

Christian Divorce: Don't Twist Scripture to Make It Fit

This is part 6 in a series. Read part 1, part 2, part 3, part 4 and part 5.

Perhaps one of the most difficult Scriptures dealing with divorce or separation is found in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11: "A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not leave the wife."

This clearly states that those who are divorced or separated, unless "scripturally released," should not remarry, but instead, seek restoration.

I believe that if this Scripture was fully taught and acknowledged, it would create more serious consideration before marriage, and would be a deterrent to divorce. There would be fewer divorces without cause and more reconciliations. Lack of regard for this Scripture has taken us to the other extreme—no-fault divorce.

First Corinthians 7:15 continues: "But if the unbeliever departs, let that one depart. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called us to peace."

This Scripture has been repeatedly misused for personal advantage. Even though a spouse's actions may resemble that of an unbeliever because they choose to leave, hard questions need to be asked. For example, if extreme anger, verbal or physical abuse, and frantic controlling and manipulating are occurring, a spouse may leave for a season with the goal and hope of restoration. In this case, the spouse leaves because the environment is unbearable, not because they are an

unbeliever. The other spouse is not scripturally released in this case.

What if an unbelieving spouse walks away for a so-called “better life” and has no desire of returning? First Corinthians seems to indicate that the other is released. Blatant disrespect, financial irresponsibility and pornography can also drive a spouse away. Some never return, while others leave for a season.

Clearly understand that I’m not advocating separation, divorce or remaining in an abusive relationship, nor am I saying that if you are currently separated, that divorce become an option because better opportunities await you. God hates divorce and anyone who has been there knows why. This article is not designed to be a one-size-fits-all approach. There are too many variables to address every situation.

I believe, first and foremost, in reconciliation and restoration, but these are not always options. That’s why a personal relationship with Jesus and obedience to God’s Word is profoundly important. Through that relationship you will be able to make the right decision. It won’t be easy because lives have been damaged, dreams destroyed and promises broken, but God continually redeems us through His forgiveness. God desires that we know His will and follow His lead in spite of detours.

Even when 1 Corinthians 7:15 applies, it’s wise to allow a significant amount of time to pass before moving forward. This may reveal if the person left only for a season or has chosen to leave permanently. One of the biggest obstacles when considering restoration or seeking direction, is to become involved in another relationship soon after the divorce or separation. This severely hinders any chance of reconciliation, as well as the ability to follow God’s lead.

Restoration does not happen quickly. What takes years to

destroy may take years to rebuild. Patience is the key—a person truly seeking God's will waits and does not rush into a new relationship. Sadly, many rush this process or twist Scriptures to pursue other relationships.

Seeking advice or counsel during a separation requires good judgment. It may be tempting to accept the advice of others even though their advice may not be scripturally sound. Counseling with those skilled in the Word is invaluable and desperately needed, but all the counseling in the world will not work if the heart is not right. God heals us primarily with the transforming power of His Word and repentance through a broken heart: "He sent His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions" (Ps. 107:20).

One goal of counseling is to take people back to the Word. Spouses must spend extended time in the Word with an open and teachable heart.

My intent is not to disregard counseling—I do it daily and seek it often.

I also don't want to disregard the emotional pain of brokenness—I've experienced it myself.

But I do want to remind you that God restores us primarily through obedience to His Word, along with faith and forgiveness. Obedience is the key: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

We live in deception and futility when we fight against the spiritual principle of obedience. We only delude ourselves when we look for those who tell us what we want to hear, not what we need to hear. God's Word often does the opposite; it reveals the heart and does not validate sin. The Word does not coddle feelings like some tend to do; it crushes them so that repentance takes place. It also builds and restores.

When we justify sinful behavior, genuine repentance has not

taken place. We become very good with our words; very good at excusing actions. Blame deflects responsibility—it excuses actions and prevents genuine repentance from taking place. Don't twist the Scriptures or make excuses. Surrender the entire relationship to God and trust Him to see you through.

Watch my sermon, "Lord, Remove My Guilt and Shame," on Vimeo.

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