

*Question: My husband and I have had several bad marriages; and while we knew it was wrong, we had sex together before we were married. We pray daily for forgiveness. Can God accept us into heaven when we die?*

Only God can pass judgment on who will or will not enter heaven, for he is the only one who can know the sincerity of our hearts. However, I believe that the Bible offers some guidance and hope for this kind of situation.

The Lord God has clearly stated, “I hate divorce” (Malachi 2:18). But this does not mean that (unlike other sins that God hates) divorce is some kind of unforgivable sin. Proverbs 6:16-19 says: “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.” Our Holy God hates all sin and evil, but that did not stop Jesus from giving his life that sinners might be forgiven (Romans 5:8). In 1 John 1:9 it says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Also, after listing an assortment of sins that include sexual sins like fornication and adultery, the apostle Paul stated that those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But then he added: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Even if you were treated sinfully by your former spouses, it is still important that you both accept personal responsibility for the failures in those marriages. You did make vows before God that were not kept, and it is possible that a different response to each situation might have brought about a different result. However, that is now all in the past; it can't be undone. According to God's law, you can't go back and re-do those previous marriages (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Therefore, I would encourage you to acknowledge your own sins, seek forgiveness and move forward with Christ. God's grace is more than adequate when a person comes humbly and sincerely before God seeking forgiveness (Romans 5:20; 6:23).

It is also important that you recognize that repentance is essential to forgiveness. Jesus said, “If your brother . . . sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4). Repentance is a change of mind that comes from a sorrow for sin and results in a change of behavior. In this case, it means a sorrow for the divorces of the past that leads you to stop divorcing and remarrying. If you have genuinely repented, you should seek out a Christian marriage counselor and do all possible to remain faithful to your marriage vows. By openly acknowledging the sins of the past, turning from the practice of those sins and offering your lives in faith and obedience to Christ, you have every reason to be confident of the Lord’s forgiveness. I pray you will trust in Christ to help you serve him faithfully.

If I can help you further with questions about divorce and remarriage, please call me.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12<sup>th</sup>, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881.]      2011/08/05