



## Marriage & Divorce

If there are two doctrines that are taught clearly in the Bible it is marriage and divorce. If there is one doctrine that is most confused, either on purpose or accident, it is, most specifically, the doctrine of divorce. Just as Jesus met the question of divorce head-on in Matthew 19:1-9 so shall we do here.

The biblical teaching on marriage is simple: "It is not good that the man should be alone...therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 24). Marriage is the joining together of a man and a woman in a union that was created by God, and completed by the couple becoming "one flesh." Once married, the role of the wife is primarily "to be mother of sons...[as well as] manag[er of] the Household" and the role of the husband is primarily to "provide for his wife and family."<sup>1</sup> The main limitation of marriage is that it is an exclusive relationship, meaning that promiscuity and adultery are "ruled out."<sup>2</sup> Also, indissolubility is only allowed when certain conditions are present. The Bible is clear that "what therefore God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

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<sup>1</sup> Perkin, H.W. "Marriage, Marriage Customs in Bible Times." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Elwell, A. Walter. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 742.

<sup>2</sup> Granberg, L.I and Root, J.R. "Marriage, Theology of." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Elwell, A. Walter. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 743.

In Genesis 2:24 one can see that God views a couple married when the man leaves his mother and father (a new primary relationship/responsibility), the couple is joined together (a covenant with one another and God), and finally, join their two bodies together to create a complete whole, “one flesh.” There is one distinct way that this biblical view stands out from common practice today: becoming “one flesh” is solely intended for the marriage relationship, not any other relationship(s) (1 Cor. 6:16).

The Bible is clear about divorce as well: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6). God abhors divorce and does not encourage it. "A marriage is intended to be a relationship, healing and growing and maturing through time, a 'harvest of the Spirit,' which is patterned on and in turn displays something of God's covenant relationship."<sup>3</sup> A marriage union is not meant to be severed.

Although divorce is discouraged in the Bible, it is allowed under certain circumstances. The only grounds for divorce (or release from the marriage covenant, in the case of death) that are mentioned in the New Testament are "sexual immorality" (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9), death (Rom. 7:2), and if an unbeliever in the relationship wishes to leave (1 Cor. 7:15). This differs from what is witnessed in our current society. Money is a large, but decreasing, reason for divorce, as are emotional factors<sup>4</sup>; neither of which are biblical reasons for divorce.

The main objection to the view this author stands by (above) is that divorce is not biblically allowed under any circumstances (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). A second objection goes to the opposite extreme and says that a divorce can take place for any reason (Deuteronomy 24:1).

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<sup>3</sup> Atkinson, D.J. "Divorce." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Elwell, A. Walter. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 347.

<sup>4</sup> "The State of our Unions." ed. Wilcox, W. Bradford. (Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project, 2009), 45.

This author stands by his interpretation of scripture (shown above) and believes that in the case of "sexual immorality," death, or an unbeliever leaving the marriage, divorce is permitted to take place.

The topic of divorce may raise questions concerning remarriage. Specifically, is remarriage allowed? Yes. If a spouse dies, the living spouse is permitted to marry again without committing adultery (Romans 7:3). Also, if a divorce takes place due to "sexual immorality" then an individual is free to remarry due to the first marriage covenant being severed. That being said, if there is even the slightest chance of reconciliation to the first marriage, a second marriage should not take place. "Remarriage always falls under the cloud of the broken covenant of the first marriage."<sup>5</sup>

When divorce happens in the church and society, it harms the immediate family as well as society. Ultimately what is at play in divorce is love and sin. A marriage starts with love, and sin enters into the relationship to destroy it. Giving sin the victory (divorce) may lead those in the church and society to believe that God will stop loving them as a result of their sin. This is not the case, but there is no doubt that divorce, if allowed to happen, will not just affect how individuals view one another, but also how individuals view God.

God created the union of a man and a woman in the marriage covenant as a means to complete the incomplete. He did not make man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) and when one enters into marriage they are able to experience a relationship that is unlike any other relationship on earth.

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<sup>5</sup> Atkinson, D.J. "Remarriage." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Elwell, A. Walter. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 1007.



Atkinson, D.J. "Divorce." in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Elwell, A. Walter. 345. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001.

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