

Transcript 100-2

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. This is part two of our discussion on divorce and remarriage. So, if you've not yet listened to part one, we encourage you to do that, because a lot of the stuff we're going to talk about today is very closely related to things we talked about. Episode one was more about divorce specifically in episode two will be more about remarriage after divorce. So very related but hopefully both episodes will answer at least slightly different questions and joining me on Part 2 again is Sarah Van Baale. She's been a Got Questions volunteer writer for over a decade. So Sarah welcome back.

Sarah Van Baale

Thanks very much.

Shea Houdmann

So the question of divorce, I'd say the vast majority of people who ask Got Questions a question on this and it is blank grounds for divorce? Can I divorce with this? They often or almost always, have remarriage in mind, but not always. So let me just lead off with the kind of a more general question and then we can dive into the specifics. What does the Bible say about remarriage after a divorce, based on how you've studied the scriptures?

Sarah Van Baale

Sure, so we take a lot of this particular question out of Matthew 19: 7-9 where I'll just read the whole thing. The Pharisees are asking Jesus, they say, why then they asked, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away and Jesus replied, Moses permitted you, he's correcting them most and commanded. He permitted them to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it's not this way it was that this way, from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another woman, commits adultery.

Sarah Van Baale

And so a lot of people, it kind of sets them on their heels a little bit. And they say, wait a second if I remarry, even if I'm divorced does that automatically mean that I've committed adultery? Or my husband left me and it wasn't my choice to get divorced. Does that mean that I must remain single forever and so even this past year I had an older woman approach me and say you know my husband divorced me 30 years ago, something around at time, I'm still single. I'm afraid that if I get remarried that it will, I will be committing adultery like am I I'm I bound to the signal, singleness forever, and I think that for some people, that's a real concern of theirs.

Sarah Van Baale

And so it's really important to clarify what Jesus is talking about here. He's not saying that if you are divorced that you may never get remarried again, unless your spouse dies. It's not like you are condemned, so to speak, to singleness for all eternity. Really what the issue is here is when there are divorces for unbiblical grounds, what are the consequences that spill out of that? And I have a few

different things to talk about, but before I just jump right in, I guess that kind of summarizes the main issue that I think a lot of people are asking.

Shea Houdmann

And the passage you mentioned there in Matthew 19 was what's known as the exception clause. That's what most people refer to it as the except for sexual immorality, saying that anyone who divorces his wife or husband in reverse except for sexual immorality and marries another, commits adultery. So whatever this exception clause means, it means that there are some instances where getting a divorce get every marriage after divorce is not sexual immorality, and in the Greek the that word for sexual morality is the word *porneia*, from which we get pornography. Is this *porneia*? It just means basically sexual perversion in general, so it's not referring to anything specifically in the context, it very likely has adultery in mind, but it's not necessarily only limited to that. So in your study, how do you typically interpret the exception clause in terms of what in what circumstances can a person remarry after divorce without it being considered adultery?

Sarah Van Baale

Sure, so I actually answer this question a little bit differently, but we do backtrack this a little bit when we're talking about sexual immorality. You're right, it covers a whole slew of things. Actually in the Old Testament there they give a list like if you know you sleep with this person or you lay with this person, there's animals involved and there's a whole list of things that really kind of define or not even exclusively, but give people the idea of hey. This is really wrong and it was so serious that it was punishable by death. And so when I approached this topic of can I get remarried what we really need to think about is what is sexual morality?

Sarah Van Baale

And this is something that we really don't talk a lot about in churches. It's it's kind of glossed over, and so we'll talk about certain instances of sexual immorality, but we don't really talk about sexual morality and what God wants is for people to be sexually moral in their behavior, and so there's a verse I point to when I'm talking especially to younger people. We often talk about the do not be yoked to such and such a person when? Who can I marry? Who shouldn't I marry?

Sarah Van Baale

But there's another really clear verse here in 1st Corinthians 5:9 through and then the beginning of 10. It says Paul talking to the church accordance. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with the sexually immoral people, and he clarifies it next verse saying not at all, meaning the sexual and will of the world he's talking about the people in the church, like they're they're, being somewhat a little bit too permissive about this, and so the question of whether or not we can get remarried has a lot to do with the first question of whether or not we should marry a person and so we tend to focus on remarriage and kind of ignoring the first part of actually, who can I marry to begin with? Or who should I be marrying to begin with?

Sarah Van Baale

So God really wants us to be sexually moral individuals. That means that our sexual lives are supposed to stay contained within the bounds of the person that we marry, and I know in today's society that is not

well accepted. When I was growing up, I wasn't really sheltered, but I was probably a little bit naive and I kind of thought that everybody waited until marriage to have sex. That was just kind of what I thought it was. I read the Bible I knew my family and I thought this is how the world operated and obviously I grew older and I understood this is not at all the way the world is operating. And that has crept into our churches. And so we are very quick to excuse lots and lots of sexual immorality except for maybe this instance which is easy to identify. Or this instance, which is easy to identify and so I think it's very important when we're talking about can I get remarried? Is would that marriage would you can you live a sexually moral life within that new marriage, because God does not want us hopping from person to person to person, he explicitly forbids that. That is not how we are to behave or act. That's not a reflection of his character of his design.

Sarah Van Baale

And so instead of trying to make a checklist, well did this happen so I can do this? Or did this happen so I can do this? We have to broaden the question and say is participating in a marriage or remarriage is that going to be conducive to living a sexually moral life and a lot of people don't want to ask that question because without even looking at that, we then have to look at ourselves and say OK before we even talk about marriage am I living a sexually immoral life? Like we can get really caught up and maybe I'm committing a sin if I get remarried, but what about all these other areas of my life? Like sexual sin is much broader than just marriage and remarriage and and so I think it it really lends itself to a bigger topic, a bigger conversation instead of being so incredibly focused on this one particular area.

Shea Houdmann

I'm sure, as we've submitted questions to you, to answer over the years, you've read some of these where it's like, OK, so here's my situation, and then they go on to describe. OK, I've I was divorced in before I became a believer and now I became a believer and can I remarry and but then the person I'm considering getting remarried to has been divorced twice. First time she cheated on her husband. The second time he cheated on her and so. But then this verse, my pastor says if we get remarried, it's a continual state of adultery. And what do we do? I'm just like? The the Bible does not tell me what to do in that specific situation. I mean, there's each situation is its own question, and it can get so very complicated, and yet your hearts go out to the people who are in these situations, 'cause probably the most painful is people who their husband or wife like leaves them and then their husband or wife who left them then re marries and yet people are telling them that they have to remain single the rest of their lives because, well, you remarry it's going to be a continual state of adultery. When I'm not even sure that's what the the Bible teaches, and it just seems so inconsistent with God's grace for the innocent party to be the one who can't remarry, and then the whole question of singleness while Paul talks a lot about singleness and how it's better and there's things we can do when we're single that we can't do and the the rush to get remarried after divorce is I think out of step with what God's word described, so it's so complicated.

Shea Houdmann

So many things that go into the equation that's trying to answer these questions. As you know, it's both painful as frustrating and then also it's like OK how do I point this person to what scripture says about their situation when I can't ensure the scripture directly addresses their situations or trying to take

principles from the scriptures that apply, while not saying like a thou shalt, this is absolutely what God says about your situation.

Sarah Van Baale

Right, so I'll just backtrack a little bit and kind of reference some of the things I talked about and the first podcast that we did. I am divorced from my first husband who committed serial adultery. He was a serial cheater and there was not repentance. That process didn't move particularly fast, but I did get to the place where I knew that God had allowed me to leave, however. There was a struggle with OK, so I did leave, but I left on biblical grounds. Am I allowed to remarry? I was young. I must have been, I think 26 or 27 at that time when I was going through that. And I really to think about living a life alone for the rest of my life. That was really hard for me. That's not what I looked forward to and so I had to search scriptures and really study it and think am I allowed to remarry and eventually I arrived this conclusion that I was I am remarried now for almost 16 years. And I think we have to look at the idea of first of all what is God character?

Sarah Van Baale

We have to be a little bit careful about just taking a sentence out of the Bible and reading it without understanding the situation. Who he's talking to. The whole context of the Bible and so there are some churches who pull it out and say, well, once you're married to one person, that's the only person you ever get until they die. And I do not believe that that is what the Bible teaches because we are, in certain circumstances released from that marriage.

Sarah Van Baale

So if you have a husband who or a wife, a spouse who has stepped out of your marriage and who has introduced another person into your marriage bed, defiled that marriage bed. Then God doesn't say you have to leave, but he says you do have a way out. And if God is giving you a way out, you have not committed a sexual sin, then there isn't anything in the Bible that says, oh, because of your spouse's sin, then you now are condemned forever.

Sarah Van Baale

And in fact we have to also remember that this is not the unforgivable sin. This is all the sins that we're talking about are completely forgiveable we're not. We're not turning our backs on God. We're not any of these things, so even if you have committed adultery in your marriage, or you have stepped out or you have done something else, you are not unforgiven for your entirety of your life once you repent of your sin and you turn back to Christ and change your ways. You're made whole and clean and new.

Sarah Van Baale

And so I don't want anybody to think that. I'm saying, hey, if you've done one of these bad things that's it forever. That's that's not what the Bible teaches either. And so when you're released from a marriage, it's just like the certificate of divorce they were talking about. Even in the Old Testament. Or in the beginning of the New Testament. Here that certificate of divorce said on there that you're free to remarry. So there wasn't the understanding at the time that if you got divorced that that was it. These certificates said, hey, you can remarry, and so that's the context which we're talking about here.

Sarah Van Baale

And so when I chose to get remarried, my interest was still on being sexually moral. I did not want to jump into society and start acting like a lot of them. I think that the idea is God has given us this gift. He's given us not only marriage. He's given us our sexuality. He's given us love and grace and all of these things. And we are to live our lives in a way that best reflects Christ in the church, and so when you have had a divorce on biblical grounds, I cannot find any evidence in the Bible that says, hey, that's it. You can no longer get married. In fact, the only evidence I find is to the contrary, which allows you as the innocent party to become remarried.

Sarah Van Baale

Now I do want to speak to, let's say your spouse left you and it was for not sexual infidelity or whatever they left you for whatever reason, and they've gone out and started another life, and I do think the Bible says, hey, you know you're in a monogamous relationship here, and if your spouse leaves you for a reason other than infidelity you, when I say leave I'm saying, like physically divorces you or walks away. Their most likely enter into a relationship with somebody else, and as soon as that marriage bed is defiled again, that bond is broken and so God is not holding you to wait for this particular person who's already moved on and is living their life with another spouse.

Sarah Van Baale

And so I do encourage people who aren't ready to give up on their marriages, but their spouse has left, to not jump into remarriage, I think that's incredibly foolish. I think that we have to set boundaries. We have to give time for God to work. We don't know exactly what God is going to do another person's life and I personally believe, and I think there is scriptural evidence to back it up, that once that person who you might be waiting for has left and has now started, you know having sexual relations with somebody else that you are no longer bound.

Sarah Van Baale

However, until that happens, I do encourage people to wait because there are many instances where a spouse has left and then in time seeing the error of their ways and repented of their sins and are able to come back. And I think that that brings God a lot of joy to he's so happy when sinners come back to him to return. I mean the heavens, rejoice. People are supposed to celebrate these things and so we have to be very careful.

Sarah Van Baale

Even though marriage is extremely passionate, it hits to our inmost being and we can become incredibly wounded that we don't react on emotion. We can feel those emotions, but that we act with wisdom and our ultimate priority is to honor Christ and to set an example for those around us. And God walks you through that if you lean on him. So it's a hard thing when somebody asks you, hey, what do I do here and you're like well I can't tell you exactly what to do. I can teach you about the principles in scripture. And we can look at the overarching things being Christlike, forgiving, sexual morality, all of those things, but every individual should be not only asking Christians in their situation, but praying and searching the scriptures and trying their best to honor God because he's the one ultimately who has to walk everybody through their situations.

Shea Houdmann

So we've discussed like the innocent party I agree totally with what you said that a person who is the innocent party in a divorce, the current as a result of infidelity, adultery is free to remarry they. Do they have to remarry? No. Should they take some time to remarry? Of course they should, should they consider singleness? Yes, they should. But Scripture describes that as a gift that God gives to some people, not to everyone so it in no sense do I think everyone who's the innocent party in a divorce should remain single.

Shea Houdmann

But we also received questions from I guess let's just call them the guilty party so the spouse who is committed adultery and then even remarried, possibly remarried the person they were having adultery with or break that relationship off and eventually remarry someone else, and then then they have people tell them well since you are the guilty party, you are not free to remarry. Therefore your new marriage is a continual state of adultery, and based on the the passage that talk about anyone who divorces wife except for adultery, sexuality, and remarries, commits adultery. How do you answer those questions and what's your understanding of the guilty party in this type of a divorce situation?

Sarah Van Baale

Sure, I think there's two situations the guilty party who has stepped out and remarried and the one who hasn't necessarily remarried yet. And this is where I think sometimes it can be a little bit harsh what I say. And I don't mean it to be harsh, but I think we have a problem in society where we are just really flippant with how we handle sexual immorality.

Sarah Van Baale

And so if you are the guilty party and you have left, abandoned your wife, whatever the case may be, or. Speak about wife, but it can go either way obviously, your spouse. I think that you have to be extremely careful about your behavior and your heart moving forward. Adultery just doesn't come out of nowhere. There there's a lot that leads up to it.

Sarah Van Baale

I think somebody has a song which I just listened to. Its been out for a while. Called it's a slow fade. I mean we fall into serious sin. Not really quickly. I mean, most of us are not jumping into it. We we fade our way into it and pulling ourselves out with with Christ help or him pulling us out of that sin takes a lot of time. And so for those who have their marriages have ended because they were the wayward spouse. I am not sure that the Bible says hey, yeah, you know be forgiven, go get married. I think there's a lot more seriousness to this. Remember, we're not killing people for this. This is, I mean, Christ Christ blood covers all of it. But the Old Testament takes some of these sins extremely seriously, and we do not take them early as seriously as we should, and so I'm hesitant to give an answer, but I would really default towards the singleness on that first and foremost, until or unless there's been extreme reconciliation to Christ and a real understanding of the error of their ways, because God can forgive everything, but I'm just not at all convinced that we take this seriously enough.

Sarah Van Baale

Now, to those who've already met, moved on, and are remarried. God does not say hey, divorce your current spouse and then go remarry your other spouse so that you could make your whole adultery thing go away. That's not how it works like there are some people who think that if they just get rid of the person who they're now with and go back to the other person that it kind of undoes the sin. It doesn't undo it, it makes it worse and far complicates it.

Sarah Van Baale

And so when we find ourselves in extremely sinful situations. And we know that perhaps this marriage did not start out the right way. There are even people who've had affairs and then marry their affair partner. God is not saying hey divorce your affair partner so you can try and make these things right. What God wants us to do is to stop sinning, which means no more sexual immorality. Don't step outside of the marriage that you're in, don't look at pornography. Don't engage in things that debase your mind, he he wants you to focus on being holy. Sometimes the devil tricks us into thinking well, if we just do some of these sins, we'll be happy, but that happiness, or that moment of high, which isn't really unhappiness, often makes things much much worse.

Sarah Van Baale

So if you find yourself in this situation, and in a remarriage situation which maybe didn't start out the right way. God wants you to make that situation as holy as possible, which means make the next best choice. Treat your wife well. Treat your spouse well, your husband well, do not step outside of your marriage, to be a good parent if you have children. And so we have to offer people grace because we've all sinned in one area or the other. Some of us may not struggle with sexual sin as much as others, but there's definitely people who struggle with being judgmental, so that's a pretty serious sin too. And our focus needs to be on being Christ like, making God happy with our choices. Taking a situation that we're in and doing the absolute best with what we have because God is able to forgive all of those sins.

Sarah Van Baale

But what he doesn't want you to do is to maintain those old behaviors. Those old ways of thinking. It's very hard to repent from a sin and then keep doing it over and over again. Even if you're not acting on it you still have sins that occur in your mind and you need to make sure that you are conforming your mind to what the Bible says instead of trying to take the Bible and conforming it to what you want. Which would we end up with twisting of scripture and all these little pieces here, there and everywhere, and we get our favorite sins and the sins we don't talk about and and so when we look at this as not what can I get away with? But how can I make Christ happy? How can I be a light in this world? That is the attitude that I advise people to take when they're in a situation that perhaps didn't start out the best way?

Shea Houdmann

I agree with what you shared. Just both on how complicated it can be and how some situations that the Bible doesn't specifically talk about that we just have to try to use biblically informed opinions almost, and then the the guilty party stuff. The whether they can remarry or whether once they are remarried again God's intention is that we remain faithful and committed to our our marriages and adultery, sexual morality, and other forms of abuse. Things that causes divorce. They're all painful. They're all terrible. The verse in Malachi, which it's questionable whether it should really be translated, God hates

divorce, but that's a reasonable understanding of what God is saying there. He this is not what how it's supposed to be, and so every divorce is painful. It's difficult. It's not God's intent. It breaks the Union that's supposed to illustrate our relationship with Christ as his church and it's so it's trusts me, in the 20 years at Got Questions, it's awful trying to help some people deal with the situations they come through.

Shea Houdmann

I remember in seminary I took a class that marriage and family counseling and one of the books that is read was divorce and remarriage. 4 views. So there's four biblical scholars presenting different scholars presents four different viewpoints and the first one was no divorce, no remarriage, ever. The second view was you can divorce, but you can't remarry. The third one is you can divorce and you can remarry under these circumstances, and that's probably the closest one to the one we were talking about and the 4th one was basically you can divorce and remarry for whatever circumstances. God eventually wants you to find a marriage you'll be happy and and. Wow, but so I'll probably include a link to that book. Any books that Sarah recommends as the resources to go along for further study.

Shea Houdmann

Obviously Sarah and I aren't covering every possible angle and issue that's involved in sort of trying to give you a basic foundation of here's how we approach things at Got Questions. And here's the conclusions God has led us to as it's we study scripture. But divorce and remarriage. I I want to ask you like how do we summarize what we've talked about in these episodes? So, so take it away and in one minute summarize everything we've talked about for almost the past hour of these two episodes.

Sarah Van Baale

OK, well I think the 1st and most important thing like you said is God God did not intend for divorce to be part of the marriage experience. It is not something he promotes. But he does sometimes allow it, and I think that what we've really covered is the allowance often comes when there is sexual immorality involved where that marriage bed has become defiled.

Sarah Van Baale

Now we also touched on a little bit of abuse. And separation. We've talked about abandonment, which is, you know, not just abandoning the needs of a marriage, but completely abandoning. And I even think that sexual immorality weaves its way into those situations as well, but I I want everybody to understand that how society deals with divorce and remarriage is not how the Bible deals with it and while divorce is often offered to people in difficult situations, usually by the devil is you're only waiting it out. It's your only form of hope that the Bible offers and God offers way more alternatives than just divorce to get out of a difficult situation, and that God can use lots of different things that you haven't even thought of to make your situation better.

Sarah Van Baale

If you are divorced, you are not condemned to live single forever. You are not condemned in your relationship with Christ. And if you are remarried and you're you're upset about how that marriage began, that doesn't mean that the marriage your in must be bad or that you are in an adulterous relationship in your new marriage, and so I think we have to always present a lot of this with grace, but

we also have to not under play the role of what sin really is because society would have us to believe that it's different than it is.

Sarah Van Baale

But ultimately God wants us to be in happy, fulfilling marriages. He wants us to have homes that are full of joy and love, and he teaches us in the Bible to love others well, which means that we have to learn to love our spouses even when they are extreme sinners. We have to learn to love people who are hard to love and through that by navigating through these really difficult situations in a Christ like fashion, we can actually help draw other people to Christ 'cause people see you walk through this and they say how did you do it?

Sarah Van Baale

And this has happened to me often. I say let me tell you. Let me tell you how I got through all these terrible things in my life and I'm still here and I'm still full of joy because God, he restores, he heals. He forgives, and that's the message that we want to promote to the world that you're not hopeless. Whatever situation you're in is never hopeless with Christ.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, so Sarah, thank you for joining for this conversation. As we were going through the top 20 questions of all time, this is one again. It's not one question. There's so many different questions we just kind of lumped together. And what does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage? But we put it off for this long for a reason because it's such a difficult and involved topic so.

Shea Houdmann

I truly, truly enjoyed our conversation and I appreciate your insights. And hopefully people just hear the spirit in which we're trying to communicate, and that the Bible says some very specific things about divorce and remarriage. We believe there are biblical allowances for divorce and biblical allowances for remarriage after divorce. But what the Bible says is not what how society approaches it and that study the scriptures, look to see what God's word says about these issues and here at Got Questions we're happy to answer these questions, but hope you hear us communicating, it's really, really difficult sometimes to apply scripture to the situations we're presented with, because I really don't know if a couple where both of them have been divorced, remarried five times and half of which they're the innocent party there after the guilty party. Whether they can get remarried that's way above my or Sarah's pay grade, but we will still try to point you to scripture. Is there a way you can honor truly honor God in this potential additional marriage after divorces and all that, it could be a big mess. Best solution that we want to point you to stay faithful in your marriage. Look for ways to bring healing, repentance, forgiveness, restoration to your marriage. Seeking godly counsel through pastors through Christian counselor. Do everything you can to save marriages. Marriages are worth saving.

Shea Houdmann

So there's been the Got Questions podcast with Sarah Van Baale, a long time volunteer with the ministry who has a passion for this issue. Both through her study of the Scriptures and her own personal experience. So hope the conversation has been encouraging and edifying to you. And again, we'll

include some resources for those who might want to dig into this a little further, but trust me, there's a lot left we could dig into. Got questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.