

Marriage Divorce Remarriage

11-16-14

When we examine the New Testament writings of Paul, we see that he focused in particular on the hard and controversial issues of his day. He mentioned the issue of circumcision in 7 out of 13 of his letters; the issue of racism in 5 out of 13; the issue of sexual immorality in 9 of 13. From this pattern we can conclude that, while we are called to deliver ALL things, we need to focus particularly to our needs (meaning doctrines that are especially pertinent to ourselves), and our needs are often controversial subjects. There is little value in delivering a twelve sermon series on the sin of polygamy in the US, for example.

Sometimes brethren suggest that we have become too "issue specific"; that we need to cease our "majoring in the minors", and focus on more important subjects, such as evangelism. Yet we forget that the most evangelistically minded people of the New Testament were the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said "*you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*" (Matthew 23:15). We MUST ensure that our doctrine is right before we attempt to persuade others to it; as Jesus taught, we need to remove the beam from our eyes before we can remove the splinter from another's eye.

One of our many doctrinal dilemmas today is the issue of Marriage – Divorce – Remarriage. Jesus' teaching was straightforward on this: "*But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*" (Matthew 5:32, see also Matthew 19:9).

Effectively, Jesus said:

1. To divorce and marry another is a sin
2. That subsequent "remarriage" is not marriage, but adultery
3. The exception to this teaching is a divorce for the case of sexual immorality

First, Jesus said that to divorce and marry another is a sin (Matthew 19:6). He tells us that God joins man in marriage, and that man cannot join/unjoin marriage. Simply stated, God HATES divorce (Malachi 2:16). This is covenant language; a covenant (like marriage) once entered cannot be annulled (Galatians 3:15).

Second, Jesus said that the subsequent remarriage is actually not a marriage, but is instead adultery. Remember that He said that God defines what makes marriage. Jesus is clearly saying that a remarriage after a divorce (without the sole exception) is adultery, not marriage. If two homosexuals were "married" by a judge, we can see that they might be married in the sight of the law, but since God defines marriage as one man and one woman for life (as stated in Matthew 19), it is not truly a marriage; it is homosexuality. So it is with the one who remarries (without the exception); their relationship is not "marriage" but adultery. "*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery*" (Luke 16:18)

Finally, Jesus made it clear that there is ONLY one exception – Sexual Immorality (physical adultery). It allows ONLY the innocent remarriage.

When we understand what Jesus said, we draw some heartbreaking conclusions. Some may have to "put away" spouses to come to Christ. The apostles understood this, as they said in Matthew 19:10-11. Jesus concurred with their assessment when He concludes the teaching by saying that "*there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*" (Matthew 19:12).

Because of this hard teaching, there are some who reject what Jesus said. They base their rejection on human emotion or on selfish or carnal desire. They teach the following:

FALSE TEACHING 1: Divorce/Remarriage is Forgiven at Baptism

Some believe that when we are baptized, an unsanctioned remarriage becomes legitimate. The important point to understand Jesus' teaching is that He is not accusing a man of adultery for divorcing his wife; He is saying that subsequent marriage is not, in the eyes of God, a marriage, but is simply adultery. Thus, the sin is not divorce, but remarriage. That remarriage is an ongoing condition of adultery, based on what Jesus is saying. It was not a onetime act of adultery that he performed at his wedding ceremony; his living condition is a constant state of adultery. If he has been remarried 25 years, then he has been living in adultery 25 years.

Baptism removes all sins that we have committed, but it does not remove sins we are still committing or will commit. Paul would address this in Romans 6:2; there he would ask the rhetorical question "may we sin so that grace (forgiveness) might abound?" His clear answer is that we cannot continue in sin once our sins are removed. This is the basis of repentance. The issue in this circumstance is that the man or woman who has remarried in a way that is not seen as such by God, at baptism, has their previous sins removed. However, this does not immediately make their current relationship a marriage. There is nothing that does not define it as adultery, and therefore if he/she proceeds in it, they are still in an adulterous relationship.

FALSE TEACHING 2: Repentance Permits Remarriage

Tied by the same string as considering baptism to remove adultery is the idea that we need only repent of our adulterous relationship to be forgiven. This statement is true in its wording, but false in the intent of the speaker. We need to realize that it reformats the word "repent" to mean something quite different than what the Bible means.

In the Bible, repent means to change. It insists on an ending of sinful activity, an about face, and a movement in another direction. In the passage above we saw Paul (Romans 6:1-4) clearly describe repentance as an end of our sinful behavior. The error in applying this to the remarriage circumstance is that it describes repentance as merely the confession of sin, not the cessation of sin. Remember, the sin Jesus identified was living in an adulterous relationship, not a single act of adultery.

FALSE TEACHING 3: Matthew 19 is the Old Law

Recognizing that the idea that baptism cannot wash away our future intentional sins, some have instead undermined the teaching of Jesus by claiming that the teaching in Matthew 19 is in fact a doctrine of the Old Covenant of Moses, not the New Covenant of Christ.

First, we must understand that Jesus told His disciples that everything He taught them was the Law of Christ, and upon His resurrection they were to go forth teaching these things (Matthew 28:19-20). Second, Jesus made it clear that this teaching was one that originated from the beginning. He said as much in qualifying how it superseded the Law of Moses. This Law of Marriage was from the beginning. Hence Paul's use of the term in Romans 7:1-3 draws not to the Law of Moses, but one of marriage itself.

Finally, when we look at the Mosaic law of divorce in Deuteronomy 24, it is quite a bit different than the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19.

FALSE TEACHING 4: Matthew 19 is for Christians, Not (Alien) Sinners

This false doctrine is linked to the previous idea of rejecting Matthew 19 for a lack of jurisdiction. The problem to this teaching is on multiple levels. First, the concept of sin requires that a law be in place. If the alien sinner is not under law while apart from Christ, in fact, he would not be under sin (Romans 7:7). Second, Jesus said that the law of marriage was a law from the beginning. Therefore, there is no law that exists (the law of Adam, of Noah, of Moses, or of Christ) that did not contain this law. Remember that even with the certificate of divorce in the Mosaic law, the Israelites were condemned under the original law of marriage for divorcing their spouses in Malachi 2:14-17. If Moses' certificate was all they were accountable to, then how could God condemn them?

FALSE TEACHING 5: A Forsaken Believer is Free to Remarry

Here the debate is taken to a new place. In this statement, a case is made that there is a subsequent teaching made by Paul in I Corinthians 7 that nullifies or clarifies the teaching of Christ in Matthew 19. Specifically, the key passage of use is Paul's discussion in I Corinthians 7:15. Many who have adopted this doctrine have of necessity also adopted one of the preceding doctrines of nullification as they apply to Matthew 19.

1 Corinthians 7:15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Of course, the first thing we notice is that this is not what Paul said. His stated word "bondage" is translated from the Greek word *Douloo*; in no place in Scripture is that word ever associated or made to refer to marriage. It is however used repeatedly to identify someone who is owned by sin (Romans 6:18-22). Secondly, it must be made clear that if Matthew 19 is in effect as Paul writes his letter, he cannot contradict that command, but anything he writes must be seen as subsequent to it. In other words, we see an example that Paul states in Romans 10:9 about salvation and confession. Third, this teaching ignores the whole context of the passage, particularly Paul's qualifying statement earlier in the chapter. In fact, four times in the chapter Paul restates the commandment not to divorce. As well, Paul clearly states that when divorce occurs, remarriage is not an option. It is deliberately ignorant of the passage's context to suggest Paul seeks to free the married one whose spouse departs from that marriage.

God Does Not Desire for Families to be Broken Apart

This last position we identify is fundamentally an emotional plea rather than a Scriptural point. It is rooted in that age old error that has been around since Cain offered his unaccepted sacrifice: to believe that what I care about most is what God cares about most. In this case, to believe that because we see the results of ending a remarriage that was unacceptable to God as being too much to bear, God must as well. Specifically, that God would not teach something that might require a husband and wife, especially those who have children, to put one another away, if their marriage is adulterous in the eyes of the Lord.

There are a couple of things that need to be addressed in this. First, who caused this problem, God or man? We know that there are consequences to sin that are additional to the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). We realize that such consequences may not be avoidable, even with repentance and forgiveness. David was forgiven by God, but his son still died (II Samuel 12:13-14). When Onesimus the runaway slave

became a Christian, he had to return to his master (Philemon 10-12). It is a contemptible thing to accuse God of being unjust because we suffer the consequences of our own sins.

Secondly, has not God done this very thing before? Has He not said, for far less reason, that men should put away wives that they had no authority to marry? Even those with children?

Ezra 10:3,44 "Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law"..... All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

CONCLUSION

Jesus taught a very clear and straightforward teaching on Marriage-Divorce-Remarriage in Matthew 19. All of the attempts to invalidate this teaching are illegitimate attempts to allow people to come to Christ without repentance. Sometimes sin has terrible consequences in this life, but it will absolutely have even worse wages in the one to come.