

**Marriage, Divorce, and
Remarriage:**
A Biblical Perspective

Biblical Perspectives
on Present Day Issues, #2

by
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Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: A Biblical Perspective

By Clair Martin

The matter of divorce is all around us, in our families, and among our friends and work acquaintances. It is painful and hurtful, and it causes much heartache.

The Bible says that when a person is divorced and then remarried, the resulting sin is adultery. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 how serious it is.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

However, it doesn't stop there.

But such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.

Certainly, there will be people in heaven who have committed adultery, but they will be there because they repented. If you are divorced and remarried, some of the things presented here and the words of scripture may pierce your heart. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:12 that the Word of God pierces the soul and exposes sin. Let us allow God's Word to speak to us as we look at this subject. We simply want to present the truth in a loving way.

First, let us look briefly at marriage. We have no information about Adam and Eve's wedding, or of their marriage

vows. In fact, there is no record of any marriage vows in the Bible. Look at Genesis 2:18-24:

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

This is as close as we can come to Adam and Eve's marriage. Adam was created single. Was Eve created single or married? We do not know. The closest we come to a marriage vow is in verse 23 where Adam says, "This is now. . ." meaning from this time forward. In our marriage vows we "now" pronounce the couple husband and wife – from this time forward. Also in verse 24 God speaks about becoming one flesh, or uniting in marriage.

Some years ago a friend shared this definition of marriage which he took from several sources: "Marriage is a universal process of divine origin and regulation in which an unmarried man and an unmarried woman, by mutual con-

sent, are permanently made to be one flesh by God." Marriage is a universal process around the world, across the globe. It is of divine origin. God ordained it.

We want to look at a number of pertinent scriptures on this subject. In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 we read:

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

We note here in Deuteronomy that Moses allowed for divorce. The Bible says it was because of the hardness of their hearts. This was not God's perfect will, but what He allowed for that time. In this passage Israel was given instruction that a person who was divorced was not permitted to go back to their first partner. Our next passage is Malachi 2:15b-16a. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away." Other translations substitute "divorce" for "putting away". That is God's heart on divorce. Now let's look at Matthew 5:31-32:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his

wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement [Deuteronomy 24]: But I [Jesus] say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

In Matthew 19:3-12 we read where the Pharisees questioned Jesus on the matter of divorce:

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered [allowed] you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of

heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Then in Mark 10:2-12 we read:

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

Also Luke 16:18:

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

Romans 7:1-3 reads:

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? 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. 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.

The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 7 is relevant to the subject. Look at verses 10 and 11:

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

For many years these scriptures were clearly understood by the Protestant churches to mean that divorce and remarriage were outside of God's will. Only within the past 50-60 years have we seen the increased rate of divorce in our society. This is true for several reasons. One may be due to the wording of various translations of the Bible. The Bible also says that in the last days people will "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." In other words, they will hear only what they want to hear. They will find persons who will tell them what they want to hear. People look for loopholes to get around the matter of divorce and remarriage. In 2 Peter 3:16 we read that people will twist the scriptures to their own destruction. Peter, referring here to Paul's writing, says, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [twist], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Here is the warning for us (v.17): "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

One of the most prominent loopholes that people use to get around this subject is the so-called "exception clause" found in the book of Matthew. Preachers today are telling people that it is okay to divorce and remarry if your partner has been sexually unfaithful. Before we look at the meaning of the Greek word used here, it is important to understand to whom these different scriptures were addressed. Matthew was writing primarily to a Jewish audience. The Book of Mark was written primarily to the Romans, and Luke was written primarily to a Greek audience. Neither Mark nor Luke contains the exception clause.

There are two different views of the exception clause, both in line with scripture. The first we want to look at is the betrothal view. When a young Jewish man wished to get married, he went to the prospective bride's house and attempted to strike a deal, an agreement regarding the bride price, or dowry. This would result in a betrothal or covenant relationship. The young man then returned to his father's house and lived at home for approximately one year. During that time the young man and his betrothed were referred to as husband and wife, even though they did not live together. This would parallel what we call the engagement period.

To illustrate, when Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant and while he debated what to do, he was visited by an angel who told him, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife" (Matthew 1:20). They were referred to as husband and wife. The word espoused, used in verse 18, means betrothed. There we read: "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together." That would indicate that there had been no sexual relationship.

This exception clause in the Book of Matthew does not refer to a marriage divorce; it refers to a betrothal divorce. If during the one year period before the couple came together,

the young man discovered that his bride to be, or wife as she was called, had been sexually unfaithful to him, he would be able to divorce her. He needed to divorce her because the engagement period was legally binding in their society. That is why we find it only in the Book of Matthew. It was not applicable to the primary audiences of Mark and Luke.

Notice the use of the word fornication in Matthew 19:9. It does not say adultery. Fornication speaks to sexual relations between two unmarried people. A word of caution: in this passage some translations use different terms. For instance, the NKJV has *sexual immorality*, the NIV *marital unfaithfulness*, NASB *immorality*, and the Amplified Bible *unchastity*. It should be noted that the choice of the Greek word here is very important. It is easy to see why some people prefer what they find in some of these translations: it fits what they want to understand from this scripture. The Greek word for fornication here is *porneia*. It is the root word from which we get the word pornography. While the definition of *porneia* can and does mean any kind of illicit sexual activity, the context clearly indicates here that it speaks of sexual activity between two unmarried persons, which is best represented by the English word *fornication*.

While there are times in scripture when the word fornication refers to the broad scope of illicit sexual relationships, notice here in Matthew 19:9 that fornication and adultery are used in contrast to each other. When this happens in the Greek language, the two words cannot mean the same thing. If Jesus had meant adultery, as some of these other translations state, He would have used the word for adultery, *moichao*. Jesus was careful here in His choice of words because the Pharisees were testing or tempting Him. He was very careful to make Himself clear. Jesus did not say divorce and remarriage is okay if sexual unfaithfulness has happened in a marriage; but rather that the betrothal can be broken if

sexual unfaithfulness happens within that time period. This was what Joseph was planning to do as noted in Matthew 1:19: "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away [divorce her] privily." It is clear the only time a "wife" could possibly commit fornication would be during the betrothal period. After marriage, it would be called adultery.

In Jesus' day there were two trains of thought on this subject. There were two teachers, Hillel, who allowed divorce for basically any reason, and Shammai, who was a stricter, more conservative teacher who said that divorce was allowable for marital unfaithfulness only. These were the two theories prevalent in Jesus' day, and the attempt here in this passage was to pull Jesus into a controversy they had between themselves. Instead of identifying with either of these schools of thought, Jesus went further. He said, "From the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). From the beginning God had no intention of allowing divorce. His intention was, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).

The disciples were shocked at Jesus' response. Their reaction was that, if this is the way it is, it would be better not to get married. They understood the seriousness of marriage – that there was no way out. Marriage was binding.

Those who hold to the exception clause in Matthew 19, as other translations read, should also look at the corresponding verses in Mark and Luke where it simply says, "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery." Nowhere in the New Testament does it give any hint that sexual unfaithfulness is a cause for divorce and remarriage. Adultery does not break the marriage vows, it only violates them. It does not make the marriage vows of no effect. As an illustration, if you go to the bank

and take out a loan to buy a house and commit to a 30-year mortgage, then miss a payment, does that free you from the mortgage? Certainly not! You are still responsible to make payments. In the same way, adultery does not break the marriage vows, it only violates them. This describes the betrothal view. I recommend for your reading the book *Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* by John Coblentz.

The second view is referred to as the patriarchal view. While the betrothal position is compatible with Jesus' major position of no divorce and no remarriage, no early Christian writer understood this as referring to the Jewish betrothal period. It is apparent the early church writers in the second, third, and fourth centuries did not understand the word *porneia* as fornication strictly speaking. Their understanding of this word was whoredom or persistent unfaithfulness. Jesus was not here making an exception for an adulterous affair or marital unfaithfulness, or He would have used the word for adultery, *moichao*. What He was addressing was the matter of a promiscuous partner. Jesus was saying no divorce and remarriage, except that a man may put away his wife if she persists in sexual unfaithfulness; He was saying a person who has a promiscuous partner is not bound to live in a three-way relationship. The early Church almost universally taught this position. To understand their position, we must realize that their understanding of putting away was not like our modern divorce.

Modern divorce procedure allows one to go through the legal system and thus be free to remarry. The early church, however, clearly understood that Jesus had done away with that kind of divorce (granted by Moses). Divorcing in the sense of severing the union and permitting remarriage was not permitted in the early church. To "put away" simply meant "to leave" or to "send them forth." This was more of a physical process than a legal process. It was the equivalent

of separation. The early church understood that Jesus' exception meant that a Christian companion could put away a promiscuous companion. If a husband or wife was practicing unfaithfulness, the faithful partner was allowed to "put away" the unfaithful one.

Jesus had done away with the Mosaic standards. The early church understood that to put away a companion for whoredom meant one of two things: if you sent your wife out, it meant that either you remained single or you were reconciled. Remarriage was not an option. This position is consistent with the way God related to Israel. God wanted Israel to be faithful to Him. When they turned to idols, He withdrew His presence, not to seek someone else, but to wait on them until they repented and came back to His love. This is the patriarchal view of the exception clause.

Both views, the betrothal view and the patriarchal view, are consistent with Jesus' position of no divorce and no remarriage. Marriage is for life—no exceptions.

Next we want to look at several questions. Is adultery an act or a state? What about pre-Christian relationships? What does the phrase "not under bondage" mean? What about the innocent victim? Do divorced and remarried people need to separate to make things right?

Let us look at what could be called the second loophole. Is adultery an act or a state? It can be both. In the New Testament, every incident where an individual remarries while the first partner is still living is called adultery. Does adultery happen in the *act* of being remarried or in the *state* of being remarried? If adultery happens in the state of being remarried, then that individual needs to get out of that relationship in order to truly repent. He needs to stop that relationship. Look at Romans 7:1-6. Verses 2 and 3 say:

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. 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.

Notice in verse 3 it says, "if while her husband liveth she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress." That is the present (continuous action) tense. She not only committed adultery, but is continuing to commit adultery in an on-going relationship. Why is it called adultery? It is because the first marriage is still binding. The Bible says that in God's eyes death is the only thing that ends a marriage.

The state will tell you differently. It says if you get a divorce, you are then free to be remarried. But that is not what the Bible says. If divorce ended a marriage in God's eyes, then any following relationship would not be adultery. It would be the same as a widow or widower getting remarried. A widow does not need to repent if she remarries. The only thing that ends the marriage relationship is the death of one of the partners.

Some would say that we who hold this position treat adultery as almost unforgivable. They claim we are not willing to forgive adultery as we do other sins. But we do treat adultery as any other sin that must be repented of and its practice stopped as proof of repentance. Those who argue otherwise are the ones who treat adultery differently from other sins. When a person repents, they discontinue the sinful activity in which they were engaged. For instance, if a thief comes to Christ, he discontinues being a thief. When he truly repents, he stops stealing. A homosexual person

who comes to Christ and repents of his sin needs to leave that lifestyle. A liar stops lying when he repents and gives his heart to the Lord. He no longer practices deception. The only way to forgiveness is repentance, discontinuing the sin, and placing it under the blood of Jesus. Adultery must be treated that way.

Acknowledging the sin is not enough; it must be stopped. One cannot find forgiveness of sin simply by acknowledging the activity as wrong. Both the Old and New Testaments are very clear that it is presumptuous for a person to ask forgiveness for a sin and then remain in it. For instance, in Jeremiah 7:9-10 God asks, "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely... And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" God says, "I didn't set you free from these sins to continue in them." Sadly, this is happening in the church today. People are coming to church and praising the Lord while living in an adulterous relationship. Jeremiah 7:8 says, "Ye trust in lying words, which cannot profit." The margin notes call it "false trust, false profession."

This is not a popular message in our day. There is much deception taught from the pulpit about this subject and what God's Word says about it. In the New Testament when the Pharisees came to John the Baptist to be baptized, he did not mince words; he spoke the truth and he spoke it plainly. We must do the same.

Next we want to focus on what happens when people confess sin but continue in that sin. In Matthew 3:7-8 we have John the Baptist's response: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits

meet for repentance." In other words, they were to demonstrate their repentance by a genuine and observable sorrow for their sin and forsaking it. The Amplified Bible says, "Let your lives prove your change of heart." For instance, we would not think of telling a thief that if he simply acknowledged that what he was doing was wrong, he could keep on doing it. That would be absurd! In a sense, that is what some are telling people who are in an adulterous relationship. That is man's reasoning – it is not biblical.

Another loophole some people hide behind is that of pre-Christian marital relationships. This is a very emotional issue. What do you do when an individual who has been married, divorced, and remarried, maybe even several times, comes to the Lord Jesus Christ and gets saved? The popular argument is that since God forgives sin we certainly can't hold them to previous relationships. But let us look at Mark 10:6-9 where Jesus is talking about the institution of marriage:

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

This scripture says marriage is a divine institution, not necessarily a Christian institution. Do you see the difference? Jesus said, "From the creation" this was God's plan. Before there was anything like a Christian or a non-Christian, from the beginning of Creation God made them male and female and intended for them to find fulfillment in uniting in marriage. Marriage did not just begin or become binding since the beginning of the Christian era. It was God's plan for mankind from Creation.

It is our conviction that God has placed within every individual, Christian or non-Christian, the knowledge that marriage is binding. An example of this is what David Livingstone found when he went to the unreached people of Africa. He discovered that those who never before had the Word of God presented to them knew that adultery was wrong. He also discovered that they realized stealing was wrong. How did they know that? It seems that God has placed certain basic ethical understandings within people. They have an innate sense of right and wrong, without ever having heard God's Word. Romans 1 sheds light on the matter of people being accountable to God. Verses 18 and 20 and following relate to man's accountability to God.

Another word we need to look at regarding pre-Christian marital relationships is the word "whosoever" as it is used in this context. Mark 10:11 reads: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her." Matthew 5:32 and six other passages in scripture connected to divorce and remarriage also use that word or a form of it. "Whosoever" is all-inclusive. It means anyone and everyone. There are other verses in the Bible where that word is used. For instance, John 3:16 tells us "whosoever" believes in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life. We readily admit that verse means everyone. Acts 2:21 reads, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." We understand that to mean everyone. When the Bible uses this word in connection with marriage and says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another commits adultery," that is all-inclusive. Regardless of the culture or ethnic group, the Bible says marriage is binding, Christian or not.

Let's look at several verses in 1 Corinthians 7. There are several verses here that relate to pre-Christian marriages. Some people quote verses from this passage to claim it is

okay for an individual to remain in that condition if they were not saved initially, but then got saved while in a divorce and remarriage situation. Verse 17 states, "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." Verse 20: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." Verse 24: "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." Some claim these verses give the person the right to stay in whatever relationship they are in when they get saved.

But look at the context of these verses. Here Paul was talking about two things, circumcision and servanthood - or being a slave. He was saying that if one got saved and was not circumcised, it was not necessary to become circumcised. If one gets saved and is a slave to someone, he should not try to get free. Paul was not talking about sinful or wrong living. He was not saying, if you were a murderer you may keep on murdering or if you were a thief you may continue being a thief now that you are saved. Nor was he saying if you are an adulterer it is okay to keep on being an adulterer.

The Bible makes it clear what God expects: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). When a person repents, they must confess their sin and turn from sinful living. They must confess their sin and forsake it. Romans 6:1, 2 says, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." God expects a changed life when one truly repents.

Does God recognize the marriage of non-Christians? In Mark 6 we have the account of John the Baptist. He literally lost his head over this issue. "For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for

Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John said unto Herod, it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:17). According to this passage, John told Herod it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. What law was he talking about? He was talking about God's eternal law, the law that was from the beginning—one man and one woman for life. Herod was not a Jew and neither was he a Christian. John told him that this relationship was unlawful. She was not Herod's wife but the wife of his brother, Philip. Herod was living in an adulterous relationship with Philip's wife. God had obviously recognized the marriage relationship of Philip and his wife, two non-Christians.

It is true that God does not recognize some marriages. For instance, in the above situation, the marriage that God did not recognize was the marriage of Herod to his brother Philip's wife. God did not recognize that marriage because the first marriage was still binding. Hebrews 13:4 also sheds light on this matter as it indicates that marriage is binding between both Christians and non-Christians: "Marriage is honourable in all [among all, by all], and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." God also recognized the marriage of two wicked persons in the Old Testament, the marriage between King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31).

So we can see that marriage is not primarily a Christian institution, but a divine institution, binding upon all who enter into it. If God did not recognize the marriage of unbelievers, it would be impossible for them to commit adultery. They could be involved in other sexual sins, but it would not be an adulterous relationship if God did not recognize their marriage.

Now let us look at three other difficult issues: what is

called "the innocent victim"; the phrase "not under bondage"; and the question, "Do divorced and remarried people need to separate when they repent to make things right?" These are tough questions and the answers to them are not easy. I refer you again to John Coblenz's book, *Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage*, for additional help on this subject.

When we previously looked at some of the loopholes people have used in argument on this subject of divorce and remarriage, we looked into the scriptures to see what God has to say. We need to approach the subject with kindness and compassion.

First, we want to address the question, "What about the innocent victim?" Does the Bible give the innocent victim freedom to remarry? One wonders just how often there is a totally innocent party in a marriage conflict. As we analyze marital issues and problems, we see that there may have been insensitivity by one or the other which may cause the other partner to overreact, thus causing conflict. It is true that there are varying degrees of fault in any marriage conflict. The person desperately trying to save the marriage will usually readily admit that they have not always done everything right or as they should have. Therefore, to say that one party is totally innocent may not be accurate.

However, for our discussion we are going to assume that one individual is totally innocent. What does the Bible have to say in such a situation? Does the Bible give the totally innocent person whose marriage ends in divorce the right to remarry? Let us look first at Luke 16:18: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." Look at the last part of that verse. It says, "Whosoever marrieth her that is put away [divorced] from her husband committeth adultery." These

are the words of Jesus. He does not clarify the reason for the putting away in this instance. The Old Testament law allowed for a variety of reasons for putting away one's wife, some of which were real issues and some simply non-issues. Whoever marries such a person who was put away involves oneself in an adulterous relationship. This would indicate that the marriage relationship is so sacred that there are no exceptions, even if one party is supposedly innocent. So what are the options?

Let us look at 1 Corinthians 7. This chapter has a lot to say about troubled marriage relationships. Verses 10 and 11 say, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, [the Lord's command] Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." This scripture tells us that when times get tough in one's marriage, we are to "hang in there" and attempt to work out our problems and difficulties. Verse 11 also shows us God's permissive will related to marriage. God does allow for partners to separate *if* the relationship becomes too strained. Notice the first part of the verse: "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." Two options remain once separation has taken place: either remain unmarried or be reconciled to one's partner. The scripture here is saying do not separate, but if you do, do not remarry. On the marriage day couples enter into a covenant relationship with each other to stick together "for better or for worse, until death do us part." This covenant is recorded in heaven and is in effect until one partner dies.

Now let us look at Matthew 19:10-11. These verses follow immediately after the verses addressing divorce and remarriage and portray what we might call the eunuch option. Jesus had just talked about the seriousness of marriage, then

"His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given." The New Living Translation puts it like this: "Not everyone can accept this statement." Verse 12 then continues: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

A eunuch is one who cannot perform sexually. These verses tell us that there are some who are born this way and there are some who have been made this way by man, perhaps even against their own will. The Bible also says that there are those who have committed themselves to a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God. Society tells us that it is too much to expect a person to go through life without enjoying the blessings of marriage. Unfortunately, that same philosophy has crept into the church.

Isaiah 56 tells us that God has a special place in His heart for those who are willing to forgo some of the otherwise acceptable pleasures of life for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Verses 4 and 5 state, "For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Paul also talks about singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:8: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I." Regardless if Paul was ever married or not, he says that it is good if the widows and unmarried abide even as he was currently, unencumbered by marriage obligations.

The Bible exalts the position of singleness for those who have never been married and for those whose partner has died. It is also clear that the Bible permits single persons to get married as well as for widows and widowers to be remarried. However, God does have a blessing in store for those who choose not to get married for spiritual reasons. Look at 1 Corinthians 7:32-38. These verses explain the benefits of singleness. Being single gives one more opportunity to focus on spiritual matters. Surely, if God has a special blessing and grace for those who choose not to marry, He will also have sufficient grace for those who find themselves in a difficult and unfortunate marriage situation. Those who are determined to obey God's Word and go through life not marrying or remarrying will have God's special blessing and grace. It is the responsibility of us as fellow Christians to support those who thus choose to obey God.

Let us now look at the phrase, "not under bondage." Just what does that mean? It appears in 1 Corinthians 7:15. "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace." Some use this verse to declare that if you are married to an unbeliever and the unbelieving partner leaves you, then you are free from the bondage of that marriage, just as you were before you were married, and thus free to remarry. The Greek word for "bound" carries the meaning of an obligation to function as a slave. Paul seems to be saying that if the unbelieving partner departs, you are not obligated to serve him as a slave. You are free from that sort of bondage, not free from the marriage bond. To say it includes being free from the marriage bond would be totally contradictory to the message of the rest of the chapter. Verse 11 says, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." If verse 15 allowed for remarriage, it would be in direct contradiction to verse

11. Scripture does not contradict itself. The married person must always leave the door of reconciliation open. Look at verse 39 of this chapter. It states, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Only death terminates a marriage.

Now let us look at the question, "Do divorced and re-married people need to separate in order to make things right and to truly and fully repent?" This is a difficult issue. How do we handle such? What if children are involved? What if the couple is happy together? Does the Bible give any instruction for such cases?

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were involved in some sinful marital relationships. Ezra 10 provides some counsel on this issue.

And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without [outside], neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us . . . And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty,

they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass (Ezra 10:10-14, 19).

Some translations say, "they solemnly vowed, or pledged." Verse 44, the last verse of this chapter, which follows a long list of people who were involved in this sin, says: "All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children." We can see that children were involved here.

Verse 9 says the people were trembling because of this matter; they were seriously affected. Couples were undoubtedly in love with each other. Proverbs 13:15 says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." Sometimes there is no easy way out of difficult situations. However, the above scripture does indicate a biblical way to experience God's blessing even in tangled marriage relationship situations. Scripturally, there needs to be a voluntary separation of partners who are wrongly married.

There is a story in the March 1996 issue of *Sword & Trumpet* which illustrates this issue. It describes an interview between the pastors of a congregation and a middle aged couple who had become Christians and was looking for a church home. During the interview, there seemed to be a troublesome underlying issue which had not been verbalized. Finally it was revealed that for one of the partners this was their third marriage. There were five children involved and the situation was emotionally intense. The ministers explained, as kindly as possible, their understanding of the teaching of the Bible on the subject. The couple, somewhat upset, left the interview sensing that their questioning was at a dead-end. The ministry, with heavy hearts, assumed that they likely would never see these seekers again. However, they later learned the couple had made arrangements to live separately. The husband continued supporting the family

financially and shared in the spiritual nurture of the children, of whom only two were biologically his own.

This couple had been searching the scriptures for themselves, and what they found did not reassure them in their marriage. They had inquired of four or five other pastors and all assured them that their marriage need not be dissolved, but they found it difficult to reconcile these answers with their understanding of the New Testament. They eventually became members of the first congregation where they had been confronted with the claims of scripture regarding pure marriages. Life is difficult, but they live with the assurance that they responded honestly and correctly to God's Word regarding their marriage. Had the ministers formulated their answer to accommodate unfortunate circumstances rather than maintaining biblical integrity, things would have turned out differently.

This is an area in which continual pressure to compromise is being exerted upon God's people. Some people say taking such a stand is to exclude a large percentage of our population. However, as a church leader once said, "There is a scriptural way out of such circumstances, but most people don't want to take that way." It is hard, as Proverbs 13:15 tells us.

There is another important principle related to some of the difficult situations we face in life. It is found in I Peter 2:19-21:

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted [punished] for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an ex-

ample, that ye should follow his steps.

Look especially at the latter part of verse 20. "But if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." That verse is saying that when we do what is right, even when there are consequences for doing so, this is not unnoticed by God.

We tend to shrink from suffering, but the Bible tells us that we may need to suffer for righteousness' sake. Yes, there are times when we need to suffer for His sake in obedience to His Word.

No doubt more could be said on this subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. It has been my desire to rightly divide God's Word of Truth, and I trust this will also generate further study and discussion on this important subject. However, it is of utmost importance that our discussion and study be Bible-driven and not feelings-driven. We dare not trifle with God's Word. Our response must be one of obedience, not of accommodation to society's norms. We can only expect God's approval and blessing when we follow His will explicitly. May God help us to do just that.

Resources:

Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage by John Coblentz, Christian Light Publications, 1992.

Adultery: An Act or a State? by Allen Roth. (Included in the BMA Minister's Manual).