

## **MUST A CHRISTIAN SPOUSE REMAIN IN AN ABUSIVE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP?**

The issue of the Biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage in the life of a Christian has been a topic of extremely contentious debate for decades. It is not the purpose of this study to enter into that discussion at this time; other than to briefly share my perspective as to what the New Testament teaches us in that regard. I believe that there are three Biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. First, if one spouse is guilty of adultery, then one option for the offended spouse would be that of divorce and remarriage, with the re-marriage free from being considered as adulterous by God (Matthew 5:31-32). Second, if the divorce, for whatever reason, takes place prior to one's conversion to Christ, Romans 7:1-6 makes it clear that the sins which were committed during a person's life before salvation, do not "carry-over" into our Christian life. Simply put, divorce is not the unpardonable sin. The authority of the Law to condemn the individual guilty of divorce, is nullified upon one's conversion to Christ. And as a result of our forgiveness in Christ, we would be free to remarry. Third, if the new convert is already married and their unbelieving spouse divorces them, they are free to remarry (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Nevertheless, the question remains in regard to an abusive relationship that could involve two Christians or a Christian and an unbeliever. It could also involve either physically or verbally abusive behavior on the part of one spouse against the other; with the wife being as potentially guilty of such abuse as the husband. There is a provision in the New Testament which grants freedom from such an abusive relationship. It is found in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, where we read the following –

**“But to the married, I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (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.”**

So, the allowance here is clearly limited. There is to be no remarriage after the departure of one spouse from the other. The only option is that of reconciliation to one's original spouse and NOT remarriage to another. Paul doesn't even specify the circumstance under which this should take place. Why? He knew that any marriage relationship can be characterized by a variety of pitfalls, especially since it involves two sinners, whether saved or unsaved. Nevertheless, the marital relationship is not to be taken lightly, with a reconciliation being sought for as the first option.

In conclusion, it is absolutely outrageous to think that some contemporary Evangelical ministers are insisting that a spouse must remain in an abusive relationship, no matter what. Do not listen to such a pastor, whether you are hearing this counsel in person or from someone who claims to be a Christian on social media. Instead, listen to the instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ, as given through the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. If your physical well-being or mental health is in serious danger from an abusive spouse, leave that relationship temporarily, with the hope of a future reconciliation. Or, in the worst-case scenario, depart from that spouse permanently, and remain single for the remainder of your earthly life, with a single-hearted, undistracted devotion to Christ. This is precisely what Paul advises us to do, later in the same chapter, in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.