

DIVORCE AND A JUST MAN

By Allon Maxwell

“When Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” (Matthew 1:18-19)

Under the law of Moses a new wife found guilty of fornication, (premarital sex with another man), was condemned to death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

On the face of it, Joseph's refusal to inflict this penalty on Mary was a breach of the Law. He was refusing to *“purge the evil from the midst of the people”*. (Deuteronomy 22:21)

However Matthew tells us that Joseph's unwillingness to put Mary to the public shame of a trial (and its awful penalty), was the action of a just man.

How could this be? How is it possible that a man who refuses to implement the demands of the Law, can be called “just”?

The answer lies, of course, with Jesus. When faced with temptation, men must not live by the Devil's **subtle** and **selective** and **inadequate** use of Scripture. (Matthew 4:4)

Instead, men must live by **every word** from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

Joseph was not breaking the Law of Moses, any more than Jesus was when He refused to condemn that woman taken in adultery but gave her another chance. *“Go and do not sin again”*. (John 8:11)

The truth is that Joseph had found **another word from the mouth of God** about the sin of fornication, which was far more merciful than stoning, and much more to the taste of a just man.

The penalty did not have to be inflicted! God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God would much prefer that the wicked should turn from their ways and live. (Ezekiel 18:23)

That provision was enshrined in the Law of Moses.

Joseph found it there. So too, later, did Jesus.

He kept the Law perfectly. And He also found the provision for our forgiveness there, when He made Himself the sacrifice for our sins.

That woman taken in adultery, and we also, have been saved from a judgement which would have exposed us to public shame, and condemnation, and death for our sins. (and Mary was saved from an **undeserved** open disgrace).

What **other word from the mouth of God** did Joseph find, to justify his proposal to deal with Mary without public shame, and yet **“justly”**?

The answer lies in Deuteronomy 24:1, where Moses made provision for divorce of a woman in whom a husband finds “some indecency”.

The hard hearted Jews argued much about the meaning of “indecency”, using it at will to divorce for all sorts of reasons which ignored **another word** from the mouth of God.

Jesus quoted **that other word** from [Genesis 2:24](#), to conclude that, *“What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder”*. ([Matthew 19:6](#)). At the same time Jesus also concluded that the “indecentcy” of [Deuteronomy 24:1](#) was limited to “fornication” alone. ([Matthew 19:9](#)). Divorce and remarriage for any other reason, is the same as committing adultery in other more obvious ways.

Of course [Deuteronomy 22:21](#) does call for stoning in the case of “fornication”. But the other **merciful word** from the mouth of God, about the indecentcy of fornication, is that of [Deuteronomy 24:1](#).

That is **the operative word** from God, for just men like Joseph, and Jesus, and us also!

As well as dealing mercifully and justly with the fornicator, that same word from God also rejects **all other grounds** of divorce!

Carnal men (and women) with ulterior motives, still use what Moses said, **subtly**, **selectively**, and **inadequately**, to take away the meaning of the words of Jesus about divorce , **in order to condone what Jesus calls adultery**.

All such are in mortal danger of the consequences of another word from the mouth of God.

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand”. [Matthew 7:26](#).
