

Who is, or is Not, Free to Marry?
According to Jesus and Paul

Has this ever happened to you? Some time ago, when you were young, or maybe not, you married a person whom you thought would make your life wonderful. After awhile you decided the person you married was incapable of making you happy. As time passed you grew apart. Life filled with boredom, children, and responsibility seemed empty. Your spouse no longer showed an interest in the same things you are interested in. You grew apart. You turned to God for comfort and began studying His word. You found a congregation of like minds to fellowship with, but your spouse refused to join in. Gradually your spouse became irritable and resentful, accusing you of caring more for “your church” than your family. Your relationship grows from empty to hostile often leading to angry words. “Well, if you’re so unhappy why don’t you sue for divorce?” your spouse lashes out, “If you don’t I’m going to!”

You assume the spouse is bluffing, so you ignore the suggestion. You might think, “I would like to be free of this marriage, except that when we got married I thought marriage was for life. I remember someone saying, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder”. So, as long as I strive to keep God’s laws, I have to stay with this marriage regardless of how miserable I am.”

If this is what you have experienced you might find this study interesting. Just who, if anyone, is free to divorce and remarry? What does the bible tell us about this subject? Christ discusses marriage and divorce with the Pharisees and his disciples in Mat. 19:3-9

3 ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 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.

Mr.10:2 And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.

3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

- 4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.
- 5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.
- 6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.
- 7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;
- 8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.

At the beginning it was God's purpose, His plan, for a man and a woman to become one by the union of intercourse. The man was to leave his parents, "cleave" to his wife, and the two of them become a new family. This would "join" them in marriage.

Jesus referred to Deut 24: where Israel was given permission to divorce a wife.

Deut.24:1 ¶ When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife.

Notice: This was a case where the man found "uncleanness" or as Jesus said, "fornication" in the woman. She was not the sexually pure woman he thought she was. After she is divorced she may remarry, but if she remarries she is never to go back to the former husband who divorced her. The man, in this case, represents the believer, and the woman represents the non-believer. The first husband is being instructed not to take her back IF she marries someone else.

3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;

4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Paul condemns fornication among believers in

1Cor.6:15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

Webster's Dictionary: Fornication - 1. Human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife: sexual intercourse between unmarried people – used in some translations of the Bible (as in Mt 5:32) for unchastity (as in RSV) or immorality to cover all sexual intercourse except between husband and wife or concubine. 2. Sexual

intercourse on the part of an unmarried person accomplished with consent and not deemed adultery.

Adultery : voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband.

In the Bible the term “fornication” and “adultery” is mentioned as a sin.

According to Strong’s Concordance: Fornication is #4202(3) = to indulge in unlawful lust.

Adultery is #3431(2) = a male paramour (an illicit lover).

Paul agrees that the sex act binds two people together. Ideally, the sex union makes the marriage binding. Marriage ceremonies made by man serve for announcement to friends and family that a couple is making a commitment to each other. Since we are to “obey the laws of the land” it is acceptable to God that the couple obtains a license from their state that insures the stability of any children that they may have, and family property and possessions. But the state license or ceremony is not what God looks at that “joins” them together. God does not give an outline as to how to perform a wedding ceremony. He simply says that a man should leave his parents and “cleave” to his wife, and be sexually active with her. Other places we find that the man is also responsible for supporting his wife and the children that comes from that marriage. The commitment to God and one another is the primary glue that “binds” the marriage.

In the story of Isaac and Rebecca (Gen. 24:51) we see that he “took” her to his mother’s tent and there they became married. They became “bound” by God as soon as they became sexually active with each other. It is important to note that these two people were being lead by God and was mature enough to know what they were doing. They would be considered by most religions of today as being “believers” whose lives were dedicated to God.

A married believer, one who is striving to obey God, must flee sexual sin, having sexual desire for no one other than the spouse. Once the sex act has been engaged in they are bound to each other, and should accept responsibility for each other in a marriage relationship.

How many believers have at one time or another been intimate with other than the person they are married to? In Old Test. Times when a man had sex with more than one woman he assumed the responsibility of husband to all of them. They became a part of his household. He accepted them as his responsibility. They bore children by him and became his family. God knew some would eventually break his laws, and commit sexual sins.

God made His laws specifically for His people. Amos 3: 1-2

1 ¶ Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,

2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

When talking to the Pharisees Yeshua made a very interesting comment:

John 9:41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

Not everyone who gets married are either physically or spiritually mature enough to know what they are doing. So from Yeshua's point of view unbelievers are spiritually "blind". So, when unbelievers enter into a sexual relationship, they can be "blind". God is not personally involved in the decisions they make.

Of course God's laws are binding on all peoples, but, as we read earlier, all peoples are not being judged now. However, judgment has begun in the house of God, to his begotten believers, to those people who are not spiritually blind. Believers are, regardless of nationality, considered spiritual Israelites and must abide by God's laws. Now, if we have become spiritual Israelites, a spirit filled believer, have we been forgiven for past sins? If we have been "washed" of our past sins, does God still hold them against us? Of course not! We may have to suffer the consequences of wrong choices, but that does not mean God holds those sins against us after we repent. Does God approve, or bind every couple who has committed a sex sin? If that is the case how many wives or husbands would many of us in the body of Christ be bound to? God is not the author of confusion.

1Cor. 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

Many people who advocate a person is not free to remarry because they have a living divorced spouse should ask themselves if their spouse, that they are presently married to, is the only one they have ever been intimate with. Those of us that have repented of our sins, including sexual immorality, have been forgiven of past sins; that includes sexual sins, and "blind" marriages.

Paul deals with a problem of a man (considered to be a "believer" brother) having sex with his father's wife (a step-mother?). In 1Cor. 5: 1-6 He shows this was a sin. If her husband was dead she was free to marry, but not to her step-son. It is clear that they were being intimate. In 2Cor. 2:3-11 After sufficient time has passed Paul encourages the church congregation to forgive and accept this same person back into their fellowship. Evidently the man has stopped the sexual relationship with his father's wife and has repented.

Did God bind this man and his step-mother? Not at all! When one has sex with a prostitute does that make them "joined" by God? No. That is a sex sin. When a child is sexually abused, does God "bind" the child to the abuser? No. That is a sex sin of the abuser, not the abused. When non-believers enter into a sexual union, does God "bind" them? No. They are spiritually "blind", not inviting God into their lives at this point. But, if

they become believers, and agree to “stay” together, in a sexual relationship, then God binds them in marriage. However, if only one becomes a believer and the other does not, if the non-believer chooses to leave, the believer is free from the relationship and according to Paul, “is free to remarry”.

If, on the other hand, a believer marries a non-believer, knowing he/she is not being led by God, the believer binds himself to his sexual partner. Otherwise it would be a sexual sin of fornication. As long as the non-believer is willing to live in peace with the believer, the believer is obligated to honor that marriage. The believer is not free to divorce and remarry. It becomes only the non-believer's choice to end the marriage. Paul also advised believers not to become “unequally yoked” which if followed, would prevent many marriage problems believers bring upon themselves.

2Cor. 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

If two believers marry they are “bound” by God. But suppose one believer stops being led by God and chooses to leave the marriage? Jesus says that person, if he enters into another sexual relationship, commits adultery. If the one who leaves the marriage, commits adultery, and becomes an unbeliever (falls away) and chooses not to return to the marriage, it is the same as being married to an unbeliever.

If a believer, divorces a believer spouse, and remarries, he causes the person to whom he marries to commit adultery as well as himself. Converted people truly are “bound” for life as long as they stay believers. They may separate, they may divorce, but they are never free to remarry. They can, however, reunite with each other. Marriage is taken very seriously by Jesus Christ, and so it should be with all converted believers! However, if a believer goes leaves the spouse, and remarries, commits adultery, the believer is no longer bound, and is free to remarry.

Mat.5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

A believer who divorces (a believer), except for the discovery of sexual sin, causes the divorced to commit adultery (if one remarries). And even the one he/she marries commits adultery,. The same rule applies to both man and woman. Jesus speaks to believers:

Mr. 10:9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

10 And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter.

11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.

12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

God does not “join” every spiritually blind couple that has a sexual relationship. But, they, who are spiritual Israelites, who “see”, are converted and inviting God to be a part of their life, do become “joined” when they enter into a sexual relationship. They are being judged according to how they conduct themselves, whether in sexual sins, or other sins, and are being held to a higher standard.

1Cor.7:10 ¶ And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?

Verse 16 shows that Paul is addressing both husbands and wives. The question arises: “What constitutes “being pleased to dwell”? If one is guilty of physical, or mental abuse, or adultery, or incest, or abandonment, or anything that involves breaking the marriage vows, as set forth by God, are they “pleased to dwell”? I think not. “God hath called us to peace”. These sins are not conducive to a peaceful co-existence in any kind of relationship, and in reality, in some cases, could cause death to the abused spouse. In such a case every person has an obligation to protect themselves and their families by leaving the offender.

In conclusion: If you and your spouse were mature, knowing God’s laws, striving to please Him, and you entered into a sexual relationship, you are married and “bound” by God into one flesh. If, on the other hand, problems arise that takes time to work out, you are allowed to separate, even divorce, but you are not free to remarry.

If you, as a converted believer, married a non-believer who does not commit adultery, is not abusive, and is willing to live peacefully, you may not leave that person and remarry, because you were not “blind” when you entered the relationship. On the other hand, if that person chooses to leave you, you are “no longer under bondage” to the relationship, and are free to remarry.

If you, as a non-believer married a non-believer, and later you became a believer and your spouse does not want to live peacefully, you are free to leave that person. God did not “join” you because you were both spiritually “blind”. You were not being lead by God at that time. However, if, after you become converted, you choose to stay in a sexual relationship, God will accept and “bind” that relationship as long as the unbelieving spouse is willing to live peacefully.

In this case, if a believer finds himself married to a non-believer who is unwilling to live peacefully, unwilling to change, and the believer chooses to leave, the sexual relationship should be discontinued until changes are made that indicate an acceptable commitment has been made by the non-believer. Once the believer returns to the non-believer he/she is “bound” The believer is no longer “blind” and is making a commitment to both God and the spouse. On the other hand, if the believer does not return to the non-believer, (becomes divorced), because their marriage was made when they were both “blind”, he/she is free to marry.

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