

The Bible – Divorce and Remarriage

by J. T. Smith

Today divorce is a common occurrence. In some areas as many as one-half of all marriages end in divorce. A great percentage of those who divorce will remarry.

The following passages set forth all that is said in the New Testament on these subjects. **Matthew 5:32** “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 19:9** “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.” **Mark 10:11-12** “And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 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.” Romans 7:23 “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.” **I Corinthians 7:10-11** “And unto the married I command, {yet} not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from {her} husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to {her} husband: and let not the husband put away {his} wife.” **I 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.”

Also in this article we will answer a number of questions that are commonly asked about this subject. We will answer such questions as:

- 1 What is meant by “put away”?
- 2 Is it possible for one to be *married* and *not bound*?
- 3 What of the person who has been put away — may he/she remarry?
- 4 How does the “exception” of which Jesus spoke fit into all this?
- 5 Is the “exception” still applicable today?
- 6 What of those who marry, divorce and remarry before becoming Christians?

Definition Of Words

In order to have a proper understanding of this or any subject, we must have a proper understanding of the words that are used. We must also examine the context in which they are used.

“Put Away”

According to Joseph Henry Thayer in his Greek-English Lexicon, the words “put away” are from the Greek word *apoluo* and mean, “to dismiss from the house, to repudiate” (Thayer, page 66). W. E. Vine in his Dictionary of New Testament Words (Volume 3, pages 235-236) defines *apoluo* as, “to put asunder, to send away, Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9.” Sometimes people confuse the “putting away” with the writing of divorcement. Even though both are involved in that which Jesus was discussing, the word “divorce” is

a technical term that is used in the English language implying the right, according to civil law, to remarry. “(1) Legal dissolution of the marriage; (2) Complete separation” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, page 181).

“Fornication”

The word “fornication” is from the Greek word *porneia* and means, “Prop, of illicit sexual intercourse in general” (Thayer, page 532). “Prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse in general” (Moulton and Milligan, page 529). Thus, in the New Testament, “fornication” is sometimes used for “adultery,” as it involved married people; “homosexuality,” illicit sexual relations with those of the same sex; “incest,” sexual intercourse with family members; and “bestiality,” as one tries to satisfy his sexual desires with animals.

“Adultery”

The word “adultery” is from the Greek word *moicheuo*, and the basic meaning is “to commit adultery with, to have unlawful intercourse with another’s wife” (Thayer, page 417). The word “adultery” was used almost exclusively in the Old Testament for all kinds of illicit acts. In fact, according to Young’s Analytical Concordance, the word “fornication” was only used five (5) times in the Old Testament, and every time it was used in a figurative sense to refer to the illicit spiritual actions of God’s people (Ezekiel 16:15,26,29; II Chronicles 21:11; and Isaiah 23:17). Although the word adultery is generally used in the New Testament to denote illicit sexual intercourse with another’s spouse, it is sometimes used (in context) to include all people (cf. Matthew 5:28; II Peter 2:14). “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Thus “whosoever” (which would not just involve married people), looks on a woman to lust after her commits adultery. “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin;...” (II Peter 2:14). The same thing said of Matthew 5:28 would apply here.

“Bound”

The word “bound” is from the Greek word *deo* and means “to bind by a legal or moral tie, as marriage, Romans 7:2; I Corinthians 7:23,29” (Bagster’s Analytical Greek Lexicon, page 89). “To bind, i.e. put under obligation, sc. of law, duty, etc. to be bound to one: of a wife, Romans 7:2, I Corinthians 7:27, 39” (Thayer, page 131). The “binding,” as you can observe from the definition of the word, is a “spiritual binding” in the mind of God. The same idea is set forth in the word “joined” in Matthew 19:6. “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” The word “joined” in this passage is from the Greek word *sunzeugnumi*, and means, “to yoke together, is used metaphorically of union in wedlock” (W. E. Vine, page 616). Since it is God’s law that binds, only God is able to release one from the obligation of law.

“Bondage”

The word “bondage” found in I Corinthians 7:15, is wont to be used by some brethren to discuss the “marriage bond.” The Greek word used in I Corinthians 7:15 is *dedoulotai*, and is “3rd person, singular, perfect, indicative, passive of *doulooo*, to be under restraint, I Corinthians 7:15” (Bagster, page 85, 107). The word *doulooo* or a derivative thereof, is used 133 times in the New Testament and unless it is so used in I Corinthians 7:15, is never once used to mean “the marriage bond.” It means, “To make a slave of, reduce to bondage. In I Corinthians 7:15, to be under bondage, held by constraint of law or necessity, in some matter” (Thayer, page, 158). “Originally the lowest term in the scale of servitude, came also to mean one who gives himself up to the will of

another” (W. E. Vine, Volume I, page 139).

Now according to the definition of these words, let’s examine what is said in the passages at the beginning of this article that pertain to the subjects in order to determine what God teaches. Perhaps the following charts will assist us in understanding what is meant by “marriage” and “put away.”

“Scriptural Marriage”

Marriage consists of a covenant between a man and woman: an agreement, a commitment to fulfill the duties and obligations enjoined upon them by their covenant to each other. Consequently, having taken the above mentioned “vows” and having obeyed civil law, that are joined (bound – yoked) by God having formed a relationship that is to last as long as they both shall live.

What Is Meant By “Put Away”?

The above commitment and joint responsibility is forsaken. When the commitment is broken, the relationship is dissolved, the marriage is TERMINATED. Unless it is terminated for fornication (thus with God’s approval) even though the marriage is dissolved, they are still joined (bound – yoked) by God

Now we want to answer our question # 2, “Is it possible for one to be married and not bound?”

One of the pitfalls that I want to warn about is that of confusing terms. Many make the mistake of equating:

Married = Bound

Divorce = Loosed

Neither of the above are equal.

Some people reason that since “bound” means “fasten with chains,” when an innocent party puts away an adulterous spouse for fornication, thus severing the “bond” for the innocent mate who is doing the putting away, the “bond” is also broken for the “guilty party.” “For,” they reason, “when the chain is broken, both are released.” However, as we have already observed from the above definitions, the fact of the matter is that the word “bound,” when referring to people relationships, does not mean “to fasten with chains.” It means, “to put under obligation, namely to law.”

Now it should be obvious that one can be “married” and not “bound,” or “bound” and not married.” For example in Matthew 19:9, the innocent party (the one doing the “putting away”) is loosed from any obligation to the guilty party, if he so desires. But it is obvious that the guilty party is still under obligation (bound to the law of her husband, Romans 7:2-3; I Corinthians 7:39). The reason that this should be so obvious is because “whosoever” marries the guilty party is an adulterer.

In Mark 6:17-18, we find the case of Herod and Herodias. Here are two people who are “married,” for that is what the text says, but they are not “bound.” John the Baptist told Herod that it was an **unlawful** marriage, for she was still his brother Phillip’s wife.

Thus the word “married” refers to relationship, and “bound” refers to obligation: and “marriage” does not equal “bond.”

Four Positions on “Bound”

- 1. “Bound” and scripturally married – Matthew 19:5**
- 2. “Bound” and unmarried – I Corinthians 7:10-11**
- 3. One mate “bound” while being unscripturally Married to another – Mark 6:17-18; Romans 7:2-3**
- 4. One Mate “Bound” though unmarried while the other mate is free – Matthew 19:9**



**Remember, “bound” means, “Obligation, namely to law”
(Thayer, Page 131, 2b)**

As you can see from the above chart, there are actually four positions taken in the Scriptures regarding “bound.” First, there is one who is “bound” in a scriptural marriage (Matthew 19:5). Second, there is one who is “bound” but separated (I Corinthians 7:10-11). Third, one mate may be “bound” while being *unscripturally* married to another (Mark 6:17-18; Romans 7:2-3). Fourth, one mate may be “bound” though unmarried while the other mate is free (Matthew 19:9). ☞