

Series: God & Man & Woman #815

Title: Genesis 2.24, Part 19

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! As you know if you have been with us our central text is Genesis 2, verse 24. That reads, “**24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.**” This speaks profoundly and with certainty to God’s view of marriage – marriage that is acceptable to and pleases our God. Indeed, the Bible says marriage is **one man as one flesh with one woman for one lifetime.**

But many people, perhaps even you, do not have one flesh and one-lifetime marriages. And so we have diverted from Genesis 2.24 to ask and answer four questions listeners have because they are not in one-lifetime marriages. This week we answered question one and now we are going to finish answering question two. Next week we shall take up question number three. I hope this is beneficial to you, and that you will be right back here on Monday and all next week!

If you have your Bible with you and you’re free to open it, we are in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. In this chapter Paul answers our second question. This is the question: what happens to a Christian husband or wife when their non-Christian husband or wife abandons the marriage (leaves, divorces)? What can the abandoned, Christian spouse do? Can he or she remarry a Christian? How does the expectation for a one-lifetime marriage apply in this case?

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 the Apostle Paul gives a seven-point answer. We’ve looked at the first four insights already, and I am only going to repeat the fourth, which sets us up perfectly for *the answer* to our question I want to give you today. Our fourth insight was this: when a Christian is married to a spouse who is not a Christian, as long as the non-Christian (the unbeliever) consents to remain married, the Christian spouse (the believer) cannot divorce. Cannot. As one author put this (quote), “Spiritual differences alone are not a reason to end a marriage.”

Listen to 1 Corinthians 7, verses 12 and 13, “**...if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce her husband.**” This is very clear. I hope you remember our case study of Chris and Sarah. Chris is the Christian, Sarah is not. In that scenario Chris must not initiate divorce from Sarah. The Christian spouse is bound to the marriage with a non-Christian spouse. This is insight number four.

However, and here comes the exception on our **fifth insight: if the unbelieving spouse (the spouse who is not a Christian) abandons the marriage forcing divorce on the believer (on the Christian), then the Christian is free to re-marry another Christian at some point in the future.** So, because Sarah abandoned and then divorced Chris, because the person who was not a Christian (Sarah) divorced the person who was a Christian (Chris), this then frees Chris to remarry a Christian woman in the future. God allows for this exception in His Word here at 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

Listen carefully to the specific verse. This is 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 15, “**15 Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us in peace.**” I better read this again, because I want make certain we understand God in His Word. 1 Corinthians 7.15 says, “**Yet if the unbelieving one is leaving, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us in peace.**”

Whenever an unbeliever married to a believer decides to abandon the marriage, to divorce, the believer should let that spouse leave. Let’s put this in the practical context of Chris and Sarah’s story. The unbeliever (Sarah) decided to leave (to abandon Chris) and divorce him because of Chris’ faith in Christ. Sarah said to Chris, “I didn’t agree to this when I married you. You know I hate religion, church, and God...” Chris then should let her go (Chris should agree to the divorce). Chris should not intentionally provoke her to go! But he lets her go. Why? He does so to maintain *peace*.

Paul commands the Christian to keep the peace. This is reminiscent of what Paul also wrote to the Romans in chapter 12 and verse 18. Romans 12.18 reads, “**18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people.**”

Someone might ask, can the believer hope the unbelieving spouse will change and so persist in such a marriage? Yes, but he or she may not. The Apostle addresses this in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 7.16, **“16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”** In other words, you do not know. You can hope, but you cannot be certain, and so therefore since your unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage, you are to let him or her go.

And so our **sixth insight** is now this: in this case, **the believer (Chris) is free to remarry**. To be sure, there are different views on whether or not Chris can remarry. Some would say that even though Chris is free from the marital obligations to Sarah, because she divorced him and his marriage is over, *in the eyes of God* he is still married to her and therefore Chris is not free to remarry, *even though he is the innocent party*.

I take a different view. And I am in good company. My view is that because Chris is the innocent party. (He did not initiate separation and divorce), then Chris is free to pursue remarriage down the road. As most Protestant, evangelicals agree, in the Bible when divorce is permitted, then remarriage is permitted. But when divorce is not allowed, then remarriage is not allowed. Given that the Apostle Paul has liberated the Christian spouse who is being divorced from the marriage, then remarriage is by extension allowed.

Catch this: I am not saying Chris must remarry or should remarry or that it would be wise to remarry. I am only saying, because I think the Bible is saying, Chris *can* remarry another Christian in the eyes of God. I am answering our question, friends.

By the way, remarriage is allowed for Chris, but not for Sarah. Even though Sarah is not a Christian, God still holds her to her marriage covenant with Chris. Sarah’s reason for divorce is on *unbiblical* grounds.

Listen, if you would, to the wise words of theologian Charles Hodge, which are quoted by Jim Newheiser in an excellent book I will tell you about next week. He quotes Hodge, “If the unbeliever broke up the marriage, the Christian partner was thereby liberated from the (marriage) contract. This is the interpretation that Protestants have almost universally given to this verse. It is a passage of great importance, because it is the foundation of the Protestant doctrine that willful desertion is a legitimate ground of divorce (as quoted in *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* by Jim Newheiser).” Unquote.

So, let me ask our question and answer it simply now that we have done our work in the Bible. Question: what happens to a Christian husband or wife when their non-Christian husband or wife abandons the marriage (leaves, divorces)? What can the abandoned, Christian spouse do? Can he or she remarry a Christian? Answer: yes, the Christian is free to re-marry another Christian in the future.

And if you are keeping track, you know I have given you six insights. I said I had seven and with the **seventh** (and with the time remaining) I want to quickly say two things. First, our question does not cover what happens if a Christian abandons a Christian spouse. Write to me if that interests you. We are focusing on when a non-Christian spouse abandons a Christian spouse. This is common. Like with Chris a lot of new believers struggle with this when their spouse did not also convert to follow the Lord. But should a Christian abandoning a Christian interest you, write to me, will you?

Second, you may be listening to this worried about your children. Chris and Sarah do not have children, but maybe you do. So you are a husband who is a Christian married to a wife who is not a Christian. Or you are a wife who is a Christian married to a husband who is not a Christian. What should you do? You may even be very concerned of the negative influence your unbelieving spouse is having on your kids lives.

I have good news! The Bible answers you directly. So, if this is your concern and your question, will you also write to me this weekend? I have a few verses from 1 Corinthians 7 I want to share with you but we are out of time. So, please do write to me! The email is mark (with a K) mark@godisministry.o-r-g.

You can always listen to this again from my website, godisministry.org and join us again on Monday as we continue to answer questions related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We’re making sense of marriages that do not last one-lifetime here on God Is! ---END---