

IS DIVORCE (AND REMARRIAGE) PERMITTED FOR CHRISTIANS?

In the New Testament, Paul's teachings NEVER give permission for divorce or remarriage:

- * Paul gave the Lord's commandment in 1 Cor.7:10-11 that a couple who separate cannot be remarried to anyone else, but can either remain separate or can return to each other. Divorce is not an option.
- * Paul gave his personal counsel in 1 Cor.7:12-16 that if a Christian is married to an unbeliever they should not become divorced, but if the unbeliever should leave their spouse, then the righteous person does not have to chase after them, their separation can let the Christian live in peace alone.
- * In 1 Cor.7:39 a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Again, no divorce or remarriage permitted.
- * In Rom.7:2-3 Paul repeats that a woman is bound to her husband "till death do we part." However, he also adds that anyone who remarries commits adultery.

In the Gospel of Mark (10:6-12) and Luke (16:18), Jesus taught that there is NEVER permission for divorce or remarriage.

WHAT ABOUT CHRIST'S ONLY EXCEPTION PERMIT FOR DIVORCE, IN MT.19:9? "Except for Fornication"

"Matthew 19:9 "Whoever will put away his wife except for fornication (porneia), and shall marry another, commits adultery (moichao); and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery (moichao)."

PORNEIA: is translated fornication (KJV), marital unfaithfulness (NIV), and unchastity and immorality (NASV). The modern English word 'pornography' comes from this Greek word, although porneia did not mean exactly that.

MOICHAO: is translated as adultery (KJV), adultery (NIV), and adultery (NASV)

What is the word 'fornication'(porneia), as used in the Bible? It is sexual immorality between unmarried persons, 1 Cor.7:2, Jn.8:41. Adultery is sexual immorality when one or both are married, Lev.20:10. The NASV version does not make that difference clear, and the NIV translation (which sometimes oversimplifies words) is worse. However, comparing scripture to scripture, the above definition is very clear. All the other New Testament scriptures say that divorce is never permitted for married persons, and these words of Jesus agree with all the rest.

There is a difference between fornication (porneia) and adultery, they are two different sexual sins as confirmed by Galatians 5:19, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these; adultery (moichao), fornication (porneia), uncleanness, lewdness..." (KJV)

The exception clause of Jesus is found only in Matthew's gospel. You cannot find "except for fornication" in Mark, Luke, or anywhere else in the New Testament. The reason is because Matthew wrote his gospel specifically to the Jews, who had their own marriage customs, and these Jews understood what this meant in their culture.

A Jewish engagement was counted to be almost as important as a marriage. When a man and woman were engaged, the engagement in itself was almost as binding as a marriage. During this period of engagement (which usually lasted for about one year), they were called "husband" and "wife." The engagement itself was very sacred thing to the Jews.

Jesus, speaking to the Jews in Matthew (as Matthew was written specifically to the Jews), was simply saying that if during the engagement there had been “fornication” (not adultery), they could put away their engaged wife or husband. In other words, they could break the engagement.

An example of this is found in Matthew 1:18-20. Joseph and Mary were only engaged at the time of Mt.1:18-19. While they were only engaged, Mary becomes pregnant (by the Holy Spirit). Joseph was very upset. At first he thought she had been involved in fornication, and he was going to “put her away” or divorce her.

Matthew 1:19 “Then Joseph *her husband*.” Though they were only engaged, still they were called husband and wife by custom. “Joseph... was minded to put her away.” How can you put away somebody you are not even married to? Simple! The Jews regarded the engagement almost as binding as marriage, and they were called husband and wife even during engagement. So all Jesus is saying in 19:9, is that if there has been “fornication” during engagement, you can put away or divorce your engaged husband or wife.

The “except for fornication” is not found in Mark or Luke. In these two other gospels Jesus did not offer any permitted reason for divorce. The reason for these apparent differences in the teaching of Jesus are accounted for by the differences in the cultures & customs to which these books were aimed. Mark was written to the Romans. Luke was written to the Greeks, and both of these cultures did not have the marriage custom of the Jews for engaged couples. The Gospel of Matthew was specifically written to the Jews and took into account their own Jewish customs. Only Matthew's gospel gives the 'exception clause' for divorce, because it only applied to Jewish culture, and this gospel also gives us an example of how it was used in Jewish culture in the story of Joseph and Mary!

* You can also see another example in two Gospels how divorce is spoken of differently according to the different cultures that these two gospels are speaking to. In Matthew 19:9, Jesus said that if a man divorces his wife (except for *porneia*) it is adultery- a woman divorcing her husband is not mentioned, because Matthew was written to the Jews, and they did not allow women to divorce. But in Mark 10:11-12 Jesus said that if a man or woman divorces their spouse, it is adultery. This was mentioned to both men & women because Mark was written to the Romans, who permitted both men and women to divorce their spouse.

So to the Romans and the Greeks (and to the Filipinos and to modern societies), the commandment of Jesus is clear: there is never permission for divorce and remarriage, it is adultery! This applies to every culture that does not need a legal divorce for a broken engagement. Jesus permitted the breaking of an engagement because of fornication, but did not permit the breaking of a marriage.

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

FROM THE BEGINNING: At the time of Adam and Eve, God instituted marriage. His marriage laws apply to Adam's entire race, saved or unsaved! There are serious consequences when any of these laws are broken, whether a person is saved or not, Mk.10:9.

POLYGAMY - although it was “legal” in the O.T. it was never blessed. Look at the unhappy home life of Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, or Gideon, who each had more than one wife. Polygamy is forbidden today.

LEVITICUS 21:7- The ministry were forbidden to divorce and remarry. It was considered defilement even in the O.T. where the standards were much lower than today.

DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4 Although divorce was *permitted* under Moses, God was not *pleased* to give this permission. In Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:5-9, Jesus interprets Deut. 24:1-2 as being against His will.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA- Although his wife became an adulteress, God told Hosea to take her back, Hos.3:1-2. In the same way, God was going to restore His adulterous wife Israel. God was “married to them,” He said

in Jer.3:14, Ezek.16:8. This is a revelation of God's character - divorce is not part of His nature. If we know His character we will understand truth and doctrine!

MALACHI- Malachi 2:13-16 is God's view on divorce. He said, "I hate divorce"! God calls it treachery. Deut. 24:1-2 was against His perfect will. God calls marriage a covenant in Malachi. God does not honor broken vows or covenants, Eccles.5:4-6. He wouldn't listen to their prayers, Malachi 2:13.

THE NEW TESTAMENT GIVES A MUCH HIGHER STANDARD: Divorce & remarriage and polygamy are outlawed in the New Testament. See: Luke 16:17-18; Mark 10:1-12; Romans 7:1-3; Matthew 19:9, 5:31-32.

MATTHEW 5:17-48 In the New Testament, God does not lower His standards of righteousness. He raises them! Now we have the Holy Spirit living inside us to help us to be righteous and obey God's laws.

MATTHEW 14:3-10 tells us that John the Baptist lost his head because he preached against the king's divorce & remarriage! His calling- and ours, to prepare the way of the Lord for the 2nd Coming- is to bring repentance and restoration to families, Lk.1:17, Mal.4:5-6.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11 Paul repeated the command of the Lord, that divorce is forbidden- but if one does divorce the other, they are to remain unmarried or become reconciled. In 1 Cor.7:12-15 Paul then goes on to add his personal opinion: if you are married to an unbeliever, do not divorce: but if the unbeliever departs, then let them depart. However, Paul did not go on to say the believer could get remarried- he had already stated the command of the Lord in vs.10-11 that did not allow remarriage!

1 TIMOTHY 3:2; 3:12; TITUS 1:6 Marital purity is very important in the ministry, and being divorced and remarried will disqualify someone from being a minister.

WHY DID MOSES PERMIT DIVORCE? (Read Mt.19:3-12, Mk.10:1-12)

WHY DID MOSES PERMIT DIVORCE? ANSWER: "Because of the hardness of your hearts."

This was a judgment! Hardness of heart never brings blessing from God, but judgment. Therefore, this permission to divorce was not a good statute. In Ezekiel 20:25. the Lord said, "Wherefore I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."

Consider what else happened to Moses' generation because of hardness of heart. They didn't inherit God's promises and possess the land, but wandered for 40 years, Psalm 95:8-11, Hebrews 3:7-17. This was the hard-hearted generation that God gave permission to divorce.

In Psalm 106:13-15 we read more about Moses' generation. "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." In this story, Israel was out of the perfect will of God, but God allowed them to have what they wanted. The Israelites also wanted divorce, so God gave them permission. He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. Permission to divorce was a judgment.

Every place in God's Word where people hardened their hearts, it brought God's displeasure. Permission to divorce because of hardness of heart was a judgment. God was not pleased to give this statute. He was grieved with that generation.

Israel also later asked for a king, although the Lord was their king. God gave them a king in His anger- but He gave them their request! This is part of the nature of God. He will give people their requests but send leanness into their soul, He will send judgment, when their requests are evil.

Although divorce was "permitted" in the Law, it was not the "spirit" or the "perfect will" of the Law because in other places in the O.T. such as in Malachi 2:13-16, the Lord said that He hated divorce and calls it treachery.

THE PHARISEES - used the O.T. Scriptures to justify divorce.

THE LORD JESUS - used the O.T. Scriptures to condemn divorce.

How we interpret the Scriptures will depend upon what is in our hearts. Will we be like the Pharisees or Jesus?

THE DANGERS OF DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE:

1. It increases sin (adultery), unforgiveness, and evil thoughts (maybe I should get divorced and marry *her*...)
2. If the 2nd marriage "appears" to be blessed, it can encourage others to also get divorced & remarried.
3. It is a broken covenant that brings judgment, Eccles.5:4-6.
4. The "option" of divorce & remarriage encourages people to not work out difficult marriage problems.
5. It damages the lives of the children.
6. It divides and confuses families and relatives.
7. It increases the possibility of incest, for a man living with young girls who are not his own children.
8. It disqualifies from ministry, 1 Tim.3:2, Lev.21:7, Mk.10:11-12. (So divorced & remarried ministers should not be allowed to speak from your pulpit.)
9. It is a bad testimony for Christians: Christ cannot save & restore our marriage!
10. It lowers the spiritual and moral defenses of a family, church, or nation.

IF A COUPLE ARE DIVORCED & REMARRIED, SHOULD THEY SEPARATE TO BE GOOD CHRISTIANS?

Divorce & remarriage is sinful according to the New Testament. However, it is legal in many nations, and even many churches think it is OK and can be blessed by God. So what should you do, as a minister, to handle these problems?

- 1) If two people are thinking of getting married, and one or both are divorced & remarried, you should not give them your blessing. If you are in a position to speak into their lives (as a minister over them, or as a friend or relative) try to show them that it is not acceptable to God. Love them, but do not support or bless their wedding.
- 2) If they are Christians who are already married (but previously divorced), and if you are in a position to speak into their lives, try to show them the unscriptural, sinful foundations to their second marriage. Try to lead them to repentance in this area of their lives, and help them to maintain the public testimony that it was wrong and that others should not follow in their path.
- 3) If they are legally divorced and remarried, but are now functioning as a Christian family, it is generally thought to be wisdom that the family should not be split up, especially for the benefit of the children, 1 Cor.7:17-24. However, the couple are disqualified from ministry (1 Tim.3:2 & Titus 1:6) and should not be given a pulpit ministry. Ministers must have a reputation above reproach (1 Tim.3:7 & Titus 1:7) or else they will not be able to properly build righteousness into their church and community.