

# Harmony of the Gospels

## Matthew 5:27-32

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### **Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'"**

This law is found in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18, and yet we know that adultery was also wrong prior to the Law of Moses (Genesis 39:9; 20:1-7). From Leviticus 18:1-24, we learn that adultery was equally wrong among non-Jews as well as God's people.

**"You have heard that it was said":** "Again the rabbis were attempting to limit the scope of the commandment *you shall not commit adultery*. Although the sin of desiring another man's wife is included in the tenth commandment against covetousness, they evidently found it more comfortable to ignore this. In their view they and their pupils kept the seventh commandment, provided that they avoided the act of adultery itself. They thus gave a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin and a conveniently broad definition of sexual purity" (Stott p. 87).

Seeing that the Pharisees and scribes never corrected Jesus and argued that they did believe lusting after a woman was wrong, it seems clear that they had conveniently ignored this truth. The fact that Jesus draws lust out of the command not to commit adultery and doesn't quote the verse about coveting after your neighbor's wife, proves that the command

about not committing adultery also was a command against even starting the process that can lead to adultery, i.e., lusting (Mark 7:20-23).

### **Matthew 5:28 "but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart"**

**"that everyone":** Seeing that non-Christians are guilty of lust (Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:3), we must conclude that "everyone" includes "everyone". It ought to be understood that what is thus said of a man is equally true of a woman. Likewise, "every man" is general and cannot be restricted to married men. A bachelor's lustful look upon a woman is certainly just as sinful as the lustful look of a married man upon another's man's wife.

**"who looks on a woman to lust for her":** This is not a look of admiration or affection, but rather, sexual lust. Both Job (24:15; 31:1-4, 9-11) and Solomon (Proverbs 2:9, 16-19; 5; 6:23-7:27; 23:26-28) saw the connection between the lust of the heart and eyes and the act of adultery. Here is the true cause of adultery. What fuels adultery isn't love, loneliness, or some other "noble cause", rather, adultery happens when at least someone is lusting and has evil and selfish desire. There is nothing pure, decent, noble, or redeemable about adultery. It is impure and evil from beginning to end. Joseph had it right, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

The expression "to lust for her" is literally, "a seeing with a view to", and is not the casual evil thought which is immediately checked by holy watchfulness. But it is the gazing with a view to feed that desire. Gene Frost notes, "God created the woman to be attractive to man, and it is not the attraction that is sinful. Sin results when the attraction becomes a viewing with an intent of inflaming the passions

and contemplating adultery (or fornication). The intent is strongly marked in the Greek. It is not the passing glance, not even the momentary impulse of desire, but the continued gaze by which the impulse is deliberately cherished until it becomes a passion. Thus the look is supposed to be not casual but persistent, the desire not involuntary or momentary, but cherished with longing" (*Adultery: Is Every Man Guilty? Gospel Anchor, May 1985, p. 3*).

Of course, this doesn't justify a casual or momentary sinful thought, for such thoughts can lead in the wrong direction also. One must guard their heart with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23).

**"has committed adultery with her already in his heart"**: Notice that the "look" doesn't produce the lust, but rather, the lust produces the gazing. Too many men and women feel safe just as long as they don't look. But one will never overcome lust by simply refusing to keep your eyes from seeing evil. Lust is rooted in a heart that is selfish, and lust cannot be conquered unless it is dealt with honestly. We can try to keep our eyes from suggestive images all we want, but unless we accept the fact that lust itself is evil, we will never overcome this temptation (James 1:13-15).

#### Point to Note:

Since God made men and women and we are expected to live and work in a world filled with the opposite gender, it must be possible to look upon the opposite sex without lusting. God is not requiring the impossible of us.

**"already"**: Such a man has already passed the bar of criminal intent; made up his mind, stifled his conscience; in thought, committed the deed. All that is lacking is the opportunity to carry out this desire. "The man who would if he could is guilty before God as though he did" (Frost p. 3).

**Matthew 5:29 "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell"**

**"And"**: This word connects verse 28 with verse 29. Here Jesus answers the age-old excuse, "but I just can't help myself", "I have desires that need to be fulfilled", "I was born this way", "the problem isn't my heart, it is my body".

**"your right eye"**: "This was evidently a favorite saying of Jesus, for he quoted it more than once (Matthew 18:8-9)" (Stott p. 89). "On the surface it is a startling command to pluck out an offending eye, to cut off an offending hand or foot" (p. 89). Some religious people in the past have even taken the command literally. Perhaps the best-known example is the third century scholar, Origen of Alexandria. He actually made himself a eunuch.

#### Point to Note:

Jesus isn't advocating bodily mutilation, for if one cuts off their right hand, they can always sin with their left hand. In addition, Jesus has already told us that the problem isn't the hand, rather, the problem is in the heart. This is an example of the ruthless self denial that is demanded to live the Christian life. That is, behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and flung them away, and were now blind and so could not see the objects which previously caused you to sin. Jesus stated the same truth by challenging us to take up our cross, put to death the old man, and crucify the flesh (Mark 8:34; Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:24; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:5).

"One wonders if there has ever been a generation in which this teaching of Jesus were more needed or more obviously applicable than our own, in which the river of filth (of pornographic literature and sex films) is in epidemic" (Stott p. 90).

Note, one's "right eye" or "right hand" would be a very precious thing, something that you wouldn't want to live without. Jesus is telling us, "if there is something sinful that you have learned to prize, cherish, and place all your hopes for happiness in, then you must learn to live without it!" God is challenging us to give up every form of sinful activity and mental thoughts, including those which people claim that they can't live without.

**"makes you stumble"**: That is, entices you to sin, weakens your spiritual resolve, undermines your faith, and so on. Anything that would trip you up spiritually, things which would stunt your spiritual growth and prevent you from being pleasing to God.

**"tear it out, throw it from you"**: No mercy! Concerning sinful things we are to ruthlessly and without any pity get rid of them. Paul said that he treated his body roughly (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

Point To Note:

"That is to say, it is better to forego some experiences that this life offers in order to enter the life which is life indeed; it is better to accept some cultural amputation in this world than risk final destruction in the next. Of course this teaching runs counter to modern standards of permissiveness. It is based on the principle that eternity is more important than time, and purity than culture, and that any sacrifice is worth while in this life if it is necessary to ensure our entry into the next" (Stott p. 91).

**"to be thrown into hell"**: Jesus did believe in hell. And Jesus believed that the entire person, soul and body will be cast into hell (Matthew 10:28). Jesus did use hell at times, as motivation to live a pure life. Jesus is preaching some fire and brimstone here. Using hell as a motivation to change is not contrary to the love of God.

**Matthew 5:30 "And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell"**

**"that one of the parts of your body perish"**: This really places things in perspective! Are we going to allow our entire person to suffer for eternity in hell because of one sinful desire? Is one sinful desire really more important than the real needs of the rest of your body and soul?

**Matthew 5:31 "And it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal;'"**

**"And"**: "The reason Jesus connects His teaching about divorce with His instruction about adultery is that there is an unavoidable moral connection. When any society sinks to such a level that complete freedom to divorce for any excuse permits as many husbands or wives in quick succession as desire may crave, any command not to commit adultery becomes a farce" (Fowler p. 279). In addition, true motive behind many unscriptural divorces is lust—not incompatibility or some noble motive. Adultery not only happens when we lust after others, it also happens when people divorce for a cause other than fornication (5:32). Note, "The gospel of Jesus Christ concerns every part and portion of our life, and we have no right to say that any part of our life is outside its scope" (Jones p. 252).

**"Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal"**: The Pharisees had viewed the legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1ff, as giving them permission to divorce their wives for all sorts of reasons. Remember, in the Law of Moses the word "adultery" is not even mentioned in the matter of divorce, for the good reason that under the Law the punishment for adultery was death. Hence the marriage had come to an end; but it was not brought to an end by divorce but by punishment of death.

## Deuteronomy 24:1-4

**24:1**"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, **2**and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, **3**and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, **4**then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."

Pharisees that God did not sanction such divorces. 4. In Matthew 19:3-9, we find God's inspired commentary on Deuteronomy 24:1-3. This legislation was given because of the hardness of men's hearts (19:8), which means that anyone who was involved in the situation described in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, was a man with a hard heart, that is, a man in rebellion to God! He then says, "but from the beginning it has not been this way". Jesus didn't say, "at the beginning", rather, He said, "from the beginning". Deuteronomy 24:1-3 didn't alter God's law on marriage given at creation (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4). When Deuteronomy 24:1-3 was stated, Genesis 2:24 was still in effect. Hence Deuteronomy 24:1-3 never gave the Jews the right to divorce their wives for some cause other than sexual immorality.

### Points to Note:

1. The Pharisees and scribes had interpreted the above section of Scripture as giving them permission, as a positive command that allowed them to divorce their wives. But the only command found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is in verse 4, "then". The only command is, if such a case happens, then this man can never remarry his former wife.
2. "They said the Law of Moses commanded, indeed urged, a man to divorce his wife under certain conditions" (Jones p. 256). The above is a great example of contingency legislation, that is, "if such and such happens, then". All God is saying is that "when" this situation would happen, "then" (24:4), here are the consequences. Compare this section of Scripture to Exodus 21:18-35. God isn't commanding or approving of what happens in verses 24:1-3, He is only saying, "when or if this happens", then the consequence is...3. Notice that the woman is "defiled", even if her second husband dies! This should have told the

The school of Hillel interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-3 in the widest and most lax manner possible: literally for any cause. Shammai argued that the expression "some indecency" was wantonness, lasciviousness, or lewdness, although he did not include actual adultery since that was punished by death. A rabbi Akiba even allowed the finding of a more desirable woman as ample justification for divorcing the present wife

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### Point to Note:

Some have tried to argue that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was a law given when the Jews would be under foreign occupation and lose the right to execute adulterers. But Jesus never interpreted this law as being an example of God's grace to men who needed to divorce adulterous women, but rather, He interpreted verses 1-3 as an example of human stubbornness. In addition, the Jews didn't have any problem carrying out the death sentence when they had conviction (John 18:31; Acts 7:58-59; 26:10).

The only mercy found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, is found in verse 4. That is, such a hard-hearted husband could never take back a wife that he had dismissed. This would have made him think seriously about putting her away in the first place. Some say the certificate of divorce would have protected the woman in society against the charge of adultery, but Jesus will say that in putting one's wife away for a cause other than fornication will involve her in adultery (Matthew 5:32). Remember, everything we have studied thus far in this section of Scripture applies to everyone (5:20ff), and was truth in the Old Testament as well as the New.

**Matthew 5:32 "but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery".**

**"everyone"**: This term cannot be limited to "covenant people" or "Christians", for the same language is used in connection with anger and lust (Matthew 5:22,28). We know that God holds non-Christians accountable for their lust and anger, and in addition, we know that God holds non-Christians accountable to His laws on marriage (Leviticus 18:1-24). In addition, Jesus linked "everyone" or "whosoever" with people who marry (Matthew 19:4-6). If God recognizes the marriages of non-Christians (which most concede), then they must be under His marriage law as well.

Note, this verses also apply to wives who would divorce their husbands (Mark 10:12).

**"except for the cause"**: There is only one cause! Note that the Pharisees took divorce and remarry lightly, but Jesus didn't. "There is only one legitimate cause and reason for divorce" (Jones p. 259). Does our modern society need to hear this teaching?

**"of unchastity"**: This word means "illicit sexual intercourse and stands for and includes adultery". It would also include homosexuality and incest. Since this is the only cause that

allows you to divorce your mate, the person guilty of unchastity is obviously the person being put away. You cannot put away your mate because of your own unchastity! Unchastity or fornication means some act of physical sexual immorality.

Carefully note, the "unchastity" has to happen prior to the divorce and not after it.

**"makes her commit adultery"**: Some say this means that by putting her away, her former husband causes her to be stigmatized as an adulteress. But we need to reject this view. Since adultery among the Jews was punished by death, I can't see how the Jewish community would view a divorced woman as an adulteress. It seems that the fact she was put away proved that she wasn't an adulteress. In addition, in light of the fact that the Pharisees view on this was so lax, it seems that the Jewish people really didn't care about the state of put away women, since this wasn't viewed as a big deal.

Rather, when a husband or wife unscripturally divorces their mate, that mate will typically remarry, and when that happens, the mate and the new spouse are both in an adulterous relationship, "and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (5:32).

#### Point to Note:

God holds husbands and wives, who divorce their mates for a cause other than fornication, morally responsible if their former mate remarries! The idea that I can separate from or divorce my mate for a cause other than fornication, and then I am fine as long as I don't remarry is false! Husbands and wives are held accountable in this situation, because such a divorce makes their mate vulnerable, and you have placed a stumbling-block in their way (Matthew 18:1ff).

This Scripture surely condemns what has been called the "waiting game". That is, I divorce my mate for some cause other than fornication, then I out-wait her, and when she finally remarries, then I put her away for fornication. Read the above verse again! Notice, the verse

says nothing about the man divorcing his wife to remarry. He simply divorces her for a cause other than fornication—when she remarries, HE IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR HER ADULTERY!

**"and whoever marries a divorced woman":** That is, a woman put away either because of her adultery, or put away for some reason other than adultery. The woman who puts away her husband because of his adultery, can marry again.

This "whoever" is exactly that, "anyone", including a man who has never been married before. Some have tried to argue that the "adultery" in this verse and Matthew 19:9 is the one time sin of divorcing to remarry. But the "whoever" that marries this put away woman could be a single man, a man who hasn't divorced anyone. This man commits adultery because he has just married a woman who is still, in the sight of God, the wife of another man. A divorce that isn't because of fornication, doesn't dissolve the marriage in God's sight! (Romans 7:2-3).

**"commits adultery":** Notice the present tense. As long as he is married to this woman he "commits adultery". So, what is the only way to stop the adultery, or in other terms, what does repentance demand in this situation? The only answer is that the adultery will only cease when this adulterous marriage relationship is ended.

## Closing Comments

Because of all the questions that people have on this topic and because preaching on this topic is so needed in our modern society where we have countless people being encouraged to divorce and remarry on the slightest whim, I have attached the following overview.

## MDR OVERVIEW

One of the positive things that can come from any controversy is a better understanding of the Scriptures. In fact, a good portion of the New Testament is God's response to various erroneous ideas that were confronting First Century Christians. Whether it was Judaizing teachers (*Romans, Galatians*), Gnosticism (*Colossians, 1 and 2 John*), or various abuses within the congregation itself (*1 Corinthians*). In fact, a great wealth of knowledge and good material wouldn't exist today if the Church had been spared from the controversies of the past.

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## Deuteronomy 24

It has been argued that Matthew 19:9 is nothing more than the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Since the woman in that chapter could remarry following divorce, therefore both partners in Matthew 19:9 can remarry when one of them commits adultery. *But we know:* 1. There are many differences between the legislation found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the New Testament. Certain elements of Deut. 24 would be unlawful today (compare 24:4 with 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). The "indecent" of Deut. 24 is not adultery, therefore any supposed parallel between this verse and Matthew 19:9 immediately breaks down. In Matthew 19:9 the adulterer is put away. In the book of Deuteronomy they are put to death. Adultery was punishable by death under the Law (Deut. 22:22). Neither was the "indecent" a suspicion that adultery had occurred, for there was a test for that (Numbers chapter 5). And neither was it the suspicion that the woman you had married wasn't truly a virgin when you had married her (Deut. 22:13-21). 2. If Matthew 19:9 isn't binding today, then it was a law that was never used, and never enforced, because the fornicator under the Law of Moses was put to

death—remarriage for them was never an issue. Therefore we must reject the argument that Matthew 19:9 only applied to the Jewish people. If that is true then it contradicted a number of Scriptures in the Old Testament. And if this only applied to the Jews, then the Christian cannot put away a mate for the cause of fornication. There isn't a passage in the epistles which gives the Christian the right of remarriage following a divorce which stemmed from their mate's sexual unfaithfulness. 3. It is clear that Jesus isn't restating Deuteronomy 24 and neither is Matthew 19:9 based on Deuteronomy 24 (*Matthew 19:8 'but from the beginning it has not been this way'; Mark 10:6 'But from the beginning of creation...'*).

### Matthew 19:9: Addressed Only To Covenant People?

It has been argued that this verse only applies to Christians. *But we know:* 1. The first people who heard this teaching weren't saved! (*Matthew 19:3 'some Pharisees'*). 2. The people who heard the teaching of Matthew 5:32 were not even in the kingdom of God (*Matthew 5:20*). Both of these passages were addressed to people who were outside of Christ and in need of salvation. Both passages were directed to people who didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. 3. There are many teachings which surround both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 to which non-Christians are accountable. By our own admission, the non-Christian is under Matthew 19:5-6. We view their marriages as recognized in the sight of God and we do not insist that they become 'officially' married immediately prior to or following their baptism. But if the non-Christian is not under Matthew 19:9, then how can they claim the benefits of 19:5-6? If one is not accountable to God's marriage laws, then how can they claim in the same breath that God recognizes their marriage? 4. The verses that surround 5:32 clearly apply to non-Christians as well as Christians (*5:20; 22 'everyone who is angry'; 5:28 'everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her' (1 Peter 4:2); 5:29-30 'if your right eye makes you stumble'; 5:32 'everyone who divorces his wife...'*). 5. The man mentioned at the end of Matthew 5:32, could be a non-Christian. 6. There are too

many passages which place the non-Christian under God's law, especially His laws concerning marriage and sexual morality (*Leviticus 18:20,24; Genesis 20:7; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 3:5-7*). All these passages make it impossible to place the non-Christian under a different set of Divine rules concerning marriage and morality than the Christian. It is clear that the non-Christian is guilty of more than just not believing in Jesus. 7. Remember, Matthew 19:9 is not all negative. There is an exception or a right in the verse. But if the verse doesn't apply to you, then neither does the "right".

### The Definition Of Adultery:

The statement "commits adultery" in Matthew 19:9 is a major focal point in this controversy. People on both sides of the issue realize that if this phrase is describing a continuous condition, then for all practical purposes the relationship must be ceased for the adultery to end. So various arguments have been advanced in the attempt to make the statement describe a sin that took place in the forming of the relationship, but something that in no way tarnishes the relationship. It was a sin to marry this person, but the relationship isn't sinful. Hence, repent of the sin, and keep the relationship. 1. Some have argued that adultery in this verse is the sin of divorcing to remarry. But the definition doesn't fit. We know in Matthew 5:32 a man who hasn't divorced anyone is said to commit adultery when he marries an unscripturally put away woman. And a woman who hadn't put away anyone, rather she found herself put away, is said to commit adultery when she remarries. Neither does the above definition fit other verses (*Matthew 5:28; John 8:8*). 2. Much like the previous argument, some have tried to redefine adultery as 'covenant breaking', a one time sin of breaking the covenant with your mate. But again, the woman in Matthew 5:32 hadn't broken a covenant with anyone. Rather, it was her mate that broke the covenant, and yet when she remarries she commits adultery. The man who marries a divorced woman, hadn't broken a covenant, and yet he commits adultery when he marries a divorced woman. Notice Matthew 5:32 makes it clear that an

unscriptural divorce inherently contaminates every marriage relationship in which either party enters following such a divorce. The husband and his new wife commit adultery (Matthew 19:9). The wife, who was unjustly put away commits adultery when she remarries, and so does the "innocent" man who marries her (Matthew 5:32). These verses make it clear that the "adultery" under consideration contaminates the whole relationship, and not just the person who pressed for the unscriptural divorce. It even contaminates innocent third parties which enter into the relationship. Question: Of what or how does the man in Matthew 5:32 who married the divorced woman repent? He didn't divorce anyone and neither was he wanting to "remarry" anyone. This could be his first marriage. 3. Some have argued that you only commit adultery against your first wife, but not with your second wife (Matthew 10:12). *We have learned:* In order to commit adultery against someone, you first must be guilty of the actual sin! That is, committing adultery *with* someone. 4. Some have argued that you cannot commit adultery with someone to whom you are presently married, and yet that is what all these verses are teaching (*Matthew 5:32; 19:9*). Along the same lines some have said marriage is always right and divorce is always wrong. Actually, neither expression is true. Jesus gives a right for divorce and the Bible also condemns a number of 'marriages' (*Mark 6:17-18 'because he had married her...' 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'* ) Both of the previous arguments fail to understand that while you are 'married' to one person, you can at the same time be legally bound by God to another, and that's why the second marriage is called "adultery" (*Romans 7:3 'So then if, WHILE her HUSBAND is living, she is JOINED to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.'*) The word 'joined' in this verse must refer to a marriage as having taken place, for at the end of the verse Paul says that this woman wouldn't be an adulteress if her husband was dead, though she is joined to another man. Obviously, Paul isn't talking about a living together relationship, or a situation in which this woman is having an affair. Romans 7 is talking about a situation in which a woman is married to one man, but

bound by the law of God to another. Hence she will be called an adulterous and she will be in an adulterous situation as long as the law of God holds her to the commitment she made with that first husband. In the absence of any adultery on his part, she is bound until he dies. Romans 7:1-3 answers those who claim that man can actually break the force of what God has joined together (Matthew 19:6). Matthew 5:32; 19:9 and Romans 7:1-3, make it clear that while men and woman may attempt to break what God has joined together, the fact that adultery is said to happen after such attempts, infers that the original marriage contract is still in force in the eyes of God.

### Various Issues Surrounding Matthew 19:9/5:32

Some have argued that 19:11 is teaching that this section of Scripture is "optional". If you can accept it fine, if not, then God won't hold you to it. Such is dangerous reasoning. If this is true, then you would have to apply the same "optional" status to everything that Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*). Seeing that Matthew 5:32, which is basically the same as 19:9 was included in that sermon. 2. Some have argued that 'except for the cause of unchastity' (*Matthew 5:32*), must also modify, 'whoever marries a divorced woman'. By doing this people are trying to prove that marrying a divorced woman wouldn't be wrong, if she had been put away because she was guilty of sexual immorality. Besides being grammatically incorrect to make such an assertion, it brings us to our next point.

### Can The Guilty Party Remarry?

The text gives permission for the non-fornicating spouse to divorce and remarry without sin (*Matthew 19:9*). Other texts give permission to the widow (*1 Corinthians 7:39*) and the single person (*1 Corinthians 7:28*). The right of remarriage is specifically given to the person who divorced a spouse that had been sexually unfaithful (*Matthew 19:9*). Permission does not exist for the put away fornicator to remarry.



Some have argued that if one spouse is free to remarry, then both spouses must be free to remarry, known sometimes as one loosed, both loosed. *But we know:* 1. Adultery doesn't free both parties. Adultery hadn't freed Herodias from her husband Philip, even when such adultery was also incestuous in nature (*Mark 6:17-18*). And we all know what "repentance" demanded in this case. If it was not lawful to have her, then Herod must part with Herodias. 2. There isn't a Scripture in which a divorce happens and both are said to be free to remarry.

Some have said that the guilty party is free to remarry, only after the innocent party has divorced them and have themselves remarried. Or, the guilty party is only free to remarry after their spouse has remarried and forgiven them. First of all, man is never given the permission to grant to others the right of who can marry and who can't marry. Both of these arguments are adding legislation to the Word of God. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 give one party the specific permission for the right to put a mate away and remarry without sin. The principle of biblical silence demands that we stop where the verse stops. Some say, 'Well the verse doesn't say that they can't remarry.' *Be we know:* 1. Neither does the Bible specifically say that we can't use instrumental music in worship, and yet what God has said necessarily excludes its use (*Ephesians 5:19*). 2. If we start making the argument, 'But the verse doesn't say.....', then we better be prepared to sacrifice the principle of biblical silence on all practices and teachings. Through that same door will come: "But the Bible doesn't say...we can't have women elders, one elder over a congregation, many congregations under the oversight of one congregation, a universal human head of the church, and so on." Everything, virtually every idea and practice currently in place in the denominational world, could walk through that same door. 4. People need to realize that if these verses can be stretched to include the guilty party as having the right of remarriage, such stretching can't be stopped at that point. Nothing is said about the guilty party having to repent prior to any remarriage. Nothing is said about the innocent party forgiving them as a

condition of remarriage. And while we are arguing on the basis of what the text doesn't say, the text doesn't say that the guilty party can't put away the innocent party on the basis of their own fornication. How do you stop someone from arguing that the verse could be saying, 'whoever divorces his wife, except for his own immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'?

### *Why The Fascination With The Guilty Party?*

Am I so intrigued as to why Christians want to rush to the defense of someone who has cheated on their mate. If we are going to try to liberate candidates for remarriage, there are many other groups that should take a moral precedence over someone who committed adultery.

The woman who is beaten by her husband doesn't have the right to remarry. The woman or man who is emotionally and verbally abused by their mate doesn't have the right either. The person married to a drug addict or alcoholic, isn't given the right, neither does the person who is married to someone in a mental hospital, or nursing home. And yet people are arguing that one's own adultery can enable them to remarry. In assuming the position that the guilty party can remarry, we are saying that God rewards immorality in this case and punishes the person who is trying to be ethical. We are extending to them a privilege that doesn't apply to others who haven't sinned (*1 Corinthians 7:10-11*). It sure seems like we are rewarding adultery. And ethically, how can the guilty party have the right to remarry without sin, and yet the woman divorced from a physically abusive man, or an alcoholic, can't?

People sometimes say that the teaching that the guilty party can't remarry will scare away potential converts, but does the following make any sense to someone who is morally sensitive? 'Can a woman who is beaten by her husband divorce him and have the right to remarry? No. Can a man married to an alcoholic divorce his wife and have the right to remarry? No. Can a man married to a woman

in a coma, divorce his wife and have the right to remarry? No. Can a woman with a husband who is a drug addict, or drug pusher, divorce her husband and have the right to remarry? No. If I cheat on my wife, can I have the right of remarriage. Yes.'

Let us be impressed that it is only the sexual unfaithfulness of our spouse which gives us the right to put them away and have the right to remarry without sin (*Matthew 19:9*).

### Repentance And Forgiveness:

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Repentance and forgiveness do not change the teachings of Matthew 5:32 or Matthew 19:9. *Points to Note:* 1. The guilty party can repent and ask for forgiveness, but such doesn't remove the permission given to the innocent party to put them away and remarry. In such a situation I would strongly urge that the innocent party seriously examine their own life, the sincerity of their mate, the needs of their children, and so on. Jesus gives one the permission, but it doesn't have to be used. In many situations it might be spiritually better for yourself, the children, and your straying mate, to take them back. But, we cannot say that such a person must take them back, or they are in sin. The verse doesn't say, 'And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, expect for unrepented of immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.' My point is that forgiveness and repentance do not change the text. Just like repentance doesn't change the text of Matthew 5:32. If the man who unlawfully put away his wife, 'repents', that doesn't change the fact that his wife is still in a sinful relationship if she has remarried. Repentance doesn't change the text in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 either. Verse 11 reads, '*but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband.*' But what if she 'repents'? Does she now have the right to marry someone else? It is clear that repentance and forgiveness would not add a third option to the text. And neither would it remove the verse. Just like 1 Corinthians 7:10-

11 still stands as authoritative and binding upon the person who repents and asks for forgiveness, so Matthew 5:32 or 19:9 still remains in force even for the person who repents and is forgiven.

### Acts 2:38:

A very common argument is that since Peter didn't require couples to separate before baptizing them on the day of Pentecost (and it is assumed that many unscriptural marriages existed among these new converts), then baptism must cleanse all unscriptural marriages. This is a dangerous argument, for neither did Peter specifically tell these people to stop living together relationships, homosexual relationships, drunkenness, lying, stealing and so on. Actually, Peter covered all of the above bases and many more when he told the people to "repent" (Acts 2:38). And repentance demands that we cease any obviously sinful relationships or practices prior to becoming a Christian (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*).

### The Order Of The Text Must Be Respected:

Another situation that happens at times is where both people in the marriage have committed adultery. One view is that the person in such a situation that has the right to remarry is the person who committed the first act of adultery and not the last. That whoever committed adultery last, doesn't have the right. *Points to Note:* 1. Such would have to assume that a person who was guilty of adultery and contributed towards the unfaithfulness of their spouse can use the exception in Matthew 19:9. 2. I know that people might be tempted to call me a legalist on this point, but I would say that we are straying towards legalism when we start trying to find loopholes in the text or insert something into the text. 3. There is the question of consistency. If I can put them away for their adultery, then why can't they put me away for my adultery? If I can appeal to their unfaithfulness as my right to put them away and remarry, then why can't they apply to my unfaithfulness as a right to put me away and remarry? 5. And again, the order of the text

must be respected. We are walking on dangerous ground when we start adding into the text such things like, 'And I say to you, whoever commits adultery, and divorces his wife, except for immorality....' 6. Again, the issue isn't forgiveness, because forgiveness doesn't change the order of the text or the consequences of the text. 7. There is also the issue of what triggered the divorce. If both of us committed adultery prior to the divorce, then how can either of us claim to be the innocent party? 8. There is another issue of consistency. If I commit adultery, and my mate can't handle that, so she commits adultery before any divorce, and then I put her away and remarry—without sin. Does this mean that I can treat my mate terribly (physically abuse, verbally abuse, emotionally abuse and so on), and as long as they commit adultery or commit it last, I still have the right to remarry? In the end all of us will answer to God. So before we claim the right in Matthew 19:9, make sure you can claim it with a clear conscience.

### 1 Corinthians 7:15

The following factors prevent me from saying that this verse gives another right for remarriage, that is desertion by a spouse who is an unbeliever. 1. Concerning the tense of the phrase "not under bondage", McGuiggan writes, 'Paul used a perfect tense verb..the brother...has not been and is not now enslaved...in such cases the brother or sister has not been enslaved and does not now stand enslaved.' (*1 Corinthians*, p. 105) That doesn't sound like the 'bondage' in the above verse refers to 'marriage', for God does recognize as valid the marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian (*1 Corinthians 7:12*). If Paul is referring to the marriage relationship, then he would be saying, 'the brother has not been married and is not now married'. Is Paul saying, 'Yes, you can remarry, because the marriage you were in was never a real marriage?' And if it wasn't, does God approve of living together arrangements? In this verse God is talking about a type of bondage which

the believer has never been under. To compromise one's faith in order to hold on to a mate is one form a bondage that a Christian is never under. 2. The specific Greek word rendered 'bondage' in this verse isn't the word which is used for the marriage bond in other passages. This isn't the usual or customary word for the binding character of marriage (*Romans 7:2*; *1 Corinthians 7:39*). 3. Verse 16 clarifies verse 15. The expression, 'For how do you know, O wife.' Now this may refer to the woman mentioned in 7:14, but the last woman or wife mentioned is the one in 7:15. And yet this woman still has a "husband" even after he has departed and even after God says that she isn't under bondage in such cases. In addition, the husband of 7:16 still has a wife. Verse 16 is perfectly suited to be God's closing comments on the situation described in the previous verse. The brother or sister in 7:15 still has a mate, even after the mate has departed and God has declared them not to be under bondage. Thus it looks to me as if God is saying, 'If your non-Christian spouse wants a divorce, remember, don't compromise your faith, God has never required that of you, even to keep them. Don't act in an ungodly manner during the divorce, let it happen, live in peace, because in the end, you might just save them. Your stand for the truth, your refusal to compromise or behave in a ungodly manner, even during the most stressful of times, can become a powerful ally in converting them to Christ.'

### 1 Corinthians 7 Observations:

1. 7:2 is not teaching that the right to remarry can never be forfeited, i.e. every man or woman always has the right to be married to someone. The rights of those in 7:10-11 had been limited. They could only remarry the person from whom they had separated or divorced.
2. 'Let each man remain in that condition to which he was called' (*1 Corinthians 7:20*). Some have argued that this verse is teaching that baptism cleanses all

unscriptural marriages. *But we have learned:* A. The conditions in the context are morally neutral conditions (circumcised or uncircumcised-7:17-19). B. The above argument can backfire on you. Everyone of us heard the gospel when we were in a condition of some sin—can we keep those sinful practices? C. It is obvious that sinful practices and habits must be ceased prior to conversion (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*). If the man who refuses to give up his fornication, homosexuality, or theft is resisting the call of the gospel, then certainly the man or woman who refuses to give up committing adultery is also resisting the call of the gospel.

3. *'Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you should marry, you have not sinned.'* (*1 Corinthians 7:27-28*). It is a misuse of the above passages to use them as a blanket to approve of all marriages or remarriages. Such a use would violate other passages in the chapter. A. If the man or woman in 7:10-11 were to marry anyone other than their previous mate, they would sin. B. The man in Matthew 5:32 marries someone and he sins. C. The woman unscripturally put away marries someone and she sins. C. The man in Matthew 19:9 scripturally puts away his mate and he and his new mate both sin. D. The woman in Romans 7:2-3 marries another man and she sins. One can be released from a wife by her death or by her sexual immorality.

### Closing Observations:

1. Forbidding to marry is a doctrine of demons (*1 Tim. 4:1-3*). Neither can this passage be used as a blanket to endorse all marriages. For John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles all singled out situations in which a person would not have the right to be married to

someone or contract a new marital partner.

2. The teaching in this handout would breakup happily married couples. Biblical precedent exists for dissolving marriages which violate the will of God (*Ezra 10:9-10,44; Mark 6:14-18*). This included marriages that even involved children. In addition there are happy couples who are living together, happy couples involved in homosexual relationships, and in some parts of the world very happy families that are based on multiple marital partners or polygamy. In addition, why didn't the happiness of their previous mate keep such a person from sundering the first marriage?

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