

# Study 8: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (1)

## **Introduction**

Paul spends a considerable time in the Corinthian letters dealing with Marriage and Sex. Before dealing with the specifics that Paul spells out in the letter, we need to take a broader look at the issue of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (MDR).

We will explore this further in the next study (chapter 7), and then wrap things up in another special study to look at some of the practical outworking of things. So, to some extent, this study will leave things “hanging”.

## **Body of the Study**

### **The beginning of Marriage**

### **What does God think about divorce?**

### **The “general rule” and the exceptions**

### **The Romans discussion**

### **The Corinthian situation**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

- *What’s different about sexual sins compared to other sins such as gluttony, drunkenness etc?*
- *How have the moral “standards” that were rife in Corinth invaded our society – and indeed the church – today? Are our moral problems any different than theirs? In what ways are they the same or different?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 7 in preparation for the next study.

# Notes for study 8: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (1)

## Introduction

Marriage and Sex are intertwined in society, just as they were in Corinth. Paul intertwines them through the Corinthian letter. Before dealing with the specifics that Paul spells out in the letter, we need to take a broader look at the issue of MDR.

Whilst MDR is a controversial issue, we must not back away from understanding what God has said on the matter, and putting it into practice in our lives and in our fellowships. I premise this study by saying that there was a time when I held different views on the MDR issue, but deeper study of the scriptures led me to come to the reverse conclusions. This material is presented to provide what I believe to be a clear exposition of a complex and very emotional subject.

## Body of the Study

### *The beginning of Marriage*

God instituted marriage. It did not originate from Man, and began with Adam and Eve in the garden:

*"...The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."<sup>19</sup> Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.<sup>23</sup> The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

*GE 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

*<sup>25</sup> The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame..." (Gen 2:18-25 NIV)*

Some specific things that we notice about marriage from this passage:

1. It is not good that man is alone,
2. Woman was made as a helper for him, (Whilst I will follow the language of the bible, I believe that the principals here are not "sexist" but just as equally apply the other way around. In this case, neither is it good for a woman to be alone, and man is also a helper for her).
3. Man shall LEAVE his father and mother (**LEAVING**)
4. Shall be UNITED (cleave KJV) to his wife (**CLEAVING**)
5. They shall become **ONE FLESH**.

Moses wrote the book of Genesis about 2,500 years after the events described here, and he refers to the institution of marriage. How did Adam leave his father and mother? Moses is describing for the Jews, what *they* were to do, and that it has been this way from the beginning.

In a New Testament reference to this passage (Mt 19:5) we see that that *two* shall be "one flesh".

We have here the keys as to what makes a marriage: *LEAVING*, *CLEAVING*, and *TWO* in the *ONE FLESH* relationship. There are rules and structures that society imposes on us (and as christians we need to respect and obey them), but here we have what *God* says is a marriage. It doesn't matter what society, country, or culture in the world you live in, this is what God says we must do if we are to have a marriage.

A proper understanding of this is key to the whole issue. Throughout the studies, we need to notice *HOW MANY* people are in the "one flesh" relationship. God says marriage is when you have TWO (one male and one female by the way, in case anyone has any doubts!).

The "one flesh" relationship certainly embodies a sexual relationship between a husband and wife, but it also embodies much more than that. Husbands and wives act as "one" when they think together, do things together, raise children together, help others together etc.

### **What does God think about divorce?**

*"...<sup>11</sup> Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob--even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.<sup>13</sup> Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. <sup>15</sup> Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup> "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith..." (Mal 2:11-16 NIV)*

In the passage in Malachi, God is telling the Jewish people not to divorce their Jewish wives and marry Gentiles (heathens). God says "I hate divorce". We have here the plain and simple revelation of what God thinks about divorce.

### **The "general rule" and the exceptions**

In Luke 16:18, we have the "general rule" on marriage and divorce: *"...Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man that marries a divorced woman commits adultery..."* If we were to take this verse only, we would have to conclude that there can be no divorce on any grounds.

However, God has made some exceptions to the "general rule".

*"... anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery..."* (Matt 5:32. NIV)

Jesus makes an exception to the "general rule", and that is where "marital unfaithfulness" (fornication KJV, sexual immorality NKJV) is involved.

We need to notice that TWO women who are described here. One is described explicitly, and the other by implication.

Firstly, the woman *explicitly* described, is the woman who is divorced for any reason other than "marital unfaithfulness". (To make this easy to understand - "because she burns the toast").

Secondly, the woman described *implicitly* is the woman divorced because of her "marital unfaithfulness". She has gone out and had an affair, and has been consequently been divorced.

**Jesus says that the man who divorces his wife "because she burns the toast" causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries her to commit adultery.**

**He says *NOTHING* about the woman who is divorced *BECAUSE OF* her adultery.**

Take a look at what is happening here:

1. A man and a woman are married: TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship.
2. Woman commits adultery: THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship = no more marriage.
3. Husband divorces her BECAUSE OF her adultery = no more marriage. Jesus says NOTHING about this situation.
4. Woman is divorced because she burns the toast: Still TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, because they are still married in God's eyes.
5. Woman cannot control herself sexually and has a fling/one night stand/relationship, and she commits adultery: THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship, since the original marriage still stands in God's eyes.
6. The woman says "I want to do the right thing, so I will get married to satisfy my sexual desires": The new husband commits adultery when he marries her: THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship, since the original marriage still stands in God's eyes.

### The other passage – Matthew 19:3 – 12

*"... Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"... " (Mt 19:3 NIV)*

The very question that they are asking Jesus is about divorce "because she burns the toast"

*"...Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator `made them male and female,'<sup>5</sup> and said, `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate..." (Mt 19:4-6 NIV)*

Notice here the specific use of TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship. Also that they were "male and female" (not female and female, nor male and male).

*"...Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away? 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning..." (Mt 19:7-8 NIV)*

It was not this way from the beginning, because "God hates divorce" and He intended marriage to be a permanent relationship.

*"...I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery..." (MT 19:9 NIV)*

The situation that Jesus describes here is from the perspective of the man putting away the wife, rather than (in Mt 5:32) of the wife being put away. Once again, we have the two women here - the one explicitly, and the other implicitly.

One woman (explicitly) is divorced "because she burns the toast". "...anyone who divorces his wife, "because she burns the toast", and marries another woman commits adultery..." If a man divorces his wife for such reasons, and marries another woman he commits adultery (and by implication the woman who marries him does too - this is exactly the same as in Mt 5:32).

The other woman (implicitly) is the one who is divorced BECAUSE she committed adultery. Jesus says NOTHING about that woman.

By implication, the man commits adultery when he re-marries, not when he divorces her. Note what is happening here:

1. A man and a woman are married: TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship.
2. Woman commits adultery: THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship = no more marriage.
3. Husband divorces her BECAUSE OF her adultery = no more marriage. Jesus says NOTHING about this situation.
4. Woman is divorced because she burns the toast: Still TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, because they are still married in God's eyes.

5. The man now goes and marries another woman: THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship, since the original marriage still stands in God's eyes.

*"...The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." <sup>11</sup> Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." (MT 19:10-12 NIV)*

A further discussion of the issues raised in verse 12 will be discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 7.

### **The Romans discussion**

Paul here is talking about Law, and uses marriage as an illustration. He is *NOT* primarily talking about marriage. His point is, that the law given by Moses has been taken away. IT IS DEAD. Jesus took it out of the way and nailed it to His cross (Col 2:14 / Eph 2:15). The problem in the churches in Ephesus, Colosse (and also Rome, Corinth, and the Galatian churches) was that they still wanted to hold onto the law of Moses (and by the way, many people today want to hold onto it in the 10 commandments, which are a part of the Law!!!). Paul says that this is *NOT* spiritual adultery, because the old law has "passed away" and therefore we are free to be bound to a new law (the law of Christ).

*"... <sup>1</sup> Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup> For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. <sup>3</sup> So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. <sup>4</sup> So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. <sup>5</sup> For when we were controlled by the (flesh KJV), the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code..." (Rom 7:1-6 NIV)*

One thing that we learn about marriage from here is its *PERMANENCE*. That should not surprise us, since "God hates divorce", and "Man must not separate what God has joined together" (Mt 19:6).

Marriage is based on two things: Its permanence, and its purity. When its purity is broken, then its permanence is also broken.

### **The Corinthian situation**

There was a serious problem of sexual immorality amongst the church at Corinth. Paul introduced the issue in Chapter 5. Not only was there immoral behaviour going on within the church, but a man was even having an affair with his stepmother, *it was common knowledge*, and *they had no shame* about it.

With the sexual practices of Corinth widely going on around them, the immorality of the world was bound to invade the church. Some of the brethren were sure to stray, if they hadn't already. Some of them had behaved this way in the past, for Paul says of them "...such were some of you..." (1:6:11)

Paul outlines a key principle for us in 1:7:2 "...to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband..." (KJV)

He is making a general statement here – he is not instructing every person in the church in Corinth not to marry (he says later in the chapter that it is better not to marry, as he also has said in 1:7:1). He is addressing those who are unable to control their sexual needs.

God expects us to keep our virginity for our marriage. All sexual relationships outside of marriage are fornication, whether it is pre-marital sex, or a marital affair after marriage. The latter is a special class of fornication “adultery” which “adulterates” (pollutes) the marriage. Paul tells us what to do about fornication in three words “flee sexual immorality” (1:6:18). Notice that in verse 1:6:16 he shows us that when we have sex outside of marriage, that we become “one” with our partner, and introduce a third person into the “one flesh” relationship. (THREE in the ONE FLESH relationship). Such is true for every sexual encounter (when we are married) outside of that marriage relationship.

In 1:6:16, Paul specifically addresses those who were visiting prostitutes. Even although the man might have only had relations with the one woman (the prostitute), the question arises as to how many men that the woman was in a relationship with? (MANY in the ONE FLESH relationship).

By engaging in such sexual relationships (whether with prostitutes as in the specific case of 1:6:16, or in a general case as in anyone to whom we are not married), we are giving our bodies over to that person. We “...*have been washed...sanctified...justified...*” (1:6:11) so how could we even think of putting our bodies into such relationships!

The section (1:6:13-20) is structured to counter the argument that the Corinthians were adopting the belief that their practices were only something that their bodies did, and that their actions were of no consequence to their mind & spirit. We are a part of Christ’s body (the church), therefore we need to control our own bodies. Sexual immorality is wrong in and of itself. We have been bought with a price (the blood sacrifice of Jesus), and therefore we should glorify God in every thing that we do (1:6:20).