

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Just Tell Them What Paul Said?

(Jerry Fite)

What would you say to someone who asked to be a member in your congregation, but let you know they had divorced their mate for a reason other than the one Jesus allowed: fornication? One preacher recently said he would just tell the person what Paul said, “...remain unmarried or be reconciled to your husband” (*I Corinthians 7:11*). True, Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about what a woman should do if she has “departed”, separated, or divorced her husband. Guarding against the sin of adultery, which happens when one marries another after divorcing their mate for a cause other than fornication (*Matthew 19:9*), Paul exhorts the divorced woman to remain in an unmarried state. Since she is bound to her husband by God’s law till death (*I Corinthians 7: 39, Romans 7:2*), hopefully she can be reconciled to him once again.

To say one should simply remain unmarried or be reconciled to a divorced mate overlooks or dismisses the character of the act

of divorcing for a reason unauthorized by our Lord. Paul prefaces his remain unmarried statement with the exhortation pointing back to the Lord and his teachings that the woman, “*depart not*” from or divorce her husband, and quickly adds with equal force that the husband “*leave not*” or divorce his wife (*I Corinthians 7:10*). Jesus had clearly stated God’s law when He says, “*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (*Matthew 19:6*). By definition, when we do what God commands by law not to do, we practice lawlessness - we sin (*I Jn. 3:4*).

Paul focuses on the consequence of divorce. Remaining unmarried would be the consequence of divorce when the wife seeking reconciliation is rejected by the husband whom she divorced. But this does not mean the act of the woman divorcing her husband was not a sin.

After walking on a freshly mopped floor with my muddy shoes, I hear a loud and forceful cry, “Stop where you are! Or,

carefully retrace your steps.” Does anyone think I have not “sinned” just because my wife gives me my options as a consequence of my action? Neither does Paul ignore the act of divorce as a sin by speaking to its consequence.

Jesus said, “*Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress...*” (*Matthew 5:32*). While the put away woman makes herself an adulteress by marrying another, the man who divorces her for the cause other than fornication also bears blame before the Lord. He “maketh her an adulteress” through divorce by putting her in the position that her next sexual relationship with another would be adultery. How does one read this passage and conclude that divorce for the cause other than fornication is not sin?

We should tell people what Jesus says regarding the act of divorce not for the cause of fornication, and not merely tell them what Paul says regarding the consequence of divorce.