

# Divorce and Remarriage?

by Sebastian R Fama

In Luke 16:18, we hear Jesus saying: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." Paul says essentially the same thing in Romans 7:2-3: "Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress."

Those who disagree will often point to Matthew 5:31 where Jesus says: "It was also said, 'whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

And so, the reasoning goes, if my spouse cheats on me, I am free to divorce and remarry. But that is not the case. The Greek word that is translated as "unchastity" is *porneia* (πορνεία) which can mean harlotry, adultery, incest, or fornication. In determining how Jesus uses the word there are a couple of things we need to consider. First, you cannot have Jesus contradicting himself by making no exceptions in one verse (Luke 16:18) and then allowing for them in another (Matthew 5:31).

The Church has always seen the word unchastity as referring to an invalid marriage such as a couple who are living together. They can separate because they were never legitimately married in the first place. And then there is the obvious fact that if Jesus was referring to adultery, he would have used the word adultery, just as he did two other times in the same verse.

Second, let us look at this logically. If the critics are correct in their interpretation of Matthew 5:31, then anyone can divorce their spouse and remarry someone else no matter what the reason. Think about it, all that would be necessary is for one of them to go out and have an affair. Somehow, I do not think that is what God intended.

Marriage is a bond established by God. Jesus revealed this to us in Mark 10:6-9: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. **What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.**" And yes, that would include the milkman.

But what about if one of the spouses is abusive? Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. He said: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce the wife." This may not be the most popular verse of Scripture. But with God's grace (Hebrews 4:16) we can find peace in it.