

Study 10: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (2)

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 10: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (2)

Introduction

In the previous studies we have looked at most of the New Testament teaching on MDR. I have deliberately not looked too hard at the Old Testament (as mostly the instructions are “Moses Law” and were nailed to the cross).

It is an interesting study to look at what Moses allowed on MDR (especially since the Pharisees came asking Jesus about this in Mt 19). However, it really is peripheral to the main issues.

There are several other passages in the NT that talk about marriage, however they also are mostly peripheral to the core issues that we have looked at. What I have tried to present is what I believe are the central issues.

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:

Before we get too far into this, I want to make it clear that there can be NO DIVORCE AT ALL with out there being sin. Either the divorce is BECAUSE OF SIN, or the divorce itself IS SIN. Therefore, if we want to please God, we will NOT get involved in divorce (although it is sometimes not up to us to control it).

We now want to make some applications of the things that we have seen. To some extent, we have already looked at some of those as we have gone through the studies, but there are some specific circumstances that we need to consider. I will try to do this in a logical manner.

In the **first instance**, and in its purest form two virgins marry. They have kept their virginity for their wedding night, and by doing so neither of them has committed the sin of fornication. This is exactly what God wants, and He wants them to remain married “until death they do part” without having sex with anyone else (committing adultery). TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, and a marriage based on PURITY and PERMANENCE.

Secondly, what about the couple who marry, but are not virgins? Let’s assume that they are not christians. One or both of them has had pre-marital sex (either with each other or with someone else). Neither of them has been married before. Whenever they have had pre-marital sex they have committed the sin of fornication. They are sinners in the sight of God – not only because of their fornication, but because they have not obeyed the gospel of Christ and become christians. The issue here is not their state with God, but their RIGHT TO MARRY.

God does not want anyone to sin, and so he wants everyone to STOP committing fornication. We have a choice – either remain celibate (and stop committing fornication if we have lost our virginity) or get married to enable our sexual needs to be met. Once these two are married, like the first couple, God wants them to stay that way. TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, and a marriage based on PURITY and PERMANENCE. Whilst it may have not begun in purity, God expects it to be kept that way and not polluted by adultery.

Our **third** couple have never been married before, but are christians, and they have had (or are having) pre-marital sex. Like the second couple, God wants them to STOP sinning – either remain celibate or get married. Like the first couple, God then wants them to stay married. TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, and a marriage based on PURITY and PERMANENCE. Like the second couple, whilst it may have not begun in purity, God expects it to be kept that way and not polluted by adultery.

But this couple have another problem, in that when they have known God’s law, they have violated it and sinned against Him. The Hebrew writer tells us:

HEB 10:26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,

I want to deal with the consequences and remedy for sin later, rather than get distracted on it now BUT IT IS A KEY ISSUE.

This third couple needs to correct the sin in their lives, and get back into a right relationship with God, and that means that they also have to STOP sinning.

Now for our **fourth** couple. Like couple two they have had pre-marital sex. They have now married. At the time that they married they were not christians, but they later obey the gospel. What are they to do about their previous sin?

Like all other sin, the sin of fornication is washed away by the blood of Christ when they obey the gospel and are baptised into Him. They are no longer living in a sinful relationship, and they need to STAY THAT WAY. TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship, and a marriage based on PURITY and PERMANENCE. Like the second couple, whilst it did not begin in purity, it has been made pure by the blood of Christ.

Our **fifth** couple are like the fourth, but are CURRENTLY living in sin. They have never been married, but are in a de-facto relationship. They now learn the gospel – what are they to do?

The simple answer is to get married immediately, and STOP having sex until they do. However, there is another issue here, as one needs to define “what makes a marriage?” In fact, the term “de-facto” means “in fact”, and in older terms was called a “common law marriage”. The tests from the bible of a marriage are whether there is the LEAVING and CLEAVING. There is certainly the ONE FLESH relationship. It could be that it is just regarded by the couple as a casual affair that has not yet stopped (ie no CLEAVING).

The real test however is how does society regard it – do they regard it as a marriage or as “living in sin”? If it is regarded as marriage, WHEN did it become a marriage and STOP being fornication? If they came together for the very first time with the intention of “being married without the piece of paper”, is that what society would see it as? How could society make a distinction between “living together” and marriage?

You can see that the answer to this situation is complex, and I think the clear and simple answer is to STOP having sex and GET MARRIED immediately – then there is NO QUESTION of the status.

Our **sixth** couple is one that Paul talks about in 1 Cor 7. They were married before either of them became a christian (whether “legally married” or de-facto), and now only ONE of them has become a christian.

Paul says that if they are happy to stay together, then that is what they should do. We talked about this during our third study. But what to do about the de-facto relationship (assuming that is what they are in)? There has been no formal marriage, so there can be no (formal) divorce. The simple answer is to get married as soon as possible, and STOP having sex until they do. But what if the non-christian partner does not want to do it?

Paul covered such a situation in 1 Cor 7.

^{1CO 7:13} And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.¹⁵ But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances;

Theoretically, neither of them has been “married” although the water is VERY MUDDY (“de-facto” and “common law marriage”), and when they separate they have (almost) certainly been guilty of the sin of fornication. I say “almost” certainly, as there is the area of doubt that I raised above on the status of the “marriage” – one can hardly image ANY situation where a de-facto relationship has not involved fornication at some point in time – although theoretically if the couple AND society BOTH recognised that what they were doing was a marriage, then it IS POSSIBLE (but highly improbable).

So the question is: What is their status after they separate? Can they get married to someone else?

MY OPINION here is that I think that Paul’s comment in verse 13 that “A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances;” is very applicable.

My JUDGEMENT on such a circumstance is that they should STOP having sex as soon as they learn the truth of the gospel, and GET MARRIED as soon as possible. If the partner doesn’t like it and moves out, then the believer is NOT BOUND to the one who has left. For all intents and purposes, they have just been “living in sin” and committing fornication. As they have not been married, they are then free to marry whomever they will. If they regard their relationship as a marriage, then they will have NO PROBLEM with formalising it immediately.

Now, things start to get a bit more complex, as we look at those who have been previously married.

Our **seventh** couple is John & Betty. They are faithful christians, and have been married for some time. Neither has been married before, and they were both virgins when they married.

Betty had an affair with Charlie, a man she met on a bus, and John has now divorced her because of her adultery. (I am describing here the “simplest” of situations from Mt 5:32).

From our study in Mt, we noticed TWO WOMEN were mentioned there. The woman divorced BECAUSE OF her adultery, and the woman divorced FOR ANY REASON OTHER THAN her adultery (because she burns the toast).

Jesus says NOTHING about Betty in Mt 5 or Mt 19. Yes, she is guilty of adultery. Yes she has sinned. She needs to correct the sin. But the sin has BROKEN THE MARRIAGE. (The PURITY of the marriage has been broken, and hence its PERMANENCE is also broken).

We need to notice that we are talking about THE RIGHT TO (RE)-MARRY, not the STATUS of the person with GOD.

The divorce has BROKEN the bond between John and Betty, and they are NO LONGER MARRIED. Betty is not married to John, neither is John married to Betty.

John is free to remarry (because he is no longer married to Betty) and Betty is free to remarry (because she is no longer married to John).

Of course, after Betty has had the affair with Charlie, John could forgive her of the sin, and take her back as his wife. As a christian, he should forgive her, and as a christian, she should repent and ASK forgiveness. John can of course forgive her of the sin, but still not take her back as his wife.

My JUDGEMENT is that John taking her back, Betty repenting of the sin, being forgiven by both John and God, and determining NEVER to commit the sin again is the preferable position. But it is not the ONLY position that God allows.

Our **eighth** couple is Jack and Jill. Like John and Betty, they are faithful christians, and have been married for some time. Neither has been married before, and they too were both virgins when they married.

Jill continually burns the toast. Every day! Jack gets sick of burnt toast, and decides to divorce her. (Once again I am describing here the “simplest” of situations from Mt 5:32).

Jill is the other woman (the one EXPLICITLY described in Mt), the woman divorced for “any and every reason” not because of her adultery.

Jesus says that when Jack divorces her, that he causes her to commit adultery, and that the person who marries her commits adultery. We discussed this in the third lesson also. Of course, it is implicit in the adultery that she is having sex. If she never has sex (and hence also never remarries) then she does not commit adultery. Mt 19 says that Jack commits adultery and so does the woman he marries (assuming that he also has sex at some point).

They have now divorced, but neither of them has had sex yet. What should they do? They are still TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship. The divorce was wrong (and hence sinful in and of itself), but neither of them has committed adultery so **THEY ARE STILL MARRIED IN GOD'S EYES**. They should get back together, and determine **NEVER** to do that again.

But Jill met Charlie on a bus. She was very lonely after being kicked out by Jack. She ended up having sex with Charlie. She and Charlie fall in love, and they want to get married. What are they to do?

Let's look at what is happening here:

When Jill and Charlie had sex, a **THIRD** person entered the ONE FLESH relationship between Jack and Jill. Whilst the marriage was previously formally legally dissolved, it was still in place in God's eyes. The entering of the **THIRD PERSON** has broken the marriage, since there is no longer TWO in the ONE FLESH relationship.

Jack was **WRONG** to divorce Jill, and Jill was **WRONG** to have sex with Charlie. Jack, Jill and Charlie have all sinned, and they need to repent if they want to be in a right relationship with God. They need to correct the sin. But the sin has **BROKEN THE MARRIAGE**. (The **PURITY** of the marriage was broken, and hence its **PERMANENCE** was also broken).

Jill is guilty of the sin of adultery (just like Betty was). We need to notice again that we are talking about **THE RIGHT TO (RE)-MARRY**, not the **STATUS** of the person with **GOD**.

The divorce and the adultery **BROKE** the bond between Jack and Jill, and they are **NO LONGER MARRIED**. Jill is not married to Jack, neither is Jack married to Jill.

Jill is therefore free to marry Charlie.

Before I finish with Jack and Jill, I want to notice what some people will say about this situation, which I will do in the next lesson.

I also want to look at a few other couples.