

Divorce & Remarriage - What The Bible Really Says

A prevalent notion in Christianity today is that the Ten Commandments are “Jewish,” and that non-Jews need not be concerned about them. Christ anticipated this deceptive thought when He said, “. . . the Sabbath was made for man. . .” (Mark 2:27). The fourth commandment teaches us to observe the Sabbath, so the scope of its requirement for all mankind is found in Jesus’ statement. Sabbath observance applies to both the converted and unconverted; all men are instructed to observe the Sabbath. The same thing can be said about all of the Ten Commandments. The seventh commandment is explicit with respect to marriage. Regarding marriage, the Bible instructs, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). “. . . 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” (Matt. 19:4-6). “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” (Matt. 19:9). God is the one who binds marriages. This was why the Apostle Paul stated: “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband. . . . and let not the husband put away his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10-11). When a marriage is bound by God, only one thing breaks that bond-death of either one of the parties.

The Seventh Commandment Protects the Home

The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God; the last six teach us how to love our fellow man. The seventh commandment is designed to protect the home and the family relationship. Marriage is a type of the spiritual relationship that exists between God and His people. Children are instructed to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12), but it is difficult, if not impossible, for children to honor parents who are divorced, who squabble over child support payments, or who see their children infrequently. To be honored by one’s children, parents must be exemplary. They must set the right example in the marriage relationship. A strong family and home is the building block of society. A strong and united family brings forth the “godly seed” spoken of in Malachi 2:15. Adultery is committed by those whose marriages have been bound in the sight of God, but who divorce and remarry another—a condition, which if unchecked, will eventually lead to the breakdown of society as a whole.

When one covets his neighbor’s wife, he demonstrates his dissatisfaction with the wife of his youth. He violates the seventh commandment in intent, and the tenth commandment literally. When nations water down God’s law of divorce and remarriage, they invite a plethora of unsavory activities. The attraction to pornography by many divorced men attests to this fact. Those who understand the purpose of God in establishing marriage, quickly see the value of the seventh commandment. They realize divorce is a hardhearted act which brings about unhappiness and produces hate. Broken homes and juvenile crime often are the result. Divorce is contrary to the very purpose God has for marriage.

The Purpose of Marriage Excludes Divorce

The historian Edward Gibbon wrote that one of the reasons the Roman Empire collapsed was due to the high divorce rate. Today, in America, divorce and remarriage is a national tragedy. About fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Millions of people believe marriage has no purpose except to gratify the self. They believe that marriage is the product of custom, and that living in a state of cohabitation without

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

marrying is perfectly acceptable. After all, they reason, it is the State that binds marriages, not God.

God holds the ministers of our land responsible for this appalling condition. They have caused the people to forget God and His law (Jer. 2:32). God thunders, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos. 4:6). Those ministers who have remained loyal to the Bible instruction are commanded, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1).

Man was placed on this earth for a purpose. He is instructed to reproduce after his own kind (Gen. 1:28). In addition, he is commanded to turn from sin-the transgression of the law-and to receive the Holy Spirit. He is required to overcome the evil pulls of human nature, and to be born into the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50-53). At the return of Jesus Christ, those who have overcome will be resurrected into that kingdom and, as the affianced bride, marry Christ (Eph. 5:22-23, Rev. 19:6-9).

When God entered into a covenant with ancient Israel, He married her (Ex. 24:7, Jer. 3:14). As a wife, Israel was both a Church and a Kingdom. Christ was the God of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:1-4). When He was crucified, He died and that marriage came to an end. The affianced bride of Christ today is spiritual Israel-the Church (Gal. 6:16). Christ introduced the New Covenant, which at His return will establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. The fact is: The gospel message itself is about that kingdom. Those resurrected into the Kingdom of God will constitute the bride of Christ, and will enter into a relationship that shall last forever, not in the temporary relationship which ancient Israel experienced.

The marriage relationship is a type of the spiritual marriage that will take place at the resurrection. This divine marriage will last forever. There will be no divorce and remarriage in that antitype. Human beings who are the type need to realize this transcendental purpose. Therefore, there should be no divorce and remarriage in the conjugal union. This is why Paul wrote in Romans 7:1-3:

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.

Those who permit or advocate divorce and remarriage today are, in effect, denying the necessity to be faithful to God and His law. Marriage for human beings teaches those called to the Truth to fulfill the role of Christ's faithful wife for all eternity (Eph. 5:27). This marvelous purpose is lost on those who cannot learn the permanency of marriage in this physical life.

What Does the Bible Reveal About Adultery and Fornication?

The Old Testament is extremely valuable in helping us to understand what Jesus meant when He said, ". . . 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" (Matt. 19:9). We find Scriptures which mention "fornication," "whoredom," and "harlotry" in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These words are used in both the figurative and literal sense. Notice Isaiah 54:5. This text tells us that God was the husband of Israel. We find the same thing in Jeremiah 3:14. Israel was, therefore, in the figurative sense, married to God. But Israel committed spiritual adultery by consorting with pagan gods and pagan nations. This is what Jeremiah relates in Jeremiah 3:8. He wrote: "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also" (Jer. 3:8). While Christ, the God

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

of the Old Testament, “put away” Israel for her adultery, He did not remarry. In effect, the “marriage” to physical Israel remained until His death on the cross. Notice the conduct of Israel during this marriage. “For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot” (Jer. 2:20). In the figurative sense, Israel had become a harlot, even though she was married to God. In the book of Ezekiel we read: “But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was” (Ezek. 16:15). Normally the Hebrew word used for fornication, or whoredom, or harlotry, is zana. The word “fornications” in Ezekiel 16:15 is not zana, but taznut. It is a derivative of zana. The word could just as accurately be translated “harlotries,” or “whoredoms.” Why the King James translators selected “fornications” in this verse is confusing because of the definition of fornication. We shall examine this more closely later. Taznut is translated “fornication” in Ezekiel 16:29, where it again could just as accurately be rendered “harlotry,” or “whoredom.”

An examination of zana in the Old Testament reveals the following. Only in three places is zana rendered “fornication.” These are: 2 Chronicles 21:11, Isaiah 23:17, and Ezekiel 16:26. In each of these cases, the meaning is figurative. This is clearly seen in the context of these three Scriptures. Check them out. See, for example, verse 13 of 2 Chronicles 21, as a case in point. Every other place in the Old Testament zana is translated “whore,” “whoredom,” “harlot,” “harlotries,” or some derivative of these. What this means is that the King James translators limited the word “fornication” to the figurative sense. In the literal sense we find zana (whore, whoredom, harlot, harlotries, etc.) applied to single women, to concubines, and to betrothed women. See, the following examples:

And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot? (Gen. 34:31).

Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom, and the land become full of wickedness (Lev. 19:29).

If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid. . . . Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father’s house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you (Deut. 22:13-14, 21).

And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father’s house to Bethlehemjudah, and was there four whole months (Judges 19:2).

And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt [assuming that Tamar was betrothed to Judah's son] (Gen. 38:24).

The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD (Hos. 1:2).

For their mother hath played the harlot. . . for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink (Hos. 2:5).

And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee (Hos. 3:3).

We will see that married women can be guilty of both adultery and harlotry. Fornication, which is distinct

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

from adultery, is clearly defined in the New Testament. But an Old Testament example which throws light on the meaning of zana is seen in Numbers 25:1-8. In verse one, we read: "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab." The Apostle Paul calls this "fornication" in 1 Corinthians 10:8. That this activity involved both figurative and literal whoredom is certainly inferred from Number 25:3, 6-8.

What is the distinction between zana and the word used for adultery-na'ap? Notice what the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, page 246, tells us of zana: "This verb is used in both literal and figurative senses. Figuratively, the thought may concern forbidden international intercourse, of one nation (especially Israel) having dealings with other nations. It may also refer to religious intercourse, of Israel worshiping false gods. . . . The literal meaning is illicit heterosexual intercourse. . . . Certain distinctions exist between zana and the parallel root na'ap "to commit adultery." na'ap commonly refers to men rather than to women. na'ap connotes sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than his/her spouse (Lev 20:10). . . . Never is the person said to be unmarried. . . . A third distinction is that na'ap is not used to designate the professional prostitute. . . ." (Emphasis ours).

Although na'ap is not used in some of the following texts, examples which illustrate that adultery was committed by married people are:

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me (Gen. 39:7).

And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her. . . and she returned unto her house. . . . But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD (2 Sam. 11:3-4, 27).

And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. . . . So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face. . . . For the [husband] is not at home, he is gone a long journey (Prov. 7:10, 13, 19).

But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! . . . And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy" (Ezek. 16:32, 38).

Compare Hosea 2:5 and 3:1 to see that a married woman can be guilty of both adultery and harlotry.

Take a look at Hosea 4:13. This text is of particular interest. "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery." Both zana and na'ap are used here, zana referring to whoredom, na'ap to adultery. There is clearly a distinction between the two noted here. In the New Testament the word for fornication is porneia. It is distinct from moichao which means adultery. These two are often mentioned together, as both are violations of the Law of God. See, for example Galatians 5:19. Since fornication applies to unmarried women, as the Old Testament demonstrates, it is clear how this was viewed by the Jewish community about the time of Christ. We read the account in Matthew 1:18-21:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Joseph thought Mary, his betrothed, had committed fornication and was pregnant as a result. He could have exercised his right, as defined in Deuteronomy 22:23-24, and had her stoned to death, but decided to “put her away privily.” The offense could not have been adultery because Mary and Joseph had not yet “come together.” While *porneia* is not used in the context here, it is clear this example could only be viewed humanly as a case of fornication, since Mary was pregnant before they came together. Some may wish to argue that Joseph could have believed Mary committed the act after she was espoused and, therefore, would have been guilty of adultery. The argument is, of course, speculative and proves nothing. Whether the “act” was committed prior to betrothal (and concealed from the prospective mate) or after betrothal, makes no difference. The death penalty was normally required in both cases. See Deuteronomy 22:13-14, 20-21 and 23-24.

That *porneia* refers to fornication is clear from John 8:41. A number of commentators take the Pharisaic remark here to be a slur regarding Jesus’ paternity. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being born of fornication, that is, He was illegitimate. The dictionary definition of fornication is precise. Fornication is defined as “human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife; sexual intercourse between a spouse and an unmarried person; sexual intercourse between unmarried people; sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person accomplished with consent and not deemed adultery.” This is why we see a distinction between fornication and adultery in Jesus’ statements in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. In 1 Corinthians 5:1, *porneia* is defined as illicit relations between a man and “his father’s wife.” Commentators, in general, believe the offender here was having illicit relations with his stepmother. Looking at dictionary definitions, we can see fornication certainly applies in this case. In 1 Corinthians 7:2 we find another example of the meaning of fornication. In order to avoid fornication, the unmarried are told to marry. They are not told to marry in order to avoid adultery. Lawful sexual relations occur in the married state, not out of it. We have seen from the Old Testament that a married person can be guilty of both adultery and harlotry at the same time. But adultery is never applied to an unmarried person.

So, what did Jesus mean when He said, “. . . 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” (Matt. 5:32). We see from Deuteronomy 22 that a false claim of virginity was punishable by death. In such a case the man had been defrauded because the girl had committed fornication prior to marriage. Fornication is not adultery. It would make little sense for Jesus to say, “whosoever shall put away his wife saving for the cause of adultery, causes her to commit adultery.” If adultery was the intended meaning of *porneia*, she could not have been “caused to commit adultery.” She was already committing adultery. The annulment granted by Matthew 5:32 is for fornication, not adultery. Adultery in the New Testament is the same as it was in the Old. It is never applied to an unmarried person. Matthew 5:32, often referred to as the exception clause, grants the defrauded party the right to annul a marriage that has been based on fraud. It refers specifically to illicit sexual activity that occurs prior to marriage. But, if there has been no fraud prior to marriage, and hence no right of annulment exercised, one who divorces and remarries is in the sight of God guilty of adultery.

Adultery is illicit sexual activity involving married persons that takes place after the marriage ceremony. Fornication is sexual sin, in general, which has taken place prior to marriage. As we have seen from the Old Testament, *zana* can include harlotry, whoredom, and all other prohibited sexual activities. A mate can exercise the “exception clause” to put the guilty party away for fornication committed prior to the wedding ceremony. But what about an injured party who does not discover fraudulent behavior until after the wedding or sometime later? The injured party must take action soon. In such a case God knew the fraud was there and did not bind the marriage. Upon discovering the fraud, the failure to take action is the tacit

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

acceptance of the past behavior on the part of the fraudulent party. If action is not taken within a reasonable length of time, the exception clause is waived. The marriage is then bound for life. Keep in mind, in some cases divorce may be necessary due to many factors that are a part of present-day society, things that often intrude into a marriage after some period of time. These could include emotional and physical abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, adultery, pedophilia, etc., but remarriage is not an option for those who have been bound in God's sight. Such may find it necessary to separate, but are not free to remarry.

Jesus Christ-the Same, Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:1-4). He was the One who spoke to the prophets and revealed His Law to Moses. The Ten Commandments comprise this great spiritual law. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). In the "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus magnified the law by expanding it from the physical level to the spiritual level. The Old Covenant with Israel required physical obedience only. Because of the hardness of their hearts, Moses permitted the Israelites to divorce and remarry. But not so with the New Covenant. In Matthew, chapter five, Jesus magnified the law. When asked why Moses permitted divorce-the putting away of their wives-Jesus answered, "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" (Matt. 5:31-32). Jesus pointed out that divorce was not God's intention "at the beginning" when the institution of marriage was ordained (Matt. 19:4). And Jesus explained that from now on, under the New Covenant, divorce and remarriage is no longer permitted. Why? The Holy Spirit was not available under the Old Covenant, but under the New it is. Men can overcome the hardness of their hearts and learn to love and cherish their wives as God originally intended. Therefore, the only legitimate reason for divorce and remarriage is fornication or fraud on the part of the guilty party. In such cases the marriage was never bound to begin with. God has not changed His law. It is the same law that was given at the beginning (Matt. 19:4-6). Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

No Divorce for Adultery Under the Old Covenant

The nation of Israel was both Church and State. Many statutes found in the Old Testament were part of the civil code which had to do with civil government. Christians today are not under the civil government of God. They are under the civil governments of the world. When Christ returns, His Law will be applied to all of mankind, and with the Holy Spirit, mankind will be able to live up to the requirements of the New Covenant. But, consider for a moment how God viewed adultery under the Old Covenant. We read, "If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel" (Deut. 22:22). Divorce was permitted for other reasons (see, for example, Deuteronomy 24:1), but not for adultery. The penalty for adultery was death. Marriage is sacred. To defile it is tantamount to sacrilege. The penalty paid for adultery under the Old Covenant was physical death. Under the New Covenant Jesus did not demand immediate death. Rather, He required repentance (John 8:1-11). But what is the penalty for the unrepentant adulterer under the New Covenant? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Ephesians 5:5, and Hebrews 13:4. Unless atoned for by the blood of Christ, the penalty for adultery is eternal death!

What Did Paul Teach About Marriage?

Under the concept of "progressive revelation" (the notion that the latest revelation in chronological time order is the truth, which in turn negates previous revelation), 1 Corinthians 7 has been cited to "prove" the Apostle Paul taught that divorce and remarriage is perfectly acceptable in the sight of God. We are told that since Paul's epistles were written from 20 to 35 years after the crucifixion of Christ, we should abide

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

by his epistles. This notion, however, contradicts what Jesus plainly said: “. . . the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). The Word of God does not contradict. So, what did the Apostle Paul teach about divorce and remarriage?

In 1 Corinthians, chapter seven, Paul addresses four groups of Christians: 1) the unmarried and widows; 2) Christian married couples; 3) married couples when one is not a Christian; and 4) virgins and parents with marriageable daughters. We can begin in verse ten. We read, “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.” The Greek word for “depart” (chorizo) in 1 Corinthians 7:10 is the same word translated “put asunder” in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9. It refers to a separation in the marriage. It is never translated divorce in the New testament. So, in 1 Corinthians 7:10 Paul forbids Christian women to separate from their husbands. He then goes on to say in verse 11 that if she does separate, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. She is not free to remarry. Paul addresses Christian men in the latter part of verse 11, instructing the husband not to “put away” his wife. The word for “put away” is aphiemi, which means the same thing as chorizo, “to send away, to lay aside.” Like chorizo, it is never translated divorce in the New Testament and does not mean that. What applies to the wife applies to the husband. Paul makes it clear the wife must remain single if she separates. Since “separation” is the first step in divorcing one’s wife, Paul forbids both Christian men and women to take this step.

Next, Paul addresses “the rest” (verse 12). This is the group where one mate is a Christian and the other is not. Paul instructs the Christian partner to keep the marriage intact if the non-Christian is amenable, that is, pleased to dwell with the converted party. “Let him not put her away,” in verse 12 and “let her not leave him” in verse 13 are both from the Greek word aphiemi, used in verse 11, which means that in these circumstances the Christian partner should not separate from the unbelieving mate. Aphiemi is never translated “divorce” in the New Testament. Paul tells us that by remaining in such a relationship, the husband or wife, as well as the children, will be set apart for special blessings, and not viewed by God as defiled or unclean (verse 14).

Verse 15 is the crucial verse that needs to be clearly understood. To fail to correctly grasp what this verse says has led many to conclude that Paul was teaching something different than what Christ clearly stated in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Paul instructs, “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” (1 Cor. 7:15). What does “not under bondage” mean? Does it mean the marriage has been severed, and the Christian partner is now free to remarry? First of all, the Greek words used for “depart, let him depart” in this verse is chorizo. To repeat, it is never translated “divorce.” It simply means “depart, separate, put asunder, to place room between.” Then Paul says, “. . . A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. . . .” What does this mean? The Greek word used in the expression “not under bondage” is douloo. It means “to bring into bondage, to become a servant.” Like chorizo and aphiemi, it is never translated “divorce” in the New Testament. What Paul states is that if the unbelieving mate departs, the Christian partner is not bound to renounce his or her faith in order to retain an unconverted mate, nor is he or she obligated to try to make the marriage work. He or she is no longer required in any way to serve the heathen desires of an unbelieving mate. Why? Because God wants us to have the peace of mind that comes with service to Him. It cannot come by service to a heathen unbeliever. Why do we know this text is not sanctioning divorce? Read verse 39. Paul writes, “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” (1 Cor. 7:39). To interpret verse 15 to mean Paul sanctions divorce and remarriage makes Paul contradict himself, not only by what he wrote in his other epistles, but even within the same chapter! Paul did not sanction divorce and remarriage in this verse nor in any of his other epistles.

In 1 Corinthians 7:25-26, Paul addresses virgins. He says because “of the present distress,” it is good not to marry. Obviously some political or economic event had set the stage for such a remark. Paul then asks

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

the question in verse 27, “Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.” The word “bound” is from the Greek verb *deo* which means “be in bonds, knit, tie, bind.” The same word is used for “bound” in verse 39. “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth. . . .” Paul tells the Corinthians that if a married believer is bound, he or she is not to seek or desire a change of state (verses 20 and 24). And one who is loosed from a wife should not seek a wife at the present time. Is one who is “loosed” a divorced party? Not at all! There is only one way a bound marriage can be loosed. That is by death. To say otherwise contradicts what Christ said in Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9, and what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:39.

The word used for divorce in the New Testament is *apoluo*. This word is never used in 1 Corinthians 7. But, it is used in Jesus’ statements regarding divorce or the putting away of a mate in Matthew 5, 19, and Mark 10, and Luke 16. It clearly refers to divorce. See Matthew 1:19; 5:31-32; 19:3, 7-9, Mark 10:2, 4, 11-12, and Luke 16:18. What is clear from 1 Corinthians 7 is that while Paul addressed a particular set of problems that prevailed in the Corinthian Church, not once did he contradict the teaching of Christ, nor what he himself had taught previously. What did Paul teach the Romans about marriage and divorce? Read it again in Romans 7:1-3. “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.”

What Constitutes a Marriage?

A number of factors come into play when a marriage is bound in the sight of God. The purpose of marriage is to establish a family and to provide stability for that family. A look at Genesis 2:24 tells us the following: (1) The offspring of a family are to eventually leave in order to establish their own family; (2) The man and his wife are to cleave together in a binding covenant relationship sanctioned by Almighty God; and (3) The two become “one flesh,” that is, the marriage is consummated in a sacred and holy relationship which continues throughout the years, thus cementing the marriage bond.

Marriage is not for children or for the immature. The Bible indicates the age of accountability is 20. By that time most young people will be making their own decisions. The couple should be eligible for marriage by not being previously bound to someone else. Remarriage by a divorced person could very well mean the possibility of adultery in any subsequent marriage. Ideally, the couple should be of the same racial stock, and there should not be any undisclosed *porneia* that could be the basis for a fraudulent marriage. In the sight of God a valid marriage occurs when two eligible people sincerely and solemnly take each other as husband and wife with the full intention of establishing a home in perpetuity. Since the only reason Jesus gave for an annulment is *porneia*, it would be beneficial to consider the scope of fraud in the consideration of marriage.

What Is a Fraudulent Marriage?

Jesus said, “. . . whosoever shall put away his wife, [except] for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery. . . .” (Matt. 5:32). We have already defined “fornication” from both the Old and New Testaments. This exception rule is the specific example Jesus gave as the basis for fraud. But is fraud broader in scope than sexual promiscuity before marriage? Notice this Old Testament passage: “And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her” (Ex. 21:7-8). This text

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

tells us that the betrothal has been repudiated by the master. As a result, he is not permitted to sell her to any outside nation, and she must be redeemed because he has been deceitful. The betrothal, considered binding, was broken by the master. Was fraud involved here? Yes, indeed! The maid cannot be forced to remain in her present condition under these circumstances. The contract is voided, and there is no restriction placed on her to marry someone else. A betrothal was considered as serious as a marriage. It was not something to handle in a frivolous manner.

Jesus used porneia to illustrate the principle of fraud. It is a principle that everyone should understand. The fact is: There are defects that affect the character and mental orientation of individuals. Destructive behavior and lifestyles such as alcoholism, dope addiction, homosexuality, demonism, etc., deeply affect the stability of the marriage. Few people would knowingly enter into a marriage with an individual who had these character defects. But what if one enters into a marriage not knowing the defect of such an individual, having been led to believe differently, and when the defective individual withheld vital information? For example, in conversations, observations, and associations, these significant defects were hidden. Would God bind such a marriage when it is based on fraud?

Of course not!

Marriages are not bound on the basis of fraud and deception. God is fair and just. He understands the hearts and minds of those who are sincere and honest, even though they may have been deceived and misled. He holds no conscientious person to an agreement if the very basis of the agreement is fraudulent. However, once the fraud is discovered, the injured party must act. He or she cannot acknowledge the fraud and continue in the relationship. Action must be taken. Not to take action means the right to annul the marriage is waived. If he or she forgives or tolerates the fraud and continues to live with such a mate, God would then bind the marriage.

Who Decides?

There is the assumption that since there is no New Testament example of a divorce and remarriage decision rendered by anyone, Jesus did not intend for us to take His instruction regarding marriage and divorce seriously. This assumption is incorrect. What the New Testament really tells us is that Christ never gave the Church the authority to “bind” or “loose” marriages. The text in Matthew 18:18 needs an explanation here. Look at the context beginning in verse 15. The subject under discussion here is what steps need to be taken to resolve disagreements among Church members. See verses 15-16. If the participants fail to solve the problem, it should be taken to the Church. Most commentators take “the Church” to mean the officiating ministry. If the offending party refuses to heed the conclusion of the Church, then the offender should be excommunicated. To back up that decision Jesus told His disciples, “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (verse 18). The truth is: This text has nothing to do with a ministry rendering decisions on divorce and remarriage cases, that is, deciding who is bound and who is not. Those who say there is no New Testament example of anyone deciding who is bound, and who is not in the sight of God, are correct.

But does that mean no decision should be made at all?

Attempting to discern the hearts and minds of others is not given to men, not even ministers. Only God can read the hearts and minds of men. Marriage generally involves intimacies so personal that, along with God, only those who have been divorced and remarried are in a position to evaluate the facts. Therefore, it is the duty of the ministry to make known the truth about divorce and remarriage, but it is the duty of the parties involved in divorce and remarriage to decide whether any previous marriages were bound or not. Some, no doubt, may be dishonest and will decide in their own favor. Others, however, will not. In either

Bethel Church of God

Divorce & Remarriage – What The Bible Really Says

case, those who are divorced and remarried are the ones who are directly involved and responsible for their actions. Therefore, they must be the ones who make the decision. It is their responsibility to absolve the problem according to the will of God. It is not the duty of the ministry to decide the outcome of people's lives. People must decide for themselves. To repeat, it is the duty of the ministry to make plain the Bible teaching on divorce and remarriage. The decision, no matter how painful, rests on the shoulders of those who, for whatever reason, are divorced and remarried. They will be evaluated on their response, once they understand what the Bible really says about divorce and remarriage. This article was written to help them understand that Truth.