

## Questions I get asked: Divorce & remarriage 1 of 2 - 20210529

Hi all,

Don't you hate it when your words are taken out of context? A person who takes your words out of context can firmly believe those words, though you know you didn't mean what they think you did. Getting them to give up believing in what they think you said, in favor of believing what you actually said, can be difficult.

When it comes to the Word of God, the words and culture which are taken out of context can be especially damaging. A person will fight you tooth and nail for what they believe to be the true and accurate Word of God, when in reality what was meant in scripture isn't what they believe. They took God out of context. Beliefs founded upon God's Word taken out of context often form strongholds not easily overcome by history and context.

To save ourselves that trouble on the subject of marriage and divorce, let us set the context of Jewish history and Old Testament Mosaic law the boy Jesus would have known and discussed when He was in the temple talking to the elders at age 12. Let's talk within the context of the schools of religious thought of His day when He started His ministry about age 30. Let's first understand what a 1st century Jew in Jerusalem would have known and believed.

### God gives the Israeli divorce law, about 1300BC

Remember that God created marriage when the Lord God (Christ) brought Eve to Adam in the garden, thus making Him the center of their marriage. That they lived all their lives together reveals original intent: Marriage is intended to be until death.

But recognizing anything He creates or gives to man can be misused, damaged, or destroyed, and knowing fallen man, God also provided a way of escape in the event someone failed love. That each person might start anew if the original intent of their marriage was irretrievably lost, He gave Moses the law of divorce.

### Deuteronomy 24:1-4, around 1300BC

"When a man has taken a wife and married her, and it comes to pass that that she find no favor in his eyes, because he has found some uncleanness in her; then let him give her a bill of divorce and put it in her hand and send her out of his house. And when she is gone out of his house she may go and become another man's wife. And if the 2nd husband hates her and gives her a bill of divorce, or if he dies, the first husband cannot take her again to be his wife, for she has been another man's wife, it would be an abomination and cause the land to sin which the Lord God gave you as an inheritance."

### Tom, Joe, and Betty...

That's it. That's all God gave Israel as a divorce law. Notice the divorced people are both free to remarry without guilt before God or man. This is how it was taught and practiced up to and including the time of Jesus. The one condition is that once married and divorced, they may remarry but cannot return to their first spouse.

Why? Because let us say you have Tom and Joe, and Betty is married first to Tom, then he divorces her, so she marries Joe. If God didn't forbid it, it would be possible for Betty to say, "I had it better with Tom than with Joe, so I'm going to have an affair with Tom and break up his new marriage to return to him."

To do that defeats the purpose of the law of divorce. Marriage was intended to be until death unless the marriage was beyond repair, which is why God provided the way out, the divorce law. To allow Israel to treat marriage so lightly, in effect swapping spouses at will according to one's lust, would introduce lust and adultery into society. So God said once divorced, you can't return to a former spouse. You may marry again, but not with a former spouse.

(God doesn't define what 'found some uncleanness in her' means, and that was the focus of debate from Moses down through history to the time of Jesus. We know the reason much of the law was vague was so that people would have to walk with God in order to know how He wanted His law applied to a given situation. But man being man, by the time of Jesus the Pharisees had added over

800 of their own laws to try to define every course of action for any possible situation. And it was those additional laws that Jesus continually taught against.)

### **Flash forward about four hundred years, about 900BC...**

When Solomon died around 930BC his successor, Rehoboam, said he would make the taxes on the people much greater than Solomon. As a result 10 tribes broke away from Judah, Benjamin, the Levites and a remnant of other tribes who loved the Lord around Jerusalem, and moved north to Samaria. (Read of this in the whole of I Kings 12)

There, they established their own king, Jeroboam, their own priesthood of the lowest men of society, as a spite in the face of God and rejection of Him and His ways. Simply put: They didn't want to go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. When Israel split with them, Judah became its own nation which included Benjamin and the Levites who continued to serve as priests in the temple in Jerusalem, and a remnant from the other tribes who were faithful to the Lord. But in the general sense we say there were 10 tribes that broke away from Judah and Benjamin.

This is why when you read the Old Testament you'll see references to the 'king of Israel' and the 'king of Judah'. They co-existed for about 200 years in an uneasy relationship; Judah having mostly good kings like Jehoshaphat and Josiah, and Israel having mostly ungodly kings like Ahab. God sent many prophets to Israel including Elijah, to try to bring them back to Him.

### **God divorces Israel: 722BC**

Israel was continually unfaithful to the Lord, choosing to worship Baal and other gods. Finally, God had no choice but to leave them to face the consequences of their actions, and spiritually divorced them. Being left without His covering, Israel (the 10 northern tribes) was conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC, roughly 200 years after the death of Solomon and their rebellious break away from Judah and the Lord. Those 10 tribes of Israel are called the "Lost tribes of Israel".

This is covered in II Kings 17, including how Assyria moved many foreigners into Samaria so that over time the remaining Jewish population intermarried with the Gentile immigrants. These 'half-breed' Jews who worshipped a corrupted version of the God of Israel, became the hated Samaritans in the gospels. You will recall in John 4 it was a Samaritan woman Jesus asked for water, and told her in v22: "You don't know what you worship, but we know what we worship, for salvation comes from the Jews." Their history was common knowledge to them both.

### **God divorced Israel you say? Jeremiah in about 600BC**

Jeremiah lived after the destruction of Israel, but just before and during the time Judah was destroyed for her unfaithfulness. The Lord is talking to Jeremiah about unfaithful Israel and how Judah is following in her footsteps. Jeremiah 3:1-8 records this history and the Lord's case against Israel's adultery and (spiritual) fornication with Baal:

"They say if a man divorces his wife and she becomes another man's wife, shall she return to him again? Won't the land be greatly polluted? You have played the harlot with many lovers, yet return to Me says the Lord....(v8)...and when I saw all the cases where backsliding Israel has committed adultery, I divorced her and gave her a bill of divorce. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it and wasn't afraid, and played the harlot also..."

### **Hosea**

This event of God divorcing Israel leading to their destruction in 722BC was the topic of the book of Hosea, who lived in that time. The Lord tells Hosea to take a prostitute as his wife, and there is some debate about whether this was an allegory or factual. But we do know that in 2:2 the Lord quotes the Israeli divorce decree (to Israel) required to be stated before the elders of a city, along with the written bill of divorce: "...you are not (no longer) my wife, neither am I (any longer) your husband..."

In 2:8 of Hosea you can feel the Lord's pain at Israel's betrayal and His pain of divorcing her, for He says in v8: "For she did not know that it was I who provided her grain and wine and oil, and prospered her with gold and silver, for which she gave credit to Baal."

In verses 14-23 the Lord speaks of a future day, "I will allure (woo) her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her...and in that day she will call me Ishi (husband, a term of endearment) and no more Baali (master)."

He goes on to say in v19-20: "In that day I will betroth you to myself forever. I will betroth you to myself in righteousness, and justice, and also in loving kindnesses and mercy. And even in faithfulness, for you will know faithfulness to Me for you will know the Lord." (The word 'Lord' here is 'Yahweh', or YHWH, who we know as Jesus, which is the Greek transliteration of Yahweh, or Joshua, or more strictly speaking, YHWH). So the Lord, Christ, is telling Israel there will come a day when they will know Him - Christ Jesus.

### **Fast forward 300 years: God hates the misuse of His divorce law, about 400BC**

By the time of Malachi in roughly 400BC the corrupt priests were using the vagueness of the divorce law to marry and divorce at will to such an extent God said 'I hate divorce'. That wasn't a doctrinal statement, for it was He who gave the law of divorce to begin with. So He doesn't hate His own law, He hates divorce as they used it.

He hates the misuse of His law of divorce, for the fact He gave the law of divorce means there are times divorce is His provision for an innocent spouse.

The priests of Malachi's time also offered in sacrifice only the worst of the animals, the worst of the grain, and didn't enforce the giving ordinances, which are largely designed to make sure no one suffered any lack in Israel. Many pastors have quoted Malachi 3 before receiving an offering, perhaps not realizing of the 6 tithes given over 7 years (no tithing in the 7th year) 4 of them went back to the people or never went to the priests at all. Most were returned to the giver of the tithe after the priests took out enough for the sacrifice and their own living.

And so we've laid the groundwork of history and Jewish culture to set the stage for the life of Jesus in the first century. Jesus never contradicted any of the Mosaic law, though He did contradict many of the 800 laws of the Pharisees which were added to the law. It was after all Christ who spoke to Moses from the burning bush - Jesus claims to be the One who spoke to Moses in John 8:56-59 when He identifies Himself as the "I AM".

So anything you think Jesus said about marriage and divorce must be placed within the context that He is the author of the Mosaic law and as the Son of Man, well educated in its meaning and original intent. And we will look at what Jesus said which was based on the Deuteronomy 24:1-4 divorce law next week. Until then, blessings!

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### **Questions I get asked: Divorce and remarriage 2 of 2 - 20210605**

Hi all,

Last week I shared Israel's history concerning the law of divorce, how it was used and misused from Moses to Malachi. When God invented marriage He also had to invent a way out so that flawed people in a sinful world might start anew, which is what the Deuteronomy 24:1-4 divorce law provides.

### **400 years after Malachi, in the time of Jesus**

God sent forth His son in the fullness of time, and young Jesus in the 1st century AD would have learned all that I shared last week and much more. Most boys of His time had to memorize the 5 Books of Moses and be able to recite them by age 5 or 6 (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)

That is quite a kindergarten class! So He knew God's divorce law, knew Israel's history of unfaithfulness to (Him), knew how (He) had divorced Israel, knew how the priests of Malachi's time abused the law of divorce (He) had given them. He knew its intended purpose because He gave it!

### **Houses of Hillel and Shammai**

During the early part of the first century two schools of thought emerged. One was the 'House of Hillel' and the other was the 'House of Shammai'. Rabbi Hillel died about the year 10AD and perhaps he knew the boy Jesus if we think Jesus was born in 4BC and at 12 years old visited the temple - about 2-3 years before Hillel died. We don't know. But Rabbi Shammai lived to about the year 30AD, and may very well have known Jesus.

They were both part of the Jewish leaders who added some 800 of their own laws onto the 613 laws of Moses, and it was those 800 Jesus debated the leaders about. As it pertains to the Israeli divorce law, Hillel taught the 'uncleanness' a man might find in his wife could include a burnt meal she cooked for him. That's right folks, Hillel taught if the wife burns a meal it was grounds for divorce.

Shammai however taught God's intent was for marriage to be life-long, therefore divorce had to be for something more serious like fornication, abuse, abandonment, neglect, or other serious issue. These were the 'hot' topics in Jesus' day, and that brings us to Jesus' statements about marriage and divorce. Now we have the history, now we have the context - at least in brief.

### **The difference between adultery and fornication according to Jesus**

In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus equated anger without a cause with murder, stating if a man is angry with his brother without cause, he is in danger of hell. That equates the unjust anger with the act. It equates the imagination of hatred with murder.

In 5:28-32 Jesus does the same thing concerning the thought of sex. To look on a woman with lust is to commit adultery. That is where we need to pause. Our definition of adultery is often different from His definition of adultery, and that leads to confusion when trying to understand His words. Understand what Jesus said: Looking on a woman with lust equals the act. Hating your someone without cause is the same as the act of murder. Jesus is dealing with the heart and imaginations of people.

v28: "Whoever looks on a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." After that He said to 'pluck out' the eye - the method by which lust is demonstrated, and 'cut off your right hand' - the hand represents taking action on the lust of the eye. So He is saying deal with the lust, deal with the imagination of the plans to consummate the lust with that other person. Deal with it. Cut off your thoughts, your imagination, think on other things.

In this context, adultery is the act of a married person imagining sex with someone other than their spouse. Adultery is the lust, the imagination, the fantasy. Jesus said cut off the lust of the eye and thought of action before you actually do the deed.

### **Adultery vs fornication**

"Therefore if a man divorces his wife except for fornication, he is guilty of adultery and causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries her is committing adultery. v32

Because adultery is the imagination of an affair, Jesus in this verse is classifying a marriage born of lust as adulterous. He was classifying a marriage founded upon lust in the same way we might say 'He married her for her money' or 'She married him for political reasons'. Jesus said a marriage founded upon lust that caused the breakup of a previous marriage, is founded upon adultery and the two people are in adultery - an imagination with each other and fantasy of lust.

This does not contradict the Lord's own law of divorce, but builds on it revealing original intent for marriage to be free from lust and wandering eyes. Many churches and even denominations not understanding that the law of Moses already allowed for a man or woman to remarry, and Jesus would not contradict the very law that He Himself gave Moses, think Jesus is saying there is no cause for divorce at all except for fornication.

That's not what He said here. There is no 'stand alone' verse, but every verse is balanced in context with other verses. He said if a man gets caught up in lust and adultery and leaves his wife for that reason, his next marriage is therefore an adulterous one - founded upon lust and fantasy.

### **Why did He give the law of divorce in the first place?**

In Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus is asked: "Is it legal to divorce a wife for any reason?" As I shared about the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel, this was a much debated topic. Because of the two schools of thought, they tried to trap Jesus between opinions of the two houses.

But Jesus side-stepped the issue by going to the beginning in v4-6: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female...that they may leave their families to cling to one another and become one flesh. What God has put together let no man separate."

In other words in answer to their question if they could divorce for any reason, Jesus said no. The highest and best is that they remain one all their lives. "What God has put together let not man separate."

### **Divorce given in case one spouse hardens their heart against the other**

But they persisted, asking if that was the original intent when they did God provide for a divorce? So Jesus in v8 went beyond the written law to the heart of the law. "Moses (the law) gave the divorce law because of the hardness of your hearts. But from the beginning it was not so."

Jesus here reveals the true intent behind the law of divorce: It was given due to the hardening of one spouse's heart towards the other. Under that condition, the hardness of heart, the divorce law was given. Jesus justified the House of Shammai who said divorce was only for serious reasons like fornication, abuse, abandonment and such - indicating he understood it was granted for situations where one spouse hardened their heart against the other.

This is why Paul would later write in I Corinthians 7:15 that if a believing spouse is married to an unbeliever who wants a divorce, let them go. That indicates that unbeliever had hardened their heart against their spouse, and Paul said, let them go.

### **The Word and Spirit agree**

If we believe the Holy Spirit is doing something in the world, then we will find it in the Word. If not, then it's not the Holy Spirit. If we believe something is in the Word, then we'll see the Holy Spirit agreeing with that understanding through the centuries in the body of Christ, to our day.

When it comes to divorce and what I stated above as what I believe the Word says, let me ask this of those reading this who have been married, divorced, and maybe remarried: Is the Lord still with you as He was before? Has He ever treated you like a second class citizen of the kingdom by withholding His Spirit from you? (Or has the church and church culture made you feel that way?)

So if what I have shared is balanced, let me ask those who are divorced, or divorced and remarried: Is the Holy Spirit still with you? Still blessing you? If the answer is yes, then this balanced understanding of the Word is confirmed by the Holy Spirit in your life.

There are some who understand the Word differently, believing a person who divorced cannot remarry under any circumstances. Yet God promises to remarry Israel in the New Covenant. Can't we follow His example? Isn't God Spirit with you and blessing you proof He does not think of you as a 2nd class child of His? Did He show grace and His presence while you were going through the divorce? Isn't He with you now? Then rest. He is at peace with you.

### **What about leadership being 'the husband of one wife', from I Timothy 3:12?**

"Let the deacons (servants/ministers) be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."

From this verse some denominations and teachers say if a man has been divorced he (or she) cannot be in leadership. But taking that logic to its completion means deacons had to be married, so Paul would be disqualified as a deacon because he was single. See how that logic falls apart?

What Paul was talking about was polygamy, which was common in that day. What shocks many in the west is to learn that it is still an issue today in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and India in particular. Quite often we in cwoi deal with those who have a wife from an arranged marriage made when they were children, as well as a woman they fell in love with as an adult. Sometimes the arranged marriage

can be annulled by paying the bride's family a large amount so they save face and the contract of marriage is dissolved.

I could tell you of former Muslims who have come to the Lord in recent years that include one with 17 wives the last I heard, and another very wealthy man in the Mid-east with over 35 wives. I could tell you of arranged marriages from India and parts of Africa, some that have worked well, others that have not.

But these issues of today are relevant as they were in Paul's time, when he said if a married man wants to enter into leadership, he has to just have one wife. Again, to this the Word and Spirit agree, I see it almost monthly here in our network. Hey folks, we're just to catch the fish, God is the one to clean them, lol.

### **Summary**

I hope the reader sees God's grace and mercy in this subject, in life's unexpected tragedies, like divorce. His highest and best was as Jesus said, that once joined together they remain so for life. But when He gave marriage He also had to provide a way of escape. To create marriage for flawed human beings, He also had to make a way of escape.

In I Corinthians 10:13 it says God will not allow us to be tested above what we are able to handle, and will when that trial comes in, make a way of escape that we may endure. Sometimes as Jesus taught, when one spouse becomes hardened against the other and there is no turning back, divorce is God's way of escape. God gave it for He is love, that there may a fresh start, as the Mosaic law says. (Which Jesus could not and did not contradict)

Nothing Jesus said contradicted the law of Moses which He as Christ, gave to Moses. Remember that. Jesus does not contradict Himself, and the NT is built upon the Old. A divorced couple is free to remarry the law of Moses says. Jesus said it wasn't the original intent, but provided due to hard hearts. Find your peace in that. Rest in that.

if you have had to use God's 'escape' in a failed marriage, know that as Christ was in you then, He is in you now. Nothing diminished, nothing lessened, no spiritual cloud over your head marking you as 'unclean'. The proof is His continued graciousness to you, His continued presence in your life, in your heart, and no one can come against that.

Sorry this one was so long, it is a big subject. If you don't agree, no problem, let us continue fellowship around what and on Who we do agree. He accepts both of us, but this is balance applicable in 'real life', and confirmed by His Spirit in our lives. New subject of 'Questions I get asked' next week. Until then, blessings,

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