

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE

*“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife:
and they shall be one flesh.” –Genesis 2:24*

A Concise Biblical Perspective



Divorce and remarriage is an area of intense controversy among Christians. It is admittedly a difficult and complex issue. Doctrinal positions on this issue range from “*no divorce, no remarriage under any circumstances*” to “*divorce for any cause.*” We, at *Consuming Fire Fellowship*, offer this concise doctrinal statement which we feel reflects the spirit and letter of Scripture regarding this issue.

Marriage Is A Lifetime Contract In The Purpose of God

Genesis 2:24 speaks of the man and woman “*cleaving*” to each other and “*becoming one flesh.*” Thus, breaking a marriage is like rending the body apart.

The marriage contract is intended to be binding until death (I Corinthians 7:39).

Marriage is symbolic of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31, 32) who are bound in an indissoluble union which can only be broken by death via sin (Romans 6:23; 8:13).

Divorce Is Sin & Should Never Be Practiced By Christians

Malachi 2:16 says that the Lord hates divorce; the Lord Jesus reaffirms this in Matthew 19:3-9 (what “*God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*”).

Nevertheless, should Christians be innocently abandoned and divorced by their spouses there is little they can do in our licentious and Christ-rejecting culture.

The Exception Clause: *For Fornication*

The Lord Jesus names “*fornication*” as grounds for remarriage after one has been divorced (Matthew 19:3-9). However, what does our Lord mean when using the term “*fornication*?” The Greek word “*pornea*” translated “*fornication*” in Matthew 19 and Luke is used elsewhere in Scripture to denote “*harlotry*” (Luke 15:30); “*incestuous relationships*” (I Corinthians 5:1); “*sodomite relationships*” (Jude 1:7); “*betrothal unfaithfulness*” (Deuteronomy 22:13-21); and “*marital unfaithfulness*” (Proverbs 7:10-20; Hosea 2:2; Jeremiah 3:6-9; Ezekiel 16:28-34; 23:43-45), where *adultery* and *fornication* are used synonymously.

As shown above, the restricting of “*fornication*” to mean only “*betrothal unfaithfulness*” is to ignore its usage in other parts of the Bible.

However, when Jesus cites “*fornication*” as an exception to His divine principles regarding divorce and remarriage He cannot be referring to single acts of sin. Why? Because elsewhere the Bible instructs Christians to forgive and to seek reconciliation, to love our enemies, and to even pray for those who spitefully use us. Therefore, we are of the opinion that what is meant in these passages refers to “*perpetual adultery*,” or, being deserted by a spouse who then remarries another, thus committing continual adultery. There is no command in the Bible that marriage *must be* broken off for fornication or any other sin. There is a better course—to forgive, and be reconciled (as in Hosea 1-3).

Desertion By An Unbeliever

Desertion of a believing mate is addressed by the *Apostle Paul* in his first letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 7:15). The Apostle states that the believing mate “*is not under bondage*” in such cases. Again, we are of the opinion, based on the totality of Scripture, “*desertion*” here refers to being abandoned, divorced, and the offending party remarrying another. Under these conditions the deserted Christian is not bound to the marriage contract. This situation is in direct contrast to that of *I Corinthians 7:11*, where the “*separated*” believer is bound to the spouse. The same root word (“bound” or “bondage”) is used in I Corinthians 7:27 & 39 where it refers to the marriage contract. Moreover, the incentive to remain with the unbelieving partner (i.e., that the unbelieving partner is sanctified by the unbelieving spouse) is nullified when the unbelieving partner deserts.

Two Christians joined in wedlock do not have grounds for divorce outside of “*fornication*.” Allowance is made for “*separation*,” but there is no allowance for divorce (“*putting away*”) or remarriage (“*let her remain unmarried*”). The reason stated is that the door must always be open for “*reconciliation*.”

Scriptural Divorce Gives a Right To Remarry

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 24:1,2 which clearly states that a right to divorce means a right to remarry (Matthew 19:8).

Since a Scriptural divorce is a dissolution of marriage, the Scripturally divorced person is an unmarried person. When a former partner marries, the other party is automatically freed from the bonds of that marriage, regardless of where the guilt lies, and thus is free to remarry.

Remarriage is not permitted for desertion of a believer by a believer, unless the deserting party remarries (thus committing adultery and breaking the marriage bond).

Remarriage is not permitted in the absence of fornication or desertion of a believer by a believer where the divorced partner is still living.

Remarriage is permitted when a former divorced partner is deceased.

Moral Failure, When Duly Repented Of, Cannot Bar The Offended From Fellowship

When a person comes to Christ, he is forgiven of all failures in life, moral or otherwise (II Corinthians 5:17). Human obligations may continue, however. If he is divorced and remarried before salvation, he should remain in the new marriage, since to remarry the former spouse (even if possible) would be an abomination (Deuteronomy 24:3,4). If he is divorced without Scriptural cause and has not remarried and his spouse is not remarried, he may be reconciled to the former spouse or remain unmarried.

Unscripturally divorced persons or unscripturally remarried persons should not be barred from church fellowship if there is clear evidence of repentance.

The right hand of fellowship may be denied for those who deliberately obtain an unscriptural divorce or remarriage against counsel. When considering a divorced person for an official church position, the Elders must weight the facts of each case in order to determine eligibility. Qualifications for leaders as expressed in *I Timothy 3* and *Titus 1* should be applied to present character rather than the former shame of the unregenerate life.

Sanctity of Marriage

We are as fully committed to the sacred character of marital commitments as other believers. We join with them in deploring the high divorce rate and the disintegration of family life. Our view of the Scriptures is not a careless yielding to the spirit of modern life, but a conscientious examination of the entire teaching of God's Word on this subject. Let us hope those of differing views respect our Scriptural conscience.

–B.W.

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