

Divorce and Remarriage

Dealing Treacherously Against the Wife of Your Youth

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This study is directed toward the Christians who teach that a believer should divorce if he is married to a second wife

I am married to my first wife and have been since 1982. We have seven children and they are all believers and walk in the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. Therefore, I have no personal motive on how to treat a second wife other than trying to forward the will of God.

Many others contending to forward the will of God believe that if a Christian was previously married, or at least if the wife was previously married, they should separate or divorce. They use this quote from Jesus for the basis of their argument:

*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.** - Matthew 5:32*

However, did Jesus command the man who marries “*her that is divorced*” to divorce his wife once he sees this verse? Is she even his wife? Are they lawfully married? What does Jesus mean when he says, “*saving for the cause of fornication*”? Before you divorce your wife, please prayerfully consider some other passages of the sacred scripture as we seek God’s will on this topic. For the Lord also said:

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. - Malachi 2:15b

God hates divorce:

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. - Mark 10:9

For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away. - Malachi 2:16a

As a Christian, have you, or do you know others who use Matthew 5:32 to teach men to separate from their wives? The premise of this study is the warning Jesus plainly gave “let not man put asunder” Miriam and Aaron once erred in speaking against a marriage. You can read the whole account in Numbers 12.

And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. - Numbers 12:1

Unless God tells you personally that he did not join them together, like Aaron, you may be walking on thin ice.

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them [Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses]; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb. - Numbers 12:9-12

The prophet Malachi says, “The LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away”. When talking about marriage, this is the theme of the Bible. While there are many examples of fornication and adultery in scripture, there are no instances where the Lord took delight in or commanded a married couple to get a divorce (We will examine chapter 10 of Ezra).

David committed a terrible sin with Bathsheba, committing both adultery and murder. Shortly after murdering Bathsheba’s husband:

David sent and fetched [Bathsheba] to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. - 2 Samuel 11:27b

Though God rebuked David’s sin through the prophet Nathan and David repented of his sin. He did not command David to divorce Bathsheba. Is it possible that God cared about Bathsheba? Where might she have ended up if David had dumped her?

Why does God hate divorce?

And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.

Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

*And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. **And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed.** 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:** for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. - Malachi 2:13-16*

One reason God hates divorce is that he is looking for godly children. Our interpretation of Scripture must do the same thing, that is not hinder the raising of godly children. I have known some couples, who in trying to obey the church elders separated. In every case, the children suffered, many becoming bitter against the Lord. Look at this doctrine of divorce. It hurts the children!

Some teach that God forbids only women to remarry:

Some brothers teach that it is okay to remarry or remain remarried if only the husband had a previous spouse. However, they must separate if the woman comes from a previous marriage. They use the following text as proof.

But I [Jesus] say unto you, [...] whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. - Matthew 5:32

They note that Jesus did not say anything in the passage that forbade a woman from marrying a man who was divorced. Jesus may have named only the woman because it was a polygamist culture, a husband could take a second wife and still reconcile to his first one. However, once a wife remarries she can never reconcile with her first husband. For those under the law it would be an abomination. Moses taught:

*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.
- Deuteronomy 24:1-4*

Even though today's culture frowns on polygamy, there may have be some good reasons for it in a culture. First, it was the way Israel supported a childless widow (See Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Perhaps after a battle, there could be a shortage of men and polygamy could provide support and a family to an otherwise single women. This study is not an argument for polygamy, yet when ancient Israel esteemed to the law, even with polygamy, they had a more Godly culture then we have today. Today we consider split families and fatherless households as being normal.

Because polygamy is a sin in our culture, it is impossible for a husband who has remarried to be reconciled to his first wife without divorcing his second. Is it not than the same sin in our culture, to marry *him that is divorced*, as it was in ancient Israel to *marry her that is divorced*?

Marriage is not what God hates. He hates divorce.

Jesus and the law

Did Jesus change the Law of Moses or replace it with a New Testament Law?

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.

- Mark 10:2-5



AND

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. - Mark 10:11-12

Some believe that Jesus changed the law at this point, by speaking against divorce. Moses had no prohibition on divorce; while Jesus is now saying it is illegal to do so. However, Jesus did not change the law, for he also said:

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill, for verily I say unto you, **Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.** - Matthew 5:17-19*

Jesus did not say, do not break *The Ten Commandments*, he said; do not break “*one of these least commandments*”. We must understand all Jesus’ words on divorce in this light. Most saints do not realize that the early church (when it was all Jewish until Acts 10:25-11:18) was under the law.

*And when they [James and the church elders at Jerusalem] heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and **they are all zealous of the law:***

***And they are informed of thee, that thou [Paul] teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses,** saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.*

What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may

shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. - Acts 21:20-25

Most Christians are surprised to see that Paul himself kept the law (Acts 21:24). It is important to realize that Jesus did not do away with the law. Only the false prophets and unlearned teachers replace the Law of Moses with another law.

It is also important to realize that for the Gentile Christians to come under the Law of Moses they must also come under the curse.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. - Galatians 3:10

In the same letter Paul said:

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. - Galatians 5:18

(For those who have the fruit of the Spirit): against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:23

There are two important points to understand. First, if you are under the Law of Moses, you are under the curse.

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. - Galatians 5:4

Second, since Jesus did not replace the Law of Moses with another law, if we replace it, we come under a curse.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.- Galatians 1:8-9

Therefore, the New Covenant is not a new law.

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. - Galatians 5:4

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. - Galatians 5:18

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. - Galatians 5:22-23

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. - James 2:12

Now returning to our topic, when a brother counsels a man to put away his wife, is it to fulfill the righteousness that comes from the law, or is it because he believes divorce is a loving act? If it is to fulfill the righteousness of the law, listen to what Paul says, “*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace*”. If a brother thinks he is counseling divorce as an act of love, who is being loved by the divorce?

Is the divorce an act of love to the children? No, I have never seen any benefit for the children, though I have seen several families where the children grew bitter against God because of the parents that split in order to keep the works of the law. Jesus gives a dire warning for those who would cause a child to stumble.

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. - Mark 9:42

Is the divorce an act of love to the wife? Again, I have never seen a divorce, in obedience to church elders, benefit the wife. I personally know one woman who divorced her second husband because she thought the marriage was illegitimate. Later as a lonely single woman, she finally remarried. The guilt caused from this doctrine of divorce returned and now she is divorced for a third time. She is lonely, getting older, suffering deep emotional turmoil. Now with no man, who is going to care for her?

And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. - Luke 11:46

AND

*And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand [...] Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, **against whom thou hast dealt treacherously**: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. [...] **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**: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore **take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously**. - Malachi 2:13-16*

Finally, is it love to punish a sister for trying to do what is right? Try to judge a case between these two young women. One committed fornication as a young woman and then many years later married. The other, to avoid fornication married, later her husband leaves her for another woman. How is it love, to forbid her from marrying (being loved and having her and her children provided for) when she has done nothing wrong?

The church should not advocate punishing a woman for committing fornication before she came to the faith (John 8:11). Why should we punish the sisters who were not in fornication?

So, when is divorce an act of love?

Divorce is an act of love when the husband is so cruel, that his wife is better off without him. Jesus said:

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. - Matthew 19:8

A Christian husband should never be abusive. The sorry truth is however that many husbands still have a heart of stone; there is an epidemic of spousal abuse in this country. When God allows a divorce, it may be an act of mercy toward these women.

If the second marriage is illegitimate, is it really a divorce?

Some teach that because Jesus said if she put away her husband, “*be married to another, she committeth adultery*” the second marriage is illegitimate, and the separation is therefore not a divorce.

This is a common argument for those who believe in separating couples that are in a second marriage, yet it sounds like it is coming from an attorney not a Christian. The fact is however, the man in a second marriage is the legitimate husband.

Jesus said unto [the woman at the well], Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. - John 4:17b-18

If Jesus said her husbands were her husbands, were they her husbands? Even if it is not her first marriage, the wife should obey her husband and not someone else who is troubling her marriage. For the man, even if he is not her first husband, he is to love his wife and not listen to those who trouble their marriage.

[Paul said] I would they were even cut off which trouble you. - Galatians 5:12

There is not one verse of scripture that teaches the wife not to obey her husband or the husband not to love his wife.

A marriage covenant is a covenant

When you enter into a covenant, like any contract, it is binding. The Old Testament was a covenant, an eternal contract. The Christian entered into a New Covenant, Jesus' testament to be specific. Though gentile Christians never entered into the Old Testament, for those who have, it is still binding. As for it being still binding Malachi referring to the end days said:

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: - Malachi 4:4-5

Even Paul was still bound by the Old Testament:

Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee [Paul], are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. - Acts 21:24

Jesus could not have made it clearer that the Old Testament is still binding.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:17-19

The marriage covenant is patterned after the covenant between Christ and His Church, see Ephesians 5:21-32. When you enter into a marriage covenant, like any contract, it is binding. When a couple divorce they are breaking this covenant. When a brother counsels a couple in their second marriage to separate, they are asking them to continue breaking their covenants.

Two wrongs do not make a right. Each time we break our covenants we are sinning. Let those who believe they are a Christian repent and ask for forgiveness for any covenants they broke in the past and no longer break their covenants in the future.

A second reason for marriage

The first reason, as we already mentioned, is to raise up Godly children. The second is to avoid fornication.

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. - 1 Corinthians 7:2

This may be a little blunt; however, this doctrine on divorce has split up many marriages. How many of these people later fell into fornication? Does not any doctrine that forbids marriage actually over ride Paul's counsel to avoid fornication?

Jesus made an exception for divorce in the case of fornication

*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. - Matthew 5:31-32*

Jesus did make one exception for divorce, a wife who commits fornication. When a husband really loves his wife and she cheats on him, it is devastating. While some have committed murder and or suicide, Jesus only allowed the husband to put her away.

There are those who try to distinguish the difference between fornication and adultery. They suggest that you may not divorce a wife who commits adultery after marriage; you may only divorce one who committed fornication before marriage. Again, this sounds like an attorney not a Christian. The truth is that the definition of fornication includes adultery. Since Jesus did not exclude adultery in this verse, we should probably not do so either.

In ancient times, the husband and children were to provide for their wives and mothers in their old age. A husband divorcing his wife would leave her on the street a beggar or force her to remarry. However, when a wife committed adultery, her reduced circumstances would have been her own fault.

Paul said that Christian men are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. Jesus gave himself for the church before we turned from our sins. If Jesus is our example for giving of ourselves, no sacrifice is too great. When we try to live up to this standard, our marriage may improve; however, our relationship with God will improve. It may be hard, however with God's grace many have been able to forgive a cheating spouse, heal the marriage and prevent the divorce.

The troubling passage on divorce in Ezra 10

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. - Ezra 10:2-3

When Israel came back into the land after the Babylonian captivity many brought back pagan wives (the leaders were the worst offenders). Chapter 10 of Ezra implies that to prevent the country from returning to paganism and facing more of God's wrath, there was a wholesale divorce of these pagan wives at this time.

Another solution this chapter did not mention was that these pagan women could convert to Judaism. In Esther 8:17, there was a mass conversion of pagans to Judaism after Mordecai the Jew rose to power.

It would have been acceptable for these Babylonian women to convert to Judaism to avoid being divorced. Personally, I believed this happened in some cases. Since Scripture is silent on the subject, we do not know if this mass divorce really was pleasing to God.

- He may have been thankful for their willingness to make such a big sacrifice.
- He may have been happy at their willingness to put their paganism away at any cost.

However, history shows troubled times ahead for Israel, both the Greek and Roman occupation were cruel. There is little else to commend Israel for in her relationship to God at this time. The last chapter in Nehemiah shows that before that generation passed away, Israel was already backsliding. Maybe God was not as impressed with this generation as we could hope.

Later, we see in Jesus' time the pride of the Jews for their racial purity when God was looking for purity of heart. The Jews despised the Samaritans because of their racial impurity, while at the same time we see that Jesus did not.

For all these reasons, it may be wise to look at the divorces in Ezra 10 as a piece of history. However, do not justify your behavior based on their behavior unless you want to come to their end.

Concerning marriage, my counsel is this,

If you are a single adult:

Follow Paul's advice (it is advice not a command) if you are single remain single. However if you really desire, it is okay to marry:

*Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned.
- 1 Corinthians 7:27b-28a*

AND

He that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.
- 1 Corinthians 7:33-34

AND

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. - 1 Corinthians 7:2

If you are in your first marriage:

Now God calls us to obedience.

- Wives obey your own husbands
- Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church

The Lord expects us to remain married. The exception to this is that you may seek a divorce if you have an unbelieving heart or heart of stone. For the sake of your judgment day however, you may seek the Lord for a new heart, rather than seeking a divorce.

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your **own** husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so **let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*** - Ephesians 5:22-24

AND

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
- Ephesians 5:25

AND

Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. - 1 Corinthians 7:27a

AND

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: - 1 Corinthians 7:10

AND

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 a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.
- 1 Corinthians 7:12-13

If you separated or divorced:

If you have separated from your spouse, follow Paul's counsel, remain single, and make an effort to reconcile to your spouse. Even when it seems impossible, reconciliations happen, and they do give God glory.

But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. - 1 Corinthians 7:11

AND

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 Corinthians 7:15

If Paul said, "a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases" why do some in the church place brothers and sisters in their second marriage into bondage?

If you are divorced and remarried:

Recognize the sinfulness of your divorce. Ask for forgiveness for your betrayal of the commitment to your first spouse.

And [Jesus] 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. - Mark 10:11-12

Now also realize that the earlier divorce does not make a second divorce right, anymore than a second murder would be okay after the sin of a first murder.

Husband if you have entered into a marriage covenant, she is your wife; you are commanded to love her.
Wife if you have entered into a marriage covenant, he is your husband; the scriptural admonition is clear, you are to obey your own husband and not those who trouble your marriage.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. - Philippians 3:13-15a

Both of you should be spending time trying to raise your children so that God might find a godly seed.

Finally, realize that when you divorce the second time, you will again have desires toward the opposite sex. Those desires will tempt you to more and more sin, either fornication or another marriage and thus the cycle will continue.

If you are separated or divorced a second time

Do not seek a third marriage. Remain single or reconcile to your previous spouse.

In closing

If a brother believes that I have taken any scripture out of context, please write to me. Today the divorce rate among Christians is equal to the divorce rate among unbelievers. My prayer is that those who profess to be Christian will stop pushing their brothers and sisters into a divorce. Rather that they would teach ...

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. - Colossians 3:19

*Teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,
- Titus 2:4*

Amen

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