

Series: God & Man & Woman #835

Title: Genesis 2.24, Part 38

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! Welcome back as we conclude the week together and bring to a close our discussion on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I hope you were here yesterday, because it really is necessary that you take what was said last time with what will now be said. It all goes together. So if you were not with us, go to the God Is Ministry website and press play on yesterday's podcast. www.godisministry.org, that's godisministry.o-r-g.

We return now to our text, 1 Corinthians 7, verse 15. I'll read it as we get started. 1 Corinthians 7.15 says, **"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."** In this series we have covered the basic meaning, the principle interpretation of this verse. But last time I added that this verse might also be used to justify divorce in the case of unrepentant, ongoing, and repeated abuse of one's spouse by the other spouse in a marriage. I stressed and stress again, *might be used*. This is a question of biblical interpretation. Can an abused spouse use 1 Corinthians 7, verse 15 to justify divorce? *Maybe*.

I do want to be clear: this verse could only be used when it is determined that abuse really is taking place in the home. So it is not that abuse is a false claim, it is not that what is a temporary outburst of anger or a period of conflict in a marriage is being put forth as abuse, and it *is* that the master manipulator (the abusive spouse) is guilty. When all of that is true, then the abused spouse, already having separated, can consider divorce. These are the conditions under which this verse might be used, but again God does not include in the Bible any clear verses that say divorce is warranted for abuse. So, we want to make sure we do not say what God does not say.

That being said, I do believe God has given Christians the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. With Him as our guide who leads us through the Bible and with the Spirit as our protector (guarding us from error), there is a verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 that serves to justify a permanent separation and *maybe* divorce in true cases of spousal abuse where separation has been tried and is not working. But, even then, we have to be very wise and careful in how we apply this.

I trust the Spirit of God will remind you of this warning as we now proceed in understanding how it is possible to apply 1 Corinthians 7.15 to an abusive marriage. And last time we dealt with the opening part of the verse: **"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave..."** And we said an abusive spouse is an unbelieving spouse and by "leaves" the sense is that an abuser has left his or her marital responsibility. In the act of abuse, there is a divorcing of oneself from the marriage. The evil acts of abuse have already caused the innocent spouse to separate, but the abuser has still not changed. The separation becomes so lengthy so as to effectively be a divorce.

And, again, this is caused by the abusive person. Oh, he or she may be physically present. The abuser will likely not want to be separated or divorced (keeping up appearances, maintaining control is always important for abusive people), *but* is there really a marriage when one spouse is barely living under the threat of domestic violence in all its forms? In some marriages I think the case can definitely be made that the abusive spouse has abandoned, has left the marriage!

And Paul says, **"...let him leave..."** If an abusive spouse acts like he or she does not want to be married to you anyway, then let him or her go *by separating from* the abusive spouse and maybe even officially *divorcing*.

Let's continue to follow along the Apostle Paul in this verse. He says, **"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases..."** The "brother or the sister" in this interpretation will be the man (the husband) who is being abused and the sister will be the woman (the wife) who is being abused. And "not under bondage" will be the bonds of marriage (the marriage vows), so that an abused spouse is free to leave the marriage. And then a key statement as verse 15 ends, **"God has called us to peace."**

This is important: God has called us to peace. When someone who is being abused gets the abuser out of his or her life, oh *there is peace*! And peace, as we have said all along, is what God calls us to. Abuse is

intolerable to God. Abuse is contrary to the nature and to the character of the Living God. God does not want you to remain in an abusive situation. It is not God's will for you to just sit there and accept verbal, physical, emotional, mental (psychological), and sexual abuse. I submit to you 1 Corinthians 7.15 in light of the other Scriptures we have read can be used to provide grounds for divorce in abusive marriages.

But along with this, I also submit to you 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verses 10 and 11. Going just across the page in most Bibles we come to verses 10 and 11 of 1 Corinthians 7, which reads, **"¹⁰ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife."** We have also looked at this before, but again I find some application in these verses for an abused spouse who has decided for divorce.

And what is the wisdom God has for you here? It is two-fold. First, remain unmarried. Second, continue to make an effort at reconciliation with your now ex (abusive) spouse. If you choose to follow the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7, verse 15 that says an abused spouse is free to move from separation to divorce, then after the divorce you will not remarry and you will continue to pray for the repentance of your original husband or wife.

Some will ask, "But why? Why would it be OK for me to divorce, but not remarry?" I think is because of the importance God puts on a one-lifetime marriage. And the possibility, no matter how impossible it may now seem to you, that your abusive ex-husband or wife may yet be transformed by God and return to you seeking your forgiveness and remarriage to *you*.

I have been insistent that anyone being abused in a marriage must immediately separate from the abusive spouse. Like, today! Flee danger to safety. And then over the last two days we have thought about how 1 Corinthians 7.15 might be used to justify divorce. Even so, I want to leave you with this: marital reconciliation is always preferred over divorce. God never commands divorce in the Bible. He grants it because of the hardness of our hearts. If your spouse repents of his or sin, and if God so ministers in their lives that they then come back to you wanting to reconcile with you, you will want to be free – you will want to be unmarried – so that you can resume your original marriage to him or her.

So I would encourage you to put together 1 Corinthians 7.15 with 1 Corinthians 7.10 and 11. Let me say that again so you can read these Scriptures on your own this weekend. Put together 1 Corinthians 7.15 with 1 Corinthians 7.10 and 11.

My sincere prayer is that what I have shared in these weeks together is helpful to you. I pray no one will have misunderstood me. One of the many challenges of communicating Bible truth on the radio and via the podcast is that the Bible teacher does not know who is listening. I am limited to the kind of advice I can only give through the radio and the Internet. Whereas, in pastoral ministry in a local church, I would know you well. The pastor in me sure would love to have combined the teaching with counseling as we have navigated biblical wisdom on abuse under the command of God for a one-lifetime marriage.

The best environment for handling abuse in marriage is within the local church. So let me encourage you again to work out the difficulties in your marriage not through the radio or a podcast, but within the context of an in-person setting where you are being loved, cared for, listened to, and believed by someone competent in marital counseling. Take what I have said here as general, biblical guidance and (hopefully) encouragement. But do be honest with someone locally about what is happening to you and with you.

And if you have any questions about what I have said. Maybe you have a comment or you want to offer me a correction, please do write to me. I would love to hear from you!

I can honestly say, whoever you are, I love you in the Lord. And I feel a great deal of genuine compassion for any person being abused today. God does not want anyone to be abused. There is *never* any biblical justification for it. Please remember that, and take action against abuse *now*. Let's all of us do that. And if you are an abusive person, then I pray for you. I pray you turn to God and receive the transformation in your life only He can give.

And join us again on Monday when we move on to Genesis 2 and verse 25 on God Is! ---END---