
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **Are divorced people still married in the eyes of God?**

There are two common ideas about divorce:

- First, there are some who think divorced people are "*still married in the eyes of God even though they are not married in the eyes of men.*"
- Second, there are some who think remarried people are "*married in the eyes of men, but not in the eyes of God.*"

Neither one of these positions can be proven from scripture. Let's discuss each position briefly.

"Married in the Eyes of God"

First, are divorced people "*still married in the eyes of God, even though they are not married in the eyes of men*"? The short answer is simply, "No." When people divorce, they are no longer married in the eyes of God, but that is not the complete story either. Even though someone may be divorced and are now unmarried, that does not mean they are unbound. What this means is, an unmarried person could find themselves bound by God's law which would prevent them from marrying someone else. Notice the following passage:

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

¹⁰ Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband.

¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

Notice two rules here:

Rule #1: The wife is not to "depart from" her husband. This word depart means divorce. (The word "depart" is translated from the same Greek word which means "put asunder" or "separate" in Mt 19:6). In other words, Rule #1 is saying it is sinful for a wife to divorce her husband if he is being faithful to his wife.

If the husband is not being faithful to his wife, Mt 19:9 says she may divorce him and remarry someone else who will be faithful.

But if the husband is being faithful ... if he's not cheating on his wife ... she may not divorce him.

Rule #2: If the wife sins and does not obey the first rule, she is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to the husband she divorced.

For sake of emphasis, let me remind you the passage commanded the wife not to divorce a faithful husband. It is a sin for a wife to break her wedding vows and divorce a faithful husband.

Notice the word "unmarried." If the wife divorces her husband, she is *not* "still married in the eyes of God." No, God said she was unmarried. Yet even though she is unmarried, she is still bound by God's law. God's law says she is not free to remarry someone else.

- If the husband has died, the wife is to remain unmarried for the rest of her life. She broke her wedding vows and is commanded here to remain unmarried. She is still bound by God's rules.
- If the husband is still alive, the wife is to be reconciled to him. Divorce is not an option when a husband has been faithful to his wife.

"Unmarried in the Eyes of God"

This brings up our second question: Are remarried people "*married in the eyes of men, but not married in the eyes of God*"? The short answer is, "No." Married people are married in the eyes of both men and God, but this is not the complete story. There are some married people whose marriage God does not approve of.

Mark 6:17-18

¹⁷ ... Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for **he had married her**.

¹⁸ For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Notice here that, although Herod should not have stolen his brother's wife away from his brother, the scripture plainly says Herod had "*married*" Herodias. They were married, but God did not approve of this marriage.

In Ezra 10 the Jewish people married heathens from other nations. This was against the Law of Moses (cf. Dt 7:1-4). Even though these Jews married heathens, their marriages were not approved by God.

Why This Matters

Why does all of this matter? It matters for two reasons.

Reason #1: Some people play a waiting game. A wife will divorce her faithful husband and think, "We're still married in the eyes of God. When he commits adultery, I'll then divorce him for adultery and I can then marry another."

This waiting game is wrong.

- First, the scripture says she became "unmarried" when she divorced her husband. An unmarried woman may not divorce anyone because an unmarried woman is unmarried by definition.
- Second, the wife was commanded not to divorce the faithful husband to begin with.
- Third, when she divorced the husband she is told she must be reconciled to him. She is not told she may wait till he commits sexual sin and then be free to marry someone else.

Reason #2: Divorced couples may not have sex with one another until they are reconciled.

Since divorced people are "unmarried," they may not start dating again and assume that they are really "still married in the eyes of God," and go to bed and have sex with one another on their dates. They must first become married again by becoming legally married once again.

When divorced couples go to bed and have sex with one another without first becoming legally married, they are committing fornication. Fornication is a sin which must be repented of (Gal 5:19-21).

Conclusion

When a man and woman divorce, they are "*unmarried*" (1 Cor. 7:10-11), but they are not "*unbound*."

- "*Unmarried*" in the sense that they may not simply sleep with each other tonight. If they wish to cohabit with one another again, they will have to be reunited in marriage.
- But though they are "*unmarried*" they are still "*bound*" in the sense that the only person they can marry is the spouse they just divorced.

Hence, when Mt 5:32 and Mt 19:9 says, "*whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery,*" it means they are marrying a woman who is "*unmarried*" but still "*bound*" and not free to marry another person other than her original spouse.

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