

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

I. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING MARRIAGE.

MARRIAGE IS:

A. A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

1. God instituted marriage for all of mankind (Gen. 2:18-25).
2. Jesus reiterates the teaching that God has ordained one man for one woman for life (Matt. 19:1-12).

B. THE FIRST AND MOST FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTION.

1. See above and I Tim. 3:5,12.
2. It is through the marriage bond that God seeks to raise up a godly generation (Mal. 2:15).

C. COVENANTAL AND BINDING.

1. God makes it clear that this is a life long commitment (Gen.2: 18-25; Prov.2: 17, Matt. 19:1-12).
2. Malachi precisely states that this relationship is a covenant before God in which He acts as a witness (Mal. 2:14).

D. A COVENANT OF COMPANIONSHIP.

1. See Gen. 2:18-25 and Mal. 2:14.
2. Peter warns all husbands that their prayers will be hindered if this companionship or understanding is not taking place in the marriage (1 Pt. 3:7).

E. THE PLACE FOR TRUE INTIMACY.

1. God says that the leaving of father and mother comes before the cleaving in marriage (Gen. 2:18-25).
2. One marriage partner is not to deprive his/her partner of sexual intimacy (1 Cor. 7:1-12).
3. We are to be pure in our premarital relationships and faithful to the companion God gives us in marriage (1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4).
4. Any sexual relationship outside the bond of marriage is clearly forbidden (Ex. 20:14).
5. Jesus explained that to look on someone other than your spouse, to desire that person in your heart, is sin (Matt. 5:27-28).

F. TO CONFORM TO THE MODEL OF CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH.

1. Paul says the relationship between husband and wife is to point to the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church. The husband is to love the wife and give himself up for her as Christ did for the Church; and the wife is to respect, obey and honor her husband as she would Christ (Eph. 5:21-33).

G. TO BE IN CONFORMITY WITH THE LAWS OF THE LAND.

1. Paul clearly teaches us that we are to be in subjection to the laws of the land and unless those laws contradict the clear teaching of God's Word, we must obey them (Rom. 13:1-7).

H. ONLY TO BE ENTERED INTO BY TWO NONBELIEVERS OR TWO BELIEVERS, BUT SHOULD NOT BE ENTERED INTO BY A BELIEVER AND A NONBELIEVER.

1. God made it very clear that the Hebrew believer was not to intermarry with the nonbeliever, for that would draw his heart away from God (Deut. 7:3-4).
2. Paul makes this same point. The New Testament believer is only free to marry another believer, for there can be no fellowship between light and darkness (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14).

II. PRACTICING THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE. ON THE BASIS OF THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE WE WILL:

- A. Seek to honor the marriage relationship as highly as God does.
- B. Seek to encourage and motivate all married couples, by sound biblical teaching and counseling, to find the entire fulfillment that God intended for them through their marriage relationship.
- C. Allow couples to use our facilities for a marriage ceremony or to be married by our pastors, only after they have had adequate premarital counseling, so that they may duly consider the privileges and responsibilities of marriage.
- D. Not allow our pastors to marry or have our facilities used for the marriage of a believer with a nonbeliever.

III. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING DIVORCE. DIVORCE:

A. ALWAYS STEMS FROM SIN.

1. God never intended divorce (Gen. 2:18-25).
2. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).
3. Because of the hardness of man's heart and God's knowledge that some men would not repent and be reconciled, He has allowed for and put controls on divorce (Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:15).

B. IS NOT NECESSARILY SINFUL.

1. God divorced Israel for her lack of faithfulness (Jer. 3:8).
2. God calls Joseph a righteous man and he was about to divorce Mary (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).
3. Jesus allowed for divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality (Matt. 19:9).
4. Paul allows for a divorce when a nonbeliever leaves a believer. The believer is no longer bound in that situation (I Cor. 7:15).

C. ALWAYS BREAKS THE MARRIAGE.

1. Moses regulates divorce and the woman is free to remarry (Deut. 24:1-4).
2. The word used by Paul makes it clear that once the divorce has occurred, God recognizes it as a divorce even though the reason is not biblical (I Cor. 7:10-12).

D. IS NEVER NECESSARY AMONG BELIEVERS.

1. The offending believer can always repent and through the power of the Holy Spirit change behavior, seek reconciliation and make restitution (1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 10:13).
2. The offended believer must always grant forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; 1 Cor. 10:13; Luke 17:1-10).

E. IS LEGITIMATE ON THE GROUNDS OF SEXUAL SIN.

1. This is clearly stated by Christ (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).
2. Joseph was righteous in seeking a divorce after one offense during the engagement period (Matt. 1: 19).

F. IS LEGITIMATE WHEN AN UNBELIEVER WISHES TO DIVORCE A BELIEVER (I Cor. 7:15).

G. IS COMPLETE ONLY WHEN THE LAWS OF THE STATE, WITH REGARD TO DIVORCE, HAVE BEEN FULFILLED (Rom. 13:1-7).

H. IS FORGIVABLE WHEN SINFUL.

1. There is no support for the position that divorce is the unforgivable sin (1 John 1:9; Acts 13:39; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21).

I. IS FORGIVEN BY GOD, AS IS ALL OTHER SIN, AT THE MOMENT OF SALVATION (2 Cor. 5:17).

J. DOES NOT NECESSARILY EXCLUDE A MAN FROM SERVING AS AN ELDER.

1. "Husband of one wife" does not mean married only once, but rather a "one woman man" (1 Tim. 3:2).
2. However, "above reproach...one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control ... and having a good reputation..." must definitely be considered in selecting a man for the position of elder if he has gone through a divorce and/or remarriage (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

IV. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING REMARRIAGE:
REARRIAGE:

A. IN GENERAL IS DESIRABLE.

1. Remarriage is not wrong for one whose spouse has died (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:14).
 2. Younger widows are encouraged to remarry (1 Tim. 5:14).
 3. It is better to marry than to yield to sexual temptation (1 Cor. 7:9).
- B. IS POSSIBLE FOR A PERSON DIVORCED ON BIBLICAL GROUNDS.
1. Jesus states that remarriage is acceptable if divorce occurred on the grounds of sexual immorality (Matt. 5:32-33; 19:9).
 2. If someone remarries whom an unbelieving spouse, has deserted, it is not a sin for him or her to remarry (I Cor. 7:15, 27, 28).
- C. IS POSSIBLE FOR THE PERSON WHO DIVORCED ON NON-BIBLICAL GROUNDS, THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND AFTER ALL ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION HAVE FAILED.
1. All sin is forgivable and God's mercy extends to all (Acts 13:39; 1 John 1:9).
 2. Steps to consider when seeking forgiveness, reconciliation and restitution. The parties involved should:
 - a) Make a list of all their failures in the marriage relationship and seek God's forgiveness (Matt. 7:1-5).
 - b) Seek forgiveness from their former spouse, children, relatives and others involved (Matt. 6:14-15).
 - c) Make every effort at reconciliation (where possible) (Rom. 12:18).
 - d) Make every effort to right all wrongs (so far as possible) regarding such matters as:
 - (1) voluntary repayment of any unfairly obtained monies, properties or rights in a divorce settlement.
 - (2) assuming obligations for child support or other obligations.
- D. IS POSSIBLE ONLY WHEN ALL BIBLICAL OBLIGATIONS HAVE BEEN MET (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- E. IS POSSIBLE ONLY WHEN PARTIES ARE PREPARED FOR MARRIAGE (Prov.11:14).
- V. PRACTICING THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE. ON THE BASIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE WE WILL:
- A. Seek in meekness, mercy and love, combined with firmness, to understand each individual case that comes to us. In order to consider each case on its own individual and biblical merits, we will always seek to answer, at the very least, the following questions:
1. Are all, one or none of the parties Christians?
 2. Who wants the divorce?
 3. On what grounds?
 4. Does this party really want a divorce, or only a change in the situation?
 5. Has 1 Cor. 6:1-8 been violated?
 6. Has sexual sin been present?

7. Is there acceptable evidence for such sin or only hearsay and/or supposition?
 8. Has church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20) been applied?
 9. If so, what was the outcome?
 10. Is there repentance/forgiveness?
 11. Is reconciliation required?
 12. Does an unbeliever want the marriage to continue?
 13. Has a former spouse remarried another?
 14. Did any church fail to handle a divorce/remarriage properly?
 15. If so, how? And what must be done to set this right?
 16. Is the believer in a state where the church may declare him/her free from all obligations and, therefore, free to remarry?
 17. If not, what more needs to be done to bring about this condition? (These 17 questions are taken from Jay Adams, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage," p. 98.)
- B. Counsel against divorce as something that God hates, doing all within our power to bring reconciliation to each marriage relationship.
- C. Recognize that all sin complicates life and accept each individual who comes to us as a sinner, saved by grace, and help him to the best of our ability, to apply God's principles to his situation.
- D. Acknowledge no divorce as final or irreconcilable until it is final in the eyes of the state, just as we do not recognize a marriage as legal or biblical until the laws of the state are fulfilled. We recognize that people who are going through a divorce are still married and, therefore, we expect them to conduct themselves as married people.
- E. Give special attention to the counseling of candidates for remarriage by:
1. Counseling all formerly divorced persons before remarriage about any sins in their lives that may have contributed in some way to their divorce.
 2. Counseling them about the nonbiblical attitudes, ideas or expectations they may have about marriage (or marriage partners) that may have developed during the previous marriage and the divorce proceedings.
 3. Counseling them with a special emphasis on love as giving, not getting.
- F. Allow couples to use our facilities for a remarriage or be remarried by our pastors only after they have met the Biblical conditions for the allowance of remarriage and have had adequate counseling to prepare them for remarriage.
- G. Recognize that any divorce and/or remarriage that took place before conversion is already forgiven by God, but counsel carefully the person in that condition as to any repentance, reconciliation or restitution that God may require of him to restore the broken relationships of the past.

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