

The Difficulty of Divorce and Remarriage

INTRODUCTION

The impact of divorce on our society

- In our neighborhoods
- In our schools
- In our churches

The impact of divorce on us personally

Sobering topic . . .

- Because of how widespread divorce has become.
- Because of the depth of sorrow and pain and anger and shame and difficulty divorce brings.
- Because of the way divorce so drastically misrepresents the faithful and enduring love of Christ for his people.

There is grace and forgiveness available in Christ!

GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

"So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27).

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him' . . . 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:18–25).

God's original design for marriage was a permanent, covenant commitment between one man and one woman.

The essential elements constituting a marriage:

1. **Leaving**—Steps out from own family.
2. **Cleaving**—Covenant promises to live as husband and wife in a new family.
3. **"One-flesh" union**—Consummated by sexual union, though it is more than this.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

THE ENTRANCE OF SIN

“The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:6–7).

“He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you” (Gen. 3:16).

DIVORCE TOLERATED AND REGULATED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, he may write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house. ² If after leaving his house she goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and the second man hates her, writes her a divorce certificate, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house or if he dies, ⁴ the first husband who sent her away may not marry her again after she has been defiled, because that would be detestable to the Lord. You must not bring guilt on the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance” (Deut. 24:1–4).

Cf. also Lev 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:9.

JESUS’ TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. The Sermon on the Mount

“It was also said, **Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.** ³² But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, *causes her to commit adultery*. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31–32, CSB).

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, *makes her the victim of adultery*, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31–32, NIV).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

2. Jesus and the Pharisees

“Some Pharisees approached him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?” 4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, 5 and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 7 “Why then,” they asked him, “did Moses command us to give divorce papers and to send her away?” 8 He told them, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of the hardness of your hearts, but it was not like that from the beginning. 9 I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt. 19:3–9).

“Some Pharisees came to test him, asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He replied to them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away.” 5 But Jesus told them, “He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts. 6 But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. 7 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother 8 and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples questioned him about this matter. 11 He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:2–12).

“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Luke 16:18).

1. God’s design for marriage is a permanent covenant relationship.

2. God unites people in marriage.

3. People do not have the liberty to dissolve this union.

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Lesson 20

ARE THERE ANY BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE?

Are there any circumstances where God sanctions the decision to divorce, such that a person is in his eyes released from their obligations of marriage to their former spouse and, by implication, is also free to remarry a different person?

1. Adultery

“I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

2. Abandonment by an unbeliever

a. *Guidelines for Christians married to other Christians.*

“To the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10–11).

b. *Guidelines for Christians married to unbelievers who want to stay.*

“But I (not the Lord) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:12–14).

c. *Guidelines for Christians married to unbelievers who want to leave.*

“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife” (1 Cor. 7:15–16).

“A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

LOVING THE DIVORCED (OR THOSE CONTEMPLATING IT)

1. **Come alongside.**

2. **Speak the truth to keep it from happening.**

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read the 2019 FBC Shepherding Statement “Divorce and Remarriage” attached to this lesson.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

APPENDIX: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The pastoral leadership at First Baptist Church (FBC) is committed to the living, active, inerrant, and inspired Word of God. And so, we believe that the Bible dictates and governs our lives and cultural practices, NOT the other way around.

A central aim of our ministry is to glorify God by accurately imparting and teaching the full counsel of scripture to those of First Baptist Church. This positional paper intends to define, according to our careful study of the scriptures, FBC's position on divorce and remarriage and how we will counsel and shepherd the body at First Baptist in this area.

1. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:13–16). God hates divorce and, therefore, this is our foundational premise that shapes our view on divorce. It is rare when we see the word hate attributed to God's view of someone or something in Scripture so we take this phrase in Malachi seriously.

It is our view that God's best and highest plan for all marriages is to stay married as one flesh because He hates divorce and He intends for marriage to be a lifelong covenant; moreover, His overflowing grace can restore any marriage regardless of the situation.

Yet, we believe there are two allowances for divorce in scripture as an accommodation to man's sin. However, since divorce is only a concession to man's sin (Matthew 19:5–9) and is not a part of God's original plan for marriage or even advised, all believers considering divorce should have the same attitude toward divorce as God does and see it as a violation of God's expressed purpose for marriage.

2. The only biblical grounds for divorce are (1) fornication (any sinful sexual activity, including adultery—unfaithfulness of a marriage partner), or (2) a nonbelieving partner who initiates the divorce due to incompatibility with a Christian.

The first is unrepentant fornication (*porneia*), which seems to cover a wide area of sexual activity such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest (Matt. 5:32; Mk. 19:9; 1 Cor. 5:1). Adultery will take place even after the "official" dissolution of the marriage if the divorce is on nonbiblical grounds (Matt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11, 12).

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where a nonbelieving spouse refuses to live with his or her believing spouse, especially because of his or her Christian testimony (1 Cor. 7:12–15). This passage gives a passive allowance or freedom for the believer when the unbeliever abandons the marriage not a proactive directive, advisement, or permission to pursue divorce. A believer should not assist in the initiation or furtherment of the abandonment or divorce by the unbeliever.

It is essential to keep in mind that the Bible merely permits divorce in these limited circumstances but never commands divorce. (This is clearly indicated in Hosea 1–3, where the adulterous wife is forgiven and restored.) We believe that although divorce may be an option under these two circumstances, God's highest and best resolution is the reconciliation and restoration of the marriage through repentance and forgiveness.

3. Remarriage is permitted for the innocent party when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In cases where a divorce was obtained between believers on nonbiblical grounds, the person who remarries commits "adultery" (Matt. 19:9) and the person who marries a person who was divorced on nonbiblical grounds also commits adultery (Lk. 16:18).

According to the Old Testament pattern, remarriage was allowed after the divorce (the exception is found in Deut. 24:1–4). The New Testament allows for remarriage when the divorce was based upon biblical grounds (1 Cor. 7:15). In cases where the divorce was not for the two reasons stated above, the believer is exhorted to (1) seek for reconciliation, or else (2) remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:10–11).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

4. Believers who pursue divorce on nonbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. In the case that an unbiblical divorce and remarriage has occurred, the parties should repent and seek forgiveness in an appropriate fashion (i.e. by seeking counsel of the pastor(s) – Hebrews 13:17). In the case that there are those seeking an unbiblical divorce or marriage, church restoration and discipline will be applied out of a heart to love them to genuine repentance and restoration (Galatians 6:1–2; 1 Corinthians 5, Matthew 18).

5. Salvation means that a person begins a new life. Though God's moral laws apply to believer and unbeliever alike, and all held accountable to it, the repentant believer enjoys the incredible forgiveness of his sin.

According to 2 Cor. 5:17, the believer has become a "new creature" when he or she accepts Christ as personal Savior, where one's past sin no longer describes him (Eph. 2:1–2; Col 2:13; Gal. 5:16–25). This does not mean there are no consequences of past sin that may be felt the rest of one's life, that Christ immediately erases painful memories, bad habits, or the underlying causes for past marital problems, but that He begins a process of transformation through the Holy Spirit and the Word. A sign of saving faith will be a receptivity and a willingness to obey what Christ has revealed about marriage and divorce through the Word.

The Apostle Paul's counsel in 1 Cor. 7:20–28 is that a believer is to see every circumstance that they are in as from God. And yet Paul gives his opinion as well in light of the present persecution. If they were called while married, they are not to seek a divorce / be "released" (except on the grounds given in Matt. 5:32, 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12–16). If they were called while divorced, stay single, but if they marry (remarry) they are free to do so and it is not sin (remarried to another believer / 1 Cor. 7:29; 2 Cor. 6:14).

6. In cases where divorce took place on nonbiblical grounds and where the guilty party repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. It is assumed that the repentant party will endeavor to restore the marriage whenever possible as a sign of true repentance.

In other words, where two believers were divorced on nonbiblical grounds, the grace of God becomes operative at the point of repentance and confession, and they can once again experience the joy of their relationship with Christ and their mate.

A true sign of repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Cor. 7:11. This involves a willingness to remain unmarried or else to be reconciled to their mate.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on nonbiblical grounds and remarried, the second marriage union is recognized as living in "adultery" (Mk. 10:11–12). If repentance takes place, it is recognized that to obtain a second divorce would disobey Scripture (Deut. 24:1–4). Hence, they are to remain in the second marriage.

7. The church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. In cases where there has been a divorce in a person's past, the church has an obligation to consider his qualification based on the general requirement of "blameless/above reproach" that could disqualify him on a number of fronts, including divorce. 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 sets the marital qualification for leadership within the church. The phrase "the husband of one wife" does not mean that a person cannot have had a divorce in his past since none of the other qualifications listed refer to specific acts in the past (prior to salvation or subsequent to salvation) but rather to qualities which currently characterize a man's life.

It is especially important, in cases where there has been a divorce in a man's past, that there be a period of careful observation to see that his present marriage is characterized by devotion and sacrificial love exemplified by Christ's relationship to His church.