

DIVORCE: IS IT WRONG TO MARRY AGAIN?

By Olan Hicks

The Bible answer: "Art thou loosed (divorced) from a wife? Seek not a wife. But and if thou marry thou hast not sinned." (1 Corinthians 7:27-28).

This simple answer is clear enough and should be sufficient. But there is a problem. A long standing tradition in religious circles insists on an opposite view. They say the Bible teaches an ineligibility to marry for most divorced people. Now, if there is such a teaching in the Bible we need to find it. We do not want to be guilty of lifting a single passage out of context and disregarding all else the Bible says on the subject, so we need to check this out. Is the "ineligible to marry" ruling based on scripture statements or on human theory? Did Jesus or the apostles hold it? What is the origin of that theory?

The scriptures offered in support of this tradition by its advocates do not support it. Matthew 19:9 is the primary one and it does not say it at all. But before we look at this passage and what few others are offered as "proof," let's look in history at its point of origin. This is an important consideration.

What is the source of the "marriage forbidden" idea?

In the middle of the 16th century the Roman Catholic Council of trent convened, (1545 to 63), and issued rulings on many disputed subjects. One thing they tried to do was regulate marriage. What they said about it created an idea which came to be accepted by religious leaders around the world. Today, over 400 years later, the concept they proclaimed is still the one most commonly held in religious circles, among both Catholics and non-Catholics. The decrees issued by that Council form the basic premises of what we now call "The Traditional view." It is this theory, not the Bible, that raises questions concerning "Who is eligible to marry? One who really wants to determine what God's will is on this matter must look to the scriptures and find where these premises are off course.

The basic feature in what originated with this council is the idea that marriage is a "sacrament." In declaring this they defined it to mean that **1.** marriage is under the authority, or con-

trol, of the Church, and **2.** marriage is unbreakable until death. These two premises are the foundation stones upon which the theory that some people are "ineligible to marry" rests.

Even though many non-Catholics do not use the word "sacrament" in reference to marriage, they accept the idea, the two central premises, that marriage is not breakable by human hands, and that the church is authorized to enforce the consequences of this concept upon the people. In churches of Christ the word "sacrament" is not ordinarily used, but the idea is there. These two premises have been strongly held in recent years. The idea has prevailed that only God can break a marriage and that the church is obligated to enforce this decree upon the people. Leaders of churches regularly declare some people "ineligible" to marry and say that some marriages are "invalid" and the people involved are "living in adultery," on the basis of the idea that "in God's eyes" they are still married to their first mate after the divorce.

This is the concept we find totally missing from the Bible. It is, in fact, anti-scriptural. The idea behind it does not come from the Bible. It comes from human theory. Regardless of where someone today may have gotten this notion, it came originally from Roman Catholic tradition and particularly from the Council of Trent. It is not found anywhere in the Bible.

First let's be sure we understand the question at issue

Many have been confused by the arguments of debaters and led to misunderstand what the question at issue is. Note that we are not asking, Does God forbid people to destroy their marriages? The Bible makes it clear that this is exactly what is forbidden in the Bible. God's way is **one man - one woman - committed for life.** We do not challenge that. But forbidding marriage is a different matter. What we are asking is, Does God approve another marriage for people whose marriages have been destroyed? When a divorce happens, does God see that marriage bond as still intact? Does that divorce cause either or both of the partners to be "ineligible" for marriage there after? Human tradition says it does, but we find nothing in the Bible to indicate that. In fact, the scriptures indicate the opposite. We believe that marriage is God's appointed way for all

people, including those who have failed in past marital relationships. It is marriage breaking that God hates, not marriage practice. In the Bible we can find out whether we are right in this or the Council of Trent. Certainly one of us is wrong.

The perspective Jesus presented

In Matthew 19:3 the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" To that question He gave a very clear "No" answer. In verses 4-6 He explained that God's will from the beginning has been that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and that they become "one flesh" and remain so for life. That should settle that question. There can be no doubt that it is wrong to break marriage, to put asunder what God has joined together. So anyone who forbids the **breaking of marriage** speaks the truth. They are saying what Jesus said. That is not the question in dispute here. But when men forbid the **practice of marriage** to some people, that is a different matter altogether. In doing that they are saying what neither Jesus nor any apostle ever said. That teaching, in fact, contradicts what the Bible does say on the subject.

So then guilt is not our question. People who break marriage do wrong. They sin. They do what Jesus said we must not do. But how are they to be redeemed? This is our question. After a marriage has been destroyed and sins have been committed by the partners involved, what then? How does God want that guilt to be handled? Many church leaders insist that God wants it handled by forbidding most divorcees to marry again. But if that is so, why does the Bible never say it? Why is there not one single case in the scriptures in which a person was seen as "ineligible to marry?" It is true that certain **kinds** of marriage were condemned, yes. Herod, for example, was told it was not lawful for him to have **his brother's wife**. But he was not told he could never marry anyone. In the Old Testament Jews were ordered not to marry heathen wives. (Ezra 10). But they could marry someone of their own people. The Bible does not give us any case in which someone was told that he was not eligible to be married at all for the rest of life.

The Bible is God's statement of His will for man. It was written by men whom God chose to represent Him. The Holy Spirit inspired them to write God's word correctly. It is by this standard that every teaching must be measured. It is this word that will judge every one of us in the last day. (John 12:48). In that day, when these books are opened, they will still say the same thing they say now, regardless of what men say. So there will be no "marriage forbidden" regulations at the judgment. No one among us has authority to change what God has said, to add that idea in nor to delete something from it. The Bible must be the final word on every matter on which it speaks.

DO THEY PROVE IT WITH SCRIPTURE?

They assert that Matthew 19:9 says it, but it does not, as we shall see in a moment. We must distinguish between what God actually said and what men say He said. One of the men God chose to represent Him, the apostle Paul, wrote, "The Gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12). This apostle wrote more about the matter of marriage, divorce, and related matters, than any other New Testament writer.

When we read what Paul wrote we are reading information that came from Jesus. When we read the decrees of councils, the creeds, and human tradition, we are reading theories men have developed through the years. Often the theories men devise end up contradicting what the bible says. They appeal to scriptures to argue it but they do not prove it. On this question, "Who is eligible to marry?" we need to be sure we see this distinction. What has God said? What have men said?

Knowing that men often contradict scripture, while professing to be following the scriptures, it is important to look at what the Bible says independent of what men say. On this very subject, for example, this same apostle, Paul, prophesied that "In later times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons," and end up "forbidding to marry." (1 Timothy 4:1-3). If God wants some people forbidden to marry, why does His word call "forbidding to marry" a doctrine of demons?

The fact is marriage is God's way for people on earth. God gave marriage to help us avoid evil temptations. It is not marriage that He hates, for anyone. It is the breaking of marriage. God hates "putting away." (Malachi 2:16). This is what Jesus was discussing in Matthew chapter 19. The question put to Him was not about remarriage after divorce, but about putting away a mate for every cause. (Vs. 3) If Jesus was legislating there about "eligibility to marry," why is there no case in the New Testament where anyone understood Him that way? The truth is He was condemning the breaking of vows, destroying the "one flesh" relationship. That is what violates God's will, not the practice of marriage.

How important is it that marriage be permitted?

Note again, we are not saying that divorce should be permitted. We are saying that marriage must be permitted. God designed marriage to accomplish very vital purposes in human life. It is as urgently needed by people who have failed in marriage as it is by those who have not. God's word not only states repeatedly that God wants everyone to be allowed to marry, but also states the reasons why that is necessary.

God recognized the urgent need for marriage in the very beginning. When He had created the first man, Adam, He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helpmeet for him." (Genesis 2:18). Hundreds of years later the apostle Paul was still teaching this same principle to the Corinthians. He said, "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband." (1 Corinthians 7:2). This was written to a church in which there were some former adulterers. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Man's need of marriage, to avoid immorality, is a Bible fact. That fact does not change when people sin against marriage and destroy it. The traditional teaching flies in the face of this Bible truth. One who buys into that concept has to also buy the idea that marriage is not as vital as Genesis 2:18 suggests.

The devil, of course, does not want sin avoided. He wants it practiced. That is the reason he wants marriage omitted from the lives of as many people as possible. That is why he wants

divorce to happen in the first place. Then after it has happened, he wants to lock it in place and allow no remedy, no repair of the situation. That gives him the upper hand in tempting the person with evil alternatives. Paul said, to avoid that let every man have a wife and let every woman have a husband.

BUT THEY ARGUE FROM THE BIBLE

Of course we do not want to accept a doctrine of demons on any subject. Therefore, any teaching whose foremost idea is that "marriage is forbidden to some," should quickly raise a red flag of caution in our minds, even though its advocates claim to be offering Bible arguments. After all the preachments, the rationalizations, and the attempts to prove it, the fact remains that this theory of human tradition does not occur in the Bible and it is expressly identified in the Bible as a product of Satanic deception. It opposes the purposes of God and serves only evil purposes.

Paul's prophecy in 1 Timothy 4 does not specify any certain category of people, such as priests or nuns. It simply says that forbidding marriage is of the devil and such a teaching occurs when men depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. If someone says that clergymen must not marry, he is forbidding marriage. If someone says that divorced people must not be allowed to marry, he is forbidding marriage. A doctrine that forbids marriage to anyone who is not married is of this kind, deceptive, and contrary to the faith of God. It is wrong.

DOES MATTHEW 19:9 SAY IT?

Those who teach a "forbidding to marry" doctrine base the whole thing on Matthew 19:9. Other passages that may be mentioned are only offered to add "implication" to what they attribute to this verse. But when you examine their "case" you find it simply is not there Biblically. Remember, Satan also cited scriptures when he tried to tempt Jesus. (Matthew 4:4). But they were scriptures misused. We must look closely at how the scriptures are used concerning this doctrine. Counterfeit, false teachings, are always sprinkled with scripture quotations. But two basic errors usually occur: **1.** The statements of the text are twisted and distorted, and **2.** other Bible passages which would shed more light on the subject are omitted. This is exactly what is being done in this case.

Matthew 19:9, their central "proof text," does not say what they attribute to it. It says the opposite. Back at verse 6 Jesus said, "What God has joined together, **let not** man put asunder." They have changed that idea to "What God has joined together man **cannot** put asunder." This is what causes them to contradict the verses following. It is why they say a divorced person is "still bound to their first mate in God's sight." They have changed "do not" to "cannot." Thus, when they come to verse 9 a conflict occurs. The first statement in the verse is "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication. . ." But they have just said it is not possible to do that. Jesus said "who-soever" does that. . . He said the man puts away his wife. These men say he does not, actually, but that he remains married to her "as God sees it." They contradict their own proof text.

The next thing Jesus said in the verse is, ". . .and shall marry another. . ." But the teachers of tradition have said that in such a case the person cannot marry another, that "in God's sight he is not married to her, but is still married to the first wife." Jesus said he marries her. These men say he does not marry her, actually, as God sees it. They contradict Jesus again.

The third thing Jesus said in the verse is that in doing these two things, putting away his wife and marrying another, this man commits adultery. Again the teachers of tradition say the opposite. They say "adultery" is always a sex act and therefore cannot be committed in doing these two things because they are not sexual. They say the adultery happens later.

So they end up denying all three of the statements of Jesus. They deny the first one, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication. . ." They say that is not possible. They deny the second one, "and shall marry another." They say God does not see them as married. And they deny the third one, that whoever does these two things commits adultery. Thus, what they attribute to this passage is not what it says at all, but in fact, is the opposite of every statement in it. No wonder no apostle or inspired New Testament writer ever drew those conclusions. They contradict what the Lord said. We need to keep the text as it is and base our conclusions on what Jesus said, not on what men say.

Looking at a parallel passage in Mark 10:11, we find that the "adultery" Jesus spoke of is not something committed **with** the second wife, but something committed **against** the first wife. There He said, "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her." What is in view in these "divorce passages" is disloyalty against the man's wife, not sexual sin with the next wife. This is not sexual adultery. What is referred to as "adultery" here is what the prophet called "treachery," in Malachi 2:14.

It is easy to establish that the word translated "adultery" is not purely a sex word. Just take a concordance and look up all the scriptures where this word occurs. You will find it applied to many things which are not sexual at all. Some scriptures to illustrate this are: Matthew 12:39, James 4:4, and Hosea 7:1-4. Here in Matthew 19:9 it is used in reference to divorcing a mate to marry another. What the sin consists of is stated in the verse. It is unfaithfulness to the vows of marriage.

In Jeremiah 3:8 God said He divorced Israel for many adulteries. If you read the Bible account you find that what Israel did was to break their covenant with God and go to idols. God called that "adultery." What does the man in Matthew 19:9 do? He breaks his covenant with his wife and goes to another one. Jesus called that "adultery."

The word "adultery" does not have a sexual etymology. It is from the Latin "adulterio," and simply means to adulterate in the sense of adding something to the mix. It can be committed sexually but the Bible also uses it of non-sexual acts.

The mistakes of tradition have caused these men to completely revise God's word on the subject, particularly their own proof text. They make it say, "Whoever tries to put away his wife, cannot really do so, and if he tries to marry another, he cannot do that either, and whoever does these two things, does not commit adultery, but will later commit adultery when he has sexual relations with the next wife." The simple statement of Jesus in the text is that a man who puts away his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery.

The truth is, Jesus was talking about sin, not impossibilities. He did not talk about "Who is eligible to marry?" He talked about it being wrong to destroy a marriage. In Matthew 19 the section of scripture from verse 3 through verse 12 focuses on the wrongness of breaking marriage. That is what the Pharisees had asked about and that is what Jesus was concerned about, destroying the "one flesh" relationship. The subject there is **not** marriage eligibility. It is marriage destruction. Marriage breaking is not impossible. It is a sin. The consequences of the human theory are severe. Any sin, to be pardoned by the blood of Jesus, must be stopped. But the "impossible" idea changes it into a continuing sin and sees it as not pardonable.

WHAT WAS THE VIEW OF THE APOSTLES?

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His apostles to guide them into all truth. (John 16:13). They were appointed to be the final interpreters of His will. Their understanding of any matter is the correct one. (See 1 Cor.14:37). When we look to the apostles on this subject we find the traditional concept is as contradictory to what they said as it is to what Jesus said. The longest treatment of it occurs in the 7th chapter of 1 Corinthians. There Paul says the opposite of what tradition says on every point.

PAUL SAID THIS

To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and let every woman have her own husband

To the unmarried and widows. . .let them marry, for it is better to marry that to burn.

If the unbeliever departs let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases.

Are you loosed from a wife? (put away). . .if you marry you have not sinned.

TRADITION SAYS THIS

Not every man is eligible to have a wife. Not every woman is eligible to have a husband.

Not all unmarried people can be allowed to marry, regardless of whether they can contain or not.

A person abandoned by a mate is ineligible to marry unless he put that person away because of fornication.

Any man put away by his wife is ineligible to marry.

SOME OPPOSITION ARGUMENTS

1. "According to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 the person who becomes divorced has only two options, either remain unmarried or be reconciled to their mate."

ANSWER: This passage is expressly addressed "Unto the married" in the text, not unto the divorced. Reading on, it specifies a case where there is a "departing," a separation, not a divorce. This command was never given to divorced people in the Bible.

2. "The verb 'commits adultery' in Mat. 19:9 means 'keeps on committing adultery' because it is a present tense verb."

ANSWER: This verb is a present indicative, not a present infinitive, a present imperative, or a participle. Every recognized Greek grammar says of it what A.T. Robertson did: "It is not wise to define the present indicative as denoting action in progress like the imperfect." (Grammar- page 864). Dana and Mantey say: "It is a mistake to suppose that the durative meaning monopolises the present stem." (Grammar, page 181). The traditional argument on this point is seriously in error. It fails to recognize the mood distinctions.

3. "But they have to pay for their sin."

ANSWER: The only thing in the universe that can pay for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ. No one has anything with which to pay for so much as one sin. The concept of salvation by grace, based on the atoning blood of Jesus, is the essence of the Bible message. If we throw out atonement we may as well throw away the entire Bible. Nothing would be left. To you who say that I think Jesus would say, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." You might also want to remember that He said, "With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged."

A FINAL NOTE

This is not written to excuse sin, to justify anything, or to deny the condemnation of God against divorce. It is written to clarify what God Himself has stated that His will is and to plead with everyone to let His will be done in this matter. The author has never been divorced and neither has his wife. We have no personal axe to grind. We believe our sins are forgiven and thank God for that. We want everyone to have that, including those who have messed up in marriage and now know better.

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