

# Marriage and Divorce

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## Introduction

Divorce has become all too common in our society today. The local church is not immune to its affects. Many who profess to be Christians pursue divorce and probably all of us have known people who have been divorced. More often than not, someone who is in some way connected to our church is heading toward divorce or in the midst of a divorce.

However, divorce is more emotionally wrenching than the death of a spouse and causes incredible upheaval for both family and future generations. It is often long years in coming and long years in the settlement and in the adjustment. The sense of failure and guilt and fear can torture the soul. Court room controversy compounds the personal misery. And then there is often the agonizing place of children, as parents hope, or at times assume, their problems will not ruin their children's view of marriage in the future. Throw in custody battles and financial strain, and the ramifications of divorce on society is monumental.

It is our desire to help each married couple to experience God's blessing upon their life and part of our ministry is to teach what the Bible says about marriage and divorce. It is unfortunate that there is no universal agreement among Christians on this topic, but this does not mean that the Scripture is unclear about the subject. The problem appears to lie more with the application of the Bible in the difficult situations of life than with the correct understanding of the biblical teaching. However, proper interpretation precedes proper application.

## The Bible and Marriage

### *Marriage is a God-ordained covenant:*

Marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is set apart by God to signify to the world the relationship between His Son and His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:21-33). Marriage is literally an institution established by God. Marriage was even used as a picture of God's relationship with His chosen people, Israel (Isaiah 49:18; 62:5) and later to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Church (1 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:32)

### *Marriage is a combination of two lives and experiences into one:*

Marriage involves leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Genesis 2:24 teaches that the husband and wife are "one flesh" which no man should separate (Matthew 19:4-6). More than that, Jesus said, "what God has joined together, let no man separate." Therefore, when a couple is married, God is joining them together. This joining is the physical union between the husband and wife is part of marriage.

### *Marriage partners have God-designed roles:*

The husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church (Ephesians 5:25-27). The husband will give account to God for his decisions. A man is responsible for setting the spiritual tone in his family (Psalm 128:1-4, Genesis 17:26-27). The man is to provide for the family (Genesis 3) and protect their welfare (1 Peter 3:7).

The wife is to submit to the husband's leadership (Ephesians 5:22), provide support and encouragement (Psalm 128, Titus 2:4-5, Proverbs 31) and are to respect their husbands, even in difficult times (Proverbs 27:15).

If we confuse these God-designed roles, trouble follows. Many, even Christians, have sought to undermine the position of the husband in the marriage relationship. This has served to damage marriages and more importantly, has dishonored the Lord by ignoring His Word.

### *Marriage is not merely physical consummation:*

There are some who argue that if any man and woman have sex, God considers the two of them to be married. The basis for this argument is the fact that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is the ultimate fulfillment of the "one flesh" principle (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31, Matthew 19:5). However, if a couple is legally and ceremonially married, but for some reason is unable to engage in sexual intercourse, the couple is still considered married. 1 Corinthians 7:2 says sex before marriage is sexual immorality. *Sexual relations of any sort outside of marriage are specifically prohibited by God (Ex. 20:14, Lev. 18:22-23, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 1 Thes. 4:3-5).* If sexual intercourse causes a couple to be married, it could not be considered immoral, as the couple would be considered married the moment they

engaged in sexual intercourse. There is no biblical basis for an unmarried couple to have sex and then declare themselves to be married, thereby declaring all future sexual relations to be more moral and God-honoring.

### ***Marriage is not for all:***

Matthew 19:12 describes people who have chosen to remain single for the sake of the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 describes reasons for choosing to remain single in light of present difficulties (7:26) which can lead to additional concerns in this present life. So, being single is not a second-rate existence and should not be seen as advantageous in serving God.

### ***Marriage between a Christian and non-Christian is not allowed:***

*A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 6:14-15).* Marriages honor God when both spouses are pursuing Christ, submitting to the Law of Love, considering each other as more significant, and portraying Christ's sacrificial love for his bride. Our love for Christ must always supersede our love for any person (Matt. 6:33).

## **The Bible and Divorce**

*The most clear message concerning divorce in the Bible is that it is not God's plan in any circumstance (Romans 7:1-3, 1 Corinthians 7:39).* The relationship was a mystery in that it set forth symbolically in physical form the relationship between Himself and His people. Therefore God hates divorce for what it does to people and for what it does to the glory of His own covenant with the church. Therefore, we do not encourage divorce. Forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferred to separation or divorce, even when adultery has occurred. This is implied in Matthew 18:21-22 - "Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive Him?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'".

### ***Divorce between two Christians***

There is a difference between what God intends and what God allows. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16, yet ***because of the failings of man, God allows divorce, between two Christians, on only one circumstance - adultery (Matthew 19:3-12).***

In Matthew 19, Jesus is questioned concerning Moses permitting divorce in Deuteronomy 24:14. Jesus describes God's ideal that marriage should be permanent, and that divorce and remarriage results in adultery, with an exception - immorality. Immorality is a term referring to acts of a sexual nature, specifically adultery. If a spouse has indeed broken the sexual bond, the other partner is not guilty of adultery by ending the relationship and remarrying.

The adultery must be known for a fact, not merely assumed. We have no right to end a marriage based upon suspicions alone. Although Jesus mentions lust as a sin akin to adultery (Matthew 5:28), it is not in itself technically an act of immorality. We understand that passages such as Matthew 5:31-32, Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18 do not include an exception for the case of immorality. However, the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is sufficient to allow for divorce in the case of immorality.

### ***Divorce between a Christian and non-Christian***

If a non-Christian leaves or breaks the marriage covenant, the believing spouse is free from the marriage covenant (1 Corinthians 7:15). However, if the non-believing spouse wishes to remain married, the believing spouse has no grounds for divorce (1 Corinthians 7:12-13)

## **The Bible and Remarriage**

Marrying again is not commanded by God, but in some cases it is permitted by God. Marrying again may not be God's best. A single life of service may be preferred (1 Cor. 7:7, 39-40), or the divorced spouse may wait for the repentance and return of an aggrieving former spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

### ***Remarriage of widows:***

Since death breaks the marriage bond (Romans 7:2-3, 1 Corinthians 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow and widower, if marriage is with another believer.

***Remarriage of two believers:***

A divorced spouse who *did not* break the previous marriage covenant, is free to remarry a believer (Matthew 19:9), if he or she has confessed all known sin in the divorce, and has made significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes.

Persons who were divorced “wrongfully,” and who married again without scriptural warrant, should not withdraw from their subsequent marriage. But it would be appropriate for them to confess this as sin personally and to receive forgiveness from God.

**Remarriage of formerly married spouses:**

Marrying a former spouse is permitted if neither person has been married to a different person after their divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). However, a believing former spouse may not remarry an unbelieving former spouse (2 Cor. 6:14-15, 1 Cor. 7:39).

**Marriage, Divorce and the Church**

A person who calls Antioch Christian Church home and who violates this understanding of marriage, divorce and marrying again will be counseled by the church, which may lead to discipline by the church. He or she may be restored to full privileges of Christian fellowship as prescribed by the church leadership.

There is no past divorce or marriage that in itself brings church discipline. No divorced and married-again participants will automatically come under discipline because their divorce or marriage falls into a category which this statement declares to be “wrongful.” But it would be appropriate for them to confess this as sin personally and to receive forgiveness from God.