

If Indeed You Marry

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In 1982 I wrote a book titled, *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of Jesus and Paul*. This work was presented in an exegetical format as an example of how my students at Southeastern Biblical Institute were taught to do an exegetical study of a biblical text. A rule I followed was that the conclusions drawn from the biblical research should be only those conclusions warranted by adequate evidence. This rule is called, "the law of rationality," and was used by Aristotle in his logical discourses. In order to follow this principle, one must be convinced that he has adequate information from which to draw his conclusions. Of critical importance here is the expression "adequate evidence." One may consider himself a rational thinker when he has responsibly gathered the information he thinks germane to the text or issue before him.

One consideration, however, is that the information he believes to be "adequate" may not be all the information available on the matter he is considering. If he is unaware of such information, his conclusions should still be based on the information he has before him. The one most in violation of the law of rationality is the one who ignores the information before him and draws whatever conclusion he wants, not because of, but in spite of, the information. But what of the researcher who honestly draws his conclusions based on the information he has, then later discovers information he did not have before, which may be applicable to the issue, and may even change his conclusions altogether?

This is the situation I found myself in with reference to the above-mentioned book. I had spent almost three years of research and had produced 183 pages of data on a very complex and controversial issue, was convinced that my research was thorough

enough to warrant the conclusions I had drawn, then, in an inadvertent moment, while translating a text from 1 Cor 7 concerning Paul's expression, "because of the impending distress," I discovered that I had missed something of great significance to the issue on which I had written. The text is 1 Cor 7: 25-28, which I had not considered germane to the issue of my book because of the way the English translations read. Reading it in Greek revealed some things that were of great importance to the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, as well as revealing what I consider to be some very sloppy translation work by the English translation committees of a number of Standard English translations.

This occurred somewhere in 2002 and I had no forum for presenting my findings, but later, when someone called me requesting a copy of the book, which has been out of print for years, I informed the caller that I would change the book before ever allowing it to be reprinted. He ask me if I would be kind enough to send him an explanation of what I would change about the book, which I did in the following Email. This Email is a good presentation of my understanding of the 1 Cor 7:27-28. It is presented in the spirit of honest scholarship and faithfulness to the law of rationality as well as the title of this link, "Digging Out the Ore."

Serendipity on 1 Corinthians 7:27-28

Dear _____: As I mentioned to you, I had earlier translated the verses of 1 Corinthians 7 that I thought contained the relevant material on the marriage, divorce, and remarriage issue. Recently, I was translating the whole 7th chapter for a class I was working on and discovered that verses 27-28 did not reflect the English translations I had been reading. I double-checked my translation, and there it was, one of the most critical comments on this issue and I had missed it. I wrote a book on this subject, lectured on the issue, and had not checked the Greek text as thoroughly as I should have; consequently, I missed something. I will never be able to understand some of the translation decisions of the English translations we have, but they clearly blew it on these two verses. Below is the information I discussed with you on the phone. You may use it as you please.

Before allowing the reprinting of my book on marriage, divorce, and remarriage some sections would need reworking and I would want to add a chapter on the Greek text of 1 Cor 7:27-28, and the implications of the misleading translations of "*dedesai*" (are you having been bound) and "*lusin*" (to be loosed) of verse 27 in the English versions. "*Dedesai*" is a perfect, indicative, passive meaning, "having been bound." Paul is addressing someone, "having been bound," to whom he says, "*me zetei lusin*" (do not seek to be loosed). He then says, "*lelusai*," another perfect, indicative, passive meaning, "having been loosed," which he follows with the instruction, "*me zetei gunaika*" (do not seek a wife). Then he adds, in verse 28, "*ean de*" (but if [3rd class conditional sentence]) "*kai*" (indeed) "*gameses*" (aorist subjunctive, "you should marry"), "*ouch hemartes*" (aorist, indicative, 2nd person, plural), "you have not sinned." He then says to the virgins, "and if a virgin marries, she did not sin."

Now, what is the implication of this instruction and how could I have missed something as critical as this. I should have translated the whole chapter rather than assuming that only certain verses were worthy of careful consideration. If you have some facility with the Greek text, you may want to look at this on your own. I would be interested in your observations. Is Paul giving instruction to these Christians at Corinth not to divorce and remarry, then telling them that if they do, they have not sinned? If so, how are we to understand his instruction? If a divorced person is loosed from their marriage bonds, then remarries, Paul says, "he has not sinned," and the virgin who marries "has not sinned." It is as plain as that! Whether one likes the implications of this or not, it appears that Paul is giving his thinking on a matter (*gnomen de didomi* - [my] knowledge I give), as he says in verse 26, "I consider this then to be good" (*nomizo oun touto kalon huparchein*). He then gives his advice, which is warranted in view of the present situation, and then concludes with the statement, that if the having been loosed individual does marry, he has not sinned. The best advice given to someone in a given situation, even if given by a man inspired of God, is not necessarily a universal mandate to be followed by all person, in all places, at all times, under all circumstances.

The Exceptive Clause of Matthew 19:9

Further, Paul does not qualify the one "having been loosed" (divorced) as one having been loosed as a result of fornication on the part of his former mate. To assume that those Paul is addressing here would have understood that the exceptive clause of Matt 19:9 would have to be applicable before Paul's words could be followed, is just that, "an assumption." What justification is there for assuming that someone has knowledge of something without a particle of evidence to establish such an assumption? Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was most likely written somewhere around the late 50's and Matthew's Gospel was most likely written somewhere around the 70's. There is no evidence that the people to whom Paul was writing would have had any knowledge of the exceptive clause, "except for fornication" given by Jesus to the Jews in Jerusalem in Matt 19:9. Further, what is one to make of Paul's statement in verse 25, "a commandment of the Lord I do not have," if he did have knowledge of Jesus' teaching on the matter of which persons having been loosed may marry and which ones may not?

As one who has a great deal of respect for the law of rationality, I would give little or no credence to an argument which "assumes" that Paul's recipients would have to have known about the exceptive clause of Matt 19:9, lest they sin by following the apostle's instruction. If the provision that the only one who could remarry after having been divorced (or "bound" then "loosed") was the innocent party in a divorce on the grounds of fornication, was of such importance that it would cost a person their soul if they did not comply with it, I would think that Paul would have made the people to whom he was writing aware of that. But he did not. He did not say one thing that would indicate that he believed his reader, whom he identified as "having been loosed," would sin by marrying again, if his grounds for "having been loosed" were not fornication on the part of his mate.

Reading the Greek Text Literally

The Greek text of 1 Cor 7:27-28a, translated literally, reads:

You have been bound to a wife, do not seek to be loosed. You have been loosed from a wife, do not seek a wife. But if indeed you should marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

So what does one make of these words of Paul here in this text? It appears that Paul is instructing these people not to change their marital status in view of what he calls, "a present situation." If they are married, don't divorce (do not seek to be loosed), if they are loosed (i.e. having been bound but now are persons having been loosed) do not seek a wife (do not seek to be bound). But, if they do marry (i.e., seek to be bound) they have not sinned. To follow Paul's best case scenario would be to not seek to be loosed from a wife, and if one is loosed from a wife, don't seek another. But, if one does seek another (i.e., if indeed he should marry), he has not sinned.

From this it should be clear that the position that to remarry without having been divorced for the cause of a mate's fornication is not a position Paul felt disposed to mention. His instruction here in these verses takes no such provision into consideration. From all this it would appear that the conclusion drawn in my book as to who could and could not remarry after having been divorced, was not a conclusion warranted by adequate evidence or, at least, all the evidence relevant to the issue. Some evidence was obviously missing and the position I took there is not one Paul would have agreed with. I think I can live with that and I relinquish the floor to him!

MWLIII