

Unlawful Relationships True Repentance

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Many today have been told, after they come to the Lord, that it is not sin to continue to live in a "marriage" with a person who is divorced from a former spouse who is still living.

They say that God forgives the past, and that we should remain as we are when God saves us. They base this reasoning on I Corinthians 7:17-24, which commands each one to "abide in the same calling wherein he was called." But notice that these callings mentioned have nothing to do with being in a state of sin. If a person has been living in sin, God expects that person to come out of that state of sin.

Worldly Happiness vs. God's Approval

If you are married to a divorced person whose spouse is still alive (married or not), both of you are living in a state of sin. No matter how "happy" you seem to be, God is against it. Remember, sin brings pleasure for a season (Hebrews 11:25). But this unlawful relationship must be forsaken before one can know true forgiveness of sin.

What about children born out of this relationship? I believe we are to care for them in a responsible way, and God will give parents wisdom and grace to enable them to do so, but this does not mean you are justified in "staying together for the children's sake." The example you will set for your children by being absolute about forsaking sin is more important than any other consideration. Be sure they understand the reasons behind your actions.

If you want only "happiness" in this world, you will not receive what I am saying. But if you want God's true blessing, life in union with His Son, then a few days of pleasure in sin will seem as nothing compared with God's approval now and forever. Therefore, if you want God's approval more than temporary "happiness," you will forsake any unlawful relationship and live unto God--alone, if necessary.

Some say, "Doesn't God want us to be happy?" Yes, He does. But He defines happiness, not us. He is the One who knows the beginning from the end, and obeying His Word is what brings us true everlasting joy, no matter how the devil would lie about his kind of earthly happiness. If you don't care about God's Word, you will reap the consequences whether you call yourself a Christian or not.

The "Why's" of God's Marriage Law

God established the marriage law: "What God has joined together let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). For at least three reasons He ordained the permanency of marriage:

- 1) Marriage is a type (or symbol) of the union between Christ and His church.
- 2) The love union between a man and his wife is God's way of establishing a home where children are born and raised for His glory.
- 3) A man and his wife may enjoy God together and help each other to carry out His will.

Many people consider God's law of marriage to be "unfair" as I have presented it, and many interpret it differently. But all of God's laws are for His glory and honor and for our ultimate joy and blessedness. Only sin and a hardened heart would try to make God's law different.

"But I Was Ignorant of God's Ways"

You may say, "I wish I had known all of this before I married the first time." Well, maybe it would have helped you to see things rightly, and you would not have married your first spouse. Nevertheless, it was done, and it was a marriage before God--no matter if your love has grown cold. You must now live with your mistakes and look unto God for what He would have you do for the remainder of your life on this earth.

He expects you to come out of any unlawful relationship and live unto Him, no matter what you may "think" at this moment or what others say. Remember, it was your willful ignorance or rebellion against His ways that caused the trouble. Let us not blame God for our foolishness. He desires to help us, for He truly loves us, but we must come His way, for true help and for His glory and honor to be maintained in our lives from now on.

True Repentance Produces Forgiveness

When Jesus forgave sin, He said, "Go, and sin no more." If you are asking God to forgive you your past sin of remarrying with your first spouse still living, how do you forsake that sin? Would it not be by coming out of that unlawful relationship? If you care about your eternal soul, you should care about God's Word no matter what your feelings tell you.

A good way to test whether your heart only seeks its own way is to say, "Is this for God's glory and honor or just for my earthly happiness?" If you choose God's way, He can make your life a blessing to others no matter what your past mistakes have been. If you choose your own way, you may have a few days of temporary "happiness," but an eternity of regret.

Only true obedience will bring light into your soul to cause you to understand God's Word. God's blessing can rest only on a heart that is obedient to His Word. You choose; but remember, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

What is forgiven by God as sin must be forsaken by us as sin. This is true repentance.

What About Matthew 5 & 19?

You may say, "The Lord, in His Word (Matthew 5:31,32; 19:9), gave me the right to divorce my spouse for unfaithfulness to me. It says that if you put away your wife for any cause but fornication, you cause her to commit adultery, and the one who is joined to her also commits adultery. I was the innocent party, and in this verse the Lord is giving me the right to divorce and remarry." May I suggest an explanation of these verses that is in agreement with the rest of Scripture, as the above interpretation is not?

Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11,12 also speak about this question of divorce, and they do not include the phrase "except it be for fornication." The possible reason for this is that the gospels of Mark and Luke are directed to the Gentile people, while Matthew's is directed to the Jews. Marriage customs among these peoples are different. Among the Jewish people, the espousal (engagement) period was very binding. In fact, the espousal time was used not only for preparation, but also to see whether there was any unfaithfulness. During this period of time, "putting away," or divorce, was allowed if fornication was committed. The example of Joseph seeking to put away his espoused wife Mary during this time (Matthew 1:19) helps us to understand how binding the Jewish espousal period was.

If a man is using these scriptures in our time as justification for putting away his wife, after they have come together in physical union and lived together as husband and wife, he is using them in a way that is out of context. If fornication or adultery is a valid excuse for divorce, why didn't Mark and Luke include it in their accounts? It is very shaky ground indeed that you are standing on, if this is the reason for your actions.

In the case of unfaithfulness, there can be forgiveness, even if your spouse wants to live apart from you. But you should either remain alone or be reconciled to your spouse. Only the death of one marriage partner causes the marriage vow to cease to exist (see I Corinthians 7:10,11,39).

Scriptures on This Subject

Following are the scriptures in the New Testament that pertain directly to this subject:

Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-12

Mark 10:1-12

Luke 16:18

Romans 7:1-4

I Corinthians 7:10-16; 39,40

These scriptures should be studied in their context, and out of an honest and good heart you should ask God for the power to carry out His Word.

There is also an interesting passage in the Old Testament that tells how men who truly sought God's blessing put away wives that were not Israelites (see Ezra 9 & 10). Also, in Malachi 2:13-16, God's hatred of divorce is clearly stated.

One Last Appeal

In closing, one last appeal. If you are professing to be a Christian, the way of suffering is your calling. Don't pull back from it and take the world's way, thinking that the majority must be right.

May your choice bring honor and glory to your Lord and Savior.