

Note on I. Cor. vii. 15.

BY PROF. E. P. GOULD.

In regard to the question whether the permission to separate, in this verse, leaves the believer who has been deserted by the husband or wife free to marry again : Meyer says, yes ; because Paul's permission in this case is based on the fact, necessary to his interpretation of the Lord's command, that that command applies only to cases in which both parties are believers, *i. e.*, that it is a Christian, not a general law. DeWette makes the same answer, though on the entirely different ground that the case contemplated here, like the one treated as an exception to his prohibition of divorce by our Lord, is one in which the marriage tie is actually broken. But, as regards Meyer's position, it seems scarcely tenable that our Lord's command is to be treated as merely Christian, and not general law. For his argument in Mt. 19 is based on the original relations of man and woman, established at creation and inherent in their structure, and must therefore be universal in its application, not limited to Christians. It is true that in Mt. 5, Christ is laying down the law of his kingdom, but that law is based on universal human relations and obligations, and is applicable in all its parts to man as such. And in Mt. 19, Christ is discussing what is lawful under the Jewish dispensation, but on the same general grounds. As to De Wette's position, that both in our Lord's treatment of the matter and in Paul's, the exception to the law is reducible to an actual dissolution of the marriage tie, which leaves the party divorced free, our Lord, instead of leaving it so that the two cases can be classed together in this way, himself draws the line between them, and declares that, where there is divorce without adultery, he who marries the divorced party commits adultery. Our Lord does not consider divorce an actual, but only a formal dissolution of the marriage tie.

On the whole, then, it seems that we can go just as far as the apostle does in his exception to the statement of our Lord, and no further. Because there is the line which separates between obedience and infraction of that law. The law is that marriage is a physical connection based on the physical relation of the sexes, and can be dissolved properly only physically and really, not formally. And hence to contract another marriage when there had been no such real dissolution, is, as our Lord says, to commit adultery, which is certainly applicable to this case. But what the apostle actually permits involves no infraction of the law on the part of the believer to whom he is speaking. For when he advises the Christian to allow the unbeliever to depart in order to avoid strife, it simply means that he is to accept the situation forced on him, he himself being passive in the matter. And it is important to notice that the apostle says not a word against the obligation of the unbelieving husband or wife to keep up the connection, but simply permits him to have his way, as something beyond the apostle's control. But if we may judge from what he commands in the case over which he as a Christian apostle does have control, we should say that he does not consider the action permitted to be morally right.