

# **An Examination of Matthew 19:9**

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## **An Examination of Matthew 19:9a**

**Matthew 19:9a “And I say to you, whoever puts away his wife, if [he does] not [put her away] on the basis of sexual immorality, and marries another [woman] commits adultery.”<sup>1</sup>**

There have been two interpretations of Matthew 19:9a when the exception clause is applied to it. They are as follows:

[1] Whoever puts away his wife on the basis of sexual immorality and marries another woman does not commit adultery.

[2] Whoever puts away his wife on the basis of sexual immorality and marries another woman commits adultery.

In sentence 1, when the exception clause is applied to the first verbal phrase of Matthew 19:9a (puts away his wife), the last part of Matthew 19:9a (commits adultery) changes to “does not commit adultery.” This is the meaning of the pro-remarriage view.

In sentence 2, when the exception clause is applied to the first verbal phrase of Matthew 19:9a (puts away his wife), the last part of Matthew 19:9a (commits adultery) stays the same. This is the meaning of the no-remarriage view.

Which interpretation is correct? Certainly, they both cannot be correct at the same time.

The best way to determine whether Matthew 19:9a permits remarriage or not is to construct other examples that have the same syntactic and semantic structure as Matthew 19:9a. In order to do this, three sentences must be constructed to understand the flow of argument and logic of Jesus’ words. These sentences will be constructed according to the principles found in the Gospels regarding divorce and remarriage. In other words, the divorce and remarriage texts in Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; and Luke 16:18 will be used to construct the three sentences.

The three skeletal sentences with their syntactic structures corresponding to the syntax of the divorce and remarriage texts in the Gospels are as follows:

[1] if A and B, then C (Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18)

[2] if A, except D, then C (Matthew 5:32)

[3] if A, except D, and B, then C (Matthew 19:9)

where:

sentence 3 is a combination of sentences 1 and 2;

A = verbal phrase;

B = verbal phrase;

C = verbal phrase;

D = any phrase;

(if A, except D, and B, then C) cannot mean the same thing as (if A and B, except D, then C), because (except D) is only linked to A, not both A and B.

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<sup>1</sup>All scriptural verses in this article are taken from the *Spirit of Prophecy Version* (SPV), <http://www.spvbible.org/>.

In sentence 1, A followed by B will always result in C. There are no exceptions to this rule.

In sentence 2, A will always result in C. An exception to this rule is when D is applied only to A.

In sentence 3, by preserving the analyses of sentences 1 and 2, A followed by B will always result in C. There are no exceptions to this rule. A will always result in C. An exception to this rule is when D is applied only to A.

Now that the skeletal structures and meanings of the three sentences are completed, they can now be filled in with real phrases.

Two examples are provided, and their subject matter is modeled after Matthew 5:22 (regarding murder) and Matthew 5:28 (regarding adultery).

### **EXAMPLE 1: COMMITTING MURDER**

1) Whoever is angry with his brother and kills him commits murder. (Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18)

2) Whoever is angry with his brother, except for a cause, commits murder.<sup>2</sup> (Matthew 5:32)

3) Whoever is angry with his brother, except for a cause, and kills him commits murder. (Matthew 19:9)

Sentence 3 combines both sentences 1 and 2 and means only two things:

a) Whoever is angry with his brother and kills him commits murder.

b) Whoever is angry with his brother for a cause and kills him commits murder.

**No-remarriage view:** Only being angry for a cause not followed by killing is not murderous. Killing after any type of anger is always murderous. This is biblically sound.

**Pro-remarriage view:** “Whoever is angry with his brother for a cause and kills him does NOT commit murder.” This is biblically absurd. This is proof that when the exception clause is applied to “is angry,” “commits murder” does not become “does not commit murder.” This is also proof that the exception clause (except for a cause) only modifies the first verbal phrase (is angry with his brother) and not both verbal phrases (is angry with his brother and kills him), the latter of which is biblically impossible to do without sinning.

### **EXAMPLE 2: COMMITTING ADULTERY**

1) Whoever sexually desires a woman and copulates with another woman commits adultery. (Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18)

2) Whoever sexually desires a woman, unless she is his own wife, commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

3) Whoever sexually desires a woman, unless she is his own wife, and copulates with another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

Sentence 3 combines both sentences 1 and 2 and means only two things:

a) Whoever sexually desires a woman and copulates with another woman commits adultery.

b) Whoever sexually desires a woman, who happens to be his own wife, and copulates with another woman commits adultery.

**No-remarriage view:** Only sexually desiring your own wife not followed by copulating with another woman is not adulterous. Copulating with another woman after any type of sexual desire is always adulterous. This is biblically sound.

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<sup>2</sup>“But I say to you, every man who is angry with his brother without cause will be answerable to the court.” Matthew 5:22.

**Pro-remarriage view:** “Whoever sexually desires a woman, who happens to be his own wife, and copulates with another woman does NOT commit adultery.” This is biblically absurd. This is proof that when the exception clause is applied to “sexually desires,” “commits adultery” does not become “does not commit adultery.” This is also proof that the exception clause (unless she is his own wife) only modifies the first verbal phrase (sexually desires a woman) and not both verbal phrases (sexually desires a woman and copulates with another woman), the latter of which is biblically impossible to do without sinning.

The above two examples show that the no-remarriage view works perfectly, and that the pro-remarriage view simply falls apart.

Now, consider the meaning of the divorce and remarriage passages in the Gospels:

### **DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE GOSPELS**

1) Whoever puts away his wife and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18)

2) Whoever puts away his wife, except on the basis of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. (Matthew 5:32a)

By saying “**causes** her to commit adultery,” Jesus is forcefully putting the guilt of sin on the husband who puts away his wife other than on the basis of sexual immorality. Because the husband put away his wife unjustly, he is responsible for driving her to adultery if she remarries or commits sexual immorality. Therefore, according to Jesus’ teaching, the husband’s action is tantamount to adultery.<sup>3</sup> This also shows Jesus’ hatred for divorce. Under the New Covenant, just as Jesus declares that anger and lust also violate the Ten Commandments, in this manner he declares that divorce also violates the Ten Commandments. Therefore, a man who initiates a divorce is not free of any guilt.

3) Whoever puts away his wife, except on the basis of sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9a)

Sentence 3 combines both sentences 1 and 2 and means only two things:

a) Whoever puts away his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.

b) Whoever puts away his wife on the basis of sexual immorality and marries another woman commits adultery.

**No-remarriage view:** Only putting away your wife on the basis of sexual immorality not followed by remarriage is not adulterous. Remarriage after any type of putting away is always adulterous. This is biblically sound.

It has been shown that Matthew 19:9a does not permit remarriage after any divorce. If you choose to put away your wife on the basis of sexual immorality, then you are not sinning. However, any remarriage after this is always adultery. Therefore, in the first clause (19:9a), Jesus teaches no remarriage. In the second clause (19:9b), he goes on to reinforce his no-remarriage position climactically by putting it in another way: whoever marries a woman who is put away commits adultery.

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<sup>3</sup>Gordon J. Wenham and William E. Heth, *Jesus and Divorce*, updated ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2002), 69–71.

## **An Examination of Matthew 19:9b**

**Matthew 19:9b “And he who marries a woman who is put away commits adultery.”**

**Matthew 5:32b “And whoever marries a woman who is put away commits adultery.”**

**Luke 16:18a “Every man who puts away his wife and marries another [woman] commits adultery.”**

**Luke 16:18b “And every man who marries a woman who is put away by [her] husband commits adultery.”**

**Mark 10:11 “And he says to them, ‘Whoever puts away his wife and marries another [woman] commits adultery against her.’”**

**Mark 10:12 “And if a woman puts away her husband and is married to another [man], she commits adultery.”**

There is a mistake in attempting to exegete only Matthew 19:9a when one should exegete the entirety of Matthew 19:9. If one examines and draws his conclusions only from Matthew 19:9a, then he can be susceptible to misguided conclusions. This is where Matthew 19:9b plays a very crucial role in the determination of whether remarriage after divorce is valid or not. In fact, Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b are the strongest evidence in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels that remarriage after divorce for any reason is forbidden.

Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b all say the same thing: a man who marries a woman who is put away commits adultery. In all three passages, regarding the woman who has been put away, it does not state any reasons for or exceptions to the putting away activity. All it states is that she is simply put away. Therefore, whether she was put away justly or unjustly has no connection to the meaning of the “b” clauses.

The woman in Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b is simply “a woman,” indefinite, generic. It does not have the definite article. Therefore, it is not referring to the same woman in the previous clause. The “b” clauses refer to an indefinite woman who is put away, and nothing more. Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b are independent of Matthew 5:32a; 19:9a; and Luke 16:18a. Therefore, the “b” clauses stand alone and do not use the “a” clauses as part of their interpretation.

Additionally, in Mark 10:12 the woman who puts away her husband is not the same woman who is put away by her husband in Mark 10:11. Mark 10:12 is also independent of Mark 10:11. The word “woman” does not have the definite article in the four divorce and remarriage passages in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; this was not an accident but rather was done on purpose by each author. In fact, if one reads all four passages in context, the man in Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; Luke 16:18b; and Mark 10:12 is not even the same man in Matthew 5:32a; 19:9a; Luke 16:18a; or Mark 10:11.

According to Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b, why does a man commit adultery if he marries a woman who is put away? Because the woman who is put away is, in the eyes of God, still bound to her first husband. The woman and her first husband are still married in the eyes of God. They are still bound and married according to Jesus. And if the husband and the wife are still bound and married to one another even though the woman is put away, then the husband will commit adultery if he remarries. Just as the woman who is put away commits adultery if she remarries, in this manner also the husband who puts away his wife commits adultery if he remarries. Therefore, this ultimately states that the man in Matthew 5:32a and Matthew 19:9a commits adultery if he remarries.

There is no such thing as, after a just divorce, one person being bound but the other person not being bound, the guilty person not free to remarry but the innocent person free to remarry. Either they are both bound (with

the result that they both will commit adultery if they remarry) or they are both not bound (with the result that they both will not commit adultery if they remarry). Once two people are unbound, is one still bound to the other, or vice versa? No. In the no-remarriage view, the husband and wife, after any type of divorce, are bound to one another until the physical death of one of them.

The end result is that neither the man nor the woman in the second half of all four divorce and remarriage passages is referring to the man or the woman in the first half of all four divorce and remarriage passages. Each half is independent of one another. To make one of the men or women in the second half be the same as one of the men or women in the first half is to force something that is not there.

All the above is to say that because Matthew 5:32b; 19:9b; and Luke 16:18b forbid the remarriage of a woman who is put away, Matthew 5:32a; 19:9a; and Luke 16:18a also forbid the remarriage of a man who puts away his wife. The reason is that, because a woman who is put away commits adultery in her second marriage, she is in fact still bound to her first husband and is still his wife; and if she is still bound to her husband, then her husband is still bound to her and is still her husband.

## **Conclusion**

In both Matthew 19:9a and Matthew 19:9b, Jesus teaches no remarriage.