

Marriage and Divorce
Why both sides in the question of marriage and divorce are wrong
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I. Let's start out with talking about the importance of the marriage relationship:

The marriage relationship is so important that its sacredness is honored by a prohibition against adultery found in the Ten Commandments. When you think about the fact that God only gave ten commandments and that one of them is about marriage, that makes marriage awfully important in God's eyes.

There is nothing ambiguous about this commandment. God, who created us, created us with a need for relationship that cannot be found anywhere except in a monogamous marriage relationship. We are not whole without that relationship. In Genesis 2:18 it tells us "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." He then created woman; creating her not from the dust from which he created man, but from man. Genesis 2:23 tells us "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." The next verse makes an observation about man and woman and the marriage relationship over which many have pondered: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife: **and they shall be one flesh.**"

II. What Jesus had to say about marriage and divorce:

Jesus had a number of things to say about marriage and also divorce. Let's look at some passages and then examine them to see what they are talking about.

In Matt. 5:27-28 it says: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

In Matt 5:31-32 it says: It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I 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 Matt. 19:3-9 it says "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 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."

III. To better understand what Jesus was saying, let's look at who He was talking to, what He had to say and what it means to us when it comes to marriage and divorce.

A. First, He stressed the importance of marriage and it's sacredness

Jesus in Matt 5:27-28 goes beyond the face of the commandment about adultery to the intent behind the act of adultery. A person's intent is an important thing. That is why we have court cases even today to try people for things they haven't done, but are plotting to do such as "conspiracy to commit murder." The best example of this kind of lustful fixation upon someone else is the one in II Samuel the 13th chapter; Amon's desire for his sister, Tamar. The death of Lacy Peterson came about because of the lust of her husband for someone else. If you lust after someone, you have already dishonored the individual to whom you are married whether the opportunity arises to fulfill that desire or not.

B. Second, He answers questions about Jewish law regarding divorce

God gave only specific reasons for divorce in the Jewish law as those found in Deuteronomy 10 and 24. By the time of Christ, the Jews had twisted the passage in Deut. 24 to include just about anything as a grounds for divorce. Jesus sets things straight and tells them that the only reason for divorce was because of fornication taking place prior to the marriage.

So, if the husband had illegally divorced his wife under The Law, it follows that in marrying another, he has committed adultery against his wife. And if the wife marries another when she is not legally divorced under The Law, the one who marries her commits an adulterous act.

Jesus talked about this in Matt 5:31-32. The Jews were allowing divorce for any reason and all you had to do was just give her a writing of divorcement. Jesus makes it clear that this is wrong! The only reason for divorce under Jewish law was for fornication. As Jesus told the crowd, if you married someone that was not legally divorced, you were committing adultery. As He said "and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Jesus talked about this again in Matt. 19:3 when the Pharisees came to Him to try to trip Him up. "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?" Jesus reminded them that at the beginning that God's intent had always been that it should be one man and one woman for life. He also stated that the law regarding divorce had been given out of the hardness of their hearts. Then Jesus gave His answer to their question about the legality of divorce for any cause **under the Jewish legal system**: if a man married someone after putting his wife away "for any cause," he committed adultery because **according to the Jewish legal system**, he was **not legally divorced from his wife**. And if someone married the woman **who was not legally divorced according to Jewish law**, he also was committing adultery. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that if you are NOT legally divorced, then having relations with someone else would be adulterous.

IV. What about divorce and remarriage in the church?

In I Cor. 7:1-28, Paul gave us some guidelines: “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. 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. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 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. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? 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. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.”

Evidently, many in the church had read the passages in Ezra 10:2-3 and Nehemiah 13:26-27 and had decided that the proper course for them was to divorce their non-believing spouses. Paul, in this passage, instructs them regarding that belief.

Paul lays down three basic principles for Christians when it comes to marriage:

1. Whatever state you find yourself in when you become a Christian you should stay in.
2. If you are married to an unbeliever, it is better to stay married to them if possible.
3. A Christian is under no obligation to remain married to an unbeliever.

A passage that helps me as a Gentile Christian to understand my relationship to The Law is the one found in Acts 15:23-29 “And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

V. So what effect does all of this have on us today?

A. God still hates divorce. Just because it is easier to have a legal divorce under the American legal system does not mean that God has changed his hatred for divorce. God still “hateth putting away.” (Malachi 2:16)

B. Still today, if you are not legally divorced from someone, you will be guilty of adultery if you go through a marriage ceremony while still being legally married to someone else.

C. If you are married to an unbeliever, if they are content to continue being married to you, don't divorce them.

Please understand, if you are legally divorced, you are therefore not committing adultery if you marry another. If you are NOT legally divorced, you are therefore committing adultery. This is what Jesus was dealing with. People who were not legally divorced according to Jewish law were entering into marriages with another individual.

We have been discussing passages for hundreds of years now that have nothing to do with divorce and remarriage today at all. The arguments on both sides of the issue have been handed down from one generation to another and both sets of arguments are irrelevant.