

As Christ Loved the Church

Remarriage in the twenty-first century

The view of church leaders has shifted dramatically in this generation regarding remarriage. Why?

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"AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH" *a parable*

Long ago the Everlasting Father sought for a wife. He chose Israel. Not because of her beauty or for her love for Him nor for her virtues, but He chose her because He loved her. His wife complained in Egypt, griped in the wilderness, became a harlot in Canaan, rejected Him in the Promised Land, and then prostituted herself in Babylon. Sometimes she was contrite, sometimes apathetic, sometimes hateful. At times she did not love Him at all. But He loved her still. She bore Him a Son then rejected her own child. She left her husband and her homeland. But He loved her still. Her Son grew up, and the Everlasting Father chose a bride for His Son.

The Son's bride was also unfaithful. She disobeyed. She rebelled. She prostituted herself with false religions, materialism and lustful living. But the Son loved His bride. He wanted to present her to His Everlasting Father, pure and blameless, without spot or blemish. He had given His very life for her. He loves her. Someday He will present her to His Father as a chaste virgin, pure and holy. He has chosen His bride. He will never seek another no matter how far away His bride should stray. He will never marry another. She is His. He has chosen her and given her His seal, His inheritance and His pledge that He will never leave her nor forsake her. He has vowed a vow and will never break it. He loves His bride. If she leaves Him, He will always be true. He has given us the example.

"So ought men to love their wives."

". . . 'til death. . ."

Over the years as I have talked with young engaged men who came to me for counsel, I've asked each one a very pointed question. "Suppose there comes a time in your marriage that your wife leaves you. She despises your name, your face, even the thought of you. What if she comes to the point where she abhors the very memory of your touch? What if she divorces you? What are you going to do?"

I tell him it happens thousands of times every day.

And then I let him squirm. It isn't a pleasant thought for a man in love who is planning a wedding even to consider that the day may come when his wife would leave him for another man.

He and I have already been over the Scriptures in Ephesians 5 that demand that a husband love his wife as Christ loved the Church. He knows his responsibility. We've already seen that Christ will never seek another bride though His bride is unfaithful. He sees this responsibility, too. "Will you love her unconditionally forever?"

Do I have the right to tell him that there will never be an excuse good enough in the sight of God to warrant his remarriage to another (save, of course, for death)? May I tell him that "from the beginning" [*the Garden of Eden*] God did not allow any divorce or remarriage of any kind for any reason [*Matthew 19.8*]? May I tell him that under the Mosaic Law, God overturned His first decision (*which had stood for several thousand years*) and permitted divorce only because of hard and sinful hearts [*Mark 10.5*]? *Exclusively operative during the Old Testament Law.*

Well, that is what I do tell him. I caution him on the awesome responsibility that he undertakes in choosing a bride. I tell him that marriage is a picture of the most intimate relationship that God has with people.

The Lord has pictures of at least six relationships with us:

1. Creator to creation (*important but somewhat distant*)
2. God to people
3. King to subjects
4. Savior to saved
5. Father to son (*a very close relationship, perhaps God's favorite*)
6. Husband to bride (*by far the most intimate - He is very jealous of this relationship.*)

Christ fulfilled Moses' Law and established the law of grace—the law of liberty. He overturned Mosaic laws and established higher standards. Under grace the bonds of marriage have become even more stringent than under Law. His disciples recognized this awesome truth and they said, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry." [*Matthew 19.10*]

Divorce today has run rampant. Far worse than the sin of divorce is the fact that Christians accept it as a part of our society. Even far more appalling is the stamp of approval we put on remarriage after divorce. There is not one verse in the New Testament that explicitly allows for remarriage if a divorce does occur.

Remarriage is a sin that is under the blood. It can be forgiven as fully and completely as murder or slander or gossip. It is not an albatross to be hung around the neck of the divorcee never to be forgotten or forgiven. But like gossip or slander or murder, there are consequences that can never be removed. However, in a unique way God has separated all sins that involve sex in a category by themselves. "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." [*1 Corinthians 6.18*].

Totally Forgivable

If you are divorced, do you see your divorce as a forgivable sin? Do you realize that if you call it sin in deep sorrow, and have already confessed it, you been completely forgiven [*John 1.9*]? Sin should not separate us from God, but it should draw us closer to His side as we stand in awe of His holiness. We should see a just, pure God willing to look with compassion on sinful us.

I have been counseling a young man who has recently gone through a divorce and is now contemplating remarriage. Repeatedly he has rehearsed his ex-wife's sins, keeping me up to date on her progress in immorality. Though he admits that he has also done wrong, he never has mentioned any specific thing which he could have done to improve his half the bargain. He is a prime case of self-justification in Christian divorces. Before the divorce was finalized she asked him to take her back. He told her it would be utterly impossible unless she promised to stop her old ways. She said she couldn't and he said he wouldn't take her back. Clearly he did not love her "as Christ loved the Church."

Later he told me that he fully intended to remarry because, "I'm a red-blooded American boy and I just couldn't live without a wife." He felt that if God required him to live a life of singleness it would be too great a punishment for him to bear. I tried to explain the difference between chastening from God and consequences from our own decisions. Singleness is not a sin nor a punishment, but it is God's plan to heal us. Even among the Christian community the success rate of second marriages is drastically low.

Is Remarriage to be Based on Scripture or Social Standards?

The proper view of the issue, however, is not found in discussing hypothetical situations but must be decided by a biblical foundation. As we look at the eight portions of Scripture I want you to notice an important principle.

There are four facets to this matter.

- Church instructions in the epistles
- Rules set up in the Garden of Eden
- Moses' laws for the nation of Israel
- Christ's explanation to the Pharisees about Moses' laws

I disagree strongly with the hermeneutic procedure of those who start their study by examining the "exception clause" in Matthew 19. That will be our last step. Most who defend remarriage start there. All the rest start with Mosaic laws for Israel. I have not read one commentator who supports remarriage for those in the Church Age who addresses the epistles before discussing Jesus' words or Moses'.

To begin with Jesus' words, would be to use the Mosaic Law as the foundation during the Church Age. We're not going to study remarriage that way. We will look at the Church directives first. The Church is not under Mosaic laws, but we are certainly under OT moral laws all the way back to Adam.

Remember, in Matthew 19 Jesus was giving a commentary to **unsaved** Pharisees who wanted to know about divorce regulations by the Mosaic Law. It was a trap. Virtually every book in my office that addresses this topic begins with the Old Testament Law or else with Christ's answers to the unbelieving Pharisees about the Law.

Four sets of rules for remarriage: We'll address them in this order:

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1st | New rules for the Church Age, | Paul's epistles |
| 2nd | Oldest rules from the Garden of Eden, | Matt 19.8 |
| 3rd | Moses' new rules for the nation of Israel, | OT Law, Deut 22 & 24 |
| 4th | Jesus' comments on the OT Law, | Gospels |

CHURCH EPISTLES *2 remarriage passages*

THE EPISTLES AND REMARRIAGE

I Corinthians 7.10

"To the married I give instructions . . . the wife should not leave her husband."

- a. Wives should not divorce (*leave*) husbands.
- b. Under Old Testament regulations, the wife never had any right to bring a divorce charge against her husband.

I Corinthians 7.11

"But if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband."

The New Testament never gives more than these two alternatives to those formerly married:

- a. Singleness
- b. Reconciliation

No long explanation is needed. God is clear in what He says.

I Corinthians 7.39

"A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

The obvious reading of this verse is clear. Marriage bonds are for the entire lifetime.

If her mate dies the widow has two options:

- a. Remarriage to a believer
- b. Singleness

Again, the plain reading of this verse gives a complete answer.

I Corinthians 7.15

"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases."

The question deals with the believers response to desertion by an unbelieving mate.

- a. The believer is not obligated to stay with an unbeliever who leaves:
 - i.e. she is free to remain single.
- b. *[by implication]* A believer is bound to stay with an unbeliever and may not "leave."

During the Church Age, although a believer is not allowed to marry an unbeliever, neither is she allowed to divorce an unbeliever. This verse also addresses the believer's actions in "no fault" divorce." You are freed to live alone. You are freed from having to stay with the one who left, but it does not say that you are free to remarry. That opportunity is spelled out very clearly in verse 39: "She (*a widow*) is free to be married." It was clear to the Corinthians that all married people were under bondage. They were biblically bound to remain with their partners.

Beware of writers who spend a whole chapter explaining that "let him leave" means "and go marry someone else." It simply means you may "let him leave." The phrase "not under bondage" does not mean "free to remarry."

For 300 years after God gave us the New Testament, not one pastor or writer believed that any Christian could remarry after a divorce. Divorces do happen. These writers knew exactly what the Greek meant. These guys even dreamed in Greek. Don't believe anyone who says the Greek means anything different than its obvious meaning.

Romans 6.23—7.1-4

For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? 2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. . . 4 dead to the law. . . married to [Christ].

The permanence of marriage is used in an illustration in the context of man's salvation.

PRE-MOSAIC LAW

1 remarriage passage

Before Moses was asked to record laws for Israel, there was a law regarding remarriage “from the beginning” in the Garden of Eden.

Before He gave the Mosaic Law God gave absolutely no circumstance that would allow anyone to get a divorce. Matthew tells us later that Moses permitted divorce because of hard, unforgiving hearts.

"but from the beginning it has not been this way." [Matthew 19:8]

MOSAIC LAW

2 remarriage passages

Deuteronomy 22.19

[If he married a virgin] *"she shall remain his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days."*

Plain language. Marry a virgin = never divorce. That's the law.

Deuteronomy 22.20, 21

If this charge is true, [that the girl was not found a virgin], "then they. . .shall stone her."

Plain language. Marry a girl who says she's a virgin and isn't = death. That's the law.

Deuteronomy 22.29

[If they had premarital sex] *"she shall become his wife because he has violated her. He cannot divorce her all his days."*

Plain language: marry after having sex = never divorce. That's the law.

My guess it would also include marrying the mother of any "love child."

Here's the Mosaic Law for the nation of Israel. The following passage is the specific Scripture to which the Pharisees referred in Matthew 19.3 when they were tempting Christ.

Deuteronomy 24.1

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house. . . ."

Jesus says to the Pharisees that the "indecency" is sexual. The answer Christ gave them pointed back to the uncleanness of fornication found in Deuteronomy 22.20,21. They asked Him what the indecency was and He clearly identified it as "porneia" πορνεία. (Since He directed this answer to unbelievers, this would have also applied to anyone who was divorced before he was saved.)

By the by, those who choose to abide by the divorce laws of the Mosaic Law can't be selective. They're obligated to accept the stoning part for pre-marital sex, too.

JESUS AND REMARRIAGE

4 remarriage passages

Notice how many times Jesus connects remarriage to adultery. I count seven times.

Matthew 5.32

"Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Matthew 19.9

"He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. . . .He who divorces his wife. . . and marries another commits adultery."

[Let me deal with the exception clause, "except it be for fornication," a little later.]

Luke 16.18

"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. . . .He who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."

Mark 10.11, 12

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. . . .If she divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

These four verses make it exceptionally clear that Jesus taught a divorcee who remarries commits adultery. It is also clear that anyone who marries a divorcee commits adultery (*even a virgin man could commit adultery with his bride if she was a divorcee*). This is the plain reading of the text.

PART II. ISSUES

the "exception clause"

&

personal "vows"

THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

Matthew 19.9 [vss. 3-12]

"Whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality [fornication, KJV], and marries another commits adultery."

[See also Matthew 5.32.]

Under the Law of Moses, God allowed divorce for only one reason: a hard heart unwilling to forgive premarital fornication. "For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept." [Mark 10.5 & Matthew 19.8] Fornication [*porneias*] is in contrast with adultery [*Gr. moicheuthenai*] in both of the verses that contain the "exception clause."

There is a difference between adultery and fornication. Mosaic Law allowed divorce only in the case of "uncleanness" [Deuteronomy 24.1]. Christ identified this uncleanness as fornication in both Matthew 5.32 and 19.1. It was a sexual sin. Pre-marital sex is fornication which comes from the word "porneia," a broad word that also includes pornography, filthy language, and X-rated movies. By His choice of words, the Lord excluded adultery [*unfaithfulness after marriage*] as the "exception" and specified porneia, the more general term. Certainly He was not giving approval for divorce because of dirty jokes.

It is interesting to note that for the past *2,000 years most church leaders have understood the use of "*porneia*" to refer to pre-marital sex, but in one generation [*which included the "sexual revolution" of the '60s*] Christian theologians have departed from this orthodox interpretation.

*You will find the majority of commentaries written before 1900 [*and all the way back to 100 AD*] agree with the "pre-marital sex" position. Many pastors today assert that they know their Bibles better than the vast majority of theologians over the past 2,000 years of biblical students.

We don't live by the Mosaic Law today, but if we did there would be two precepts:

- a. If a man divorces and remarries for any other reason than fornication, he commits adultery.
- b. Divorce would be allowed for fornication. Fornication is the uncleanness described in Deuteronomy 22.13-21. This is the reason that Joseph would have had the legal right under Law to put away Mary: premarital sex.
- c. Those who disregard the epistles and cling to the OT regulations about remarriage must comply with the fact that no woman ever had any right to initiate divorce proceedings against her husband. We can't pick and choose the parts of a Mosaic law which we prefer.

So, what's the conclusion? If you find yourself in a divorced situation, thank God for the grace He has for you. His grace is sufficient [11 *Corinthians 12.9*]. As you seek to please Him, be assured that He loves you very, very much. Do not remarry.

What if you are already remarried? Accept God's full and free forgiveness. Seek to honor the Lord through your new marriage. Though you must confess your sin (*only once*), you do not have to look at your marriage as a continuing state of adultery.

If you have been wronged, realize that you still have a loving heavenly Father. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart . . . in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct." [*Proverbs 3.5, 6*] He has much work for you to do in your church. You will probably find that the Lord has softened your heart to be especially tender toward others who are in pain or have special needs. There is no one quite as understanding as someone who has gone through the same heartache.

And my heart aches [*as much as it can*] with yours. I have many good friends who sit where you sit.

VOWS AND REMARRIAGE

There is one more verse I'd like to explain. Ecclesiastes 5.4, 5.

"When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying for it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

Now that's a strong statement our Lord made. Whether it is a vow that consummates a marriage or not, we have an obligation to fulfill every vow made before the Lord. When you made that vow of marriage, you can NEVER break that vow without being called a fool by God.

Among my remarried friends (*and these number in the hundreds*), I have found that there is usually an unwillingness to fulfill the obligations that came with making their original marriage vows. For the most part they feel they have no more responsibility to "love, honor and cherish 'til death do us part." In their minds, those obligations seemed to ceased even before their divorce. If you are the victim of a "no fault" legal divorce, simply determine that you will never break your part of the vow. Do not remarry.

Our Father is gracious, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." [*Lamentations 3.22, 23*] He wants you to glorify Him. Allow what has happened in the past to draw you closer to Him. He seeks to have us cast all our care on Him, because He cares for us. [*Peter 5.7*]

Love, Phil Myers

Quotes are from both NASB and KJV.

If sued for divorce, here are 3 statements to read to the judge before the process begins.

A 3-Pronged Defense

1. Your honor, my religion teaches that we are to honor our government. It also disallows me from being judged in a government court of law.

*Read these verses aloud in court
out of your own Bible.*

I Corinthians 6.1 KJV

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints.”

I Corinthians 6.1 NASB

“Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”

Our Church provides that anyone who desires to sue me must stand before the leaders of the church *[his/her church or mine is ok with me]*.

2. I have made a public vow to be faithful to this person forever. I will not break that vow. Our holy book the Bible, declares that I am a fool if I break that vow.

Ecclesiastes 5.4,5 KJV

“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and no pay.”

Ecclesiastes 5.4,5 NASB

“When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!

It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”

If your court of law negates my marriage, I am still obligated by my God to keep my vow, and to act as though that I am still married to this person forever. I will sign all documents, henceforth, as a married person. I will not break my vow.

3. Our holy book also disallows any man *[judge, pastor, or justice of the peace]* to put asunder, nullify, negate, or declare void any marriage which God has joined together.

Mark 10.9 KJV

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Mark 10.9 NASB

“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

My God forbids Your Honor to grant a divorce.

I request that this matter be remanded to the leadership of my mate’s Church, and if he/she does not have a Church where he/she attends regularly, then I request it be remanded to the leadership of my church.

Thank you, Your Honor.

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