

The Biblical View on Divorce and Remarriage

- I. The Confusion Today
 - A. No Divorce and No Remarriage
 - B. Divorce but No Remarriage
 - C. Divorce on Biblical Grounds and Remarriage Allowed
 - D. Divorce on Any Grounds and Remarriage on Any Grounds
- II. The Biblical Perspective of Marriage
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 - a. Eve Completed Adam - Genesis 2:18a
 - b. Eve was a Complement to Adam - Genesis 2:18b
 - 2. Ownership
 - a. Man was to leave his home and be with his wife - Genesis 2:24a
 - b. Man and Woman were to be glued to one another - Genesis 2:24b
 - c. Man and Woman belong to one another - Genesis 2:24c
 - 3. Intimacy - Genesis 2:25
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- III. The Biblical Perspective on Divorce and Remarriage
 - A. Remarriage
 - 1. The issue in the Bible is over the validity of a divorce.
 - 2. If a divorce is valid - remarriage is assumed.
 - B. Valid Grounds for Divorce
 - 1. Habitual Fornication/Adultery - Matthew 19:3-9
 - a. The Question - Matthew 19:3
 - b. The Original Plan - Matthew 19:4-6
 - c. The Rebuttal - Matthew 19:7
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- e. The Allowance in the Case of Fornication - Matthew 19:9
- 2. Abandonment by an Unbeliever - 1 Corinthians 7:12-16
 - a. The Desireable Situation - Stay Married - 1 Corinthians 7:12-14
 - b. The Departure Allowed - 1 Corinthians 7:15
 - c. The Desireable Effect - the Salvation of the Spouse - 1 Corinthians 7:16

IV. Sticky Problems

The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list of possible scenarios and the Biblical resolutions, but it does give a sense of what the issues are and how they can be resolved Biblically.

- A. Is it ever right for two Christians to get a divorce?

The only allowance for divorce in such cases is fornication or adultery according to Matthew 19:3-9. It is never right for two Christians to seek a divorce on the grounds of "irreconcilable differences." It is a travesty to tell a lost world how Christ brings unity while at the same time divorcing your spouse because of personality conflicts or other marital difficulties.

- B. What if I am a Christian and my spouse abandons me?

The sticky question to answer in this case is "is my spouse a believer or not?" If your spouse is an unbeliever, then you have the freedom to marry according to 1 Corinthians 7:12-15. If on the other hand, your spouse is a believer, then your only option is to remain unmarried or seek reconciliation according to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

- C. I got a divorce while being a Christian anyways, and since then my spouse has remarried. Am I free to remarry?

According to Matthew 19:3-9, your spouse has committed adultery, and in that case your former marriage has been dissolved. In this case, you would be free to remarry.

- D. I recently found out that my spouse had a "one-night stand" with a coworker. My spouse has repented of this and asked forgiveness but I am considering a divorce. What are my options?

Although Matthew 19:3-9 allows for divorce in the case of fornication, this was given in the context of a reluctant admission on the part of God to allow divorce because of the hardness of man's heart. The best counsel would be to forgive your spouse for their sin and seek to remain married, especially since they have repented of their sin and sought your forgiveness.

- E. I recently began dating another believer whom I later found to be divorced. Additionally, I have found out that the divorce is not justified Biblically. What should I do?

According to Matthew 19:3-9, anyone who marries someone that was divorced on non-Biblical grounds commits adultery. In this case, the relationship needs to be broken off.

- F. My marriage is a mess and I recently found another person with whom I would like to pursue a relationship with in the hopes of marriage. They are much more understanding than my current spouse, and I feel so right about being around them. What does the Bible say about this?

You are courting sin. Too often we disobey the clear teaching of Scripture because we “feel right” about something. I am sure that Eve “felt right” about eating of the tree, but her act of disobedience plunged all of humanity into sin. It is never right to disobey a clear command of Scripture. The Bible commands us to cleave to our spouse. To divorce your spouse to marry someone else who is “better” is to invite disaster and the judgment of God in your life.

- G. My spouse, who claims to be a believer, is physically abusive to the point that I fear for my personal safety. What should I do?

Although God desires that your marriage be a slice of heaven on earth, many times it does not work out that way. In this situation, the wise thing to do would be to separate from the abusive situation and seek counseling to work through the difficulties that are causing this abuse. In no way should you remain in a potentially dangerous situation where you expose yourself or your children to physical abuse. However, the Scripture is also clear in that if this happens, you must remain single or be reconciled to your spouse according to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Even in this situation, divorce is not Biblically allowed.

- H. I wish I had known what the Bible said about marriage and divorce. Unfortunately I was divorced before I became a believer. Is there any hope for me?

Although what follows is a hotly contested issue, I think that the Bible does say something in this situation.

In 1 Corinthians 7 we read of basically four groups of people: the married (vv. 10, 33), the unmarried (vv. 8, 11), the widows/ers (vs. 8), and virgins (vv. 25, 34, 36-37). The married are, by definition, those who are married. Widows are obviously those who have lost their spouse. In their case, marriage is permissible (v. 8) and even encouraged (1 Timothy 5:14). Virgins are again, by definition, those who have never been married at all, and hence are allowed to remarry. The only remaining category is the unmarried. We get a clue as to this group from verse 11 where we read that one who departs from a marriage is to remain unmarried. Hence, we would conclude that unmarried refers to those who used to be married, but are now not married because of a divorce. However, in verse 9 Paul states that those who were widows, or those who are unmarried, are allowed to remarry? How can this be reconciled with Matthew 19:3-9? The resolution for this is to examine 1 Corinthians 7:18-24 where Paul says that we should remain in the state in which we were called. The best understanding of “called” is the call to salvation. Thus, it appears as though Paul is saying if a person is unmarried when they become a believer, in other words they are divorced, they should remain unmarried. However, if they cannot control their passions, they should marry. Therefore, if your divorce occurred prior to your salvation, you have permission to marry again, only in the Lord.

A more thorough discussion of this can be found in the *MacArthur New Testament Commentary on 1 Corinthians*.

- I. I am a woman married to an unbelieving husband. How can I reach him for Christ?

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3 that a woman can reach her lost husband by being the best wife she can be. Too often, a woman is tempted to “nag” her husband into the Kingdom. However, a close reading of 1 Peter 3:1-7 would tell her that by being a godly woman, submissive to her husband, and honoring him as the head of the home will do far more to reach him for Christ than all the evangelistic contacts in the world.

- J. Through no fault of my own, I became a victim of divorce. Since then I have found fulfillment in Christ and do not feel the need for remarriage. However, all of my friends think that I am “weird” because I am not trying to find a spouse. Am I OK?

Yes. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7, 38, and 40 tell us that some people have the gift of singleness. It may be the case that in your situation God has given you this gift. If that is so, you are free to serve the Lord in a much fuller capacity than you could if you were married. Don't let your friends put you on a guilt trip over this.