

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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The range of views on divorce and remarriage:

1. Divorce is *never* allowed.
2. Divorce is allowed in some cases, but *remarriage* is never allowed after divorce.
3. Divorce and remarriage are allowed *in some cases*
4. Both divorce and remarriage are allowed *on demand*.

God's revulsion towards divorce: Malachi 2:16 .

God's plan for marriage: Matt 19:6

One man, one woman, for a lifetime

Yet: God Himself has been divorced:

Jer 3:8 Is 50:1

God Himself divorced Israel when her spiritual adultery became intolerable. Although God hates divorce, God Himself acknowledges an exception, when Israel's adultery became intolerable. That principle-but-God-ordained-exception pattern is the key to understanding the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage.

Key passages:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Summarised:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 taught that a woman who was divorced by her first husband, and then a second husband as well, was not allowed to remarry the first husband. This passage does not affirm the validity of divorce; it merely restricted *remarriage* in certain cases.

Note:

The KJV translates v. 1 as if it were a command, but there is no imperative in the Hebrew.

Conclusion:

In OT Israel, divorce for the reason of a lack of favour or indecency was considered a *defilement* by God. They were invalid grounds for divorce.

Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9

In these texts, the *principle* (the married couple is indivisible) is tempered by an *exception*—the same exception God employed when He divorced Israel. Divorce is allowed (not commanded, but allowed) for sexual infidelity in the marriage.

Matt 19:7-9

The word *porneia*, translated "immorality" or "sexual immorality," was broad enough to cover any illicit sexual activity.

Divorce defiles *except* where sexual unfaithfulness has disrupted the marriage covenant.

v. 9 *except*

The word *except* means that if one divorces for the reason Jesus mentioned, then remarriage is *not* adultery. Grammatically the exception must apply both to the divorce and to the remarriage.

19:9 rewritten to reflect this:

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, except if he divorces his wife for the reason of sexual immorality.

Principle: If the divorce is for a God-allowed reason, then remarriage is also allowed.

Attacks on the exception passage in Matthew 19.

1. Since it is found only in Matthew, we should ignore it.

Responses:

- These verses are in all the manuscripts of Matthew; therefore, it was unquestionably part of the original text.
- God doesn't have to say something twice for His statements to be authoritative. (Should we, for example, exclude Matthew 18:15-17 because it's only in Matthew's gospel?).

2. This refers to sexual unfaithfulness during the engagement period, not marriage.

Responses:

- Marriage is under consideration here, not engagement. In v. 31, Jesus quoted Deut 24:1, a passage about marriage, not engagement.
- There is a specific Greek word for the engagement period, and it is not used in Matthew 5 or 19.

1 Corinthians 7

The principle/exception pattern of 1 Corinthians 7:

- In v. 3, Paul said that a husband and wife must not withhold themselves from their spouse sexually speaking. But in v. 5 Paul also said you could make an exception for times of devoted prayer.
- In v. 7, Paul encouraged believers to stay single so they could serve Christ with undistracted devotion. But in the next breath, Paul said that each person has his or her own gift regarding singleness or marriage.
- In v. 26, Paul said that it was good to stay single. But in v. 28 he said that if someone chose to marry, he or she had not sinned.

That's the pattern of the whole chapter: principles balanced by legitimate exceptions.

Four different groups addressed in 1 Corinthians 7:

- *Virgins*—never married (v. 25, 28)
- *Married*—currently married (v. 10)

- *Widows* and *widowers*—no longer married due to the death of a spouse (v. 8)
- *Unmarried*—previously married, but now divorced (v. 8)

A side note:

It is quite wrong, then, to speak of divorced parties ... as "still married in God's sight." Here, as elsewhere (Deut 24:1-4), God calls them "unmarried." (Adams Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible, 42)

Three words for divorce used in this chapter:

<i>aphenai</i>	to dismiss 7:10
<i>chorizo</i>	to separate from 7:11
<i>luw</i>	to release 7:27

All of them mean *to divorce*.

The **principle**: marriage is one man, one woman for a lifetime:

1 Cor 7:39

This is the same principle Jesus laid down in Matthew 19. The only thing that allows a partner to remarry is the death of his or her spouse (cf. Rom 7:3).

In v. 10-11, Paul applied this principle to a Corinthian situation:

Apparently some women in the Corinthian church had already divorced their husbands, thinking that this would be more spiritual than remaining married. In that case, they had only two options: to remain unmarried or to reconcile with their husbands (if the husband was a believer).

1 Cor 7:8-9 The **exception**:

Like Jesus, Paul said there were some circumstances in which an unmarried or divorced person could seek remarriage.

v. 8-9

This is an exception to the principle of v. 39, that remarriage can take place only after death.

The **exception** repeated:

v. 27-28

There were circumstances in which a "released" or divorced person could remarry without sinning. (Note: The word *you* at the beginning of v. 28 has to refer to an unmarried or divorced person. The married were already married, and the never-married virgins are addressed in the second clause. The first clause of v. 28 must refer to a previously married, but divorced person.).

Under what circumstances was it not sin for a divorced person to remarry?

Jesus: after a divorce due to sexual unfaithfulness (Matt 19).

Paul: after abandonment by an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:15)

Principle/exception (v. 12-15):

In a marriage in which only one person was a believer, Paul encouraged the couple to stay together (v. 12-13). Paul's "stay as you are" principle which dominates this chapter (v. 20, 24, 26) determines the believer should not pursue a divorce. When a person converts to Christ, his or her already existing marriage to an unbeliever is not defiling (v. 14).

Exception to "remain as you are":

v. 15 Yet, if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave ...

The command to the believing spouse is to allow the unbeliever to divorce if the unbeliever wants to do so. If reconciliation has been rejected, Paul said the believer should not resist the unbelieving partner's desire to seek a divorce. Nothing is said about the *reason* the unbeliever wants a divorce. Paul simply said, "If the unbelieving partner demands a divorce, allow it."

Regarding separation:

Some husbands or wives, refusing to allow an unbelieving spouse to divorce them, live for years in the unsettled and unsettling state of separation. That is the opposite of Paul's counsel. He said, "If the unbeliever is adamant on getting a divorce, let him do so, and have peace."

Question:

Can a believer remarry if an unbelieving spouse divorces him or her?

Yes. Three reasons:

1. Matthew 19 makes it clear that if God allows a divorce, He allows remarriage. That principle would apply in this case as well.
2. Twice in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul said that there are situations in which it is not sin for a divorced person to remarry (v. 8, 28).
3. The word *bondage* in v. 15 referred to slavery. Therefore, v. 15 means that the believing spouse is released from the powerful bonds of the marriage covenant when the unbeliever divorces him or her. The believing spouse isn't tied to or enslaved to that marriage anymore. He or she is completely released. And in that case, remarriage is not sin, as v. 28 notes: *If you [the legitimately divorced person] marry, you have not sinned...*

Adams on 1 Cor 7:15:

All the bonds of marriage have been removed. He is released entirely from every marriage obligation ... (Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible, 48)

Other scenarios:

- 1) What if a professing believer is put under church discipline, can the faithful spouse divorce him or her?

Adams:

An excommunicated party who continues to be unrepentant must be looked upon and treated as a heathen and publican When he has been put outside of the church and still evidences no signs of salvation, the believing partner may deal with him as with an unbeliever. (The Christian Counselor's Manual, 62)

If the disciplined spouse pursues a divorce, he or she is treated as an unbeliever, 1 Corinthians 7:15 applies, and the believing spouse is free to allow the divorce and to remarry in the Lord.

- 2) What about *de facto* divorce?

What if someone abandons a spouse, but refuses to divorce the spouse because of the social or financial consequences of divorce?

Response:

Typically the abandoning spouse will pursue another partner. That adultery turns the situation into a Matthew 19 scenario, in which both divorce and remarriage by the faithful partner are allowed.

In *de facto* divorce, the elders of the church must help the faithful spouse seek reconciliation. Eventually the elders and the faithful spouse may jointly decide that the abandoning partner is refusing all reconciliation, and has, in essence, divorced without divorcing (*de facto* divorce).

In that case, the remaining spouse, with his or her elders' approval, may be allowed to implement an *actual* divorce, making official the *de facto* divorce, resolving the situation and bringing peace as 1 Corinthians 7 instructs.

- 3) Can someone who was divorced before he or she became a Christian remarry after conversion?
- A new believer is not allowed to remarry his or her previous spouse, unless the ex-husband or ex-wife has become a believer: marriage is to be *in the Lord* (1 Cor 7:39).
 - The unbelieving ex-spouse can be evangelised by the church, with the hope of conversion, reconciliation, and eventual remarriage.
 - 1 Corinthians 7 says that the first option when one becomes a believer and has been divorced is to remain in the condition in which he or she was called (1 Cor 7:20).
 - As a new creature in Christ, old sins are forgiven and there is a complete starting over—therefore, marriage to a believer is not sin (1 Cor 7:28).

Summary:

1. God's plan for marriage is one man, one woman, for a lifetime (Matt 19:3-6).
2. Divorce is sin and leads to adultery when the people involved remarry (Matt 19:9; 5:32).
3. As strong as that principle is, God allows *two exceptions*:
 - Divorce is allowed in cases of sexual unfaithfulness in marriage (Matt 19:9).

- Divorce is allowed if an unbelieving spouse pursues it (1 Cor 7:15).
4. If a divorce has occurred on God-allowed grounds, remarriage to another believer is also allowed.