

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about Church building ministries. Today's teaching is: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE. We will discover the reasons why God allows divorce. We will study the word "adultery" and especially consider the possibility of transformation and remarriage of a person who is divorced.

(S) **POINT 1. THE REASONS WHY GOD ALLOWS DIVORCE**

Because of the sinfulness and brokenness of people, God allows three reasons for divorce. A Christian may divorce for marital unfaithfulness or marital indecency; for religious adultery and for spiritual incompatibility.

First. Divorce in the Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 24:1 is written, "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds *something indecent* about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house ...". Although in the Old Testament, Moses permitted people to divorce, he did not agree with divorce. He only regulated an evil practice that already existed in Israel.

The scribes and Pharisees in Israel were always debating the possible reasons for divorce. They based their opinions on the opinions of men who lived long ago. Because of the lax of morals during the time Jesus Christ lived on earth, the scribes and Pharisees were pre-occupied with the method of divorce rather than with the marriage ordinance of God. They argued that when a person divorces his wife and sends her away, he should at least give her a proper certificate of divorce. They thought that a piece of paper like a legal divorce document could dissolve the marriage bond in God's eyes! They were very wrong!

(T) The Old Testament permits divorce for the reason of finding "*something indecent*" (H: erwath dabar) in the marriage-partner. The two major schools among the Jews had widely different opinions about the meaning of the words "something indecent".

According to the school of Shammai, the meaning of "something indecent" was only unchastity and adultery. *Unchastity* was losing one's virginity before marriage and *adultery* was sexual intercourse with another person than one's marriage-partner.

According to the school of Hillel, the meaning of "something indecent" was *anything which displeases the husband*. They allowed divorce for the flimsiest reasons. For example, the husband could reject his wife if she accidentally served him food that had been slightly burned. He could divorce her if she talked so loud at home that the neighbours could hear her, etc. However, the true meaning of the words "something indecent" is "a report of nakedness" or "a matter of offensive sexual behaviour" (indecency) or "a case of unchastity, lewdness or obscenity". It is clear that the Old Testament in this passage teaches the same as Jesus Christ teaches in the New Testament. The expression refers to "unbecoming, improper or illegal behaviour with respect to nakedness".

In Malachi 2:16, God explains that he hates "violence" within the marriage relationship. Violence is another kind of indecent behaviour within marriage.

Thus, the Old Testament allows divorce for "adultery" or for "any kind of indecent behaviour related to sex" or for "violence within the marriage relationship".

(S) **Second. Divorce in the New Testament.**

While the scribes and Pharisees emphasised *the exception*, Jesus Christ emphasised *the principle rule*. He reiterates God's marriage ordinance that God *commanded* a man to leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife and become one flesh with her (Gen 2:24). This is not merely a historical description of what generally takes place between a man and a woman on earth, but it is *a divine ordinance*, an authoritative command of God for all time and in all cultures. Therefore in Matthew 19:5-6, Jesus clearly teaches that at the creation, God did not permit divorce. Jesus commands, "What God has joined together, let man not separate"! Marriage is God joining a man and woman together for their whole life! If either one of the marriage-partners or a person outside the marriage relationship interferes or breaks this marriage bond, he disobeys God and does a very great sin against the innocent married person! Such a person is called "an adulterer" and according to 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, an unrepentant adulterer will not inherit the kingdom of God!

Jesus also allows a Christian to divorce, but only in the case of “marital unfaithfulness”. In Matthew 5:31-32 he teaches, “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” This text in Matthew 5:32 has often been misunderstood and needs to be translated more carefully.

(T) Third. The meaning of “marital unfaithfulness”.

The original word for “marital unfaithfulness” is “porneia”. The word describes two sins: physical prostitution or adultery and religious prostitution or adultery.

Marital unfaithfulness first describes *physical adultery*. It means every form of sexual immorality. It includes all kinds of sexual immorality, particularly fornication, the act of sexual intercourse *before* marriage. It also includes all illicit clandestine relationships with the opposite sex, particularly adultery, the act of sexual intercourse *after* marriage with anyone who is not his marriage-partner. In short, the Bible forbids sexual intercourse with anyone except one’s marriage-partner (spouse)! Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterer”.

(S) Marital unfaithfulness secondly describes *religious adultery*. It means apostasy from God and idolatry. It includes involvement in worshipping a god that is not the God of the Bible. It includes occultism, which always includes extreme false teachings and many forms of extreme violence.

(T) Conclusion. Based on this meaning of the word “marital unfaithfulness”, Jesus Christ allows a Christian to divorce, when the marriage-partner is *guilty of the sexual act before marriage*. He allows a Christian to divorce, when the marriage-partner is *guilty of the sexual act after marriage* with anyone who is not the marriage-partner. Matthew only speaks of a husband who is permitted to divorce his guilty wife, because he primarily writes to Jews, among whom the rejection of a wife by her husband was well-known. However, Mark (10:11-12), who writes to the Gentiles, speaks also of a wife who is permitted to divorce her guilty husband. Therefore, whatever Matthew teaches about men is equally valid for women.

(S) Fourth. The meaning of the words “he causes her to become an adulteress”.

The original word translated in Matthew 5:32 as “causes her to become an adulteress”, is written in the passive form. It should be translated “he causes her to suffer adultery” or “he exposes her to adultery”. If for example the wife did not commit marital unfaithfulness, then *she is innocent* and when the husband divorces her, he is the guilty partner. The innocent marriage-partner gets exposed to a very difficult situation and suffers. The innocent marriage-partner in a divorce is not guilty of committing adultery, but suffers the wrong done against her. The innocent person does not become an adulterer, but suffers because of the sin of adultery of the guilty person. Of course, because she has been rejected and feels lonely, she is much more exposed to a situation to also commit adultery. Whoever divorces his innocent wife must bear the chief responsibility if she in her deserted state should immediately yield to the temptation of becoming married to someone else. However, Jesus emphasises the fact that she suffers under the sin of adultery, to which she has become exposed to by her guilty husband.

(T) Fifth. The meaning of the words “anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery”.

When Jesus says, “Anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery”, he does not mean that she may *never* marry again. If that was the meaning, then Jesus would punish the innocent person for the sin of the guilty person. When a guilty husband divorces his innocent wife, other men and women should give them enough time and opportunity to correct their error and get reconciled to one another. Another man may not rush in to marry the innocent, but deserted woman, because if he does, he gets involved in that adultery case. Matthew 5:32 means that another man may *not immediately* rush in to marry her and she may *not immediately* yield to the temptation to marry another person. The reason is that the guilty person, who divorced her, must be given time and an opportunity to correct his sin of adultery and go back to his wife.

Thus, Jesus is counteracting the looseness of morals prevalent in his day. He discourages divorce, refutes the rabbinical misinterpretation of the Old Testament law, reaffirms the true meaning of the law (Mt 5:17-18), censures the guilty party, defends the innocent party and throughout it all upholds the sacredness and inviolability of the marriage bond as ordained by God. As far as the record goes, “marital unfaithfulness” is the only valid reason Jesus gave to innocent Christian men or women to divorce their spouse. This includes physical adultery, spiritual adultery and violence.

(S) Sixth. A Christian may divorce for spiritual incompatibility.

One. A mixed marriage in which the husband and wife agree to live together, should not be separated. It must be emphasised that the Bible does not permit a Christian to marry with an unbeliever. However, some people got married when they were still non-Christians, and afterwards one of them became a Christian. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-14, the

apostle Paul speaks about marriage and divorce in such a case. If *the unbeliever is willing* to live in marriage with the believer, then the believer may not divorce the unbeliever.

(T) Two. A mixed marriage in which the husband and wife cannot agree to live together, may be separated. If, however, *the unbeliever is unwilling* to live in marriage with the believer, then the believer should allow the unbeliever to divorce him. 1 Corinthians 7:15-16 teaches, “If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” Literally it says, “If the unbeliever separates or divorces himself, let him be separated or divorced. The believing brother or sister is not bound as a slave in such matters.” The unbeliever is fully responsible for the divorce, and not the believer. The believer is under no obligation to prevent the unbeliever’s departure or the divorce.

The reason why the believer should allow the unbeliever to divorce, is that God has called believers to live in peace. The meaning of *peace* is here not *the absence of domestic troubles and fights*. This peace is the result of salvation (1:2) and consists of *an inner well-being* and *a restored relationship with God and people*. If this salvation-peace, inner well-being and restored relationships of the believer is disturbed or threatened by the continuation of the marriage with the unbeliever, then divorce should be permitted. On the one hand, the believer should permit the divorce. On the other hand, the believer should not prevent the divorce. In the case of an unbeliever, who does not want to divorce, but continues to maltreat the believer or their children, the governmental authorities or the church authorities may decide to annul the marriage and then the believer should not prevent the divorce.

(S) POINT 2. TRANSFORMATION AFTER ADULTERY OR DIVORCE

Although adultery and divorce is a great sin, the gospel is powerful to transform the lives of people who committed adultery or who are guilty of divorce. Whoever genuinely repents of his sin and converts his life receives forgiveness and transformation. God will have mercy on the repentant sinner. He will forgive and radically transform broken lives by conversion and sanctification.

One. The example of Jesus Christ was to save people who lived in adultery. In John 4:16-19, Jesus does not condemn the Samaritan woman, who lived in adultery. Instead he revealed himself as the Saviour and her life was completely changed. In John 8:1-11, Jesus does not condemn a woman who was caught in adultery. Instead, he warned her to leave her life of sin!

(T) Two. The gospel of Jesus Christ has power to transform adulterers. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 we read about how corrupt and degenerate the people of Corinth were. And in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, we read God’s judgement of all kinds of sexual immorality. It says, “Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ... will inherit the kingdom of God.” But the apostle Paul also says that people who have lived like that can be saved and completely changed. He writes, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Therefore, although the elders of the church should discipline adultery and divorce among the Christians, they should make it their aim that the lives of such sinners will be changed! All people have sinned. All people need the mercy and grace of God to be saved and changed. Also people who have committed adultery or wilful divorce can receive mercy to be forgiven and grace to be transformed from God.

(S) POINT 3. RE-MARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE

Re-marriage after divorce is a controversial issue among Christians. Sincere Christian leaders differ in their interpretation of key Bible passages. However, all Christians must consider the evidence in the Bible and the elders of a church should give the final verdict. The Bible teaches the following two important principles about re-marriage after divorce:

One. The guilty partner of a divorce must reconcile himself to the original marriage-partner or remain unmarried. In Mark 10:11-12, Jesus says, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” Jesus is here speaking about *the guilty partner* of a divorce re-marrying. When the guilty partner of a divorce remarries, he commits adultery. Adultery is a serious sin in the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, the apostle Paul teaches the authoritative command of Jesus concerning divorce and re-marriage. He is speaking of two people who are both Christians. The apostle here appeals to words which Jesus Christ taught in the Gospels, in order to prevent the Corinthian Christians to conclude that remaining together in marriage is “good”, but not necessary a commandment of God, just like getting married or remaining single is “good”, but not necessary something a person is commanded to do (1,8). The apostle *may recommend* getting married or remaining single in certain circumstances, but Jesus Christ *commands* married Christians to stay together! While Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew addresses the Jewish situation, where most often men divorced their wives, Paul in his letter to the

Corinthians addresses the Corinthian situation, where women were emancipated and often divorced their husbands. However, in both cases their opposites are equally true.

After *an unlawful divorce*, the first marriage is not considered annulled by God. And the guilty marriage-partner should undertake steps to get reconciled to the innocent marriage-partner. If the divorce is beyond repair, because the innocent partner got re-married, the guilty partner is commanded to remain unmarried.

(T) Two. The innocent partner of a divorce is not bound to remain unmarried. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, the apostle Paul teaches, "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." Here the word "bound" literally means to remain continually bound by law and duty to the marriage-partner. Death of the marriage-partner annuls the bondage and she is free to re-marry. Verse 39 helps to explain verse 15. In 1 Corinthians 7:15, the apostle Paul teaches, "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." The word "not bound" literally means not to remain continually bound as a slave in marriage to the unbeliever. It means not to remain continually bound as a slave while waiting for the unbeliever to become a believer or to reconcile himself to the believer. It means not to remain continually bound as a slave to remaining unmarried for the rest of her life. Divorce by the unbeliever annuls the marriage-bond in God's eyes and *the believer is free to re-marry*. The marriage relationship in such cases is no longer regarded as binding by God. The believer is set completely free from the former bondage. This also means that the believer is completely free to re-marry. The believer may not have received the gift of continence and may burn with passion, so that, unless she marries again, she may be tempted by Satan due to a lack of self-control. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, in such circumstances, it is better for the believer to marry again.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.**

First. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about divorce and re-marriage.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".