

DOES DIVORCE, EVEN IF SINFUL, END THE MARRIAGE?

I. THE CASE OF THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (John 4:16- 17).

A. This woman was clearly moving from one sinful relationship to another, as indicated by the fact that she is “shacking up” with her current man (V. 17).

B. Jesus clearly recognizes the various marriages she has had as real marriages, as indicated by the fact that He declares that she has had 5 husbands. If these remarriages were not real, Christ would have declared only her first marriage to be her real husband. This is very clear indication that divorce ends the marriage even though it may have been brought about by sinful circumstances that God disapproves. The subsequent marriages of the woman were clearly recognized by the Lord as real marriages. Given this woman’s track record, it is highly unlikely that all or perhaps any of her divorces were on Biblical grounds. Yet the subsequent marriages are still recognized.

II. PAUL’S TEACHING ON BELIEVERS DIVORCING IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-11.

A. Paul declares that two believers married to one another are not to divorce. But if they do, they are to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to their spouse.

B. Paul’s goal here is the reconciliation of the two parties. This is why he commands believers who have divorced to remain unmarried. Why are they to remain unmarried? Because a remarriage would end the opportunity for reconciliation. Clearly, from what we have already learned from John 4:16-17, the new spouse from the remarriage would be viewed by Jesus as a wife or a husband. Thus, the new marriage would now come under God’s prohibitions against divorce. For the newly remarried man/woman to divorce and return to their former spouse would be to commit adultery a second time, just as they did when they remarried (Matt. 19:9). Sin would be piled up on sin.

C. Thus, Paul clearly desires the divorced believer to stay single because this leaves open the opportunity for reconciliation.

The implication is clear that if remarriage occurs, that opportunity is now lost.

III. JESUS' TEACHING ON DIVORCE IN MATTHEW 19:1-12.

A. Jesus warns in Matthew 19:6—"Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

1. The whole impact of this command is lost if, as some have taught, it is impossible to separate sinfully-separated believers because they are still married in God's sight.

2. Jesus is not warning against an impossibility. He is warning about the destructiveness of something that *can* happen.

3. Marriage, as an ordinance, is not just given to the Church (believers, alone). It has been given under common grace to all of society and is regulated by civil government. God founded the institution of marriage and has given in Scripture his guidelines for marriage/divorce. As in any other of the areas God has given to society as a whole, civil government can and often does exercise this authority sinfully. Yet Jesus clearly implies that civil authority *can* separate, by giving a command that it is not to do so (except for adultery, Matt. 19:9---or the unbeliever deserting the believer, 1 Cor. 7:15).

B. Moreover in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the case in view there involves a bill of divorce given for inadequate (and, therefore, sinful) reasons. In Deut. 24:2 the wife leaves the husband and becomes "the wife of another man." This second man is called her "husband" (vs. 2,3). And we read that the first man may not again take her to be his wife if the second husband divorces her or dies. (This shows clearly that God views that divorce ends the marriage).

1. The purpose in prohibiting remarriage to the first husband, even with the death of the second, is because the people here were making a farce out of marriage. God is stepping in with regulations to put a stop to this foolishness.

2. This prohibition probably does not apply today, in light of Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7:39. The spirit of this passage, however, does apply in that I would refuse to reunite a

wife to her first husband if there is no indication of repentance and taking these decisions seriously.

3. The key point I am making here is that the text clearly indicates that divorce ends the first marriage, even if the divorce is for illegitimate, sinful reasons. The woman is clearly called “the wife of another man.” Further, the remarriage clearly stands as a roadblock to reconciliation with the first spouse.

4. The idea that God does not recognize unbiblical divorce and that the former spouses are “still married in God’s eyes” cannot

IV. NEITHER DIVORCE NOR REMARRIAGE CONSTITUTE AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN.

A. A person who divorces and remarries without biblical cause *has* committed adultery (Matt19:9).

1. Question: When sin is confessed, in this case adultery, and God’s forgiveness is extended, how then does God view the sinner? As a perpetual adulterer? (See I Cor. 6:9-11).

Does God view a forgiven drunkard as a perpetual drunkard? A forgiven thief as a perpetual thief? (Heb. 10:17). The issue is this: Has the sin been confessed and repented of? If not, the guilt remains.

If so, they must live for Christ in the marriage they are in. To divorce and return to the former spouse would be to commit the same sin the second time.