

What Does The Bible Say About Remarriage?

By Casey Head

The divorce rate in this country is alarming. It is a sad truth that most people in the United States will be affected by divorce- whether directly or indirectly. This is not a problem that exists only with non-Christians. We as Christians need to understand what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage, because it could happen to any of us. While the focus of this article will be on remarriage, it is necessary that we first establish a few points concerning divorce.

The Pharisees came to Jesus in Matthew 19:3 and asked, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” In other words, can a man divorce his wife for any reason? The world today tells us that we CAN divorce for any reason, whether that be “irreconcilable differences,” financial problems, or plain boredom. Jesus, however, responds in verse four, “Have ye not read?” He tells them to go back to what God had said in the very beginning, that God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman for life! He concludes His explanation, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” It really is that simple, but the Pharisees continued their interrogation, asking Him about a law that Moses had given which permitted divorce. Our Lord said, in verses 8-9, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: *but from the beginning it was not so.* And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

A new law is proclaimed here, and it is necessary that we understand it. Notice that there is a law stated in verse eight, and also an exception to that law. The law- “Whosoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” The exception- “except it be for fornication.” Man is not to separate what God has already joined together, and marriage can never lawfully (in the sight of God) be broken, unless fornication has been committed. In the case of an adulterous spouse, one has the right to divorce *for that cause*. Any other reason will not sever the bond between a husband and wife. They may be legally divorced, but they are still bound to one another in the sight of God. Rather than condoning divorce and remarriage for any cause, we must condemn divorce, just as Jesus condemned it here.

What if two people are unlawfully bound? Let us say that a man is legally married, but he unlawfully divorced (or was divorced by) his first wife. Or a woman marries a man who has been unlawfully divorced- what is their state? The Bible says that they are living in adultery, and that they need to be separated. Those in adultery will not inherit the kingdom of God, and therefore they need to repent (1 Cor 6:9-11). Just as John rebuked Herod for having married his brother, Philip’s wife (Mark 6:17-18), so must we warn those who are in adulterous marriages.

Now let us move on to the main part of our discussion- does a person ever have the right to divorce *and remarry*? The Bible does teach that remarriage can take place lawfully. Three reasons exist for remarriage.

First of all, if two people who are lawfully bound in the sight of God divorce one another, then they are to either remain unmarried or be reconciled (1 Cor 7:11). Paul is not saying here that we can divorce our spouse so long as we remain unmarried. That is a common misconception. Rather, he is addressing those who have *already* unlawfully divorced their spouse. Instead of being hopelessly lost, they had two options- remain unmarried (they are unmarried), OR remarry the spouse to whom they are bound. This is the first lawful reason for remarriage to take place- if two people unlawfully divorce and then are reconciled back to each other.

Second, remarriage can occur when one spouse in the relationship dies. This point is set forth in two places. In 1 Corinthians 7:38, Paul says, “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband

liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” This furthers the statement of Christ in Matthew 19 that man should never separate what God has joined together. Marriage is for life! That was God’s original plan, and the plan to which we are bound under the new covenant. It is clearly stated here that if a spouse dies, then the remaining spouse is loosed from the law of her husband and can now remarry. This law is also found in Romans 7:2, “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.” This is exactly what we found in the previous passage- when your spouse dies (assuming that the marriage is lawful to begin with), you are permitted to remarry.

The third reason for remarriage to scripturally occur is when divorce takes place for the cause of adultery. Again, let us consider Matthew 19:9, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” Now, earlier we dealt with the divorce aspect of this statement. Now, we will address the remarriage aspect of it. Again, there is an exception set forth here in addition to the rule- the cause of fornication. Without the exception in Jesus’ statement, the point is that if we divorce our spouse *and marry another*, the result is adultery. The exception of fornication permits a lawful divorce and by necessity a lawful remarriage, for both divorce and remarriage are under consideration here. The adultery does not take place with the divorce, but rather with the remarriage, and so the exception makes it abundantly clear that a person can divorce their spouse for the cause of fornication and then scripturally remarry. This same point is made in Mark 10:11, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.” Once again, the adultery is committed at the point of remarriage, and when you include the exception of fornication as it is set forth in Matthew 19, our point is further established.

Divorce is a terrible thing. It ruins lives and it ruins souls. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:10, “Let not the wife depart from her husband,” and a powerful point is made in Malachi 2:16, “For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away (divorce).” Let us get back to the Bible and preach these truths about divorce and remarriage.