

Why King David Cannot Be Used to Justify Divorce, Remarriage or Adultery

There have been numerous leaders who have referenced King David to justify their ability to continue ministering without a hitch despite unbiblically divorcing their spouses, remarrying and even committing adultery.

Before we examine this subject, let us first establish some general rules as a foundation: 1) The moral standards of the law as found in the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20) remain the same in the New Covenant; 2) The ceremonial Levitical sacrificial system has been done away with in Christ (see John 1:29; Heb. 9-10); 3) The sanctions for disobeying the law as applied in Israel's civic law have been modified in the New Covenant.

Regarding this last point: Punishments for disobeying the Ten Commandments as found in the extrapolation and application of Israel's civil law have been greatly modified because of God's grace as revealed in the New Testament. Specifically, the punishments for breaking the Ten Commandments regarding the sabbath, adultery, all sexual sins, blasphemy and disrespecting parents are no longer punishable by death. Those breaking these laws may be worthy of death as shown in Romans 1:28-32, but nowhere in the New Covenant do Jesus or the apostles advocate the death penalty for breaking these laws, including the sins of homosexuality and witchcraft.

Also, in John 8:1-12 Jesus affirms the punishment of stoning for the woman caught in adultery, but He doesn't enforce it. In addition, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says that many in the church actually lived immoral lives before their conversion but because they were washed and sanctified they were not under

the punishment of execution. Also of note: Christians in the first century were under Roman law and not Old Testament theocratic law.

The only capital offense that seems to be a constant in any age predates the Law of Moses and goes back to the time when God first instituted human government: the Noahic law in Genesis 9:5-6, in which a man's blood should be shed if he murders another human being. Also, Romans 13:1-7 seems to indicate that capital punishment is still somewhat enforced with God's approval, even in secular society. Thus, this shows us that God's sanctions for disobeying His law are very different in both testaments with the exception of the punishment for murdering a human being.

Furthermore regarding King David, in light of clear Old Testament law David should have been executed for both murder and adultery (Ex. 21:12). But for some unknown reason God suspended this biblical standard by not putting David to death. Thus, we can see God's dealings with David were based on His sovereign choice adjudicated by the Prophet Nathan, possibly based on His divine purpose in using David's seed to bring forth the Messiah and not based on known biblical law.

Perhaps the biblical prophecies regarding Jesus coming from the line of David through Judah overrode the penalties of biblical law for the sake of fulfilling the divine purpose (see Gen. 49:10; Matt. 21:15, 22:41-45; Heb. 7:14). Hence, we cannot use David as a biblical standard when it comes to adjudicating biblical decisions regarding murder and adultery. Using him as an example on how to deal with a Christian leader who commits murder, adultery or divorces their spouse and remarries is not biblically tenable.

Which present-day prophet has the credibility and accuracy equal to Nathan to render such a subjective decision reflecting God's sovereign will? If there was such a prophet today, how would we prove we can make such a biblical

exception based on their prophecy? And if we can make such an exception for one prophet or prophecy then what's to stop every so-called prophet or Christian who claims to hear from God from ignoring biblical standards based on personal prophecies?

Furthermore, the New Testament actually brought the standard of marriage back to the beginning when Jesus referred to the model of one man joining one woman as Adam joined with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Also, Jesus taught that God's standards were lower in the Old Covenant. In Mark 10:1-12 He says that God allowed divorce because of the hardness of their hearts. Consequently, in the New Testament a person who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. Also, in Matthew 5:32 Jesus became more specific and taught that if a person divorces their spouse for any reason other than infidelity they cause their spouse to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced person (a biblically unlawful divorce) commits adultery.

In Matthew 19:9 Jesus flat-out says the only allowable biblical reason for divorce is when a spouse commits sexual immorality. Thus, we clearly see that the standard of marriage in the Old Testament is not the standard we should use when making decisions regarding divorce and remarriage in the church today since the Old Testament standard is clearly lower than that of the New Testament.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 17:17 teaches that kings were not allowed to have many wives (which shows another instance of God suspending His law to allow David and Solomon to do this, to the demise of their kingdom and family!). But the New Testament brings the standard back to the one man-one woman model of the Garden of Eden. Paul teaches that church leaders (elders and deacons) are not allowed to have more than one wife at the same time (1 Tim. 3:2, 12) thus again nullifying the usage of King David's adultery and marriage experiences as

a model of faith and life for today's Christian leaders. (By that time, Bathsheba would have been at least David's third wife after Michal and Abigail.)

I will be the first person to admit that unpacking all these verses in the New Testament is not that simple. It also gets real tricky today when we deal with instances of spousal abuse, spousal drug addiction, child molestation involving a spouse with one of their children or another child, sexual abandonment (I know of an instance in which a wife never allowed her marriage to be consummated, with the husband divorcing her after a few years), and the like in which people claim they must divorce their spouses just to survive physically or emotionally. Also, 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 seems to teach that it is acceptable to divorce a spouse that leaves the marriage, but it isn't clear in this passage if Paul is giving them the green light to remarry or maybe just to stay single.

Since a detailed explanation of all these passages on marriage and divorce is not the purpose of this article, I will end by saying that the primary purpose of this article is to propose that before we can have a doctrine of marriage and divorce, or any other doctrine, we need to first understand the hermeneutical framework in which a passage of Scripture fits, based on which testament (Old or New or pre-Mosaic law) it comes from (with its peculiar standards, laws, patterns and rules of life). This is necessary before we can interpret any passage correctly and apply it to contemporary issues.

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