

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

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When Paul wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3. 16) he was, of course, referring to the Old Testament, the New had not been written.

The Lord Jesus clearly upheld the Old Testament for He said. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5. 1 7). Indeed the Lord said that not the smallest part of the law would pass away until heaven and earth came to an end. As F B. Hole writes, "The Lord did not contradict Moses."

In certain circumstances in Old Testament times, a man could divorce his wife and remarry and so could the wife he divorced remarry.

As we shall see, there are permissible grounds for divorce in addition to adultery and fornication since adulterers and fornicators were stoned to death.

The facts are that people from within the nation who actually received God's laws did divorce and remarry in accordance with Divine law and, obviously, for reasons in addition to adultery and fornication.

Divorce was not mandatory. Abraham had illicit sex with Hagar, who his wife Sarah's maid and with Sarah's consent! But Abraham and Sarah never separated or divorced. In fact polygamy became a usual thing in the Old Testament.

Concerning the other issue, King David was an adulterer and yet not stoned to death!

God gave the Sinaitic law to His people, Israel, and since it came from God, it was good and holy.

Certain of these laws were exclusively Jewish, namely the blood sacrifices, feasts of Jehovah and the fourth commandment which demands the observance of the Sabbath. Christians set aside Sunday, the Lord's Day, as was the practice of the apostles (Acts 20.7). In the New Testament Christians are said to be not under the law but under grace (Romans 6.14) endorsing the statement of John that the law was given by Moses but that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1.17). But it must be remembered that the law Moses gave to the people, God had given to him. That the Christian is not under law but under grace does not mean that he can disobey the law the law and can, for example, steal and kill. A believer avoids these sins, not because he observes the law, but because he has received grace and truth. In the Old Testament the law was to bring people to God whereas in the New Testament it is grace and truth that brings people to Christ.

The principles of Sinaitic law are not invalidated because God does not operate a double standard for mankind.

For example, God did not say that adultery was only wrong in Moses's time or only wrong for the Jews. God's law remains. The Lord Jesus and the New Testament does not cancel that out. If the Old Testament gives grounds for divorce in addition to reasons of adultery and fornication, God would hardly reduce his standards of holiness or morality for the Christian age. The punishment and consequences may be different in our day since do not advocate polygamy or the stoning of sex offenders no more than we follow the example of Solomon in having a harem.

In considering the subjects of divorce and remarriage attention must therefore be given to both the

Old and New Testaments. Many disregard the Old Testament teaching on this subject thereby neutralising, to some extent, both what the Lord and the apostle Paul taught and upheld.

On the matter of divorce, Matthew 19.6 reads, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder," which is often mistakenly taken to mean that every marriage, without exception, is approved by God and in accordance with God's will.

But consider this. How many people get married in the certainty that they are in the Will of God in so doing and that their partner is God's choice? Atheists and agnostics marry just as Christians do. As someone has observed, if a marriage is in God's will, it will last.

It cannot be said that every marriage is in the will of God. Even Christians refer to some marriages between fellow Christians and say that some couples are not suited and should never have married. The world is full of marriages of Christians who were not right for each other. As God does not make mistakes, who joined such couples together? How can two walk together unless they be agreed? If a marriage no longer has agreement and a working together, or if affection is no more, can those two walk together and live as God intended married couples should?

What is evident from scripture is that God wants His people to marry within His people so that each marriage is of two believers devoted to God and to each other. Marriage of the people of God with the heathen was forbidden in the Old Testament as indeed it is in the New Testament (Genesis 24.3, Deuteronomy 7.3, 2 Corinthians 6.14). This is but one of the excellent examples of the New Testament endorsing the Old.

When a Hebrew or a Jew married a heathen, that is to say one of another faith, God's displeasure was shown and often disaster followed resulting in such tragedies as the case of Esau and the most evil profligate of them all, namely Solomon whom some Christians still refer to as being a type of Christ!

Solomon became evil and God had to raise up enemies against him to teach him his gross sin (I Kings 11).

A marriage between believers is certainly intended to be for life (Romans 7.1-3). The exceptions are uncleanness as stated in Deuteronomy 24 and fornication in Matthew 19. Uncleanness is an all-embracing word. If a man finds some uncleanness in his wife so that she no longer finds favour in his eyes he can divorce her (Deuteronomy 24.2), The word uncleanness here is the Hebrew word *ervah* which means nudity, semi-nudity, immodest dress, disgrace which would include fornication and adultery although some shame would not necessarily connote adultery or fornication The word *ervah* is also used to describe unclean spirits or something that defiles, befouls, stains or blemishes.

I have not only heard Christians claim that if either of the two married people were not virgins when they married then fornication has taken place and this is the only ground for divorce. I have heard it said (and by Christians) that if in a marriage one party constantly commits adultery then that is not grounds for divorce! I have also heard Christians say that if a married woman poses naked for a painter or photographer or in swimwear or in glamorous fashion her husband must forgive her since this is not grounds for divorce either! That is totally against the Scripture and also betrays a total lack of common sense and decency. It is uncleanness. Uncleanness is also the Greek word *akaharsia* which means anything that is inconsistent with personal purity even to the extent of sordidness.

Many Christians insist that fornication simply means pre-marital sex and nothing else. This is possibly due to the inference they draw from Matthew 1, where Joseph was prepared to put Mary away because she was pregnant although she had not been intimate with him. 'Put away' is used in Matthew 5.32 and 19.9 to clearly denote divorce.

Joseph was a good man and did not want to make a public example of Mary, so he decided to put her

away privately. The issue here was that it was believed that Mary had had pre-marital sex and this is why she could legitimately be put away by divorce. Some Christians link this with the words of the Lord Jesus, “Whoever shall put away his wife except it be for fornication referring to Joseph, who was to put away Mary, as her sin was sex before marriage, then that is what constitutes the only meaning of fornication and the only reason for divorce.

To put these thoughts together, and simply, the dictum would be: “You can only divorce your wife if she has fornicated, that is to say, had sex before marriage – in other words, if she was not a virgin when you married her”.

But that is a false syllogism. Let me give another example of a false syllogism. All atheists have brains. The American evangelist, Billy Graham, has brains. Therefore, Billy Graham is an atheist. Nonsense!

A careful study of New Testament words proves that porneia, usually translated as fornication, like uncleanness, is an all-embracing word. It is used, for example, of adultery which means, of course, voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and another person other than his or her spouse. Strong Concordance states that porneia means not only sex before marriage but also adultery, lust, prostitution and incest. Cruden’s Concordance rightly says that porneia is any act of sexual impurity between people not married to each other, and its equivalent Old Testament word is ervah, which means uncleanness. Lustful thoughts and looks are adulterous. The Lord Jesus said so in Matthew 5.28. He went on to say quite clearly that he allowed divorce for porneia which, as we have seen, includes adultery, prostitution, incest and lust (Matthew 5.32). Porneia is also the basis of the word pornography which is also condemned in the Bible.

The initial bond for marriage was that the wife was to be a ‘help’ meet for the husband and vice versa. The Hebrew word for help comes from the word azar meaning to protect or aid, to surround or succour.

So both testaments clearly indicate that grounds for divorce are uncleanness which includes fornication, adultery, and also includes nudity, semi-nudity, immodest dress, shame or disgrace.

Such a disgrace would, for example, include flirting since flirting is any attempt to attract sexually. How a man responds to a woman and how he ‘chats her up’ is flirting with an ulterior motive. He has many ways to achieve his goal. The main ‘playgrounds’ for flirtation are the pub or nightclub where alcohol is used to destroy inhibition and there is also dancing which necessitates physical contact the other main ‘playgrounds’ are the beach and the swimming pool where the flirt can feast their eyes upon the subject in a bathing costume. In that situation, the goal is in sight!

Women use the same ‘playgrounds.’ They know how to tempt and tease a man and they know what to wear and how to indulge in fashion-flirting. How a woman dresses and where she is prepared to go in response to her own flirting gives the signal that she is, or may be, in the market for sex. Illicit sex and any move that precedes it is sexual impurity. Flirting indicates sexual interest.

Every affair and act of adultery begins with flirting or sexual desire which is in itself, the introduction to physical contact. It can also come within the definition of sexual harassment. It must follow that if your spouse or partner flirts, then that is sexual harassment and distress for you. It annoys and angers you causing you shame and embarrassment.

[\(See article on Woman's Dress\)](#)

The Lord upheld the Old Testament and therefore the Divine concession that divorce was allowed and on grounds in addition to what is commonly referred to as fornication and adultery.

Divorce is allowed for the shame brought upon someone by their spouse or someone else.

A teenage girl, who was the daughter of an elder, often came to the breaking of bread meeting in a white see-through dress. When she married she often came to the meeting in that same revealing dress and the husband was clearly embarrassed. She was shaming him!

A dear Christian woman realised that her husband had starting to smoke and would go out of the church service to have a cigarette for which he was desperate.. That shamed and embarrassed her but could not be grounds for divorce because it did not attack the sanctity of their marriage.

There are also the legal as well as the spiritual aspects of marriage. Christians have to keep the law of the land whether it refers to the payment of taxes, however fair or unfair they are, driving within the speed limit and so on. (Romans 13.1). Thus if a couple in a state of intoxication have a legal marriage ceremony they are legally married. But did God join them together?

If a man is violent towards his wife and children there may have to be a legal separation to protect life and in order for the wife to obtain State Benefits. She may have to obtain a divorce. It is all very well Christians saying that divorce is wrong and that the Church will financially help a woman in such dire straits but that is not practical. I know of cases where the family home had no money - the husband was wasting it on drink, for example. The only way for the wife and children to survive was that a divorce be implemented in order to obtain Social Security Benefits as well as maintain their personal safety. Such women have been seriously shamed, disgraced and damaged.

It must be emphasised that divorce is never commanded in the Bible; it is allowed, however. But divorce has its problems. There is the welfare of the children; the appalling emotional stress which only those who have endured it can truly understand; the stigma; the misery and totally unacceptable censure from those who just do not understand. Christians and the Church are often the least understanding. They treat divorced people with disdain. Indeed many Christians and churches say, in effect, "Thou shalt not be divorced or, if you do, you will not be welcome in our church or fellowship." I have a letter from a church stating just that!

Consider the serious plight of those in difficult and sometimes dangerous marriages which are heading for divorce. In addition, note certain scriptures.

For example, Romans 16.17 tells us to avoid those who are divisive; 2 Timothy 2.16 tells us to shun profane and vain babblings and verse 23 instructs us to avoid things that engender strife and trouble. In many difficult marriages there is not only division and strife, but malice as well, and malice is condemned in the New Testament (I Corinthians 5.18). We are not to keep company with one who is a disgrace or one who is false. So, if one married partner is divisive and causing trouble or is malicious or false, are they to be avoided? The prophet Amos posed the question, "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?"

1 Corinthians 7 has a great deal to say about marriage. As scriptures do not contradict themselves what we have expounded so far is not invalidated by other Biblical passages. Verse 39 is often quoted. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives' and taken to mean that divorce and remarriage is forbidden. Romans 13 tells us that we must keep the law and that makes provision for divorce as did the Lord Jesus Himself as we have already seen. But the salient fact that people overlook is in 1 Corinthians 7.39 which states that a couple are bound to each other while they are husband and wife. If they are divorced they are no longer married. Of course Paul advised against divorce but he also advocated advantages of celibacy.

Romans 7 takes up the same thoughts. A wife cannot marry another man if her husband is still alive. If she did she would be a polygamist. She is bound to one husband at a time. If she has no husband, because she is a widow or divorced, she can remarry. Common sense must prevail here. I am divorced. I do not have a wife. How can my ex-wife be bound to me? 'To be bound' is the

Greek verb, deho, which means to be tied together. My ex-wife and I are not together; we do not even see each other. We are not bound. What is my ex-wife doing to show that she is bound to me for the rest of her life? Nothing.

It may be argued that some indiscretions by a spouse may be temporary and that if the partner ceases to be divisive, troublesome and a disgrace, unity can be restored. But how long does one tolerate bad behaviour? If such indiscretions persist and there is no repentance on the part of the offender, then the offender cannot be forgiven since the Lord Himself states that forgiveness is always dependant upon true repentance first (Luke 17 etc.).

God is the God of mercy and understanding. He is also the God of justice. Can we really accept that He would be so unreasonable as not to allow a divorce when the marriage has irretrievably broken down and the quality of life is suffering?

Can you imagine God saying, 'Woman, I know your husband is beating you severely every night and is also cruel to the children but I tell you that you must not divorce him. Divorce is far more serious than your continual beatings!' Or can you envisage God saying, "Young man, your wife is sleeping around and has been doing so for years. Overlook it, for I tell you that if you divorce her you will be committing the bigger sin!" Imagine an older couple and God saying to the husband, "Well, Fred, for years your wife has belittled you and caused you shame, disgrace and pain. I know you have had several heart attacks as a result but you must not divorce her. If you do then your offence is greater than all of hers put together!" Here is a man who treats his wife as a slave in the kitchen and a sex object in the bedroom. That is not a marriage. That is, as Paul states, not what a marriage should be. It is uncleanness, to use a Biblical word, and unreasonable behaviour to quote a legal term.

Take a last example. God is talking to a married man, "Yes John, I know that your wife is wearing shortish skirts and has done so for years and whenever she bends over or sits down everyone has a good chance of seeing her underwear. That is causing you shame!"

In the Bible this constitutes immodest dress and is forbidden. Christians say, "I know that you are really mad about it and understandably so, but ignore it and don't even think about taking the matter further. Divorce is out of the question even though she is shaming you constantly!"

The Holy God would not tolerate such behaviour.

It should also be remembered that acts of sexual impurity or intercourse between people of the same sex is adultery. Consider, in a marriage between a man and a woman one develops into being a homosexual then this, being adultery, is grounds for divorce.

Divorce should never be for trivial reasons. If a marriage can be saved it should be. Once you are divorced from a partner you cannot go back to him or her. Intimacy with a former spouse is absolutely forbidden. It is an abomination to the Lord (Deuteronomy 24.4). God detests and loathes such action.

It will be realised that there are potential difficulties in remarriage and these naturally increase with any further remarriages. One must be sure of a new partner's sexual history and expert medical advice be sought to prevent any possibility of sexually transmitted problems.

Paul's advice is clear. If you are going to be married, choose the right person and remain married to that one person for life. It makes sense. A man should have his own wife and none other; a woman should have her own husband and none other. If they really love each other they will not do anything to upset or shame each other.

Is God so unreasonable that He would disallow remarriage? He clearly said that it was not good for

man to be alone (Genesis 2.18). The same principle applies to the woman. Loneliness is not something that God desires for people. I Corinthians 10.13 states that God does not want us to be tempted or tested above what we are able to bear, but has provided a way of escape. It must be emphasised that marriage is not to be bondage; it is not strife; it is not a contest; it is not a perpetual testing; and if a marriage has become divisive and difficult to the point of intolerability, or where there is danger (and such danger includes emotional damage) then that is certainly not a marriage as God intended it to be.

There are other matters named in the Bible that God hates. Often they are called abominations. Here they are:

Deuteronomy	7. 15	Graven images, idolatry.
	18. 10	Witchcraft and the occult.
	25	Unjust weights, unfairness, injustice.
Proverbs	6.16	Pride. Lying. Murder. Wicked imagination. False witness. Swift mischief Sowing discord.
	11.20	Froward heart
	28.29	Disregard of God's law and word.

These things, the things that God hates, are repeated in the New Testament.

Anyone who has endured the awful trauma of divorce is still worthy of respect. A man who has a leg amputated is no less a man because of surgery; a woman who has been raped is still a woman: a Christian who has suffered is still worthy of the love and understanding of fellow believers and others. God treats people just the same so why don't Christians?

Make no mistake about it. The Lord would have, and indeed welcome, divorced people, but some local churches are very reluctant to allow this and even refuse it. Their attitude is one of pride and discord, of disregard of the Word of God and they are therefore setting themselves up to be above God. Conceit could not be more blatant.

It is amazing how the experts' on divorce are those who have not experienced it but, nonetheless, judge it and those who have suffered it.

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