***Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage***

Today divorce and remarriage are widely accepted in the world and present problems in many churches. The New Testament teachings on it are few but they are important. Since Jesus says that adultery is involved in divorced people it is important that Christians understand and follow what the Bible teaches. We should never condone or advise adulterous behavior. Following are the principal New Testament Scriptures involved.

***A. Teachings of Jesus To Everyone***  
  
The teachings of Jesus about divorce and remarriage apply to everyone, including Jews, Christians and non-Christians. Jesus bases His teachings on Genesis 2:24. “**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore, God has joined together, let no man separate**.” Matthew 19:5–6.

Following are the teachings of Jesus.  
  
1. “**What God has joined together let no one separate**.” Matthew 19:6.

2. “**Everyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery**.” Matthew 5:32b; Matthew 19:9b; and, Luke 16:18b.

3. “**Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and, if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.**” Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18a.

4. “**Everyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery**.” Matthew 5:32a.

5. “**Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”** Matthew 19:9a.

This last verse, Matthew 19:9a appears to be in conflict with Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:11; and, Luke 16:18a quoted above. However, if we understand the context of Mathew’s Gospel it is clear that there is no conflict. Matthew addresses the Jewish tradition of betrothal and marriage. In the Jewish context it was normal for the bride and groom to become betrothed and then wait for about a year for the marriage ceremony and the consummation of the marriage. Also, betrothal was a more solemn and binding commitment than “engagement” is today.

Read Matthew 1:18–20 where Matthew indicates that Joseph and Mary were betrothed but had not yet “come together” and consummated their marriage. Matthew referred to them as “husband” and “wife.” After their betrothal and before consummation of the marriage, Joseph learned that Mary was “with child” and he was considering putting her away for her apparent “fornication”. Matthew indicates that Joseph would have been “just” in doing so. This is the issue that Matthew later refers to in Matthew 19:9a. See 5. above. The exception is for “fornication” and not “adultery.” Mary ostensibly was guilty of fornication but not adultery because their marriage had not been consummated. Such would be adultery if it were committed after the consummation of the marriage. This is the “context” of Matthew’s gospel and the exception that Mathew is describing in Matthew 19:9a. When the Pharisees pressed Jesus in Matthew 19:7 Jesus explained that for someone in the position of Joseph, to put away his wife **before consummation of the marriage**on the grounds of her fornication was not forbidden; and, if he did so and later married another he would not commit adultery. However, **after consummation of the marriage**, he would be forbidden to divorce (Matthew 19:6 and 1 Corinthians 7:10–13); and, if he divorced and married another he would commit adultery by doing so (Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18). This is also true for a wife (Mark10:12).

In Christianity today many incorrectly teach that divorce is permitted and that divorce and marriage to another is also permitted. They rely upon Matthew 19:9a in support. In doing so they sanction the violation of the above teachings of Jesus (which includes adultery) and the following teachings of Paul.

***B. Teachings of Paul to Christians.***

**Do you agree that Paul would never contradict or nullify the teachings of Jesus?**

Paul addresses Christians only. He does not address nonbelievers. See 1 Corinthians 1:2.

Paul wrote: “**A wife is not to depart from her husband… And a husband is not to divorce his wife**.” 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11. Here Paul expressly teaches that Christians are absolutely forbidden to divorce. There is no exception provided even if the spouse is guilty of fornication or adultery, or if the spouse is a non-Christian. 1 Corinthians 7:12,13.

In 1 Corinthians 7:11 Paul indicates that if the Christian wife disobeys the command by departing from her husband, “**she must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband**”. This is necessary in order for her to avoid becoming an **adulteress**. If she married another she would become an **adulteress**. Mark 10:12. Whoever married her would also commit adultery. Matthew 5:32b; Matthew 19:9b; Luke 16:18b.

**C. In Summary**.

After a marriage is consummated:

(1) Divorce is forbidden for everyone,

(2) To divorce and marry another is adultery.

(3) For a man to marry a divorced woman is adultery; and

(4) If a man divorces his wife, he causes her to commit adultery.

**D. There are other related issues which are not discussed above including.**  
  
1. How are we to decide whether to treat someone as a Christian or not for purposes of 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, 39 and other verses that command different behavior for Christians married to Christians opposed to non-Christians?

2. Some site 1 Corinthians 7:2, 8, 9; 1 Corinthians 7:15; and 1 Corinthians 7:27, 28 as authority to nullify and contradict the above clear teachings of Jesus and of Paul. To do this sanctions sin and adultery. Obviously, Paul would never nullify or contradict the teachings of Jesus.

3. What about incestuous marriages, same sex marriages, etc. See Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Leviticus 18:6–23.

4. Many attempts to justify divorce and remarriage saying things like: “What about a wife whose husband beats her or is committing adultery.” or “God does not want me to raise my children as a single parent.” They incorrectly rely upon human reasoning and sympathy to nullify the clear commands of God.

There are many other very sad and difficult situations that are incorrectly relied upon to justify divorce, and then marriage to another. Instead of divorce, help should be sought from other Christians, churches, government, police, family, etc. Divorce is not an option.

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Below is a response by Bob Rolland to this note. He is a counselor of many years who I have respect for. Good fodder for your thinking.

“Steve has laid out correctly the law of divorce and anyone who works in family therapy sees the destruction and pain it causes to the guilty and innocent. It doesn’t give us all the answers in dealing with the destruction it leaves in its wake.

Part of it comes out of a chapter (Duet 24) that is in a section full of God’s grace for the stuff of everyday life. It leaves me wondering how the certificate of divorce accomplishes that. I look to God to reveal that answer, careful not to assume my genius knows all. I deal with families who have had divorces in their distant past and are raising children out of unions that have violated those laws. In those cases, I don’t go to Ezra as a pattern and dissolve those families. I rather use examples like Jesus with the adulterous woman ‘go and sin no more,’ or the woman at the well in Sychar but I still have to wrestle with David and his men eating the sacred bread in the Tabernacle without God condemning but Jesus affirming.

So, my tension is not explaining to couples on the brink of divorce the disaster of what they are about to do, it is figuring out how to help people who have sinned find the path of repentance that leads to a God of grace where they can hear, ‘go and sin no more.’ And at times I find this full of complications and mine fields that only God can untangle. So, my thoughts are more focused on the God’s compassion as well as the law.”