

What Happens When a Christian Remarries After a Divorce?

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Maybe you have been sincerely looking for a Bible answer on whether God's Word condones divorce and remarriage or does not allow for divorce and remarriage. I would like to provide that answer for you in this study. Ultimately you will be responsible to God for your own decision and actions regarding divorce and remarriage. I would like to

share with you what Jesus and Paul taught about divorce and remarriage so you can make an informed decision. The Bible will guide you in this decision-making process. Should you file for divorce? Are you already divorced and now single? Are you divorced and remarried? The Bible will shed light on where you should go from here. Psalm 119:105 promises: "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

I not only want to speak the truth in love but also write the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). My goal is not to win an argument but to progress through the Scriptures to show God's mind on divorce and remarriage. If I would give counsel on the basis of how I feel on this subject, I would come to a conclusion outside the realm of Scriptures. But I need to present truth based on what the Scriptures teach on the subject of divorce and remarriage. Although it may be hard to swallow the truth is still what sets us free from our own ideas and ways of living (John 8:32).

Although evangelicals disagree with each other on the subject of divorce and remarriage, we appeal to the same source of authority – the Word of God. But I firmly believe that within the evangelical church and community of Christians, that many ignore, misinterpret, and misrepresent the clear teaching that Jesus and Paul shared on the subject of divorce and remarriage. Let's investigate the Scriptures with an open mind and heart. God will give you the correct answers to your questions on this subject and then direct you in the right path.

Malachi 2:16 declares God's unchanging moral law on divorce when it states: "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away (*divorce*)..." You will notice that God does not say: "I hate the divorcees" but that He despises the practice of divorce. We should not condone any sin, but neither should we foolishly condemn those who have gone through marital failure. Rather than shunning divorced persons, Christians should make a special effort to include them in church activities and make them feel accepted and part of the fellowship because they have repented of their past failures and sins.

Divorce was a problem in the day of Moses, in the day of Jesus, and it's still a problem today that causes conflict in relationships and local churches. The Bible informs us about God's unchanging mind and moral law about divorce. It also informs us on the way He has chosen to regulate divorce for those who do not follow the prescribed path that marriage is for life.

What did Jesus say about divorce? Jesus taught that remarriage after divorce (while the previous mate is still alive) constitutes an act of adultery since in God's eyes you still have a "one flesh" union with your previous partner. Here are they key verses.

Mark 10:11 -12

"And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife (divorce his wife), and marry another, committeth adultery against her (he commits adultery against his former wife because according to God's moral code the man is still has a binding covenant with his wife even though he is divorced from her). And if a woman shall put away (divorce) her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (she commits adultery against her former husband because she is still bound to him by the previous marriage covenant).

Luke 16:18

"Whosoever putteth away his wife (divorces his wife), and marrieth another, committeth adultery (because according to God the previous marriage union is still intact with his previous wife): and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (commits adultery with another man's wife due to her previous marriage covenant with another man).

Jesus adds an exception clause in Matthew 5:32:

"But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife (from a legal perspective), saving (except) for the cause of fornication (an illegitimate non-

binding marital relationship not recognized by God), **causeth her to commit adultery** (when and if she remarries another man following the divorce): **and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery**” (a man also commits adultery if he has been previously divorced and remarries because of his marriage contract with his former wife).

In Matthew 19:9 the exception clause is seen again:

“And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife (divorces his wife from a legal perspective), **except it be for fornication** (a legal termination of an illegitimate marriage not recognized by God), **and shall marry another, committeth adultery:** (through remarriage adultery occurs because in God’s eyes the previous marriage covenant with the man’s former wife still exists) **and whoso marrieth her which is put away** (divorced) **doth commit adultery**” (because the previous marriage covenant of the wife still exists with her former husband).

This is the law and theology of marriage. God reveals His plan and moral law for marriage in Genesis 2:24 and repeats it in the Gospel records and epistles. It is one wife for life or one man for life. No divorce. No exceptions. There are no Biblical grounds or Pauline loopholes for divorce. In fact, no historical illustration of God divorcing Israel (Jer. 3:8) in respect to the Mosaic regulations should be used as grounds for divorce today. This illustration does not condone divorce.

Nor should the action of the restoration leaders of Ezra and Nehemiah be used as grounds for divorce. In protecting and preserving the Jewish and messianic line (bringing Christ into the world) the leaders gave permission to divorce their pagan Gentile wives (Ezra 10:1-4). But we should never use historical illustrations and unique situations during Israel’s historical community to replace and override sound doctrine (Titus 2:1) and the Biblical theology on the subject of marriage and divorce. “From the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8).

**Except For
Fornication**

But what did Jesus mean by the exception clause in Matthew’s gospel account (“except it be for fornication”)? Although some evangelicals teach the exception clause refers to adultery and that one can divorce because of the unfaithfulness of another partner, it must be understood that under the law adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20:10). This alone would exclude adultery as the exception.

James Montgomery Boice remarked:

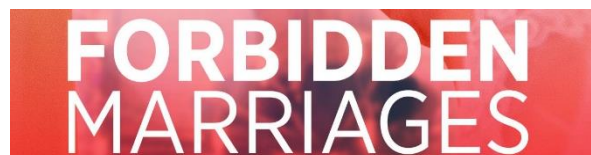
“It cannot refer to adultery because adultery was punishable by death, and in that case there would be no need for a divorce.”

It’s interesting that whenever this term “fornication” (porneia) is used in a generic way (referring to sexual immorality), it does not specifically refer to adultery (1 Cor. 6:13; 2 Cor. 12:21). It also should be noted that Matthew seems to make a distinction between the words fornication and adultery (Matt. 5:32; 15:19), as do other lists in Scripture (Gal. 5:19; Mat. 15:19; Mark 7:22; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb.13:4). Lexical and Biblical evidence does not require the meaning of adultery in the divorce texts unless it can be proven (which it cannot) that the word always means adultery. Everything points to the exception clause as being something uncommon, certainly nothing as common as adultery.

It must also be understood that the intended Roman readers of Mark’s Gospel (Mark 10:11-12) and the Greek-Gentiles readers of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 16:18) would not have known about this exception clause that was recorded only in Matthew’s Gospel and which was primarily for Jewish readers. This means the exception (“except it be for fornication”) has a special Jewish emphasis and meaning. The Jewish setting of Matthew’s gospel account uses the term “fornication” (porneia) in a specialized sense as in other instances (1 Cor. 5:1; Acts 15:20, 29) which the Jews would fully understand.

Ruling out adultery based upon the consensus of Scripture, two popular views have been given regarding the illegitimate nature and non-binding marital status under Jewish law. Some conclude it refers to the Jewish betrothal period where the two have not yet come together in physical relations. However, legally in accordance with Jewish law, and therefore before God, the two were considered husband and wife during the betrothal state (Lev. 19:20; Deut. 22:23). It was a legal and legitimate marriage even without the consummation of sexual union. Marriage is by contract – not by sexual relations. For this reason, there seems to be a better option and understanding of this exception clause that relates to “fornication” and which is pointing to a marriage not recognized by God.

Again, Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience that would be very familiar with what this word “fornication” (porneia)



was referencing. Historically during Jesus' day this referred to incest, committing sexual immorality with near kin or relatives (Leviticus 18:6-18; 20:21; Acts 15:20, 29). Near kin marriages (incestuous marriages) was a hot issue in Jesus' day and among the Jews. This was a well-known ethical and moral issue. Therefore, the Pharisees were obviously trying to put Jesus to the test and see if He would defend the Old Testament Scriptures about near kin marriages (fornication - porneia) and use these Scriptures to speak out against Herod's illegal incestuous marriage with his niece, the former wife of his brother Philip (Matt. 14:3-4).

Let's state it in simple fashion. God puts all marriages together (Matt. 19:6) *except* when two people commit incest (marriage among near kin Jewish relatives). In this unique case a marriage was never established in God's eyes and an exception could be made, where the two could sever their marriage from a *legal* standpoint and no longer live together in incest. According to Christ, He did not consider these as legitimate marriages much like homosexual marriages today.

Now getting back to the main point. God gave only one wife to Adam (not two or three wives) and said that he was to cleave to her ("to be glued together" - Gen. 2:24) and this was God's design for marriage. The concepts of cleaving and becoming "one-flesh" speaks of the permanence of the marriage relationship through an unbreakable union. This was God's desire and intent for marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).

In following the teaching of Jesus, Paul taught the same thing about divorce and remarriage. Marriage is to be a permanent union and divorce and remarriage are wrong because they result in committing adultery.

Romans 7:2-3

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law (the law of marriage which God gave in Genesis) **to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband** (the law of the permanency of marriage – "the two shall be one flesh" – Gen. 2:24). **So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress** (because according to the law of marriage she is still bound to her former husband through the covenant of marriage): **but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law** (free from the binding covenant of the law of marriage); **so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man** (a man who is not divorced himself – 1 Cor. 7:39)."



1 Corinthians 7:10-11

“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord (something that Jesus had already taught), **Let not the wife depart** (in the context of marriage a technical term for divorce) **from her husband: But and if she depart** (be divorced from him), **let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife** (divorce his wife).

Appealing to the teaching of Christ (Mark 10:9-12; Luke 16:16), Paul declares in no uncertain terms that married persons should not seek divorce. Two times he affirms the principle of no divorce (“Let not the wife depart from her husband” and “let not the husband put away his wife”). If divorce or separation does occur that person should remain single for the rest of his life or be reconciled and restored (“let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled”).

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 goes on to say:

“But to the rest (those believers who are in mixed marriages with unbelievers) **speak I, not the Lord** (unlike vv. 10-11, where Paul shares what Christ taught on divorce, Paul is now giving additional information on the subject of marriage that Christ did not share): **If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away** (no divorce). **And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him”** (no divorce).

When Paul says that he was speaking and not the Lord, it does not mean that he was presenting his own viewpoints and not speaking by inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). He is simply explaining that what he is about to say had not been previously taught by the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth. In other words, there is no instruction in the Gospels on this matter. The “rest” means those who have partners which are not believers and are involved with a mixed marriage. This passage does *not* condone a Christian marrying an unsaved person (2 Cor. 6:14-17). It probably has in view the situation where one of the partners was saved after marriage. Paul encourages the saved partner to remain in the marriage with the unsaved partner. Once again, divorce is not sanctioned by God and seen in any positive light. It’s always looked down upon by God and should be avoided.

Four times in 1 Corinthians 7:10-13 Paul argues for “no divorce.” Count them!

- “Let not the wife depart from her husband” – vs. 10
- “let not the husband put away his wife” - vs. 11
- “let him not put her away” – vs. 13
- “let her not leave him” – vs. 13

Later in the same chapter Paul concludes:

- “Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed” – vs. 27
- “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth” - vs. 39

Six times in the same chapter Paul affirms that divorce is not an option. Paul’s teaching on divorce and remarriage is that a person should remain single and if possible be reconciled to their previous marriage partner. He does not give “options” for divorce in his teachings. One must be looking for a needle in a haystack to come to these conclusions.

1 Corinthians 7:14-16 reminds us why we should not divorce even an unbelieving partner in the marriage: “**For** (the reason to strive for peace in the present marriage) **the unbelieving husband is sanctified** (set apart) **by the wife** (the believing wife), and the **unbelieving wife is sanctified** (set apart) **by the husband** (the believing husband): **else were your children unclean; but now are they holy** (they are potentially set apart for God’s movement and salvation blessing to occur in their hearts and lives because of the presence of the saved partner in the marriage). **But if the unbelieving depart** (seeking a divorce), **let him depart** (go through with the divorce). **A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases:** (the bondage or slavery to allow the unsaved partner to adversely affect their Christian life and therefore keep the marriage intact) **but** (in contrast to divorce) **God** (God’s true desire) **hath called us to peace** (to experience a peaceful relationship with the present marriage partner and maintain the marriage as previously stated in vv. 10-14). **For** (the reason to strive for peace and stay with the marriage) **what knowest thou, O wife** (the believing wife), **whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man** (the believing husband), **whether thou shalt save thy wife?”** (God may use us as an instrument to bring our unbelieving partner to salvation).

It should be noted that Paul would never give the prospect of the unbelieving partner's salvation occurring, if a believer was free to remarry or no longer be bound to their partner, as so many suggest from 1 Corinthians 7:15. In other words, don't divorce, since through a lifestyle change of godly living and the witness of the Gospel the unbelieving spouse or partner might become saved! You never know what God will do in the heart of the unbelieving partner. Therefore, stick with the marriage. As a believer, one should not promote divorce in the marriage relationship and if divorce does occur, one should strive for reconciliation with the marriage partner if a peaceful agreement can be made and maintained between the partners.

Realistically, sometimes we cannot prevent a divorce if the other partner wants to leave us. Paul says as believers we are not under the "bondage" or slavery to maintain the marriage relationship, a bondage experienced when another marriage partner seeks to draw us away from our godly commitment to Christ (1 Cor. 7:15). However, Paul never gives us permission to seek a divorce and sever our relationship with our spouse. We should always strive for "peace" in the present marriage relationship and reconciliation of the marriage (preserving the union) knowing that we might have a sanctifying impact on our partner.

The presence of a practicing and godly Christian within the home has a sanctifying influence on those who are not Christians or who are not living for Christ. So don't give up and keep practicing what some have called "tough love." Our testimony and the Gospel light can make a difference in a not so good marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:39 also speaks of the permanence of marriage:

"The wife is bound by the law (the law of marriage as stated in Genesis 2:24) as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (only a saved person who has not been divorced).



If your spouse dies you have the green light to remarry. If your previous marriage partner is still alive you should obey the red light and not remarry. Marriage is "until death do us part" but when our original partner dies, we are free to remarry another Christian who meets the "no divorce" criteria for marriage. In God's eyes a divorce certificate does not free you to remarry – only a death certificate allows you to remarry. However,

sometimes it's better to remain unmarried when one's wife or husband dies, so you can better serve the Lord and be more effective in the work of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:27

“Art thou bound unto a wife (by the moral law of marriage)? seek not to be loosed (divorced from her). Art thou loosed from a wife (either by the death of the spouse as in 1 Cor. 7:39 or by already living in a state of freedom from matrimony ties)? seek not a wife.”

Why shouldn't we seek a wife? It's because you may better serve the Lord without a wife or husband (1 Cor. 7:26-33). Much prayer and consideration must be sought before making the decision to remarry, even when you have the Biblical right (the green light) to remarry after one's spouse dies (1 Cor. 7:39). For instance, as one grows older sometimes rash decisions are made regarding marriage because of the desire for companionship. In older age, a believer should not enter a marriage quickly, without much forethought and prayer, even when the two have the Biblical right to remarry (Ps. 32:8).

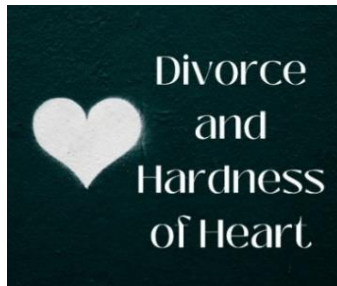
In these cases, many times some counsel is advisable with another godly friend (Prov. 11:14). However, remarriage is permissible and sometimes necessary when one partner dies, especially when a younger partner passes away (1 Cor. 7:9). God has not bound us to any previous covenant or marriage bond when a spouse dies. This is because death breaks the marriage covenant (1 Cor. 7:39).

Jesus compared physical marriage to His spiritual marriage to the Church (Eph. 5:25-33). Just as a union is formed in marriage when two people commit themselves to each other, so a spiritual union is formed when the believer is joined to Christ as he trusts Him for salvation. Will Christ ever break the relationship between Himself and His Church? Absolutely not for the Bible says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5) and nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).

**MARRIAGE
ILLUSTRATES
CHRIST'S UNION
WITH THE
CHURCH**

Since the marriage union is a picture of the permanent relationship between Christ and His Church, the marriage union itself must be viewed as a permanent

relationship. If marriage can end in divorce, it would be an inaccurate representation of the indissoluble relationship between Christ and His Church. Breaking this spiritual marriage and bond would discredit the doctrine of eternal security (John 6:47; 10:28-29).



Based upon the Bible passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-5, Jesus was asked why God allowed Moses to give a certificate of divorce to the people and gave permission for remarriage of divorced people. Jesus gives the answer in Matthew 19:8: "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so."

In other words, the people's hearts were set on getting divorces, so Moses tried to regulate the less than perfect situation regarding divorce and remarriage. It's important to understand that Moses was *legislating* divorce - not *legalizing* it as something that was commendable to God. He was dealing with an existing legal custom already in place and was not commenting on the morality or correctness of divorce. Divorce and remarriage was never looked upon with favor by God and there was a social and moral stigma attached to it (Lev. 21:7; Deut. 24:4; Mal. 2:16). Through Moses God regulated divorce (Deut. 24) and through Paul He regulated slavery (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1). But neither Jesus nor Paul approves of these actions.

It's also certain that allowing divorce and remarriage to occur because of the people's hardened hearts does not mean God was sanctioning living in continuous adultery (Deut. 24:1-5). God apparently unites divorced and remarried Christian couples in a new union while at the same time maintaining their legal forgiveness and righteous standing before God's throne (Rom. 4:6-7). In other words, they would no longer be seen as an adulterer or adulteress before God.

We know that the divorce Moses permitted in Deuteronomy 24 does not sever the original marriage relationship since in remarriage the person was defiled ("after that she is defiled" – Deut. 24:4). There is a carry-over of the previous marriage bond into the new marriage which results in an act of adultery (Matt. 5:32). However, God permitted the woman to marry again and because of His forgiving grace and own legislative law her second marriage was not considered to be a continuous act of ongoing adultery. In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 the remarried couple is

identified as “husband” and “wife” in the new relationship – not adulterers. So despite the initial adultery factor in the remarriage, a new union was formed and forgiveness was provided.

We must remember that there is a distinction between God’s *preceptive* (mandatory) or *perfect* will and His *permissive* will (what He permits). Within God’s sovereign will, He chooses to permit or allow many things to happen that He takes no pleasure in within a fallen world. In allowing these things to occur God does not *approve* of them but does *permit* them to occur. In His permissive will, God allows us to make decisions—even sinful decisions that are not God’s prescribed will and purpose for our lives. At the same time, not following God’s preceptive, prescribed, and perfect will (no remarriage because of adultery) comes with consequences such as wounds and dishonor (Prov. 6:32-35).



Here is the point. In God’s permissive will evil, sin, and wrong choices are allowed to occur, but God’s ultimate plan still triumphs every time. For example, God allowed the kidnapping and enslavement of Joseph. At every mistreatment of Joseph, God had the power to intervene, but He “permitted” the evil to happen. God allowed the sins of Joseph’s brothers in order to bring about a greater good (Genesis 50:20). In all of this God was not sanctioning sin but working behind the scenes despite the sinful and wrong choices of others. But the same might be true when a Christian decides to remarry. God can work and bring about some good despite bad decisions as evident when the people crucified Christ (Acts 2:24).



Of course, we should never sin presumptuously which means to commit willful sins against God with open knowledge and understanding of what we are doing.

Psalm 19:12-13

“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults (committing sins of which we are not aware - sins of ignorance as in Leviticus 5:17). **Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;** (sinning against God while possessing

knowledge concerning our wrongdoing) **let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.**"

To sin presumptuously is to sin with the light of revelation and truth, knowing what you are doing is wrong. It is the sin of the high hand (Numb. 15:30) which God made spiritual provision for under the Mosaic Law (Numb. 15:22-29). It's when we intentionally and openly rebel against the truth. In other words, when we knowingly disobey God's Word on divorce and remarriage and think we can still be blessed by God through disobedience, we presume upon God's grace.

Presuming on God means making life decisions with the thought in the back of our mind: "I can always come back to God after I do wrong." Presuming on God means we choose to sin and deal with our sin after the fact. We just repent, pray, and we're all set! Sinning openly while possessing knowledge of the truth does not demonstrate deep concern and remorse for violating God's holy will. Instead, we react light-heartedly toward God's purpose for our lives (James 4:8-10).

Here is the point. We should never openly defy God's will by thinking that He will somehow bring good things out of it. After all, it's possible that another marriage could be a disaster! However, we can know that somehow God can still use an unfortunate situation to make something good out of our lives (Rom. 8:28). We may not make all the right decisions, but God can still change us and use us for His glory in the future. Divorced and remarried Christian couples need to remember this. Their lives are not doomed for failure forever in the sense that they must live without God's blessing, spiritual growth, and transformation. God uses what we give Him and enables us to move on in life or as Hebrews 6:1 states: "Let us go on."

Once again, it should be understood that God's *preceptive* (mandatory) will is to remain single and not remarry after divorce since remarriage results in the act of adultery. At the same time, God's *permissive* will allows for divorce and remarriage in a sin fallen world, as in the days of Moses, because of the hard hearts of God's people toward His moral law (the permanence of marriage). In other words, they were going to do it anyway, so God legislated the moral problem through giving strict instructions when people divorced and remarried.

Of course, in allowing for divorce and remarriage God also provided forgiveness for the people so they would not live in a perpetual state of adultery (Ex. 29:36; Lev.

1:4). Today God's people, even those who are divorced, have a constant positional forgiveness before God's throne which is unchanging (Eph. 1:7; Rom. 3:24).

It must be made clear that God does not hold a believer's sin of adultery against them when he or she is divorced and remarried for "There is therefore now condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ..." (Rom. 8:1). We are freed from the penalty of sin forever. We should never fear God's wrath and judgment in Hell.



But as wonderful as this is God does in the act of remarriage maintain the individual's previous marriage covenant or bond with their living partner. Therefore, remarriage is always wrong and constitutes adultery (Matt 19:9). The previous marriage covenant is not forgotten by God (1 Cor. 7:39). We can walk away from a vow, but we cannot walk away from God who holds us accountable for what we have promised (Ps. 15:4).

Therefore, to remarry constitutes an act of adultery that needs to be forgiven and cleansed. A believer's sins are judicially and eternally forgiven based upon Christ's death (1 Cor. 15:3) but they need to be forgiven within the context of the Christian life to restore the saint's relationship and walk with God (1 John 1:9). This means that a divorced and remarried person does not live in a continual state of adultery. Forgiveness clears the Christian of adultery, and they can live without being an adultery or adulteress in the new marriage in accordance with God's legislative and regulatory purpose in remarriage (Deut. 24:1-5).

This once again brings up the question. Can a new marriage covenant be established before the death of a divorced spouse occurs? Apparently a new covenant can be created. Jesus said the woman of Samaria had five husbands and she was presently living with a man which was not her legal husband (John 4:16-18). Jesus recognized them as five different marriage covenants based upon the God-ordained government system in the day (Rom. 13:1).

But when multiple marriages are recognized, how can a person commit adultery in a new relationship? It's because God on His own terms and in His own way still

honors the first marriage covenant, since defilement occurs when remarriage and sexual relations occur after a divorce (Deut. 24:4, Matt. 19:9). Nevertheless, it's equally true that God also establishes a new covenant in remarriage with another partner. But the good news is that the unsaved couple can find forgiving grace through a *saving* relationship (Acts 16:31) with Jesus Christ and those who are already Christians who have been divorced and remarried can experience a *restored* relationship with the Lord based upon confession (1 John 1:9).

So both are true. Adultery occurs in remarriage because of the existing covenant and "one flesh" union with the previous partner. (Gen. 2:24) On the other hand, God allows a new union to form in remarriage and through His forgiving grace the sin of adultery is permanently erased (Micah 7:19) and the couple no longer lives in a perpetual state of adultery. God has a big eraser!

This brings up another question. Should a Christian dissolve their present marriage if they come to realize they have entered a marriage wrongfully? Should they break up their present marriage? We can answer the question in this way. Should sexual intercourse between married partners cease? Not according to Paul and other Scripture (1 Cor.7:5; Heb. 13:4). Should marriage end in divorce? Not according to Jesus (Mark 10:9; Matt. 19:6). Did God instruct that a new marriage should be dissolved? Not according to Moses' regulations on divorce (Duet. 24:1-4)?



It was previously recognized and legislated under Jewish Law that one could not divorce another marriage partner (in a second marriage) and return to their original marriage partner and commit adultery once again, since this practice was termed as a sinful act or "abomination before the Lord" (Deuteronomy 24:4). Why would it be an abomination? It's because another marriage covenant and bond was evidently established in God's eyes through the permission He gave to human agency and authority in recognizing the new marriage. The same would be true today when divorce and remarriage occurs. Marriage is by contract or covenant through the legal authority that God has ordained (1 Pet. 2:13-14).

To summarize, the act of adultery does occur in remarriage (Matt. 5:32) because of an outstanding covenant or bond with the previous partner but this sin can be forgiven in a new marriage covenant and union that is established, overriding the

previous union. Unsaved people can be forgiven and no longer termed an adulterer (1 Cor. 6:9-11) and believers can be restored to God's fellowship with God and be forgiven of adultery as David was (Psalm 51:10). God by His own grace can forgive the adulterous sinner and reestablish another marriage covenant that replaces the previous one, which results in the couple not living in a perpetual state of adultery. Of course, the Bible does not teach that believers in Christ can lose their salvation because of divorce or any other sin (John 3:16; 1 John 5:10-12).

Our security in our Savior's death on our behalf should never come into question since Christ paid the penalty of God's wrath (1 Pet. 3:18) for all our sins (past, present, future). On the other hand, each believer still needs forgiveness to maintain their walk with God which consists of their personal fellowship with the Lord (Ps. 51:10; 1 John 1:9). Therefore, the best thing a divorced and remarried Christian couple can do is to ask God for forgiveness because of their adultery in remarriage.

Afterward, the new couple can then go on with their lives knowing God's grace has forgiven them and align their new marriage after God's New Testament teaching regarding marriage (Eph. 5:22-33). They are to remain faithful to their new partner and create a marriage that honors and glorifies God (1 Cor. 10:31). They are not to follow the same pattern of neglect and failure in their first marriage but "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). God in His grace has given each marriage partner a second chance, a fresh start, and a new direction as they commit themselves to Christ and the local church.



There are five important truths that must be highlighted as you contemplate your decision on the matter of divorce and remarriage.



First, we must realize that it's always best to follow God's original design for marriage to receive the greatest blessing from God (Josh. 1:8). James 4:17 reminds us: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin." Jesus taught in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Our degree of love toward Christ is conditioned upon our obedience to what He teaches us in His Word.

Divorce is a sin which results in a lot of heartache, difficulty, and a soiled testimony for the Lord. The Bible declares that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). There is a certain amount of hardship we pass through when experiencing a divorce. It is inevitable. The same is true with remarriage and committing adultery.

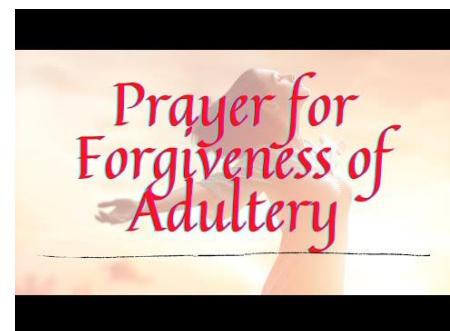
Proverbs 6:32-33 says:

“*But* whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.”

Although we are no longer physically punished for adultery there is a sense of dishonor and reproach that we take with us the rest of our life. But renewal and transformation can take place in our lives to make our new marriage and Christian life meaningful and filled with God’s blessing and growth (1 Pet. 3:9; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Nevertheless, choosing to not follow God’s law for marriage (no divorce) and remarrying after a divorce has occurred results in the sin of adultery, shame, and other wounds that we will end up carrying with us. But if we choose to follow God’s perfect will for our lives there is greater blessing. God’s purpose is that we should not defile ourselves (Dan. 1:8). The Christian is called upon to “possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (1 Thess. 4:4). Obedience to God’s will is still the very best thing! It may be hard at times, but it will pay eternal dividends or rewards (1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 John 1:8).

Second, if you are presently divorced and legally remarried to another partner, you must understand something. Although the adulterous sin of believers is legally and eternally forgiven before God, their previous marriage bonds and covenants are still intact before God’s eyes (1 Cor. 7:39). *Our sins are forgotten by God (Micah 7:19) but not our previous marriage covenant.* This is why remarriage constitutes adultery with another marriage partner (Matt. 19:9).



According to Jesus, legal divorce does not dissolve a previous marriage bond and remarriage constitutes adultery (Matthew 5:32; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). This is why there is a need for personal confession and forgiveness in relation to the Christian life after the adulterous act is perpetrated in remarriage (2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51). The confession provides forgiveness for violating our previous marriage covenant, and we can move on in our new marriage knowing that we cannot go back to our previous partner at this point (Deut. 24:4). Instead, we can accept our present marriage and lot in life, “maintain good works” (Titus 3:8, 14), and “Serve the LORD with gladness” (Ps. 100:2).

It is certain that a believer in Christ who has remarried and committed adultery can enter a new marriage and continue to claim the promise of legal forgiveness and justification before God (Rom. 5:1-2). But at the same time each child of God needs to confess his sin to God (1 John 1:9) to maintain fellowship and a right relationship with the Lord. Confession removes the dark stain of adultery from our lives. Furthermore, we can then go on with our lives in a newly established marriage relationship and live for the Lord while remaining faithful in our present marriage. Praise God we don’t have to live in the past (Phil. 3:13). Instead, we can press on developing new spiritual goals and direction for our lives and marriage knowing we are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7).



Third, whether you were divorced *before* or *after* conversion (salvation) you still do not qualify for remarriage. Some will argue, “But I was unsaved and not a Christian when I went through a divorce. Surely this qualifies me to be remarried to a Christian mate.” But Jesus does not make the “before and after conversion” distinction in

relation to divorce and remarriage. Interestingly, Jesus gave His teaching on divorce and remarriage to unbelieving Pharisees (Matt. 19:3; Mark 10:2).

Marital relationships cannot be changed just because someone is converted. *Salvation does not alter the marriage state.* The marriage is still a covenant and union before God and breaking it and starting another one, even if one is saved, would also be violating that union and covenant. Apparently one lifelong marriage is God’s standard for societal living, including unbelievers, not just for the Church. According to Paul’s teaching a marriage union between a saved and unsaved person

is viewed the same way even before becoming a Christian (1 Cor. 7:12-13). Peter also speaks of remaining with an unbeliever and not violating the ethical code on the permanence of marriage (1 Pet. 3:1). An elder was to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2), meaning faithful to his original wife and not divorced, without any distinction made between his pre or post conversion status.

Fourth, the terms “innocent party” and “guilty party” do not have any significance in the Biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. The Scriptures are silent when it comes to allowing a divorce based upon this “no guilt” terminology. Of course, one partner may be responsible for many hardships in



the marriage, but often it takes two to tangle! Also, many times both are guilty in some measure of not fulfilling the Biblical roles of husband and wife in the marriage. Even if infidelity takes place, is the other partner willing to forgive and love unconditionally and sacrificially as Christ and Paul taught (Matt. 18:21-22; Eph. 4:32)? Divorce results when two people fail to honor their covenant with one another and before God. The Bible does not give grounds for divorce based upon adultery or the innocent party.

There is no conflict between what God requires and what is best for us. God is just in establishing the law of permanency in relationship to marriage (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 115:3; Isa. 14:27; Rev. 15:3). The outcries of the innocent parties often conclude: “But that’s not fair,” or more specifically “God would not be fair if He established a rule like this,” or “You can’t expect somebody to suffer for another person’s sin.” These types of questions point their finger directly at God. People have always questioned God’s moral codes and ways, but God always does right (Gen. 18:25). The Scripture opposes those who object to God’s ways, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom. 9:20). We are not in any position to question God. “But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3).



The marriage vow has not changed. Marriage is to be “For better or for worse.” Sometimes a marriage turns into a very difficult and irresolvable situation.

However, God's unchanging law cannot be reversed (1 Cor. 7:39). Marriage is to be "Until death do us part." So we should not question God's ethical laws and dealings with mankind regarding divorce and remarriage. We must deal with divorce and remarriage based on God's moral law which is eternal and applicable to both believers and unbelievers alike. God always knows what is best for our personal lives. His laws transcend man's laws and ideas. His ways are not our ways.

In Isaiah 55:8 God declares:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."



Fifth, you must understand because of the nature of divorce, remarriage, and adultery that many fundamental and Bible-believing ministers will not conduct a wedding for a divorced couple because of the act of committing adultery in remarriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Ministers who teach the importance of sanctification (holiness) in the

Christian life do not want to condone divorce, remarriage, and adultery (Eph. 5:10-11; Rom. 12:9). In good faith they cannot override God's clear command and preceptive (mandatory) moral law that marriage is for life because "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). They understand that God still hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) - not the divorced person - and that conducting a marriage ceremony between those who are divorced causes the minister to sanction divorce and adultery as Jesus taught.

This means that Christians who choose to be remarried despite the immoral dilemma associated with remarriage should fully understand the difficult position of a minister. The couple may be friends with the pastor but at the same time he cannot under any circumstance perform a wedding between divorced Christian people (while their former mates are still alive). In doing so he would be condoning and sanctioning adultery, which is forbidden by God, a form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), and which is also a sin that requires church discipline if you are a practicing member of a local church (1 Cor. 5:11). So your decision to remarry after being divorced brings its own set of complications with it.

The Christian couple who chooses remarriage cannot expect a Gospel minister who believes in the permanency of marriage to perform their wedding in a church which

is to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). If a Christian couple chooses to be remarried under the permissive will of God, which is outside the parameters of God’s preceptive, perfect, and prescribed will, they will likely need to be married outside the church and then be restated in the church in accordance with individual church polity.

Most pastors are more than willing to encourage and support the new Christian marriage through Biblical preaching and directives for marriage. However, sometimes difficulties can arise within church life and ministry after a divorce and remarriage occurs. Different situations occurring within the church call for different solutions. In some unique cases the elders will advise that a remarried couple find a different church fellowship. For instance, a remarried person might return to the assembly while a previous spouse is still in the church. This would create a difficult situation. Although forgiveness is shared by the church with those who are repentant of their ways, the new marriage relationship would be an oddity and potentially cause jealousy, confusion, and division while former marriage partners are still serving in the local church.



1 Corinthians 14:33 declares:

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”

No matter what different situations might occur there must always be the spirit of forgiveness for the erring saints (2 Cor. 2:7-8). Divorced and remarried couples should never be looked down upon in assembly life. They should be welcomed and warmly received into a loving fellowship.

1 John 4:7

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”

Colossians 2:2

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love ...”

We are all sinners saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Everyone has sinful baggage from their past and we are called upon to love one another in the local church setting and body of Christ as blood-washed brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must all put the past behind us (Phil. 3:13) and serve the Lord together (Rom. 12:11). But at the same time most fundamental local churches do not encourage dating friendships between someone who is divorced and another who may not be divorced, or between two divorced people. The reason is because of the “appearance of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22) that such a relationship might generate and the testimony of the local assembly. A dating divorced couple could very easily be tempted to remarry resulting in an act of adultery within assembly life. It would be wise to talk to your pastor about a relationship like this so he can convey his personal thoughts regarding divorce and remarriage to you.

It should be the desire of every Christian to keep their present marriage pure and intact for the rest of their lives (1 Cor. 7:39; Titus 2:4-5). They should live above reproach and therefore provide a good testimony for their own children and the future generation of believers (1 Tim. 4:12). The strongest deterrent to divorce is positive instruction concerning God’s plan for the permanence of marriage. I’m convinced that if a Biblical view on divorce and remarriage were taught in the local churches there would be fewer divorces among believers.

In conclusion, every believer must make an informed decision regarding divorce and remarriage based on the facts of Scripture. The lamp of God’s Word will help you to make the right choice. So what is your decision? It should be to follow the “perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2) for your life. You should not presume on God’s grace and take the route of His permissive will as it relates to divorce and remarriage occurring in a fallen world of sinners. God’s will is always the best thing for your life. And remember that the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you!

Review and Application Questions

- What did Jesus and Paul teach about divorce and remarriage?
- What is God’s mandatory and perfect will regarding marriage?
- Why did Moses allow divorce?
- Are there any grounds for divorce?
- How long is marriage to last?
- In God’s eyes, when does a marriage relationship end?

- What is God's permissive will in relation to divorce and remarriage?
- Does God hate or love divorce?
- If you are divorced as a Christian, are you willing to remain unmarried for the rest of your life?
- What is a presumptuous or high-handed sin?
- Would you expect your pastor/minister to remarry you if you are divorced?
- Are you going to follow God's mandate on divorce and remarriage, or will you choose to remarry?
- What are the ramifications of being divorced and remarried in relation to your own life and church ministry?
- Does God forgive all your sins?
- What is the difference between judicial or legal forgiveness before God and forgiveness in the Christian life?
- Does God always love you and maintain your salvation when you sin?