

## Divorce

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I can't say I really wanted to address this topic, divorce, but Christ insisted on it. And he wanted me to address not just the topic in general, but my own divorce. However, it helped that he said, "Compassion – express it, my heart," and, "Set them free from condemnation." The biggest problem to do with how the Church treats divorced people is that amateur interpreters ignore the context of the words of Christ in the gospels because the context is not as clear in the Bible, but it is in the records of history, less available to the average Christian. Christ's words may seem plain, and hopelessly condemning – but they are not.

The denomination I grew up in also suffers still from the same problem to do with requirements for deacons and other leaders in the Church saying "the husband of one wife," in interpreting scripture wrongly, due to a lack of knowledge of the potential interpretations of this phrase, and of verifiable history to do with the existence of polygamy at the time those words were written. And the Church in general suffers from a complex that always wants to maintain an impression that their leaders have always been basically infallible, so they can't go back and simply say, "We were wrong," about what they used to teach in their ignorance. They did, however, eventually adopt better interpretation of scripture in their bylaws, to do with ministers, due to a vote of their ministers, to allow ministers to be ministers if their divorce meets the requirements of scripture, and state clearly the requirements. The churches, however, were left to struggle with what they already had in their bylaws, and what they had always been taught, now being deeply ingrained in some of their people in the pews, and it not getting changed by that action.

I struggled myself with these issues, and I had been through seminary. I don't recall it being taught on in the classes I took in Bible college, or at my Christian college, or in the seminary classes I took, or from the pulpits of churches I sat in. If there was clear teaching, it did not make much impression. So how many miserable people did all this make – people feeling condemned and rejected? And how many miserable people did it keep out of church because of the inappropriate condemnation by the similarly uneducated people in the Church? Only God knows. But apparently because God sees all those miserable people, people hurting and condemned – and cares about them – he wants me to address the topic with his help.

It is hard to separate this topic from my own case, and my own ignorance. So, let me place myself in the same "boat" with all the rest of the miserable people wounded by the Church's inadequate treatment of this topic and talk about my case, and how I learned what scripture really says, properly interpreted. But let me first note that I met the denomination's newly revised requirements – revised to be in line with scripture properly interpreted – in the bylaws of the denomination I was in. I could have continued to be a minister with them under their bylaws even though divorced and remarried. (But God told me to leave). But I had dear friends that did not know about those changed bylaws and still condemned and rejected me unscripturally – forever, with some significant help from slanderous lies spread about the circumstances of my divorce, a divorce I did not want, did not choose, and did not file or push through. As to that, at this point, I will simply say that my former wife left me and divorced me without scriptural grounds to do so, and her conduct gave me every scriptural grounds to remarry. In fact, the scripture actually required me to agree to the divorce she filed, and I obeyed the scripture, and the voice of God, and my denominational authority over me in the situation, in doing so.

God wants me to keep this simple and plain. I had come up with a long list of topics that seemed related and relevant. I will try to simplify this down to what scholars say, who really did study and consider the historical record of the context of the words in the New Testament. But first let me simplify this down to what somebody not well versed in the topic, and with even more limited education on the matter, can understand (where I started years ago). If you do not recognize the historical context of the remarks of Jesus Christ on divorce and remarriage versus the words of the Apostle Paul on the topics, then you are placed in the position of having to disagree with all of the experts of the Church all the way back to the time of Christ as to what is the word of God, and rip either the words of Christ or the words of Saint Paul from the scripture – because they are completely at odds and one of them must be completely wrong and not belong in the Bible. Not ready to go there? Then listen to the context that explains what people thought who knew Christ, and knew the Apostle Paul, and circulated and endorsed both of their words on divorce and remarriage as the word of God to us. They were addressing different cases of divorce and remarriage circumstances they all knew about, and one of which was being publicly debated by the teachers of their time. Since they are debating or discussing different cases, and their original audience understood that, their statements are not at odds.

What are the cases? Case number one: the “any cause” divorce justification. Case number two: the abandonment case. Case number three: the sexual immorality case. It is my understanding that the Jews did not argue much about sexual immorality (including adultery) or abandonment as a just cause for divorce. It is my understanding that they argued a lot about someone being able to divorce their wife for “any cause” – including the equivalent of burning the toast that morning, (something minuscule). Now, officially, the context is there in the question asked of Christ in Matthew 19:3, but those of us not fully informed of the history miss it quite easily. And some translations state the context more plainly than others. If you see Christ, properly, as speaking only to the “any cause” divorce debate, which Christ considered divorce without true scriptural grounds, you can reconcile his words to those of the Apostle Paul’s in First Corinthians chapter seven, which deals with the case of abandonment, either by a believer or an unbeliever. If a believer is abandoned by an unbeliever, Paul instructs the believer to consent to the divorce the abandoning spouse insists upon and that they are “not bound” – meaning the bond of marriage in God’s eyes is broken and the believer is free to remarry (without condemnation). And it refers to the principle that a believer is not to marry an unbeliever in the first place, so it is consistent to let someone who is, or becomes, an unbeliever, go, and therefore agree to the divorce they seek.

When you are dealing with people who were divorced and remarried before they became believers (Christians), the words of Paul in First Corinthians chapter seven are seen as providing acceptance for them. It is also noted that the early Church likely had large numbers of people in this category.

Since the rules set out by the Apostle Paul are different depending upon whether a person is considered to be a believer (a Christian) or not, one might have to decide if someone involved in a divorce is a Christian or not. Where is the best place to go to determine who is a “believer” under Paul’s rules in First Corinthians chapter seven? We need to know what the Apostle Paul was thinking in terms of defining a believer or an unbeliever. Well, it so happens that Paul had

just been talking about that in that letter included in scripture. Just ignore the chapter breaks not put there by Paul, but added much later, to make Bible reading and references easier for the rest of us. Back up a few chapters. Start with chapter five and read on through the end of chapter seven on divorce, and you will know what Paul was thinking of, as to who is a believer and who is not. He was speaking to a particular body of believers, and now us all, about how to tell who is a true believer in the Church and who is not, and who should be expelled from the body to wake them up to their need to come to or return to the faith – and to protect the Church from their sin that will tend to spread and corrupt the Church. He does that in chapter five by listing sins that decide who can be considered a Christian or not and are to get you expelled from the Church by its leadership if you continue to practice them.

In chapter six, Paul gets even more plain by listing sins and saying that those that do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God – his way of saying they are not included in the body of believers and are not going to make it to heaven. And among those sins are sexual immorality and slander/reviling. I noted the slander/reviling (actually both terms were included in the meaning of the original Greek word, so it gets translated either way). Maybe everybody ought to be careful to look at that list once in a while. I'm no expert on the theology of other parts of the Church, but I think that is where they got the concept of "mortal sin" – or maybe we should call it fatal sin, spiritually fatal. Basically, it proves that not everybody that walks in the door of the church should be considered a believer, and especially for the purposes of Paul's rules for divorce involving a "believer" versus an "unbeliever." If they are living in repeated sexual sin without repentance, or they are slandering people without repentance and without making it right, they are not "believers" in Paul's frame of reference for his rules in the next "chapter." A chapter that really was just him writing on, in sequence, about related topics.

In my own case, I endured outright slander many years. It probably started with deception, such as presenting something, like representing a person as saying something offensive or critical that happened only one time years ago, and that was highly provoked, as if it were happening constantly for years without provocation. That is character assassination through deception. But outright lies, extremely damaging lies were also eventually involved (such as trying to make people believe that I was insane, had made a "death threat," and had grabbed her neck and held up a fist to threaten her), lies with the evident purpose of the Church believing her filing a divorce was quite justified and sympathizing with her to where they would not even believe there was another side to the story. And the demonic was involved, and eventually, mental illness, a break with reality – when she began to show evidence she had come to believe things she originally knew were lies that she had crafted, were true. As to the demonic, once, at God's direction, I spoke loudly to bind Satan to her face, and her countenance and behavior changed instantly and she sat down and calmed down and showed no sign that she knew I had said anything. I had been dealing with another personality, a demonic one, in control of her at that moment.

And another, deeply burdened to pray for her and our family, was talking to her in a last-ditch effort to save our marriage and obeyed God to stretch out her hand and place it on my former wife's head and bind spirits of deception. I witnessed it. My former wife showed no sign whatsoever that she even knew it had happened – and then she proceeded to tell the confused and twisted account of an incident that had been used to slander me to many. And she admitted in

front of three witnesses that she did not believe I had committed adultery (which I had not, but she had used language useful to give many the firm impression that I had). Only by God's intervention in this was I even able to find out what was being used to slander me.

I was battling demons in control of my former wife, but she had refused real deliverance and inner healing for years. And she was living her life in rebellion against the call of God on our lives, as attested to by many, including a friend of hers she had wanted God to use. Maybe God wanted me to be seen as a less clear case so that I could fight the battle for so many in the Church who suffer condemnation from those in the Church that do not understand the scripture, or apply it correctly. I have certainly lived through the pain of other people's judgements against me for my divorce (and remarriage), when they did not have all of the facts or interpret the scriptures correctly.

And God insisted that I allow him to be my defender – and he has waited many years to defend me. When I started to defend myself to a friend I really wanted to keep, God spoke clearly to me as I started to tell them the whole truth and said, “Am I your defender?” – which had a default answer of, “Yes.” Then he said sharply, “Then shut up.” Christ did set an example of not defending himself before his accusers either, and he had told me, in another situation, not to defend myself. I lost friend after friend due to my obedience to God. Eventually, years later, God had me warn people of judgment from God for judging unscripturally, per the clear statement of Christ in scripture. That did not bear much fruit with people who had believed for years that I was utterly evil and a fraud of a Christian.

There was no question that my former wife had clearly slandered me with the most damaging slander imaginable. And the rules that the Apostle Paul lined out in scripture required the Church to expel her (per First Corinthians chapter five) and consider her an unbeliever (per First Corinthians chapter six). And per First Corinthians chapter seven, she was an unbeliever who wished to divorce, and had filed that divorce, and I was required to let her have the divorce she wanted – and I was then free to remarry. But the Church did not bother to find all that out before they judged. And their judgment of me was far more impactful for me because I was a minister and, to obey the call of God, continued to try to work as a minister, a servant of God, even if slander spread far and wide to make most any church that knew of me not want me to attend, much less preach and be paid. I lived in deep poverty for years, as did my new wife, because of the sins of the Church.

The root problem was that the Church refused to follow its clear responsibility to judge and expel her as required per First Corinthians chapter five. So, the corruption spread and spread and now God must judge, not just my former wife, but many leaders in the Church, and all the people she spread her false witness, false accusations, to, and all the people it got gossiped to after that – just like Paul warns will happen if those sins are not judged by the Church as he instructed. By the way, God forbids bearing false witness in one of the ten commandments. That is the seriousness of slander and gossip that bears false witness. It is right in there with thou shalt not kill, or commit adultery. Why would the Church think God would not judge for repeatedly, and for a very long time, breaking one of his ten most important commands?

But there was another problem here, another sin of the Church. They were judging when they were specifically commanded NOT to judge. Scripture clearly indicates, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19 NKJV). Really, the principle applies to everyone, not just ministers. Christ refers to the passage in Deuteronomy 19:15 and following that originally lined out the rules when he teaches on accusations and offense in Matthew 18:15 and following, where he speaks of “that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established,” quoting from that passage. This keeps one slanderer or false witness from being able to destroy people. Two or more witnesses are required. It is interesting that American legal principles to do with “due process” and our rights to justice come from this passage in Deuteronomy. It also required diligent inquiry and being able to face the witnesses against you, accusing you, and give answer and argue your case.

All this was being denied me as the Church repeatedly judged me in secret conversations I was never allowed to hear and give an answer to. The Church, even its ministers and leaders, seemed unconcerned about violating the rules specified by Christ and the Apostles in scripture. Yet the scripture warns, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers [ministers], knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1 NKJV). How many people have been treated this way? How many people’s divorces have been judged by whispers at the back of the church with no concern for the innocent that may be destroyed by it? Yet Christ warned, in Matthew 7:1-2: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (NKJV). Basically, Christ is warning us we will be judged the same way we judge others. If we judge harshly, unjustly, with no defense allowed the accused, we will be judged the same way. Per scripture, the person being accused has a right to be there and hear the accusations and give answer. Perhaps we should volunteer to go get the accused the next time a whispering accuser starts accusing someone. It might spare us being judged the same way. It might also spare the whisperer from judgment, in that they probably do not have the courage to face the one they are secretly accusing.

It would be better still if the leadership of the Church accepted its responsibility to judge and make it clear that it does not condemn the truly innocent. And perhaps many divorces would be averted if errant parties knew the Church would examine and judge the matter scripturally as to who may scripturally divorce and scripturally remarry.

But we must all keep in mind that divorce, or even adultery, is not the unpardonable sin. We must all keep in mind that if we refuse to consider that the blood of Christ covers the sins of which others have repented, we are basically, by judging others this way, assuring that our own sins will not be covered – because Christ warned we will be judged as we judge others (as explained above per Matthew 7:1-2).

Another factor in this, an interpretation issue, needs to be addressed. I have seen some that want to argue that if the divorce is not scriptural, then the remarriage that follows is not just adulterous at its beginning, but adulterous on an ongoing basis. It is clear that Christ said, with a divorce that is not for abandonment or sexual immorality, but the “any cause” divorce under debate, then the subsequent remarriage of the parties is adultery. However, it is my understanding from commentaries that the Greek involved does not have to mean that the marriage is ongoing

adultery. We should be careful in condemning others for life, or the life of their marriage. Keep in mind that the scripture, under the law, says that once someone marries another, they are not to go back to the spouse they divorced before that. So, breaking up the following marriage cannot fix the originally broken one, per the scripture. And, once again, divorce, and even one the scripture identifies as initially adulterous, is not the unpardonable sin. King David was forgiven his adultery, and even the murder involved in his scheme to marry Bathsheba and cover his sin, and was, after his repentance, called a man after God's own heart. God set an example of forgiveness. We should follow it and allow the sins of others to be forgiven upon their repentance – so that ours can be as well.