

What Does the Bible Teach

About

Divorce and Remarriage in the Church?

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What Does the Bible Teach About Divorce and Remarriage in the Church?

Preface

Almost everyone today has been impacted by divorce, either directly or indirectly. Many of us have seen the painful consequences of a broken marriage and family. You may be reading this because your spouse has filed for divorce and now you're not sure what to do. Or perhaps you're the one considering divorce because you see no other way out. You may be reading this because of unresolved guilt or anger over a divorce. Others may have a heartfelt question about remarriage or marrying someone who has been divorced -- "Will it make me guilty of adultery?" Yet others may simply want to know what Parkway Community Church's stand is on divorce and remarriage.

Whatever your reason, it's assumed that you're genuinely interested in the answer to the question asked in the title, "What does the Bible teach about divorce and remarriage in the church?" In other words, "What does God say about it to Christians?" You may not have expressed it in so many words before, but it's assumed that you sincerely want to please the Lord Jesus in all you believe and do in life. It's our prayer that you approach this study with a growing passion for the supremacy of Jesus Christ in your life, especially in your marriage and family.

After careful study of the Bible, prayer, and serious discussion by the board of elders, this paper presents Parkway's position on divorce and remarriage. It should not be used in place of asking for assistance from the pastors or elders. If you're struggling, or just have questions, it's our heart to help you.

Introduction to Marriage

Marriage has both a human and divine side to it. The divine (God's) side may not be obvious, but it's as real as the human side. God himself established the institution of marriage with Adam and Eve. Even more remarkable is that the Bible indicates that God personally joins together every husband and wife! Matthew 19:6 says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."¹ The union between a husband and wife even pictures the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32). These truths should humble us in our view of marriage.

One place that the human and divine sides of marriage meet is in the exchange of wedding vows. A vow is a solemn promise made not only before people, but also before God as witnesses to what was promised. It's really the exchange of vows that establishes the relationship and obligations of a husband and wife. Sexual intimacy consummates this relationship and is the unique, physical expression of it. In biblical terminology, the creation of a relationship with a non-relative, involving obligations, and established through a vow (oath) that is consummated (ratified) is called a covenant.² A covenant can be thought of as a sacred contract that binds two parties together. Like any legal contract, it's a very serious matter to break a marriage covenant.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

² Gordon P. Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant (Baker Books, 1998), p. 184.

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Malachi 2:13-14 talks about the fact that marriage is a covenant witnessed by God, “Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

Acknowledging the divine side of marriage, the solemnity of a marriage covenant made before God and other witnesses, and the profoundness of sexual intimacy is essential to understanding what the Bible teaches about divorce.

Introduction to Divorce

The New Testament passages which speak directly about divorce are Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12, Luke 16:18, and I Corinthians 7:10-16. We'll only look at I Corinthians and Matthew (because his record of what Jesus said is more comprehensive than Mark and Luke).

It's not our intent to write a paper for scholars. However, it's necessary for anyone who wants to become spiritually mature to live on solid food and not milk alone (Heb. 5:12-14). There is an old saying that *a text taken out of context becomes a pretext* (hides the real intention) for whatever we would like it to mean. Therefore, to properly understand a Bible text we must understand its historical and literary context. The historical context tells us what the situation was that caused the text to be written. The literary context tells us what is the author's point and train of thought.³ It will be helpful at this point to follow along in your own Bible or reference the Scriptures in the appendix.

Divorce in Matthew 19:1-12

The historical context of this passage is introduced by verse 3, “Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?’”

The hypocritical nature of the Pharisees and the fact that they came to test Jesus are important, contextual clues. The “test” was most likely an attempt to embroil Jesus in a controversial debate going on in those days between the rival schools of rabbis Hillel and Shammai. “Hillel taught that a Jew could divorce his wife for any cause whatever. Shammai held that divorce was lawful only for the cause of fornication. This dispute, debated up and down the land, was between the *every-cause* of Hillel and the *one-cause* of Shammai.”⁴

Rather than fall into the Pharisees' trap by debating the human side of marriage, Jesus redirects their attention to the divine side of marriage in verses 4-6: “‘Haven't you read,’ Jesus replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?”

³ Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Zondervan, 1993), pp. 22-24.

⁴ Guy Duty, Divorce and Remarriage (Bethany House Publishers, 1983), p. 24.

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So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.””

There are two noteworthy things about Jesus’ reply. First, he redirected them to the Word of God (specifically to Genesis 2:24) by asking, “Haven’t you read?” The Old Testament Scriptures were given to the Jews because God chose them to be his people and made his own covenant with them. The Pharisees were the leaders of the Jews and the top Old Testament scholars. Jesus expected them to have already read, studied, and understood the truth taught about marriage in Genesis 2:24 (remember this for now because we’ll come back to it in the study of divorce in I Corinthians 7).

Second, by going back to the beginning when God established the institution of marriage, Jesus reminded the Pharisees of the two principles that are essential and foundational in God’s design of marriage:

1. *Leave his father and mother and be united to his wife* indicates a new, lifelong union is formed. The word “united” literally means to cleave or cling together. It implies an ongoing loyalty rather than a one time act.⁵ **In this paper, we’ll refer to this as the “cleaving principle.”**
2. *The two will become one flesh* indicates the two are bonded together by God himself. This bond can be experienced spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. But God intended sexual intimacy for expressing and experiencing it in its fullest form. Obviously, a true bond requires a sexual relationship to be exclusive and carried out only within marriage. **We’ll refer to this as the “one flesh principle.”**

Nevertheless, the Pharisees were not humbled by Jesus’ appeal to God’s design for marriage. Instead they tried to confuse the human and divine sides of marriage by misusing one of the Old Testament laws. This takes place in verses 7-9, “‘Why then,’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.’”

Jesus essentially explained that divorce was a human invention and not something that existed from the beginning when God instituted marriage. He concedes that Moses permitted divorce, but only because of the hardness and stubbornness of men’s hearts against their wives and God’s ways. Nevertheless, it appears that even in the New Testament age that Jesus permits divorce under certain circumstances when he said, “...anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

In the section on remarriage, we’ll come back to Jesus’ statement that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery. But for now, let’s focus on the exception for

⁵ Hugenberger, p. 161.

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divorce. Although Jesus isn't advocating or requiring divorce for marital unfaithfulness, he is allowing it. What exactly is marital unfaithfulness? In the original Greek language, the word used is *porneia*. Other versions of the Bible translate this word as fornication, immorality, or sexual immorality. We'll use the word "fornication" because it's the traditional translation and most commonly used in scholarly books on this subject.

Some Bible scholars believe that fornication refers only to premarital, sexual sin. Therefore, their position is that the exception for divorce applies only for unfaithfulness during the betrothal or engagement period.⁶ They point to the example of Joseph's and Mary's betrothal in Matthew 1:19, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

However, their interpretation is in the minority and with good reason. In Greek and Hebrew, the word "fornication" includes adultery, incest, homosexuality, prostitution, perversion, and all sexual sin, both before and after marriage.⁷ Jay Adams, a widely respected theologian and pastor, uses Jeremiah 3:1-8 to disprove their position. To paraphrase Adams, God himself divorced Israel for adulterous fornication. Jeremiah 3:8 says, "I the LORD gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery [literally fornication]." God pictures Israel as his wife. He uses the words adultery and fornication synonymously within the context of his "marriage and divorce" of Israel.⁸

This passage in Jeremiah may surprise many people! Obviously the language is figurative, but God wouldn't picture himself as divorcing for fornication if he considered it to be sinful in literal marriages. It appears that spiritual fornication was enough to break Israel's covenant relationship with God. Likewise, physical fornication is enough to break the covenant relationship in marriage. It violates an exclusive, sexual relationship and the "one flesh principle."

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that divorce is permissible for fornication (sexual immorality) because it breaks the marriage covenant and violates the "one flesh principle."

Although divorce is allowable in this situation, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's desirable or inevitable. It may be possible through heartfelt sorrow and repentance by the guilty partner, plus Christ-empowered forgiveness and unconditional love by the offended partner, to avoid divorce to God's glory. God said to the prophet Hosea whose wife had committed adultery, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods..." (Hos. 3:1) Remember the love and forgiveness God shows us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8)

⁶ The betrothal was much more formal and binding than modern day engagement periods.

⁷ Duty, p. 52.

⁸ Jay E. Adams, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible (Zondervan, 1980), pp. 55-56.

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Divorce in I Corinthians 7:10-16

The historical context of this passage is that some people were saying it was better to be single than married. In other words, they believed it was more spiritual and pious to live a celibate life. Not only so, but they tried to enforce this lifestyle on all Christians. The Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul asking him about this and now he is answering them. Verse 1 introduces this context, “Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry [literally, not to touch a woman].”

Paul answers their question and gives instructions, but he does so based on a person’s current marital status. He addresses the married in verses 1-7, widows and widowers in verses 8-9 and 39-40, those considering divorce in verses 10-16, the engaged to be married in verses 25-28, 34, 36-38, and other singles in verses 29-35.⁹ We’ll focus only on verses 10-16 which deal with divorce.

Notice these contextual clues as you read the verses below. The introductory phrases (underlined) show that Paul is talking to two groups: (1) a first group in verses 10-11 consisting of believers married to believers; (2) a second group in verses 12-16 called “the rest,” consisting of believers married to unbelievers.¹⁰ As a side note, when Paul says: “(not I, but the Lord)” and “(I, not the Lord)” – he doesn’t mean one is the Lord’s command and the other is his opinion. He simply means that the Lord Jesus spoke directly on the first issue while he was on earth. But the second issue is a new one that Paul is now addressing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.” (vss. 10-11)

“To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” (vss. 12-16)

To the first group (believers married to believers), Paul gives the same command against divorce that the Lord Jesus gave in Matthew 19:9, only in Paul’s own words. Most likely Paul doesn’t mention the exception for fornication because it’s not relevant to the Corinthians’ concern about

⁹ William A. Heth, *Jesus on Divorce: How My Mind Has Changed*, p 11.

¹⁰ Adams, p. 36.

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celibacy. Paul also says that if a Christian couple disobeys by divorcing anyway, then they must remain unmarried or be reconciled in their marriage.

Also, remember the comment we made on Matthew 19:4-6 that Jesus expected the Jews, God's chosen people, to have already understood what Scripture taught about marriage (see p. 3). Likewise in this first group, Paul is speaking to believers (the church) who are God's chosen people. We too are expected to read, study, and understand God's truth about marriage, especially since we have the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

A Christian husband and wife who realize that marriage has a divine side and remember their covenant vows before God should know to reject divorce. Jesus laid down his life to pay for their sins. He grants them mercy and forgiveness over and over. He gave them the Word of God to guide them. He gave them the Holy Spirit who can transform their attitudes and actions. He gives them Christian brothers and sisters who want to help and pray for them. He even gives them leaders who dare to firmly use discipline if necessary.

However, it appears according to verse 11 that sometimes two believers will still not avail themselves of these precious resources and a divorce may result. In that case, they must remain unmarried so that reconciliation is always possible. Because Christ gave his church the ministry of reconciliation and committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16-21), the church is obligated to help the couple be reconciled to God and each other.

Now turning to the second group (believers married to unbelievers). We already mentioned that Paul is addressing a new issue in the church. As the gospel message spread to Gentiles in pagan cities around the world, some people were saved but their spouses may have remained unbelievers. Although it may be hard to be married to someone who doesn't share your faith in Christ, Paul's command is to stay married. Peter says it in an even more practical way, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." (1 Pet. 3:1-2) Because there is a believer in the family, the unbelieving spouse and any unbelieving children are indirect beneficiaries of God's sanctifying work.

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that a believer may not divorce an unbelieving spouse who is willing to stay together. Clearly this implies that the believer live in such a way that the unbelieving partner sees a relationship with Christ as attractive.

However, Paul recognizes that not all unbelieving spouses may accept their partners' Christian lifestyle. If an unbeliever is determined to leave and rejects reconciliation, Paul says to let him/her go because "God has called us to live in peace." To distraughtly hang onto the marriage through legal wrangling, financial barriers, or other worldly means will not bring peace. If the unbeliever insists on leaving, the believer is not bound to the marriage in such circumstances. Divorce of this type is called *desertion* or *abandonment*. Desertion breaks the marriage covenant and violates the "cleaving principle."

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Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that divorce is permissible for desertion by an unbeliever because it breaks the marriage covenant and violates the “cleaving principle.”

Someone might ask, “But what if a believer deserts a believer? Isn’t the abandoned spouse in a catch-22 because he/she must remain unmarried?” If both partners are professed believers, then this situation should be handled according to the reconciliation process in Matthew 18:15-17. Eventually this situation becomes a matter of church discipline if the deserting partner refuses to reconcile. If even church discipline fails to bring about humility and repentance, then the hardened person would be treated as an unbeliever according to Matthew 18:17 and a deserter according to I Corinthians 7:15.¹¹

Introduction to Remarriage

Remarriage isn’t wrong in and of itself. No one would argue that widows or widowers shouldn’t be permitted to marry again. The Bible is clear that the death of a spouse frees a person to remarry. I Corinthians 7:39 says, “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” However, what about remarriage after divorce while the former spouse is still alive? Is the second marriage considered adulterous? There are three preliminary concepts that are essential to understanding what the Bible teaches about remarriage.

First, remember from previous sections that there are valid and invalid reasons for divorce according to God’s Word. Fornication and desertion are the only biblically valid causes for divorce.

Second, divorce is a legal transaction that ends the marriage according to human law. This was true even in biblical times and involved a certificate of divorce.¹² Whether the reason for the divorce is biblically valid or not, a divorced person is legally unmarried and subject to other human laws such as alimony and child support. I Corinthians 7:10-11 says in part, “A wife must not separate [divorce] from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.” We already learned that this type of divorce is not for a valid cause. Nevertheless, the divorced woman is said to be unmarried.

Third, although every divorce legally ends the marriage, it doesn’t necessarily release a person from the divine side of marriage and sacred obligation before God to the former spouse. We’ll see that only a divorce for a biblically valid cause frees a person to remarry by releasing them from divine obligation to the previous marriage.

¹¹ Adams, pp. 88-91.

¹² See Deut. 24:1-4, Isa. 50:1, Jer. 3:8, Matt. 5:31.

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Remarriage in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9

Before reading the verses below, remember the historical context. In the section on divorce in Matthew 19 we emphasized that Jesus was speaking to Jews whom he expected to already know God's truth about marriage (see p. 2). They basically were like Paul's first group of believers married to believers.

Matthew 19:9 says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." Ignoring the exception for a moment, this verse clearly says anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery! This can only mean that the divorced man is still bound by divine obligation to his ex-spouse. This obligation includes sexual faithfulness. However, this doesn't mean the divorced couple may have relations with each other because they are in fact legally unmarried now. In this situation, the only ways to be sexually faithful are to remain unmarried (celibate) or else be reconciled (remarried) to each other. When the man marries another woman, he commits adultery because he spurns his sacred obligation before God by being sexually unfaithful and making reconciliation impossible.

Matthew 5:32 says something similar from a different perspective, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." This verse doesn't say anything about the man marrying another woman, but it's assumed in that culture that his wife would remarry causing her to become an adulteress. Also, the man who marries her participates in her unfaithfulness and commits adultery! He also interferes with her divine obligation and prevents reconciliation. These truths may be hard to accept, but it is what Scripture says.

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that divorce for an unbiblical reason does not free a person to remarry because he/she is still bound by divine obligation to the ex-spouse. God's reason for this limitation is to make reconciliation possible and desirable.

However, what about the exception for fornication? Some Bible scholars believe that the exception applies only to divorce. In other words, they allow divorce for fornication, but neither partner may remarry. Whether the exception applies only to divorce or also applies to remarriage largely comes down to a grammatical study. The majority, including leading Greek scholars, support the interpretation that the exception also applies to remarriage.¹³

The grammatical study is not too difficult to understand, but must be read carefully. A well written paper on this subject explains, "The sentence in Matthew 19:9 involves a singular subject ('whoever') with a relative clause ('divorces his wife...and marries another woman') and one verb ('commits adultery'). The verse without the exception clause reads as follows: 'Whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman commits adultery.' It is grammatically impossible for the main verb 'commits adultery' to refer to two different subjects. The 'whoever' commits adultery except in one case ('except for immorality'). In contrast, the exception clause highlights the fact that the one who divorces and remarries in light of a spouse's

¹³ Duty, pp. 45-51.

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sexual immorality does not commit adultery... We could read the verse then in this way: ‘Whoever divorces his wife...and marries another woman commits adultery. But in the case of sexual immorality, whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman does not commit adultery.’”¹⁴

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that divorce for fornication frees a person to remarry and releases him/her from divine obligation to the offending spouse.

Remarriage in I Corinthians 7:10-16

Remember the context of these verses is Paul speaking to two groups: (1) a first group in verses 10-11 consisting of believers married to believers; (2) a second group in verses 12-16 consisting of believers married to unbelievers.

In the section on divorce in I Corinthians 7 (see p. 4), we already established the meaning of verses 10-11 which say, “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that this type of divorce between two believers does not release them from divine obligation to each other. They must remain unmarried or be reconciled. This is identical to the invalid divorce situation in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

Now turning again to Paul’s second group, verse 15 says, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.” Some Bible scholars believe that “is not bound in such circumstances” only means that the believer isn’t bound to live with the unbeliever if he leaves (divorces). Remarriage isn’t permitted because the believer is still bound to the marriage itself. However, again the majority, including leading Greek scholars, support the interpretation that “is not bound” means release from divine obligation and freedom to remarry.¹⁵ Even apart from the overwhelming scholarly support, to make “is not bound” refer to “not living together” is unconvincing. If the unbeliever leaves, the believer has no choice about continuing to live together anyway.

Therefore, we believe that the Bible teaches that divorce for abandonment by an unbeliever frees a person to remarry and releases him/her from divine obligation to the deserting spouse.

Summary of Divorce and Remarriage

In summary, God established the institution of marriage based on the principles of a lifelong union and oneness, expressed by an exclusive, sexual relationship. God personally joins together

¹⁴ Richard J. Vincent, *Divorce and Remarriage: Pastoral Applications of the Reformed Position* (www.theocentric.com), p 12.

¹⁵ Duty, p. 99-111.

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every husband and wife. A marriage covenant is created when solemn vows are exchanged before God and other witnesses. Therefore, divorce is a very serious matter. Since we are implored on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), we should make every effort to be reconciled with the marriage partner to whom God has joined us.

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world and God's ideal is not always possible. We believe that the Bible teaches that divorce is permitted for fornication and desertion. These two causes alone are recognized by God as valid for a divorce to release a person from divine obligation to the marriage. The person is free to be remarried to anyone he/she wishes, but the new partner must belong to the Lord (be a professing believer) (1 Cor. 7:39). It seems gently implied by this verse to be careful not to remarry naively.

We believe that the Bible teaches that divorce for unbiblical reasons doesn't release the partners from divine obligation to each other. Because this obligation includes sexual faithfulness, they must remain unmarried or be reconciled to each other. As hard as it may be to accept, they commit adultery if they marry someone else. Who they marry also commit adultery by participating in their unfaithfulness as well as preventing reconciliation.

It should be noted that the position presented in this paper agrees with the traditional, majority, evangelical view on divorce and remarriage held by Christianity for centuries. The board of elders arrived at this position without presupposing it. After serious discussion at a retreat, we were unanimously persuaded that this position is the one most faithful to God's Word.

Conclusion

The danger of writing a paper about divorce is that it tends to focus attention on the valid and invalid reasons for divorce rather than on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We don't want to be like the Pharisees who would rather debate the Son of God than worship him. Our mission is to spread a passion for the supremacy of Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Word. To that end, we've humbly and faithfully tried to answer, "What does the Bible teach about divorce and remarriage in the church?"

However, it's impossible in a short paper to address all the heartfelt questions about specific situations in marriage (abuse, chronic lying, alcoholism, etc.). Again, it's our heart to help you. Many Christians suffer in silence thinking marriage problems are a private matter. Jesus understands your sense of privacy. That's why he says in Matthew 18:15-17 (applying it to marriage), if your spouse sins against you, show him his fault just between the two of you. The majority of marriage problems are solved this way. But if he will not listen regarding some harmful sin, take one or two others along. The one you take along can be a pastor, elder, or mature Christian brother or sister. God designed this reconciliation process to start very privately and only become increasingly more public if needed to avoid even greater problems.

Some of you, now knowing what the Bible teaches, may realize you've sinned in the past regarding a divorce or remarriage. Is divorce for an invalid cause an unpardonable sin? Does an adulterous remarriage continue to be adultery? If the answers are yes, then the gospel of Jesus

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Christ is not good news after all. I Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **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.**” If you realize that you sinned, sincerely confess it to God and put your trust in Jesus Christ who paid for our failures on the cross. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) We also encourage you to confess to the former spouse you sinned against and ask forgiveness. (James 5:16)

Someone might protest that this encourages divorce for any cause and adulterous remarriage because it’s easy to ask for God’s forgiveness. We should not honor that argument any more than Paul did when he said, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Rom. 6:1-2)¹⁶

It seems fitting to close with a passage that both honors marriage and glorifies Jesus Christ:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Eph. 5:22-33)

¹⁶ Adams, p. 95.

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Appendix of Scriptures

Matthew 5:31-32

³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 18:15-17 (Reconciliation Process)

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matthew 19:1-12

¹ When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. ³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" ⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

1 Corinthians 7:10-16

¹⁰ To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶ How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?