

# Angie's Marriage Column ~ April 28, 2010

## Are There Exceptions to the Marriage Law? What Does the Bible Say?

**Ask Angie:** Hi Angie, what is the difference between a court wedding & a Christian/Church wedding? Is it true that a person that goes thru a Court Wedding is still classified as "Living in Sin"? Court Weddings if they divorce & remarry is that still adultery? Please clarify, God bless.

**Marriage Guidance:** It does not matter where the wedding is held, whether you are married in a courthouse, Christian church, hot air balloon, or in your own back yard, **God is the author of marriage.**

- \* God is the author of marriage: Genesis 2:18-24
- \* Marriage is permanent: Matthew 19:6
- \* Marriage is based on the principled practice to love one another, not on feelings: Ephesians 5:21-33
- \* Marriage is a Living Symbol of Jesus Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:23-32

In regards to your second question, *God's Word* does not change because of one's circumstances, events, position or conditions. The bible is the Christians instruction book for righteous Christian living, regardless of who you are, where you are, or what the circumstances are. Remarriage while your first spouse is still living, no matter where or how you got married is considered adultery to God.

"Anyone who divorces his wife (one flesh spouse) and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Luke 16:18)

"To the married I give this commands (**Not I but the LORD**): a wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife." (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

**Please get your bible and concordance out and lets do the biblical study on marriage, divorce, and remarriage below.**

## Are There Exceptions to the Marriage Law?

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his WIFE, EXCEPT IT BE FOR

**FORNICATION, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.** Matthew 19:9

Does Matthew 19:9 allow a man to divorce his wife if she commits adultery?

No. The New Testament gives no grounds for divorce. When Jesus made an exception to the marriage law at Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, it was for a betrothed wife, not a real wife.

### **Betrothed wife**

To understand why the word WIFE is used at Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, we need to know a little about Jewish customs because Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. Jews had a social practice called "BETROTHAL," which is similar to engagement today. Betrothal starts when a couple agrees to give themselves to each other in marriage and ends in the actual marriage. Jewish betrothal is different from modern-day engagement in one significant way. Once a couple was betrothed, they were regarded by the rest of society as "one flesh" and were called husband and wife. Usually within a year to eighteen months after becoming betrothed, the couple consummated the marriage.

In modern society during the period of engagement, if the couple change their minds, they break up and start over again. In Jewish society, however, once a couple is betrothed, they could not just call it quits. A betrothed couple in Jewish society had to obtain a **LEGAL DIVORCE**. **Even though they were only engaged and had never lived together as man and wife, they were considered married and must get a divorce if they wanted to separate.** This custom can be proved from the scriptures.

### **Mary is called "wife"**

Look at Matthew 1:18-20 and 24-25. Here is a passage most of us have read many times and possibly missed a powerful truth that reveals this Jewish custom. Notice that Joseph and Mary are called HUSBAND and WIFE, even though they were only betrothed or engaged:

**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise; When as his mother Mary was ESPoused (engaged) to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph HER HUSBAND, (espoused, but called husband) being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. (literally, divorce her)**

*Notice that even though they had not yet consummated the marriage, Joseph was considering divorcing Mary.*

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee MARY, THY WIFE: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and took unto him HIS WIFE: and KNEW HER NOT till she had brought forth her firstborn son; and she called his name Jesus.

Jesus, being raised in Jewish society, was aware of this Jewish custom of being considered husband and wife during the betrothal period. Matthew records this special provision, not as a universal exception, but only as a clarification to the Jews concerning the betrothal relationship. The exception is for a betrothed couple when FORNICATION is committed BEFORE their marriage vows make them one flesh for life. The principle of the permanency of marriage that Jesus teaches applies only to those who have consummated their marriage, not to those who are merely betrothed.

### No Exception in Parallel Passages

With this understanding of Jewish custom, Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 concur with the other parallel passages of Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11. If we take out the "EXCEPT IT BE FOR FORNICATION" clause, then Matthew 19:9 is almost identical to Luke 16:18:

Whosoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (Matthew 19:9 with fornication clause removed).

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery. Luke 16:18

Matthew 19:9 appears to make an exception to the marriage covenant that is not made in the parallel passages at Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18. But when the passage is viewed without the exception clause, it harmonizes with the rest of the New Testament teachings on marriage.

### Fornication vs adultery

Another reason we know the exception clause is referring to a BETROTHED WIFE and not a real wife, is that Jesus makes the exception for FORNICATION, not for adultery. FORNICATION is illicit sex between an UNMARRIED couple. If Jesus was referring to a real wife, why didn't He say "except it be for adultery"?

The word translated "fornication" is "porneia" in Greek. "Porneia" generally means illicit sexual relations between an UNMARRIED couple. If a real wife were unfaithful, she would commit adultery, not fornication.

The modern translations sometimes confuse the issue because they translate the Greek word PORNEIA not as fornication, but as the general term "sexual immorality." However, none of the modern translations we have seen translate PORNEIA as adultery.

If Jesus meant to say adultery is grounds for divorce, why wasn't a derivative of the Greek word "Moichao" used? That is the word translated as adultery in the same verse. "Moichao" (adultery) occurs when a married person violates wedlock.

Let us assume that fornication means adultery in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. Then we could assume that if a spouse commits adultery, it is grounds for divorce and subsequently, remarriage. But how can this be? It flies in the face of what Jesus and Apostle Paul speak about so clearly elsewhere in the New Testament. Earlier in Matthew, Chapter 19, verse 6, Jesus says that a man and woman are joined as one flesh and *no man can divide them*. **To seek a divorce, is to allow a man to separate what God has put together.** Both Jesus and Apostle Paul teach that those who divorce and marry another commit adultery. Once the marriage has been consummated, there are no escape clauses. Marriage is until death do you part.

## Only Death Ends Marriage

Paul confirms Jesus' teaching of being one flesh for life by saying in effect:

**If you separate, stay single or reunite with your only spouse, for if you do remarry before your partner dies, you are an adulterer or an adulteress; and adulterers SHALL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 7:11)

When one becomes a eunuch, he cannot go back to his former state. When one marries, they cannot go back to the unmarried state. **Marriage is permanent.** No wonder Christ's disciples said to Him, "**If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry**" (Matthew 19:10).

Does Jesus allow a man to divorce his wife because of adultery? No, the scripture remains true, the only way out of marriage is death.

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no

adulteress, though she be married to another man. Romans 7:2-3

Marriage is not created to be only a 5, 10 or 30-year commitment. God designed marriage to be a lifetime commitment. **Marriage is permanent.** God's teachings are not something that just because we disagree with certain scripture we can put aside. God's teachings are there to show us the right way for Christian living, and they are there for our own discipline so we may serve Him in righteousness and love and honor God with our marriage.

May God Bless!  
IN Christ,  
Frank and Angie

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