

“But If The Unbeliever Depart”

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”

1 Corinthians 7:15

God, in His infinite wisdom, provided the scriptures for mankind written in a language perfectly suited for the message of redemption. It is certainly worth the Bible student’s time to carefully investigate key Greek phrases in the scriptures. Although it is not necessary for one to be a student of the languages of the Bible in order to understand it, a cursory examination can instill within us a vividness and appreciation for the Holy Spirit-inspired words.

The Greek Interlinear and the Analytical Greek Lexicon identified the two major verbs in the verse as *chorizetai* or “separates himself,” which is a present-passive-indicative and *chorizestho* or “let him/her be separated,” which is a present-passive-imperative. Both tenses indicate a continuous action, and the voice in both words indicate that the subject receives the action.

The word order in the first phrase is subject-verb. The International Critical Commentary says that the emphasis is “on the unbelieving one, and the present tense indicates the heathen partner’s state of mind ... so the responsibility (to leave or not to leave) rests with them, and they may do as they please, chorizestho” (p. 143).

The distinction between the two verbs is their mood. *Chorizetai* is in the indicative mood which expresses the idea of certainty, while *chorizestho* is in the imperative mood which expresses a command. Dana and Mantey call this occurrence an imperative of permission. They say, “The command signified by the imperative may be in compliance with an expressed desire or a manifest inclination on the part of the one who is the object of the command, thus involving consent as well as command” (p. 176). The imperative can be seen in Matthew 8:32 where Jesus commanded the demons to “Go!” from the swine. Paul is saying that if the partner is continuing to want to leave, then let them leave.

Vine states that *chorizo* means to “put apart, separate, and in the middle voice, to separate oneself, to depart from” (p. 296). Rienecker adds that in the papyri the word was used as a technical expression for divorce (p. 406). *Chorizo* only occurs seven times in the New Testament and Paul is the only

one who uses the word to indicate divorce. The other occurrences signify mainly the beginning of a journey from one point to another.

Dedoulotai or "enslaved" means "enslaved, to be a slave, to be under bondage" (p. 406). Thayer adds that it means "to be under bondage, held by constraint of law or necessity, in some matter" (p. 158). Other words which are in the same word family include *douleia*, which means slavery or the condition of a slave; *douleuo*, which means to serve or do service; and *doulos*, which means serving or subject to. *Douloo* occurs seven times in the New Testament. It is used to represent being held in bondage (Galatians 4:3), being brought under bondage (2 Peter 2:19), being enslaved to wine (Titus 2:3) and being a slave to righteousness (Romans 6:18).

Many believe that 1 Corinthians 7:15 allows for the "Pauline privilege," or the view that the believer who is divorced by the unbeliever is free to remarry. However, this explanation drifts away from Paul's main point. The International Critical Commentary states, "If, therefore, the heathen partner seeks divorce, the Christian partner may consent. The Christian partner is under no slavish obligation to refuse to be set free ... But if the one who remains a heathen demands divorce, the Christian is not bound to oppose divorce" (p. 143). The phrase "not under bondage" refers to the duty of holding the marriage together. The imperative command in *chorizestho* means that if an unbelieving spouse wants to leave, they should leave and the believer should feel no compulsion to stop them. Paul is not speaking of the marriage bond. The kind of bondage that a person cannot become involved in, as it relates to another person, is found in 1 Corinthians 7:23: "Ye are bought with a price; be ye not the servants of men." We are not to forfeit our obligation to Christ for any service to any man, thus becoming enslaved to him.

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