

REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE IS USUALLY A SIN

DIVORCE IS ONE OF THOSE SUBJECTS that are almost never mentioned in church. Even though churches supposedly frown on divorce, the truth is that divorce rates among Christians aren't that different from divorce rates among the general public. Churches rarely preach against divorce and by and large don't seem to have very much to say about it.

But that doesn't mean that the Bible has nothing to say about the subject. It actually has quite a few passages that talk about marriage, married life, and divorce. Since the previous chapter covered the Biblical roles for husband and wife, we now need to discuss what constitutes Biblical grounds for divorce – and what does not.

The first point that needs to be brought out is that God does not like divorce, and divorce is almost always against His will. While there are valid grounds for getting a divorce, those grounds are very narrow and any divorce outside of those grounds is against His will. Jesus Himself made it clear that you cannot get a divorce for any and every reason:

Matthew 19:3: “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?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,
5 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?
6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Notice what happened here. The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to get a divorce for any reason, and Jesus said *no*. He explained that marriage is not a man-made construct, but is an institution that God established. When two people get married God joins them together, and God does not want anyone to destroy that union. Let me repeat that: marriage is where *God joins two people together*.

This is important. One of the key reasons divorce and remarriage is a sin is because unless the divorce was done for a God-given reason, God does not recognize the divorce. This point is critical to understand. If your divorce was not done for the one reason that God allows, then in God's eyes you are not divorced at all. Remarriage after divorce is no different from having an affair with someone while you are still married to your original spouse. You may be divorced in the eyes of society and in the eyes of the law, but God does not recognize the separation. The divorce may seem “right” to you, but God does not recognize the separation. You may have been living with your new spouse for many years, but God does not recognize the separation. In His eyes you are just cheating on your real wife.

Jesus went on to explain the only valid grounds for divorce and remarriage:

Matthew 19:7: “They say unto him, Why did

Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 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.

9 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.”

Jesus was very clear about this: the only valid grounds for divorce and remarriage is fornication. If you get a divorce for some other reason and then remarry, you are committing adultery because *God does not recognize your divorce*. In His eyes you are cheating on your real spouse. If you marry *someone else* who was divorced for a reason that was not fornication, then you are committing adultery because in God's eyes *you are sleeping with someone else's wife*.

So what is fornication? It's very simple: it means you had sex with someone who was not your spouse. If one of the parties in the marriage has done this then the other party may divorce and remarry and it is not a sin. In that case – and in that case *only* – God recognizes the divorce.

Now, in our day people have invented all kinds of other reasons to justify divorce. People say that divorce is acceptable “if my spouse isn't living up to her duties”, or “if I'm unhappy”, or “if I'm not compatible with my spouse”, or “if we don't get along”, or a thousand other reasons. Practically any and all behavior has become grounds for divorce. But it is worth nothing that Jesus allowed exactly *one* reason for divorce and remarriage, and that is fornication. Jesus Himself said that if you divorced for *any* other reason then you *cannot* remarry.

At this point someone might say “Well, if adultery is grounds for divorce, and if remarriage outside of fornication is adultery, then that fixes everything! My remarriage is adultery, which is valid grounds for divorce, so there's no longer a problem. Everything is fine.” The problem with this is what Jesus said in verse 9: *God considers your remarriage to be a sin*. You cannot use your sin to justify your sin! The fact that you have sinned against your spouse *does not therefore make it fine to sin against your spouse*. That is madness. On top of that, Jesus adds in verse 9 that if you divorce your wife and someone else marries her, your ex-wife's new spouse is now guilty of adultery. Why? Because in God's view *she is still your wife*, and she is now sleeping with another man.

The bottom line is that *if* you terminated your marriage *because* of fornication, God recognizes the divorce. If you did *not* terminate your marriage for that reason then God does not recognize the divorce. Any sexual union that happens after your unbiblical divorce cannot be used to justify your divorce *because the divorce was not done for that reason*. In God's eyes you are still married and are just cheating on your spouse. What God wants you to do is *stop sinning* and get out of your sinful relationship with another person. Remember, Jesus said very clearly in verse 9 that remarriage in that case was adultery – and *God does not want you to be committing adultery*. The whole reason it is adultery is because God still considers you to be married to your original partner *in spite* of what you are doing.

Now, one thing I want to make clear is that fornication involves an actual, physical union with another person. Looking at porn on the Internet *does not qualify*. Yes, I realize that Jesus said this:

Matthew 5:27: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

But the Bible also says this:

Matthew 5:21: "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

1 John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

It is true that the Bible equates lust with adultery – but it also equates hate with murder. If lusting after someone is no different from adultery, then that means hating someone is no different from murder. Are you willing to claim that the next time you act hatefully toward someone, you have done the same thing as murdering them and should therefore be executed? If lust is grounds for divorce then hate is grounds for facing a firing squad. Do you really want to be held to that standard?

It is true that hate is a terrible sin in the eyes of God, but under the Mosaic Law you had to *actually murder someone* in order to be charged. Hate itself just wasn't enough. Likewise, lust is a terrible sin in the eyes of God, but under the Law you had to *actually commit physical adultery* in order to be charged.

If a spouse has committed actual, physical adultery then

God permits divorce and remarriage. If a spouse has *not* committed actual, physical adultery then God does not permit divorce and remarriage. In that case God considers each spouse to be bound to the marriage as long as they live:

Romans 7:2: “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.”

1 Corinthians 7:39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

Remarriage is only permissible *after the spouse dies*. As long as both parties to the marriage are alive, God considers them to be married. It doesn't matter if they are divorced in the eyes of the law; **God still considers them to be married**. Even though they are supposedly divorced and living with someone else, God still considers them to be married. That is why their new marriage is adultery. After all, if their new marriage justified things then *God wouldn't call it adultery in the first place*.

IF YOU DIVORCED AND REMARRIED FOR AN UNBIBLICAL REASON, YOU ARE LIVING IN SIN

What this means is that if you got a divorce for some reason other than adultery and then remarried, you are living in sin. It doesn't matter how long you have been remarried; you are still living in sin. If you got a divorce and remarried before you

became a Christian and have since come to know the Lord, you are still living in sin. It doesn't matter if your original spouse was a Christian or not: God does not recognize your divorce, and in His eyes you are living in adultery. The reason we know this is because *that is what Jesus said every single time He was asked about this topic.*

You might say “Well, I just don't agree with that.” You can think that all you want, but you're not disagreeing with me; you're disagreeing with Jesus. Whenever Jesus was asked about this issue He always gave the same response. We've already gone over what Jesus said in Matthew 19. Jesus said the very same thing in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:31: "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 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."

When you say “I just don't agree with that”, what you are really saying is this: “I reject the direct command of the God of the Universe, and I'm going to do my own thing instead. What Jesus Himself commanded about the institution He established is of no concern to me whatsoever.” If that is really your view then please stop calling yourself a Christian. You're no different from the heathens who follow God when it's convenient and who reject Him when they feel like it. Incidentally, that's not just my opinion. That's actually how God feels about it:

I John 2:3: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

You can claim all day long to be a Christian, but if you shake your fist at God and say "I reject your commands and refuse to obey you", then *God* says you are not a Christian and your faith is a lie.

If you divorced for an unbiblical reason, you must either remain unmarried or else be reconciled to your spouse. If you remarried after an unbiblical divorce, you are living in sin and are cheating on your actual spouse. It is God's will for you to break off that sinful affair and either remain unmarried or else be reconcile with your actual spouse:

I Corinthians 7:10: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife."

That is God's rule. Remember, God does not recognize a divorce that was done for reasons other than fornication. If you married outside of that then you are living in sin, and it is God's will for you to *stop* living in sin and either remain unmarried or else reunite with your *actual spouse*.

WHAT IF MY SPOUSE DIVORCES ME?

So what happens if your spouse divorces you for a reason that is not fornication? Are you then free to remarry someone

else? Jesus actually addressed that question, and the answer is a resounding *no*:

Matthew 5:31: "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 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."

Notice what Jesus said in verse 32. If a man divorces his wife for an unbiblical reason and his wife then marries someone else, *the person who marries her is guilty of adultery*. Why? Because *God has not recognized the divorce*. In God's eyes she is still married to her original husband. As you can see, Jesus Himself taught that if your spouse divorces you for an unbiblical reason and then marries someone else, you *cannot* remarry. In God's eyes you are still married, and your new marriage is nothing more than an affair. You may not like this at all, but *that is what Jesus said*.

WHAT IF MY SPOUSE IS NOT A CHRISTIAN?

The Bible does not allow you to get a divorce on the grounds that "my spouse is not saved". That is not a good enough reason:

I Corinthians 7:12: "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with

him, let him not put her away.

13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

14 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.

15 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.

16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

Paul says that if a believer finds themselves in this situation, they should stay married because God may use their marriage to save their unbelieving spouse. Now, verse 15 does *not* mean that if the unbeliever divorces them they are free to remarry. All it means is that if the unbeliever wishes to depart, the believer should let them go. This is how one person put it:

"Not under bondage" simply explains "let him depart" (v15) and is the opposite of "dwelling with" them (v12,13). Stay with your companion and fulfill your marital obligations if he/she is satisfied. But if your mate is so bitter against your service to Christ that he cannot stand to be around you, God does not require you to cling to them, refusing to let them go. And especially, do not compromise your service to God to get them to stay. This would be a form of slavery in which God does not require his people to be enslaved.

Nothing in the context implies the Christian may

remarry. The subject of remarriage is not discussed in v12-24. V10,11 has already settled the issue of remarriage by forbidding it. We would need clear proof in order to reach a conclusion that constituted an exception to v10,11. But in fact the conclusion harmonizes with v10,11 and with Matt. 19:9; it does not contradict. (David E. Pratte)

Some may say “But what if there are children involved?” Well, let me ask you a question: suppose that you cheat on your wife and get another woman pregnant. Do you really think that in God's eyes the child justifies the affair and makes your adulterous union acceptable? Absolutely not! Divorcing your wife, marrying someone else, and having children with her is *no different* in God's view from having an affair while you are still married and getting your mistress pregnant. You are *not* actually married to this other person, and the fact that you are having children with someone who is *not* your wife is an abomination in His sight. Continuing to stay with her is a *sin*, not a virtue.

WHAT ABOUT ABUSE?

First of all, let's be clear what we are talking about when it comes to spousal abuse. In modern times the word “abuse” has been redefined to mean “My husband did something I don't like”. Did he leave up the toilet seat? That's abuse. Did he refuse to pay for a five-star vacation in Europe? That's abuse. Did he watch television when you wanted him to take out the garbage? That's abuse. Do you just “not feel loved” for some vague reason? That's abuse.

None of those things are actually abuse. You are not

allowed to say “Well, I'm unhappy, so therefore I am abused, so therefore I get to divorce my husband and find someone else who makes me happy”. That is an abomination in the sight of God. Abuse is *not* “whatever I say it is”. When you go around saying “I divorced my husband because he was abusive” when all he really did was leave his socks on the floor, you are trivializing women who fled their husbands because they were being beaten and hospitalized. You are making a mockery of real abuse.

If your spouse has beaten you within an inch of your life and put you in intensive care, *that* is abuse. If he forgot to pick up milk at the grocery store then that is *not* abuse. This should be obvious, but I have to actually explain this because modern woman cry “abuse” for any and every reason. They believe that all they have to do is raise the “abuse” flag and they have a magic get-out-of-marriage-free card.

If you are receiving actual, real abuse then I strongly recommend filing criminal charges. You need to get out of that environment. God does not require Christians to stick around and get persecuted: even the apostles fled when things got bad, and that was not a sin. You are not required to stand there and take it.

However, in this case you are *not* allowed to remarry. You can search the entire Bible from cover to cover and you will find no verses that say “If your spouse abused you then you can marry someone else”. Neither Jesus nor the apostles said anything like that. You can separate from your spouse (in fact, you *should* separate from them), but you cannot remarry.

Does this make life difficult and painful? Absolutely. Even Jesus' disciples said that His rules regarding marriage were very strict (Matthew 19:10). But Jesus never apologized for them. He is the one who established marriage, and He has not backed down. The problem is not that His rules are unclear; the real issue is that we don't like them.

WHAT ABOUT HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE?

Let me be very clear about this: marriage is God's institution, and He established it as a lifelong union between a man and a woman. Jesus Himself said this:

Matthew 19:4: “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 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?”

Marriage is *only* between a man and a woman, and it is impossible for it to ever be anything else. Men may pass laws to change the legal definition of marriage, but God's definition is permanent and unchangeable.

On top of that, homosexuality is an abomination in the sight of God. He does *not* recognize homosexual marriages. In fact, that very thing is a contradiction of terms! The law may say that the legal union of a man and another man is a “marriage”, but God strongly disagrees. There can *never* be such a thing as a homosexual marriage, anymore than there could be an unsaved Christian. Homosexual activity brings down God's judgment upon nations – but that is something we will talk about in a later chapter.

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

Jesus is the one who created the institution of marriage and who laid down the rules governing it. His rules are clear,

simple, and straightforward – and the modern church pretty much ignores them entirely. Jesus was very clear that divorce and remarriage are only allowed for *one* reason, and that is fornication (which is defined as actual, physical adultery). God does not recognize divorces that are made for any other reason. In His eyes people who get unbiblical divorces are still married to their original spouse.

If you remarried for some other reason then you are living in sin, and God wants you to leave that sinful union and either remain unmarried or else reunite with your original spouse. You do *not* have the option of continuing to live in sin with your new partner.

If you are being abused (which refers to *actual* abuse), then by all means get the legal authorities involved and flee from that situation. But even then, you cannot remarry. You can (and should) separate from the abusive partner, but remarriage is not an option.

You may not like these rules and you may think that they are overly strict or unfair, but they are God's rules. He will use them to judge you when you stand before Him and give an account of your life. I assure you that when that day comes, telling God “Well, I just disagreed with you” is *not* going to be a valid defense.