

Is Divorce allowed for Adultery by Jesus Christ?

The Bible is against divorce for remarriage under all circumstances for it holds that once a valid marriage takes place it can only be dissolved by death. If the Bible is really authored by God as the Church says then what it says is true and matters very much.

The gospels speak of man and woman becoming one flesh in marriage. Becoming one flesh is a metaphor for merging. It is man and woman becoming inseparable in marriage. The metaphor is that as you can no longer separate two eggs that you have scrambled you cannot separate man and wife. Realistically man and woman cannot merge that much so it is the law merges them. It is about law. For Catholics it is about divine law. Only a God doing miracles could merge two people who are not that merged! The judgementalism of Catholicism is apparent when it says that people fail not marriage for marriage is a sacrament, a channel of help from God that helps you transcend the flaws of your human nature.

Twice in Matthew's Gospel, people think they read of Jesus allowing divorce when adultery has happened.

In both instances, Jesus says that whoever divorces his wife except for unfaithfulness makes her commit adultery and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. It is believed that women in those days could not survive long without a husband so to divorce a woman was almost to force her to marry somebody else.

Bernard Hoose thinks the word means fornication but as in marriage between a Jew and a pagan. The idea is that such a marriage is not technically fornication but is spiritually so and the couple can part. So why then is it that only a man can divorce? Jewish women could have married pagans. And so Jesus is accused of being racist! The marriages would have been too rare to have been in Jesus' mind.

Another suggestion is that as marriage in those days was a process that was finalised in a ceremony a marriage was not real if it was found that the woman was pretending to be a virgin. The man would not find out until after the ceremony. That is not permitting divorce then but an annulment. Or is Jesus saying divorce and annulments are the same thing? This is not too likely either for the women were children and the law had to understand that girls have accidents where the hymen can break.

Father Richard P McBrien refers to these texts in his tome Catholicism page 853. He notes that Jesus says that marrying a divorced person except on the ground of porneias or unchastity is adultery and therefore forbidden. McBrien says that one interpretation says the exception is not a real exception at all. It refers not to divorce but to separation without marrying somebody new such as what happens in the case of an adulterous wife who had to be stoned to death for her sin in Jewish law. So what Jesus is saying then according to this interpretation is, "Whoever divorces his wife unless she is an adulteress and therefore will be stoned to death makes her commit adultery." But McBrien says this idea is wrong for the text does not use the word for adultery.

McBrien says the more accepted solution is that it does not mean an exception to the ban on divorce but is referring to incestuous marriage. In such a case the marriage can be annulled and husband and wife can remarry. The reasoning is that porneia means prostitution among the Hebrews and was used to refer to incestuous marriage. An annulment may have been called a divorce. Marriage between relatives who were too close and marriage between a Jew and a Gentile was considered invalid.

Porneia which is translated as unfaithfulness may be translated incorrectly for the word may mean fornication. Porneia is a Greek term. It appears meaning adultery in Ezekiel 16:32, prostitution in Hosea 2:2 and Jeremiah 3:9 and in the New Testament it appears sometimes as sex outside marriage and is distinguished from moicheia which is adultery. This happens in Matthew 15:19; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Galatians 5:19. However, fornication is the least it could mean so that must be what it does mean for we must accept the simplest understanding. Both reason and the Bible forbid us to say that Jesus said except for adultery. When he did not make it clear he meant adultery he did not mean it. Jesus was undoubtedly trying to restrict divorce. In Matthew 5:28, he said that even looking at another woman with desire was adultery evidently showing that he did not really think that adultery was enough to dissolve a marriage. If he did, thinking about adultery being adultery would be enough to dissolve it which would mean that very few marriages could not be dissolved.

Even if porneia sometimes means adultery it was not the usual word which is moicheia. That is significant.

If a married couple fornicate with one another then they cannot be validly married. They are married in name and law only. Jesus is saying that if you have a wife who is not really your wife for some reason it is not a sin to divorce her. He forbids

divorce except to end invalid marriages. They didn't have annulments in those days. Jesus is probably saying that legal divorce is better than looking for an annulment which is probably right.

Jesus allows what amounts to artificial divorce in the eyes of God and real divorce in the eyes of the law to end a fake marriage for even God could not dissolve a true marriage. He said then that a man cannot divorce his wife unless he fornicates with her and that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. The woman that was fornicating with was not married so to marry her would not be adultery. The assertion that whoever marries a divorcee is an adulterer stresses that the exception was not about real marriage.

The Catholic Church forbids divorce as in ending a marriage in the eyes of God. But under grave circumstances it allows civil divorce as long as this is understood to be just a man-made decree that has no real power to dissolve the marriage. The Church allows divorce for example when the Church annuls a marriage and the state doesn't agree with that annulment and the man and woman want the state benefits of being single again so they divorce in the eyes of the state.

Jesus could have had the same attitude with regard to invalid marriages. But since he complained that divorce was making a person commit adultery and therefore bad he would not have allowed it as freely as the Catholic Church does and would have allowed it only when the marriage was not real.

By the way, the hypocrisy of allowing civil divorce when it will lead to the temptation of remarriage which the Church says would be so serious a sin that it would not be worth the benefits of the divorce proves its hypocrisy. It is still making the state think and act as if the marriage is over when it still exists. It is making the state try to dissolve a real marriage and marriage is a legal affair as well as a religious one. The Church says the state has no rights except what God gives it so how could the state have the right to say a marriage that God created is no more? How could it be right to divorce even under the conditions allowed by the Church and as long as one doesn't think the marriage is truly dissolved? Is it okay for the state to legislate that somebody is not a thief when it knows they are?

It is hypocrisy to say that divorce is a great evil not just because it is the false declaration that a marriage bound by God is no more but for what it does to the children and then allow divorce within the confines of Church teaching. Availing of it is like supporting something bad.

When Jesus allowed divorce on the grounds of fornication he said that whoever divorces his wife except for unfaithfulness or pornea makes her commit adultery. If a man divorces his real wife that is what he is doing making her commit adultery. But what if the marriage is not real because the man is already married and not divorced or married and divorced to another woman? Then for him to divorce his new wife would not be making her commit adultery for their fake marriage is adultery against the woman he is still married to in the eyes of God. Perhaps this is what he meant by the exception.

The exception is still more unlikely to mean that divorce is allowable over adultery when Jesus said that life-long valid marriage was the ideal and that we should forgive. Divorce and separation could not possibly be approved by a man who said that if our brother hurts us several times a day we should still forgive him and take his word for it that he is sorry though it does not look like he is. So if your husband beats you up ten times a day you must still stay with him (another interesting indication that the twelve apostles who allegedly set up the Church and who all agreed with this drivel were nutcases who should not be taken seriously). The fact that Christianity cares about your virtue more than your happiness could mean nothing else. They excuse God being so cruel on the grounds that God wants us to suffer so that we might learn virtue. Even belief in God implies divorce and separation are immoral. The Church sometimes says it is not being cruel and unsympathetic. It is for it allows killing in certain circumstances and remarriage after divorce in none so controlling people is more important than looking after them. For the Church to be telling the truth it would need to be the case that the Church would oppose remarriage after divorce even if Jesus had not mentioned it. The Church would be opposing divorce and remarriage just because it is bad. This is wrong for it can't be always bad. The Church opposes them because Jesus says so and that is fanaticism for no authority has the right to make demands without being able to prove that these demands are good for us. Jesus was claiming this authority and proving that he had no right to any obedience for he gave no hint that evidence had anything to do with his demand. He gave no examples of how bad these things are – another mistake that proves that whatever he was the Son of it was not a good God.

To interpret Matthew as saying that only fornication or invalid marriage was a separate case for divorce is the right interpretation.

EXCEPT FOR ADULTERY

Some say except for unfaithfulness or pornea means that when a man marries a woman and it is found that she had been unchaste with other men before the wedding while claiming to be true to him and promising to be true to him forever the man could divorce her for there was no real marriage and she did not mean the vows.

This interpretation is the best for it fits the Bible better. Remember Jesus said to the Pharisees and Scribes that fornication was a separate case. It is a bit vague to us but it would not have been to them. He was speaking to them as one person who knew the law speaking to another who knew it well too. The Law permits a man to get rid of his wife and marry again if he finds she is not a virgin on the wedding night. She married him on the basis that she was a virgin and so the marriage was not real for based on a lie.

Some say that the unfaithfulness meant is not that of the woman before the marriage but after. It's adultery. The man can repudiate the marriage contract if the woman commits adultery.

Jesus would not have dared to make divorce permissible over adultery because that would be encouraging people to commit adultery to escape from unhappy marriages. And battering the wife is worse than committing adultery and a better reason for divorce.

If Jesus regarded divorce for remarriage over adultery as lawful when adultery had taken place then this is no consolation to Christians. He was talking to Jews about Jewish marriages. Nothing in the Bible says that a valid Christian marriage can be dissolved. The Bible says that true Christians have been changed by the power of God into holy people unlike the Jews and other outsiders. That is why the marriage rules for true Christians could and would be different and tougher for they are delivered from the sin nature. Jesus said divorce was allowed by Moses because the people were so pig-headed. Some say the exception clause is like something that is in brackets. This makes Jesus say, "Divorce and remarriage are always wrong (adultery is another case) etc". Adultery is another case could mean that he allows separation for adultery or divorce without remarriage which amounts to the same thing. Matthew 5:32 gives light on this for it says that a man who puts his wife away except for adultery makes her commit adultery and that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Divorce would mean separation as well as divorce for not all divorce was legal in those days. The non-legal version would be separation and the legally permitted one would be divorce. The man can make his wife commit adultery by separating from her and whoever marries a separated woman commits adultery (Question 880, Radio Replies 3). Bible scholars agree that Matthew 5:32 implies that a marriage after divorce or separation is forbidden (page 397, Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties).

Radio Replies 3 says of Matthew 5:32,

Question 880, "According to Matthew V., 32, Christ said, "Whomsoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and marry another, maketh her commit adultery".

Christ allowed permanent separation without remarriage, if adultery has been committed by one of the parties. What He meant was this: Whosoever shall put away his wife (I am not now speaking of mere separation without remarriage, for that is lawful in the case of infidelity,) but whosoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery himself and by this adulterous union forces his wife into adultery if she marries another. That is the only possible interpretation in the light of the context and parallel passages. If the man who marries the woman so put away commits adultery, she must still be the wife of the one who dismissed her; and if she is still his wife, he must still be her husband, and forbidden to take a new wife."

The reasoning is perfectly right in so far that it is known that the verse does not allow divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery considering that all of the other teachings on marriage in the New Testament absolutely forbid divorce for remarriage and enjoin celibacy on all whose marriages have broken down. Incidentally, if a man is not making his wife commit adultery by dismissing her the dismissal must be a separation or just a living apart not a divorce. If a man puts away his wife because she committed adultery he would still be making her commit adultery by telling her to go away. If a man puts away his wife realising that the marriage was somehow invalid in the first place he would not be making her commit adultery for if she remarries the marriage will be real. Those who feel that we should take the word wife literally will have to go with the interpretation that Jesus is simply only allowing a man and wife to live apart without remarriage if adultery has taken place.

Page 54 of The Catholic Church has the Answer says that in Matthew 19:9 Jesus doesn't allow divorce in the case of adultery but he allows separation. It says that the fact that Mark 10:11,12 and Luke 16:18 have Jesus forbidding remarriage for those who are separated proves this. It is true that Jesus never ever said that remarriage was lawful. If he allowed divorce in the case of adultery or fornication, he still never said that the parties could marry other people.

All divorce would involve adultery for it is intending to commit it or make the partner commit it when the partner wishes. Jesus said that adultery in the heart was as morally bad as real adultery so the apostles knew that all divorce was adultery. Then, when the apostles said that it would be better not to marry at all when they heard Jesus' teaching on divorce it proves that they knew that Jesus did not allow divorce and remarriage unless the first marriage was not real and not because of adultery.

When Mark and Luke forbade divorce absolutely it proves that Matthew was unlikely to allow it for the tradition was that divorce was wrong. Jesus condemned Moses' permitting of divorce and was hardly likely to contradict himself later by permitting it for adultery. He opposed divorce and never said it was wrong only when intended for remarriage but wrong all the time.

Liberals ignore Jesus' divorce ban for they say he was not saying that divorce is wrong all the time but saying that the ideal was life-long marriage. But he was asked a legal question and so he gave a legal answer and to an idealistic one.

It is possible that if Jesus meant divorce could only be possible if adultery had happened that the words except for pornea were an addition. It could be said that we can tell this from the context which does not fit the idea of any exceptions for a valid marriage and from Mark which absolutely bans divorce. And why do the same words pop up in both places where Jesus has a go at divorce.

Matthew 5:31, 32 has Jesus saying that whoever divorces his wife except for pornea makes her commit adultery because her and his marriage cannot be dissolved by divorce and she is contracting a new but fake marriage making her an adulteress. But if he divorces her he is not making her do that unless her second or new wedding has already been prepared for. Jesus could not have meant that he was making her commit adultery when he knows she will contract an illicit marriage. It's not his fault if he does not know. It is her decision. In that case, she would already have been an adulteress so her husband could not make one of her. What Jesus might have meant by except for pornea or unchastity was that whoever divorces his wife makes an adulteress of her unless she already is one.

But except for pornea does not mean adultery here for what Jesus meant was that whoever divorces his wife except for the unchastity of an invalid marriage makes her commit adultery. That is the most straightforward interpretation. The reason he can't make her commit adultery is because there never was a marriage.

Jesus did not allow divorce on the grounds of marital infidelity despite the loose and prejudiced translations you have in Bibles like the New International Version.

THE NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA SAYS

The New Catholic Encyclopedia, DIVORCE (IN THE BIBLE) says that Matthew 19 where it says except for pornea just allows separation without remarriage or that it is on about concubinage or fake marriage so a divorce that is not a real divorce is allowed in cases of adultery.

If it allows separation without remarriage on the grounds of adultery then something interesting happens if you consider Jesus' declaration that divorce for any reason but adultery is making the divorced commit adultery. Then the texts are saying that to divorce someone except for adultery is to make them commit adultery for it is certain once they are out the door they will make plans to get somebody else to have sex with and perhaps wed.

If Jesus only allowed the divorcing in invalid marriages, Jesus would mean that if somebody commits adultery their spouse can have the marriage checked out to see if it was real and if it was unreal they can get a civil divorce and remarry. But otherwise the marriage should be assumed to be real despite all appearances. Therefore to use this procedure for any other reason would be making the spouse commit adultery.

Then the third possibility is stated by the encyclopedia to be that the exception does not refer to the verb for put away but to something else. It may refer to the question Jesus was asked about what the Law of Moses meant when it said a man could separate from his wife because of some indecency in her. So by saying pornea is an exception, Jesus meant that pornea or indecency was an exception not for divorce or remarriage but that he was not going to discuss its meaning. So what he meant was divorce and remarriage are always wrong but indecency was to be left out and to be an exception from the discussion. In support of this theory it can be argued that the word pornea is very ambivalent and unclear.

Conclusion

Matthew's gospel does not really say that if a couple are married and one commits adultery that they can remarry following divorce. Matthew fits the absolute ban on divorce in the rest of the New Testament.

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BIBLE VERSION USED

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