

## What does the Bible say about divorce?

**Foundational Understanding** – God established marriage in **Genesis 2:24** – **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.** God’s design for marriage is one man and one woman for life. This is not only the specific design of God, but it is a very reflection of His character.

Since God established marriage, man has absolutely no right to change or re-define it. And even though man tries to change it, in God’s eyes it will never change. This means that marriage is ALWAYS between one man and one woman. This also means that marriage is ALWAYS for life.

**Principle #1** – God hates divorce and divorce is ALWAYS sin

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**Matthew 19:3-9** – **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? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, 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? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 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. 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.** (Parallel passage in Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:17-19)

(SEE ALSO Malachi 2:15-16 – “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. 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.” AND Romans 7:2-3 – “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth...so then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress...”)

This is the most straightforward explanation of divorce which Jesus Christ gives in the Scriptures. The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for *every* cause. Jesus Christ’s doesn’t talk about the law in his response, but rather directly references God’s view on divorce. God’s view is simply this: **they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.** In other words, God now sees these two people as one, and there is no dividing them again. Even if a divorce legally separates a pair, that pair is forever one flesh in the eyes of God. Sin is defined as anything that a man does which offends the character of God. Once a couple is seen in the eyes of God as one flesh, any break of this marriage covenant is offensive to the very character of God, therefore it must be sin.

To this the Pharisees asked a question: why did the law allow a divorce then? Jesus’ answer: sin. Because men are wicked, he rebels against the design of God in every way he can. Divorce is a reflection of man’s sinful heart as it has corrupted the beauty and intimacy of the God-ordained institution of marriage. To this Jesus adds a little extra warning: that any man who divorces his wife will commit adultery if he marries another. Jesus also warned in **Matthew 5:32** that the woman who is put away commits adultery when she marries another. Finally, the spouse who marries a divorced person also commits adultery. The only exception to this adultery warning is if the original divorce was because of an unfaithful partner. In this instance (as in EVERY instance) the divorce is still sin, but a re-marriage would not be seen as adultery in God’s eyes.

NOTE: The passage in Matthew 5:32 is not a divorce exception clause, nor is it referring to the betrothal period. It actually has nothing to do with divorce. Jesus Christ is speaking in the context about adultery, not about divorce. He does not say that divorce is OK if the spouse commits adultery; He is simply giving instances of when divorce is adultery and when it is not adultery. That doesn’t change the fact that, adultery or no adultery, divorce is always sin.

**Clarification:** This does not mean that there are never times when divorce is necessary. In numerous situations divorce is the best option for one or both spouses. Things such as abuse, perpetual unfaithfulness, or severe neglect are all reasons why a divorce might be necessary. This does not change the fact that divorce is sin, but sometimes sin is the consequence of our wrong decisions.

**Principle #2** – If divorce is absolutely necessary, the divorced persons should NEVER remarry

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**1 Corinthians 7:10-11** – And unto the married I command, *yet not I, but the Lord*, Let not the wife depart from *her* husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to *her* husband: and let not the husband put away *his* wife.

Once two people are one flesh in the eyes of God, there is no going back. Those two are always regarded in the eyes of God as being one flesh, even if they choose to separate legally. This is why it is adultery if the person marries another. It is therefore commanded by God that any person who leaves their spouse should NEVER remarry, unless it be to the same person whom they were married to before. Simply put, remarriage is not an option in the eyes of God.

**Principle #3** – If a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer should do his best to remain in the marriage, but (as best as I understand it right now) is under no obligation to seek reconciliation if there is a divorce.

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**1 Corinthians 7:12-16** –If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 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. 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. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save *thy* husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save *thy* wife?

God sees marriages that involve believers differently than He does the marriage of two unbelievers. If there are two believers married, or if there is one believer and one unbeliever, God sets those couples apart as representations of Himself to the world. This is why it is so important that marriage be forever. Marriage reflects the character and love of God, and this symbol must not be destroyed. The believing spouse should do his best to remain in the marriage in order to be an example and maybe see the unbelieving spouse come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. I am not completely sure what the phrase “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*” means. I know it CANNOT mean that this person is free to remarry, because that would contradict the character of God and His established word. Therefore, to the best I understand it, this phrase means that the believer is not obligated by God to seek reconciliation with the unbelieving spouse.

**Why is it so important?**

**Ephesians 5:22-33** – Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 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. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.

There are numerous reasons why the marriage relationship is important to God: (1) God designed mankind to marry. There are some who are called to be single, but as a whole the marriage relationship helps us as humans better reflect the attributes of the God who created us. (2) God established marriage, therefore He desires to sustain it as well. When God made woman, He made her *for* man. After doing this, He pronounced it very good. God's plan is perfect, and in that plan male and female are meant to be in union with each other. (3) Marriage is used in Scripture as a symbol to reflect the love of Jesus Christ for His church (believers). The immense love that Jesus Christ has for the believer is supposed to be reflected in the immense love of a husband for his wife. The complete reverence and submission that the believer displays toward Christ is supposed to be reflected in the complete reverence and submission of a wife toward her husband. When these virtues fail: when the husband fails to love his wife, or when the wife fails to reverence her husband, the picture of Christ and His church (believers) is marred. When a couple gets divorced, this is the greatest offense that a person can do to this picture. Christ will not, nor can He EVER be separated from the believer once they are united. You may have heard it this way: once saved, always saved. This is why the marriage relationship is so final: because it pictures the relationship of a believer to Christ through salvation. A believer cannot EVER be "divorced" from Christ, and a person should not EVER be divorced from his spouse.