



has divorced a spouse for any other reason than sexual immorality is not free to marry; (2) the man or woman divorced against his or her will for any reason is not free to marry, and (3) the man or woman divorced from his spouse because of his or her sexual immorality is not free to marry.

### Conclusion

beyond its application to only those who are still married to someone. He teaches that one who divorces and remarries (or is divorced against his or her will and remarries) “commits adultery” (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). The one who practices adultery will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). This means: (1) the man or woman who

and sentiments in our culture just as they were to the world of the first century, but they are the teachings our Lord laid down (as with all divine law) “**for our good always**” (Deut. 6:24). Our task is to trust in God’s wisdom and obey His commands. Jesus said, “**For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels**” (Luke 9:26).



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# Faithful Sayings

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## Who Has the Right to Marry?

By Kyle Pope

The teaching of Jesus about the permanence of marriage is one of the most radical elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is seen in the reaction of His disciples when Jesus first taught this doctrine. They declared after hearing it, “**If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry**” (Matt. 19:10, NKJV). In an age in which efforts are continually made to redefine marriage in both public policies or attitudes and in the private choices made within the human heart it is important to remind ourselves exactly what Jesus taught.

### Who Has the Right to Marry?

**A Man and a Woman.** When God created marriage, He defined it with the words, “**Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh**” (Gen. 2:24). As God designed it, the parties involved in marriage are “**a man**” who is joined to a “**wife**.” Homosexual relations are sinful under any circumstances (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11).

**One Man and One Woman.** In all three quotes of Genesis 2:24 in the New Testament, the last phrase reads “**and the two shall become one flesh**” (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:8; Eph. 5:31). This

difference between “**they**” and “**the two**” is also found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made before the time of Christ. While polygamy was permitted under Mosaic Law, the Law of Christ teaches that marriage to another while one is already married to another is adultery (Rom. 7:2-3). That prohibits multiple wives or multiple husbands.

**Those Who Are Free to Marry.** Not all who might want to marry are free to marry. Regardless of whether culture or civil laws allow it, not all marriages are acceptable before God. John the Baptist was killed because he told

Herod of his marriage to Herodias, “**It is not lawful for you to have her**” (Matt. 14:4). Who are those free to marry?

#### **A man and a woman who have never married.**

Malachi 2:14-15 teaches that God acts as witness to the covenant made between a man and woman. While marriage vows make a woman a man’s “**wife by covenant**” (2:14) in witnessing this contract, it is actually God who makes “**them one**” (2:15). Jesus taught, “**what God has joined together, let not man separate**” (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9). A man or a woman whom God has never joined to another stand free to enter into the marriage covenant.

**A man or woman whose spouse has died.** Paul wrote, “**A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord**” (1 Cor. 7:39). To illustrate the Jews’ liberation from the law of Moses, Paul restates the same point in Romans 7:1-3, explaining “**if her husband dies, she is free.**” The marriage covenant ends upon death. A widower or widow is free to marry.

**A man or woman who has put away a spouse for the cause of fornication.** The general teaching of the gospel forbids divorce. Of the four texts in the Gospels recording the teaching of Jesus on the subject, two teach:

“**Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery**” (Luke 16:18) and “**Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery**” (Mark 10:11-12). So, in most cases remarriage after divorce is defined by Jesus as a continuing practice of “**adultery**.” The gospel teaches that adultery prevents one from inheriting the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

In the other two texts Jesus inserts an exception clause that modifies the general teaching. He adds, “**except for sexual immorality**” (Matt. 19:9) or “**for any reason except sexual immorality**” (Matt. 5:32). Careful consideration of how this clause modifies the general prohibition indicates that when the reason one spouse divorces another is “**sexual immorality**,” Jesus does not define the remarriage of that spouse as “**adultery**.” This clause does not change how God defines remarriage on the part of the one divorced (or put away) for “**sexual immorality**” (or any other cause)—Jesus still defines it as “**adultery**.” One cannot practice adultery and go to heaven (Heb. 13:4).

#### **Who Is Not Free to Marry?**

**A man to a man or woman to a woman.** Since God defines the participants in marriage as a “**man**” and his “**wife**” (Gen. 2:24), and since homosexuality is sinful under any circumstance (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-11), a man has no right to marry a man and a woman has no right to marry a woman. Marriage does not make sinful behavior right.

#### **A man or a woman already married.**

David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, who was the wife of another man (2 Sam. 11:1-4). According to Mosaic Law, adultery was to be punished with the death penalty (Lev. 20:10). David sinned further by concocting a plan that led to the death of her husband, then marrying her (2 Sam. 11:5-27). Throughout all periods of biblical history sexual relations with one married to another is sin, so one married to another is not free to marry someone else (cf. Gen. 20:1-10; 39:9; Hos. 2:1-7; John 8:1-11).

**A man or a woman who is unscripturally divorced.** Herodias, the wife of Philip, Herod’s brother had unlawfully divorced her husband and married Herod (Matt. 14:1-3). John was executed by Herod because he courageously exposed his sin telling him, “**It is not lawful for you to have her**” (Matt. 14:4). Jesus extends the definition of adultery