



“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6).

### **Divorce and Reconciliation**

**Central Truth:** Divorce is marital bankruptcy.

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**Topic:** Divorce; Marriage.

The most difficult part of your study of this subject is to keep an open mind to what the Bible says and a kindly spirit toward people who differ with your opinions regarding divorce. Since divorce is so prevalent today, it is fortunate that God has spoken so many times and so clearly about it. An understanding of divorce depends on an understanding of marriage as God designed it.

God designed marriage to be a blessing to the husband, the wife, and the children. The home, which is established in God's presence through marriage, is the foundation of society. When homes are broken all social institutions suffer — the state, the school, and even the church.

Divorce is a major problem in America. There are as many divorces as there are marriages. (But remember that some are the second and third times the same persons are divorced.) When we remember that God says that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), we must approach the subject with great care. What does the Bible teach concerning divorce which will help remedy the problem today? Here is what God says about divorce and reconciliation.

### **Divorce**

**What does the Old Testament teach about divorce?** (1) There are two occasions when divorce was permitted and one when it was demanded.

(a) When a man married a wife and found “*some uncleanness in her*,” he could give her a written bill of divorce and send her out of his house (Deuteronomy 24:1). We are not told what the “*uncleanness*” might have been; perhaps it could have been immodesty, impropriety, or immorality. Whatever it was, divorce was permitted. (b) When a husband failed to provide “*her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage*,” she could divorce him (Exodus 21:10, 11). Without providing those three things, he would not be a true husband to her. (c) When a person who worshiped God married a person who did not worship God, divorce was required (Ezra 10:7-14). That was to protect the nations from religious apostasy (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Surprisingly, divorce was not given when one party was guilty of adultery. Adultery was punished by the execution of the guilty party, not by divorce (Deuteronomy 22:22; Leviticus 20:10).

(2) There were two instances when divorce was never permitted. (a) If a husband made a charge that his wife was immoral before marriage, and the charge was proven to be untrue, he could never divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:13-19). That was to guard against false charges simply to get rid of a wife. (b) If a virgin girl was seduced by a man, he had to marry her and could never divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:28, 29). That was to curb promiscuity among the unmarried.

Remarriage was permitted for a person who had been divorced. The woman whose husband divorced her for “*uncleanness*” could remarry. Deuteronomy 24:2 says, “*She may go and be another man's wife.*” A divorced couple could turn and remarry each other if they chose (Isaiah 54:6, 7). But if the wife had married another man, she could not return to be married again to her first husband (Deuteronomy 24:4).

All Bible students must remember these foundation truths. First, God intended marriage to be permanent — one man with one woman for life. Second, God permitted divorce for the protection of the innocent party, not for the convenience or preference of either partner. Third, “*The LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: . . . therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously*” (Malachi 2:16). Distinguish between God's intention and His permission regarding divorce.

**What does Jesus teach about divorce?** There are three primary references to divorce in the teachings of Jesus; two in Matthew and one in Mark. They must be considered in the light of Old Testament teachings on the subject.

In Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus interpreted marriage and related God's original intention to the problem of divorce. That interpretation was given in a generation when divorce was so common that it was abused. It is said

among the Gentiles in Rome that the women counted their years by the number of husbands they had married. Some Jewish rabbi interpreted “*uncleanness*” in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as talking too loud, not cooking the husband's food to his taste, and other foolish things. Jesus spoke to His disciples and the Pharisees who thought divorce should be permitted for almost any reason.

Jesus emphasized the unity established between a husband and wife in marriage (verses 4-6). That unity is based on (1) their sex as God created them, (2) the separation of a man from his parents in marriage, (3) the cleaving to his wife which constitutes marriage, and (4) the union as “one flesh” established in marriage. That makes marriage permanent in God's eyes.

But why did Moses write a divorce provision in God's law to govern His people? Jesus said divorce is permitted “*because of the hardness of your hearts*” (Matthew 19:8). It was not God's design but man's depravity that made divorce necessary.

The divine intention is clearly distinguished from the divine permission in Jesus' statement: “*From the beginning it was not so*” (Matthew 19:8). That means, “It was not intended that way at the beginning (when God instituted marriage),” or, “Originally there was no such thing (as divorce).” Divorce was permitted to protect an innocent woman who was cast out by a husband who was displeased with her. Protection of the innocent party is the key to understanding God's permission to divorce. But He hates it!

Jesus forbade divorce “*except it be for fornication*” (Matthew 19:9). That is the interpretation of the “*uncleanness*” of Deuteronomy 24:1. “*Fornication*” is the translation of our word pornography. It means sensuality, immorality, and unchastity.

Adultery is the consequence of divorce and remarriage without a biblical reason. Matthew 5:31, 32 indicates that Jesus expected a divorced woman to remarry because the divorce “*CAUSES her to commit adultery.*” Mark 10:2-12 indicates that adultery is not only with someone (the sexual partner) but also against someone (the marriage partner).

**What does Paul teach on divorce?** Read I Corinthians 7:1-17. This is his only extended discussion on the subject. His teachings may be summarized in seven statements. (1) It is right and good that people marry (verses 1, 2, 26). (2) There are mutual obligations resting upon both husband and wife regarding marital intimacy (verses 3-6). (3) It is best that some people never marry (verses 7-9). (4) Those already married should remain married (verses 10, 11). (5) The marriage of a Christian and a non-Christian is valid (though not recommended) before God because of the sanctifying

influence of the Christian on that union (verses 10, 11). (6) Desertion of the Christian by the non-Christian partner breaks the bond, for *“a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases”* (verse 15). (7) A believer married to an unbeliever should seek to lead the partner to faith in Christ (verse 16).

There are many principles in that short text. Do not hasten through it. If Bible teaching on marriage and divorce is important to you, spend time in prayerful study over those verses. The Holy Spirit will show you the truth as God intends it.

### **Reconciliation**

**Do not consider divorce an option in a troubled marriage.** You can work to repair a broken marriage before divorce is decreed. Here are some principles to follow in heading off divorce.

(1) Look for a remedy, not an escape. Don't even talk of leaving your partner; don't let your mind dwell on its advantages. Stop all feelings of self-pity and look to the welfare of your mate, whatever it might cost you personally.

(2) Accept responsibility for your part of the problem. There is no totally “innocent” person. Stop all criticism and work on communication. Completely forgive all offenses and offenders. Change yourself rather than trying to change your mate.

(3) Renew your love for your mate. Make a list of his or her strengths. What attracted you to that person originally? Emphasize those points of strengths in your thoughts about your mate.

(4) Find out what God is saying to you through the conflict. Is He working to break your stubborn will? Is He showing you what genuine love is (giving of self for the sake of another)? Is He creating in you a servant's heart which says, *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (II Corinthians 12:15)? Is He making you look to Him, rather than to another person, for your needs? God speaks through your troubles as well as your blessings.

Consider what divorce will say to your children. It says marriage is a matter of convenience, not a binding, sacred covenant. It teaches them to run from their problems rather than to face them and solve them. It indicates that there are some problems God cannot solve; specifically, the problem of a rebellious mate. It says a vow before God is not binding but is kept only when convenient and comfortable. Is that what you want to say to your children?

**You can improve the situation if you are already divorced.** First, accept responsibility for your part of the problem; do not place all the blame

on your mate. Then gain a clear conscience with your mate and others affected so they can never say, “You wronged me and made no effort to set it right.” Then learn to commit everything to God (including child support, sexual desires, etc.) and trust Him alone to satisfy your needs. Seek counsel from mature Christians (preferably of the same sex as you) to help you through the difficulties you face. Give your life to a ministry of helping others through what you have learned. And make every effort to restore your marriage.

Divorce is not a quick way to get out of a bad situation into a good one. It gets you out of one bad situation into another bad situation. You take your problems with you out of the marriage into the divorced state. Often those problems are compounded. Divorce is marital bankruptcy.

The home and marriage are under demonic attack today. Faithful Christians, even ministers of the gospel, are falling. The low standards of society require an emphasis on the biblical standards of marriage. Our society cannot survive if the homes of our nation are broken. Pray for the homes of America, yours as well as others. God wants us to have stable homes.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why is divorce “marital bankruptcy?”
2. Why is divorce so common in our society?
3. How is the home the foundation of a stable society?
4. Why did God permit divorce to be included in the Bible?
5. What is your opinion of Bible teaching on marriage after divorce?
6. How did He distinguish God's intention from His permission on divorce?
7. How can one repair a marriage before divorce occurs?
8. What does divorce say to the children involved?
9. What should a divorced person do to improve the situation?
10. How can you strengthen your own family?