

On Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

O. S. Asaolu (asaolu@yahoo.com), Lagos, Nigeria. {June 7, 2013}

TEXT – Deut 24:1-4, Mal 2:14-16, Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-12, Mk 10:1-12, Lk 16:18, 1 Cor 7:1-40, 1 Pet 3:1-7

Deuteronomy 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. 2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. 3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; 4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Malachi 2:14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

Matthew 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Matthew 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 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. 10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. 11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Mark 10:1 And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. 2 And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. 3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? 4 And they said, Moses

suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. 5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. 6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. 7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; 8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 10 And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

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

1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. 5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. 6 But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. 7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. 8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. 10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: 11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. 12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. 16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? 17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. 21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. 22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. 23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. 25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. 27 Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. 28 But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; 30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world

passeth away. 32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. 34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. 37 Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. 38 So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. 39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

1 Peter 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

Introduction

Marriage is a union ordained by God for mankind –Gen 2:23-24, it is meant to be between a man and a woman. It is only for this life (Mt 22:30) and it is intended to last for one’s life-time or as couples vow ‘*till death do us part.*’ This is the simple truth from our Text above. We need to know that God means what He says and only states what He means. He is neither fickle-minded nor unstable nor partial - James 1:17, Acts 10:34. Some think that God has different marriage laws for believers and unbelievers but that is not so. His truth is one. He will judge all in righteousness by the gospel of Jesus Christ -Jn 12:48, Rm 2:16, Acts 17:31. In the beginning, men were marrying close kin such as sisters and cousins. Later after the language dispersion and world population increased significantly, men marry women from other families and nations. Problems arose over time (relating to personal, medical, ethical, socio-cultural and other issues) and more regulations became necessary for marital relationships. Practically everyone agrees that someone who has never been married or who is a widow(er) is free and eligible to marry if s/he wishes to. It is the eligibility of a divorcee to remarry that is usually debatable when the circumstances of the divorce are scrutinized. While the necessity of baptism for salvation is probably the most debated issue between Christians and denominationalists, the truth about marriage, divorce and remarriage (MDR) is probably the most debated topic within the Lord’s church. MDR was topical even during the time of Jesus so we should not be surprised today. While the governing law for us today is the New Testament, we may not easily understand the discussion of Jesus and the Pharisees on MDR without background information from the law of Moses –Rm 15:4, 2 Tim 3:15-17. That is why our Text includes material from the law and the prophets; we

intend to study all the relevant passages. Our focus is scripture not *speculated* customs or modern human opinion.

Preamble on Divorce and “Put Away”

To divorce a spouse is to legally renounce a marriage; go apart and break the oneness union, repudiate and forsake the vows and to be relieved of marital obligations. From Deuteronomy 24, we see that three consecutive things are needed for a divorce to take place:

1. A woman loses favour from her husband because he has found some uncleanness in her or a man develops hatred in his heart for his wife.
2. The man voluntarily writes a bill of divorcement or certificate of divorce and gives it to the wife.
3. He sends her away from his house and she departs from his home.

Some argue that Jesus is not against divorce and remarriage; that He was only against a practice of the Jews in putting or sending their wives away without issuing the bill of divorcement. It is reasoned that Jesus merely rebuked this professed act which does not amount to a formal divorce that was intended to free a woman so she may become another man’s wife. This argument that our Lord condemned mere abandonment and not divorce itself is not credible because:

1. The phrase ‘put away’ had additionally become a synonym for the entire divorce process, *see Lev 21:1-7*. In Mt 5, Mt 19 & Mk 10 in particular, ***the context shows that ‘put away’ does imply formal divorce, not just ‘send away or to separate.’*** [This is just as the phrase ‘believe’ was used to represent the steps to salvation in Jn 3:16 and as shown in Acts 16:30-34. The summary-answer to the Philippian Jailor’s question on what to do to be saved was, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.’ Immediately thereafter, the apostles preached the details of the gospel to his household which repented and were baptized. In Acts 3:19; 11:18 & 17:30, *repentance* was the summary-word utilized. In Rm 6:3, *baptized* summarized the entire salvation process.]
2. The LORD promotes not divorce but the permanency of marriage. Jesus in Mt 5:32 & 19:9 was not teaching; “*divorce is okay, don’t just send away your wife, ensure you always issue the bill of divorcement!*” He was discussing the impropriety of both flimsy legal divorce and unlawful abandonment. His use of language and choice of words indicates that marriage is supposed to be between one man and one woman for life. The Pharisees could discern that hence their retort (‘*Why did Moses...*’) but Jesus clarified that the divorce law was due to their hardness of heart or proclivity to sin. [It is like one asking ‘should a man rape a virgin in order to be able to marry her (Deut 22:28-29), why did Moses command it?’ God never desired anyone to be a rapist or a divorcee in the first place but being omnipotent, He knew that the heart of man is desperately wicked (Gen 6:5, Jere 17:9) hence the provisions of the law -1 Tim 1:9]
3. Contrary to what some now assert, reputable concordances and Bible translations show that divorce is one of the *evolved* meanings of the Greek word ‘apoluo’ although it primarily means ‘put or send away, release **fully**, set free, etc.’ Nevertheless, consider Mt 5:31-32 in the ASV Bible version:

*“**31** It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: **32** but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.”*

Let us be sincere and reasonable on the import of the Lord’s statement above: If a man gives his wife the bill of divorcement **and** put her away for any reason except fornication, what has he made her? Is Christ against such a divorce? **Was he teaching: ‘divorce is okay; only don’t practice abandonment of a wife except for fornication?’**

God expects each individual to remain faithful and loyal to the lawful partner in marriage by keeping the marriage vows to which He was a witness. Since He is the one that joins a couple together, He wills that no one should disintegrate a (validly contracted) marriage. The LORD hates putting away the wife of one's youth or one's original lawful spouse whether by abandonment or via a frivolous bill of divorcement. So no husband, wife, parent, relation, priest, pastor, judge, friend or whoever should instigate a divorce unless God specially approves. Those who do otherwise are answerable to Christ on the Day of Judgment. Let us therefore be wary of pronouncing a marriage '*irretrievably broken down and therefore dissolved.*'

Romans 7:2 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. 3 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.

1 Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

Some reason that the two preceding quotations do not apply to a divorcee as such does not have an husband. Technically speaking, that could be right; the lingering issue is '*If and when does God allow one to put away a spouse?*' As noted earlier, God permits putting away (under Mosaic law) when a bill of divorcement has been issued and given because of some uncleanness found in a woman. The sad thing is that rather than stick with what truly constitutes '*uncleanness*' before God, some Jewish school of thought seemed to have arbitrarily defined it, going by the Pharisees question in Mt 19:3. Moses sought to regulate indiscriminate putting away of wives but the law was abused via their loose interpretation to get rid of a wife that is despised. This was corrected by Jesus in His sermon on the mount and furthermore in His answer to the Pharisees. Moses commanded (*let him write her...*) the precept on *uncleanness* in Deut 24:1-2 whereas he suffered or allowed, not required *hatred* (*if the... husband hate her and write her...*) in verse 3. First of all, we need to understand and appreciate the following:

1. Being tempted by the Pharisees, Jesus would not have contradicted God's law commanded via Moses. He went back to '*the beginning*' to reveal the mind of God on marriage. The exception clause He grants for one to put away a spouse *should correspond to the one actually commanded* by Moses. He would have been accused of heresy and condemned to death if he should gainsay rather than expound the law of Moses –Deut 17:8-13, Jn 5:46-47; 8:46. [Please note that Christ lived under the law (Gal 4:4) and was sinless; meaning he NEVER violated the law in thought, deed or teaching -Heb 4:15, 1 Pet 2:22. He truly explained the law on several occasions in his lessons and response to questions. Whenever Jesus remarked "*Ye have heard of old... but I say unto you;*" He was not implying that He was about to break the law or teach something totally different from Moses. What Jesus means was that the people have heard the doctrine and tradition of their religious leaders (Mt 15:1-9; 22:29) *but* He was about to give the true intent and meaning of the law –See Jn 4:25; 7:16-19. The Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were engrossed with the letter, not the spirit of the law and they often misused it. That is why Jesus said: "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in*

*the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” -Mt 5:17-20. Surely, he brought a better covenant which replaced the Old Covenant **after** his death (Heb 8-10) but the marriage-truth that He taught is timeless and for all.]*

2. Jesus can not contradict himself (Mt 5:37, 2 Cor 1:18-22) and neither would inspired Paul contradict the Lord (Gal 1:11-12, 1 Cor 7:40b)

A Re-examination Of Arguments Commonly Used To Now Support Divorce

Some have traditionally sought to justify divorce of a lawful marriage (and possible consequent remarriage unto another spouse) by using exception clauses based on certain interpretations of Mt 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:12-15. The idea is that one may divorce and remarry if:

- a. His or her spouse becomes guilty of adultery.
- b. S/he has an unbelieving partner who wants to abandon the union because of religious differences.

We need to study those passages in context and ensure they harmonize with the rest of scripture. Brethren, it seems many things are being read into them that are not there, with excuses/assumptions leading to human traditions that make the word of God of none effect. Please note that Luke’s account is rendered like Mark’s while the Mt 5 statement is akin to Mt 19. The Mark rendition was to answer if it is lawful to put away a wife while Matthew elaborated that it was whether it is lawful to divorce a wife for every cause. This explains the variation in wording which does not constitute a contradiction. Surely, there must be a consistent or harmonious interpretation of all the passages on MDR.

The Lesson From Mt 19:9

Jesus says one is unfaithful to the marriage vows and partner if s/he divorce a spouse and marry another person. He also says what would make one guiltless or justified is IF the action was prompted or precipitated by reason of “fornication/sexual immorality.” The first part of the statement matches Mark/Luke’s account while the exception part makes the verse subject to mainly three interpretations:

- a) ***“Anyone in a marriage may only divorce and marry another provided the partner engaged in pre-marital sex /sexual immorality before their wedding, otherwise such commits adultery. The guilty party who is put away would be committing adultery if such should remarry.”***

Proponents cite Mt 1:18-25 to buttress this **claim** and imply that Jesus was teaching; *'you may only divorce and marry another if you discover your wife was not a virgin, such a woman should not be married to any man.'* This however is suspect for many reasons: [Joseph contemplated breaking his engagement to Mary privately as they were yet to be fully or technically married. The context here undoubtedly shows that put away connotes send away not divorce, where an issued Bill would be for public evidence.]

1. The law of Moses clearly addressed pre-marital sexual immorality in Deut 22:13-21 which evidently was not the focus of discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees; the relevant text they cited is Deut 24. Thus the above interpretation would not have been tenable to Christ’s audience. [Joseph was a righteous man who wanted to spare Mary the shame of being stoned to death for the perceived transgression of Deut 22]
2. The latter part of the interpretation ultimately amounts to forbidding marriage for anyone who has ever been involved in pre-marital sexual immorality, including rape victims. That would violate Deut 22:21-29 then and 1 Cor 6:9-11 & 7:2 now as typified in Rahab -Josh 6:22-25, Heb 11:31.

[Today, many people ‘wink at’ or choose to overlook the affairs their spouses were involved in as singles before they met and got married. Most Christians do not follow the interpretation which is contrary to the spirit of forgiveness and would be discriminating against women who are co-heirs of God’s impartial grace -1 Pet 3:7; 4:3, 1 Cor 7:16.]

- b) ***“Anyone in a marriage may only divorce and marry another provided the partner committed adultery /sexual immorality after their wedding, otherwise such commits adultery. The guilty party who is put away is still considered married ‘in the eyes of God’ so whoever marry such again commits adultery.”***

Although popular, this interpretation actually contains absurdities. If true, it implies:

1. Jesus contradicted then prevailing Mosaic law that specified death penalty, not divorce for adultery in Lev 20:10 & Deut 22:22.
2. The said divorce is partial and against Deut 24:2 as God (supposedly) sees the original marriage as subsisting since He purportedly still joins one person (“the guilty”) to another (“the innocent”) who is loosed from their marital union.
3. Jesus thereby endorsed divorce of a lawful marriage and negated his earlier statement; *“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”*
4. Jesus later contradicted himself on the matter by His command stated through Paul in 1 Cor 7:10-11

[The Pharisees would never have accepted this interpretation which is not consistent with the law of Moses and practice of Israel. We must remember Christ’s speech was directed at them, the multitude, His disciples and ‘whosoever.’ Sincere Christians will also reject it knowing that Jesus can neither contradict himself nor the law. The Lord gave a fundamental description of adultery in Mt 5:28 based on the intent of the law. In Mt 19 however, He describes marital states of adultery and not its punishment. He did not contest the law of Moses when a woman caught in the act of physical adultery was brought before him, rather He said: *“he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her... go and sin no more”* - John 8:3-11. Curiously, that woman was presented alone without her sin-partner. The gracious Lord interestingly used that occasion to reveal unto all, a foretaste of forgiveness/divine judgment for adulterers in the new covenant, and not stoning/divorce.]

- c) ***“Except the marriage itself was ab initio an act of fornication/sexual immorality, whosoever divorces and marry another commits adultery. Other divorcees who marry again commits adultery.”***

1. The first part of the interpretation shows that a man is permitted to divorce his wife and marry another if and only if their marriage was unlawful and they were not truly eligible before God to be married in the first place! For Christ’s Jewish audience, this would immediately make perfect sense given the types of marriages prohibited in Lev 18:6-18 & Deut 7:1-4. It is also an illicit and unclean thing for a man to take a living brother’s wife -Lev 20:21.

Mark 6:17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. 18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

Herod sinned by actually marrying Herodias, he was expected to repent and formally put her away as a fruit of repentance. Recall some unlawful marriages were dissolved with divine approval in Ezra 10.

{Some somewhat agree with this interpretation but insist that the word ‘divorce’ be replaced with ‘send away.’ They contend that no bill of divorcement was necessary or mentioned in Ezra 10 and mere separation suffices. However, they are wrong because:

- (i) Ezra 10:3 states ‘*Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to **put away** all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the **commandment** of our God; and **let it be done according to the law.***’ The emphasized portion shows it was to be done legally as prescribed in Deut 24, thus the issuing of Bill of divorcement is implied!
 - (ii) The purpose of the Bill is to serve as public evidence and formalize the end of a marriage. The Ezra event was a public matter known unto many and not a private thing between a single man and woman. It involved many couples whose marriage dissolutions were planned under the direction of their leader and priests, before a very great congregation out of all Israel at the house of God. The announced information in this case actually amounts to a circulated judicial and religious communication. Note that the Israelite men acknowledged their trespass of the law in verse 2. Neither the people of the land nor the wives were sent away in verse 11 rather the men were asked to confess their sin and go into **seclusion**. In verse 19 the men individually indicated that they would put away their wives, these words imply the *action was yet to be done* but their promise and sin offering serves as assurance for it being later done *-legally*.
 - (iii) Dissenters are simply assuming and do not have biblical or contemporary backing. Even today, while marriages that are void may not require divorce proceedings for dissolution, for formality purposes such still need a writ issued by a competent authority to declare its nullity!}
2. The latter part of (c) follows from the fact that a person who carries out any other type of divorce and marry anew would be committing adultery. Such man is involved with a woman different from his original covenanted wife who has been put away in violation of God’s decree. Thus the so-called ‘divorced’ wife is not loosed from the marriage bond that God joined together; so any remarriage by her to another similarly constitutes adultery.

[This interpretation is acceptable to both the Pharisees and Christ’s disciples since it is consistent with scriptural law and their history. It is the most sound biblically; not merely an interpretation but a permissible rewording of Mt 19:9. Recall that the word ‘*fornication*’ generally refers to sexual immorality in all its various forms and is regarded as an **uncleanness** -2 Cor 12:21, Eph 5:3, Col 3:5, Jude 1:7. It also specially refers to sexual activity between persons who are not lawfully married –1 Cor 6:16-18; 10:8, Gal 5:19. Christ thus explained the uncleanness envisaged in Deuteronomy and justifies why the woman *may* remarry after an approved divorce and the first husband could not take the wife back again. The Mt 19 exemption for instance applies to an *initial incestuous* marriage which when dissolved; each party involved may marry someone else. That would be God’s will such as when anyone discovers that he got married to a long-lost sibling. Married folks commit ‘fornication’ when their union is an unclean thing from its inception. In 1 Cor 5:1-5 it is not certain from the text that the man married his father’s wife. It is however evident that he was involved in sexual sin with his father’s wife (not widow) and violated -Acts 15:19-20. Both would have been executed if this happened under the law of Moses –Deut 22:30, Lev 20:11. The interpretations stated in options (a) and (b) are faulty because the two violate the law of Moses which was in effect at the time Jesus spoke, are at variance with gospel principles and lack true Bible examples demonstrating their application. They are therefore inferences which are not necessary. It is evident Jesus deliberately said ‘*except for **fornication***’ to refer to those not lawfully married before God. He would have again used the actual word **adultery** therein in that exemption if that was the intended message! He knew what the law of Moses prescribed for ‘marital unfaithfulness.’ Not one jot or tittle of that law was taken away until after His death. Today, under His New Testament, even adultery is not

expected to lead to a divorce between a lawfully married couple; God expects repentance and reconciliation between the two. Since the longsuffering and loving God forgives us our sins (Mt 6:12-15) and accepts us in Christ, who beseeches us to forgive ‘*seventy times seven*,’ we must make every effort to make our marriages work and always reconcile when offenses arise.]

The Lesson From 1 Cor 7

Some wrongly base an argument for remarriage on desertion as divorce (1 Cor. 7:15). Paul advises: ‘*But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.*’ He did not say ‘*the believer should thereafter remarry.*’ [God does not describe marriage as bondage but to give up one’s faith because of an unbelieving spouse and return to the world would amount to bondage –Gal 5:1, Lk 14:26] That *the Christian is not enslaved* does NOT mean that s/he was not or is no longer married. ***The Lord addressed departures in 1 Cor 7:10-11.*** Every Bible translation effectively says ‘*the husband/wife should not leave the other.*’ Yet, Christ permits (though He does not will or have pleasure in) temporary separation with the wife departing, as a contingency measure. This is when in human judgment the situation seems to warrant that they should live apart until a reconciliation and resolution of a crisis such as when life-threatening violence, gross betrayal, strong disagreements, etc. is involved. No duration is specified for the reluctantly recognized separation but it is clear that the woman (and by inference the man also) is commanded not to marry someone else. Such is to live as a single or preferably reunite in the marriage. Irrespective of the situation, Christ commands that ‘*the husband must not leave his wife.*’ [This indirectly forecloses divorce of a lawful union which would **amount to** a permanent separation.] It is a perpetual and universal command to all men, not only to believers. It is not part of Paul’s later opinion due to the then “*present distress.*” Since with time *hardened* hearts may soften for reunion to take place after a sin-induced separation, the door to godliness should not be hastily jammed by remarriage.

Resolving Common Objections

1. Are you saying people are free to commit adultery as the spouse cannot divorce for that reason? Won’t this encourage married partners to cheat on each other?

That God hates putting away (and uncleanness-free divorce which involves a put away) is not a license to be reckless or unfaithful in marriage or to continually make life unbearable for one’s partner -Rm 6:1. Knowing the truth, we should be virtuous, loving and considerate (Prov 5:18-21, Eph 5:22-25) otherwise one will receive *many stripes* –Lk 12:47-48, Heb 10:26-29. If a partner is unfaithful and unrepentant, one could hand such over to God in prayer (Eph 4:26-27, Phil 4:6-7) and/or temporarily separate as permitted in 1 Cor 7:10. Thus we must guard our homes, be watchful and intercede for our spouses, neither giving room for temptation nor ignorantly allow the enemy to get a hold on them.

2. You claim that neither party can divorce and marry another based on adultery but God himself used that principle. Did Jesus not marry Israel whom God divorced for adultery according to Jere 3:8 and Rm 7:4?

The notion that Jesus married *national* Israel whom God divorced is questionable:

- (i) Was the marriage that is implied in Jeremiah literal and physical?
- (ii) Isn’t this an exceptional divorce situation since the holy and wise God could not have engaged in a spiritual marriage that is ‘fornication/unclean/illicit’ at its inception?
- (iii) Was the adultery of Israel physical or spiritual?
- (iv) Who is the innocent party and who is the guilty party in this case (if I may borrow your lingo)?
- (v) Which of the parties is remarried according to your story?
- (vi) When God put away the nation with divorce bill as stated in Jeremiah, was it literal?
- (vii) Does the resulting separation not amount to putting Israel to spiritual death?

(viii) If so, does this not conform to the law of Moses that an adulteress should be put to death?

(ix) Is Jesus our High Priest married to ‘a defiled and divorced entity’?

(x) Are your analogy and suppositions valid?

God found fault with the wayward nation of Israel and put them away together with the law that covenanted both. Jesus will be married (*future* –Rm 7:4) to a new virgin; ***the universal church*** (*spiritual*) in heaven when the physical nation of Israel is no more -2 Cor 11:2, Rev 19:7-9; 21:9-10. **Rm 7:4 says death ended their marriage to the law; Israel was a type/shadow of the church –Gal, Heb.**

3. A person that sins via illicit sex becomes one with his/her adultery or fornication partner based on 1 Cor.6:16. S/he somehow becomes married to that person in God’s sight. Therefore the innocent, true spouse should divorce and remarry.

The context of that verse is: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” -1 Corinthians 6:15-18

We are to keep ourselves pure as part of the body of Christ and habitation of the Spirit. The passage says it is one’s body that is joined to an harlot. Defilement occurs thereby but the link established does not constitute marriage. Oneness with a valid human spouse is more than physical union, it involves other aspects. ***When did Eve become the wife of Adam and Mary of Joseph?*** A steadfast believer is not married to Christ but is part of the church that is espoused to Him. If copulation alone means marriage as you suppose ***then*** every woman is automatically married to the man who broke her virginity; there is no fornication as per its secondary meaning. There is hardly adultery as whore-mongering men will be de-facto polygamists. There is no harlotry since the wayward woman in/voluntarily gets married to a new husband every time she has a different sexual partner. Otherwise, recognized prostitution becomes polyandry and thus divorce becomes unnecessary. Your assumptions are *self-defeating*!

Conclusion

For unlawful unions, Jesus implies ‘*what therefore God hath NOT joined together, let man put asunder.*’ The Lord hates divorce in a lawful marriage and subsequent remarriage unto another person. This truth is reiterated in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. He has not changed his position on the matter irrespective of the hardness of human hearts. In valid marriages, under certain situations, Christ recognizes that separation may occur between a lawful couple; so he commands that any departure from such matrimonial home ought to be temporary until reconciliation takes place, prohibiting remarriage. Does this mean that if one’s partner is unfaithful or has abandoned the home for religious or other reasons, one should hopefully hold out for settlement, remain faithful and celibate? Yes, because when God joins a man and a woman together, He truly looses the marriage bond at the point of death of either of the duo! That may be a hard saying but it should not be surprising if we really pay attention to Christ in Mt 19:10-12 where He concludes “*...and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*” Please note that I am not imposing celibacy on anyone, it is a matter of personal choice for those who have difficulty abiding with their legitimate spouse. Neither am I ‘*forbidding to marry*’ which is a doctrine of demons -1 Tim 4:1-3. [I believe what Paul wrote concerning every man and woman that ‘*let them marry*’ in 1 Cor 7:2, 8-9, 27-28 especially those who face the challenge of controlling their sexual passion. Interestingly, he identified such as the unmarried, the virgin and the loosed. Contextually these refer to the single (bachelor/spinster) and widow(er) in verses 36-37 and 39-40 respectively. The divorcees which may be included by inference are those who satisfy the exception clause given in Mt 5:32 & 19:9.] Jesus does not allow a man to

divorce the wife if the husband hates her rather our Lord command husbands to love their wives. Every lawfully married person ought to obey 1 Cor 7:10-11. Our study shows that it will be a sin (adultery) for someone who is sent away from the home or separated but not divorced, to marry another. It also amounts to adultery when one marries another without an approved divorce while the first spouse is still alive. Divorce is approved only on the grounds of fornication by reason of an unlawful union. Valid marriages should endure, be determined and make effort to enjoy this divine blessing –Prov 18:22, Ecc 9:9. Despite the Lord’s restraining order, humans can attempt or purport to put asunder what God has joined together. *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal; the Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* -2 Tim 2:19. Remember the promise: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* -1 Cor 10:13. The Lord also warns: *‘vengeance is mine, I will repay’* (Rm 12:19c) and *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled but whoremongers and adulterers **God will judge**”* -Heb 13:4.

Review Questions For Quick Consideration

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” -1 Thess. 5:21

1. Is any scripture of private interpretation?
2. Can the scripture be broken?
3. Is the word of God necessary and sufficient for life, godliness and righteousness?
4. Should one study and rightly divide the word of truth in order to show himself approved unto God?
5. Scripturally, is marriage for life or for a season?
6. Ethically, is it *“for better, for worse”* or *“for better for stay, for worse for go”*?
7. Contemporarily, is it *“till death do us part”* or *“till sin do us part”*?
8. Is marriage predicated on public proclamation by a couple or is it by default a secret status?
9. Is marriage to be consensual or is it to be imposed?
10. Does copulation between a woman and any man automatically equate to marriage?
11. Does the act of fornication or rape or adultery automatically constitute a marriage?
12. Is divorce a conscious act or not?
13. Does the act of adultery by itself automatically terminate a marriage?
14. Do some ‘churches of Christ’ hold it as compulsory or optional for the innocent party to divorce a spouse guilty of adultery in a marriage?
15. Does God love divorce or putting away one’s spouse?
16. Does God love consideration, repentance and forgiveness?
17. Is God’s grace a license for a Christian to abound in sin?
18. Was divorce the norm from the beginning?
19. Is man allowed to put asunder what God has joined together?
20. Is one’s original spouse who was eligible and free to marry the lawful spouse?
21. In Christianity, will it be adultery for one to marry another if the lawful spouse is still alive?
22. From the beginning, which is scriptural marriage: Monogamy, Polygamy, Polyandry or Gay-Marriage?
23. Would a marriage be unlawful if one party is not free and eligible in the first instance?
24. By whose authority are unlawful marriages contracted, *“it from heaven or from men”*?
25. Are those who are involved in unlawful marriages joined together by God?
26. Does repentance involve godly sorrow for one’s sin and a change in conduct unto righteousness?
27. May man put asunder an unlawful marriage?
28. Was the marriage of Herod to Herodias -his brother’s wife, a lawful one?

29. Did God approve or disapprove the action of the Israelites to put away their foreign wives in the book of Ezra?
30. Was their action based upon an explicit “thus saith the LORD” or implicitly necessary since repentance required that they should henceforth obey the commandment prohibiting such marriages?
31. Would a marriage that is an unlawful union constitute sexual immorality before God irrespective of human opinion? [E.g. between a bachelor (Mr. B) and a woman (Mrs. A) who departed from her original husband in this gospel age]
32. Should an unlawfully married couple divorce upon repentance and acknowledgment of the truth?
33. Would doing such demonstrate the “exception clause” given by Christ in Mt 19:9 and be an approved divorce?
34. Should they put asunder their unlawful marriage irrespective of whether both parties deliberately sinfully went into it or one was innocently tricked into it?
35. Is the one who was hitherto unmarried before their unlawful union now free and eligible to marry after going through the approved divorce?
36. Is such free because God has never previously joined him together with another in a marriage?
37. If such is not free after the approved divorce, could it mean that God perpetually uphold the unlawful marriage?
38. Would the other partner who was originally ineligible before the unlawful marriage, automatically become free to marry another after undergoing the approved divorce?
39. Could such who may not remarry possibly reconcile with her lawful partner?
40. Is it an act of adultery for anyone to put away the lawful spouse and marry another?
41. Is God the author of confusion?
42. Should our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees?
43. In answering the Pharisees question in Mt 19, was Christ’s response valid for only the Patriarchal age or for only the Mosaic age or for only the Christian age or for all ages “*from the beginning of creation till the end of the world*”?
44. Did Moses permit divorce due to divine will and eternal purpose or because of men’s “hardness of heart”?
45. Was Jesus justifying and pleased with divorce which Moses permitted for “hardness of heart”?
46. Today, will it be “hardness of heart” for one guilty of adultery, not to repent after exposure?
47. Today, will it be “hardness of heart” for one sinned against through adultery, not to forgive after entreatment?
48. Is Christ’s statement “*what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” absolute and immutable or did He negate/cancel/contradict it afterwards?
49. Since Jesus and the Pharisees lived under the law of Moses, would it be right to say that “He there and then changed the penalty for adultery from ‘stoning unto death’ to divorce”?
50. If in a lawful union, by reason of adultery, Jesus permitted divorce/remarriage in Mt 19 as alleged, would He not be contradicting Himself later in 1 Cor 7 where He permits only separation (irrespective of the cause) and forbids leaving to remarry?
51. A divorced woman may remarry under the law of Moses, did Jesus forbid such in His response to the Pharisees?
52. Can one person be loosed from a lawful marriage bond while the other is still tied to it ‘in the eyes of God’?
53. Did Christ prohibit remarriage because divorce of a lawful union is not recognized by God?
54. Did Jesus permit divorce and remarriage only in a union that was itself initially a sexual immorality?

55. Is it Christ-like for a couple in a lawful marriage to jump into divorce if a partner should become guilty of adultery?
56. Was Paul an inspired apostle who kept the faith till he finished his course?
57. In 1 Cor 7, does God allow separation of a couple without them being divorced?
58. Is God tolerating separation or happily commanding it?
59. Could one's spouse possibly depart or separate based on religious differences, adultery, etc.?
60. If separation occurs, did God specify a duration that it must last?
61. In marital separation, are the individuals permitted by the Lord to marry someone else?
62. Does He entreat them to reconcile and reunite in their marriage?
63. Does the Lord expect them to live as singles for the rest of their lives if they fail to reconcile?
64. Would living apart as singles require that they make themselves "*eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*"?
65. Could they end such unnatural celibacy by reconciling and rendering unto themselves '*due benevolence*'?
66. Does the phrase translated "[A brother or sister is not '*enslaved/under bondage*']" mean the believer was not, is not and has never been in marriage?
67. Does 'bondage/slavery' in that context refer to "marriage" or "obligation to the unbeliever's preference that one should renounce the Christian faith"?
68. Is Paul's advice for a Christian ('to maintain peace and allow an insistent unbelieving spouse to depart') in 1 Cor 7:15 negating the Lord's command earlier stated in vs 10-11?
69. Did Paul state or counsel that the believer should go ahead to remarry if the unbelieving depart?
70. Can marital separation be viewed a temptation for which God will provide a way of escape so that one may bear it?
71. Which of these could be legitimate ways of escape in that situation? (a) Remaining celibate until one's death (b) Reconciling with one's spouse (c) Natural death of one's spouse (d) Marrying another person while one's lawful partner is alive (e) Murdering or masterminding the assassination of one's spouse
72. Does "*the Lord know how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished*"?
73. Today, is everyone ultimately subject to Christ's gospel whether or not they obey it?
74. In this age, are marriages between free and eligible persons recognized by God irrespective of their religion?
75. Is it stated in the texts that the mixed-faith marriages described by Paul and Peter took place before one converted?
76. Does God have a different marriage law for Christians and another marriage law for unbelievers?
77. Is it lawful but not expedient for a Christian to deliberately marry an unbeliever?
78. If being married to an unbeliever is sin, how will a Christian repent and forsake such sin?
79. Does God require a repentant unbeliever to depart from an unbelieving lawful spouse before s/he obeys the gospel?
80. How many scriptural grounds exist for divorce and remarriage in a lawful marriage?
81. Could it be NONE? [Since upon realizing that the only one who could 'put away' a spouse is he whose marriage is illicit, the disciples said of it; "*If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry*"]

Look over your answers again in clear conscience for consistency and scripturality. Dear reader/ congregation, if your traditional belief, teaching and/or practice about MDR are wrong, are YOU ready to make amends? "***Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...***" -2 Cor. 13:5