

Willis
&
Donahue
Exchange

2003



*Divorce For A Reason Other
Than Fornication, But No
Remarriage?*

*From the Library of
Robert A. O'Dell*

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Mike Willis (from Mike's sermon outline entitled: "When Is Divorce A Sin"):

- a. A person may have to divorce his mate to break an unscriptural marriage (Matt. 19:9). In this case, one is divorcing for the kingdom of heaven's sake.
- b. A person may have to leave his mate to become or remain a Christian (Luke 18:29-30; 1 Cor. 7: 15; Matt. 10:34-48; Luke 14:26). In this case, one is divorcing for the kingdom of heaven's sake.
- c. A person may be in a marriage relationship in which his mate runs up bills which he has no intention of paying. In this case, one's responsibility to God to pay one's bills would demand that he not be supportive of his mate's ungodly behavior (Rom. 13:8).
- d. A mate may be abusive to the children (beating). A person has a responsibility to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4). To fulfill that responsibility, may require him to leave his mate to provide for the children.
- e. There are some cases in which one must leave to have physical and emotional health. One's obligation to serve God would require him to preserve his physical and emotional well being.
- f. Sometimes a couple becomes so alienated from each other, the hostilities have reached such a point, that they must live apart.

(1) Cf. Prov. 21:9; 25:24; 1 Cor. 7:15-16.

(2) We cannot force them to stay together.

(3) The Scriptures do not teach a person that he must become a doormat to his partner to keep the marriage together. A person who becomes another's doormat will do more to destroy his mate's love and respect for him than about anything else he can do. A person has to maintain his own self-esteem to have proper Bible love. One is to love his neighbor "as himself" and the husband is to love his wife "as his own body" (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:33).

g. Obviously, there is going to have to be left some room for judgment in these matters. (Those who allow a "separation" but not a "divorce" agree that there are some areas of human judgment that we must leave for each other.)

C. Sometimes we place the blame for divorce on the wrong shoulders -- we blame the mate who has reached the end of his rope in tolerating an intolerable situation and in his desperation has filed for a divorce, rather than blaming the one guilty of the ungodliness who created the intolerable circumstances.

D. If one must separate from his mate in order to serve his God, that is exactly what he should do!

Mike Willis' Additional Causes For "Scriptural" Divorce

This article is intended to refute the conclusions of a sermon outline by Mike Willis (a friend of mine and a brother in Christ). In this outline, Mike presents five reasons other than fornication why a person could rightfully divorce their scriptural spouse, as long as they do not remarry. Said outline can be viewed at religioustraining.com/jul03/divorce.html for reference purposes.

Paralleling Matthew 5:32 to Matthew 19:9

Many of Mike's arguments for his position can be answered simply by proving that divorce for any reason other than fornication is sinful. When Mike and his colleagues are dealing with the false Homer Hailey position that I Corinthians 7:15 allows remarriage on the part of the believer if the unbeliever deserts him, they correctly point out that the force of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9a would mean that fornication is the only scriptural cause for divorce and remarriage. Matthew 19:9a proves that I Corinthians 7:15 is not giving another scriptural cause (desertion) that allows remarriage. As effective as this argument is and as frequently as it is used to refute Hailey's false position on I Corinthians 7:15, I feel confident that Mike has used it personally in his preaching and/or writing.

Now let me parallel the Matthew 19:9a argument to Matthew 5:32a. Matthew 5:32a uses the same terminology as Matthew 19:9a, but doesn't mention the remarriage of the one doing the putting away. It reads "whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." The force of the exception here is the same as in Matthew 19:9a. So whoever puts away his wife for any reason other than fornication sins by causing his spouse to commit adultery, that is, he sins by putting her into a position of undeserved sexual temptation (I Corinthians 7:5), and putting a stumbling block before another is a sin (Romans 14:13). Unless we are wrong in our use of Matthew 19:9 against Hailey's view, this conclusion from Matthew 5:32 is inescapable, therefore Mike's position is wrong. Mike's position is wrong for exactly the same reason that he himself understands Hailey's position to be wrong.

Sinning In Order To "Remain A Christian"?

Mike's first listed cause for divorce is "A person may have to leave his mate to become or remain a Christian." Mike gives Luke 18:29-30 as a proof text for this reason, but Mike should have used this verse to prove his previous statement, "A person may have to divorce his mate to break an unscriptural marriage (Matt. 19:9)," because in light of Matthew 5:32, etc, that's exactly what Luke 18:29-30 would have to be talking about. It is absurd on the face of it to think that a person might need to leave his scriptural mate (sin) in order to become or remain a Christian. It makes about as much sense as saying that "a person may have to tell a lie in order to become or remain a Christian." Sinning never helps one become or remain a Christian; instead, it takes away from one's service to Christ.

Divorcing To Avoid Financial Problems?

The next cause for divorce that Mike claims is scriptural is “A person may be in a marriage relationship in which his mate runs up bills which he has no intention of paying. In this case, one's responsibility to God to pay one's bills would demand that he not be supportive of his mate's ungodly behavior (Rom.13:8).” With all due respect, Mike needs to re-read what Paul taught in Romans 3:8, that we should not “do evil, that good may come.” A woman can no more get divorced to solve financial problems than she can prostitute herself sexually in order to solve financial problems. The very verse Mike references commands us to “love one another,” and a man does not love his wife properly if he leaves her in violation of the I Peter 3:7 command to husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge.

Divorcing To Preserve Mental Health?

Mike gives another of his “scriptural” causes for divorce with the purely emotional argument “There are some cases in which one must leave to have physical and emotional health. One's obligation to serve God would require him to preserve his physical and emotional well being.” I'm glad the great preachers of old (including the apostles in Acts 5:40-42) didn't use this excuse for not preaching God's word in face of persecution, else many of us might not have heard the truth and be Christians today. The committed Christian should know that maintaining our “physical and emotional health” is not a valid reason to disobey God's word. Suppose a man jogs five miles every morning to maintain his physical health. Would that justify him forsaking the church's assembly on Sunday mornings to jog? Of course not. Well, I Corinthians 7:10 is just as much a command as Hebrews 10:25. A woman is commanded not to depart from her husband. Many think verse 11 gives permission for the woman to violate the verse 10 command not to depart, but it no more does that than Deuteronomy 22:29 gave permission for a couple to commit the fornication mentioned in verse 28, and no more than I John 2:1b allows us to sin contrary to I John 2:1a.

Divorcing For Incompatibility?

Mike explains his last “scriptural” cause for divorce this way, “Sometimes a couple becomes so alienated from each other, the hostilities have reached such a point, that they must live apart.” For so long we've made fun of our society for saying that people could divorce for just “incompatibility,” I can't believe a gospel preacher is teaching the same thing, but that is exactly what Mike is teaching. Mike's view is a flagrant violation of the Matthew 19:6 admonition “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Divorce Is Wrong Even If You Never Remarry

Malachi 2:16 taught that “God ... hateth putting away” itself, not just that He hates remarriage. The New Testament teaches the same on this point. Any divorce “saving for the cause of fornication” is sinful (Matthew 5:32, 19:6, I Corinthians 7:10, 3-5, I Peter 3:7).

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