

“Ready to Give a Defense”

Answering Our Friends’ Religious Questions

Lesson Thirteen - Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

Introduction. By current statistics, one out of every two marriages in the United States ends in divorce. Even among people who are otherwise religious the epidemic of infidelity to one’s mate and to one’s marriage vows has led many in the world to believe that divorce is acceptable to God. What is (and is not) acceptable to God has never been determined by statistics or popular opinion. It has always been determined by the word of God.

I. God Hates “Putting Away” (Malachi 2:13-17).

- A. God declared through Malachi, that he hated the abuse, and treachery that is involved in Divorce.
 - 1. From a Biblical standpoint, marriage at its very core is a “covenant” which God witnesses and seals for those who have the right to make such a compact with one another (Malachi 2:14).
 - 2. In this covenant, two people pledge to be there for one another, through all that life offers them until death. As a result, a mate is intended to be the only person in the world who shares the whole spectrum of personal experience with that person. They will smile with one another through the good times, clean and care for each other when they are sick and old and be closer to one another than anyone else has the right to be. Divorce is the breaking of this covenant.
 - 3. In Scripture divorce was understood to be an act committed by one mate against another. The man “put away” his wife. Under Mosaic Law, only the man could “put away” his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1).
- B. Mosaic law on marriage and divorce should not be seen as Divine approval of “putting away” (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). In fact, it set in place laws restricting and deterring its practice..
 - 1. The man who might callously put away their mate, put them in a situation in which, to survive they would be forced to remarry. When this occurred, the first husband could never take the wife back (Deuteronomy 24:4). This is not restated under the Law of Christ. Under Christ, reconciliation is possible (I Corinthians 7:11).

II. The Doctrine of Christ on Marriage & Divorce.

- A. Jesus’ taught one man & one woman for life (Matthew 19:1-9).
 - 1. In response to the Pharisee’s question, Jesus goes back to God’s establishment of marriage to show that God intended from the beginning for marriage to last for life (Matthew 19:6; cf. I Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2).
- B. Jesus’ taught that divorce & remarriage (in general) is adultery (Matthew 5:31, 32; Mark 10:11, 12 Luke 16: 18).
 - 1. Of the four times that Jesus addresses marriage and divorce in the gospels, two of the four do not even list the exception for “sexual immorality.” This shows us that the emphasis of Jesus’ teaching is on the permanence of marriage rather than the terms under which it can be ended.
 - 2. Scripture never grants the right of remarriage to the one who is “put away” (whether they are guilty or innocent).
- C. The only terms under which remarriage is not considered adultery is when an innocent mate “puts away” a guilty mate for “sexual immorality” (Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9)

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1. This “sexual immorality” must be “the cause” of the “putting away.” Jesus is not addressing immorality that occurs after the putting away. In that case “the cause” would be something other than “sexual immorality,” and the remarriage, thus “adultery.”

III. Paul’s Teaching on Marriage & Divorce.

- A. Paul did not really teach anything on marriage and divorce which Jesus had not already taught. Paul simply clarified some specifics which Jesus had not addressed while on earth (I Corinthians 7:10-16).
 1. This can be seen from Paul’s use of the phrases “not I, but the Lord says” and “I, not the Lord., say.” As an inspired writer, even his own statements were not simply his opinions. They were “the commandments of the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:37).
 2. The Greek literally describes circumstances imposed upon a woman (I Corinthians 7:10, 11). In other words one who has “been separated from her husband” is to remain unmarried or be reconciled, and a husband is not to “put away” his wife to begin with. This admonition to remain unmarried is not saying that one can (in essence) divorce but just “remain unmarried” with the Lord’s approval. Jesus taught that what God has joined together man is not to separate (Matthew 19:6).
- B. Paul’s teachings regarding “the departure” of an unbeliever do not constitute a second exception for remarriage (I Corinthians 7:15).
 1. Paul uses a word that is elsewhere used of slavery. A believer’s obligation to their unbelieving spouse is not “enslaving” to the extent that if the unbeliever leaves the believe can’t be right with the Lord. This does not grant the right of remarriage -- but the believer has not sinned when this occurs.

Conclusion. God established the covenant of marriage as a beautiful bond between a man and a woman, in order to grant to both, companionship, love, intimacy and provision within this life. Those who would love God, seek true happiness and strive for eternal life must honor the covenant of marriage no matter how far the world goes in rejection of God’s will.