

# Divorce and Remarriage

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**ISSUE:** Today, most Christians believe Matt 19:9 allows the innocent spouse to both divorce AND remarry. In contrast, the early Christians believed Matt 19:9 allowed a man to divorce, BUT not remarry while the original spouse remained alive. Even in the case of a righteous divorce (where the husband divorced his wife because she was guilty of immorality), remarriage while the original spouse remained alive was always forbidden. Jesus and the Apostles all taught: **remarriage while the original spouse remains alive is adultery.**

## **I. Principles for understanding Scripture\*:**

1. Read each sentence for exactly what it says. Don't read into scripture what is not there. Don't make assumptions.
2. Note any word or sentence that could be interpreted in more than one way.
3. Read totality of the instrument – don't delete or ignore sentences that could create problems

## **II. What does the Old Testament say about divorce and remarriage\*:**

1. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Genesis 2:24
  - a. Marriage is not a partnership. The two separate people become "one flesh".
2. "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance." Deut 24:1-4
  - a. Gives procedure for divorce in OT times.
  - b. Ambiguous - what is "uncleanness" referred to? Does it mean adultery or immorality before marriage?
  - c. Husband cannot take ex-wife back if she marries again.
  - d. Is there a provision for a wife to divorce a husband? In the OT, there was no provision for a wife divorcing her husband. God only allows divorce if man found "uncleanness" in his wife. Wife could not divorce.
  - e. Possibly has something to do with headship. President of United States can fire the Vice President or Secretary of State. Secretary of State cannot fire President of United States. Analogous to headship of husband. Wife could possibly separate from abusive/adulterous husband, but not divorce.

3. “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. ‘For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’” Mal 2:16

- a. The Lord has been witness.
- b. The Lord desires godly offspring.
- c. Husbands divorcing for causes other than “uncleanness” – dealing “treacherously”
- d. Nothing indicates wives can divorce husbands in OT.

### **III. What does New Testament say about divorce and remarriage\*:**

1. “It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Matt 5:31-32.

- a. Jesus clarifies Old Testament ambiguity of what constitutes “uncleanness”. Limits “uncleanness” to sexual immorality.
- b. Whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

2. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” Mat 19:9

- a. They are no longer two, but one flesh. Mat 19:6
- b. God sees one flesh and no man is supposed to separate.
- c. Moses permitted a broader practice of divorce to husbands because of hardness of hearts (Mat 19:8), but among Christians divorce is limited to only sexual immorality.
- d. Whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.
- e. Brings me no joy. Places people in awkward place, but will not tell people what they want to hear.

3. “In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.’” Mark 10:10-11

- a. Here something different from Matthew. Matthew gives exception (immorality), Mark does not.
- b. Also, Mark mentions wives divorcing husbands. Unclear whether Jesus was addressing wives divorcing husbands in Jewish culture (forbidden by OT) or Roman culture which allowed wives to divorce husbands.

4. “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.” Luke 16:18

- a. Again something different from Matthew. No exception (immorality) given.
- b. Paul reiterates Jesus command in Romans 7:2-3 “For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.”

#### **IV. What the Early Christians (prior to Nicea/AD 325) said\*:**

“...that a person should either remain as he was born, or be content with one marriage; for a second marriage is only a specious adultery. ‘For whosoever puts away his wife,’ says He, ‘and marries another, commits adultery;’” Athenagoras AD 175 V2 pg146-147

“But Christ prohibits divorce, saying, ‘Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marries another, commits adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, also committeth adultery.’” Tertullian AD 200 V3 p404

“But as a woman is an adulteress, even though she seem to be married to a man, while the former husband is still living, so also the man who seems to marry her who has been put away, does not so much marry her as commit adultery with her according to the declaration of our Saviour.” Origen AD 245 V9 p511

“If a layman divorces his own wife, and takes another, or one divorced by another, let him be suspended.” Apostolic Constitutions V7p503

- a. “suspended” means banned from communion.

#### **V. What about the exception for sexual immorality?**

The most common objection to the early Christian understanding that remarriage while the original spouse remains alive is adultery can be found in Matt 19:9. “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” It is important to note that the “except for immorality” clause is not included in Mark 10:10-11 or Luke 16:18. Modernly, most Christians believe Matt 19:9 allows a man to divorce AND remarry if his wife commits immorality. In contrast, the early Christians believed Matt 19:9 allowed a man to divorce, BUT not remarry if his wife commits immorality. Even in the case of a righteous divorce, remarriage while the original spouse remained alive was adultery.

“...in short, divorce He prohibits, except for the cause of fornication...” Tertullian V4 pg 45.

“‘Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery.’ He also is deemed equally guilty of adultery, who marries a woman put away by her husband.” Tertullian V3 pg 405

“The Lord having therefore made mention of John, and of course of the occurrence of his death, hurled His censure against Herod in the form of unlawful marriages and of adultery, pronouncing as an adulterer even the man who married a woman that had been put away from her husband.” Tertullian V3 p405

“‘Whosoever shall put away his own wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress.’ For confessedly he who puts away his wife when she is not a fornicator, makes her an adulteress, so far as it lies with him, for if, ‘when the husband is living she shall be called an adulteress if she be joined to another man...’” Origen V9 pg 511 AD 245

“Christ gave this judgment when, being inquired of, He said that a wife must not be put away, save for the cause of adultery; such honor did He put upon chastity.” Novation AD235 V5 p589

“He who marries a woman who is divorced from her husband is an adulterer.” Lactantius V7 pg190 AD 305

“...our Lord compassionating that erring Samaritan woman – who did not remain with one husband, but committed fornication by [contracting] many marriages...” Irenaeus V1 pg 445

“And I said to him, ‘What then, sir, is the husband to do, if his wife continue in her vicious practices?’ And he said, ‘The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he put his wife away and marry another, he also commits adultery.’ And I said to him, ‘What if the woman put away should repent, and wish to return to her husband: shall she not be taken back by her husband?’ And he said to me, ‘Assuredly. If the husband do not take her back, he sins, and brings a great sin upon himself; for he ought to take back the sinner who has repented... In case, therefore, that the divorced wife may repent, the husband ought not to marry another, when his wife has been put away’.” Hermas 150 AD V2 pg21

“‘Thou shalt take care to thy spirit, and shalt not forsake the wife of thy youth; for she is the partner of thy life, and the remains of thy spirit. I and no other have made her.’ For the Lord says: ‘What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.’ For the wife is the partner of life, united by God unto one body from two. But he that divides that again into two which is become one, is the enemy of the creation of God, and the adversary of His providence.” Apostolic Constitutions V7 p456

## **VI. Example from History**

The first person of the Trinity (God the Father) married his bride (the nation of Israel) at Mount Sinai circa 1446 BC. Israel was unfaithful to God the Father during the first 40 days that Moses spent on the mountain of Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness and because God had not yet married Israel, God

offered to replace Israel with a nation made-up of only Moses' descendants as a future bride (Ex 32:10). Only Moses' prayer changed God's mind (Ex 32:14). However, once God the Father entered into a covenant/marriage relationship with Israel (Ex 34), He never remarried with another nation. For 1000 years God the Father was faithful to an unfaithful wife (Ezk 16, Jer 3:8, Hos 3, 5:4). Finally, God divorced his apostate/adulteress wife and promised to send Jesus (Ma 4:5), but He never remarried. Later, the second person of the Trinity (Jesus) came and married the Church.

## **VII. Example by Analogy**

Another early church doctrine that is no longer practiced in most churches is unconditional non-violence. Most Christians today believe that serving in the military is a noble enterprise. Also, most modern Christians believe that to use force in self-defense or in defense of their family is acceptable to Jesus.

Yet, these beliefs are quite contrary to the early church example:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." (Mat 5:38-39)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Mat 5:43-45)

"We who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie nor deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ." Vol 1 pg. 176 Justin Martyr AD 165

"Our prayers defeat all demons who stir up war...Accordingly, in this way, we are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them." Vol 4 pg 667 Origen AD 248

"A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath. If he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected for baptism. A military commander or civic magistrate who wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If an applicant or a believer seeks to become a soldier, he must be rejected, for he has despised God." Apostolic Trad. Pg 16 Hippolytus AD 200

History shows that while Jesus' church was faithful to His teachings on unconditional non-violence, the Western world experienced the longest recorded time of peace the world had ever seen; the "Pax Romana":

This period is considered to have lasted from [27 BC](#), when [Augustus Caesar](#) declared an end to the great Roman civil wars of the first century, until either [AD](#)

[180](#) , when emperor [Marcus Aurelius](#) died, or the death of his son, [Commodus](#), in [AD 192](#) . It was a time in which Roman commerce thrived, unhampered by pirates or marauding enemy troops. It was not always peaceful; rebellions frequently appeared, but were quelled...Indeed, one might argue that Rome was constantly involved in some conflict or another during the "Pax Romana." However, the interior provinces remained largely untouched by warfare, thus giving the empire the semblance of peace. Wikipedia

God blessed the world when the church faithfully obeyed Jesus' teachings on non-violence. Yet, as the church slowly abandoned Jesus' teachings during the third century and finally abandoned the idea of unconditional non-violence altogether (Council of Nicea and acceptance of Augustine's Just War theory), the Western world plunged back into perpetual warfare (often between professedly Christian nations).

The Church's abandonment of the early Christian prohibition on divorce and remarriage is similar to the Church's abandonment of Jesus' teachings on unconditional non-violence. While the church faithfully taught against divorce and remarriage, the scourge of divorce and especially divorce and remarriage was rare. However, modernly, most churches are more influenced by their surrounding culture than the early church understandings. Few in our culture even question whether people can remarry while their first spouse remains alive.

As a result, more marriages end in divorce than fidelity. Children, more than anyone else, suffer the consequences. The majority of American children are raised in broken or blended homes caught between split families and remarried parents.

Perhaps, God is waiting for His church to return to the early understandings of the faith, where divorce and remarriage was forbidden while the original spouse was still alive. History shows that God is faithful and will bless the world with peace when His people hold to Jesus' command for unconditional non-violence. History also shows that God is faithful and will bless the world with resilient marriages when His people hold to Jesus' command forbidding divorce and remarriage while the first spouse is still alive.

### **VIII. Does biblical "Divorce" mean "simple separation" or "simple separation and a right to remarry"?**

In most "churches" today, professing Christians are told that Jesus taught that divorce ends the marriage relationship and allows for remarriage. However, historically, the early Christians understood Jesus to mean that divorce allowed for separation from the offending spouse, but did not end the marriage or allow for remarriage. It wasn't until the time of the Erasmus, Luther and Calvin that Christianity/Protestantism abandoned the early understandings. If the early Christian understandings are correct then approximately half of all professing Christians in the West are involved in adultery disguised as remarriage. Do unrepentant adulterers go to hell? Here is the explanation (paper by Heth) of what Jesus meant in Matt 19:9 by allowing divorce:

In returning to the argument that it is unlikely that Jesus used the word 'divorce' with the meaning of separation without the right to remarry, it is usually pointed out that the Pharisees use 'divorce' in Matthew 19:3, 7 with the sense of complete divorce. Then Jesus uses it when He refers to the Mosaic concession which allowed remarriage (v. 8), and so He is apparently using the term with the same meaning-content as the Pharisees do. So how can anyone argue that the word 'divorce', in the light of the exception in verse 9, carries the meaning of simple separation?

At first glance these arguments appear attractive and unquestionable. How can apolyo mean complete divorce with the right to remarry in one place, and simple separation in another-and that in the same context? This is highly unorthodox from an exegetical standpoint.

But first notice who is using the word 'divorce' and what is being stated. 'Divorce' is being used for complete divorce, with the right to remarry, on the lips of the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3, 7. It also has this meaning on Jesus' lips in verse 8. It is clear, however, that in verse 8 Jesus is referring to the Mosaic concession, which did not legislate against marrying a second time after a man had divorced his wife. Though an extensive discussion of the five different interpretations offered for the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:(1-4) cannot be entered into here, it is sufficient to say that this widely misunderstood passage does not teach that a legal bill of divorce (nor subsequent relations with another) 'dissolves' the original marriage.

As J. D. M. Derrett has observed: 'Where the Jewish law went wrong was in the failure to perceive that the one flesh persisted after divorce ...' Why, then, in Matthew 19, would Jesus have used 'divorced' in verse 9 in the sense of the Mosaic 'dissolution' divorce, as so many interpreters contend, when Jesus himself brushes aside Deuteronomy's concession (24:1-3) in favour of Genesis 2:24 (a text under which every Old Testament lexical tool lists 'one flesh' as a kinship or 'blood' relationship.)? The enduring nature of the 'one flesh' kinship bond, created through marriage is the very basis for the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:4. Hence the assumption which many too hastily make from Jesus' use of 'divorce' in verse 8-that Jesus goes on to consider the same 'dissolution' divorce in verse 9 when the exception comes into play-is without foundation.

On the contrary, it is those who believe that Matthew's Jesus allows remarriage after divorce for porneia who are faced with a greater problem of changing meanings.

'Divorce' is given two different senses, and this in one verse! Notice:

1) Putting away for unchastity plus remarriage does not equal adultery.

2) Putting away for other reasons plus remarriage equals adultery.

In the first case, since remarriage does not constitute adultery, putting away obviously dissolves the marriage completely, as traditional Jewish divorce was believed to do. This means that in statement 1), 'divorce' means complete divorce with the right to remarry. In the second case, 'divorce' cannot have this significance, for the marriage bond must still exist since remarriage involves adultery. This means that in statement 2), 'divorce' means only simple separation. Now if it is allegedly unorthodox to use a single word in two different senses employed by two different individuals (Pharisees versus Jesus) who refer to two different contexts for their concept of 'divorce' (Deut. 24:1 versus Gen. 1:27, 2:24), then it is certainly suspect to give two senses to a single word used by Jesus alone in a single context (v.9)!

No such confusion arises in the view that 'divorce', as used by Matthew's Jesus, means

'separate' without the right of remarriage in both cases. And Jesus derives this understanding from the meaning of the Genesis 2:24 'one flesh' relationship that marital union brings about.\*\*

### **IX. When and How did Jesus' Teachings Against Divorce and Remarriage in His Kingdom become Corrupted (Appendix A Timeline)**

Christianity uniformly taught that remarriage while the original spouse remained alive until the Protestant Reformation. Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was the first reformer to question the historical understanding prohibiting remarriage while the original spouse remained alive. Erasmus was a Catholic priest and theologian. Although Catholic, many Protestant reformers were influenced by his writings. Erasmus' authority among the Protestant reformers was also enhanced because he was the first to translate and publish the Greek New Testament in 1516.

In 1519, Erasmus wrote a new interpretation on divorce and remarriage in his Annotations on 1 Corinthians 7. It was a theological, homiletical interpretation, not exegetical. In other words, Erasmus applied human reasoning to the text rather than allowing the text to be taken literally. It had humanistic overtones (ie placing man's needs for happiness in front of obedience to God). Erasmus taught that love should come before any law on marriage and explained that it was unloving of the church to require married couples to continue in unhappy relationships. In fact, Erasmus asserted that the church had a duty to deliver members from unhappy marriages. The two new revolutionary understanding proposed were: 1) certain marriages should be dissolved and 2) the "innocent party" should be allowed to remarry.

"I record my pity for people who are loosely held together by an unhappy marriage and yet would have no hope of abstaining from fornication if they were released from it. I want to secure their salvation by some means, nor have I any wish for this to happen without the consent of the church. I am no innovator. But it is possible that the spirit of Christ may not have revealed the whole truth to the church all at once. And while the church cannot make Christ's decrees of no effect, she can none the less interpret them as may best tend to the salvation of men, relaxing here and drawing tighter there, as time and circumstance may require. Christ wished that all his people might be perfect, no question of divorce arising among them, and the church has endeavoured to secure this full rigour from everyone. I am no supporter of divorce. But how can you be sure that the same church, in her zeal to find a way for the salvation even of weaker brethren, may not think that this is the place for some relaxation? The Gospel is not superseded; it is adapted by those to whom its application is entrusted, so as to secure the salvation of all men. My opinion is that we are misusing the interpretation of the gospel principles, with the result that the force of its teaching in our standards of behavior is fading away. To give an example, Christ so wished his people to abstain from murder that he did not permit men to be angry. We interpret this as meaning angry without cause. Likewise Christ so wished his people to abstain from perjury that he forbade an oath of any kind. This we interpret as meaning that we must not swear without just cause. In the same way he so much wished them to abstain from divorce that he forbade it altogether. What

interpretation the church can put upon this, I do not decide. I wish she could interpret it so as to promote many men's salvation. I do not make any final proposals on this point. I leave the right of decision to the church and content myself with drawing attention to the point." (My Dear Erasmus, pp110-111)

Martin Luther taught something different than the historical understandings prohibiting remarriage while the original spouse lives. Luther argued that since the Old Testament punishment for adultery was death, that the "innocent" spouse could consider the "guilty" spouse as dead. Since, their spouse was "dead", the "innocent" spouse could remarry.

"The temporal sword and government should therefore still put adulterers to death, for whoever commits adultery has in fact himself already departed and is considered as one dead. Therefore the other ('the innocent party') may remarry just as though his spouse had died." (Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* in Works 45.32) circa 1515 AD.

John Calvin continued to advance Luther's teachings on divorce and remarriage and further confirm it as a doctrine of the Reformation:

"For, if the adulteress deserve to be punished with death, what purpose does it serve to talk of divorces? But as it was the duty of the husband to prosecute his wife for adultery, in order to purge his house from infamy, whatever might be the result, the husband, who convicts his wife of uncleanness, is here freed by Christ from the bond. It is even possible that, among a corrupt and degenerate people, this crime remained to a great extent unpunished; as, in our own day, the wicked forbearance of magistrates makes it necessary for husbands to put away unchaste wives, because adulterers are not punished. It must also be observed, that the right belongs equally and mutually to both sides, as there is a mutual and equal obligation to fidelity. For, though in other matters the husband holds the superiority, as to the marriage bed, the wife has an equal right: for he is not the lord of his body; and therefore when, by committing adultery, he has dissolved the marriage, the wife is set at liberty." John Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Commentary on Math 19:9. circa 1530 AD.

In 1532, King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his older wife Catherine of Aragon and marry his young lover Ann Boleyn. The Pope refused to allow him to annul his marriage to Catherine or allow him to remarry Ann Boleyn while Catherine was still alive. As a result, King Henry VIII promoted Erasmus' views on divorce and remarriage. Eventually, Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church, established the Church of England (AKA the Episcopal Church), and remarried Ann Boleyn.

In 1545, the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent renounced the teachings of Erasmus, Luther and Calvin as heretical. The Catholic Church maintained divorce was allowable where the wife was guilty of porneia (sexual immorality). The Catholics allowed two types of divorce: 1) separation of bed and board (still one flesh till death) and 2) annulment: the marriage had been unlawfully contracted to begin with and no marriage had in fact occurred. Here is what the Catholics said about the Reformer's divorce and remarriage changes:

"CANON VII. - If any one saith, that the Church has erred, in that she hath taught, and doth teach, in accordance with the evangelical and apostolical doctrine, that the bond of matrimony cannot be dissolved on account of the adultery of one of the married parties; and that both, or even the innocent one who gave not occasion to the adultery, cannot contract another marriage, during the life-time of the other; and, that he is guilty of adultery, who, having put away the adulteress, shall take another wife, as also she, who, having put away the adulterer, shall take another husband; let him be anathema." Council of Trent AD 1545.

In 1648, the Protestant Reformers wrote their official statement of new doctrines: called the Westminster Confession. The Reformers fully embraced Erasmus' interpretation allowing remarriage while the original spouse remained alive. Luther's reasoning that since adulterers were stoned to death in the Old Testament, Christians could consider adulterers as "dead" which would then free the innocent party to remarry.

The Westminster Confession defined the doctrines of the Church of England and to a large degree is the heritage of modern Evangelical churches in the United States. In direct contradiction to the Council of Trent, the Westminster Confession states:

"V. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead."

From this point on, the vast majority of Protestant denominations accepted the false doctrine that adultery (and more modernly even "desertion" and "irreconcilable differences") can justify the dissolution of marriage and all parties are free to remarry.

## **IX. Practical Application**

1. The Great Commission says to "[o]bey everything I have commanded you..." (Matt 28:19). Jesus expects every Kingdom citizen and church to teach and obey His commands prohibiting remarriage while the original spouse remains alive.

2. What about non-Christians who are divorced, but not remarried and want to become Christians?

Jesus expects every non-Christian who wants to become a part of His Kingdom to obey everything He commanded. Non-Christians cannot selectively choose which of Jesus' commands to follow and which are optional. Only if the divorced non-Christian accepts Jesus' teaching prohibiting divorce and remarriage while the original spouse remains alive can the non-Christian get baptized.

3. What about Christians who divorce and remarry while the original spouse remains alive after their baptism and knowingly remarry while the original spouse remains alive?

A professing Christian who refuses to repent (of any sin – not just disobeying Jesus’ prohibition on remarriage while the original spouse remains alive) should be suspended (barred from Communion). If the professing Christian repents and ends the adulterous second marriage he should be restored to the fellowship.

4. What about professing Christians who divorced and remarried prior to their baptism and were unaware of Jesus’ prohibition?

Unfortunately, most churches are full of members who are divorced and remarried and the original spouse remains alive. In fact, the divorce and remarriage statistics among churchgoers is relatively equal to the non-Christian remarriage statistics. Many remarried people have children with their 2<sup>nd</sup> spouse. Should the church demand that these couples repent of their adulterous 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage and either be single or return to the original spouse? Now that most churches have disobeyed Jesus’ command and allowed remarriage while the original spouse remains alive, how should God’s people repent?

In the last chapter of the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah confronted a similar situation where the Exiles returning to Jerusalem from Babylon had committed a similar violation of God’s Old Kingdom command forbidding the marriage of foreign women (Deut 7:3-4). The Exiles had been immersed in a foreign culture (Babylon) where marrying foreign women was an acceptable practice and had not paid close attention to the Word of God and apparently had forgotten God’s prohibition against intermarriage with foreign women. Similarly, American Christians are immersed in a culture where remarriage while the original spouse remains alive is an acceptable practice. Also, American Christians have not paid close attention to Jesus’ prohibition against remarriage while the original spouse remains alive.

One of the reasons Nehemiah is regarded as a spiritual hero is because he forcefully opposed the Exile’s disobedience. Nehemiah “[c]ontended with them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, ‘You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves’” (Neh 13:25).

Modern Christians need to strongly oppose anyone who disregards Jesus’ Kingdom teaching prohibiting remarriage while the original spouse remains alive. Also, every church should require that members engaged in an adulterous relationship (one or both spouses are “remarried” while their original spouse remains alive) terminate their adulterous “marriages”. For example, Ezra required that the marriage to the foreign wives be terminated (Ez 10:11), even if there were children in the marriage (Ez 10:44).

The New Testament is even clearer. In 1 Corinthians 5:11 it says, “But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such a one.” Communion is essentially eating together. The Holy Spirit commanded that no Kingdom Christian eat with an openly “immoral” person who also claimed to be a Christian. Although many professing Christians involved in adulterous “marriages” were deceived by religious leaders (who in many cases were unaware of Jesus’ prohibition themselves), Kingdom Christians must not “associate” with them and certainly refuse to take

communion with them. Kingdom Christians should have a heart to help them when they are in need and care deeply for them by helping them to repent. But like the Holy Spirit commands in 1 Cor.5:11, Kingdom Christians must not associate or eat with them. To do so is disobedient.

\* Bercot, David Divorce and Remarriage CD, Scroll Publishing.

\*\* Heth, William The Meaning of Divorce in Matthew 19:3-9 published in the Churchman.



## **Appendix A: Church History on Divorce and Remarriage**

**350**

**Augustine believed and taught that marriage was indissoluble until death and this was the earthly picture given of the heavenly reality of Christ's relationship to the church, therefore no remarriage was allowed if one did suffer a divorce.**

**1250**

**Thomas Aquinas taught that the mystery of marriage was one of seven sacraments, a means by which God transmitted grace into a believer's life. Luther and Erasmus both reacted to this teaching because of Luther's strong understanding of justification by faith. They wanted to rid the church of the sacramental system. In so doing, they over-reacted to changing the existing marriage laws and teachings.**

**1516**

**Erasmus publishes the first Greek New Testament.**

**1519**

**Erasmus writes a new interpretation on marriage, divorce and remarriage in his Annotations on I Corinthians 7. It was a theological, homiletical interpretation, not exegetical (inviting human reasoning instead of letting the text speak for itself)! It contained humanistic overtones (putting man's need for happiness in front of obedience to God). Erasmus taught that love should come before any law on marriage and held that it was not loving of the church to insist that couples be made to continue in unhappy relationships. The church should deliver those who suffer in bad marriages.**

**The two new revolutionary propositions were:**

- 1. It should be permissible to dissolve certain marriages.**
- 2. The 'innocent party' should be allowed to remarry.**

**These two views were considered heretical by the theologians of the day.**

**1532**

**King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife Catherine and marry Ann Boleyn. He popularized Erasmus's new views on divorce and remarriage and eventually broke away from the Catholic Church due to his desire to divorce and remarry. He started the Church of England, now known as the Episcopal Church.**

**1550**

**Council of Trent. Catholic Church meets to renounce the exegetical results of Erasmus's studies and of the reformers as well. The Catholic Church held to two types of divorce:**

- 1. Separation of bed and board (still one flesh till death).**
- 2. Annulment - insisting that the marriage had been unlawfully contracted to begin with.**

**1648**

**Westminster Confession: official Protestant Reformation statement of new doctrines.**

**The Protestant Reformers latched onto Erasmus's interpretation of the marriage and divorce texts. Luther added the thinking that since in the Old Testament adulterers were stoned, he reasoned that the modern adulterer could be considered as "dead" which would free the other party to remarry.**

**From this point on, we have our modern-day teaching that adultery (and now "desertion" and even "irreconcilable differences") can break one-flesh and all parties are free to remarry. This teaching has destroyed the family as God designed and planned it to be. For 1650 years, there was no remarriage, now look at the state of marriage in modern times after only 350 years of a false teaching!**

