

"Only In The Lord"

"A woman is bound for so long time as her husband liveth, but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she abide as she is, after my judgment: and I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:39f).

The KJV has an interpolation to this verse, reading, "A wife is bound by the law for so long time as her husband liveth ..." The ASV gives the true reading: "A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth" -- a silent testimony that God's law of marriage goes back to the very beginning, just as Jesus responded when He was questioned, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Mt. 19:3). His words: "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it hath not been so" (Mt. 19:8). Paul's words, "bound for so long time as her husband liveth," modifies his earlier words, "if they have not contingency, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn," as well as his words to believers whose unbelieving mates depart from them: "but if the unbelieveth departeth, let him depart: the brother or sister is not under bondage in such a case" (1 Cor. 7:9, 15). Whatever vs. 9 and 15 may mean, they cannot be pressed to say that when an unbelieving mate divorces his believing mate, even though he has not committed adultery, the believing mate is free to be married again, nor to say that one who has divorced his mate can marry anyone he chooses to marry. The apostle's words in vss. 10-11 are clear on this point: "... that the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart (i.e., divorce, jm) let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband)." The only exception to Paul's words, "a wife is bound for so long as her husband liveth," was given by Jesus when He said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery, and he that marrieth her when she is put away committed adultery" (Mt. 19:9).

Marriage is for life, but the death of one or the other of the mates severs the union, leaving the surviving mate free to remarry. Paul discusses a widow as the surviving mate but should it be the man who survives, the force of his instructions applies to to him as well. Still, the apostle hastens to add that while death frees her to remarry if she chooses, that freedom is qualified: the surviving mate may remarry "only in the Lord". What does the apostle mean by these words?

Perhaps most conclude that the surviving mate is free to only marry another Christian and such seems to be its natural meaning. Still many questions are raised if this be its meaning. "Is this instruction permanent or is it confined

to 'this present distress' as are other instructions concerning the 'unmarried' and 'virgins'?" "If it is a 'permanent command' what must one do who does not follow Paul's words and marries one who is not a Christian?" "If the widow must only marry a Christian, what about who has never been married? Do the same instructions apply to the virgin?" All these questions are legitimate.

Other questions likewise might be posed. "Is God's marriage law a 'church ordinance' or does it apply to mankind in general?" "If a believer is free to marry and he marries an unbeliever who also is free to marry, does God join them together?" "May either of them, believer or unbeliever, put away the other (save for fornication) and marry another without committing adultery?" "If the two are joined together by God, may man put them asunder?" "Are we to understand the apostle to mean a Christian by 'in the Lord,' and are we to understand that a widow may marry another Christian, regardless of his marital state?"

Is it possible that the statement, *"free to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord,"* is to be viewed as other "judgments" the apostle had given? God's law of marriage cannot be set aside and although because of this "present distress" inspired judgment was given regarding specific cases, God's permanent law of marriage and divorce must hold sway. Marriage is God's law for man and applies to every creature wherever he lives. The union is for life and that is true even if one is an unbeliever. One is not to divorce his mate for any cause save for fornication. However, should he do so, he must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to his mate. The gravity, permanency, and sacredness of marriage should cause each person to think long and hard before entering into a union with another, for although he may make a bad choice in his mate; he is "stuck"! Once God has joined the two together, they are bound for life!

Jim McDonald