried⁴⁵ or be reconciled⁴⁶ with their husbands.⁴⁷ There is no mention here of the possibility of divorce and remarriage stated in Deuteronomy 24:2. "He is not contemplating a future exception to the dominical command but is addressing a hypothetical situation: the possible divorce of a Christian woman, which should not happen, but which may happen."⁴⁸ Paul's opposition to the remarriage of believers was based on the possibility of their future reconciliation unless they decide to stay separated. After reading 7:10 and 11 with their reference to the dominical logion against divorce and remarriage, how do we understand verse 15?

Verses 12 and 13

After commenting on Christian matrimonies, in vv. 12 and 13, Paul addressed

36. Murphy-O'Connor, "The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11," 602. England disagreed with this view-point, arguing that a woman in the Jewish context "had not right to accept or reject the bill of divorce," but he did not solve the problem of the different usage of the tense in the manuscripts. England, "Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16," 176-177.

37. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 293.

38. Murphy-O'Connor, "The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11," 601, 604.

39. England, "Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16," 167-170.

40. See for instance Collins, *First Corinthians*, 269, and Garland, *I Corinthians*, 281.

41. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 291-293.

42. England, "Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16," 175-176.

43. B. Brooten, "Konnten Frauen im Alten Judentum die Scheidug Betreiben" quoted by Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 289.

44. See argumentations brought by Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 288-290.

45. W. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (1Kor 6, 12-11, 16), EKKNT (Cincinnati, OH: Benziger, 1995), 102. Also cited by Garland, *I Corinthians*, 283, and Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 294.

46. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 269-270.

47. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 294.

48. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 294.

the issue of mixed marriages between believers and unbelievers.⁴⁹ The phrase *Τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς* (to the rest) of 7:12 is referring to Christians married to unbelievers, not to all the Christians in Corinth, because the second part of the verse restricts the meaning of the word “rest.”⁵⁰ In this verse, the clause *λέγω ἐγὼ οὐχ ὁ κύριος* is very similar to the one found in 7:10, *οὐκ ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ ὁ κύριος* except for the negation particle, which refers to the Lord and not to Paul. The argument presented in v. 12 by the phrase “I say, not the Lord” is no less authoritative than v. 10, where Paul quoted a saying of the Lord,⁵¹ since in 7:40, the apostle affirmed that even in his judgment, he had the Spirit of God. At the same time, this text implies that Paul was not aware of any specific saying of the Lord concerning mixed marriages.⁵² After paraphrasing the dominical logion, he admitted that his counsel regarding mixed marriages did not come directly from Jesus’ mouth, but his paraphrases explaining the issue of divorce implied that his advice (7:12-16) on mixed marriages was inspired by the dominical logion.⁵³

Paul initially addressed Christian husbands married to unbelieving wives (7:12), and living together, for the expression *γυναῖκα ἔχει* (has a wife) means to have a continuous marital union with a wife.⁵⁴ The verb *συνευδοκεῖ* translated by “she agrees” evokes her willingness to live together. In fact, the meaning of this verb, “to join in approval,” “agree with,” “approve of,” “consent to,” and “sympathize with”⁵⁵ describes the approved union of the husband with the wife⁵⁶ and “expresses the active willingness of the wife to share married life with a Christian husband.”⁵⁷ This verb also assumes that the Christian husband has not coerced his wife into compliance.⁵⁸ Here, it is possible to see the principle of mutual agreement previously expressed in 7:5, which implies that marriage requires not only a legal signed document or just the continuation of sexual intimacy, but also a commitment and respect for the personal differences of the partner. The function of the verb *συνευδοκέω* (7:12, 13) implies a contrast between the approval of the unbeliever in keeping the right relationship in a mixed marriage (v. 12, 13) and the unwillingness of the unbeliever to maintain the right relationship in a mixed marriage (v. 15). Paul’s counsel on marriage and divorce in vv. 12 and 15 took into account the conflicting attitude of the unbeliever, which is a determinant of the future stability of the marriage. If there is agreement, approval, and willingness, the believer is invited to continue the marriage with the unbeliever, understanding that even if his or her spouse is not a Christian, their marriage is

49. I understand that Paul is talking to people who became Christians after marriage. Now, after conversion, they were encountering the problem of a mixed marriage.

50. See Garland, *I Corinthians*, 283-284; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 298.

51. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 163; Garland, *I Corinthians*, 285.

52. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 297.

53. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 285. Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 297-298. He affirmed that these two verses must be considered as separate from the dominical logion in verse 10, and that they came from Paul’s pastoral advice.

54. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 279.

55. See BDAG, 970.

56. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 285. Cf. Luke 11:48; Acts 8:1; 22:20; Romans 1:32; 1 Maccabees 1:57; 11:24.

57. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 298.

58. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 285-286.

not defiled, but holy.⁵⁹ Conversion to Christianity by one partner can favor the salvation of the unbelieving partner.

Although Paul used the verb χωρίζω to express the idea of divorce in vv. 10 and 11, he used ἀφίημι to express the same idea in vv. 11 (the last verb), 12, and 13. The verb ἀφίημι means “to release,” “to let go,” or “to dismiss” and is frequently used in extra-biblical literature with the legal meaning of “to discharge someone from a legal relationship, whether it be an office, marriage, custody, or punishment.”⁶⁰ In the New Testament, this word is used in four senses: “to let or allow,” “to pardon or forgive,” “to leave,” and “to divorce.”⁶¹ Paul only used the verbs ἀφίημι and χωρίζω for divorce.⁶² Is the verb ἀφίημι a synonym of the verb χωρίζω or do they have significantly different meanings?

The verb χωρίζω originally meant “to divide,” “to separate,” “to depart,” “to cause separation through use of space between,” and “to separate by departing from someone.”⁶³ The verb is not frequently used in the New Testament.⁶⁴ Throughout the entire Bible, if we also consider the LXX, it relates to the context of divorce only in Matt 19:6, Mark 10:9, and 1 Cor 7:10,11, 15.

England argued that Paul used the verbs ἀφίημι and χωρίζω interchangeably not to point out the Jewish and the Greek customs of divorce (if not, he would have used the verb χωρίζω consistently), but to emphasize their technical differences in the divorce procedure.⁶⁵ “Forms of χωρίζω would describe the action of departing from or leaving a spouse (see 7:15); forms of ἀφίημι would describe the action of divorce depicted in the legal action of putting away a spouse.”⁶⁶ Charles K. Barrett argued that “Paul’s reference to the unbeliever separating indicates probably more than the refusal of conjugal rights, but less than legal divorce.”⁶⁷ Olender embraced the idea of distinction in the usage of the two verbs, affirming that “ἀφίημι describes marital disunion in a legal sense when referring to believers, whereas in verse 15 χωρίζω stresses special separation and is applied to the unbelieving spouse.”⁶⁸ However, this viewpoint raises a question: Does the verb χωρίζω refer to the unbeliever in vv. 10 and 11? The text does not seem to support this reading. A point against differentiating between the meanings of these two verbs is the fact that Greek writers during the classical and Hellenistic periods used both verbs to mean divorce and in marriage contracts.⁶⁹ The verb χωρίζω meant “to divorce” in Greek marriage

59. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 286.

60. Rudolf Bultmann, “ἀφίημι,” *TDNT*, 1:509.

61. In the Gospels, it means also “to leave,” “to forsake,” and “to abandon.” England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 11.

62. Other authors of the New Testament use the verb ἀπολύω in reference to divorce (Matthew 1:19; 5:31f; 19:3, 7-9; Mark 10:2, 4, 11f; Luke 16:18). Moreover, the term ἀποστάσιον in Matthew 5:31; 19:7, and Mark 10:4 means divorce. See I. H. Marshall, “Divorce”, *NIDNTT*, 1:505-507.

63. BDAG, 1095.

64. Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9; Acts 1:4; 18:1, 2; Rom. 8:35, 39; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 15; Phil. 1:15; Heb. 7:26.

65. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16,” 182.

66. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16,” 182, see footnote 79 below.

67. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 162.

68. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 96.

69. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence,” *TS* 37 (1976): 211-212.

contracts,⁷⁰ and the verb ἀφίημι was also used for “divorce” in a legal sense during the same period.⁷¹ The usage of the verb χωρίζω for marriage contracts in extra-biblical literature is well attested.⁷² It is, therefore, not possible to say with certainty that Paul, by using the two verbs, was referring to two different realities (separation and legal divorce), for both verbs can be used as synonyms for divorce.⁷³ Collins, confirming this idea, remarked that if any distinction should be made, it would be the following: “It may be attributable to Paul’s Jewish tradition that tends to use active verbs for man and passive verbs for woman.”⁷⁴ Fitzmyer strongly affirmed that a distinction between the two verbs “is untenable, since both words are well attested in the sense of separation meaning divorce, and Paul does not show any awareness of the modern distinction of “separation” and “divorce.””⁷⁵ Given this evidence, I conclude in this article that Paul used these two verbs interchangeably, considering them as synonyms.

Verse 14

In v. 14, Paul introduced the idea of the sanctification of the unbeliever through the believing spouse.⁷⁶ Barrett and Will Deming asserted that this argument is not about salvation,⁷⁷ but about ritual cleanness.⁷⁸ In this case, it would be a reference to the Jewish norm that there should be no union between clean and unclean people.⁷⁹

The sentences ἐν τῇ γυναικί or ἐν τῷ ἀνδρὶ⁸⁰ are generally translated as “through the woman or the husband,” even though the Bauer-Danker Lexicon says that it should be read as a causal clause “on account of the woman or the brother.”⁸¹ Garland read this phrase with a locative sense: the Christian is the agent, and the unbelieving spouse obtains his or her holiness “in” the believer.⁸²

Paul used the perfect passive of the verb ἀγιάζω to discuss the sanctification of the unbeliever. The tense of the verb implies a present condition resulting from sanctification that happened previously. This verb, meaning “to consecrate” or “to set aside for a cultic purpose” implies that God is the one who accomplishes the

70. Cf. Euripides, *Fr.* 1063:13; Isaeus 8:36; Polybius, *Hist.* 31.26.6.

71. Cf. Euripides, *Andromache* 973; Herodotus, *Hist.* 5:39; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 44.

72. BDAG, 1095.

73. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 11-16. Cf. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949). On page 696, they stated that the term χωρίζω had become a technical term in connection with divorce.

74. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 269.

75. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 295.

76. For a further study on sanctification, purity, cleanness, and uncleanness in the social context of a Christian household, see Caroline Johnson Hodge, “Married to an Unbeliever: Households, Hierarchies, and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 7:12–16,” *HTR* 103 (2010): 13-20; Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of I Corinthians 7*, SNTSMS 83 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130-144.

77. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 165; Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 132.

78. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 183.

79. Cf. M. Kaddushin 4:1; 4:2-8, in England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 183-184.

80. Other manuscripts use the form ἐν τῷ ἀδελφῷ.

81. BDAG, 329.

82. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 287.

sanctification of the unbeliever.⁸³ Some argue that sanctification happens simply through marriage with the believer,⁸⁴ whereas others suppose that sanctification comes through the baptism of the partner.⁸⁵

Fee argued that maintaining the marital relationship increases the likelihood of leading the unbeliever to salvation.⁸⁶ Holiness is a characteristic of those who have accepted Jesus and have been baptized, but it is also a pattern of conduct, a way of life (see Rom 6:19-22 and 12:1-2).⁸⁷ In this sense, the unbeliever will be sanctified by adopting the same behavior as the believer by virtue of being under the influence of the Christian spouse and by keeping his or her commitment to the marriage.⁸⁸

Garland added that the unbeliever, being one flesh with the believer and being under God's approval because marriage is according to God's will, can be sanctified by a willingness to remain married to a committed Christian.⁸⁹ For Fitzmyer, this text stresses three aspect of marriage: "First, it implies that a marital union brings holiness to the spouse... Second, the same extension of his argument would be valid for children born of two Christian spouses, who are also 'holy.' Third, Paul sees the husband and wife as the possible source of salvation to each other."⁹⁰ In conclusion, verse 14 clearly shows the reasons for maintaining the marriage and avoiding divorce with an unbeliever.

Verse 15

The key verse of our study is 15. This verse first affirms clearly that there are no grounds for divorce for a believer in mixed marriages if there is a willingness of the unbeliever to remain married. However, this verse also seems to present a certain openness to divorce and remarriage, which is the core of our topic. To grasp the meaning of this text, which seems to make an exception to the rule of no divorce and no remarriage in v. 10, it is important to determine the meaning of the four main terms of the statement: "unbeliever" (ἄπιστος), "to separate" (χωρίζω), "to be under bondage" (δουλόω), and "God has called you in peace" (ἐν δὲ ειρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός).

83. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 299.

84. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 212.

85. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 266. See also J. C. O'Neill, "1 Corinthians 7:14 and Infant Baptism," in *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère*, ed. A. Vanhoye, BETL 73 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 357-361. J. C. O'Neill insisted on the fact that the perfect, instead of referring to a past event, can refer to a future event. That event is the cleanness of baptism for both the unbelieving partner and the children.

86. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300-301. See also Laney, "Paul and the Permanence of Marriage in 1 Corinthians 7," 286-287.

87. J. Murphy O'Connor, "Works Without Faith in I Corinthians 7:14," *RB* 84 (1977): 355-356.

88. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 530.

89. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 288-289. Rosner explained the process of sanctification of the unbeliever, affirming that "Paul has been influenced by three biblical currents of thought which he has channeled into his teaching; the holiness of people in God's temple; the transferability of such holiness; and the interrelatedness of families." Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 169. Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19; Exodus 29:37; 30: 29; Leviticus 6:18; contrast Numbers 4:15-20; Genesis 6:18; 17:7-27; 18:19; Deuteronomy 30:19; Psalm 78:1-7; 102:28; 103:17-18; 112:1-2.

90. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 298.

“Unbeliever”

The text in 1 Cor 7:10-16 argues that the believer should not initiate a divorce, but v. 15 raises the possibility of the unbeliever wanting to divorce. Olender, who is against divorce in all cases, affirmed that “Paul is not acknowledging the unbeliever’s right to divorce. Rather he is acknowledging that the unbeliever does not feel constrained to act according to God’s laws.”⁹¹ This passage (7:10-16) clearly states that marriage, even marriage to an unbeliever, remains sacred.⁹² However, the holiness of the marriage does not solve the issue of divorce if the unbeliever, not respecting God’s will, decides to divorce the Christian spouse. The apostle recognizes the liberty of an unbeliever to divorce, leaving the spouse without obligation.⁹³

To clarify this point, we must answer the following question: who is the unbeliever in this context (7:12-15)? What does “unbeliever” (ἄπιστος) mean? In the New Testament, the word ἄπιστος can mean “faithless,” “unbelieving,” “non-Christian,” “unworthy of credence,” or if expressed through a verbal form, “to refuse to believe.”⁹⁴

Ed Christian suggested that the right translation of the term ἄπιστος is not “unbeliever,” but rather “unfaithful,” a possible interpretation emphasizing that divorce, even in the case of infidelity, is not mandatory because of a possible reconciliation.⁹⁵ If reconciliation happens, the bound of marriage is safe, but if reconciliation does not happen, this reading favors both consent for the promiscuity of the partner and the continuous humiliation received by the betrayal, adding a sense of guilt on the shoulders of the faithful partner if s(he) decides to divorce.

The term ἄπιστος includes in its meaning an atheist or a pagan or any person who has a different faith from that of the believer. Along with Fitzmyer, most scholars interpret the word ἄπιστος to mean “pagan person.”⁹⁶ However, can ἄπιστος include the person who apostatized and rejected the Christian faith? May this include a person who, considering himself a Christian, no longer practices Christian behavior even if s(he) refuses to consider himself/herself an unbeliever?

According to Byron, ἄπιστος can refer to a person who received infant baptism and is Christian only in name, but does not have any true faith.⁹⁷ The word πίστις in Pauline writings has the meaning of “faith” in Jesus, not in other gods, but also of “acceptance of the Kerygma.”⁹⁸ According to this interpretation, it is possible to include any person who does not believe in Christ or who decides to reject the faith in Jesus in the category of “unbeliever.” According to this definition, the unbeliever can be any apostate, declared or undeclared (cf. 1 Tim 5:8).

91. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 112, see footnote 11 in this chapter.

92. Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Expository Lectures on St. Paul’s Epistles to the Corinthians* (London: Smith, Elder, 1860), 125 in Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 95, 96.

93. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 184; Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 95.

94. R. Bultman, “πιστεύω,” *TDNT*, 6:204-205.

95. See especially pages 52-55. Ed Christian, “1 Corinthians 7:10-16: Divorce of the Unbeliever or Reconciliation with the Unfaithful?” *JATS* 10 (1999): 41-62.

96. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 253, 298-299.

97. B. Byron, “The Brother or Sister is Not Bound: Another Look at the New Testament Teaching on the Indissolubility of Marriage,” *New Blackfriars* 52 (1971): 519.

98. Bultman, “πιστεύω,” *TDNT*, 6:217-219.

“To separate”

The verb χωρίζω, as we stated before, means “to separate” (7:15a), but was also used outside the New Testament with the meaning of “to divorce.”⁹⁹ In the NT, the only other passages that use the verb χωρίζω in the context of divorce are Matt 19:6 and Mark 10:9, where Jesus teaches against divorce. In the context of 1 Cor 7:10-15, the meaning of the verb “is not just separation in ‘bed and board’ but of the legal dissolution of the marriage bond.”¹⁰⁰ In v. 15, Paul used the indicative present middle/passive voice of χωρίζω (χωρίζεται), translated rightly by the majority of Bible versions as the middle (direct/reflexive) “leaves” or “separates/separates himself,” because the context (7:10-14) does not allow a passive translation. This is also the case of the following imperative middle/passive of the verb χωριζέσθω, “let him separate” or “let him be separated,” which underlines the active sense of the first verb following the flow of the sentence.¹⁰¹ The force of the indicative present middle clearly expresses the mindset of an unbeliever who is determined to separate definitively from the believer.¹⁰² This present, highlighting the resolution of the unbeliever in breaking the marriage, parallels the verb συνευδοκῆι (also an indicative present) in vv. 12 and 13, which expresses the attitude of the unbeliever in approving the marriage with a Christian. This shows that Paul’s reasoning on the matter of marriage and divorce in mixed couples considers the will of the heathen spouse, who does not abide by God’s law. This is supported by the subject ὁ ἄπιστος standing in an emphatic position.¹⁰³

The second verb for divorce, χωριζέσθω, is an imperative middle that expresses a permission of separation/divorce.¹⁰⁴ This last imperative does not imply that the Christian spouse must resist the separation, but being an imperative of toleration or permission, rather implies that the act is a “*fait accompli*,”¹⁰⁵ and that the believer assumes that the unbeliever is free to make other choices.¹⁰⁶ This verb indicates that separation and divorce are beyond the believer’s control and willingness. The continuation of marriage depends entirely on the approval¹⁰⁷ of the unbeliever because the Christian cannot start a divorce. This imperative

99. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 15; Isaacs 8:36; Polybius, *Hist.* 31.26.6.

100. R. L. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” *ResQ* 8 (1965): 180.

101. Cf. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 97.

102. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” 180.

103. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” 180.

104. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” 180-181. Cf. I Corinthians 7:36, where Paul also uses an imperative present of permission.

105. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 130. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 290.

106. R. L. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” 180-181, suggested that the cause of separation of the unbeliever is given by the “faith” of the believer. This reading of the text seems not to be supported by the text in verse 15. In vv. 12 and 13, the approval of the unbeliever seems related to the choice made by the spouse in becoming a Christian, implying that the marriage is based on respect for diversity and willingness to be “one flesh.” In v. 15, the willingness of separation/divorce of the unbeliever is not directly caused by the conversion of the partner, but by the inexistence of respect for diversity and by the unwillingness to be one flesh. Conversion can be only a pretext, not a direct cause for divorce.

107. By willingness and approval, I mean the consent to continue the marriage is a respectful way, which aims to be “one flesh” with the believer.

implies the tolerance of the Christian spouse and supposes that the believer already did everything in his or her ability to avoid the dissolution of the marriage. If the rupture of marriage is a *fait accompli* and the unbeliever wants a divorce, what can the Christian spouse do?

“To be under bondage”

The sentence οὐ δεδούλωται ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις, “the brother and the sister is not bound in such cases” (7:15b), raises some questions concerning the translation of the verb δουλόω “to be under bondage” or “bind.” The verb can be translated literally as “has not been enslaved” or “is not held in a state of slavery.” What does this mean? This verb appears in 7:15 and in 7:17-24 concerning slavery. According to Deming, the reference to “slavery” is more the announcement of the next topic, than a conclusion of Paul’s comments on marriage and divorce.¹⁰⁸ Fitzmyer suggested that the reference to slavery comes as the conclusion of the passage 7:12-16 because v. 16 is closely related to 7:12-15.¹⁰⁹ The association of marriage with slavery is not a topic that Paul developed in this chapter, even if in verse 15 he indirectly evoked a problem of interpreting the law on marriage and divorce, which can lead to slavery.¹¹⁰ Instone-Brewer argued that divorce can be “compared to an emancipation certificate for a slave... this was not because they regarded marriage as slavery but the divorce legislation of Exodus 21:10-11 was based on the law of the slave wife, and they found many parallels between the release of a woman from marriage and the release from slavery.”¹¹¹

The verb δουλόω, like the verb δέω, is usually translated as “to bind” in vv. 7:27, 39, where Paul, talking about a marital relationship, explained that if a spouse is bound to a wife or a husband, he or she should be not unbound until the death of the spouse. Are these verbs synonyms, or are they used to describe two different realities? Olender, supporting the second option,¹¹² argued that δουλόω, “to bind,” is a forensic term, also meaning “to enslave (losing his own autonomy).” In his opinion, this verb is not addressing remarriage in 7:15, but only separation, whereas δέω, “to bind in a metaphoric sense” with mutual commitment, opens up the possibility of remarriage in 7:27, 39.¹¹³ Olender’s argumentation was based on the fact that v. 7:39 also uses the word ἐλεύθερος, translated as

108. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 145, 147, 150. In fact Deming structured chapter 7 with a different organization of the topics in relation to the authors whom this research quotes above. He organized our passage in the following way: 7:10-15a “The Holiness of a Non-Christian Spouse as Grounds for Divorce” and 7:15b-24 “Marriage to an Unbeliever as a form of Slavery”.

109. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 301.

110. Cf. Philo, *Hypotetica* 11.17. He related marriage with slavery: “For the man who is bound under the influence of the charms of a woman, or of children, by the necessary ties of nature, being overwhelmed by the impulses of affection, is no longer the same person towards others, but is entirely changed, having, without being aware of it, become a slave instead of a free man.” Cf. also Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 145-169; he thinks that the main topic of the section 7:15b-24 is slavery.

111. David Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” *TynBul* 52 (2001): 238-239.

112. See also Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 145-146.

113. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 97.

“free” with clear social connotations, and implies that the person is free to remarry. In support of this view, Olender quoted Romans 7:2, 3, where Paul uses both δέω and ἐλεύθερος to state that a woman is free if the husband dies. According to Olender, Rom 7:2, 3 and 1 Cor 7:27 and 39 are addressing remarriage because the bind is not forensic, but metaphorical to mutual commitment, whereas 1 Cor 7:15 is not.¹¹⁴ England, opposing Olender, concluded that the two verbs have a similar meaning and that δέω has a legal meaning instead of a metaphorical meaning.¹¹⁵

This leads to the following question: Does the phrase “not be enslaved” relate to marriage to an unbeliever or to the principle of “no remarriage” stated by Paul in v. 11? In other words, is the divorced Christian free to remarry, as in the case of the widow stated in 7:39? Roberts read the verb δεδούλωται as a perfect of an existing condition, implying that the believer should not remain a slave of the unbeliever’s decision. He affirmed that the force of “οὐ δεδούλωται is that the believer is not obligated to prevent the divorce at the cost of losing all liberty, which is exactly what enslavement would be in this case.”¹¹⁶ Baumert, similar to Roberts, read that the believer is not under an “enslaving law” that obligates the maintenance of the marriage at all costs against the will of the unbeliever.¹¹⁷ For Fee and Collins, 7:10-16 does not address the question of remarriage. However, Fee admitted that v. 15 does not prohibit remarriage,¹¹⁸ whereas Collins affirmed that remarriage is likely possible, given the social circumstances at Paul’s time.¹¹⁹ Stein recognized that “one cannot be dogmatic and claim that the believer ‘no longer being bound’ (7:15) implies the right to remarry, but it would be equally wrong to be dogmatic and say that it excludes the right to remarry.”¹²⁰ Kurt Niederwimmer suggested three possible interpretations because the verb in question is unclear: “‘not bound’ to the non-Christian spouse, ‘not bound’ to the marriage agreement, and ‘not bound’ by Jesus’ prohibition of divorce” in 7:10-11.¹²¹ Fitzmyer suggested that the verb δεδούλωται, a perfect passive, expresses the condition of a slave, the counterpart of the concept of freedom (ἐλεύθερος) in Rom 7:3.¹²² From this perspective, the Christian spouse would be free from

114. Olender, “The Pauline Privilege,” 97-98, 100. The problem with this interpretation (see for instance the context of Romans 3 to 7; in a special way verse 6:22 where Paul uses also the word “freedom”) is that freedom in Christ cannot exclude, a priori, a forensic meaning of His sacrifice. If we keep only the metaphorical sense of mutual commitment, the liberating grace of Christ would be only a metaphor. The context of Rom 6 and 7 is against the interpretation of the verb δέω with just a metaphorical meaning, because nobody has a mutual commitment with sin. Sin cannot have a commitment with man; it enslaves man. This shows that Olender’s reading of the passages (Romans 7:2, 3 and I Corinthians 7:27, 39) is very weak and finally works in favor of the opposite thesis, advocating the similar meaning of the two verbs. On this issue, Garland affirmed that the two verbs in questions are not synonyms. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 290.

115. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 186. See also BDAG, 221-222.

116. Roberts, “The Meaning of *Chorizo* and *Douloo* in I Corinthians 7:10-17,” 181.

117. Norbert Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul: Overcoming a Misunderstanding*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 60-61.

118. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 302-303.

119. Collins, *First Corinthians*, 272.

120. Robert H. Stein, “It is Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?” *JETS* 22 (1979): 120.

121. Niederwimmer, quoted in Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 145.

122. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 301-302.

any bond and could remarry.¹²³ Hans Conzelmann supported the concept of remarriage here by affirming that the believer “is not subjected to any constraint because of the pagan’s behavior.”¹²⁴ A. Lindeman observed that the expression οὐ δεδούλωται does not make any sense if it means that the Christian spouse, after having being rejected and abandoned, has no right to remarry because he or she is still bound.¹²⁵ Instone-Brewer showed that the Jewish law perceives remarriage after divorce as a right:

When Paul says they are ‘no longer enslaved’, any first century reader would understand him to mean that they can remarry, because they would think of the words in both Jewish and non-Jewish divorce certificates: ‘You are free to marry’. If Paul had meant something else, he would have had to state this very clearly, in order to avoid being misunderstood by everyone who read his epistle.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, he added that the usage of the image of slavery in marriage also meant that the marriage bound should not be treated lightly.¹²⁷

“God has called you in peace”

Scholars have debated whether the clause, ἐν δὲ εἰρήνῃ κέκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεός (translated “but God has called you in peace”), belongs to what precedes or to what follows (7:15c). Baumert affirmed that “to be called in peace” means that, even if the unbelieving partner wants to leave, separate, or divorce, the believing spouse should do everything possible to save the marriage because he or she never knows if God will save the unbelieving spouse.¹²⁸ Garland read this sentence as an adversative or as a consecutive (but) as attached to what precedes, and not at all in a causal sense (for).¹²⁹ This reading of the text assumes that the believer should not contest the divorce decided by the unbeliever. According to Garland, Paul was not trying to comfort believers who were suffering from divorce or those who did not want to admit that the marriage was definitively broken and nothing else could be done against the choice of the unbeliever spouse. Paul’s purpose was to make them understand that they must maintain their marriage with the unbelieving spouse as long as the unbeliever was willing to continue.¹³⁰ Robertson and Plummer stated the following:

123. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 153; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 123; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 302. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16,” 186.

124. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 123.

125. A. Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* quoted in Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 302.

126. Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” 241. Keener suggested that after divorce remarriage was a normal. “No first century reader would have derived the meaning that some modern scholars have read into Paul’s words.” Craig S. Keener, *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 61-62.

127. Instone-Brewer, “1 Corinthians 7 in the Light of the Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri,” 240-241.

128. Baumert, *Woman and Man in Paul*, 61, 62.

129. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 292. Cf. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 153, who supports a causal close.

130. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 291-292.

To what peace is opposed to? If to *bondage*, which seems natural, than the meaning will be that to feel bound to remain with a heathen partner, who objects to your remaining, would violate the peace in which you were called to be a Christian. If ‘peace’ is opposed to *separation*, then the meaning will be that you ought to do your utmost to avoid divorce. The former is probably right.¹³¹

Rosner read the sentence as valid for both “keeping the marriage bond in peace and allowing a determined unbelieving partner to depart in peace.”¹³² For Fitzmyer, the particle δὲ., “but” (adversative), introduces a restriction to the concession of 15a and introduces what follows in v. 16.¹³³ Peace is needed to maintain harmony in a relationship, but when the believer is divorced by the unbeliever and reconciliation is no longer possible, the term peace must be interpreted as referring to the fact that the believer is still “‘called’ by God to live in some sense in ‘peace’ (Rom 12:18; 14:19).”¹³⁴ Conzelmann saw that “the peace in question is valid independently of the behavior of the pagan partner,” understanding that reconciliation or remarriage with the same partner is not the issue in this sentence.¹³⁵ Peace in this case should be understood as more than mere emancipation.¹³⁶ This concept implies that a divorce may occur “as an uncalculated and overhasty course of action.”¹³⁷ If the problem cannot be solved, then the faithful partner is called in peace by God, which implies the possibility of a new phase in life with the possibility of remarriage.

Verse 16. The word “peace” is an important key to understanding the role of v. 16 in the passage. If the word “peace” is related to the attempt of the believer to reconcile with the unbeliever, considering divorce as non-definitive, then v. 16 would mean that the waiting of the Christian spouse for a future reconciliation with the heathen spouse may be helpful in saving the unbeliever.¹³⁸ In this way, Paul would have returned to the argument of v. 14, making the content of v. 15 incomprehensible.¹³⁹ If we read the word “peace” as referring to a condition of

131. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC; (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1955), 143.

132. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, 170-171.

133. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 302.

134. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 302.

135. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 123-124.

136. Deming remarks that Paul has called the believer to “peace” and not to “freedom” as alternative to slavery. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 151.

137. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*, 152.

138. See Garland, *I Corinthians*, 294. Verse 16 is also understood as the capstone of Paul’s argument for the Christian not to initiate divorce against the unbeliever. This interpretation also does not respect the flow of Paul’s argumentation. See England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 187. Sakae Kubo, “I Corinthians 7:16: Optimistic or Pessimistic?” *NTS* 24 (1977-1978), 539.

139. We must say that attempts in reading verse 16 as related to vv. 12-14 have been made. J. B. Lightfoot read the expression τί γὰρ οἶδας, γύναι, εἰ not as a doubt but as a hope. He did that by quoting other passages (2 Sam 12: 22; Esth\ 4:14; Jonah 3:9; Joel 2:14), using similar expressions which emphasize hope, and not doubt. J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1904), 227. See also J. Jeremias, “Die missionarische Aufgabe in der Mischehe” in Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 303, who understood the expression to mean “perhaps,” given that several extra biblical Greek writers used it: Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.20.30; 2.22.31; 2.25.2; *Joseph and Aseneth* 54, 12-13; Philo, *LAB* 9.6; 25.7; 30.4; 39.3; Homer, *Odys.* 3.216; Sophocles, *Antig.* 521; Plato, *Gorg.* 492e. This interpretation does not give justice to the function of v. 15 which seems out of place.

the believer to which God called him, whether or not he is able to reconcile with the heathen partner, v. 16 is stressing the idea that, after divorce ($\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$) from the unbeliever, one cannot know if the heathen spouse will be saved or not (only God knows and will provide other ways to call the unbeliever).

This is for two reasons: First, trying to maintain a marriage with somebody who does not want it does not grant that the unbeliever will be saved;¹⁴⁰ second, separating from the heathen spouse breaks the marriage, the bond that can sanctify the unbeliever.¹⁴¹ This understanding justifies the position of v. 15 and indicates its role as a conclusion of the passage.¹⁴² In fact, the expression $\tau\acute{\iota}\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \omicron\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha\varsigma,\ \gamma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, *ei* (how do you know, wife, whether) at the beginning of v. 16 expresses a doubt about the future of the heathen partner that only God can take care of.¹⁴³

Conclusion: How to read 1 Corinthians 7:15

After studying the issues at stake in 1 Corinthians 7:15, we can now propose an interpretation in the light of its immediate context.

As stated above, Paul introduced the topic of divorce in v. 10 by using the verb $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$, which is also used in vv. 11 and 15. This verb links the three verses tightly, even though they present an apparent contradiction: in vv. 10 and 11, Paul seems to exclude the possibility of divorce, whereas he seems to allow an exception in v. 15. The Catholic interpretation,¹⁴⁴ based on Aquinas, solves the problem by differentiating between a marriage between two believers and a mixed marriage. The former is indissoluble because there is unity of faith, while in the latter, divorce and remarriage are possible because of disunity of faith.¹⁴⁵ If the Catholic interpretation is correct, Paul would have considered the dominical logion of 7:10-11 on divorce applicable only to marriages between two Christian believers, making his and Jesus' commands on divorce a principle applicable only to Christian believers and excluding a priori mixed marriages with unbelievers. This interpretation presupposes that Jesus' saying was addressed only to Jews and not also to Gentiles, and forgets that Jesus, recalling that marriage was instituted "in the beginning" as a blessing for all creatures,¹⁴⁶ was speaking to all of humanity.¹⁴⁷

To resolve the apparent contradiction between Paul's "rejection" and "permission" of divorce and remarriage, we must step back and consider the value of the Jesus' sayings on divorce. Paul, because he was quoting Jesus' sayings, showed that the authority of his advice had to be found in Jesus' statement on divorce and

140. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 303.

141. England suggested that if the unbeliever divorced and left, he was probably rejecting salvation. ("Divorce and Remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16," 187).

142. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 303.

143. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 303.

144. The Catholic interpretation is officially the only unified interpretation of a church on divorce and remarriage. In fact, there is no Protestant reading of a possible "Pauline privilege." The only possibility for a Protestant to divorce is because of "*porneia*." See Pierre Dulau, "The Pauline Privilege: Is It Promulgated in the First Epistle to the Corinthians?" *CBQ* 13 (1951): 147.

145. Aquinas, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura* I, 299, paragraph 336.

146. See Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12.

147. Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, "The Divorced Woman in I Cor. 7:10-11," 605.

remarriage.¹⁴⁸ Since Mark and Matthew also report Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage in an extended form, the meaning of the same key words employed by Mark, Matthew, and Paul is relevant. These key words are the following: γαμέω "to marry" (Mark 10:11, 12; Matt 19:9, 10; 1 Cor 7:10); γυνή, "wife" (Mark 10:2, 7, 11; Matt 19:3, 9; 1 Cor 7:10-12, 16); ἀνὴρ "man" (Mark 10:2, 12; 1 Cor 7:10, 11, 13, 14, 16); and χωρίζω "to separate, divorce" (Mark 10:9; Matt 10:6; 1 Cor 7:10, 11, 15). Since there is little question as to the meaning of the words "to marry," "wife," and "man," the problem of interpretations must arise with the verb "to separate, divorce." As we have observed, some scholars read the verb χωρίζω with the meaning of separation. Others read both separation and divorce in this verb, but not remarriage. Still others read the possibility of separation, divorce, and remarriage.¹⁴⁹ Paul's statement, "not I but the Lord," seems to imply that he was actually giving to the verb χωρίζω the same meaning that Jesus gave, according to Mark and Matthew's accounts. This reading is supported by the fact that Paul used χωρίζω as part of the dominical logion and ἀφίημι as part of his own command or development on the issue: "I say, not the Lord" (7:10, 12). This suggests that when we find the verb χωρίζω, we should read "to divorce" with the meaning given by Jesus in the dominical logion, and when we find the verb ἀφίημι, we should read "to divorce" within the meaning that Paul intended in 1 Cor 7, which is a further application of the dominical logion. Consequently, the verb χωρίζω in verses 10, 11, and 15 (twice) should be read within the meaning of the dominical logion.

In Mark 10:9 and Matt 19:6, the verb χωρίζω is primarily translated as "separate."¹⁵⁰ In the synoptic Gospels, this verb means not only "to separate" with a spatial dimension, but, as stated above, may also mean "to divorce," which implies the breaking or dissolution and the end of the relationship.¹⁵¹ If we take the verb with the meaning of just "spatial separation," we must also read the rest of the sentence, "what God joined together," in the same way, with the meaning that God joined man and woman only physically, without giving any deeper signification to that union.¹⁵² If this is the sense of what Jesus said, Adam and Eve would have been joined together only physically, fulfilling their marriage only when they met together. If we read the verb χωρίζω with the meaning of "to divorce," but with the impossibility or remarriage, this reading presupposes that the sentence, "what God has joined together," does not offer freedom of choice in marriage,

148. Cf. B. Byron, "General Theology of Marriage in the NT and 1 Corinthians 7:15" ACR 49 (1972): 1-10. He understood that the "Pauline Privilege" did not depend on the dominical logion, but rather from Paul's command, where v. 15 is a natural argument coming out of v. 12 where Paul says "not the Lord, but I..."

149. See above.

150. GNT, NIV, ESV, GDB, GW, CSB, LEB, BLA, LSG, NAS, NCV, NKJV. It is also translated, "put asunder" (ASV, RHE, KJV, RSV), "be parted" (BBE), "break or split apart" (CJB), "separate or tear apart" (HNV), and "cutting apart" (MSG).

151. H. G. Coiner, "Those 'Divorce and Remarriage' Passages (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16)," *CTM* 39 (1968): 382.

152. In this way, the union cannot be called marriage. In my opinion, in Genesis 2:24-25 Moses used a legal term to talk about Adam and Eve's union. For a further study of this topic see Richard Davidson, *The Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 15-54.

forcing two people to be united and not respecting their choice. Adam and Eve chose to join together and God blessed their union because of their free choice. If there is no consent in a marriage, that marriage does not reflect God's original design. To be "one flesh" implies not only sexual intimacy, but also a willingness to live in a marriage with the partner.

Verses 12 and 15 strongly support this concept. The verbs *συνευδοκεῖ* and *χωριζέσθω* respectively show a willingness or unwillingness to continue a marriage, creating the condition for not divorcing or for divorcing definitively. Jesus' sentence is eloquent: "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Jesus knew that humans can end a marriage through their behavior, which is why he said, "Let man not separate." The meaning of the verb "to separate" in Mark 10:9 and Matt 19:6 implies that a believer must not break a marriage. In giving this warning, Jesus recognized that human beings have the power to end their marriages. Jesus did not mean a partial rupture, but a total rupture of marriage. A marriage can be completely broken, not just partially broken with the prohibition of remarriage. If remarriage is not allowed, it means that the marriage is not completely broken. For this reason, Paul used the verb *χωρίζω* in vv. 10 and 11 to say that believers should not remarry because the verb implies a definitive rupture of the marriage with the possibility of remarriage. If this was not so, there would not be a reason to insist on this. Nevertheless, divorce between believers is not a fatality: God has the power to reconcile two believers who have a sincere desire to restore their marriage. If one of the two spouses does not share the same faith and breaks the marriage, God can no longer intervene in that marriage. In this case, the abandoned person is free.

Further support for this reading is given by the fact that the dominical logion to which Paul makes reference is quoted by Mark and Matthew in different ways: Mark puts it as an absolute, while Matthew leaves room for a specific exception (*porneia*). All three authors have been inspired by the same Spirit, and all three come to apparently different, but complementary conclusions.¹⁵³ This means first of all that the logion cannot be viewed as an absolute, and that the prohibition of divorce and remarriage, which is the rule for marital issues, may have exceptions.¹⁵⁴ Paul, even quoting the logion, recognized that the saying was not applicable when there was no longer any hope for the restoration of the marriage because the unbelieving partner refused it. "We believe that the Matthean (5:32; 19:9) and the Pauline (1 Cor. 7:15) exceptions are directed at those innocent parties and function to relieve them of the responsibility for the breakup of the marriage."¹⁵⁵

Another relevant point in favor of this reading is that there is no clear mention that, in the case of a divorce provoked by the unbeliever, the believer should not remarry. Although Paul clearly stated in 7:11 that believers cannot remarry if they separate, he did not say that in mixed marriages, the believer cannot remarry if the

153. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 298; J. A. Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 100.

154. Stein, "It is Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?" 119; Keener, *And Marries Another*, 53-54.

155. William A. Heth, "Divorce and Remarriage: The Search for an Evangelical Hermeneutic," *TrinJ* 16 NT (1995): 64.

unbeliever divorces, but rather, suggested that the believer is no longer “enslaved” or bound.¹⁵⁶

Finally, Paul confirmed God’s rejection of divorce as Mark and Matthew did. This rejection is a rule aiming at goodness for all humanity, believers and unbelievers, regardless of whether they recognize and accept it. If the unbelieving spouse pays no heed to the Lord’s command, he or she will only be under the marital civil law of the country.¹⁵⁷ Believers are called to listen to the dominical logion for several reasons. The most obvious reasons are that God can operate in their marriage to solve existing problems. Believers, when they are patient, can save their partners and their children through the sanctified bonds of a marriage.¹⁵⁸ Mixed marriages can also be an opportunity to aid in the sanctification of the spouse and children.¹⁵⁹ Believers who have tried everything to maintain their marriages with an unbeliever are called to peace if the unbelieving spouse wants to divorce. In this case, they are free and no longer under bondage, but this does not mean that they must remarry. They can stay single, as Paul suggests to the unmarried and widows (7:9).¹⁶⁰ However, if they decide that remarriage is good for them, they are free, before God, to remarry. It seems evident from this text that Paul read the dominical logion as a universal principle, yet admitted specific exceptions, respecting the freedom that God gives to all human beings.

156. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 185.

157. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 189.

158. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 297.

159. Garland, *I Corinthians*, 279.

160. England, “Divorce and Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16,” 189.