**HOW DOES ONE CORRECT AN ADULTEROUS MARRIAGE?**

Many are surprised to learn that there is such a thing as an “adulterous marriage.” But Jesus clearly said, “And I say to you, ***whoever divorces his wife,*** except for fornication, ***and marries another, commits*** ***adultery; and*** ***whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”*** (Mt.19:9; cp. Mk.10:11-12; Lk.16:18; Rm.7:1-3). If the Lord’s words are true (and they are), then it follows that many people are living in adulterous marriages. Since adulterers cannot go to heaven (1Cor.6:9-10), it behooves us to know how such a marriage can be corrected. I know from experience that many find this topic very difficult. However, the difficulty is not so much in ***understanding*** what the Lord said, but in our willingness to ***accept*** it. The bottom line is that an adulterous marriage can only be corrected by repentance – ***which means that the sinful relationship must cease!*** Think with me about this timely subject.

Many will protest to what I have said above by asking, “Aren’t we forgiven of all our past sins when we are baptized?” And the answer is, “Of course all past sins are forgiven in baptism.” But therein lies the real problem! You see, baptism washes away past SINS (Ac.22:16) – not past SPOUSES! Being baptized does not change the fact that you have been previously married, and are now in an unlawful relationship. In other words, baptism does not turn wrong into right.

To illustrate, consider the example of John the baptizer, who confronted Herod about his unlawful marriage to his brother’s wife: “For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, ***“It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife”*** (Mk.6:17-18). Now if it is not lawful to have her, the only way to fix that is to STOP HAVING HER! Furthermore, if baptism washed away spouses, this would have been the ideal time for John to have added, “But come on down here to the Jordan River, and we’ll fix your marriage by baptizing both of you, and washing away your wife’s previous spouse; then, the two of you may continue in wedded bliss!” Yet John he did not say that, did he?

The basic problem here is that ***baptism must be preceded by repentance*** (Ac.2:38). If one steals money, baptism will not allow him to keep the money he stole (Lk.19:8). If one is an idolater, baptism will not allow him to keep worshiping false gods (1Cor.10:20-21). If one is in a false religion such as Judaism, baptism will not allow him to keep following that faith (Ga.1:13-24). If one is a polygamist, baptism will not allow him to keep all of his spouses (Mt.19:4-5). If one is in a “gay marriage” (?), baptism will not allow him to continue his homosexual relationship (1Cor.6:9-11). And using the very same logic, if one is in an adulterous marriage, baptism will not allow him to continue in that unlawful relationship! If not, why not?

Some say, “That places too much hardship on people.” Well, I guess that depends upon whether you want to be right with God or not! Consider an example from the Old Testament, where people had to divorce their unlawful spouses. In Ezra 10:1-3, there were some Jews who had married pagans – which was not permitted under the Law of Moses. Note that the solution to their problem was not to proselytize the pagans to Judaism. Instead, they were instructed ***“to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law”*** (v.3). Was that hard? Yes! But those who find themselves in violation of God’s will must face a similar hardship today. And while it is no longer sinful to marry an unbeliever (1Cor.7:12-14; 1Pt.3:1-2), adultery is still sinful (Mt.19:9). Further, any such relationship must cease in order to be right with God.

Believe me, I truly sympathize with those who are in such difficult situations. Yet my role as a preacher is not to tell people what they WANT to hear, but what they NEED to hear! These situations are truly where the proverbial “rubber meets the road” with respect to discipleship: ***“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”*** (Lk.14:26-27).

--Lanny Smith