

Applying God's Law on Divorce and Remarriage

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Introduction: Just knowing the will of God is never enough. We must apply and do it!
(Lk 6:46)

- A. It is very easy to teach the will of God without obeying it. **(Jas 1:21-24)**
 - 1. The Pharisee's were good at this. They particularly failed to apply what they knew to those close to them. **(Mt 23:2-4)**
 - 2. In our area of study it has become common for Christians to fail to apply Bible teaching towards their loved ones. What can they be thinking?
- B. One older preacher indicated three positions being taken by churches today on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.
 - 1. Those who teach error and practice it!
 - 2. Those who teach the truth but fail to practice it.
 - 3. Those who teach the truth and practice it.
- C. The ability to put into practice God's will in a local congregation depends upon the internal strength and unity within that church. **(Phil 1:27)**
 - 1. When a church has a long practice of doing God's will, they likely will continue to do so. We should always be open to patient study without fear of my brethren!
 - 2. However when a church is full of confusion, conflicts and division then it will be unlikely that any problem will be solved in a way to please God! **(Jas 3:16)**

I. What Is God's Law?

- A. Who is eligible to marry?
 - 1. One who has never married. **(1 Cor 7:2)**
 - 2. One whose mate has died. **(Rom 7:3)**
 - 3. One who has put away their mate for fornication. **(Matt 19:9)**
- B. What Constitutes a Divorce?
 - 1. It is a legal breaking of the marriage relationship. **(Matt 19:3-6)**
 - a. One may break the relationship without breaking the marriage bond. **(Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:10-11)**
 - b. Some "single" people are in fact "bound" to another.
 - c. Herod had a marriage to one who was bound to another. **(Mark 6:17)**
 - 2. All divorce is sin except in one circumstance. **(Matt 5:32; Mal 2:16)**
- C. What Constitutes a Marriage?
 - 1. As in most Bible subjects, the failure to properly define a single word may give the false teacher the "proof" to teach anything he wants!
 - 2. Marriage is a covenant between two eligible people of the opposite sex to enter into the relationship of marriage. **(Mal 2:14)**
 - a. The Christian will also follow the laws of the government that do not conflict with the laws of God. **(Rom 13:1-4)**
 - b. The only reason a preacher can conduct a "marriage ceremony" is because the government says so!
 - c. Fornication or the sex act does not constitute a marriage. **(John 4:16-19)**
 - d. Can two marry themselves?

3. Does the Greek word "*apoluo*" give us "liberty" to marry or divorce apart from civil law?

a. The word "*apoluo*" is translated "shall put away" (KJV) and "divorces" (NKJV).

b. Some brethren are making some radical conclusions from the study of one word apart from other passages! Consider this quote:

"In its general sense, the Greek word "*apoluo*" means to "set free" (Lk. 13:12); to "let go" (Matt. 15:23); to "dismiss" (Lk. 2:29); to "let go free" (Lk. 22:68; 23:22). However, when used of divorce, Thayer says it means, "**to dismiss from the house, to repudiate.**" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, pg. 66). Based upon the Lord's usage of the word *apoluo*, it is my studied conclusion that Thayer's word *repudiation* best describes the action of putting away. Regardless of culture or custom, regardless of civil law or social ceremony, whether in the 1st century or the 21st century, one may *repudiate* his mate for the cause of fornication. By this definition the Lord's liberty is preserved regardless of what men may say or do, and regardless of the laws they may pass."

--- What Constitutes Biblical "Putting Away?" - Tim Haile April 20, 2001

c. This is a fundamentally flawed approach to the question. This is not the process by which you determine when a divorce occurs.

d. There is a process within every culture where a marriage is understood to have taken place and where a divorce is understood to have taken place.

e. The Lord has specifically commanded us to submit to the laws of man unless it causes us to disobey God. **(1 Pt 2:11-17)**

f. This does not mean that all must be put on the legal divorce paper or that one must be first to file.

g. When did your marriage occur? How do you know?

h. These brethren are now maintaining that it is *impossible* for you to divorce another for another reason other than fornication and it be *an actual divorce*.

i. One may sin in such a divorce but it is an actual divorce! If not then the words of Jesus makes no sense! **(Mt 19:9)**

II. Attitudes Essential to know and apply God's Will

A. I must want to know and do God's will. **(Jn 7:17)**

1. Far too many people approach the Bible intent to find evidence to justify something they badly want. They almost always will "find it."**(2 Thess 2:10-12; 1 Tim 1:8)**

2. When you are willing to pay the price, no matter what you may find, then you are ready to truly find God's will. **(Mt 19:20-24)**

B. I must be open and understanding with my brethren.

1. If we have the same goal of applying God's word in love, then I will not be defensive when questions are asked. **(Eph 4:15)**

2. Because of the consequences of an adulterous marriage, a local church must ask questions about future marriages or those who seek to become a part of the local church. **(1 Cor 5:11-12)**

3. Even when disagreement arises I should be longsuffering and patient. Why should a church be ready to divide when time has not been given for study?
4. I have been shocked at brethren who refuse an open study. One older preacher refused my request for an reply to be made from the very pulpit where the error was taught. I have seen this very spirit within the liberal church that I left years ago.

III. Positions that fail to apply God's Law

A. Discovery of adultery after the divorce. (Mt 19:9)

1. If one divorced without any cause of adultery then they sinned. (Mt 5:32)
2. After the "relief" of the divorce, it is easy to re-create the past.
3. Some brethren are finding new "causes" that allow for divorce without sin.

Consider this quote from a printed sermon outline:

a. A person may have to divorce his mate to break an unscriptural marriage (Matt. 19:9). In this case, one is divorcing for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

b. A person may have to leave his mate to become or remain a Christian (Luke 18:29-30; 1 Cor. 7: 15; Matt. 10:34-48; Luke 14:26). In this case, one is divorcing for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

c. A person may be in a marriage relationship in which his mate runs up bills which he has no intention of paying. In this case, one's responsibility to God to pay one's bills would demand that he not be supportive of his mate's ungodly behavior (Rom. 13:8).

d. A mate may be abusive to the children (beating). A person has a responsibility to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4). To fulfill that responsibility, may require him to leave his mate to provide for the children.

e. There are some cases in which one must leave to have physical and emotional health. One's obligation to serve God would require him to preserve his physical and emotional well being.

f. Sometimes a couple becomes so alienated from each other, the hostilities have reached such a point, that they must live apart.

(1) Cf. Prov. 21:9; 25:24; 1 Cor. 7:15-16.

(2) We cannot force them to stay together.

(3) *The Scriptures do not teach a person that he must become a doormat to his partner to keep the marriage together. A person who becomes another's doormat will do more to destroy his mate's love and respect for him than about anything else he can do. A person has to maintain his own self-esteem to have proper Bible love. One is to love his neighbor "as himself" and the husband is to love his wife "as his own body" (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:33).*

<http://www.jeffbelknap.com/mdrstudies/WillisOnBiblicalPuttingAway.htm>

B. Mental Divorces and Mental Marriages

1. Some believe they can divorce and then wait for the other to remarry. They then "put them away in their mind."
2. This is not a divorce! The divorce has already occurred. There are only two options here. (1 Cor 7:10-11)

3. Some out of concern for the “unjust” consequences for one who has tried to do right have developed a “loophole” that is not in the Bible! There can be consequences for the innocent! Be careful who you marry!
4. One preacher gave me a theoretical situation that he claims would be questionable but would not affect fellowship:

“Two Christians decide to divorce because of “incompatibility.” They say that they both realize that they will not be able to remarry. They get the divorce and a few years pass. The man is then found to have recently given in to commit fornication (Years after the divorce). The woman now claims she can divorce the man “in her mind” or “before God” and she will be able to remarry. Brethren council her not to do so but she remarries anyway. Should brethren demand that she end this second marriage or be disciplined or is this too much of a “gray area” so that brethren could take no action.”

- a. The preacher who gave me this illustration said that he would do nothing!
 - b. This was his hypothetical. We need to be very careful about trying to prove or disprove a position by a hypothetical. (**Mk 12:18-23**)
 - c. This does however illustrate how far reaching this position can be in its application. Outside of arbitrary “conditions” thrown up by some preachers I believe this position is as “wide open” to allow for acceptance of unscriptural marriages as any that I have seen.
- C. It is none of your business!
1. Some act with great defensiveness and mystery.
 2. If there is no cooperation then this one cannot be in fellowship with Christians.

IV. How do we deal with uncertainty?

- A. There are areas where we cannot be certain.
1. Some may have evidence that is weak.
 2. Others may simply tell of things that cannot be verified.
 3. In these areas we should accept the testimony given unless there is strong evidence to the contrary.
 4. Here the individual will have to face God for what he has said and done.
 5. Just because brethren may accept one does not mean they are right with God!
 6. There may be such uncertainty that a church cannot accept one with a questionable marriage situation.
- B. It is better to have the advice of strong Christians before any divorce takes place!

Conclusion: In eternity, the sufferings of this present time will be as nothing. (**Rom 8:18**)

- A. You should always have your relationship with God come first. (**Mt 10:37-38**)
- B. The day will come where the issues of this life will fade!