

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

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*About the author...*

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In what could be seen as a cycle of “I had it”, “I lost it”, “I want it back”, many people seem to be in constant pursuit of the appropriate marriage partner. In the United States and other portions of the world, marriage is not viewed as a sacred institution ordained by God. It is, rather, a place to have a little fun and companionship, but if it does not work out, then end it and look for something else. Too many times, marriage is a lot like our views on clothing. If we do not like the clothing, we throw it out and get something else.

In the United States, 50% to 60% of first marriages end in divorce. Second marriages (or greater) end in divorce approximately 70% of the time. The problem lies in a person’s attitude towards marriage. Years ago, people entered into marriage with the understanding that it was for life. People did not even consider ending that marriage. People used to frown upon those who divorced, and taught their sons and their daughters to keep their marriages together.

How do people view marriage today? Some people believe marriage is the culmination of the trial period. Two people will first live together and “try out” each other. After awhile, if everything has worked out, the people will be married. This attitude fights against the very reason for marriage (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1). It lessens marriage as nothing more than the completion of the sale after the goods have been examined. Besides being Biblically wrong, this “living together” does nothing to improve divorce rates.

Some people view marriage as a temporary situation. That is, they do not enter into the marriage with the idea of a permanent attachment to one another, with death being the only thing that will separate them. Therefore, the least little problem will cause them to look elsewhere and discard the mate they now have.

Others think of marriage as a game. They marry because it is the thing to do. It fits into the idea of the social status that they need. And, to many people, it seems that the more marriages you have the more social status you enjoy. It is certainly the case that divorce is not viewed as a shameful thing by the majority of our society. Most have reached the point where they will not blush, nor are they ashamed (cf. Jeremiah 6:15).

Many do not take seriously the vows they make when they are married. They may talk about “for better or for worse”, “richer or poorer”, and so forth. But what happens in too many cases is when the going gets tough, people run away from the problem. When one vows a vow before God, he or she must understand that they are obligated to keep it (cf. Numbers 30:2; Ecclesiastes 5:4; Ephesians 5:25).

These and other such views will cause people to not take marriage seriously and to easily enter into divorce. People need to understand the purpose and seriousness of marriage in order for them to enter into marriage with the right attitude. It is my prayer that when they see that they need to be faithful to God in all things, they will work hard to fulfill all God has said concerning the marriage.

Marriage was instituted by God in Genesis 2:22-24. In marriage, the man and the woman are to remain together until death separates these individuals (Matthew 19:1-6). Marriage was designed to bring children into the world (Genesis 1:28; 3:16). It was designed to provide companionship for man (cf. Genesis 2:18). Marriage has as part of its function to provide the fulfillment of our sexual needs (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Sexual activity outside of the marriage bond is sin (Hebrews 13:4).

It is a serious decision one must make when one chooses the person they wish to marry. Much has been said concerning whether to marry a Christian or a non-Christian. Too often, we become embroiled in the discussion that we miss the point of what we are discussing. Choosing a mate is deeper than whether the person is a Christian or a non-Christian. One must remember that the person he or she chooses to marry will be the closest person to them on earth. They will have the greatest influence over their mate than anyone else. This person can either make life miserable or outstanding. They will know the inner secrets of their mate and how the other person thinks. When choosing a mate, answer this question: **WILL THIS PERSON HELP ME GO TO HEAVEN?** Some say to marry only a Christian, but I know some Christians that I would not want my children to marry. When two people enter marriage, they are joining together in that great march to one day dwell eternally with God. The wrong mate can make it extremely difficult to achieve this goal, or can cause the other person to lose their soul entirely.

The rule of marriage is what people seem to miss. They have all their ideas and dreams, but do not seriously consider the attitude they must have when they decide to marry. If one enters into a marriage with the wrong attitude, the marriage is almost certain to fail. What is the rule of marriage? **ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN JOINED TOGETHER FOR LIFE!!**

(It must be noted that marriage is not for two men to be joined together, nor for two women to be joined together. Homosexuality is condemned by God, and all homosexuals will be lost eternally unless they repent of their sins (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:24-32). Marriage is for a man and a woman.)

When troubles come to a marriage, rather than work through these problems, the married partners start looking to end this partnership. Divorce becomes the only answer they see. A sad commentary on our society is how our young people will talk about all the different “mothers” and “fathers” they have (because of divorce), and talk about it as though this is purely natural.

Divorces usually come out with everyone being the loser. The two who are divorcing carry the difficulties of such things as sharing the children, child support, bitter feelings, and the other myriad of problems associated with divorce. The biggest losers are the children. They tend to blame themselves and then must deal with parents who do not see each other nor really like each other. They become “balls” tossed back and forth between two players.

Besides the lifestyle problems that are associated with divorce, there are serious spiritual considerations with which those who would divorce must deal. While many states allow divorce for any reason, the Bible does not. Marriage is such a serious institution that God only has allowed one acceptable reason for divorce. What God has to say is so basic, it is not very hard to understand. What usually happens to hinder one’s understanding of these verses is that personal issues enter the picture.

People have in the past held correct and strong views concerning divorce, only to waver from these views because their children or a loved one divorced. They were forced to hold fast to the correct view or soften their view lest they condemn the ones they “love”. Whatever it is God has said, the Christian must hold without wavering (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58).

In studying the issue of divorce, one must consider what Jesus taught us on the issue. We want to take some time and explore what the Bible says.

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 (Matthew 5:32)

And this 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 (Matthew 19:9)

And he said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark 10:11,12)

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery (Luke 16:18)

And to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not he husband put away his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10,11)

But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart . . . (1 Corinthians 7:15)

These verses tell us something about divorce. From these, we can see the principles set forth by God, and we must use these principles when dealing with situations today. If a divorce is right or wrong, it will be determined by these principles. We are doing no one any favors if we teach them error on the subject, and allow them to make the decision to divorce, in violation of God's will.

The verses cited above give us the following information concerning divorce. (Remarriage will be discussed later.)

Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us the general rule concerning divorce. All teach us the rule is universal (“whosoever”). They all relate that one is put away (Mark talks about either party.). Each shows us that when these are put away, they could enter into an adulterous situation if they choose to marry again. The rule is: **WHOEVER (MALE OR FEMALE) DIVORCES THEIR MATE AND MARRIES SOMEONE ELSE WILL BE GUILTY OF ADULTERY!**

1 Corinthians 7:10 is the general rule restated with the desired outcome stated if they so choose to divorce. A man and a woman should not divorce. However, what if they do? They should remain unmarried (i.e., marry no one else) or be reconciled to one another (i.e., restore the marriage

bond they broke). Some will argue that this passage is talking about a separation and not a divorce. However, please note that Paul says he is giving what Jesus had taught (cf. Matthew 5:32; et.al). He is also applying the principle of marriage God set up — the two must stay together. Further, in 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul addresses a non-Christian who “departs”. This is understood as this person breaking the marriage bond (divorcing his Christian wife). In the Greek, the word “depart” in verse 11 and verse 15 are the same word. Contextually, Paul is dealing with divorce and applying the principle to the situation. It should also be noted that the verses dealing with divorce (cited above) all talk about being married **to another** after the divorce, not to the same person.

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 address the issue of a Christian and a non-Christian married to one another. The Christian is enjoined to keep the marriage together. Do not divorce. The Christian is also taught that there is not much they can do if the non-Christian decides to leave the marriage. This passage of scripture does not teach anything about remarriage. It does, however, strongly reinforce to the Christian that God must be first in our lives, and that we must not allow our husbands or our wives to cause us to compromise (cf. Luke 14:26,27).

Whatever divorce situation we are addressing, we must apply the rule to the situation. The rule is absolute. The situation does not change the rule. In looking at the rule, we must also take into consideration any exceptions **GOD** has given. We must be careful not to interject what we think, feel, or believe. Sometimes, people will argue that children in a marriage or that the two people love each other changes the rule. Too often, people will twist God's rules to fit their needs. This they will do to their own destruction (cf. 2 Peter 3:16).

Has **GOD** given any exceptions to his rule? Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 address the exception -- *“saving for the cause of fornication”*; *“except it be for fornication”*. Fornication is defined as illicit sexual activity. It includes adultery, incest, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and bestiality. It is any sexual activity that is engaged in by those who are not married to each other or who do not have the right to be married to each other.

The rule says that a person is not to put away his or her mate. The exception allows one (NOTE: It does not COMMAND one) to put away his or her mate if that mate has committed fornication, i.e., engaged in illicit sexual activity. The one put away is the one who has committed fornication.

One who puts away his or her mate for reasons other than fornication and then marries another commits adultery. One who puts away his or her mate for the reason of that person's fornication and marries another does not commit adultery. The only person authorized to enter into another marriage after the divorce is the one who puts away his or her mate **FOR** the reason of that person's fornication. The person put away because of their fornication cannot remarry and be in keeping with God's word.

God's desire is that the marriage stay together until the death of one or both of the parties in the marriage (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:1-4). He does not want man to break the marriage bond (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is so sacred to God that he allows **ONE AND ONLY ONE EXCEPTION** -- fornication. There are no other acceptable reasons with God for people to divorce.

We have already touched on the issue of remarriage, but we want to examine this a little more. When I began this discussion, I mentioned a cycle of “I had it”; “I lost it”; and “I want it back”. People enter into a marriage; the marriage ends in divorce; these people then strive to regain that which they lost -- marriage. They do not necessarily use any good guidelines (and many do not understand that there are guidelines) when they make the decision to marry again. Our discussion on remarriage will

concentrate only on the issue after the divorce.

Since the only reason allowed for divorce is fornication, then those who divorce for reasons other than fornication cannot marry another person. The verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state this. Regardless of how much sympathy we might have for someone in a divorce, it is possible that one can get himself or herself in such a situation that they cannot marry again.

Those who put away their mates because of that mate's fornication can marry again. That is the force of the exceptive clause. (Along these lines, please note that the way the exceptive clause is given that one guilty of fornication cannot put away the mate not guilty of fornication and then marry again. If one is put away for reasons other than fornication, even if the other person has committed fornication, the one put away may not enter into another marriage.)

The verses dealing with divorce show that the fornication must be the reason for the divorce. It is not the case that one can divorce for reasons other than fornication; wait around for the one he or she divorced to commit fornication; and then claim a right to remarry based on that person's fornication. While the person did commit fornication, this fornication was **AFTER** the divorce. When reasoning on divorce, we must always go back to the reason **FOR** the divorce, not what happens after the divorce.

The same is true of death. One is not free from the marriage bond if their mate dies **AFTER** the divorce. If one divorces for the wrong reasons, nothing that happens after the divorce changes the reason for that divorce.

Since God does not allow divorce for reasons other than fornication, and since people cannot marry again if their divorce was wrong, then what does one do if they do these things? If one divorces for the wrong reason, one must repent of the divorce and remain unmarried for the remainder of their life. If one has entered into a marriage that they should not be in, then they must repent of their sin and dissolve that marriage. As long as that person remains in that marriage, they are committing adultery. Only the cessation of that unscriptural marriage will end this sin.

Divorce is not a game. It is an action on the part of people that could leave them in a situation of having to remain unmarried for the remainder of their lives. If we teach error on the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, we can cause people to be lost forever. It behooves us to make a strong stand on these issues, so we can have strong homes that will give us a strong church.