

What The Bible Says About Divorce And Remarriage



INTRODUCTION

In this study we will investigate what God's word has to say about these very important and often asked questions:

Does God approve of divorce under any circumstances and if so, what are the circumstances?

Does God ever approve of remarriage after divorce and if so, under what circumstances?

WHEN IS DIVORCE ALLOWED?

A key area of the Bible concerning this question is Matthew 19:3-9: "3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 7 They say unto him, **Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?** 8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, **committeth adultery**: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth **commit adultery**".

Note that this entire discussion between Christ and the Pharisees is in response to what Moses said in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which I quote on page 3. Related verses can be found in Matthew 5, Mark 10, and Luke 16:

Matthew 5:31-32: "It hath been said [by Moses in Deut 24:2], Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of

fornication, **causeth her to commit adultery**: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced **committeth adultery**".

Mark 10:9-12 - "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, **committeth adultery** against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she **committeth adultery**."

Luke 16:18 - "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, **committeth adultery**: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband **committeth adultery**".

DOESN'T 1 CORINTHIANS 7 SAY THAT DIVORCE IS OK?

1 Corinthians 7:10-15 - "10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, **Let not the wife depart from her husband**: 11 But and **if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband**: and let not the husband put away his wife. 12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 15 But if the unbelieving **depart**, let him **depart**. A brother or a sister is not under **bondage** in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

Departing is separation, NOT divorce. This is confirmed above since it is used in conjunction with the phrase 'be reconciled' (verse 11). The Greek word for 'departing' is **choreo** which means 'to go'. The Greek word for 'divorce' is a totally different word: **apuluo**. But since God calls us to peace (to live at peace with one another), we are not to threaten a spouse who wishes to leave. However, God expects a believing spouse to do everything possible to reconcile with a spouse who desires to leave.

The Greek word for 'bondage' (**douloo**) here refers to an obligation to serve the other person, to take care of their needs. Paul did not say the person was free to divorce and remarry. Christians are not compelled to meet the needs of a spouse who runs away (i.e. financially supporting one spouse who leaves the other). In verse 15 Paul is not contradicting Christ's statement in Matthew 19:6 nor is he contradicting what he just said in verse 11.

ISN'T DIVORCE OK IN THE CASE OF ADULTERY ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 5:32 &

MATTHEW 19:9?

Matthew 5:32 – "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, **saving for the cause of fornication**, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

Matthew 9:9 – "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except it be for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

Well, what is meant by the word 'fornication'?

Does 'fornication' (porneia in the Greek) in the context of Matthew 5 and 9 refer to any kind of sexual immorality [including adultery] at any time during the marriage or does 'fornication' refer to sexual immorality during the betrothal period?

We read in Matthew 1:19 that Joseph is referred to as Mary's "husband" even though they had not made their wedding vows yet: "Then Joseph her **husband**, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily." This may be what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 19:9, NOT adultery since you have to be married to commit adultery but you have to be unmarried to commit fornication. We see that adultery and fornication are considered to be two separate sins in Mark 7:21: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, **adulteries** (moicheia), **fornications** (porneia), murders".

WHEN IS REMARRIAGE ALLOWED?

In all the above verses, nowhere does it say that God approves of remarriage except **upon the death of the spouse** as mentioned in Romans 7:2-3. Nowhere does it say that divorce is the will of God. Our God is a God of reconciliation: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" [2 Cor 5:18]. Our God is also a God of forgiveness: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." [Matt 18:21-22].

BUT MY PASTOR SAYS...

Now that we are living in the days when anything goes, even in the Church, many people are misinterpreting the Bible in an attempt to get approval from God for remarriage after adultery occurs. This is done as follows:

1. Some people claim that since adultery in the Old Testament was punishable by the death of the guilty spouse, the innocent spouse is free to remarry because the adulterous spouse would have been dead had he or she been

caught in adultery back in the days of Moses. It may sound reasonable but the Bible doesn't say this.

2. There are people who use these verses in Deuteronomy 24 to justify remarriage after adultery:

"1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then **let him write her a bill of divorcement**, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. 2 And when she is departed out of his house, **she may go and be another man's wife**. 3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; 4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

These commandments were given to the Jews to deal with fornication as Jesus points out in Matthew 19:9 and yet many Jewish men at the time of Christ were using those verses to pick any little excuse to divorce their wives. Jesus straightened out the misconceptions and misunderstandings caused by those verses in Deuteronomy 24 when he called remarriage adultery in Matthew 19:9 AND Mark 10:12 AND Luke 16:18 AND Romans 7:3.

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALREADY REMARRIED?

If remarriage after divorce is adultery then a question arises for those who have already remarried:

Should we continue in adultery (the new marriage) or should we break it off (via a civil divorce agreement if necessary) and return to the one initial spouse whom we said we would commit to until death? The Mennonites and a very few other denominations believe all marriages but the first original marriage are invalid. If it is not really a marriage in the eyes of God, but rather an adulterous union that the state calls a marriage, shouldn't the believer stop committing adultery?

WHAT ABOUT BREAKING AN ENGAGEMENT?

Breaking an engagement may indicate that a decision to get engaged was made in haste but is it the same as getting divorced? It is much more of a public shame to terminate a marriage where you've made a lifetime commitment to your spouse before God and most of your close friends and relatives, usually at great expense and much preparation. The trauma is bound to be greater, especially once the marriage is consummated and the relationship has involved sacrifices on the part of both husband and wife. Jews

in Jesus' time considered engagement the same as being married. What about nowadays? We should not take engagement any less seriously than marriage. Since the individuals involved have not taken vows before God yet and so have not become one flesh, it appears that breaking an engagement is not as horrendous as a divorce but even so, a commitment to a future spouse regarding marriage was made and then broken and would need to be repented of just as if you bore false witness against your neighbor.

WHY DO PEOPLE GET DIVORCED?

People have all sorts of reasons for getting divorced, perhaps more reasons than they ever had for getting married. But there is always one root cause of divorce: SIN.

WHAT SINS LEAD TO DIVORCE?

The sins that lead to divorce include **selfishness**, pride, bitterness, disrespect, stubbornness, unfaithfulness and unforgiveness, among other things.

At least one of the 2 parties involved does not know what love is or never really knew what marriage is...

HOW THE BIBLE DESCRIBES LOVE:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - " 4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

1 John 3:18 - "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

John 15:13 - " 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Notice that regarding love, much is said about actions, behavior, and responsibility but nothing about romantic feelings.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE:

Genesis 2:18 & 24 - " 18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. ... 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Matthew 19:6 - " 6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Ephesians 5:25-33 - "25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

Colossians 3:18-19 - "18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

Malachi 2:14-16 - " 14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

MIXED MESSAGES

Do you know of any true Christian church that performs divorces? There are virtually no true Bible-believing churches that perform a divorce service because what God hath joined together, no God-fearing minister of God is going to want to cast asunder or have any involvement in the dissolving of a relationship that he knows is supposed to be permanent. AND YET MANY OF THESE SAME PASTORS WILL PERFORM MARRIAGE CEREMONIES FOR DIVORCED MEN AND WOMEN! Very often, it is in the name of love and compassion that they perform these marriages but it isn't love and compassion to the confused and wounded children who are satisfied with two and only two parents, the original two! And God is always interested in the reconciliation of the spouses. Let's start preaching that as much as we've been preaching love and compassion - an easy love and a compassion that neglects the needs of the children and that ignores the will of God.

YOUNG CASUALTIES - CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Are children ever better off if their parents get a divorce? They may be better off if the police arrest an abusive father for beating their mother. Then, both they and their father will learn that such behavior is unacceptable. However, children are far better off if their parents make every effort to be reconciled and to treat each other in a God glorifying way. Children need to know what a lifetime commitment is and they need to see it lived in the lives of their parents EVEN if one parent becomes totally uncommitted. **The value of a relationship lies in what you will do to keep it**, especially when faced with a spouse who challenges you to give up on your commitment to them just like we challenge God continually to give up on us, but thank God that He is faithful who has promised to keep us until He returns or takes us home.

TIL DEATH DO US PART - IS IT JUST A NICE THING TO SAY?

What message does God want the church to teach others about the permanence of marriage? People now more than ever, need to be told and shown that remarriage is wrong except with widows and widowers:

Romans 7:1-3: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man **as long as he liveth**? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but **if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband**. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but **if her husband be dead, she is free from that law**; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."

Remarriage prevents reconciliation and creates tremendous stress in parent-child relationships. What a wonderful witness for Christ (to a person's friends, relatives and children) it would be if a divorced man or woman would remain unmarried until death even if their former spouse remarried. Sometimes all the encouragement they need to do that, is to see the church leadership take a strong stand in this area and for the congregation to support them in this decision on an on-going basis. Every effort should be made to keep these folks from feeling like social lepers. Also, these folks need to be told that God expects them to maturely deal with the consequences of their past actions and to stop feeling sorry for themselves when they could possibly be spending more time ministering to others than thinking about themselves.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE:

I am the child of divorced parents and my father has remarried, my mother has not. I have seen the devastating effects of divorce on the entire family.

The remarriage of my father has been especially difficult on the relationships in the family. It has eliminated the possibility of family gatherings that include both of our parents. I admit, that like many people living through a bad marriage, I at one time thought that my parent's divorce would be for the best and that my father's remarriage was not going to be a problem. But at the time, I could not see the future. My siblings and I now have four new step-siblings who our father is obligated to spend most of his time with in order to please his wife, and yet he sometimes wonders why his relationship to his children is less than ideal. My mother, who has not remarried, has been able to spend more time with her children over the years since the divorce.

BEING CONTENT WHATEVER OUR LOT IN LIFE:

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

[Philippians 4:11]

Instead of quoting Paul when he said "it is better to marry than to burn" [1 Corinthians 7:9], shouldn't those who are divorced (and the rest of us too), when feeling lonely and unloved, quote Paul when he said "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" in Philippians 4:13 and "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" in Hebrews 13:5. Let us also remember what David proclaimed in Psalm 86:15-16: "thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant." And lastly, we must not forget what our blessed Lord said in the garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but thine, be done" [Luke 22:42].

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

What would be your primary motive for considering marriage or remarriage? To glorify God or to prevent loneliness that could otherwise be prevented by you getting more involved in ministering to others whose needs may be far greater than yours?

What would be your primary motive for considering divorce rather than being willing to be wronged and trying to work things out no matter how difficult that might be and no matter what the cost to you personally?

When do we stop being God's children or the Bride of Christ? Likewise, would we want God to treat His relationship to us as lightly and as temporary as many people treat marriage relationships today?

How might God use you to be a blessing to those around you whose marriages are failing or have failed?

What would God have you do in your own life about these issues?

What advice would God want you to give to someone who is considering divorce or considering remarriage after a divorce?

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"

Related articles on divorce and remarriage:

Divorce and Remarriage?
