



Divorce and Remarriage? What Does God Say?

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Without the advantage of personal counsel I will do my best to give you as you call it "the bottom line on divorce."

First, God hates divorce but He has allowed for it out of the sinful hardness of man's heart.

Matthew 19: 7-9 says

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

It is never God's perfect will for one to divorce. But the sin nature being what it is God has made very carefully defined provisions for obtaining a Scriptural divorce. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. For that reason, we need the many good resources on how to put our lives back together again after such shattered dreams brought on by divorce.

Second, it is never God's will for two believers to divorce under any circumstances. There are no Scriptural provisions for 2 believers to divorce -- ever. The reason for this is that whenever a true Christian sins or fails in his or her marriage that person will, out of love for Christ, repent of their sin and seek reconciliation. Husband and wife must love each other in their love for Christ. Refusal to do so merely proves the love of Christ is not in them and their salvation needs to be questioned.

Third, when two people claim to be Christians and they pursue a divorce in violation of the Word, they must come under the discipline of the church to ascertain the validity of their faith. If, in conjunction with the leaders of the church, it is determined that one or the other party is insistent on pursuing a divorce and refuses to repent, then the church has the authority to declare that the hardened one is not a believer. This can never be done in isolation but must always be done in conjunction with the elders of the church. And they must be committed to enforcing the divorce parameters spelled out in Scripture:

Matthew 18:15-18 says

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. "I tell you the

truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

If a church is not willing to practice church discipline for the purpose of bringing repentance and restoration, then one should question whether or not they should remain in such a church.

Fourth, if one party is a believer and the other is not, then divorce is allowable under only two conditions. The "desertion clause" of 1 Corinthians 7:10-17 says,

"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches."

This means if a non-believer does not wish to stay in the marriage and deserts the believer then the believer may let him or her leave. The deserted one is free to remarry but only in the Lord. The "adultery clause" says that if the non-believer commits adultery the believer is free to divorce but only after all efforts to reconcile have failed. These are the only two allowable grounds for divorce in Scripture. There are no provisions for divorce such as "irreconcilable differences" or "incompatibility."

Matthew 19:1-6 says

"When Jesus had finished saying these things, He left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' He replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'"

The ultimate goal is that if the non-repentant person is a child of God, she will eventually repent and seek restoration. That's one reason for delaying any remarriage. However, once she is disciplined in this way, then she is the deserter of the marriage. As such one would be free to "let her depart" so that he can pursue a life of peace that honors Christ.

He may remarry in this context because the church discipline process as outlined in Scripture protects his standing before God and His church. However, again, I urge all people in such situations to go very slowly into new relationships and to give God's Word time to bring about repentance. Church discipline, when done Scripturally is a very slow process.

A word to anyone reading this who is struggling in their marriage: Marriage is hard work. Mid-life crises come and go. God's desire is that you work through those hard times through the power of His strength and truth of His Word. Our culture does not help couples remain pure or to learn how to represent Christ in their marriage. Yet, marriage is God's template for showing a broken world what His love looks like. It's a powerful image and a place to learn about forgiveness and restoration. I recommend the series that my wife, Sharon, and I taught, titled *Winterizing Your Home: Building a Covenantal Marriage*. Visit their web site to order, www.markinc.org.

Dr. Chuck Betters regularly answers questions like these from readers. For more questions and answers or to ask Dr. Betters a question, visit www.markinc.org

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