

Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage

The Application of Matthew 19:9

Introduction:

Matthew 19:9

1. Statistics:

- A. 1990 Kinsey Report: 2 of 3 men and 1 of 2 women commit fornication while married (some reports lower, some higher).
- B. Christianity Today Survey: 23% of those married have had an extramarital affair.

2. One can certainly see that because of these numbers why it is so important to address the issue of MDR early on in a Bible study, because those in an unscriptural relationship usually will not repent so as to serve the Lord fully.

- A. Also early **before** marriage to stress the importance of it.

3. Matthew 19:9 has been called “the most pivotal passage in the New Testament on divorce.”

4. Regarding the clarity of the passage, Martin Luther wrote, “Matthew 19:9 is a blunt, clear, plain text.”

5. The *difficulty* arises when we refuse to make consistent *application* of the text.

Texts Parallel to Matthew 19:9:

1. Matthew 5:32

- A. *“But I say to you”* implies a contrast between Jesus’ statement and the Law of Moses, not just an interpretation of that law.
- B. This text is the only one that makes the point that the man who unlawfully puts away his wife *“causes”* her to commit adultery.
 - 1) She is caused to commit adultery in that she is *“exposed”* to adultery, i.e. she is put in a position in which she *very likely* will remarry, and when she does, she commits adultery.
 - 2) The adultery is not committed until the remarriage takes place – the put-away spouse could remain celibate (single w/o any relationship), but probably will not.
 - a. William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, p. 306, says it like this: *“Whoever divorces his wife except on the basis of infidelity exposes her to adultery.”*
- C. The text includes both the exception phrase and the remarriage clause.

2. Mark 10:11-12

- A. This text simply states the general rule, without either the exception phrase or the remarriage clause.
- B. A man who divorces his wife and marries another is said to commit adultery "against her."
- C. He does so because, although married to the second wife, he is still bound to the first (There was no scriptural grounds for him to be married again).
- D. Another unique feature of this text is that it turns the first statement around and points out that a *woman* who puts away her *husband* and marries another commits adultery.
 - 1) Divorce of the husband by a wife was apparently more common among the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel of Mark may have been written.
 - 2) The Law of Moses made no provision for a woman to divorce her husband.

3. Luke 16:18

- A. This text does not have the exception phrase, but it does have the remarriage clause.
- B. The context of the Lord's statement in Luke is different than in Matthew and Mark – it is somewhat difficult to see the connection between v.18 and the verses immediately preceding it.
 - 1) In v.16 the Lord spoke of the *gospel of the kingdom* – and then two verses later is the statement of *His law* on divorce and remarriage.
 - 2) No doubt he knew their hearts (v.15). They obviously had a problem with divorce and remarriage - not keeping the commands of God.

The Application of Matthew 19:9:

1. **Divorce.**

A. *Jesus does not command divorce – He merely gives the one whose spouse has committed fornication the right to divorce.*

B. **Divorce for the cause of fornication is permitted (with approval, as distinct from the “permitting” of divorce for “just any reason” in the Law of Moses.**

1) **Israel had gone outside of the marriage bond with God, playing the harlot.**

Jer 3:8 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

2) **In the spiritual sense, we can do likewise today.**

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

C. **In the world today, divorces are obtained for many reasons: incompatibility, irreconcilable differences, cruelty, fornication, etc.**

1) **But the Lord allowed only *one scriptural cause* for divorce: **FORNICATION.****

2) **As Jesus had indicated in v.6, unlawful divorce is sinful, whether there is any remarriage or not.**

a. **The idea that divorce for any cause is acceptable as long as the parties have no intention of remarrying is without scriptural foundation.**

Romans 7:2

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

2. Remarriage.

A. The **general rule** is that remarriage after divorce is adultery – the single exception is when one divorces his mate **BECAUSE** the mate committed fornication.

1) If the **one who puts away** remarries, it is adultery if the putting away was for any cause other than fornication – it is *not* adultery if the cause *was* for fornication.

2) If the **one put away** remarries, it is adultery whether the cause was fornication or not on their part.

B. The verse contains two independent clauses joined by **“and”**: the one who puts away (except for fornication) *and* marries another commits adultery *and* the one who is put away and marries another commits adultery.

1) When no fornication is involved, remarriage for both partners is adultery – it does not matter which remarries first; both remarriages are adultery.

2) There is *no divorce* in which *both parties* are *scripturally free* to remarry.

The Order of Events in Matthew 19:9:

1. This is an important point.

A. Some have made arguments that would justify nearly all remarriages when fornication is committed, whether before or after the divorce.

B. Often these arguments involve changing the sequence of events described in **Mt. 19:9** and the parallel passages.

2. **Put Away > Fornication > Remarriage.**

A. Some argue:

- 1) If Jack unscripturally puts away Jill and later commits fornication, then that frees Jill to remarry.
- 2) If Jack unscripturally puts away Jill and later Jill commits fornication, then that frees Jack to remarry.

B. But these scenarios change the order of events in **Mt. 19:9**.

3. **Put Away > Remarriage > Fornication.**

A. Some argue:

- 1) If Jack unscripturally puts away Jill and she remarries, then any fornication Jack commits would then justify Jill's second marriage.
- 2) If Jack unscripturally puts away Jill and he remarries, then any fornication Jill commits would then justify Jack's second marriage.

B. But these scenarios also change the order of events in **Mt. 19:9**.

4. **Fornication > Put Away > Remarriage.**

- A. The order of events in **Mt. 19:9** does not give approval for remarriages following an unscriptural divorce.
- B. it does not say that when there has been an unscriptural divorce that subsequent fornication on the part of one frees the other to remarry.
- C. It does not say that when there has been an unscriptural divorce the first one to remarry commits adultery, thus freeing the other to remarry.
- D. It does not say that when there has been an unscriptural divorce and one party has remarried that subsequent fornication by the other justifies the remarriage.
 - 1) **The text specifies that the fornication must come before the putting away – it must, in fact, be the reason for the putting away.**
 - 2) Only then is remarriage allowed for the one whose spouse committed fornication.
 - 3) We can no more rearrange the order of events in **Mt. 19:9** than we can **Mk. 16:16!**

Conclusion:

- 1) The teaching of Matthew 19:9 is not so difficult that we cannot *understand and apply* it.
- 2) Submitting to the lordship of Christ means fitting our practice to **His word**, rather than vice versa.

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