

What does the Bible say about divorce?

Pastor Jamen Wikler, 2019

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 God sees marriage as permanent.

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

Matthew 19:3-6 – **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.** (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.

What about the “exception clause”

To this the Pharisees asked a **SECOND QUESTION**. We read this question and Jesus’ answer in **Matthew 19:7-9**, **“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.”** We see Jesus state a similar thing in His teaching in **Matthew 5:31-32**, **“It hath been said, 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.”** Why did the law allow a divorce then? Jesus’ answer: because men have hard hearts, and make bad decisions: **BUT FROM THE BEGINNING IT WAS NOT SO**. Men’s sin is a force of corruption upon God’s perfect designs, and divorce is a reflection this reality: that there are times when men’s fickle and listless hearts simply refuse to follow through with the responsibilities they have accepted, and lest the one spouse’s infidelity destroy two lives, divorce was made an option. 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.

This is very important to understand. When the Pharisee asked Jesus if it is lawful for a man to put away his wife, Jesus' answer was given in **Matthew 19:4-6** and may be summarized this way: "God has made them male and female. Marriage makes them one flesh. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." **That's it**: that was the entirety of his answer concerning whether or not it is lawful to divorce.

The "exception" clause that Jesus gives has **nothing** to do with His answer to the divorce question, but to the **second** question which they asked which was: "if divorce is wrong in God's eyes, why did the law of Moses let us divorce?" Jesus' answer was simply: "because of sin." So Jesus' second answer is **not** intended to give an exception to his first answer. If this had been His intent, he would have given it in His first answer. Rather, Jesus' second answer is intended to clarify the spiritual consequences that follow divorce. His second answer gives the **one circumstance** where divorce, and subsequent remarriage, is **not considered adultery** in God's eyes. The answer to the second question, as well as Jesus' statements in **Matthew 5:31-32** are about **adultery**, not divorce. This was intended to be a protection for women, as throughout history societies have often considered adulterous women as outcasts of society. Furthermore, until recent history women truly needed a husband for support and well-being, which is why the bill of divorce was so important in society. It allowed a woman the freedom to find another spouse to provide for her. The adultery stipulation was given in the law so that men would not just divorce their wives for no reason, as doing so outside of her fornication would mean that the man would be committing adultery by marrying another. So God builds in a stipulation, not where divorce is OK, but rather where remarriage after divorce is not adultery, to hinder man's compulsion to divorce his wife for any reason, and thus to protect women from impulsive and selfish husbands in Jewish society.

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. However, this does not change the fact that divorce is sin, but sometimes sin is the necessary consequence of our wrong decisions.

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

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.

Principle #3 – If a believer is married to an unbeliever, the believer should do his best to remain in the marriage, but is under no obligation to seek reconciliation if there is a divorce.

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. However, if the unbelieving party chooses to divorce the believer, particularly due to his/her faith, the believing spouse is not under any obligation to resist the divorce or seek reconciliation. NOTE: Paul’s allowance here **cannot** mean that the person is free to re-marry, because that would contradict Jesus’ teaching, as well as his own just a few verses earlier.

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 (all of those who have accepted the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ by grace, through faith alone (John 14:6 ; Ephesians 2:8-9). The immense love that Jesus Christ has for the believer is intended 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 (John 10:27-29). 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.

What does this all mean for those who have already been divorced?

We have a tendency in Christian culture to “rank” sins. Certain sins are more egregious than other sins, and certain other sins are hardly worth mentioning. God does not see sin this way. Sin is sin, and while certain sins have greater physical, emotional, and even spiritual consequences than others **in this life**, all sin is unrighteousness with God. The blessing of this reality, however, is that Jesus’ death on the cross covers ALL sins, including divorce. That means the “sin of divorce” is covered by the cross just as much as the sin of lying, or the sin of stealing.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and thus have been personally forgiven for your sins, then the sin of divorce is just as much forgiven as any other sin you have or ever will commit. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, **“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”**

If you have been divorced or remarried following your salvation, you need to recognize that these actions are not pleasing to God, and you need to repent and seek restoration of fellowship with God as taught in **1 John 1:9**, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

God never desires a person to atone for sin with another sin. If you have found yourself in a situation where you have been divorce and remarried, and you now recognize that you remarriage is not right in God’s eyes, **do not divorce your spouse in an attempt to “make things right!”** why uproot and destroy more lives through some sense of restitution? God does not want this. Simply confess your sin, clarify what you know to be wrong, and determine to move forward for God in righteousness, being always willing to help others avoid the mistakes you made. As was mentioned previously, there may be negative consequences for sin. There are certain offices in the church that cannot be held by divorced persons (Pastor and Deacon, according to **1 Timothy 3**). The consequences, however, are not all-encompassing. **God can still use you,** and is far more likely to use you as a repentant sinner than his is as an obstinate denier of God’s teachings.