

riage. Malachi condemned remarriage to an unbeliever. “Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.” (Mal 2:11). A priest was forbidden to take a divorced woman as his wife – “They shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he is holy unto his God.” (Lev 21:7).

Jesus in His basic teaching forbade the remarriage of divorced persons.

He condemned remarriage as an act of adultery, a sin against the covenant of the first marriage. “And he said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, commits adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery. (Mark 10: 11-12). However, Jesus recognized that the basic problem is divorce itself, for He saw that the divorced could be expected to remarry. By doing so they would commit adultery and cause the new partner to commit adultery. Thus, the basic purpose in what Jesus said is to prevent divorce in the first place.

Matthew 5:32 added an exceptive clause. “But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.” This shows that a husband who divorces a sexually immoral woman does not cause her to commit adultery, since she is already guilty of it.

Matthew 19:9 also carried an exceptive clause. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and whoso marries her which is put away doth commit adultery.” It should be emphasized that the exception has in view sexual immorality, not merely a single act. Wherever possible, sexually immoral practices should be dealt with through repentance, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation, thus saving the marriage. It should be pointed out that in the extreme cases where divorce seems necessary, Jesus did not command remarriage.

However, it is clear that in Matt 19:9 Jesus assumes the man will remarry. The verse deals with divorce and remarriage, and the laws of grammar make the exceptive clause apply to both. Jesus was simply trying to throw out excuses, reasons or causes, except for fornication.

I Corinthians 7:15 also contains an exception. “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” “Not enslaved” is a strong expression. If a believer is not enslaved when an unbelieving spouse, unwilling to remain in the marriage, divorces them, the believer is considered to be set free. Since it is the unbelieving partner who determines to go and initiates a divorce, the believer’s freedom seems to be more than a freedom to let them go. The plain meaning seems to be that the believer is set free to remarry if they so choose. Paul, however, does discourage remarriage for the sake of ministering to the Lord. “Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin.” (I Cor. 7:27,28).

Remarriage is a new contract or covenant.

A remarriage entered into wrongly does indeed constitute an act of adultery against the previous contract. This breaks the old contract; the former partner is set free. Once a person remarries they are then obligated to be faithful to the new contract. The Scriptures show that God expects contracts to be kept even when entered into wrongly. When Joshua wrongly entered into a contract with the Gibeonites, God not only expected him to fulfill it, He gave him miracles of a hailstorm and the long day to help him (Joshua 9 & 10). Isaiah warned Ahaz against making a covenant with the Assyrians, but he made it anyway (Isa 7).

The place of the divorced and remarried in the church.

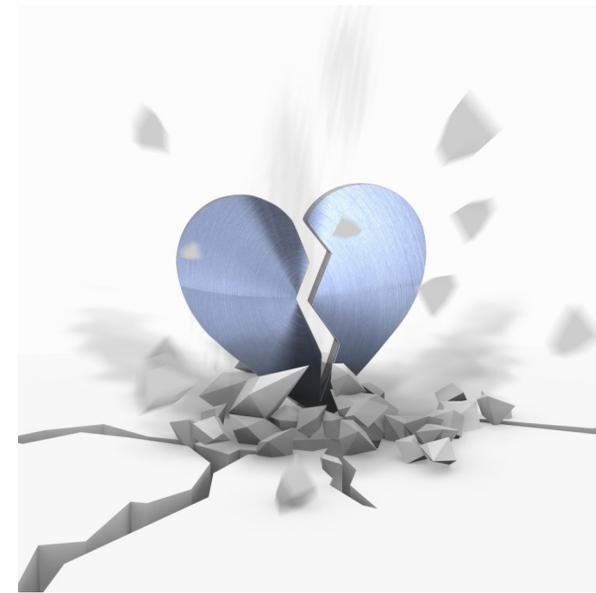
Membership is open to all born again believers. This includes all individuals, from all pasts. “The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness...” God accepted the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10 & 11). Knowing the frequency of divorce and remarriage among the Romans of the time, it is very probable that some at the house of Cornelius were so involved. If God accepts such believers, who are we to judge?

Summary

Low standards on marriage and divorce are very hurtful to individuals, to the family and to the cause of Christ. Therefore, we discourage divorce by all lawful means and teaching. We disapprove of Christians getting divorces, especially after they have been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus Christ. Such individuals should be relying on their enlightenment through the Word and the Holy Spirit to select their future spouses. Where exceptional circumstances exist or when a Christian has been divorced by an unbeliever, we recommend that the question of remarriage be resolved by the believer, their pastor, spiritual counselor, district coordinator or a member of the GCMF presbytery, as they walk in the light of God’s Word.



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Biblical Perspective—Divorce

A Policy Statement of
Global Christian Ministry Forum International

Marriage is a basic human relationship that unites a man and a woman by flesh, emotions and spirit.

Marriage is God-ordained.

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). The very nature of the way God created man to live on the earth indicates He intended man and woman for each other. Their relationship was to be social as well as physical. “The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). The first woman was a “help meet” (a counterpart) for the man, taken from his side, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, his perfect complement (Genesis 2:23). It is obvious that God meant them to share in both privilege and responsibility.

God intended marriage to be a lifelong monogamous union.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The word “cleave” means to stay joined in love and loyalty. When this is quoted in Matthew 19:5, a Greek word for “cleave” is used which means “to be glued to, be closely bound to”.

The Old Testament factually recognized that polygamy did exist. It notes that the first case of polygamy was in Cain’s line (Genesis 4:19) and shows that monogamy was still the ideal (Psalm 128:3; Proverbs 5:18; 31:10 – 29; Ecclesiastes 9:9). Jesus also acknowledges that God’s ideal in the beginning was monogamy (Matthew 19:8).

Marriage also involves a covenant, which is a solemn binding agreement made before God and man.

You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the wit-

ness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.“ (Malachi 2:14). Ezekiel applies the idea of marriage to the relationship between God and Israel. “Yea, I swear unto thee, and entered in a covenant with thee, says the Lord God, and thou became mine” (Ezekiel 16:8). From what is said we see that the husband “sware unto” the wife and entered into a solemn covenant not intended to be broken. The verbiage “sware unto” indicates an oath or a pledge of faith. The Hebrew word used, however, implies no sacrifice, thereby distinguishing it from the word used for the more sacred and binding “cut a covenant”. The love involved is fundamentally the Hebrew “hesed”, “a loyal covenant keeping love,” which God shows us even when we are unworthy.

Divorce is a matter that the Lord has dealt with. God hates divorce.

You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. “The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect, says the LORD Almighty.

This passage shows that divorce is treachery, or deceitful unfaithfulness, against your spouse. It is also a violent thing coming from a wrong spirit. Worst of all, it hinders the growth of a “godly seed”. Broken homes do not tend to produce the healthiest offspring.

The Law restricted divorce.

It recognized the fact that divorce was taking place in Israel, as well as many other practices. In giving Israel the Law, God accepted people where they were, put restrictions on their wrong practices, and tried to direct them. In their confrontation with Jesus about divorce, the Pharisees were obviously in error when they said Moses

“commanded” that a man give a certificate of divorce when putting his wife away. Jesus said that Moses only “suffered”, or permitted them to do so, and then not for “every cause,” as was commonly practiced at that time. “The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”...”They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.” (Matthew 19: 3,7,8).

This is born out in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hates her, and writes her a bill of divorcement, and gives it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; or if the latter husband dies, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shall not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God gives thee for an inheritance.”

The Hebrew Moses used there is a simple sequence that does not command divorce. He simply recognizes that men were divorcing their wives. In other words, a man is to think twice before he divorces his wife even for what seems to be a good reason. He might eventually want her back, but if she has married again, he could not have her.

Jesus forbade divorce as contrary to God’s will and word.

He made this clear in Matthew 19:5,6 – “And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” And also in Mark 10:6-9 “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God

hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Paul forbade a Christian couple getting a divorce.

“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.” (1 Cor. 7:10,11) Although Paul recognized that Christians were getting divorces he commanded that they keep the way open for reconciliation.

Paul forbade Christians taking the initiative in getting a divorce because their partner is an unbeliever.

“But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Thus Paul indicates that the Christian cannot stop an unbelieving partner from leaving if he or she insists on it.

Jesus permitted a Christian to initiate a divorce when fornication was involved.

“But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.” (Matt 5:32). This is permission, however it is not a command. The Greek word for “fornication” (porneia) may include especially repeated acts of adultery, but usually means habitual sexual immorality of any kind, both before and after marriage.

Remarriage according to Scriptures.

The Law accepted the fact that divorce permitted remarriage. This is clear from the passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (already quoted). The same passage shows that the Law put some limits on remar-