

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE - NEW WORDS FOR NEW HEARTS

By Allon Maxwell

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46)

HARD HEART OR NEW HEART?

The teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage was not really new. It was, he said, what God had always intended "*from the beginning*". (Matthew 19:4)

The vital difference between what Jesus said and what the Pharisees did, resulted from their hardness of heart. ***This was their real problem !***

If their hearts were right towards God (as his was); and if they were listening to ALL that God said "*from the beginning*" then they would not take licence from Moses for what God hated.

Almost all of the modern books available on this subject are written by "experts", whose words bear the mark of the same hardness of heart that Jesus discerned in the Pharisees. We are presented with a bewildering array of "evidence" designed to bend the meaning of the words of Jesus into something more easily accepted by carnal men and women. We are told in effect, that remarriage after divorce is not adultery, and that Jesus did not really mean to say that it was!

There is a desperate need for all of us to listen again to what God has said "*from the beginning*", a desperate need to listen as a redeemed people, with new hearts open to the words of God.

WORDS FOR NEW HEARTS.

For new hearts the words of Jesus must prevail. They are not hard to find for those with hearts open to the Spirit of Truth, which is God's gift to those who love Jesus and obey Jesus. (John 14:15-17)

We need nothing more than our Bible, and a God who is willing to honour His promise to reveal Himself to us. God does guarantee to give wisdom generously to those who ask in faith, without doubting. (James 1:5-6).

I cannot emphasise enough, how very important it is that you deal with God for yourself. You must open your own heart to the words of Jesus, say your own prayers, and read the Bible yourself.

However, I can share with you that when I prayed and opened my heart to the words of Jesus, this is what I found:

1. *"A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder". (Mark 10:7-9 & Matthew 19:5-6).*
2. *"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery". (Luke 16:18 & Mark 10:11)*
3. *"If (a wife) divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery". (Mark 10:12).*

4. *"He who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery". (Luke 16:18 & Matthew 5:32).*
5. Moses wrote a commandment from which the HARD OF HEART took licence for divorce, *"but from the beginning it was not so". (Matthew 19:8).*
6. *"A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives". (1 Corinthians 7:39)* And of course, if the wife is bound, then so is the husband!
7. *"If her husband dies, she is free to be married". (1 Corinthians 7:39).* This must also mean that a husband also is not free to marry again, until his wife's death dissolves the marriage.
8. A wife should not separate from her husband, but *"if she does let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband". (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).*
In the same way, *"a husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:11).* Even if he does (what he should not do), it cannot alter the fact that he also is bound for life. He too must remain single or else be reconciled.
9. *"If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her but if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound". (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).* The same applies to wives.
If separation occurs outside the control of believers, they are not bound, unreasonably, to try to compel an unwilling and unbelieving partner to continue to live with them. However, they are also told in **1 Corinthians 7:39**, that their marriage covenant binds them as long as their partner lives, and in **1 Corinthians 7:11**, to remain single or else be reconciled, (Perhaps they may save their partner, **1 Corinthians 7:16**).
10. *"Except for fornication" (Matthew 5:32 & Matthew 19:9).*

In Matthew's Gospel the teaching of Jesus does contain ONE exception.

This exception was not known to those who had access only to Mark's or Luke's gospels! (Note also that Luke records the Gospel as he must have heard it preached by Paul many times!)

In Mark and Luke, Jesus ABSOLUTELY prohibits divorce, with NO EXCEPTION AT ALL.

Mark and Matthew both say that once God has joined a marriage, men may not separate it.

This means that the exception cannot not refer to any ground that might arise AFTER God has bound the two into one.

Since ADULTERY is a sin which takes place AFTER God has joined a marriage, it cannot be included in the exception.

If that is so, then the sexual sin encompassed by the exception, must refer to something which arises BEFORE a "marriage" is joined by God.

We are not left without a "case history" which will help us to understand the exception.

It is significant that the only Gospel to record the exception is also the only one to include the story of Joseph and Mary. This is the only New Testament EXAMPLE of what Jesus might have meant by "fornication" or "unchastity" as a ground for divorce.

It is this case which defines for us the ground on which a "just man", (**Matthew 1:19**), as opposed to a hard hearted one, might divorce his wife (or betrothed wife) without guilt before God.

11. God says bluntly, **"I HATE DIVORCE"**. (**Malachi 2:16**).

Who amongst us, except the hard hearted, would choose to do or condone what God hates?

CONCLUSION

With the divorce rate in Australia approaching 40%, sooner or later all of us will be confronted by circumstances in which we will have to decide whether we stand in the lonely place with Jesus, or whether we travel the broad road of conformity with the vast majority who now condone what Jesus forbids.

One major reason for the growth of the divorce rate in Australia, from almost nil since the beginning of the century, to that almost unbelievable 40% now, is that most of the Church has relaxed its standards to conform with the hard hearted world.

It seems that this is just one more area in which the Church has become ashamed of the words of Jesus, no longer confessing him before men.

This is not simply a "learned discussion". Nor is it merely a simple disagreement between Christians with a different OPINION and a different CONSCIENCE about the subject.

It is a question of whether or not we are guilty of what Jesus calls "hardness of heart".

On the day of judgement, ADULTERY will not be excused as a simple "difference of opinion", left to the decision of individuals who approve it in "good conscience".

The consequences of that are almost too fearful to contemplate.
