

I have heard some people scream, "What? What? A remarriage after an earlier divorce acceptable to God? Why, I won't believe that; and I don't care what the Bible says!"

1 Cor 7:15-28 (excerpts) "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches.

"You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you."

Sometimes our prejudice blinds us to truth. God can forgive and forget divorce and remarriage, just like He can any other sin. 1Co 7:20-28 tells us to put our past sins in the past, and get on with our lives for the Lord. In His mercy and love, God deals with people where they are. When we come to Him in repentance, through the blood of His Son, He forgets our past. Every bit of it, including any divorces we may have had. If He did not forget it all, we would all still be lost.

Thousands of people don't believe that 1Co 7:15-28 means exactly what it says, but the truth of those verses is not negated by someone's unbelief. Many people now coming to the Lord are in their 2nd or more marriages, and Scripture commands them to so remain. Since a Christian man is a type of Christ, and his wife a type of the church, if a Christian man were to leave his wife now, it would topologically signify that Jesus would leave the church. That Jesus will never do, MAT 28:20. When we become new creatures in Christ Jesus, "Old things are passed away, behold ALL things have become new." That includes one's marital life or that verse is meaningless... for little is more important in a man's life than his relationship with his family.

This does not sanction any future divorces, any more than it sanctions any other kind of future sin. Understanding God's intent for the church in these matters is terribly important. If a man leaves his first wife and marries another, he has committed adultery. If he repents, his whole past is placed under the blood, adultery and all, and the Lord sees him as a totally new creature.

Even if a man has been married 20 times, the Lord still sees him as married to his present wife. That is what God's pardon, forgiveness and forgetfulness are all about. If the Lord does not see an adulterous person that way, then adultery is a special kind of sin that God cannot forgive or forget.

If we say that a man who has repented of the sin of adultery, is still in adultery by remaining with his present wife, we not only ignore 1Co 7:20 and 24, but also declare that God has not forgotten his original sin of adultery. If that is so, then that man is still

accountable for a sin that Jesus paid for in blood. If the church brings to remembrance, and demands some corrective action (in the flesh) for a sin which has been put under the blood, it nullifies the cross. In which case, God's ability to forgive would be limited, and we would be declaring as ineffectual the complete atonement that Jesus accomplished at Calvary. If the cross is ineffectual for adultery, then it is ineffectual for any sin and we are without hope.

Can a person be in sin because of the action of another? Of course not. A person has to *will* to sin. As defined, sin is a willful disobedience of the law of God. Sin doesn't happen by accident, nor by the action of someone else. If a man is married to his second wife, many think him to be living in sin. But what if his first wife gets into an automobile accident and dies? Is the man in sin while his first wife lives, but no longer in sin the instant she dies? If so, then his being in sin does not depend on what he does, but on what happens to someone else. God must really laugh at us sometimes.

That is just one example of the convoluted doctrines we can hold if we don't understand God's plan of redemption. The man's divorce and subsequent remarriage were indeed sin. But the man's remaining in sin did not depend on what happened to his first wife, but on whether or not he confessed his sin, and repented of it. Interestingly enough, I know of such a case: A man was thought to be living in sin because his first wife was still alive, but is now considered sin-free because his 1st wife died.

In the 1st Century, divorces and remarriages were rampant among both Jews and Gentiles. Yet nowhere in the New Testament (nor in any 1st Century record that I have read) are there examples of brethren leaving the person to whom they were married at the time they came to the Lord. With the conditions that existed then, the Lord had ample opportunity in the Epistles to command people to abandon second marriages if that was His will. However, there is absolutely no scriptural command to do so. Just the opposite is true, 1Co 7:12-14, and 7:27.

God hates divorce! He hates it. He hates every divorce, and His hatred of divorce does not stop at the first one a person has! How can we in good conscience command husbands and wives to separate from their present mates when we know how much the Lord hates divorce? If we command them to do so, we promote the very thing we say we stand against. We are in the business of rescuing those who are in the clutches of the devil. It would be a tragedy to lead some poor soul out of bondage to one sin only to lead him into a legalistic bondage that would destroy his family and bring terrible hardship upon all their children. The Lord has never been in the business of tearing families apart, even if that second family is not where He originally intended those folks to be. The Lord's attitude toward past sins of new believers is apparent in James' charge to the early Gentile church:

Act 15:28-29 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

James forgot to add, "Oh yes, and if you are divorced and remarried, leave your second wife

and children (Christian or not) and go back to your first wife (Christian or not).” That apocryphal addendum shows the incongruity of such a position. We are commanded to lead people to repentance. To then help them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord... to direct them to “go their way and sin no more.” Every past sin that is placed under the blood of God’s Son, “...is cast into the depths of the sea and remembered no more.” And “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Despite the doctrines of some, those verses also cover divorce.

*The basic truths of the Gospel remain in effect regardless of the TYPE of sin.*

As far as God’s law is concerned, when we came to His Son, He became sin for us, “and took all our sins in His own body on the tree.” Now all things have become new in Jesus. That is what the Gospel is all about. Those having a new heart now absolutely abhor the things they used to do for fun. In our own church, I know of three families that are in second marriages, (There may be more, I don’t take a poll). I know these brothers and sisters personally, and know for a fact, that their heart’s desire is to follow the Lord Jesus in all things. There are head covering sisters, with checkered pasts who (with their second husbands) are suffering for the name of Jesus. They wouldn’t be acceptable to some churches, but so what? Jesus accepts them. We have seen the miracle of too many changed lives to believe otherwise. So our concern should not be the approval of men. Our commission is still to rescue the perishing, Mat 28:19-20.

Throughout the Christian Era, church leaders have had a proclivity for placing special stigmas on the sins that they themselves have not committed, with a special breast-beating penances to perform for each. Divorce is only one of the lot. Some who have never been in gross sin have the mind set that God wants to make it tough on those who have.

*Having never suffered the tortures of the lost, they do not understand remorse, nor the blessed wonder of salvation!*

The Lord did not install a set of ever higher hoops (depending on the seriousness of the sin committed) through which a sinner has to jump to be acceptable in His sight. Jesus did “not come to save the (*self*) righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance.” Ah, that’s the word . . . repentance! He came to save the most wretched of transgressors, and “His yoke is easy and His burden is light.”

I know of one couple, in their 2nd marriage, who repented of their sin and came to the Lord. They were promptly separated by a somewhat legalistic elder, on the presumption that they were still living in sin. Not understanding God’s ability to pardon, that well-meaning elder destroyed their lives. So the man and woman each live alone, fearful that they will lose their salvation if they do otherwise. For the rest of their lives, they greet the day in bitterness of spirit, in dread of their condemning God. So much for forgiveness.

“Good, they only got what they deserved,” say the self-righteous. Had Jesus been there, He would again have leaned down and written in the sand. If God wanted to punish those dear people, all He would have had to do, was nothing! He need not have drawn them back to

Himself. They would have gotten what they deserved alright... on their way to Hell. Instead, He sent His Son. If we place burdens on the saints for sins past, we do not understand the blessed message of the Gospel.

However, every situation is a little different, and there are no simple answers. Families that can be straightened out, should be. But in most cases, by the time I get involved as a counselor, one or the other of the parties has remarried, or is "going with" (*a present-day euphemism for sleeping with*) someone else, and the family is beyond repair. Under those conditions, 1Co 7:2, 9, 15, and 20-28 seem to apply. Why did Paul command younger widows to marry, anyway? To put a stop to immorality, 1Ti 4:11-14. 1Co 7:2, 9 applies to everyone tempted in the flesh, to the one divorced, as well as to the one who never married. If we place saints in bondage to traditions beyond what Scripture commands, we give access to the fiery darts of the enemy. For as sure as the sun rises in the East, a person who has lost his or her spouse (*regardless of the reason*) will be attacked in the flesh, and in this promiscuous society, who will be able to stand?

The central message of this post is: There is no sin, save one (Mat 12:32) that the Lord cannot put under His blood, and totally forget: Heb 7:25 "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." How blessed it is to tell a suffering sinner, no matter what he has done, that there really is healing in Jesus.