

Divorce and Remarriage (part two of a three part study)

Matthew 5:31-32 cannot be interpreted in isolation from the larger context of the New Testament; especially as it pertains to Romans 7:1-3 –

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning her husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.”

Since there is no mention of divorce in these verses, some may question the relevance of this passage to the issue of divorce and remarriage. However, there is a connection due to the example which Paul gives of a married woman and her acquisition of a second husband. In one instance, the marriage is both legal, moral and ethical. In another, it makes her guilty of adultery. Why? The law of God does not allow for a second marriage until the first is nullified through the death of the first husband. Without his death, the wife’s acquisition of another husband makes her a violator of God’s moral law and under its condemnation.

So then this begs the question: “can conversion to Christ have the same nullifying effect upon a divorce that took place in an individual’s unsaved past?” Paul’s answer in the affirmative is given in Romans 7:4 –

“Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

In Romans 7:4, Paul is comparing the conversion experience to the death of the husband mentioned in vv2-3. Why? He does so in order to establish the similar impact of both. The husband’s death nullifies the marriage covenant and frees his wife to remarry without violating that covenant. Conversion to Christ is analogous. How? Our union with Christ involves a participation in His death and resurrection on our behalf (Romans 6:1-4). The result? We are released from the relationship of condemnation to God’s Law, under which we were bound, prior to our salvation in Christ (Romans 7:6). Now, our eternal standing before God, in our union with Christ, is that of “no condemnation” (Romans 8:1; 8:33-34).

If one element of that prior condemnation includes the sin of divorce, is that sin forgiven at conversion, or not? If not, why not? If so, then that previous divorce is no longer binding upon the new convert, freeing them to engage in a new marriage relationship, without the corrupting taint of being adulterous.