

**January 2005
Questions and Answers**

Franklin Church of Christ Edwin Crozier January 16, 2005 PM Worship
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Introduction:

This month's question is a paradox in many ways. On the one hand it addresses a very simple issue. At the same time, it is extremely complex. It is at the same time easy to answer and very difficult. Someone asks, "As we reach out to take the gospel to our friends and neighbors we will inevitably come across those who are divorced and/or remarried. What do we have to offer them?"

The reason I say this question is a paradox is because the more I study the Bible, the clearer its message it becomes to me. However, the more I deal with people the more complex their situations become and the more difficult the scripture becomes to apply to practical situations. It is easy to answer in the sense of saying what the Bible says. It is difficult because at every turn people ask dozens of questions to muddy the water. I do not believe I have all wisdom or knowledge. However, I would like to share with you what I believe is the Bible answer to this question. As with all of our question and answer sessions, if you believe I have missed anything I am more than happy to sit down and study this more fully with you. As we consider this question, we will do three things. First we must learn why this question matters; second, what we have to offer; third, what we should advise those who are divorced and/or remarried.

Discussion:

- I. Why does this question matter?
 - A. **Malachi 2:16** cuts right to the heart of why this question matters. God hates divorce. In **Mark 10:2-9**, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to divorce. Jesus said that God created male and female. God expected the man to leave his father and mother and join his wife. Jesus then explained that God joined them together and man is not allowed to separate them. Please carefully note the question that was asked and the answer. The question was can we divorce. Jesus' answer was, "No." This question matters because divorce is a sin.
 - B. This question matters because according to **Mark 10:10-12**, those who divorce and marry again are guilty of adultery. According to **Hebrews 13:4**, adulterers will be judged.
 - C. Both **Matthew 5:32** and **Matthew 19:9** provide one exception to this general rule. Divorcing one's spouse because the spouse committed sexual immorality is not a sin. Further, if one divorces a spouse for sexual immorality, the one who did not commit immorality will not become guilty of adultery by marrying again.
 - D. Please note that Jesus' teaching on marriage is not based on the Christian covenant or on New Testament doctrine. Rather, Jesus' teaching is based on God's initial institution of marriage. Despite the claims of some today that the law I have just described is only for Christians, we must recognize it as God's universal moral law for marriage. This was God's law from the beginning and it continues to be God's law today. Under the Old Covenant, God made exception to this universal law, yet no one today is subject to that Old Covenant exception. Rather, all are under God's universal moral law that divorce is wrong.
 - E. This question matters then because when we meet someone who is divorced and/or remarried, we may very well have met someone whose sin has separated and is keeping them separated from God no matter what else they might be doing religiously.
- II. What do we have to offer those who are divorced and/or remarried?
 - A. We have the same thing to offer those who have committed the sin of divorce and the sin of adultery as we have to offer those who have committed any other sin. We have God's sanctifying word. As Jesus prayed of the apostles in **John 17:17**, sanctification comes through God's word which is truth. Many today are just like the Sadducees of **Matthew 22:29**. They err because they do not know the scripture. Even among God's people some are in this same boat, being destroyed for their lack of knowledge as **Hosea 4:6** demonstrates. There are many who have committed the sins of divorce and adultery because they are simply unaware of the truth. We have the sanctifying truth of God that can set them free (**John 8:31-32**).

B. Further, we have Jesus to offer them. According to **Isaiah 59:2**, our sins separate us from God. Divorce and/or remarriage separate us from God, destroying our relationship with Him. But Jesus died that we might be forgiven and be reconciled to God (**I Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:21-22**). Regrettably, we are all too often afraid to say anything to people about the gospel because they are divorced and/or remarried. However, we must be more concerned about their eternal souls than their marital happiness. Keep in mind that marriages do not last into eternity (**Matthew 22:30**) but a relationship with Jesus will. We have that eternal relationship to offer.

III. What must we teach the divorced and/or remarried who would be saved?

A. We must teach them the same thing we teach everyone else. If they desire to have their sins washed away, they have to hear the gospel (**Romans 10:17**). They must believe that Jesus is the Christ and confess their faith (**Romans 10:9-10**). Further, they must repent of their sins and be baptized for the remission of their sins (**Acts 2:38**). The key in all of this is repentance. Repentance of sin means rethinking and turning away from the sin. If we know the person has divorced and/or remarried, what must we teach them in order to help them repent?

B. What should we say to the divorced?

1. To the one who has divorced a spouse because the spouse committed sexual immorality there is no need to say anything. This was no sin and does not affect their relationship with God (**Matthew 5:32; 19:9**). Marrying again will not affect their relationship with God either, assuming they marry one who is scripturally allowed to marry.
2. To the one who committed sexual immorality and was put away for it, we must encourage them to remain unmarried, unless they are able to reconcile with their initial spouse (**Matthew 5:32**). Marrying anyone else would be adultery. This reconciliation assumes the original spouse has not lawfully married someone else.
3. To those who are divorced for some reason other than fornication we must turn to **I Corinthians 7:11**. Those who are unlawfully divorced are told that they must either stay unmarried or be reconciled to their original spouse. Allow me to expand on this verse a little. Paul simply stated the two available options without prioritizing them. I know there is some controversy surrounding the following point, however I ask you to please consider it. If it is a sin to end the marriage relationship, then it seems to me that repentance means more than simply admitting the divorce was wrong. When the person married, he or she made a vow before God that bound them to their partner until death (**Romans 7:1**). **Ecclesiastes 5:4-6** expressed the importance of vows. If a person breaks a vow, repentance does not mean simply saying the act of breaking the vow was wrong. It means reestablishing that vow in order to keep a commitment to God. Remember that the one who is able to dwell in God's holy hill is the one who swears or takes a vow to his own hurt but keeps the vow anyway (**Psalms 15:4**). As one further illustration, what would repentance demand if we were speaking of theft? Would it demand simply admitting the theft was wrong or would it demand restoring what was stolen to its rightful owner if possible? In the same way, repentance from divorce would demand reestablishing the vows if possible. However, their lawful partner may not be willing to reestablish the relationship. In that case, the Christian must remain unmarried. As **I Corinthians 7:15** indicates if the other partner refuses to be married, then the Christian is not obligated to try to maintain the marriage. However, they are not free to remarry as **I Corinthians 7:11** demonstrated.

C. What should we say to the remarried?

1. Again, to the one who remarried after divorcing a spouse because the spouse committed sexual immorality we do not need to say anything. They have not committed a sin and their marriage is no threat to their relationship with God (**Matthew 5:32; 19:9**).
2. To the one who was put away because they committed sexual immorality and has married again and to those who have been divorced for some reason other than sexual immorality we must show them **Matthew 5:32; 19:9** and let them know of their present adultery. They are in an unlawful marriage. They must cease the adultery. The only way to do so is to get out of the marriage which is defined as adultery. Further, while the Old Testament laws were different regarding marriage, we do see what God expected of His covenant people if they

entered an unlawful marriage in **Ezra 10:11**. They had to end these unlawful marriages. Please also note that according to **Ezra 10:44**, some of these had children in these unlawful marriages. Yet they ended the marriages anyway.

- D. Through these means we can bring sinners in relationship with Christ. We must remember that this is not about upholding some doctrinal position. This is about helping people go to heaven. Further, we must remember that a person may be in a happy unlawful marriage, but that marriage will only last until they die, then they will have to face their Creator and judge. We must be concerned about people's souls above our concern for their temporal happiness and above our concern over whether or not they like us.

Conclusion:

The thrust of our question was really about personal evangelism. In this question as with all aspects of evangelism, we remember that very few will repent and walk the difficult and narrow way (**Matthew 7:13-14**). Just as many do not want to give up homosexuality, drinking, hatred, outbursts of anger, covetousness and materialism, many will not want to give up unlawful marriages. However, our duty is simply to teach people the truth as God gives us opportunity (**I Corinthians 3:5-6**). I can tell you from experience that there are some who will be willing to give up all of these things in order to serve the Lord and have their sins forgiven. There are even some who are willing to give up unlawful marriages to do so. When they do, do not feel sorry for them. Because of their repentance salvation has come to them and eternal life is in their hands.