

Some Questions About Divorce & Remarriage

Must the innocent party divorce the spouse guilty of fornication? Certainly not. Fornication does not dissolve marriage, but instead gives the innocent party the right to dissolve the marriage. They are not obligated to do so. In fact, it could be a great lesson in forgiveness if they choose not to divorce.

Must a Christian take back a mate guilty of fornication in order to forgive? The question arises from a misunderstanding of the difference between sin and the consequences of sin. For instance, it is true that a murderer may be forgiven of his dreadful act, even by the family of the murder victim. It is also true that the murderer may still have to spend time in prison or even face death by capital punishment, and that sentence may be due to testimony given by those who have forgiven him. Forgiveness of sin does not absolve a person of the consequences of that sin. Likewise, the innocent party may forgive a mate of fornication, but because of the mental anguish caused by such a betrayal, may not be able to receive them back as a mate. Divorce is still the right of the innocent party and may be the consequences the fornicator pays for sin.

If the marriage bond is broken by God in a scriptural divorce, can the guilty party remarry, since they are no longer bound? Again, this is a misunderstanding. God allows the innocent party to dissolve the marriage, and frees them (the innocent) from their bond. The bond remains for the guilty. The guilty party who remarries is then guilty of adultery (Matt. 19:9).

Does Matthew 19 really give anyone the right to remarry, or does it just give the innocent the right to divorce? Matthew 19 discusses remarriage as much as divorce. Where there is no remarriage, there is no resulting adultery for the guilty. Therefore, when Jesus says, "Whoever divorces ... except for fornication, and marries another ... commits adultery," it is implicit in the statement that one who divorces for fornication and marries another does not commit adultery.

Since all the passages dealing with this problem are addressed to men divorcing women, can a woman divorce her mate if he is guilty of fornication? Clearly, this is just a question of semantics. Mark 10:10-12 addresses the woman who divorces and remarries without proper cause (fornication) and puts her actions in the dissolving of a marriage equal with that of the man. Granted, Mark 10 does not mention the exception, but Jesus' teaching on this matter must be gathered from all sources (thus Matthew as well). In addition, there are other passages in the New Testament addressed to "men" which are really addressed to all (see Gal. 6:1, Matt. 5:27-28). Therefore, we must conclude a woman whose husband commits fornication has scriptural right to divorce him and marry another.

What about the one who is innocent, but a sinful mate "puts them away?" Jesus gives the right to remarry only to those who "put away" their mate for fornication. If one is "put away" and then remarries, they commit adultery. Therefore, if an innocent party is "put away" for incompatibility, they commit adultery if they remarry.

Why is this issue so much debated recently? It is clear that we have let worldly ideas about marriage and divorce influence our lives as Christians. Many people seek for "ways out" for loved ones and friends who find themselves divorced without proper cause. As Christians, it is important to stand for what is right and true even when "the truth hurts." We do not wish for anyone to have to suffer the lonely life of a "eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," but we recognize that this is far better than being lost. Our desire to stand on the scripture compels us to continue to debate this vital issue with those who would distort His word.

- by Rusty Miller

FIRST

The Bible tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). There is so much more involved with this than just attendance. "Seeking first" is an attitude as well as a commitment to the cause of Christ. "Seeking first" means such things as:

- Putting others first (Phil. 2:3,4)

- Being willing to give up things for the sake of others (1 Cor. 8:13)
- Being wronged rather than going to court with a brother (1 Cor. 6:7)
- Going the extra mile for another (Matt. 5:41)
- Doing without things so you won't stumble (Matt. 5:30)

Is the kingdom important to you? Is it so important that you are willing to put it FIRST in your life?
- by Roger Shouse

'Drive' A Mile In His Shoes!

We were talking about drivers on the interstate highways, and this fella said: "You can't believe the crazy stunts they pull. They think they're the only ones on the highway. You'd think they own the road!" I've said the very same things myself. When I made the remarks, I was talking about some of the truck drivers with their '18 wheelers'. But these comments were made by a truck driver talking about people who drive cars! Clearly, it is all a matter of perspective.

This may have some application to some of the problems, fusses and misunderstandings that sometimes trouble the Lord's church. Could it be that these might also be attributed to one's perspective? *"They're not friendly over there."* *"No one seems to care about me, or my problems."* *"The preacher is too ..."* *"The elders don't ..."* *"Sister So-and-so never ..."* Wait! Did you ever stop to analyze the problem from the other person's perspective? Often if we take the time to look at the situation from the other man's point of view we can gain some valuable insights that might help us work through the problem, resolve the fuss and clear up the misunderstanding.

God's word encourages us about such things: *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:"* (Philippians 2:2-5)

There are issues of right and wrong, truth and error, that demand that we take a firm stand - no matter what the consequences may be. But too often brethren have fought and divided - suffered bad feelings and alienation - over things that could have been settled peacefully by simply "walking (driving!?) a mile in the other man's shoes." Think!

- by Greg Gwin