

# THE DIFFICULTY OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

## INTRODUCTION

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- Perhaps the most difficult, confusing, and challenging area of shepherding within the body of Christ pertains to situations involving divorce
- Case in point: all 4 church discipline situations in the last 10 years at MBC have been related to divorce
- Any confusion that results from this issue, however, is not due to any lack of clarity or any other deficiency in God's Word but by the fact that sin has clouded men's minds to the simplicity of what God has said
- Despite the clarity of the Word, though, many even within the church are either ignorant of what the Scripture say about divorce and remarriage or are unwilling to heeds its counsel
- 4 views on divorce:
  1. Divorce and remarriage are allowed anytime
  2. Divorce and remarriage are never permitted
  3. Divorce is permitted under certain circumstances, but remarriage is never allowed
  4. Divorce and remarriage are possible but only under certain circumstances
- While each of these views has been held by various segments of the "church," the 4<sup>th</sup> view carries the greatest biblical argument
- We must remember Malachi 2:16 ~ For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel...
- Yet, the Scriptures do provide an "exception clause" in which circumstances God allows for divorce and remarriage

## GOD'S DESIGN FROM THE BEGINNING

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- The Bible's teaching on divorce cannot be understood apart from its teaching on marriage
- From the beginning, we learn that God intended husband and wife to leave, cleave, and weave into a perfect oneness

**Genesis 2:24** ~ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

- God intended monogamous, lifelong marriage to be the only pattern of union between men and women...one man, one wife, one for life...one flesh
- Marriage is the welding of two people together into one unit...they are not two anymore
- The goal is perfect oneness in every area of the marriage relationship: emotionally, spiritually, relationally, financially, sexually
- Unfortunately, the fall radically affected marriage...Eve did not consult Adam, her head and protector, when confronted with temptation...and Adam forfeited his role of headship and willingly followed her lead
- The Fall distorted and perverted the marriage relationship as evidenced in the curse pronounced on Eve

**Genesis 3:16** ~ To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

- Eve’s “desire” for her husband would be the desire for control (cf. Gen 4:6-7) but Adam’s “rule” over his wife would be one of stern, overbearing, selfish control
- Hence, the seeds of all marital conflict were sown in the Fall and have the potential to operate within every marriage
- Yet, from the beginning God’s desire is for marriage to be one man, one woman, one flesh, for life

## KEY PASSAGES ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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### Deuteronomy 24

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**Deuteronomy 24:1-4** ~ When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, *then* her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance

- The focus of this passage is not whether divorce is permitted...it does not provide any explicit guidelines for when divorce might be allowable or not, much less command divorce in any instance
- Through Moses, God recognized and permitted divorce under certain circumstances, when it was accompanied by a certificate, but He did not thereby condone or command divorce
- The point is that improper divorce leads to adultery, which results in defilement...illegitimate divorce proliferates adultery
- The primary purpose of this text is not to give an excuse for divorce but to show the potential evil of it and to warn against it
- Because the woman’s divorce from her first marriage lacked sufficient ground, her second marriage would be adulterous...in this sense she is “defiled” because of the adultery brought about by her second marriage
- So the purpose of this passage is not to provide for divorce but to prevent it
- It is a misunderstanding of this passage that resulted in the rabbinic justification for easy divorce described in Matthew 5:31-32

### Matthew 5:31-32

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**Matthew 5:31-32** ~ It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery

- The Pharisees interpreted Moses’ instruction to mean, “If you find something distasteful about your wife, go ahead and divorce her”...just do the proper paperwork
- The problem with their interpretation is that it resulted in a system of institutionalized adultery by permitting easy divorce for almost any imaginable cause
- What they thought was preventing adultery (easy divorce) was actually promoting it...the result of divorce is multiplied adultery (the man who marries the former wife and the woman who marries the former husband are both guilty of adultery)
- Notice the only exception to this: “except for the reason of unchastity”
- Jesus names only one condition where divorce is not the cause of adultery, and that is in cases where the marriage bond has already been destroyed by one party’s infidelity

- Now, this one exception does not mean divorce is necessary when a spouse is unfaithful...it is not a command, but a concession
- Sexual infidelity is the only basis Christ gave for divorce...He was speaking of the kind of serious, unrepentant sexual sin that represents a full-on assault against the sanctity of the marriage union and irreparably fractures every vestige of trust and intimacy
- The word for “unchastity” is the word *porneia* which is the general term for fornication (illicit sexual intercourse)...it is not the specific term for adultery (*moicheia*) but certainly includes that
- Because this passage focuses on marriage and divorce, it would seem obvious that the primary unchastity Jesus had in mind here was in fact adultery
- But *porneia* was also broad enough to include sins like incest, prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality
- Any of those would be grounds for divorce because they all do irreparable damage to the bond of marriage

### **Matthew 19:3-9**

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**Matthew 19:3-9** ~ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

- In response to the Pharisee’s question about divorce, Jesus gave 4 reasons not to do so:
  1. Christ said that God “created them from the beginning...male and female” (vs. 4) – only 1 man (Adam) and 1 woman (Eve) existed in the beginning...thus, divorce and remarriage was not an option in God’s divine plan
  2. Christ said that “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife” (vs. 5) – marriage binds two hearts together, glued in mind, will, spirit, and emotion
  3. Christ said that “the two shall become one flesh” (vs. 6) –they become indivisible and inseparable, except through death
  4. Christ said “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (vs. 6) – shows that every marriage is made in heaven
- The Pharisees then quoted from Deuteronomy 24 to give the appearance of biblical support for their liberal divorce customs: Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away? (vs. 7)
- The Pharisees misrepresented Deuteronomy 24...it was not a command for divorce...it was meant to limit remarriage in the event of a divorce
- Jesus responded to their wrong interpretation in vs. 8-9 ~ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
- Notice that Jesus clarified that God’s Law did not command divorce...it only permitted it
- And it permitted it only because of “your hardness of heart” – this speaks of a situation where the adultery is prolonged and the sinning spouse is unrepentant, making reconciliation and a normal marriage relationship impossible
- In the case of a person who commits adultery but then repents, that person is showing a tenderness of heart and should be taken back in love
- But when an adulterous husband or wife becomes totally insensitive to marital fidelity, God through Moses indirectly and reluctantly permitted divorce

- It was a concession on account of sin to make life more bearable for the one who was sinned against
- Jesus made it clear that the innocent spouse has the opportunity to again enjoy the blessings of marriage that were destroyed by the other partner’s unrelenting adultery
- Again this is reinforced by the exception clause in vs. 9 ~ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.
- “immorality” = *porneia* = a broad term that, in the context of marriage, always refers to adultery
- So divorce that does not result from adultery results in adultery if there is remarriage
- However, the exception clause permits the innocent party who marries another to do so without committing adultery

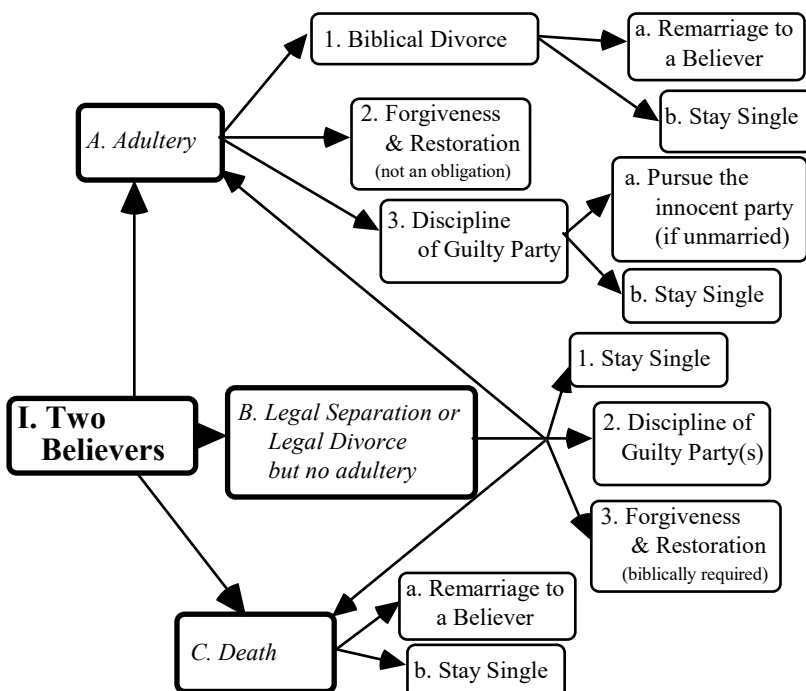
## 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

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### **Guidelines for Christians Married to Other Christians**

**1 Corinthians 7:10-11** ~ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

- God’s main instruction to married believers is to stay together in order to prove themselves true to each other, to love each other, and to make everything of that marriage that God designed it to be
- Paul made clear the source of his teaching by adding “not I but the Lord” – this shows that he is saying the same thing Jesus said in Matthew 5 and 19
- Paul here was not discussing divorce based on adultery...he was talking about divorce for other reasons, even supposedly spiritual ones
- If a Christian does divorce another Christian, except for adultery, neither partner is given freedom from the Lord to marry someone else...they must remain single or come back together as man and wife...in God’s eyes, that union has never been broken



## ***Guidelines for Christians Married to Unbelievers Who Want to Stay***

**1 Corinthians 7:12-14** ~ But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

- Any Christian married to a non-Christian will at times be tempted to divorce their spouse and take a Christian spouse instead
- But Paul addresses this situation as well.... “to the rest I say, not the Lord” – God had not given any previous revelation on that subject but He does now, through Paul
- Believers married to non-believers who want to stay in the marriage should not divorce since the unbelieving spouse will experience the blessing of God through the believing spouse
- A Christian spouse is not defiled by the unbelieving spouse...in fact, the opposite is true...both the children and the unbelieving spouse are sanctified through the believing spouse
- This sanctification is matrimonial and familial, not personal or spiritual...in God’s eyes, a home is set apart for Himself when the husband or wife is a Christian...such a home is not Christian in the full sense, but it is immeasurably superior to one that is totally unbelieving
- One Christian in a home graces the entire home...for that reason a believing spouse must not divorce

## ***Guidelines for Christians Married to Unbelievers Who Want to Leave***

**1 Corinthians 7:15-16** ~ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such *cases*, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

- Paul says that a Christian spouse who is married to an unbeliever who wants to leave is “not under bondage” to pursue the marriage...i.e. to insist that the unbelieving spouse stays
- The Christian spouse is to “let him leave” since God has “called us to peace” – constant fighting, turmoil, criticism, and frustration over the spouse’s faith will disrupt the harmony and peace that God wants His children to have in their faith....Thus, the believer is “not under bondage” to pursue the marriage
- Now some assume at this point that, this divorce necessarily allows for remarriage
- But another viable viewpoint is that there is no freedom to remarry for the believer even if a legal divorce has occurred, because there are no biblical grounds for divorce (adultery)
- However, if the unbeliever commits adultery (by an unbiblical remarriage or sex outside of marriage), then the situation is changed and there are biblical grounds for divorce for the believer and thus a remarriage

