

Matthew 19:3-12 Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage

By: Stephen Gola

Understanding what happened in Malachi 2:10-16 is key to understanding Matthew 19:3-12 (Matt 19).

Malachi 2:16a reads, “For the Lord God of Israel says that HE HATES *DIVORCE* (*putting away*).” Why did God hate “putting away?” Why was His heart so stirred to anger over the “putting away” incidents?

The Hebrew word *shalach* translated “putting away” (and sometimes “divorce”) means: a separation or to separate; it does not mean divorce nor has it ever meant divorce—EVER!

“Putting Away” (from *shalach* and *apoluo*) NEVER Meant Divorce!

For example, *shalach* is used 878 times in the Old Testament and only 13 times related to a marriage or intimate relationship, which means; 865 times it is used in other situations. To show you that *shalach* never meant divorce nor does it in any way, here are five random examples from the Old Testament:

1. Genesis 8:7: (Noah on the Ark) ...of the ark which he had made. **And he sent forth** a raven, which went forth to...
2. Genesis 24:7: (God giving Abraham the Promised Land) ...Unto thy seed will I give this land; **he shall send** his angel before thee...
3. Exodus 5:1: (Moses delivering Israel from Egypt) ...the LORD God of Israel, Let my people **go**, that they may hold a feast unto...
4. Joshua 6:25: (Rahab hid the Spies) ...day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua **sent** to spy out Jericho.
5. 2 Kings 5:10: (Naaman healed) ...of the house of Elisha. And Elisha **sent** a messenger unto him, saying, Go and ...

Shalach's New Testament equivalent: *apoluo*, though at times is translated divorce never meant divorce nor does it mean divorce but rather, a separation.

For example, *apoluo* is used 94 times in the New Testament and only 18 times related to marriage or intimate relationships. Which means it is used 76 times in other situations. To show you that *apoluo* never meant divorce, here are five random examples from the New Testament:

1. Matthew 14:15: (Jesus feeds the Five Thousand) ...desert place, and the time is now past; **send** the multitude away, that they may go ...
2. Luke 8:38: (Man w/ 2000 plus Demons) ...that he might be with him: but Jesus **sent him** away, saying, Return to thine ...
3. Luke 13:12: (Woman with the Issue of Blood) ...her to him, and said unto her, Woman, **thou art loosed** from thine infirmity. And he laid ...
4. Acts 4:23: (Lame man healed at the Gate Called Beautiful) ...this miracle of healing was shewed. And **being let go**, they went to their own company, and...
5. Acts 15:33: (Judas & Silas Leaving Antioch) ...And after they had tarried there a space, **they were let go** in peace from the brethren unto the...

God Hates “Putting Away” NOT Divorce!

Therefore, we can see that Jesus (God) who dealt with the Israelites in Malachi 2:16 regarding “putting away,” it was the same issue with the Pharisees in Matthew 19 when He came to earth to redeem mankind. The “putting away” problem was still continuing.

The Prophet Malachi and Ezra were contemporaries together in 430 B.C. — both of them were dealing with the “putting away” problem with the people of God. Here is a condensed version of Ezra 9,10 of that situation:

God’s people “have taken [them] as wives ...in this wicked act and direct violation [of God’s will]. And now, for a brief moment, GRACE HAS BEEN SHOWN US by the Lord our God..., who has left us a remnant TO ESCAPE... they solemnly vowed to *PUT AWAY* [separated from] their wives, ...UNTIL THE FIERCE WRATH OF OUR GOD OVER THIS MATTER IS TURNED FROM US” (Ezra 9, 10).

The same thing was happening in Malachi 2:14-16. The husbands were not divorcing but were just separating “putting away” their wives and remarrying other women without ever getting a divorce. This is what made God so angry. I believe the husbands knew that if they were not lawfully divorced (by giving their wife a Divorce Certificate) it gave them an excuse not to give back to the wife (or her father) the “dowry of the bride” that they paid for her when they were first married. This could of course have been a great price. However, the wives could not marry someone else without committing adultery unless they had a Certificate of Divorce that Moses **COMMANDED** their husbands to give when divorcing — which brings us to Matthew 19.

(Note: The Scriptures of Malachi 2:10-16, Matthew 19:3-12, Matthew 5:31-32, Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:2-12 are all about the same issue—of being separated and getting married to someone else without first getting divorced. Therefore, this teaching will be sufficient without going over the other Scriptures because the Greek words for *divorce* and *married* are all the same in these passages in the New Testament.)

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘IS IT LAWFUL for a man to separate [from] (put away) his wife [without divorcing her] for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then they are no longer two but one flesh.”

Jesus is saying haven’t you read that if a married couple separates without an actual divorce, they are still “joined” as “one flesh”? And if they remarry in that condition they are in adultery? In the beginning the Lord never wanted the husband and wife to separate without a divorce. Otherwise, they could not become another man’s wife or another woman’s husband (See Deuteronomy 24:1,2).

“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man **SEPARATE**.” (Jesus is talking about being **SEPARATED** and marrying another while still being married, **NOT** divorced.) They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses **COMMAND** to give a Certificate of Divorce, AND to put her away (separate)?’

These Pharisees still don’t seem to understand why they have to give a Certificate of Divorce when they separate from their wives to marry another!

He said to them, “Moses, **BECAUSE OF THE HARDNESS OF YOUR HEARTS**, *PERMITTED* you to separate from (put away) your wives [without a Certificate of Divorce]. But from the beginning [being separated **WITHOUT** a Certificate of Divorce] was not so. And I say to you, whoever separates from (puts away) his wife [without a Certificate of Divorce], except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is separated (put away) [from her husband without a Certificate of Divorce] commits adultery.”

Romans 7:1-4 and The Law

Therefore, how does Romans 7:1-4 fit into all this? It is simple. Let’s read through it: “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the *law has dominion over a man as long as he lives*? For the woman WHO HAS a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.”

Notice that this is referring to a “woman WHO HAS a husband”! The husband and wife ARE husband and wife. If they were NOT husband and wife then they would not HAVE a husband or a wife. In other words, if you were divorced, widowed or single you would NOT have a husband or wife. This is ONLY applying to a “husband/wife” relationship. In the Law, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, it says when someone is divorced they have a FORMER (ex) husband or wife — which means, they are NO LONGER married to that person.

As we continue through verse two I will underline every time it is referring to BEING “husband and wife” to emphasize that Paul is giving the analogy of a “husband/wife” relationship as to being “bound to the Law”:

“But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. THEREFORE, MY BRETHREN, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, THAT YOU MAY BE MARRIED TO ANOTHER—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”

The Apostle Paul is only giving an analogy by referencing the similarities of being “bound” to the Law to being “bound” to one another in a marriage. The book of Romans is about *being dead to the Law* in order for us *to carry out the Law through a NEW relationship*. That “new” relationship is in Christ. (See Romans 13:8-10.) Paul is NOT teaching about marriage, or divorce or even remarriage. In other words, the only way for us to break the “marriage” union with the Law is for us to die and then to rise from the dead so the Law will not have dominion over us. This is the whole subject of Romans — NOT about marriage, divorce or remarriage.

There Are Two Things Required To Divorce:

Matthew 19:7, “They say unto him, why did Moses then COMMAND to give a [1.] Writing (Certificate) of Divorcement, AND [2.] to put her away.” It takes two things to be correctly divorced:

1. Writing of Divorcement (doing the legal thing).
2. Put away (physically separate from each other).

Notice in the next Scripture that God just separates (puts away) Israel without ever divorcing her. In other words, God is separating from His wife because of a bad situation but it does not yet merit a divorce: “Thus says the Lord: ‘WHERE IS the CERTIFICATE OF YOUR MOTHER’S DIVORCE, Whom I have PUT AWAY?’” (Isaiah 50:1). God is “separated” but not yet divorced

However, at this point God is fed-up with Israel continually playing the harlot with other gods so He “separates” from her (puts her away) AND divorces her (gives her a Certificate of Divorcement): “Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had PUT HER AWAY [SEPARATED FROM HER] AND given her a CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE...” (Jeremiah 3:8). God is currently divorced from Israel He will one day remarry her.

As Jesus continued in Matthew 19:8-9, “He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts SUFFERED (allowed) you to PUT AWAY your wives (without giving them a Certificate of Divorce: but from the beginning it was not so ((to just separate and get remarried without being divorced).

And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away (separates from) his wife (without giving a Certificate of Divorcement), **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away (only separates from their spouse) doth commit adultery.”

Take notice that the “**exception clause**” was for a hard-hearted spouse who was not divorcing but rather a spouse who wanted to marry another person without ever getting divorced. Jesus allowed it for cases of fornication only. It has nothing to do with divorce. Therefore, the “exception clause” was always a myth — a doctrine we made-up because of wrong understanding of the Scriptures — basically, these truths have been lost through time.

It is Better NOT to Marry?

Continuing in Matthew 9:10-12, "HIS DISCIPLES SAID to Him, 'If such is the case of the man with his wife, IT IS BETTER NOT TO MARRY.'

But He said to them, 'All cannot accept THIS SAYING, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept IT (THIS SAYING OF THE DISCIPLES), let him accept it" (Matt 19:9-12).

The disciples replied to Jesus that it is better that no man EVER be married. First off, the disciples made an absurd statement and Jesus knew it. If no males would marry females than there would be no one left upon the earth in so many years. Because Jesus knew what they said was absurd, He answered their SPECIFIC QUESTION by stating first that "All cannot accept THIS SAYING — what the disciples said about no one ever getting married, NOT about what Jesus Himself said. Then He went on to address that if no one ever got married then everyone would be a eunuch. And if everyone was a eunuch then there would not be any life on the earth in so many years. So Jesus told them about eunuchs in verse ten and why they are eunuchs. Then the Lord summed it up by saying that, "He who is ABLE TO ACCEPT IT (what the DISCIPLES SAID regarding being single), let him accept it. The Lord was responding to what the disciples said about never marrying at all because it was that far off course.

To sum this teaching up, the **Geneva Bible** translated from the **Textus Receptus** in 1560 (about 50 years before the KJV) has a margin note concerning the term "put away" (the use of the Hebrew word (*shalach*). It says that **put away**, "**was not lawfully divorced.**"

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