

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”-Psalm 119:105

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Non-Sexual Adultery and Mental Divorce

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(This is the first part of the article, with the emphasis on non-sexual adultery. The second part will follow next week, with the emphasis on mental adultery. —TN)

One way to avoid Jesus' plain teaching on divorce is to attempt to re-define the words He used. Jesus' words are:

“but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”—Matthew 5:32 (NASB)

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”—Matthew 19:9 (NASB)

So the person who is seeking to justify a marriage after a divorce for some cause other than physical fornication says, “Jesus does not mean sexual adultery.” And when I ask for a definition of “adultery” he answers, “It means the act of divorcing and remarrying.” This is what a South African preacher told me and what a number of others are teaching. (Of course, the reason for this definition is to make it possible for a divorced and remarried person to “repent” of the act of divorcing and remarrying and to stay married to his or her second partner without sin.)

Defining “adultery” to mean “the act of divorcing for some cause other than for fornication and marrying again” violates two simple, common-

sense rules of grammar.

1. The first rule, stated in my words, is that a word should be understood in its ordinary sense unless the way it is used shows that it is to be understood in another way. Often Jesus used words to mean something other than their ordinary meaning, but when He did it is easy to see from the context what He meant. For instance, in John 6:54 He said, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." A careful reading of the chapter causes us to understand that when Jesus said "My flesh" and "My blood" He was referring to His words, and therefore the word "eats" means "listens to" or "heeds". (See verse 47, for instance).

However, unless the context shows that the word is used in a metaphorical sense, we should understand it in its literal sense. In John 3:5 Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He later explains that the word "born" refers to a birth of one's spirit, but there is nothing in the context to show that the words "water" and "the Spirit" are not literal. "Water" means "water," not something else. Those who "spiritualize" the word "water" to mean "the Holy Spirit" or something else ignore the plain meaning of the word and violate an important grammatical principle.

Let's apply this rule to Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9. There is nothing in the context to show that Jesus used the word "adultery" in anything other than its ordinary sense. The ordinary meaning of the word fits perfectly with what Jesus says. Not only does the put-away woman commit adultery when she marries again, but the man who marries her commits adultery. When a person who is bound by the marriage bond has sex with a person he or she is not bound to, both that person and the person he or she has sex with commit adultery. That is the ordinary meaning of the word, and that fits perfectly with what Jesus says. There is nothing in the context to suggest that the word should be used in anything but its ordinary meaning. If we can change its meaning to fit our desires, we can change anything in the Bible! It reminds me of the story I heard a long time ago. A man who was in the Old Apostle Church told a preacher that the Ethiopian eunuch was not baptized in literal water. He said "the chariot" represented his "responsibility" and "the water" represented "the light." What a mess! But the only way to avoid such a mess is to understand words in their ordinary sense unless the context shows that

they are used in a different way.

2. A second simple grammatical rule is: When a word is defined properly, the definition can be substituted for the word and the sentence will make sense and mean the same.

If we go back to the example in John 6:54, if we substitute the word “heeds” for “eats” and the word “words” or “teachings” for the words “flesh” and “blood,” the sentence reads, “He who heeds My words has eternal life.” We have substituted the definitions for the actual words used, and the sentence makes perfect sense. It fits the context, and the definition fits in the sentence.

However this will not work with the non-sexual definition of adultery. If we substitute the definition for the word “adultery” we get:

“but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her[divorce and remarry];and whoever marries a divorced woman[divorces and remarries].” (Matthew 5:32)

“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman[divorces and remarries].” –Matthew 19:9

That simply does not make good sense. The definition does not fit the sentence. The definition must be wrong! The only way to understand Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 is to understand the word “adultery” to mean what it usually means.

“Summon your power, O God; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before.”—Psalm 68:28

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"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"
(Psalm 118:24).