

REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE ?

DG01-03

Biblical Principles

(a) What God Says

* Genesis 2 :22-24 gives God's intention for marriage for all humans.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

Or as the King James version states , there is a “leaving” and a “cleaving”.

So God's intention from the beginning was monogamy - marriage with one person for life.

To be a marriage three things are necessary : consent , commitment and consumation .

* The seventh commandment given to Moses by God shows the sanctity of marriage -

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14)

And the penalty was death.

(b) What Moses Said

The only statement in the law of Moses on marriage and divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4 : *“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds **something indecent** about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. “*

This legislation was given by Moses to control a particular situation that could arise after divorce and remarriage. That is, a divorced wife who remarried could not go back to her first husband.

(c) What the Prophets Said

* The prophets adopted a metaphorical approach.(eg Jer 3, Eze 16, Hos 1-3).

The covenant of marriage is shown to be a reflection of God's covenants with His people.

* Malachi 2 :10 -16

God hates divorce.

God is offended by mixed marriages, broken marriage covenants, and divorcing for a younger woman.

(d) What the Scribes Were Saying in Jesus' Time

Divorce and remarriage were common in Jewish and Roman society.

Debate among the scribes centered on defining the “something indecent” which preceded the first divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1.

There were three Rabbinic views on the divorce and remarriage question :

Shammai - Strict view. Only on the grounds of adultery. (Ignored Mosaic law which said the penalty for adultery was death !)

Hillel - For any offensive behaviour.

Akiva – Because you met someone you liked better.

(e) What Jesus SaidTHE RULE

The rule stated by Jesus is : Only death dissolves a marriage. Therefore remarriage while a partner is alive is adultery in God's sight .

This is the first time in history that anyone ever said remarriage after divorce is adultery.

This rule is recorded in Mark and Luke – the gospels for unbelievers - with no hint of any exceptions..

* Luke 16 :18 *"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."*

Applies to “anyone”.

Does not say divorce is a sin. It is the remarrying that is a sin (adultery).

* Mark 10 : 2 -12 *"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"*

"What did Moses command you?" he replied.

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God `made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Every marriage is joined by God , so humans shouldn't break up what God has put together.

Moses permitted divorce to control something that was already happening. Again it is the remarriage that constitutes adultery. (Principle applied to both husband and wife.)

POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS

Only possible exceptions are recorded in Matthew, the gospel for believers.

* Matthew 5 : 31-32 *"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."*

In context, Jesus is discussing adultery, not divorce and remarriage.

Jesus is saying : If you divorce your wife you are forcing her into adultery, except in the case where she has already committed "adultery" (ie fornication or any sexual activity outside marriage).

* Matthew 19 : 3-10 *"Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'"*

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

*Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. **I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.**"*

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

Verse 9, without the except clause, restates Jesus' rule : "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery."

But verse 9 has been considered as ambiguous because of the position of the except clause. Normally an except clause qualifies what precedes it . So the exception applies only to divorce . That is, adultery is a ground for divorce but not remarriage.

Alternatively the except clause could be applied to both divorce and remarriage. This has lead to the popular view : If you divorce for physical infidelity and marry another, you are not committing adultery. That is, the innocent party can remarry.

Where there is an ambiguity look for clarification in scripture and outside it.

Immediate context - Disciples were astonished at Jesus' teaching, as it was not in line with any of the current Rabbinical teaching.

Other scripture - Every other record of Jesus' teaching is clear . No remarriage after divorce.

-Paul was clear : be reconciled to your marriage partner or remain single. (1 Corinthians 7 :10).

Outside scripture - All the church fathers(except one) for 500 years permitted divorce for adultery but prohibited remarriage altogether.

In practice the majority of divorces today, don't come under this one possible exception allowing remarriage./4

(f) What Paul SaidTHE RULE

Only death dissolves a marriage, (as Jesus said).

Romans 7 : 1-3 “ *Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.*”

1 Corinthians 7 : 39 “*A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.*”

1 Corinthians 7 :10-11 “*To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*”

POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS

* 1 Corinthians 7 :12-16 “*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”

Paul says nothing here about remarriage. He is saying if a non believer wants to leave a marriage let them go.

* 1 Corinthians 7 : 27-28 “ *Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.*”

If “*if you do marry* “ is taken as a blank cheque for all divorce and remarriage it contradicts all other biblical teaching.

More likely Paul is talking about those whose partners have died and so are free to remarry.

Summary of Biblical Principles

Three biblical positions regarding the question of remarriage after divorce :

- (a) Two exceptions (improbable)
 - for adultery (the innocent party can remarry).
 - for desertion by an unbeliever (the believer can remarry).
- (b) One exception (possible)
 - for adultery (the innocent party can remarry).
- (c) No exceptions (probable)
 - May divorce due to adultery but no remarriage.

However the majority of pastoral situations today don't come within either of the possible exceptions.

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Update

This series of messages was given by David Pawson in 2002. Since then, David has had further insight into "Matthew's possible exception" (Matt 19:3-10).

In summary: Matthew's gospel was written primarily for Jewish believers. In their culture, engagement or betrothal was as binding as marriage.

The word used in Matthew for sexual relations is "fornication" (sex before marriage), not "marital unfaithfulness" as often translated.

Jesus is therefore saying that, for Jews, if a man discovers during the betrothal period that his "wife to be" had fornicating, he may divorce her. (Note Joseph's intention to divorce Mary during their betrothal period.)

This passage therefore does not provide us with an exception to Jesus' rule in Mark and Luke. That rule is, only death dissolves a marriage.

For a more detailed explanation of David's current teaching on this, refer to messages given in 2007 (DM14 tracks 5 & 6) and 2008 (DN03 track 2).

Historical Practice

Four Periods in Church History

1. Early (0-500)

All (but one) of 25 church fathers and two church councils confirmed that Jesus permitted divorce for adultery but prohibited all remarriage.

2. Medieval (500-1500)

Church split in 1054 into western (catholic) and eastern (orthodox) .

Western - Marriage became a sacrament and so could not be dissolved under any circumstances. So a system to annul marriages was developed.

Eastern – State rules applied to the church. So divorce and remarriage were allowed within limits even though it contradicted scripture.

3. Reformed (1500-1800)

The reformers, including Luther, started the “two exceptions” position, which led to the “compassionate Christ” argument.

Tindale introduced Luther's ideas to England.

In 1603 separation or annulment were accepted (not divorce).

4. Contemporary (1800-2000)

In England up until 1857 there was no legal divorce (and so no remarriage) except by an act of Parliament.

In 1857 adultery was introduced as a grounds for divorce.

Throughout the 20th century additional grounds were added - desertion, cruelty, incurable insanity and irretrievable breakdown.

Modern Trends

The bible gives the “ideal”.

No absolutes.

Wouldn't God prefer a loving second marriage to a hating first one ?

Doesn't God want us to be happy ?

No consistent preaching or practice in the church.

Summary

- * The trend over 2000 years has been to become more liberal.

Discipline has disappeared from church life and no standards are set.

- * The church tends to follow state legislation.

Should the church be leading the world, rather than the world leading the church

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* The 11 different views on divorce and remarriage are the church's biggest handicap.

- * It is very difficult to draw the line when exceptions start to be made.

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Pastoral Problems

Two requirements for the church before pastoral problems are addressed :
clear convictions and regular instructions.

Three ways to approach pastoral problems :

1. Bypass Scripture

This approach is used if you consider scripture is culturally conditioned, scripture is an ideal, love is the only command of Jesus, or applying scripture is just too hard.

If scripture is bypassed then you rely on either :

Situations - What is the best we can do in the circumstances ?
No standards, rely on feelings.

or Precedents - What have other people done.

Remember that God's blessing is evidence of His grace and not of His approval.

2. Limit Scripture

This approach limits the application of scripture in some way.

* Limit the teachings of Jesus to believers.

This approach says : What you did before you became a believer no longer matters.

God does forgive and forget the past, but there are still ongoing human consequences to our actions.

* Only the act of remarriage is adultery.

What other sin is only sin the first time you do it ?
Leads to the practice of not getting married in church but having a blessing in church.

There is no such thing as Christian marriage. Every marriage is a marriage in God's sight.

3. Apply Scripture

Jesus never lowered His standards to meet the people, but persisted in lifting the people to meet His standards.

Apply the following scriptural principles to each situation:

(a) SIN Remarriage is sin (adultery) – note any exceptions.
Get them to read Jesus' words aloud.
Sin will be judged.
Ignorance is not innocence.

(b) FORGIVENESS

Adultery is not an unforgiveable sin.
Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins.
You must forgive the wronged partner or God can't forgive you.

(c) REPENTANCE

God can't forgive a sin until it is repented of.
Repentance is not regret, remorse or being sorry.
It has three dimensions :

- * Thought - See sin from God's angle(breaking His law, provoking His anger).
- * Word - Confess sins (be specific). "I was wrong." "
- * Deed - Involves restitution, renunciation, being sorry enough to stop.
For every other sin you would say – Stop It.

The question : Are you willing to do whatever God tells you to do to put the situation right in His eyes ?

The action : Whatever God tells you to do , you must do .

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