

BIBLICAL VIEW of DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE

Extracted from Paul Blue's Master of Divinity Thesis

Questions Answered

- I. Is God, Satan, or Man the author of divorce?
 - A. God is the author of divorce legislation in His Word. [Deut. 24:1-2]
- II. Are there different meanings of Hebrew words translated and written as “divorce” in many translations of the Bible? What about Greek in the New Testament?
 - A. Yes
 1. The Hebrew word *keriythuwth*, translated “divorce” or “divorcement” refers to the complete, legal severing of the marital bond.
 2. The Hebrew word *shalach*, translated “putting away/sending away” refers to men putting their wives away for carnal reasons without giving them a bill of divorce.
 - B. *Apoluo* and *aphiemi* are similar in definition: to let go, dismiss, send away, put away, and are the Greek words used in the New Testament for a marriage that ends without the bill of divorce, just as the Hebrew word *shalach* (put away) was used in the Old Testament.
- III. What translations differentiate these words?
 - A. These terms are differentiated in the King James Version (KJV) and the old American Standard Version (ASV).
- IV. Does God hate divorce?
 - A. No, God does not hate a legal divorce (*keriythuwth*), “*For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth **putting away (shalach)**...*” (Malachi 2:16). What God hates is what men do in putting/sending their wives away for carnal reasons *without giving them a bill of divorce*.
- V. Does the message of divorce change in the New Testament?
 - A. Neither Jesus nor Paul gave instruction in the area of marriage-breaking that contradicts the Mosaic Law. As a result, the divorce laws given through Moses are God’s only instruction to us in the area of divorce. Anything contrary to that is man-made.
- VI. What does the Bible say concerning remarriage?
 - A. According to the Old Testament, if you were given a bill of divorce, you were free to remarry.
 - B. According to Jesus, you were to obey the Law of Moses.
 - C. According to Paul, if you were properly loosed from a wife (given a bill of divorce), then you were free to remarry.
- VII. Will Jesus give me grace for divorcing my spouse?
 - A. God created man, then God instituted marriage to alleviate man’s alone-ness. As a result of sin, sometimes man does not achieve God’s best in marriage. If sin causes a marriage to break up, God allows through His grace, wisdom, compassion and sovereignty, for His children to begin again, trying to achieve God’s ideal through remarriage.

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OLD TESTAMENT

In Deuteronomy 24, the first mention of divorce in the Bible, it was not Satan who was the author of divorce. It was not Moses who was the author of divorce. The author of divorce as we find it in the Word of God is God Himself. God is the author of divorce. Although it is the sin of mankind that allows a couple's marriage to deteriorate, the process of ending the marriage officially (bill of divorce) is authored by God. The Hebrew word *keriythuwth*, translated "divorce" or "divorcement" referred to the complete severing of the marital bond. This was when the legal divorce was written, as commanded by Deuteronomy 24.

God is the author of the divorce legislation in His Word. He instituted it as a measure of protection for women who were being abused, abandoned, and left to fend for themselves. But, God does hate something, and we read about it in Malachi 2:13-16. It is not divorce (*keriythuwth*) that God hates. The King James Version of the Bible clearly states what it is that God hates: "*For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth **putting away (shalach)**...*" (Malachi 2:16). Clearly, what God hates is what men do in putting their wives away for carnal reasons without giving them a bill of divorce.

We have heard many say emphatically, "God hates divorce", quoting Malachi 2:16. They fail to take the context of this one verse into consideration, and they fail to acknowledge the Hebrew word *shalach* in the verse. Only the King James Version and the old American Standard Version translate *shalach* as it should be, "putting away". All the other translations translate *shalach* "divorce". This causes confusion about what it is that God hates.

The Hebrew word *shalach* is used in the King James Bible 847 times. Not once is it translated "divorce". The Hebrew word *keriythuwth* is used 4 times in the King James Bible. Not once is it translated as anything other than "divorce" or "divorcement." There are 23,214 verses within the Old Testament. We do not find even one that forbids divorce (*keriythuwth*). It is also notable we do not find one verse forbidding remarriage for one who has been given a bill of divorce.

NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament word translated "put away" in Jesus' teaching in the King James Version of the Bible, according to Strong's Concordance is the Greek word *apoluo*. There is a synonymous word, used by Paul, the Greek word *aphiemi*. Prior to the Old Testament Law, when a husband wanted to dismiss his wife, he simply put her away. This "putting away" in the New Testament is expressed by these two words, *apoluo* and *aphiemi*. *Apoluo* and *aphiemi* are similar in definition: to let go, dismiss, send away, put away, and are the Greek words used in the New Testament for a marriage that ends without the bill of divorce, just as the Hebrew word *shalach* (put away) was used in the Old Testament. *Apoluo*, the Greek word for putting away, was not technically divorce, though often used synonymously.

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In the Old Testament, the hard-hearted men were putting away their wives, *without giving them a bill of divorce*. God objected to that and gave regulations in the Law. Jesus also objected to the mistreatment of women. He told them, in Luke 16:17, it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away before the law requiring a written bill of divorce should fail.

Jesus reaffirms here what the law taught concerning *putting away*. He says if a man puts away his wife (without a bill of divorce) and marries another (while still legally married, since he gave no bill of divorce), the man is guilty of adultery. Moreover, the wife who was put away without the bill of divorce is also in trouble. Without the divorce paper, she is abandoned, but still married. If she were to marry again, she would also commit adultery. **The distinction between “put away” and “divorce”, between the Greek *apoluo* and *apostasion* is critical.**

Here, Paul gives a brief conclusion and summary statement of his inspired teaching on this subject.

1. If you are married, don't seek a way out. Stay the course. Love your spouse. Do what is necessary to have a God-honoring, fulfilling, happy marriage.
2. If you are formerly married, don't seek to remarry. Paul states his case for the single life in this chapter. His philosophy: “if you are single, you can concentrate on doing more for God” is a *suggestion, not a command*. His statement (1Cor 7:27), “art thou loosed from a wife” is believed by some to mean the spouse has died. Since Paul's previous statement, “Art thou bound unto a wife? *Seek not to be loosed*”, does not refer to the death of a spouse, we see Paul is speaking of someone who was married and is now divorced.
3. If you have been married and divorced, if you remarry, you have not sinned. Many have made remarriage a terrible sin. God's Word does not state remarriage is a sin.

Paul also says (1Cor 7:15), “if the unbeliever wants out, the Christian must not stand in the way of the marriage-breaking.” Paul uses the middle voice with the imperative tense: “let him depart”. If this happens, and the unbeliever leaves, even if they do not give a bill of divorce, the believer is free as if he or she were never married.

Neither Jesus nor Paul gave instruction in the area of marriage-breaking that contradicts the Mosaic Law. As a result, the divorce laws given through Moses are God's only instruction to us in the area of divorce. Anything contrary to that is man-made.

REMARRIAGE

Some say God *never* allowed divorce or remarriage; Deuteronomy 24, verses 1 and 2 clearly show otherwise. The bill of divorce formed a legal and scriptural basis for remarriage. Many struggle with the remarriage aspect. It is often referred to as “living in a state of adultery” believing divorce is wrong and the wife is still married to her first and original husband. But verse 2 says she becomes “*another man's wife*”, and it refers to her first husband as her “*former*” husband in verse 4. This shows, when the bill of divorce is given, the first marriage is completely severed, thereby freeing them for remarriage.

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So what is the conclusion the Bible brings us to concerning remarriage?

1. According to the Old Testament, if you were given a bill of divorce, you were free to remarry.
2. According to Jesus, you were to obey the Law of Moses.
3. According to Paul, if you were properly loosed from a wife (given a bill of divorce), then you were free to remarry.

Whether or not it fits into one's theology and practice, God's Holy Word allows remarriage for those who have been divorced.

FINAL STATEMENTS

Finally, we must look at divorce and remarriage in the context of Law vs. Grace. The Old Testament Law allowed divorce and remarriage. We know the Law is the more rigid of the two. Would divorce and remarriage under grace be more difficult to obtain? The answer is no. Grace, when applied to divorce, does not lead to acceptance of that which is wrong and indulgence of evil. Everything the Bible says is right must be accepted. It has been shown that divorce is not wrong, and the church must begin to show acceptance of God's Word in this area.

Jesus taught the Sabbath observance need not be threatened by a compassionate interpretation of its purpose. We read about this in Mark 2:27 And he said unto them, *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You have gotten things backwards. It is not the Sabbath that is the primary focus, man is. The sabbath was given to benefit man. Man is not to benefit the sabbath."

Likewise, Christianity does not need to feel threatened by a compassionate Jesus towards divorce and those affected by it. Just as the Pharisees were getting things backwards, churches and church leaders are also getting things backwards today. *Man was not created for marriage, marriage was created for man*. God created man, then God instituted marriage to alleviate man's alone-ness. As a result of sin, sometimes man does not achieve God's best in marriage. If sin causes a marriage to break up, God allows through His grace, wisdom, compassion and sovereignty, for His children to begin again, trying to achieve God's ideal through remarriage.

May today's churches and church leaders begin to show the same grace, wisdom and compassion in the area of divorce and remarriage that God did.