

M.V. Moore – Willie Ramsey Religious Exchange

Does “*For Fornication*” (Mt. 19:9) Apply Today?

Moore denies; Willie Ramsey affirms

(*Author’s Preface:* M.V. Moore from Gallipolis, Ohio responded to the April 1984 issue of *The Somerset Sower*, the bulletin of the church I labor with. He denied “for fornication” applies under the New Testament. Actually it does, and it is the only reason God allows one to divorce their spouse of an approved marriage under the New Testament (Matt. 19:9). This is his response (word for word, with his emphasis) and my reply reprinted from the June and July 1984 issues of *The Somerset Sower*. I have updated my part for this tract.)

M.V. Moore’s Response

“In Matthew 5:32 Jesus is answering the Jews’ question, they asked him. This was under the law. Matthew 19:9 was also under the law. The Jews were allowed under the law (for fornication) to put away their wives and marry another, because of hardness of their hearts.

“Read Mark 10:2-9. God from the beginning never intended for a man to have more than one wife or for a woman to have more than one husband. Mark 10:10,11,12. This is what Christ told the disciples. No exception mentioned.

“Christ, in John 14:26 told them the Comforter, which the father would send in my name shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. After the Church was established and Christ’s law was in effect, no place are Christians told they could have 2 living husbands or wives. Divorce and remarry for any cause. Rom. 7:1-3, 1 Cor. 7:10,11, 1 Cor. 7:39.

“We have to rightly divide the scripture or we have contradictions. Rom. 7:1-3 is using one Truth to prove another. The first Truth is a man is subject to God’s law as long as he lives. The 2nd Truth is, a woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if he be dead she is free from that law. So that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”

Willie Ramsey’s Reply

I appreciate your desire to keep marriage pure and to rightly divide the Scriptures. I have the same desire. The issue between us therefore is, “What do the Scriptures teach regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage?”

Your position is that God never authorizes divorce followed by remarriage for *any reason under the New Testament*. You take this position because *you believe Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 apply to Jews under the Old Law*, and not to people living under the New Testament.

My position is, *under the New Testament*, when a couple is in a marriage approved by God and one of them commits fornication, the innocent spouse may, for that reason only, then put away (divorce) the guilty spouse and marry another with God’s approval. The proof I offer is *Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9*, in that I believe these verses apply to all people living under the New Testament.

Argumentation And Proof

1. Jesus was born under the Law of Moses. He kept the Law perfectly all His life (1 Peter 2:22). He told those living under the Law to keep it (Matt. 23:1-3).

2. Beginning with John, the people were told to *prepare for the kingdom of Heaven* (Matt. 3:2), the *church*. Jesus taught the same thing (Matt. 4:17).

3. They both also taught that the kingdom or church was “*at hand*” (Matt. 3:2; Matt. 4:17).

4. *Much* of what Jesus taught during His public preaching period was concerning or applicable to His kingdom or church (consider many of Jesus’ parables), and preparatory to its imminent coming. Even though He lived and died under the Old Law, He still taught many things regarding how *all people*

must live when the kingdom came and the New Testament was in force.

5. He taught them these things by *His authority* (Matt. 28:18), being the *New Testament Lawgiver* (Gal. 6:2).

For example, in Mark 16:16 He taught *requirements for salvation under the New Testament*. He spoke these to *eleven Jews* (Mark 16:14).

In John 3:1-5 He taught that people would have to “*be born of water (baptized) and of the Spirit*”, in order to “*enter into the kingdom of God*”. All of this was said to a *Jew* (John 3:1).

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus taught a *group of Jews* (His “disciples” – Matt. 18:1) *requirements for discipline*, involving an individual, individuals, and then finally the *local church*; all of this obviously being under the New Testament authority, which like the kingdom, the church, was soon to be in effect.

In Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 Jesus taught *His moral requirements for lawful marriage, divorce, and remarriage*. We know that these requirements are also under the New Testament authority, because like the cases already cited, these were given by *His authority as Lawgiver of the New Testament* (“*But I say unto you*”).

Though Jesus is speaking no doubt to a number of Jews in Matthew 5:32 (see 5:1,2), and also to Jews in Matthew 19:3ff., this fact in itself *does not prove* that the exception verses (Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9) apply only to Jews under the Old Law. For Jesus’ entire public preaching effort was primarily to the Jews (Matt. 15:24), yet, as we have already seen in various cases, *He taught the Jews many things that specifically apply under the New Testament*.

6. Let us further examine our contexts. I affirm that both Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 apply to both children of God and all people under the New Testament.

A. They apply to children of God in that these verses are in *kingdom or church truth contexts*. Such truths are for people in the kingdom or church to obey under the New Testament.

Chapters 5-7 in Matthew, where Matt. 5:32 is found, contain the Lord’s sermon on the mount, which is very much a kingdom or church truth

context (Matt. 5:3,10,19,20 -32ff.; Matt. 6:10,33; Matt. 7:21,28,29).

Matthew 19:9 was also specifically given to the kingdom by its King (“And I say unto you”). Its context, *for people in the kingdom or church to obey under the New Testament*, is very obvious (Matt. 19:9-12,14,23,24; Matt. 20:1ff.).

B. Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 also apply to all alien sinners under the New Testament. In Matthew 19:4-9, Jesus tells us that His moral requirements for lawful marriage, divorce, and remarriage under *His authority, the New Testament*, are the same as in “*the beginning*”. It is important to observe that all throughout the New Testament, including after the church was established and the New Testament came into effect, God’s original will—Genesis 2:24—is presented as being *still in effect*. See Eph. 5:31 and I Cor. 6:16, as well as Matt. 19:3-9.

What God established in “the beginning” in Genesis 2:24 was applicable to all of mankind, with no exceptions. In Matthew 19:9, Jesus therefore is saying that His requirements here are likewise applicable to *all of mankind, with no exceptions* (“*Whosoever shall put away his wife*”, “*Whoso marrieth her which is put away*”; see also Matt. 5:32). Therefore any person under the New Testament who violates these requirements will be judged (Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8).

These facts alone prove “for fornication” in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 apply today.

The Real Context Of Matthew 19:7-8

Your letter also made these two assertions concerning Matt. 19:7-8: (1) “The Jews were allowed under the law (for fornication) to put away their wives and marry another, because of hardness of their hearts.” (2) “Matthew 19:9 was also under the law.” Neither of these assertions are true.

1. In Matthew 19:7-8 Jesus actually contradicted and corrected what those Jews had mistakenly thought Moses’ (the O.T.) allowed. For when the Jews, in Matthew 19:3, asked Jesus, “Is it lawful (morally permitted by God) for a man to

put away his wife for *every cause*?”, Jesus told them in verse 4 that God’s marriage law was still what it was in “*the beginning*”. And after quoting Gen. 2:24 in the first part of verse 6, He said “What therefore God hath joined together, *let not man put asunder*”. So instead of the O.T. allowing Jews to divorce their wives “for every cause”, then to also remarry, Jesus told them the O. T. said they may *not* do such things (Matt. 19:4-6).

Observe again that Christ’s answer meant Genesis 2:24 was God’s O.T. marriage law.

Verse 7 shows they thought Christ’s teaching about Gen. 2:24 contradicted Moses in Deut. 24:1-4. They were wrong. For in verse 8 Jesus told them what *they thought* Moses’ Law “suffered” (permitted) them to do, was “not” what Moses’ (God’s) Law *actually gave moral approval* for them to do. These Jews thought in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Moses gave God’s moral approval for them to divorce their wives for any flimsy reason, or “for *every cause*”. Jesus corrected them, explaining in Matt. 19:4-6 that Gen. 2:24 was God’s marriage law. He told them in Matt. 19:8, “from the beginning [it] was not so”, i.e. Deut. 24:1-4 *was not God’s marriage law*, and thus *never had been*.

The verb expressed in Matt. 19:8 by “was” and “so” with the negative in between in the English translation, is the Greek perfect tense. *The perfect tense expresses action completed in the past, with results continuing to the present*. The application of Jesus’ perfect tense here is that Genesis 2:24 was God’s marriage law *from the beginning* (the action of God’s law being *completed as of that time*), so that what these Jews thought was God’s marriage law (Deut. 24:1-4), “was not so in the beginning, with the result continuing under the O.T. in Matt. 19, *that it still wasn’t so*”.

In Matt. 19:8a Christ explained to the Jews that Deut. 24:1-4 was actually O.T. civil law legislation to regulate the wicked actions of *hard hearted* people who didn’t care about God’s marriage law.

Many people today also misunderstand Deut. 24:1-4, partly because the King James Version inserts the words “let” in verse 1 and “may” in verse 2 (both are English words expressing permission), *but neither word is in the O.T. Hebrew*. Read Deut. 24:1-4 in the KJV below without the wrongly added words, “let” and “may” in verses 1 and 2, and you

will get the correct understanding of what the original O.T. Hebrew is saying:

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then [let—is not in the Hebrew] him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she [may—is not in the Hebrew] go and be another man’s wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

Deut. 24:1-4 states that the woman was defiled by the second marriage, not that she “may” enter into that second marriage. Thus, Moses was actually saying that this divorce and her second marriage did not receive God’s moral approval under the O.T., for it was a violation of God’s marriage law in Genesis 2:24, just as Jesus said.

2. It is very important to observe and remember that Jesus placed Matthew 19:9 under His own authority, as the N.T. Lawgiver (Matt. 18:18; Gal. 6:2; see also Matt. 5:32): “And I say unto you”. This proves that “for fornication” is God’s rule for lawful marriage, divorce, and remarriage today under His New Testament authority.

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