

# Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

## 1. Jesus: The Pattern for Answering the Question on Divorce (and other model-breakers)

- a. **The Challenge** (Matt 19:3) “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?
  - i. **First A proper perspective on marriage** (4) “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ (5) and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? (6) So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.
- b. **The Challenge Continued** (Matt 19:7) “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”
  - i. **Second A proper perspective on divorce** (8) Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. (9) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

## 2. The Marriage Typology Created

- a. (Gen 1:26-27) God creates man in his own image as male and female
  - i. God’s complex image of unity and diversity necessary in male and female
  - ii. God’s authority as ruler conveyed to man and woman who are to rule
  - iii. Man and woman are to carry out their function by being fruitful and multiplying
  - iv. Man and woman to carry out their function by subduing the Earth and ruling over it
  - v. This structure is good
- b. Man and Woman created
  - i. (Gen 2:7) Man was created first
    1. Authority was given to him
    2. Commands given to him
  - ii. (Gen 2:18) Lack of goodness noted by God
    1. (Gen 2:20) God allows Adam to notice lack of helper
      - a. Never has been with anyone
      - b. No helper available while all animals had it
      - c. The woman is supposed to be a suitable helper
    2. (Gen 2:22) God forms woman
      - a. From man’s side
      - b. Presents the woman to the man

- c. Presented chaste (never has been with anyone)
  - c. (Gen 2:23) Man makes the covenant to woman
    - i. Man makes the covenant
      - 1. This is now bone of my bones—the innards are one
      - 2. And flesh of my flesh—the bodies are now one
    - ii. Man acts out headship by naming woman
      - 1. She shall be called Woman since she came from Man
  - d. (Gen 2:24) Explanation of the covenant structure
    - i. For this reason, a man leaves his father and mother
      - 1. A separation from the headship of parents
    - ii. And is joined to his wife
      - 1. Not a separation to be on his own or with friends
      - 2. A new entity comprised of the union of the man to the woman
    - iii. And the two become one flesh (Gen 2:24)
      - 1. (Gen 1:26-27) Male and Female he created them
      - 2. They are an entity
  - e. **Christ's summarizing statement:** *But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:5-9)*

### 3. The Marriage Typology Enacted

- a. **Songs: The Groom-King and his Shulamite Bride**
  - i. Awaiting their Consummation
    - 1. Expectant
      - a. The Bride's expectation for her groom
        - i. Eager (Song 1:1-5)
        - ii. Honest about who she is in comparison (Song 1:5-7; 2:1)
        - iii. Earnest in her admiration of her groom (2:2-3; 5:10-16)
        - iv. Darkness during the wait
          - 1. The bride sought him and couldn't find him (3:1-3)
      - b. The groom's expectation for his bride
        - i. Eager (Song 1:8)
        - ii. Exulting in her (Song 1:9,13-17; 5:)
        - iii. Exulting in his gifting to her (Song 1:10-12)
    - 2. Thankful
      - a. The Bride's thanksgiving for her groom
        - i. His provision (Song 2:4-5)
        - ii. His passion (Song 2:6-7)

- iii. His impending arrival (Song 2:9-17)
  - ii. Arrival of the Groom-King
    - 1. Procession of the Groom-King
      - a. Coming up from the wilderness (2:6)
      - b. Wrapped with a procession of the mighty (2:7-8)
      - c. The groom-king on a sedan chair from rich wood (2:9-10)
        - i. Posts of silver, back of gold, seat of purple, interior lovingly fitted by the daughters of Jerusalem
      - d. Daughters of Jerusalem to go out and gaze on the crowned king (2:11)
        - i. Crowned by his mother
        - ii. For his wedding day; for his day of gladness
    - 2. Confession of the Groom-King
      - a. Admiration of the bride's perfection (4:1-7)
      - b. Calling to her to join him (4:8)
      - c. Confessing what she does for him (4:9)
      - d. Admiration of the bride's love and desire (4:10-15)
    - 3. Invitation and Reciprocation
      - a. Bride: enjoy me (4:16)
      - b. Groom: I will (5:1)
      - c. The choir: feast! (5:1)
      - d. The Gap
        - i. Darkness of separation (5:1-9)
          - 1. He calls and she responds too late (5:1-6)
          - 2. She looks for him and can't find him (5:6)
          - 3. The watchmen catch her and mistreat her (5:7)
          - 4. She asks the daughters of Jerusalem to find her beloved because she is lovesick (5:8)
        - ii. Seeking the king
          - 1. The daughters ask what her beloved is like (5:9)
          - 2. Confession of the bride during the dark (5:10-16)
            - a. She still admires her beloved
            - b. She still loves his friendship (5:16)
          - 3. The daughters ask where he has gone so that they can help her find him (6:1)
            - a. She says where he has gone (6:2-3)
          - 4. They find him and he admires her (6:4-12)
            - a. The choir rejoices (6:13)
            - b. He rejoices (6:13)
            - c. He professes her beauty (7:1-9)
- iii. Union and Final Consummation

1. Profession of mutual love (7:10)
  2. Profession of mutual location (7:11-13)
  3. The lovers united (8:1-14)
- b. **Psalm 45: The King and His Bride**
- i. Admiration
    1. of the groom king (45:1-9)
  - ii. Call
    1. to the bride (45:9-11)
  - iii. Procession
    1. Admiration of the bride (45:12-13)
    2. Procession of the bride (45:14-15)
  - iv. Blessing
    1. Progeny of the union blessed (4:16-17)
- c. Levitical Marriage (Leviticus 21)
- i. Priest Holy to God
    1. Not take a woman who
      - a. Profaned by harlotry (21:7)
      - b. Divorced from her husband (21:7)
  - ii. High priest sanctified by the Lord (21:10, 15)
    1. Not take a woman who
      - a. Is a widow (21:14)
      - b. Profaned by harlotry (21:14)
      - c. Divorced (21:14)
    2. To only take
      - a. A wife in her virginity (21:13)
      - b. A virgin of his own people (21:14)

#### 4. The Marriage Typology: The Explained Ideal

- a. (Eph. 5:22) **Proper Order:** Wives are subject to their own husbands as to the Lord
  - i. (24) As the church is subject to Christ
    1. Wives subject to their husbands
      - a. in everything
  - ii. (23) Wives have a head
    1. Husbands are the head of the wife
      - a. Just as Christ is head of the church
    2. Christ is the savior of the body
      - a. Christ is head of his body (Eph 1:23)
      - b. One new humanity, one body, reconciled through the cross (Eph 2:15-17)
      - c. Sharing the promise in Christ (Eph 3:6)
      - d. Called in unity of the spirit (Eph 4:4)
      - e. Maturing together to the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:15)
      - f. Built together in love, each part working (Eph 4:16)
  - iii. (33) The wife is to respect her husband

- b. (Eph 5:25) **Sacrificial Love:** Husbands are to love wives
  - iv. (29; 23) Just as Christ loved the church
    - 1. (23) Christ is the savior of the body
    - 2. (25) Christ gave himself up for her
    - 3. (26) Christ gave himself so that he might sanctify her
    - 4. (26) Christ gave himself so that he cleansed her with the water of the word
    - 5. (27) Christ gave himself so that he might present to himself the church in all her glory
      - a. With no spot, or wrinkle, or anything
      - b. So that she be holy and blameless
  - v. (Eph 5:28) As loving their own bodies
    - 1. (28) He who loves his own wife loves himself
    - 2. (29) No one has hated his own flesh
      - a. He nourishes his own flesh (he feeds it)
      - b. He cherishes it (he takes care of it)
    - 3. (30) and [Christian] husbands and wives are members of his body
    - 4. In accordance with the created marriage covenant
      - a. (31) For this reason, the man leaves his father to be joined to his wife and the two become one flesh (Gen 2:24)
      - b. (32) This is the great mystery of Christ and the church
    - 5. (33) Each individual is to love his own wife as himself

## 5. The Marriage Typology Culminated

- a. Historical three stages of Marriage
  - i. The Betrothal (Matt 1:18; Luke 2:5)
  - ii. The Bridegroom Midnight Procession and Reception
  - iii. The Marriage Supper (John 2:1-2)
- b. The Distant Woman Betrothed
  - i. Hosea 2:14-23
    - 1. I will allure her, in the wilderness, speaking kindly to her
    - 2. I will give her vineyards. She will sing as in the days of her youth
      - a. You will call me husband and not master
    - 3. I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth
    - 4. I will make a covenant for them
      - a. Beasts, birds, creeping things
      - b. I will Abolish the bow, sword and war
      - c. I will make them lie down in safety
    - 5. I will betroth you to me forever
      - a. In righteousness and justice
      - b. In lovingkindness and compassion
    - 6. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness
      - a. You will know the Lord
    - 7. I will respond

- a. To the heavens and they to the earth
    - b. To the grain, the new wine, the oil and they to Jezreel
  - 8. I will sow her for myself in the land
  - 9. I will have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion
  - 10. I will say to those who were not My people “ You are my people”
    - a. They will say “You are my God”
- c. The Bridegroom Reception
  - i. Enjoying Him while he’s here—fasting while he’s not
    - 1. The bridegroom’s attendants not fasting while the Bridegroom is here
      - a. Mark 2:19 Why do John’s disciples fast and yours do not (18)?
        - i. It is not is it that the attendants have the ability to fast when they’re with the bridegroom? When they’re with the bridegroom, they’re not able to fast. (19)
        - ii. Days will come when the bridegroom is lifted up from them and they will fast. (20)
      - b. Unasked question: is the fasting permanent? Will they never see the bridegroom again?
    - ii. Readily Waiting
      - 1. The Virgins waiting for the Bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13)
        - a. They all took lamps to meet the bridegroom; only five took extra oil (1-4)
        - b. Bridegroom delayed and they all slept (5)
        - c. There was a shout: “come out to meet him—he’s here!” (6)
        - d. All virgins rose and trimmed the lamps (7)
          - i. The ones who didn’t plan, their lamps started going out (8)
          - ii. The prudent said “No, go buy some because there won’t be enough for us (9)
        - e. Bridegroom came when five went away (10)
        - f. Doors to the wedding were shut (10)
          - i. Virgins also came saying “Open to us the door” (11)
          - ii. He answered, “I do not know you” (12)
- d. The Bride Presented
  - i. Ephesians 5:27
    - 1. He cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that he might present himself the church in all her glory, holy and blameless.
  - ii. Rev 19:6-8
    - 1. (6-7) The voice of a great multitude saying
      - a. “Hallelujah! The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!”

- b. “Let us rejoice and be glad: the marriage of the Lamb has come—the Bride has made herself ready!
    - 2. (8) She was given clothing
      - a. To cloth herself in fine linen
      - b. It is bright and clean
        - i. The righteous acts of the saints
  - e. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9)
    - i. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.
    - ii. These are the true words of God
      - 1. John moved to worship and bowed at the feet of the speaker (Rev 17:1)
        - a. Speaker stops him and says “I am a fellow servant of yours (Rev 1:1) and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God not me.
  - f. The bride arrives (Revelation 21:8) and the union is permanent (Rev 22)

## 6. The Questioned Covenant

- a. What is God’s position on divorce?
  - i. God hates it but was divorced
    - 1. He hates it: Malachi 2:14-16
      - a. He made provisions for the fact of it (look down in the section of Marriage, Divorce, and Defilement)
    - 2. He says he divorced Israel (Jeremiah 3:8)
      - a. He woos Israel back (Hosea)
    - 3. He loves people
      - a. He makes provisions for protection of them within marriages
- b. What’s wrong with divorce and remarriage? (Matt 5:31)
  - i. Jesus says “it is said let him give her a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1)
    - 1. But I say to you
      - a. Everyone who divorces his wife (*except for unchastity. If it is for unchastity, she has made herself an adulterous woman but if without unchastity then he*) makes her commit adultery (*he’s forcing her to be in a situation of joining to another*)
      - b. Everyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (*he’s taking someone that is someone else’s wife*)
    - 2. Note that the context is the sermon of the mount where Jesus has said things like *hatred is murder, looking at a woman with desire is adultery in the heart, cutting off the hand that causes sin but also things like love your enemies and pray for them, turn the other cheek, don’t be anxious for anything, and don’t judge others.*

- c. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? (Mark 10:2; 11)
  - i. What did Moses command you?
    - 1. They said “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of Divorce
  - ii. Divorce Allowed because of hardness
    - 1. Because of the hardness of your heart Moses wrote this commandment
    - 2. But dangerous
      - a. From creation, God made them male and female (Gen 2:24)—what God has joined together, let no man separate
  - iii. Remarriage after divorce as adultery
    - 1. And marries another woman
      - a. He commits adultery against her
    - 2. If she herself divorces her husband
      - a. And she marries another man
      - b. She commits adultery
  - iv. **Note:** *Moses didn't create the law. The law was given through Moses (John 1:17; 7:19 and Deuteronomy 5:4-22) but apparently it included historically nuanced and situational commands. For example, gleaning the field by orphans, widows, and the poor: (Exod. 23:10-11)*
- d. Is it lawful for a man to put his wife away for any reason? (Matt 19:3-6)
  - v. Jesus answers have you not read
    - 1. In the beginning they were created male and female (Matt 19:4)
    - 2. Gen 2:24 quotation so that they are no longer two but one (Matt 19:5-6)
      - a. They become one via God's joining (Matt 19:6)
      - b. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.
- e. Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away? (Matt 19:7-9)
  - i. Examination of original text in context: Key is Deuteronomy 24:1-4
    - 1. The Defiled Ex-Wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)
      - a. When a man takes a wife and marries her
        - i. If she finds no favor in his eyes
        - ii. If he has found some indecency in her
      - b. He then writes her a certificate of divorce
        - iii. Puts it in her hands
        - iv. Sends her out of his house
          - 1. She leaves his house
      - c. She becomes another man's wife
        - v. He turns against her
          - 1. He writes her a certificate of divorce
          - 2. He puts it in her hand
          - 3. He sends her out of his house



- vi. Or he dies
    - d. Former husband who sent her away
      - vii. Is not allowed to take her again to be his wife
      - viii. She has been defiled
    - e. That is an abomination before the Lord
      - ix. You shall not bring sin on the land
  - ii. (Matt 19:8) Circumstantial Allowance
    - 1. Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives
      - a. From the beginning it was not this way
  - iii. (Matt 19:9) Who ever divorces his wife
    - 1. Except for immorality
    - 2. Marries another woman
    - 3. Commits adultery
- f. (Matt 19:10) If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.
  - i. Not all men can accept this statement (of not marrying)
    - 1. Only to those to whom it has been given
    - 2. There are those who were born as eunuchs
    - 3. There are those who are eunuchs by men
    - 4. There are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven
    - 5. Those who are able to accept it, accept it
- g. (Luke 16:18) Everyone who divorces his wife
  - i. And marries another
    - 1. Commits adultery
  - ii. He who marries one who is divorced from a husband
    - 2. Commits adultery
- h. Should we avoid sex altogether? (1 Cor 7)
  - i. It is good not to touch a woman
    - 1. But because of immorality: each man is to have his own wife
    - 2. But because of immorality: each woman is to have her own husband
  - ii. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife
    - 1. The wife must do likewise to her husband
  - iii. The body belongs to the other
    - 1. The wife does not have authority over her own body: the husband does
    - 2. The husband does not have authority over his own body: the wife does
  - iv. Stop depriving one another
    - 1. Except by agreement
    - 2. Except only for a season of prayer
    - 3. Except with plans to come together again

- b. So that Satan will not tempt you because of lack of self-control
- v. (7) I wish all were like myself
  - 1. But each man has his own gift from God
- vi. I say to unmarried and to widows: remain like me
  - 1. But if you can't then marry
  - 2. It is better to marry than to burn

## 2. The Pauline Exception (1 Cor 7)

- a. To the married
  - i. the wife should not leave her husband
    - 1. If she does leave, she must remain unmarried
    - 2. Otherwise let her reconcile to her husband
  - ii. The husband should not divorce his wife
- b. To the mixed marriages
  - i. If a brother has an unbelieving wife
    - 1. If she consents to live with him
    - 2. He must not divorce her
  - ii. If a woman has an unbelieving husband
    - 1. If he consents to live with her
    - 2. She must not send her husband away
  - iii. A sanctified union
    - 1. The unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believing spouse
    - 2. The children are holy
  - iv. (15) if the unbelieving one leaves (likely because of the gospel), let him leave
    - 1. The brother or the sister is not a slave here
    - 2. God has called us to peace (don't make war)
    - 3. (16) You don't know if God will save your spouse
  - v. Don't seek to change
    - 1. (27) If bound to a wife, don't seek release
    - 2. If released from a wife, don't seek bonding
      - a. (28) But if you marry, you have not sinned
      - b. If a virgin marries, she has not sinned
      - c. (36) If any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin, let him do as he wish: let her marry
    - 3. Don't seek to be bound with an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14-15)

## 7. The Guardrails on Marriage and Defilement

- a. Marriage should be undefiled (Hebrews 13:4)
  - i. Marriage isn't rejected but should be honored by all
    - 1. False teachers will be marked by their actions of forbidding marriage (1 Tim 4:3)
    - 2. Young widows are encouraged to remarry (1 Timothy 5:14)
  - ii. The Marriage Bed should be kept pure—no adultery, no admixture

1. God will judge the sexually immoral
  - a. 1 Cor 6:18 sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body
  - b. Defiling the marriage bed is sin against the unified body of the man and wife
  - c. We are to rather glorify god in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20)
- b. Marriage should not be an unequal yolk (2 Cor 6:14)
  - i. There are two different realms
- c. The Wife is bound by law (Romans 7:2-3)
  - i. A married woman is bound—Jewish woman could not give a certificate of divorce.
    1. By law
    2. To her husband
      - a. While he is living
      - b. If he dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband
  - ii. If she is joined to another while her husband lives
    1. She shall be called an adulteress
  - iii. If her husband dies (1 Cor 7:39)
    1. She is free from the law
    2. She is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man
      - a. She must only marry a believer

## **8. The Old Testament Laws on Marriage and Defilement in light of typology**

- a. A Permanent Marriage of the Defiled Daughter (Deut. 22:13-21)
  - i. A man takes a wife
    1. He goes in to her
    2. He turns against her
    3. He charges he with shameful deeds
    4. He publicly defames her
    5. He says "I too this woman but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin"
  - ii. The girl's father says
    1. I gave my daughter to this man for a wife
    2. He turned against her
    3. He charged her with shameful deeds
    4. (17) This is the evidence of my daughter's virginity
  - iv. The elders of that city
    1. Shall take the man
      - a. Shall chastise him
      - b. Shall fine him 100 shekels of silver
      - c. She shall remain his wife
      - d. He can't divorce the wife all of her days
  - v. (20) If the charge is true

1. She shall be brought to the doorway of her father's house
  2. The men of her city shall stone her to death
    - a. Because she committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house
- vi. **Conclusion:** The union of the couple is serious and should not be thought of as an abstract element enjoyed outside of the marriage covenant. God's union with his people isn't abstract and non-committal but rather transforms the entire situation into a permanent redeeming bond.
- b. The Defiled Couple (Deut. 22:22)
- i. If a man is found lying with a married woman
    1. Both of them shall die
    2. Purge the evil from Israel
  - ii. **Conclusion:** Sex is for marriage. The union is serious and takes in the will of the bride as committed to the union. God's union with his people isn't forced but committed and reciprocated and permanent.
- c. The Defiled Virgin (Deut. 22:23-)
- i. If there is a virgin who is engaged to a man
    1. Another finds her in the city and lies with her
      - a. She doesn't cry out
      - b. Both of them stoned to death—he has violated his. Neighbor's wife
    2. (25) Another finds her in the field
      - a. She cries out but no one there to save her
      - b. The man shall die
      - c. Do nothing to the girl
      - d. This is equal to a man rising up in the field against his neighbor
  - ii. (28) If there is a virgin who is not engaged to a man
    1. A man seizes her and lies with her
    2. The man who lay with her shall give to the father 50 shekels of silver
    3. The man who lay with her can't divorce her all his days
  - iii. **Conclusion:** The union of the couple is serious and should not be thought of as an abstract element enjoyed outside of the marriage covenant. God's union with his people isn't abstract and non-committal but rather transforms the entire situation into a permanent redeeming bond.
- d. The Defiled Family (Deut. 22:30)
- i. A man shall not take his father's wife
  - ii. **Conclusion:** The union is not to be perversely twisted so as to abuse the boundaries that have been established. God's union with his people is the natural union for which his people were designed to dwell together in this bond.
- e. The Defiled Ex-Wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

- i. When a man takes a wife and marries her
    - 1. If she finds no favor in his eyes
    - 2. He has found some indecency in her
  - ii. He then writes her a certificate of divorce
    - 1. Puts it in her hands
    - 2. Sends her out of his house
    - 3. She leaves his house
  - iii. She becomes another man's wife
    - 1. He turns against her
      - e. He writes her a certificate of divorce
      - f. He puts it in her hand
      - g. He sends her out of his house
    - 2. Or he dies
  - iv. Former husband who sent her away
    - 1. Is not allowed to take her again to be his wife
    - 2. She has been defiled
  - v. That is an abomination before the Lord
    - 1. You shall not bring sin on the land
  - vi. **Conclusion:** The marriage union is not something to be trifled with so as to pollute the bride or to treat her as an object made to be let go and returned at will. The husband is to commit to her and she to him. This allowance of the divorce is only because of the hardness of man's heart but the intent here was really that marriage should always be forever bound together just as the Lord's union is permanent, binding, and unsullied.
- f. The Happy Year of the Wife (Deut. 24:5)
- i. When a man takes a new wife
    - 1. He shall not go out with the army
    - 2. He shall not be charged with any duty
    - 3. He shall be free at home one year
    - 4. He shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken
    - 5. **Conclusion:** The wife finds her deepest enjoyment when she is united with the husband that sacrifices for her and gives himself up for her, no matter the duties that come along his way. God sacrificed so fully so as to shed his own blood so that the bride would be presented without blemish and blossoming in her fullest joy.

9. Answers from Church History

- a. ***"In the first five centuries (among Christians) all Greek writers and all Latin writers except one agree that remarriage following divorce for any reason is adulterous. The marriage bond was seen to unite both parties until the death of one of them."*** — The evidence for this is compiled in Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, pp. 19-44. ( The quote is taken from p. 22. Some of the writers in

*view are Hermas, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origin, Tertullian, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, etc. The one exception was Ambrosiaster.)*

—Piper, J. (1989, May 2). A Statement on Divorce & Remarriage in the Life of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-statement-on-divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-life-of-bethlehem-baptist-church>

- b. **Athenagoras** “A person should either remain as he was born, or be content with one marriage; for a second marriage is only a specious adultery. For whoever puts away his wife, say He, and marries another, commits adultery.; not permitting a man to send her away whose virginity he has brought to an end, nor to marry again. For he who deprives himself of his first wife, even though she be dead, is a cloaked adulterer, resisting the hand of God...and dissolving the strictest union of flesh with flesh” (Athenagoras, Plea for the Christians 33, Schaff).
- c. **Tertullian:** “If those whom God has conjoined man shall not separate by divorce, it is equally congruous that those whom God has separated by death man is not to conjoin by marriage; the joining of the separation will be just as contrary to God’s will as would have been the separation of the conjunction” (Tertullian, Monogamy 9, Schaff).
- d. **Tertullian** “Put away, that is, for the reason wherefore a woman ought not to be dismissed, that another wife may be obtained. For he who marries a woman who is unlawfully put away is as much of an adulterer as the man who marries one who is un-divorced. Permanent is the marriage which is not rightly dissolved; to marry, therefore, whilst matrimony is undissolved, is to commit adultery” (Tertullian, Marcion IV.34, Schaff).
- e. **The Shepherd of Hermas**, Command 4. Chapter 1 “Sir, if any one has a wife who trusts in the Lord, and if he detect her in adultery, does the man sin if he continue to live with her?” And he said to me, “As long as he remains ignorant of her sin, the husband commits no transgression in living with her. But if the husband know that his wife has gone astray, and if the woman does not repent, but persists in her fornication, and yet the husband continues to live with her, he also is guilty of her crime, and a sharer in her adultery.” And I said to him, “What then, sir, is the husband to do, if his wife continue in her vicious practices?” And he said, “The husband should put her away, and remain by himself. But if he put his wife away and marry another, he also commits adultery.” And I said to him, “What if the woman put away should repent, and wish to return to her husband: shall she not be taken back by her husband?” And he said to me, “Assuredly. If the husband do not take her back, he sins, and brings a great sin upon himself; for he ought to take back the sinner who has repented. But not frequently. For there is but one repentance to the servants of God. In case, therefore, that the divorced wife may repent, the husband ought not to marry another, when his wife has been put away. In this matter man and woman are to be treated exactly

in the same way. Moreover, adultery is committed not only by those who pollute their flesh, but by those who imitate the heathen in their actions." "And therefore I say to you, that if any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once. But if he should sin frequently after this, and then repent, to such a man his repentance will be of no avail" (The Shepherd of Hermas, Commandment 4. Chapter 3).

- f. **Justin** "Concerning chastity, He uttered such sentiments as these: "Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart before God."...And, "Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced from another husband, committeth adultery."...So that all who, by human law, are twiced married, are in the eye of our Master sinners, and those who look upon a woman to lust after her" (Justin, Apol. 1.15.1-4, Schaff).
- g. **Theophilus** "And concerning chastity...Solomon....said: "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee: make straight paths for your feet." And the voice of the Gospel teaches still more urgently concerning chastity, saying: "whosoever looketh on a woman who is not his own wife to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." "And he that marrieth," say The Gospel, "her that is divorced from her husband, committeth adultery; and whosoever putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery..." (Theophilus, To Autolycus, III.13, Schaff).
- h. **Origen** "The Savior does not at all permit the dissolution of marriages for any other sin than fornication alone" (Roberts and Donaldson 1995, 9:511; Origen, 245 AD.).
- i. **Origen** "But now contrary to what was written, some even of the rulers of the church have permitted a woman to marry, even when her husband was living, doing contrary to what was written, where it is said, "A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth," and "So then if while her husband liveth, she shall be joined to another man she shall be called an adulteress"- not indeed altogether without reason, for it is probable this concession was permitted in comparison with worse things, contrary to what was from the beginning ordained by law, and written" (Origen, Matthew, II.14.23).
- j. **Epitome of the Divine Institutes** "But as a woman is bound by the bonds of chastity not to desire any other man, so let the husband be bound by the same law, since God has joined together the husband and wife in the union of one body. On this account, He has commanded that the wife shall not be put away unless convicted of adultery, and that the bond of conjugal compact shall never be dissolved, unless unfaithfulness have broken it" (Epitome of the Divine Institutes, 250-325 AD.)
- k. **Clement** "Thou shalt not put away thy wife, except for fornication; and it regards as fornication, the marriage of those separated while the other is alive..."He that taketh a woman that has been put away," it is said, "committeth adultery; and if one puts away his wife, he makes her an adulteress," that is, compels her to

commit adultery. And not only if he who puts her away guilty of this, but he who takes her, by giving to the woman the opportunity of sinning; for did he not take her, she would return to her husband” (Clement, Miscellanies II.23, Schaff).

a. “What then, is the law? In order to check the impetuosity of the passions, it commands the adulteress to be put to death, on being convicted of this; and if of priestly family, to be committed to the flames...” (ibid).

- l. **Clement of Alexandria** “After his words about divorce some asked him whether, if that is the position in relation to women, it is better not to marry; and it was then that the Lord said; ‘Not all can receive this saying, but those to whom it is granted.’ What the questioners wanted to know was whether, when a man’s wife has been condemned for fornication, it is allowable for him to marry another” (Stromata, iii. 6.60; Clement of Alexandria 150-215 AD.).
- m. **Tenth Canon of the Council of Aries** As regards those who find their wives to be guilty of adultery, and who being Christian are, though young men, forbidden to marry, we decree that, so far as may be, counsel be given them not to take other wives, while their own, though guilty of adultery, are yet living. Tenth Canon of the Council of Aries
- n. **Ambrosiaster** For if Ezra brought about the divorce of believing husbands or wives in order that God might become propitious, and not angered, should they take other wives from their own race — for they were not instructed that, having divorced these wives, they absolutely must not marry others —how much more, if an unbeliever has deserted her, will a woman have the free option to marry, if she wishes, a husband of her own law; for what has been done outside the law of God ought not to be considered matrimony” (Ambrosiaster, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, on 1 Corinthians 7:15).
- o. **Augustine** “The man who leaves his wife because of adultery and marries another is not, it seems, as blameworthy as the man who for no reason leaves his wife and marries another. Nor is it clear from Scripture whether a man who has left his wife because of adultery, which he is certainly permitted to do, is himself an adulterer, if he marries again. And if he should I do not think that he would commit a grave sin” (Augustine, On Faith and Works, as cited in Deasley, Marriage and Divorce in the Bible, p. 205).
- p. **Augustine on the good of marriage when commenting on Genesis** — *Now this is threefold, faithfulness, offspring, and the Sacrament. For faithfulness, it is observed, that there be no lying with other man or woman, out of the bond of wedlock: for the offspring, that it be lovingly welcomed, kindly nourished, religiously brought up: for the Sacrament, that marriage be not severed, and that man or woman divorced be not joined to another even for the sake of offspring. This is as it were the rule of Marriages by which rule either fruitfulness is made seemly, or the perverseness of incontinence is brought to order. Upon which since we have sufficiently discoursed in that book, which we lately published, on the Good of Marriage, where we have also distinguished the Widow's continence and the Virgin's excellency, according to the worthiness of their degrees, our pen is not to be now longer occupied.*



- q. **Augustine on the good of marriage** — *But I marvel, if, as it is allowed to put away a wife who is an adulteress, so it be allowed, having put her away, to marry another. For [holy](#) Scripture causes a hard knot in this matter, in that the Apostle says, that, by commandment of the Lord, the wife ought not to depart from her husband, but, in case she shall have departed, to remain unmarried, or to be reconciled to her husband; whereas surely she ought not to depart and remain unmarried, save from an husband that is an adulterer, lest by withdrawing from him, who is not an adulterer, she [cause](#) him to commit [adultery](#). But perhaps she may [justly](#) be reconciled to her husband, either he being to be borne with, if she cannot contain herself, or being now corrected.*  
accessed here on 4/20/2019 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1309.htm>
- r. **Epiphanius** “He who cannot keep continence after the death of his first wife, or who has separated from his wife for a valid motive, as fornication, or some other misdeed, if he takes another wife, or the wife takes another husband, the divine word does not condemn him nor exclude him from the Church or the life; but she tolerates it rather on account of his weakness” (Epiphanius, Against Heresies, 69).
- s. **Canons of Basil** “He that divorces his wife, and marries another, is an adulterer, and according to the canons of the Fathers, he shall be a mourner one year, a hearer two years, a prostrator three years, a co-stander one year, if they repent with tears.” (Canons of Basil – Epistle III, Canon LXXXVII states; After c.a. 370):
- t. **Synod of Elvira** “Women who without any precedent cause have left their husbands and joined themselves to others, may not have communion even at the last” (Canon 8 of Synod of Elvira, ca. 300).

# What Should Christians Teach on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage?

## When Marriage Goes Wrong: The Right Way to Respond

Someone was crazy enough to ask me about my position on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I struggled because my answer was short and lacked context. Later, it made me think that we Christians need to adjust how we think about marriage. Too often we focus first on the posed situations. “When can people get divorced?” “Which marriage is recognized by God?” “Can marriage survive without love?” If we’re answering wrong, we build a list that shows what to avoid and when you’re okay. Indeed, we don’t have 613 laws for tough questions. We need to start elsewhere.

## Jesus’ Way of Dealing with the Broken Informs Our Response

We can’t start to answer without acknowledging the brokenness. Psalm 84:6 has a phrase, the Valley of Tears, which has often been applied to life in this world. People all over live through bad situations. Sometimes they make awful choices that affect the rest of their lives. Broken people in a broken world.

Jesus, at a dinner at a Pharisees house, encountered a woman who was known as immoral (Luke 7:36). We don’t know if she was an adulteress. We don’t know if she was a prostitute. We know that the Pharisee knew her reputation and we know that she came to find Jesus, to weep, and to kiss his feet. Jesus admitted that she was a huge sinner (Luke 7:47). He doesn’t stop her sorrow to lambast her. Nor does Jesus ignore the fact of her sins. Instead he goes to the heart of her need: he forgives her (Luke 7:48).

Throughout the book we see this repeated point that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). It’s only later in Luke where we find out how the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins. As he’s pinned to the cross he says “Father, forgive them: they don’t know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34). On the one hand, he can forgive sins because he’s ultimately the most offended party in any sin (Psalm 51:4). On the other, this was the point of his mission: to die and reveal his appropriate authority as the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14). After his resurrection, Christ opens the minds of his disciples to understand the Scriptures and he says to them (Luke. 24:46-47):

*Thus, it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for **forgiveness of sins** would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

Some will raise questions about marriage while being in the midst of sin and ruin and they're hoping for forgiveness. They have surely sinned but in Jesus Christ our Lord, there is forgiveness indeed. We must answer carefully, choosing the right season and recognizing the many ways we are all in need of forgiveness.

## Jesus' Way of Answering Tough Questions Inform Our Position on Marriage

We must also answer truthfully. Though forgiveness and restoration is pastorally critical, we mustn't forget that Jesus didn't ignore the sin. Jesus, at one point when asked about divorce by people trying to challenge him, didn't respond with forgiveness nor did he immediately answer the question (Matthew 19:1-8). First, he spoke about the origin of marriage. Then he went deeper. It's important that we note the pattern: start with the model then explore the ramifications.

## New Testament Writers Recorded Jesus's View of Marriage

One of the (many) things that the New Testament writers teach us is how to read the Bible backwards. They teach us to read the Old Testament texts in light of the arrival, rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of God. They don't do this so as to split the text from history. They do it to remind us that the author behind the authors is God and he had a point beyond the needs of then current readers (2 Peter 1:21). He directed people to write in such a way that it had direct application to their day while simultaneously pointing to the reality in Christ. That means that some folk, including Biblical authors, spoke better than they knew (John 11:49-53). At other times, they penned the shadows cast by the reality of what was to come in the future (Col 2:17).

Why did Matthew write chapter 19? Did he only want to record facts? Matthew learned something back when it happened, but it got more significant for him after Christ's resurrection. Even after having already recorded another interaction about marriage in Mathew 5:31-32 during the Sermon on the Mount, he felt he needed to record this incident as well.

## Jesus' Historically Relevant Actions Inform Our Position on Marriage

Allow me another example. In John 2, the writer wants us, on this side of the resurrection, to look back at Jesus' actions in light of the cross and resurrection (John 20:31). Yes, specifically when Jesus foretells the destruction of his "temple" but also including his first sign at a wedding in Cana.

Jesus is attending the wedding with his disciples. His mom is actively involved but disaster hits: the wine has run out. Back then it indicated poor planning, a legal failure in lacking the necessary funds to finance the wedding, and likely dreary festivities since wine greased the happiness wheels (Ecc 9:7; Psalms 104:15).

At this stage of the wedding, since the guests have already been drinking (John 2:10), nothing can be done. Here, at the beginning stage of a new relationship, not even the groom knows how bad it is. They're happily partying, and they've lost the wine.

It is at this dismal point that John has his readers look and see that Mary merely brings the issue to Jesus. Remember, John wrote his gospel after Matthew, Mark and Luke were written. He penned the words remembering the event and thinking about the importance of Jesus's response. Jesus answers, in this context of a wedding and needed wine, that his hour had not yet come (John 2:4).

Any person who has read through John knows that this phrase "the hour" comes up a lot. John 4:21, the hour is coming; 4:23, the hour is coming but is now here; 5:25 the hour is coming and now here; 5:28, the hour is coming; 7:6 my time has not yet come; 7:8 my time has not yet come; 7:30 his hour had not yet come; 8:20, his hour had not yet come. Finally, in John 12, in his last week, we see 12:23 the hour has come; 12:27 for this reason I have come to this hour; 13:1 Jesus knew his hour had come; 16:25 the hour is coming, indeed it has come when you will be scattered; and lastly, right before he gets arrested while he's praying 17:1 Father, the hour has come.

The hour is the time of his death, burial, and ultimately resurrection.

At the wedding, Jesus says, in light of needing new wine, that his hour had not yet come. Nevertheless, he acts by commanding that the ceremonial purifying water jugs be filled to the brim. Then he tells some servants to draw the water and bring it to the headwaiter (John 2:8). The headwaiter, not a drunk party guest but the master of ceremonies, tastes the water and John records that it has become wine. The waiter speaks to the groom in amazement that the best wine was saved until this deep into the wedding.

From this side of the cross we start to put it all together. Back then, the best wine that changed this new relationship was only made possible by Jesus' hour-driven actions. Back then, his disciples believed him. How much more now, do we Christians find our joy in our new eternal relationship grounded in what he has done on the cross and the empty tomb? What a better wedding reception are we looking forward to?

This backward looking then also takes us beyond the problems to purpose—especially the purpose behind Christ's intentional actions within these settings. That should teach us how else to think about these tough issues.

**We Christians must follow Jesus' own thinking when it comes to questions about marriage.** Jesus forgave but he also acknowledges where people have sinned, even while forgiving. Jesus Christ, when asked about divorce, shines his light on the Biblical texts. When ensuring the joy of a wedding we see that his actions shine a light on the future. We partially get to see that future by being on this side of the cross and the empty tomb. This all should all impact how we answer any question on marriage.

## Where Marriage Comes From: God's Established Model of Marriage

Jesus, when asked about the legality of divorce for any reason (Matt 19:3), focused on the origin of marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).

*"Haven't you read, that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, 'and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

Jesus quotes from the oldest marriage event which is a powerful argument to the listening Jewish authorities.

### The First Marriage was in God's Image

In Genesis 1:26-27 the text summarizes the creation of humans on the sixth day. God has spent each day creating something or separating and on the last day he gets to the crown of his creation: the creation of 'Man'. The text goes on to show that it is using 'Man' generically to refer to all humans.

When the living God wanted to paint of a picture of himself, he created humans in his image with the details being that this picture consisted of both male and female. Now the text isn't saying that God is himself both male and female. Rather the point here is that both of them individually are in his image and both of them together, with their differences, are in his image as rulers.

As God reigns over all creation, people are to reign. As he is over everything, they are to be over every beast and living thing. This creation, of his complementary image bearers both reigning over all, was declared good by God himself (Genesis 1:21). It's the perfect condition, both male and female, united as one, reigning over creation as under-rulers of God, and told to populate it.

### The First Marriage had a Purpose

Genesis 2:4 is a close-up of what happens in day six. We get to see how God forms man and woman in relationship to each other—these are details underneath the *telos*, the purpose or designed end-goal, of his forming them in his image. The ground was wild with no one to cultivate it (Gen 2:5). God forms man from the dust of the ground and gives him life and purpose. God puts the man in an enclosed area to learn cultivation and also issues commands on how the man is to operate. It's here we see, for the first time, what God identifies as not good: the fact that man is alone.

That is not a statement about the badness of singleness. In Genesis (2:18) God knows that man needs a helper that corresponds to him as a man (not to him as the individual Adam). Someone who not necessarily completes him psychologically nor merely corresponds to him physically, but one who joins the man at his side to complete the purpose for which both were made. This is God creating the need, identifying the need, and knowing how to fulfill the need.

God doesn't explain any of this to Adam.

He lets Adam work, trying to fulfill his purpose. He lets Adam name the animals. He lets him examine the fact that animals have mates. He lets Adam draw the conclusion that, as a human, no one corresponded to him (Gen 2:20). Here, when Adam realizes it, God is the one who causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep and then woman is fashioned from his side.

God himself then presents this woman to the man, in all her perfection. It is here, in light of God's bounty, that man acknowledges how the woman completes him and consecrates that completion. It is here that I think we see both a covenantal embrace and a deep fulfillment of God-placed desire. The man has at last discovered how God completed him. Man draws a circle around this new unity and confesses Woman's inestimable worth (Gen 2:23).

*"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; This one is named Woman, because this one came out of Man."*

She was part of him. She was his very life and being. She was the one thing that made this ultimate union possible. She was the one who corresponded to him. Equal but different in all the right ways.

## The First Marriage As Created Is the Model

Allow me a moment of imagination where the text remains silent. The woman didn't know any of this. She was formed, molded and presented in all her radiance. I imagine the first light she saw from her newly formed eyes was the light of God himself. In that glory, she would have understood the goodness and greatness of the one who gave her the ability to see color and hear the breeze during the cool of the day. In trust she rises and allows herself to be led to a man when she has known no others. There he stands, in his radiance and power, and the first words she hears in her new existence is the words of this one claiming that she isn't alone, that she's part of him, that she's his very being and life-blood.

The text explains that this is the model of marriage. It is for this very reason, it says, why future men leave their parents and are joined completely and utterly to their wives and the two become one flesh (Gen 2:24). Not only because of [sex](#) or love. Not only to have [children](#) and keep humanity alive. Ultimately because God fashioned it this way.

But you know, humans mess things up. Years later, Lamech boasts to his two wives Adah and Zillah (Gen 5:23) about killing a man who hurt him: all of life has gone wrong from the home to interactions out of the home. Even later, the battles between wives in Jacob's own family attests to the wrongness in relationships. The history of marriage is filled with bad examples.

Jesus' point is clear. The goodness of marriage is not grounded in the quantity of times people got it right. The goodness of marriage is qualitatively found in the origins of the first marriage. Jesus makes clear the connection: marriage, as created, is very good.

**Marriage is a good that comes from, and belongs to, God.** Marriage, though good for humans, never came from people. Marriage, though good for government, never came from government. It is why a person, beyond saying the words, can't really say that marriage is an outdated institution or that marriage can be redefined. Christ, looking back at this text in Genesis 1 and 2, summarizes the origin and owner of this man-inconceivable union: it belongs to God. God came up with the fact that the two different beings (male and female in his image) made up one whole that were joined together as one flesh. They were multiples now united; a unity instead of individuals. In marriage the man and woman are one, in God-created union. It's not a question of what we can legally do with our marriage; it's a question of ownership of the marriage. It belongs to the creator Lord God: humans dare not interfere with that fact.

## What is Marriage and Why Is Marriage Important

Why did God do it this way? Why make two beings of the same kind who have key differences in roles and yet inseparably unified? If it was to be a picture of God, why not just paint a picture in the sky of who he is? Why go through the trouble of having people grow up in a home, leave their parents, unite to another and start over? Beyond the lesson for the man in the beginning, why have us look backwards and see the fact that his wife was presented to him at all? Wasn't it enough that the man would learn the lesson?

Above, I noted the fact that Jesus began his ministry in the context of a marriage (John 2). There's a reason for that and to understand it we have to first look at Paul's warning to the Corinthians.

### Marriage is More Than Sexual Union—but Not Less Than It

The Apostle Paul warns the Corinthians about their sexual unions. He says that they're not just visiting temples and paying for a prostitute's services. They're actually taking part in something bigger and trampling the point of the original marriage picture. He writes in 1 Cor 6:16:

*Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."*

This is big. He cites the passage in Genesis 2:24, as above, to prove the point that their bodies joining is, in effect, a play at what actual marriage is supposed to be. Although marriage is more than the sexual union, it isn't apart from it. Paul underscores the wrongness of this physical momentary union by showing us that individual Christians are in fact spiritually united to the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:17). By joining with a prostitute, it is as if the Corinthians were taking Christ himself and joining him—God forbid—with that prostitute (1 Cor 6:15).

It is because in this spiritual union the individual has given up complete rights over his or her own body to belong to God.

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*

The marriage union is so all-encompassing that both individuals lose authority over their own bodies. They no longer can do what they want with their bodies. They belong to the other (1 Cor 7:4).

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

The union with the prostitute turns that on its head. It says that the union of two bodies is purely transactional and solely physical. A person is momentarily selling what belongs to him or her and the buyer thinks he can use his own body, and the seller's own body, in this way. When they're done, they break the union and walk away.

Marriage, Paul basically says, is deeper. It's not a transaction. It's not even two individuals taking the next step while remaining individuals. They're doing something greater. Christians, he noted, are spiritually joined in one spiritual body to Christ. In Ephesians 5, another passage where he reflects on Genesis 2:24, he fully fleshes this out. This is where we really start to understand why Jesus would start his public ministry in a marriage.

## God Created Marriage as a Picture of Christ and His Church

In Ephesians, Paul talks about the roles of husbands and wives, but he does so in a way where he keeps referring to the union of Christ and his church. Christ is head of the church and savior of the body; Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; Christ gave himself up so as to sanctify her, cleanse her, and present her to himself in all her glory; Christ did this so that she would be holy. Because of this, the church joins with, submits to, and serves her husband Christ. Although she is many members, she is one body with Him.

In Ephesians 5:31 Paul quotes the model of marriage (Gen 2:24) established in the Garden of Eden between Man and Woman but not to finalize his argument of marriage roles. Instead he quotes the passage to tell us what the author behind the author was talking about. In Ephesians 5:32 he says:

*This mystery is great; **but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.***

Someone might make the mistake that Christ loving the church is *like* marriage. That's not the picture at all. In God's infinite mind and wisdom, as he created humans in his image, he created a complex picture that would depict the future reality that had not yet come. The reality of Christ and the church is so important and complex, that God had to build the metaphor beforehand to explain it. The metaphor is marriage.



The greatest spiritual union that then presses itself on the actions of people. It is this greater union which was pictured in the setting of Christ's first miracle at a wedding. It is because of this greater union that Paul says in Ephesians 5:33 "each man is to love his own wife as himself and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband". They're one flesh after all and "no one has ever hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph 5:29). Cohabitation, swinging, serial divorce, abusive relationships, friends with benefits, polyamory (and any other thing) ignores why marriage is important: it is a picture Christ and the church.

You see, **marriage is important because it is God's picture**. Marriage is good even while people get it wrong. Getting what God's picture or marriage tells us would point us back to Christ. If people ignore how marriage should be pointing to the greatest reality, people will do what they want with marriage. Like the Corinthians, people would do what they want in their bodies. Or like the Jewish leaders, put away their wives for any reason while hypocritically thanking God. Or refusing to get married at all (1 Tim 4:3). **Marriage is God's way of telling us deep things**. Marriage is a picture of God himself. Marriage is also a picture of how Christ would completely join himself to the church (and she to him). In reality, that union never dissolves but is incorruptible and doesn't fade away (1 Peter 1:4) as it results in the church's glorified perfection (Eph. 5:27). It is important to get the model of marriage right before trying to figure out how people get marriage wrong.

## Which Marriage is the Best: The Perfectly Kept Marriage Vow

### A Cultural Marriage Union

Marriage, in the Biblical cultures, wound up being a way to form an alliance. In the ancient world, it was the way that two families would come together to become something greater and stronger. Marriage was usually arranged by the parents and either the parents of the groom or by the bridegroom himself. These ancient marriage contracts began with the exchange of gifts and were followed by the betrothal.

A betrothal was more than a modern engagement. Engagements today are an agreed intent to get married. The couple is committed but they're open to change their minds. Historically, betrothal was more serious than that. It had the legal status of a marriage even though the marriage was not actually in fact consummated. It's why the men that were going to marry Lot's daughters were already called sons-in-law (Gen. 19:14). It's why Joseph was going to "divorce" Mary privately (Matt 1:19) even though they weren't technically married. It was a legal bond that hadn't yet been consummated. This period could last for a year.

Next you have the wedding feast which starts off with the bridegroom coming for his bride. The bridegroom would have a procession that went out before him, his groomsmen playing tambourines (Jer 7:34) while the waiting brides-maids would help light the way for his arrival. Maybe they would both leave their homes and meet at a set place, maybe not, but there would have been a return to the already prepared groom's home (Matt 22:2) and a party that would go on for many days—at least seven (Gen 29:27; Judges 14:12). Also, according to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, the consummation of the marriage usually happened on the first night (Gen 28:23) and "the stained linen would be retained as evidence of the bride's virginity."

## The Long-Expected Marriage: Christ and His People

Many of these details come up in the Bible to illustrate the perfect marriage. The Groomsmen rejoice with the groom while he's still here (Mark 2:19-20). We have to be vigilant and wait for the coming of the bridegroom who could come at any moment lest we find ourselves like the foolish virgins who didn't prepare for a long delay to the groom's procession (Matt 25:1-13). He goes to prepare the place but then returns (John 14:1-6). It is then, that the bride is even presented without blemish (Eph. 5:27).

The ultimate depiction of this picture is that there is a marriage supper where the bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:7). The bride is clothed in fine white linen and the cleanliness of her clothing is the righteous acts of the saints. This marriage supper's boundaries are that everyone who gets to be there is blessed and it draws John to worship. It's in this state that in Revelation 21-22, we see how awesome the blessedness is.

One of the seven angels in Rev 21:9 says "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb" and then the scene that is unveiled is a glorious city, billed on the apostle sand the twelve tribes of Israel, with no need for the sun or moon because she is constantly illuminated by the glory of God with the lamp of the lamb. The city is secure and holy, and the inhabitants are those whose names are written in the book of life. Through the city flows the rivers of the water of life and in the midst of the city is the tree of life—just like in Eden in the beginning of Scripture. There's no curse and no tears and the saints that dwell there have the name of the lamb written on their foreheads.

Okay, it's a picture, sure, but it's one of those real pictures that tells us that what Paul was seeing in Genesis 2:24 will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ with his church. That perfect union is the best picture of marriage and it culminates in an eternal union with his bride.

I remember reading something in Tim Keller where he reflected on our own marriage vows. Maybe it was the *Meaning of Marriage*, but I don't remember. We say things like "Till death do us part". The words used to mean "this marriage is as permanent as our earthly lives. Death is the only thing that will break this relationship." The words then began to mean something like "this is what you say in a wedding to mean that you're committed to one another." The amazing thing about Christ's vow to the church is not that he says, "Till death do we part." Rather he dies, gets up, then promises "You will be with me always."

It's no wonder then that when Jesus is asked about the future of marriage, he rightly points out that after the resurrection of the dead, individuals won't marry or be given in marriage. In that respect these individuals will be like the angels in heaven. It's because they're already corporately joined in the ultimate marriage. The picture found its fulfillment so there was no need for the picture to keep going

**The ultimate marriage is Christ's own marriage with his bride the church.** It doesn't end by death. It begins through death and the union is permanent. There is no jumping from this marriage to another. There is no weird admixture of other elements into the marriage. It is perfect and culminated for all eternity.

## Why Marriages Fall Apart and Break Down

We can't figure out how to put broken pieces together if we don't know what the whole looks like. So far, it's taken some four thousand words to sketch, along the edges, of what true marriage is. Now we have to look at how Jesus proceeds to answer the question on divorce.

The questioners have asked him if a divorce on any grounds was allowed. Jesus' answer, as above, was to say that this isn't the model of marriage. The first created marriage was both qualitatively different and designed with the ultimate purpose of being a perfect picture of a future reality. It acknowledged God as the originator and initiator of this newly joined creature. As to reflect on any marriage, in this God-formed union, no human has the right to separate the joined elements.

Though this bears some further investigation when it comes to the issue of remarriage, the importance here shouldn't be downplayed. Jesus, speaking to Jews who know the Law and didn't believe Him as the Christ, looked back to the original marriage as being good and lacking divorce, then overlaid that model on any marriage that came afterwards. Each member of a marriage is yoked together by God so that they're both to be depicting the original goodness and must not undo God's model. No matter if they believe him or not.

### Moses Allowed Divorce for a Reason—and It Isn't Adultery

In the Law, and in their context, the Jewish leaders saw that they could divorce, and it didn't come with an injunction that they must-not divorce. So why could they divorce?

Do not be confused: according to the Law, Jews could divorce (Deut. 24). The Jews were told they could divorce but adultery was never stated as the reason. Under the Law, adultery wasn't handled with divorce but rather death (Lev 20:10) for both parties. It's why the event (in John 7:53 – 8:11, known as the *Pericopae Adulterae*—likely not part of John but might be historical) is so telling in that the accusers only brought the woman caught in the act but didn't bring the man. They sidestepped the law.

In Matthew 19, Christ's answer gets to the core of the question of why Moses allowed divorce: it's not about law but evidence of man's sinfulness. Divorce isn't a necessity because the Law allows it. Divorce isn't even a necessity if the situation calls for it. Divorce was an allowance in light of the hardness of human hearts—and this needs some exploration.

### Sinfulness, the Hardened Heart, and the Root of Divorced Marriages

The heart in scripture is not merely where we feel love or hate. We read "hardness of heart" and we immediately apply our romantic categories—but that's not it at all. The heart is the very seat of our being. The heart can refer to the place where God operates (Jeremiah 31:33), the place where our decisions come from (Deut. 8:2), the source of our morals (Psalm 58:2), our enablement to think (Proverbs 16:1), and our ability to feel (Prov. 14:10).

This is more than emotions (which we all can understand)—being angry, being bitter, being jealous. We know it when we're feeling those things even if we don't want to admit it. Rather, the heart in Scripture is unknowable to humans and only understood by God. So, Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure—who can understand it? The immediate response is that God examines the heart and then acts accordingly.

A hardened heart then is when the totality of the person embraces a position that is not pliant to God's goodness and desire. So, Nebuchadnezzar's being was arrogant and hardened with pride (Dan 5:20) or Pharaoh, when hearing the Lord's commands, hardened his heart (Ex 8:32) in rebellion against the Lord. Or when the Israelites made their entirety as hard as flint (Zechariah 7:12) whereby they would not listen to the law or the words that the Lord spoke through the prophets. This situation is so bad that God sometimes locks individuals into their embraced position thus hardening their hearts (Exodus 9:34-35; Josh 11:19-20).

When Christ speaks about the allowance in the law, it is because of the hardness of the very being of sinful humans. That hardness of heart was not in the beginning, but it was available after the beginning. The hardness of heart bears testimony to where man has fallen, not testimony that the ideal should now be changed. That being the case, God through Moses made an allowance whereby there would be provision that governed and protected what could be done in a divorce when people, in their hardness, broke the marriage bond.

When marriages end it isn't that people have grown apart. It isn't even that the situation has gotten so bad that there are no other options. Rather it is that the hardness of human hearts has set in. The fact that God historically figured out a way to protect the societally weaker party doesn't mean it's an excuse to get a divorce but rather a testimony of God dealing with human heart-hardness.

And here again (Matt 19:8), Jesus reinforces the model.

But it was not this way from the beginning.

**Marriages fail because of the hardness of the human heart.** Marriages do not fail because there is some allowance for the marriage to fail. People looking for a way out have to first ask why they're so eager to get out anyway. As Jesus says, it wasn't the case in the beginning that you had the option to divorce. God instituted the first marriage and the pair just stuck together.

## When Must A Marriage End in Divorce?

All the following is clear: (1) marriage was instituted by God, (2) people should not break it, (3) the Law had an allowance for divorce, and (4) that allowance was there because of the hardness of the hearts of people.

I'm not sure how often the Jews (even in the Old Testament) carried out the death penalty on adultery. I know they were commanded to do so in Leviticus 20:10 but the large amounts of warnings seems to indicate that it was an unaddressed problem that came with shame (Prov 5:9-14), addiction (Prov 5:22-23), self-destruction (Prov 6:32), and jealous wrath of a spurned

husband (Prov 6:34). Even so, the Jews aren't asking about divorce on grounds of adultery—technically they can't because they know the answer, even if perhaps they're not practicing what they preach. The Jewish teachers are asking about other grounds for divorce and Jesus is the one who brings up immorality.

### *Deciphering the Divorce Exception Clause of Matthew 19:9*

In Matthew 19:9, Christ says:

*“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery*

We'll get to the topic of remarriage down below, but for now it's important simply to focus on the exception here: immorality. What is the exception doing here? Is it giving grounds for a justified remarriage? Is it supplying grounds for a justified divorce? Both?

This exception occurs in other passages as well. Matt 5:32 says

*“...but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of immorality, makes her commit adultery...”*

Again, ignoring the issue of remarriage for now, is the exception justifying the divorce or is it modifying the grounds of being made an adulteress? In Matt 5:32 it does seem to be that if a person divorces his wife for a reason other than immorality, he forces her to commit adultery. But, if she was unchaste, she made herself commit adultery.

Matthew 19 is different.

### Interpretations of Divorce in Cases of Immorality

Some think this is different than pure adultery. For example, they'll say this refers to a specific group of sexual sins like incest (for example 1 Cor 6 a man marrying his step-mother 6). It's an abhorrent sexual behavior which, this position would say, is grounds for divorce. D.A. Carson in his commentary on Matthew asks why would any Jew think of incest as an actual marriage at all? Even Paul, when dealing with this sort of situation in 1 Corinthians 6 doesn't tell the couple to get a divorce but rather to stop doing what they're doing.

Others think this is actually just another way of saying adultery so that the exception is only in cases of adultery, even if it uses a different word. They would say that this *porneia* (fornication/immorality) is actually interchangeable with *mochatai* (adultery). So, this position would take it that Jesus is introducing a change from the Old Testament punishment for adultery (Leviticus 20:10) by allowing divorce. The struggle here though is that Matthew recording Jesus' words does show a differentiation between adultery and immorality in the same book (Matt 15:19).

Some take it then that what is spoken about here is not really marriage at all. This is evidence of sexual activity that occurs during the betrothal (pre-marriage) timeframe with someone other than the betrothed. The betrothed discovers his bride-to-be is sexually active—in this case, he can “divorce” her. Carson says that this would technically make the exception not a real exception to divorce. It would explain why Mark or Luke don’t include the exception at all (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). It also would explain why Joseph is thinking of getting a divorce when he’s not even really married to Mary (Matt 1:19)

And yet others think that this sexual activity is any sexual activity during an actual marriage, not limited to adultery, which would constitute grounds for a divorce. In Deuteronomy 24:1 it says that the man has found some indecency in his wife and because of that indecency he hands her a certificate of divorce. Maybe Jesus’ use of the word *porneia* is a way of covering all these types of indecencies.

## Marriage and the Divorce Exception Contextualized

To get to the answer one should try to make sense of two near-context verses: (1) Matthew 19:8, where Christ shows the grounds of divorce is rooted in the hardness of human hearts while simultaneously stating that this was not part of the original model; (2) Matthew 19:10 and the disciples’ response.

*The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”*

This isn’t necessarily a statement of surprise (like in Matthew 19:25). Are they seeking to find any excuse to divorce? Are they concerned about being married to only one woman?

Remember, these words occur in a specific theological context. Yes, the Law made allowance, but that same Old Testament depicts God as hating divorce (Malachi 2:14-16) because of the violence it causes. The general teaching of the Law, says Paul, is that the wife is bound to her husband until death (Romans 7:2-3) and they can only be free from one another if one of them dies (1 Cor 7:39). Theologically, the disciples’ context was already pointed against divorce—something that Jesus had already emphasized (Matt 5).

Historically, Mark 10:10 is helpful.

*In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again.*

Even in light of the theological context, the historical context of the statement in Matthew 19:10 might not be immediately tied to the conversation with the Jewish teachers in Matthew 19. Historically, Matt 19:10 might be spurred by Jesus’ further discussions where he makes the adulterous ramifications of divorce-and-remarriage apply equally to men and women. Historically, this part of the occurs in the privacy of a home.

Textually, Matthew structured his material so that the readers after the resurrection can feel the force of the argument. The disciples’ reaction is *contextually* important. In the context of the

original, perfect, and God-mandated order, Jesus keeps repeating that point: no matter the question, no matter the allowance, the original pattern is still what should impact our thinking and approach.

The exception therefore is also structured in the context of the original pattern. There is no mandate here that the innocent party *must* divorce. Rather, this is a non-compulsory exception using a word that implies all sexual immorality and, in their cultural context, can even apply to a legally-binding betrothal. In other words, even if the legally-betrothed-or-spouse is doing all sorts of immorality that includes sexual intercourse with another person, it doesn't necessarily mean that the offended party *must* pursue a divorce. The fact that marriage belongs to God, that there is an original pattern, and our words matter (Matt 5:37) still holds.

I want to emphasize another theme we also see in Scripture. All of the book of Hosea is caught up with the fact that God is going after faithless Israel drawing her back even though she repeatedly commits spiritual adultery. Even if God himself uses the picture of divorce to say that he has handed Israel a certificate of divorce (Jeremiah 3:8) because he saw all of her unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery, he draws her back by calling Israel to return to him (Jeremiah 3:14).

*Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.*

If contextually all readers are being called to mimic God's original created model, then the disciples reaction makes sense. The exception, in this context, could be understood more like an allowance to cast the first stone if one has no sin. Hearing this, the disciples understandably (and possibly cynically) say "well, if someone has to be in this sort of situation and always trying to model marriage as created, then it's better not to marry."

This sort of commitment to marriage is otherworldly. Getting a divorce if you fall out of love is pretty common. Even the worst people think it's okay to divorce if one's spouse went and had an affair. But what about a Christian who is so committed to living so properly and uprightly that they focus on doing it in front of the whole world (Romans 12:17; 2 Cor 8:21) even through the worst of sins? What if they committed to the marriage through the darkest night of the relationship so that no one could find fault with any of their ministry (2 Cor 6:3)?

Three things I can see here then. First, if there is a marriage pact between a man and a woman, it should be a fully committed no-exits planned binding. Second, because of the hardness of human hearts, there is allowance for divorce on the basis of sexual immorality. Third, none of this sexual immorality makes a divorce mandatory but rather gives opportunity for having a will for the betterment of the other person. **A marriage doesn't have to end in divorce**, not even because of sexual immorality, but the exception exists for the extreme cases. Not as a rule or by necessity, but as an exception that doesn't need to be acted upon.

## What About Remarriage After a Divorce?

That all said, the way the sentence reads in Matthew 19 is important. If a man divorces his wife and marries another woman, it is adultery. If a man divorces his wife for any reason and marries another woman, he commits adultery. But, if he divorces his wife for fornication and marries another woman, does he still commit adultery? And what about his wife? What if she marries the person she's committing adultery with? Is that okay?

Mark 10 is remarkable in the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage. The discussion is in private with his disciples who are asking Jesus further questions about marriage and divorce. It is historically the same event as in Matthew 19 above. Mark 10:11 says

*Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her*

No exception. The action is adultery against his divorced wife. Further:

*...and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."*

Again, no exception and now applied to the wife. In both cases, the person who divorces and marries another person finds that they are committing adultery.

Luke's (Lk 16:18) recording of this type of teaching doesn't only make the person divorces and remarries culpable, it even makes the person who is marrying the divorced person culpable.

*... and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.*

Again, no exception here: the act of marrying a divorcee is tantamount to adultery. Here it isn't even the person who divorced from another, it is the person who isn't yet married that is committing adultery once he marries the divorcee.

I touched on Matthew 5:32 above where we saw that if a man divorces his wife, he causes her to commit adultery. There's no explanation on how he causes her to commit adultery, but we might assume that in that society, the man is essentially forcing her to try to find another husband. As I said, there is no explicit mention of why. All that is there is an exception by which the man doesn't cause her to commit adultery because she herself has been unchaste: she caused herself to commit adultery. But that's not the interesting part of this verse for the question of remarriage.

*...and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Once again, there is no exception here. Marrying a divorced woman makes a person culpable of adultery just as either party is culpable of adultery in Luke 16.



We dove deep into Matthew 19:9 above but in this context, the remarriage outside of the exception clause comes with the charge of committing adultery. If a person *divorces* his wife and *marries* another woman, this person *therefore* commits adultery. Here, the act of marrying another woman is the action of committing of adultery—which is the voluntary act of sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not their spouse.

In Deuteronomy 24:2 we see the divorced woman becoming another man’s wife and then the possibility of this later husband also turning against her or dying. On the one hand, the Law seemed to make allowance for her to remarry but on the other it doesn’t allow her original husband to remarry her (Deut. 24:4) saying that she has been defiled. God differentiating his people by hammering home the necessity of holiness.

This is especially the case in the marriage of priests (Lev 21) who were not to marry a woman who is a prostitute or divorced. In the case of the high priest (Lev 21:10-15), he is not to marry a prostitute, a divorced woman, a widow, or any woman who has already had sex. Not that sex is wrong but there is difference in how the marriage bond is being treated.

This far context is what in the Gospels makes Jesus’ words so hard to swallow. In Mark 10 it’s pretty clear that the further discussion addresses both men and women (either are culpable of adultery by remarrying) but in Matthew 19 it makes even remarriage difficult in light of not necessarily having to pursue divorce even for sexual immorality. In other words, the disciples are realizing that this could mean that they’re being tasked to continue staying with their immoral spouse with no intention of leaving; and even if they do leave, they’re barred from looking for someone else.

This is where Matthew 5:38-40 start to really be applied in a person’s day-to-day. It’s easy to only hear a concept like “if you get slapped, turn the other cheek” and grapple with the concept of a metaphor but if the metaphor’s reality is one’s marriage, what does that look like? For the disciples it looked so difficult that they (maybe sarcastically) asked “then why get married at all? Why not just stay single?” (Matt 19:10).

In all honesty, this question on remarriage after divorce weighs heavily on any reader’s mind. The fact that **Jesus repeatedly taught the wrongness of remarriage after divorce** is a tough pill to swallow in today’s self-aggrandizing culture. “Who are you to say what I can or cannot do?” is one of the most heard cries in today’s world. This picture of marriage isn’t ours to do as we want.

## The Pauline Privilege: Does Paul Make an Exception for Divorce and Remarriage?

### The Husband’s Body Belongs to His Wife; And Vice Versa

Paul discusses several issues related to sexual activity. He broaches the subject apparently answering a question regarding how married Christians should function. Paul points out that singleness isn’t a bad thing and that Biblical marriage is the proper boundary for any sexual

activity. So much so, that within the marriage, neither partner belongs to themselves. The way Paul puts this is impressive.

*The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*

They are duty bound to each other and in 1 Corinthians 7:4 Paul says that the wife has no authority over her body nor the husband over his own body: that authority belongs to the other. This means that quite explicitly, neither spouse has the right to go off and have sexual activity elsewhere. This also means that neither spouse has the right to neglect the other from sexual activity. The only time they can “deprive one another” is in the case that they both agree to devote time to prayer—but after that, they should have sex!

## Marriage Isn't A Sin but Sexual Self-Control is the Better Option

Paul would rather everyone had his power of self-control by serving the Lord while being single (1 Cor 7:7, 32-34) but also knows that singleness (like being married) is a gift from God given to some and not others (Peter was married 1 Cor 9:4). That being the case, Paul would tell people not to copy him on their own power but instead just get married.

Marriage, he explains isn't a sin (1 Cor 7:2). There are distressing times (1 Cor 7:29), there are troubles (1 Cor 7:28), there are present distress (1 Cor 7:26), and there are marital duties (1 Cor 7:33-34) and these things are all valid concerns. All of this has to be kept in mind when actually deciding to marry. It's not just an issue of scratching a sexual itch but should be done in a way that is always pleasing to the Lord.

## Marriage is Until Death Do You Part

It is in this context that Paul speaks about divorce. In 1 Cor 7:39 he states quite clearly that:

*A wife is bound as long as her husband lives...*

It is also clear that though she (or a widowed man, surely) is free to remarry after death of the spouse—but marrying a believer.

*but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*

Even earlier on in the chapter Paul explicitly quotes the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 7:10) in regard to divorce

*But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband*

Paul then (1 Cor 7:11) offers a situation where even separation isn't grounds for remarriage. This is interesting because he's telling the Christian wife that she should not leave her husband but then imagines her leaving.

There's no statement here as to why she left—this isn't the later situation in verses 12-16. Neither does Paul make an equal statement to the husband. Instead, he tells the husband not to divorce his wife. I can imagine several situations in that day and age which would have been understandable for a woman to leave. Indeed, I can imagine situations even today. She left and Paul describes her state, after this separation, as unmarried.

...but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

In this case, if she leaves, Paul says that she should either remain as unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. There are no other options here. Her state of being unmarried is apparently different from the unmarried and widows in 1 Cor 7:8-9 and 25. Those unmarried could marry if they couldn't help it, but these women are in specific situations in which they aim at "remaining unmarried" or reconciling to their husbands.

All of this, Paul sees as the Lord's words presumably during his earthly ministry. This is interesting because Paul is arguing very strongly against divorce.

## Abandoned Because of Confessing Christ

Paul then broaches a unique situation where there is a couple and one of them has become a believer. There is no call for the Christian to remove themselves from the marriage union. Whatever the reason for leaving above, the issue of being married to an unbeliever does not fall under that rubric.

Indeed, the Christian is called towards commitment and sexual fidelity. In that context, the very presence of the believing spouse is working some sort of sanctification within the family (1 Cor 7:14). This sanctification is so powerful, that it might be the very means that God is using to affect salvation in the unbelieving family (1 Cor 7:16). The now-believer, who has an unbelieving spouse who is committed to staying in the relationship, must not divorce their unbelieving spouse.

she must not send her husband away. (1 Cor 7:13)

...he must not divorce her (1 Cor 7:12)

What if the unbelieving spouse is not consenting about their now-believing spouse (1 Cor 7:15)? What if, in light of this dramatic change, the unbelieving spouse finds that it is too much, and they decide to leave? Paul's answer is to let the unbelieving spouse leave.

The usual way the Pauline privilege is explained is this: (1) If one of a married pair becomes a believer by being baptized and (2) the unbeliever decides to abandon the believer because of that

belief then (3) the believer is not under bondage to the marriage: they are (4) free to divorce and (5) free to remarry.

Here's a quote from the Roman Catholic canon law

*[Can. 1143](#) (1) In virtue of the Pauline privilege, a marriage entered into by two unbaptised persons is dissolved in favour of the faith of the party who received baptism, by the very fact that a new marriage is contracted by that same party, provided the unbaptised party departs. (2) The unbaptised party is considered to depart if he or she is unwilling to live with the baptised party, or to live peacefully without offence to the Creator, unless the baptised party has, after the reception of baptism, given the other just cause to depart.*

It's only later in Canon Law 1146, after some legal issues, does the Roman Catholic Church then say it's okay for the Christian to remarry.

The [Protestant Westminster Confession of Faith](#) makes allowance for remarriage only in the context of adultery and what the framers called "willful desertion".

*( V. ) Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract, (Mat 1:18-20). In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, (Mat 5:31-32): and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead, (Mat 19:9; Rom 7:2-3). (VI.) Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage, (Mat 19:8-9; 1Co 7:15; Mat 19:6): wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case, (Deut 24:1-4).*

Note, Paul doesn't outright say that the believer is free to divorce and free to remarry. Nor does he say that the departure is a divorce. Instead he says in 1 Corinthians 7:15 that if the unbeliever *separates*, let him/her *separate*: the brother or the sister is not a *bond-servant/slave* in such a case.

The word for *separate* is the same as in 1 Cor 7:11 which has above placed the believer in an unmarried state. The question is if the unmarried state of the separated believing spouse is the same as in 1 Cor 7:11 (separated but waiting to reconcile) or 1 Cor 7:8-9 (single and able to marry).

The rest of the verse is also difficult because often that bit that says "bond-servant/slave" is (rightly) translated *bondage* but then conflated in English with what Paul later says in 1 Cor 7:27

*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*

In 1 Cor 7:27, the word for *bound* is not related to bond-servants/slaves but is the word for being tied. The passage could also be read:

*Have you been tied to a woman? Do not seek to be loosened. Have you been loosed from a woman? Don't seek a woman.*

1 Cor 7:27 makes it quite clear that within a marriage-tie, one remains within the marriage-tie but when released from the tie you don't seek to be tied. This same word is used in Romans 7:2 where a woman is tied to her husband until death. This doesn't seem to be a statement about the specific situation Paul is dealing with in 1 Cor 7:15. Because the Christian is not seeking to be loosened from his or her spouse; rather the situation is happening to them. This separation is the unbeliever in effect acting out "because of your Christianity, I am done with you".

Indeed, I don't think this "bondage" refers to the marriage bond at all. I agree with Fee who finds it odd that Paul would argue so strongly against divorce and remarriage with a single Greek word.

That said, one of the hallmarks of 1 Corinthians 7 is the interplay between remaining in the state in which one finds themselves, on the one hand, and wisely dealing with the situation in which one finds themselves on the other. So, although now, their unmarried state might be closer to that of 1 Cor 7:11—one who is unmarried, remains single, and only reconciles with her husband—this person is not under bondage. In other words, it really depends on a case-by-case basis and people have to [make morally informed and biblically grounded decisions](#).

Nowhere is this interplay more clearly evidenced than in Paul's argument for singleness. He would rather people remain single since they could be wholly devoted to the Lord, it would be better if they remained single due to temporal situations, but, if they seek to marry, it's not a problem. Frankly, he says, it's better to marry than to be in a state of lusting or burning. This interplay is not a situational ethic but rather a grown-up application of the already foundational principles.

Tentatively, I think this is the case for the individual whose spouse has departed because of the individual's faith. This individual doesn't have a hard rule on what they should be doing. Do they wait to reconcile? Do they fully serve the Lord? The answer to all of these might be yes. It also might be the case that, after some time, a friendship heats up in such a way that long after the departed spouse has left, it might be wiser to just remarry.

None of this negates Jesus' words. None of this negates Paul's own arguments. None of this is contradictory. Paul says the believer in this situation is not under bondage and called to peace. The bondage would be the freedom from a hard rule and this peace is what is situational. In some circumstance of a departing unbelieving spouse it looks like waiting for them to be saved. In other times it might look like remaining in that state of being unmarried that they have found

themselves in. Yet at other times it means trying to decide to stop a friendship or to place any further behavior within the proper boundaries of marriage.

It's a tough situation. It's one that Christians should also avoid getting into. It could be the reason why Paul generalizes his words in 2 Cor 2:14 when he says, "do not be yoked together with unbelievers". The yoke is something applied to a pair of working animals. In the context of 2 Cor 2, the unequal yoke could be a business relationship. It could be a social relationship (tied back to the whole business of idolatry and temples from 1 Cor 8-10). It could also apply to marriages. Christians shouldn't actively pursue a union with people who are not Christians because of these exact situations. For Christians, Paul would say that it is better that the couple marries than keep burning in passion, but we should always consider Jesus' drastic measures for dealing with sin (Matt 5:27-30).

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

## Concluding thoughts on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

I haven't dealt with singleness except touching on the outside edges. I haven't even explicitly touched anything from Song of Solomon nor from Proverbs regarding the goodness of marriage and the wickedness of adultery. Frankly, I think I can write another twenty pages with all the things that mentally come up, but I think for now this is enough to giving a fuller answer to these sorts of questions.

As I said above, people will mess marriage up. There will be people that marry when it would have been better if they stayed single. There are people who divorce when they had no cause or divorce with cause by wallowing in the hardness of their own heart. And there are people that flirt and date when they should remarry then proceed to remarry when they shouldn't. In each of these cases, they haven't committed the unforgivable sin. There is still grace.

That said, there might be consequences.

Former child molesters can't teach Sunday School. Former embezzlers can't be treasurers. It is not that they're unforgiven, it's that the nature of their sin has resulted in a broken situation whereby the Lord no longer would have them function in that position—for the good of the children, or the good of the finances, and for their own good. They will have other ministries surely, but some are barred to them.

In a similar (though not the same) way, a man who has been divorced after his salvation can't be an elder (1 Timothy 3:2) and I'm not even sure about it if he had a string of women and marriages before his salvation either. It has nothing to do with the sins being unforgivable, but

rather the ramifications of these acts barring them from that sort of responsibility. He is forgiven, but there are consequences.

And yet, even in light of forgiveness, I don't think we should ever find ourselves weighing sin as a viable option. Paul's inspired words must be remembered "Shall we sin so that grace may abound? God forbid!" (Romans 6:1). There is forgiveness, but this is shameful behavior. In so doing, we have joined that horrible rank of people that slanderously put words into Christian's mouths "Let's do evil so that good may result!" If their condemnation is just, our shame even more so.

The questions on marriage, divorce, and remarriage must be answered with sensitivity, with grace, and following our Lord's pattern. Any issue of marriage must be seen first in the light of God's glorious pattern, purpose, and ultimate revelation in the marriage supper of Christ and His church. I won't summarize the points I've listed above, but I will list some references while reserving the right to expand this article on a later date.

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# Question-Answers

## Question: Is divorce for any reason allowed?

No. There is only one exception that is also evidence of sin: during the case of sexual immorality because of the hardness of hearts which refuse to forgive the infraction.

## Question: Is divorce and remarriage a sin?

Yes, it was not this way in the beginning and divorce is evidence of the hardness of the heart of humans.

## Question: Is an unequally yoked marriage, a divorce, or remarriage an unforgiveable sin?

No, the only unforgiveable sin is the sin of unrepentant rejection of the revealed truth of God. In the case of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the sin is so heinous that the perpetrators might be hardened in that position. Unequally yoked marriage, divorce, or remarriage are just as forgivable as any sin.

## Question: What therefore are the allowances for divorce?

There is one. Divorce is allowed when one of the participants has committed adultery. They have defiled the marriage bed and God has made allowance (because of the hardness of a human's heart) to divorce. That said, it is a right that does not need to be enforced. It is optional. The other allowance is not that the Christian is called to divorce but rather if the unbeliever has, because of the Gospel, causing the separation and enacting the divorce. They have abandoned the believer because they have an issue with the Gospel. In this case, the Christian is not under bondage.

## Question: What about remarriage after divorce?

A complicated answer but do note that the Lord says that marrying a person who has been divorced is in effect committing adultery. It is a sin, surely, but perhaps a sin that stands over against another sin. In either case, this sin can bar people from specific ministries

## Question: Can I get a divorce if my wife is abusive?

Abuse is dangerous and some types are outright criminal. The scriptures make an allowance not for divorce but for separation. This separation is not for getting another spouse but for either remaining single or reconciling if the situation has changed. As I said, some abuse is criminal and that separation could rightly look like a prison sentence and relocation to protected custody from that individual. The chances of reconciling are unlikely but in that case we're called to singleness.

## Question: This call to singleness is easy when you're married. Do you really expect some of us to remain single?

I was single for many years. I was a virgin until 25. That doesn't make me better than anyone, it just means that I understand the weight of the question. There are some people who are born in a state of never having any chance for a sexual union. There are also some people who were



made to have no sexual unions by other situations. Some people even choose to this route for the sake of God's reign. That last category, if they're able to do it, should embrace that calling—that is God's gift to you. The others should remain in the situation in which they were called. (Matthew 19:12; 1 Cor 7:24)

Question: So are you saying the basis for staying in the marriage is more than love? If so, what is it?

[Promise](#). Keeping the word that was given. The Bible and theologians have a big word for this: covenant.

Question: Can you get a divorce if you find out your spouse used to be the opposite sex? Can you remarry if your first marriage was with the same sex?

These are only a marriage according to the state. Later in life we may find many [other forms of marriage that are legalized](#). One has to go further to see what constitutes [a marriage](#) by the one who constituted the institution.

Question: Doesn't this make the person who has been cheated against guilty for the sin of the one who performed the action?

No, it only shows that the innocent do suffer in this world of woe. [Marriage is a model](#) not merely something we aim at to reduce suffering.