

Divorce and Remarriage: What About Fornication?

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.”

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.”

The confusion of fornication with divorce and remarriage reminds me of a true humorous illustration about President Herbert Hoover. A memorandum from the FBI was sent to President Herbert Hoover. The document, though, was completely filled so that President Hoover barely had room for a comment on the margin. He wrote, “Watch the border,” and his puzzled but obedient aides dispatched FBI agents to patrol the Canadian and Mexican borders for a week. :)

Like President Hoover's “Watch the border”, each person can read the same sentence and interpret something different from it. Many have interpreted Mt. 19:9 and Mt. 5:32 as allowing for divorce and/or remarriage in the case of fornication. The thinking is that if your spouse was involved in fornication then divorce and/or remarriage would be acceptable to God. However, there are a number of important truths we need to notice from Matthew.

- **Jesus already stated clearly that divorce for any reason was not acceptable to God.** If you look in the previous verses in Mt. 19, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees' question of divorce for any reason. **Jesus' reply was that God didn't accept divorce at all.** (Please view our articles - “Divorce: Not Acceptable”; “Divorce: Not Allowed”; “Divorce: Not The Answer”.) Notice in the Bible: God “hateth putting away”; divorce was not so “from the beginning”; and “what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” **So, it is very important to realize that Jesus was not allowing any loop holes for divorce, which countered the Pharisees who were looking for excuses for divorce.** The Pharisees were notorious for getting divorced and remarried.
- **These two verses in Matthew are the only New Testament passages dealing with fornication concerning divorce and remarriage.** Yes, it is true that Deuteronomy allowed for any reason for divorce, but Jesus revealed a much higher standard in the New Testament. And in the New Testament, the only place that might indicate a reason for divorce and remarriage is in Matthew 19:9 and 5:32. However, both Mark (10:11) and Luke (16:18) address this same topic with similar wording yet without addressing “fornication”. **God wanted believers to focus on His dislike of divorce and remarriage rather than an excuse for**

divorce and remarriage. Jesus did say, though, that a “hard heart” would still pursue divorce and remarriage.

- If you look carefully, you'll notice that both Mt. 5:32 and Mt. 19:9 are actually **specifically addressing remarriage, not divorce.** Divorce is mentioned to clarify the type of remarriage: remarriage after divorce versus remarriage after a spouse's death. The parallel accounts of Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18 make this distinction clearer. The focus is remarriage. So, fornication is not being used as an excuse for divorce. **The question is not of fornication for divorce but rather fornication for remarriage.**
- Many believers have heard that the word for “fornication” comes from our word for pornography. **Are you aware that the word “fornication” refers to more than just pornography?** The word actually addresses all kinds of sexual acts including adultery.

John 8:41 “Ye do the deeds of your father. 'Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.’”

When the Jews mentioned “fornication” here in Jn. 8:41, they were, of course, referring to the rumor of Mary's adultery resulting in Jesus' birth. “Fornication” was used instead of the word “adultery”. Why? And why use the word fornication in Mt. 19:9 and 5:32 instead of just the word adultery? **The reason is because all fornication in a marriage is adultery.** Even looking wrongfully at another person you are not married to is adultery of the heart.

Matthew 5:28 “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

- So, why is Mt. 5:32 and 19:9 stating that divorce and remarriage is not adultery when the spouse has committed fornication? The reason: the spouse is already committing adultery via fornication. **Therefore, divorce and remarriage cannot cause the spouse to commit adultery since the spouse is already committing adultery through their fornication.**
- By the way, here is one major thought you need to realize. It is rare indeed to find anyone who has not committed an act of fornication in some manner or another; whether by sight, thoughts, or action. Even a quick weakness of thought or look is considered fornication. **That would mean most marriages have an excuse for divorce if God was truly saying that fornication was grounds for divorce. That would be what the Pharisees had been looking to latch onto, right?!** The emphasis of the New Testament and of the gospel of grace is that Jesus can show mercy and help us all overcome the power of sin. Every Christian marriage then is required to follow the same principles of grace and mercy for each other! With

the grace of Jesus in your life then, fornication cannot be a reason or excuse for divorce and remarriage.

- In conclusion, Mt. 5:32 and Mt. 19:9 are not reasons and excuses for divorce and remarriage. Rather both passages emphasize divorce and remarriage as causing your spouse to commit adultery. **The only time divorce and remarriage do not cause your spouse to commit adultery is when your spouse is already in adultery via fornication.** Therefore, the divorce and remarriage did not cause adultery since it was already being committed.

Disclaimer: I realize that this article may be one of my most lengthy and complicated articles. However, it is extremely important for God's people to stop accepting divorce and remarriage. The broad road of today and the majority of people reject these teachings, but the broad road also leads to destruction. **We need more believers to accept the strait and narrow truth of absolutely no divorce and remarriage.** After Jesus addressed this conflicting topic, he stated to the disciples in Mt. 19:11 "But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given." Jesus concluded the discussion at the end of verse 12, "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."