
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

THE BASIC ISSUE. This is a very great problem, as anyone in the Lord's work knows. And things are getting worse! It is estimated that 50% of all marriages today end in divorce. If someone gets saved in his or her twenties, chances are pretty good he or she has already been married and divorced, and possibly remarried, when he or she gets saved. It is something that any serious minded Pastor must consider. There are many ramifications which relate to the Lord's work. We must have God's teaching on the subject not mere opinions. The crux of the matter is: **WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT IT?** Generally, you will find more heat than light on this subject. Let us be clear on this one thing; it doesn't matter what anybody thinks; opinions really don't count! I am only interested in what the Word of God has to say. When I first entered the ministry 45 years ago, this was the first serious problem I had to deal with. In school they gave three positions which Bible believers held, without being dogmatic about any of them. So, I made a thorough study of the subject in God's Word; both in the Greek and English. I read all I could find on the subject. I found there are a lot of conflicting opinions around. I found the truth in the Word, and I have preached this for 45 years.

GOD'S WORD BEFORE JESUS CAME. In the beginning God made one man and one woman and their union was for life. That's clear from the words of Jesus in **Matt.19:4-6** "...they twain shall be one flesh... What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." So, God never allows for divorce, right? Wrong! Some say God would never sanction divorce. But here the Pharisees asked if it was lawful for a man to put away (divorce) his wife for "**every cause.**" After Jesus gave His response they said, "**Why did Moses then give a commandment to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?**" Now, Moses had not "commanded" this but he allowed it. WE KNOW THAT CAME NOT FROM MOSES BUT GOD. It is given in **Deut.24:1**:"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 give her a bill of divorcement. " Yes, it is clear that GOD ALLOWED DIVORCE UNDER THE LAW. It could be for many reasons. God didn't like it, but He allowed it. Jesus says this: "**Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away (divorce) your wives.**" **Matt.19:8.** And, she who was thus divorced could marry again without any sin

placed upon her. "**AND WHEN SHE IS GONE OUT OF HER HOUSE, SHE MAY GO AND BE ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE.**" **Deut. 24:2.** She was innocent and not considered an adulteress. God's original purpose and desire is one man and one woman for life. But He has permitted divorce and remarriage.

THE PLAIN TRUTH OF THE MATTER. There are a number of Scripture passages on the subject, but **Matthew 19** is the one where all the facts are presented in one place. Remember, the only issue is, what does God say? We don't want to add or subtract anything! Our only responsibility is to "**preach the Word.**" One of the first things we teach in the Bible Institute is you must be willing to give up unscriptural and preconceived ideas. Does God now ever allow divorce, and if so, does He permit such a person to remarry? Let's look at **v.9**:"**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.**" Jesus here is giving another change, which is to be the prevailing doctrine on this subject. There had been one change; from the beginning it had been marriage is for life, period. Then, God allowed divorce and remarriage for many reasons. Now, we have this new teaching by Jesus. A dispensational understanding of Scripture is extremely important - otherwise, you cannot rightly divide the Word of truth.

Some teach that there is no divorce allowed in Scripture, much less remarriage. How can anyone read this passage and say that? Jesus obviously teaches us that there is now one situation in which God permits divorce. It is in the case of fornication. To prove their own interpretation, some say "**fornication**" refers only to sexual impurity on the part of single people, those not yet married. But in I Cor. 5 a man was guilty of "**fornication**" with his stepmother. Also, if the above were true Dr. Ironside points out that "*that would put a premium on marital unfaithfulness, as though it were less of an evil than the same kind iniquity committed by those not yet married.*"

WHAT ABOUT THE "EXCEPTION"? What does the word "**EXCEPT**" refer to? To the unprejudiced mind it can only mean one thing - the exception refers to remarriage! The passage makes no sense otherwise. Suppose a man and a woman get divorced and neither one

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

- 2 -

of them remarries. In the normal course of life, apart from sexual sin, are they guilty of adultery? How could they be; they are living alone? There's no question about the right to divorce over fornication; **the issue is CAN THE INNOCENT PARTY REMARRY? Jesus says that he or she can!** Without doing any injustice to the Words of our Lord we can look at the verse this way: *Whosoever shall put away his wife...and shall marry another committeth adultery.* But we left out the exception. **The exception most assuredly has to do with MARRY ANOTHER!** If it was for fornication, there is no adultery if the innocent party remarries! That is what the Bible teaches and that is what I believe and preach! Some say, *"But this is the only passage with the exception."* If God says it once, that's enough!

There is another common misconception concerning this subject. There have always been some who want to help God out. But that is a very dangerous procedure. God doesn't need any help! I have heard it said that if we allow one exception, men will take liberty with God's Word and they will make other exceptions. So what! That is not our problem. In the first place, *we are not allowing one exception; God is!* **We are merely trying to be true to His Word in this doctrine as in all others.** If men take liberty with God that is their problem, not mine. People do it all the time! I can't keep people from sinning and doing their own thing. In order to help God out and keep people straight, some have taught that **Matt. 19** refers only to the *"betrothal period."* We would say the engagement. They use Joseph and Mary, when he found she was expecting and he did not know the cause. Dr. Ironside's quote above shows this is a poor and false argument. It is totally without merit! Look at Matt. 19. Four times the words **"wives"** or **"wife"** are used. Though well intentioned, such teaching distorts the Word of God, and causes one to be a teacher of error. It makes God say something He has not said! **It is speaking of a wife!** God says for one reason, fornication, a marriage may be dissolved and the innocent party may remarry without any sin or guilt.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER CASES? For other causes, divorce is wrong and the Lord says that where marriages are broken up for other reasons, and either party

remarries, they are living in adultery. This constitutes one of the greatest problems in our land today. We are not for divorce, and when dealing with situations involving fornication, we counsel that the best course is to seek reconciliation. But if God allows something, we do also. When He forbids a thing, we forbid it. **THERE IS NO OTHER SAFE WAY!** We cannot play God! One thing more: Does God forgive fornication or adultery? Of course He does, remember the woman in John 4, also I Cor. 5 and II Cor.2, etc. Some preachers act as if it were an unpardonable sin.

GODLY MEN HAVE SAID THE SAME. Now, we are not bound by the teaching of men. But we have all learned things from others; that is why God ordained Pastors - Teachers. However, we must be sure that what a man teaches agrees with Scripture. Other godly men have taught what we have given. I only have room for two: Dr. Ironside wrote: *"If one violates the tie by unchaste behavior that is, by illicit relations with a third party - the innocent one is free to divorce the unfaithful one and marry someone else."* He also said, *"...the innocent one is as free before God as though never married before."* G. Campbell Morgan on **Matt. 19:9** says, *"To that nothing need be added...it makes indissoluble the bond once made, save for the one and only sin."* He also said, *"Do not forget that it is the guilty party who is not allowed by the law of Christ to be married again."* But some say, "Divorce is a great evil, God hates it." That's true but look in the Word; He hates many things! (Read Prov.6:16-19). The issue is what does God say? He says, Scripturally divorced and remarried people are not second class Christians.

A WORD TO THE WISE. The issue goes beyond the subject at hand. As we said, it is not necessary to defend God. *"Helping God out"* often leads to great mischief, as Abraham and Sarah found out. If God permits something our only responsibility is to obey His Word. Finally, think about this: Do you want to be guilty of adding to or subtracting from the Word of God? I for one do not! In most passages the Bible is clear. It is a matter submitting our wills to His will. We must simply stick to the Word! **NO "IFS," "ANDS," OR "BUTS."**

The **CORNERSTONE CHALLENGE**

December 1995

www.cornerstonebaptistmetrostation.org

CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH

P.O. BOX 438, BELMONT, MA 02478

Rolland C. Starr, Pastor