

Divorce For Multiple Causes?

Introduction. Of all of the different ideas on divorce and remarriage, one has become more prominent in just the last few years. Several brethren are advocating that a man and woman may divorce for a reason other than fornication. This assertion is based upon several passages (Matthew 10:34-38; 19:28-29; Luke 14:26; 18:29-30; 1 Corinthians 7:10-15).

I. *The Problem*

- A. Some quotes will help us to see what is being taught about divorce. Some are even advocating that lawful marriages must be terminated by divorce if one is to be faithful to God.
 1. Maurice Barnett wrote, "It may be necessary to leave, not just material things but even relationships, because of extreme hostility from enemies in the household. That includes a spouse."
 2. He said again, "There may be other ways that some spouse might act to stand in the way of the other's serving God. It may come from mental or emotional, as well as physical, abuse that destroys spirituality. Whatever the reasons might be for either spouse's decision to leave, it is to be decided on their own judgment that they cannot serve God and stay in that household any longer."
 3. Mike Willis wrote, "There are circumstances in which a Christian must leave a marriage in order to remain a Christian. A Christian can leave a marriage for the kingdom of heaven's sake because of Luke 18:28-30. That same Greek word *aphiemi* ("left") is used in 1 Corinthians 7:11-13 for divorce ... In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, if the unbeliever is content to dwell with the believer, you must not leave. This implies that if the unbeliever is not content to dwell with you, you can leave and therefore verse 11 takes effect where you must remain unmarried or be reconciled."
 4. Willis wrote again, "I can only justify a woman's departing from her husband in those circumstances in which she cannot live as a Christian within the marriage. And I can imagine several circumstances in which that may occur, but all of them involve the mate being involved in conduct that is contrary to the Lord's command (for example, in cases where the husband is beating the wife and children, cases where one mate is bringing pornography, drugs, and alcohol into the home, thus creating a situation in which one cannot bring up his children in the 'nurture and admonition of the Lord,' etc. (1 Corinthians 7:14-16)."
 5. Willis also said, "The 'fornication is the only cause for divorce' position changes what Jesus said. What Jesus taught is that fornication is the only cause for divorce which allows the innocent the right to

- remarriage. Every other cause for divorce leaves a person without the right of remarriage. He did not say fornication is the only cause for divorce.”
- B. As you might imagine, many emotional stories of tragic marriage circumstances are used to justify this position. However, emotional arguments do not constitute Bible authority.
1. We decide matters of Bible truth by determining what God has said. We cannot determine Bible truth by conjuring up twisted hypothetical situations, and then claiming that those situations constitute authority.
 2. What does the Bible say about divorce? It is not what we think the Bible says, or what we wish the Bible says, or whether or not we will face difficulty carrying out what the Bible says. When we are finished with all the hypothetical situations, the scriptures teach that in the context of a lawful marriage, there is only one reason for divorce.
 3. Emotional arguments remind me of our Baptist friends who bewail the man who dies in a car accident on his way to be baptized. What happens to him? Will he go to heaven? Will he be saved? In so doing, they set aside what God has said and replace it with human judgment of what is “fair.”

II. ***An Examination Of Passages***

- A. Matthew 19.
1. The Pharisee’s question (vs. 3).
 - a) They had in mind the instructions given by Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
 - b) The majority of the Jews held the position of Rabbi Hillel which allowed for divorce for any cause.
 2. The answer of Jesus points to God’s law at the beginning (vss. 4-6).
 - a) God created one man for one woman (Genesis 1:27; cf. Romans 7:2-3).
 - b) There are no alternatives just in case the first marriage does not work out!
 3. Mates must cleave to each other (vs. 5).
 - a) “Cleave” means “to join fast together, to glue, cement.”
 - b) Because of this Genesis 2:24 should apply, not Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
 4. A man and his wife are one flesh (vs. 6).
 - a) This means they are one in mind, spirit, goals, will, and emotion. God has joined man and woman together in this deep bond of marriage. “Joined” means “to fasten in one yoke, yoke together.”

- b) Can a man divorce his wife for any reason? Jesus gave four reasons why divorce should not occur. Only one exception was given in vs. 9.
 - (1) God created one man for one woman.
 - (2) Husbands and wives are to cleave to one another.
 - (3) Husbands and wives are to become one flesh.
 - (4) What God joined together, let not man separate.
- c) In Matthew 5:32 Jesus said that if a man divorces his wife for any reason except fornication, he causes her to commit adultery.
 - (1) Clearly, the sin of adultery will occur when the wife marries another. But Jesus condemns the unlawful action that puts her into a position of vulnerability. Approximately 75% of divorced people remarry within three years.
 - (2) The Bible is clear about the fact that we sin if we encourage or influence others to sin (Matthew 18:6; 1 Corinthians 8:12-13). Jesus is clear that regardless of subsequent remarriage, any divorce action that is not for the reason of fornication is wrong.
- d) Notice the exclusive language of this text. Jesus expressly rules out any other reason for divorce.
 - (1) The exclusive language of this passage is similar in nature to Galatians 1:6-9 where Paul forcefully excludes any other gospel than what has been received.
 - (2) Do we read Galatians 1:6-9 and wonder if somewhere there might be authority for another gospel tucked away somewhere in the word of God?

B. Luke 18.

1. What does "left" mean in Luke 18:28? We face a similar question about "hate" in Luke 14:26. We could strip these passages out of their context and claim that Luke 18:29 authorizes actual divorce and Luke 14:26 commands actual hatred toward family. But in both cases, it is clear that Jesus is teaching that He must take priority over everything else in our lives.
 - a) In Luke 18:29 the context shows a young man that would not give Christ complete priority. Peter argues that they had "left" their nets, father, servants, boats, and fishing careers (cf. Mark 1:18-20). Yet they would fish again (John 21:3). And by no means had Peter divorced his wife (Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5).
 - b) Is this authority for divorce? Luke 18:29 does not authorize actual divorce anymore than Luke 14:26 authorizes actual hatred of "father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters."

- c) We certainly cannot claim to be putting Christ first in our lives by doing what He expressly forbids (Matthew 5:32), God hates (Malachi 2:16), and is nowhere authorized.
 - 2. Is it lawful for a Christian to divorce their spouse because of hostilities in the marriage?
 - a) A Christian does have a right to get protection from the law if their life is in danger as the apostle Paul did (Acts 25:11).
 - b) The purpose of the lesson is not about identifying the various options a spouse has in a bad marriage. Instead, there is one choice a spouse does not have. They do not have (in the absence of unfaithfulness) authority for divorce.
- C. 1 Corinthians 7.
- 1. Paul quoted the Lord and taught the exact same doctrine as Jesus. The apostle Paul was responding to questions from the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 7:1), and he repeats what the Lord commanded in Matthew 19:6.
 - a) If divorce is approved in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 as long as someone remains unmarried or are reconciled to their spouse, then divorce would be scriptural for every reason, not just for the "kingdom of heaven's sake."
 - b) But we know it is not true because it would violate what Jesus taught and what the apostle said when she was commanded not to depart from her husband (1 Corinthians 7:10). If she disobeyed that command, would she have sinned (1 John 3:4)?
 - c) Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 7:15, the Christian is not given permission to divorce his spouse even if they are not content to dwell with them. Notice that the context is between a believer and an unbeliever in vss. 12-15 while vss. 10-11 deals with two believers.
 - d) The Christian is not given permission to depart, he is told to let the unbeliever go because he is not obligated to give up his faith to remain married. You are not a slave to them; you serve Christ first. The Christian cannot force his mate to remain married.
 - 2. Peter proved that a servant can faithfully serve God even when mistreated. To help us understand, he pointed to Jesus as an example, and then made an application to wives (1 Peter 2:18-3:1).

Conclusion. Sadly, more Christians are divorcing just like the world, but God still hates it. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world's standard but be transformed by God's will (Romans 12:2). You vowed to God and your spouse that you would be faithful to your mate for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. You promised to love,

honor, and cherish until death do you part, not "as long as our love shall last" or "as long as you treat me right."

Some would contend that you can scripturally divorce if you remain unmarried or are reconciled; if your mate is not content to dwell with you; for the kingdom of heaven's sake; or if they are causing hostilities in the marriage. But we have seen that the Bible teaches that there is only one exception to the law of being married for life: fornication.

Those who study of the law of God and find themselves in an adulterous marriage should have sympathy extended to them, but they should never allow their physical relationship to become more important than their desire to go to heaven. All relationships in this life are soon over. If one is foolish and sells their eternal inheritance for a cheap price, they will endure punishment for an eternity (Hebrews 12:15-16).