

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Can God Forgive Divorce?



ADULTERY AND THE PHYSICAL UNION OF MARRIAGE

According to statisticians at least one out of every two marriages in the United States end in divorce. Sometimes there is an innocent victim who is betrayed by an unfaithful or abusive spouse. Other times both spouses are equally culpable before God. With divorce so rampant in the United States there must be something very wrong with our American society.

Yahweh God informs us in Malachi 2:16 that He “**hates divorce.**” Why does God hate divorce? Every marriage that ends in divorce breaks the God ordained holy covenant of marriage (Malachi 2:14) and brings much emotional pain, suffering, and hardship for families, especially when children are involved (Malachi 2:15). Even Spirit Filled Christians are getting divorced in America at an alarming rate. Many are guilty of breaking their marriage covenants but others are true victims without committing any wrongdoing. Yahweh God will punish the unrepentant adulterers but He is willing to extend grace to both the victims of unfaithful spouses and to the unfaithful spouses themselves who truly repent of their wrongdoing.

However, can God forgive Christians who have been divorced and remarried, even while their former spouses are still alive? According to some, once a Christian has been married, even before becoming a Christian, he can never be remarried. No matter what the circumstances that led to the divorce or separation. According to this view, if the Christian gets remarried while the former spouse lives he or she is in perpetual adultery before God. No forgiveness and no hope of eternal life! Could this be true? Could a loving God never forgive the sin of divorce?

The Holy Bible says that there is only one unforgivable sin: “**the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (See Matthew 12:31).**” The Pharisees were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit when they called the mighty works of the Spirit of God working through Jesus the works of “**the ruler of the demons**” (Matthew 12:24). It is noteworthy that Jesus did not include the sin of divorce and remarriage (while the former spouse lives) with the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. This is a very strong argument in favor of God’s ability to forgive both spouses in a former marriage, even those who have sinned!



WHAT DID JESUS MEAN IN MATHEW 5:32?

“Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery: and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Are there circumstances when Christians can get remarried after experiencing divorce?

According to Jesus, if a man or woman divorces his or her spouse (when no sexual immorality has been committed) he or she causes the other spouse to commit adultery. Note the word “causes.” Jesus knew that human need would cause most divorced people to eventually get remarried. Yet Jesus still calls it “adultery.”

If a man divorces his wife because she has committed sexual immorality against him he does not cause her to commit adultery because she has already committed this terrible crime against him. And if a man or a woman marries someone who has been divorced, while the former spouse still lives, he or she also commits adultery because the sexual union of the first marriage is broken by the second sexual union.

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives? But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if while her husband lives, she married another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.” Romans 7: 2,3

There is no way anyone can possibly twist this scripture to read anything else. Jesus and Paul did not use sexual immorality to release a spouse to be remarried. Only the death of a spouse brings this release. Remarriage (while the former spouse lives) after divorce is adultery because it breaks the marriage covenant of the first marriage and initiates another covenant. When a man or a woman has sexual union with someone outside of the marriage covenant it is legal adultery. This is why the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians that he who commits fornication with a harlot becomes “one flesh” with her.

“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall become one flesh.’” 1 Corinthians 6:16

Therefore it is clearly the sexual act of marriage that makes a man and a woman “one flesh” and not just the marriage ceremony itself. This is clearly the meaning of the scriptures. When Isaac married Rebecca there was no ceremony. Isaac took Rebecca into his mothers tent and they were immediately joined together as one flesh (Genesis 24:67).

Notice how Paul uses the same words that Jesus used about the marriage covenant as recorded in **Matthew 19:4-6: Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, **they are no longer two but one flesh.** Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

Since the Holy Spirit had Paul write: **“he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall become one flesh,’”** we know that it is clearly the physical union of sexual intercourse that actually starts the marriage covenant and not merely the actual ceremony itself. The consummation of any marriage is the coming together of a man and a woman in sexual intercourse. For this reason, Moses wrote that if a man entices a maid [a virgin woman] and she has sexual intercourse with him then they shall surely marry. **“If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed [not engaged to someone else], and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife.” Exodus 22:16**

If a man and woman fail to get married in the eyes of the State (or community) after having united together in sexual intercourse and they both end up marrying someone else, then they both have also committed adultery in the eyes of God because “the two” had already become “one flesh” with each other. The true Biblical covenant of marriage starts at the consummation of the marriage [the first sexual intercourse]. This is why God commanded Moses to publicly marry those who have already **“become one flesh”** through sexual union.

It is a great shame in our society that so many men and women have had sexual intercourse with dozens, if not hundreds of people prior to getting legally married. If God can forgive Christians who have already become “one flesh” with others prior to getting legally married in the eyes of the State, then what about the godly men and women who have been chaste all of their lives but later became the victims of unfaithful spouses? How could a Christian who repeatedly committed fornication with many partners find forgiveness but another Christian who did everything right is not able to find forgiveness because he or she got married to a spouse who later backslid from the faith. If this was true then a Christian could commit the sin of murder against their former spouse in order to later repent and find forgiveness so they could remarry someone else. If murder was forgivable but remarriage while the former spouse was still alive was not, then people could escape eternity in hell by murdering their former spouses; then they could later get remarried if they were not caught and sent to prison. How ridiculous for a just God to forgive the murderer after he repents but He is not able to forgive the Christian who gets remarried!

If fornication makes two people **“one flesh”** as the apostle Paul indicated, then fornicators who sin with more than one partner are also committing adultery; because they have entered into a covenant with one partner just to break that covenant every time they fornicate with another partner. If all people in modern times who have joined themselves in sexual intercourse with others could not be joined again with anyone else for the rest of their lives our world would become a very unpopulated planet. Mankind would eventually cease to exist. Surely God can forgive all sexual sins, even the sins of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and even pedophilia. If God can't forgive all of these sins then our Lord Jesus Christ died in vain!

The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with examples of God's grace and forgiveness. God chose Solomon as King of Israel even though he was the son of Bathsheba. King David had committed the great sin of adultery with Bathsheba prior to Solomon's birth (2 Samuel 11:4). Although God took the first son of this relationship (2 Samuel 12:18) He clearly forgave this sin and accepted the second son of David and Bathsheba (Solomon) as the next King of Israel. David committed the sin of adultery but God clearly forgave him and accepted his second son with Bathsheba. It was this son [Solomon] who became the next King of Israel.

“Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon, Now Yahweh loved him.” 2 Samuel 12:24

Jephthah was another great ruler in Israel in the time of the Judges but he was the son of his father's relationship with a harlot:

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, ‘You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.’” Judges 11:1,2

Jephtha's brothers cast him out of the family (Judges 11:3) because he was not one of the sons of their mother. Yet God chose Jephtha above his brethren to become a Judge and a ruler in Israel. Why would God choose the son of a prostitute above the sons of the legitimate mother? And why did God use Solomon above his brethren when he was the byproduct of past adultery? Surely we can see God's wonderful grace revealed throughout the scriptures. It is Solomon who is listed in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 1:6,7)!

I have discussed the subject of divorce and remarriage with many Pentecostal Pastors I fellowship with and I am so glad that the brethren I fellowship with are like minded with me. There are many in the body of Christ who will not recognize many apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers because they have suffered through the pain of divorce. When the spouse of a church leader is the guilty individual then the church leader may elect to continue on in his ministry without stepping down. But when a church leader commits adultery it is in order for him to sit down for a while to make sure he is truly restored. Yet to tell God called men that they are barred from their ministries for the rest of their lives because they had experienced a divorce and later get remarried is just plain wrong! If God has forgiven the man then why has the church not forgiven the man?

“But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:15

Surely each situation is different and should be treated differently. All who have sinned can be restored to their ministries, even church leaders! If not, then why did God accept David's repentance? God did not remove David from his position because he truly repented of his sin. If God forgives someone who are we to question it? If a man continues on in sin then there must be drastic measures taken. Yet it is unscriptural to say that a man is barred from ministry for the rest of his life with no hope of restoration!

However, there are consequences for sin. If a Pastor or church leader falls into adultery he may be removed from his office for a season to make sure he has been restored. A Pastor may permanently lose his Pastorate because of sin but this does not mean that he cannot later begin Pastoring somewhere else. If a Pastor is a repeat offender the consequences for his sin must be more severe. The scriptures clearly speak of disfellowshipping a believer for a season until the body can be sure that he or she is fully restored. The sinning believer should also suffer some public shame and humiliation for his or her sin.

“Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” 1 Timothy 5:20

Surely God uses the fear of public humiliation to prevent His people from falling into sin. There must be serious consequences for the sin of adultery. If not, sin would spread like cancer through the whole church.

The sin of divorce and remarriage can be forgiven, even if the former spouse is still alive. If the former spouse is still living, every effort should be made to reconcile the marriage before a second remarriage is in order. Yet sometimes marriages are irreconcilable because one spouse is rebellious against God and His Word. When one spouse becomes rebellious against the Word of God and the marriage covenant then that spouse becomes as an unbeliever. God does not hold the believing spouse in bondage when the unbelieving spouse wishes to depart out of the relationship. If a spouse is physically abusive or displays violent and aggressive behavior against the other spouse then the couple must separate for a season. If the abusive spouse refuses to change his or her violent and aggressive behavior then a divorce may be in order.

God does hate divorce, yet sometimes people have no alternative. Sometimes the unbelieving spouse either wants a divorce or the unbelieving spouse is a false believer. Some who claim to be Christian are emotionally and physically abusive to their spouses. When a believing spouse is having marital difficulties he or she must get godly counsel. Each situation is different and must be counseled differently. If the relationship is not glorifying God and there is no hope of change in site then the couple should separate for a season and seek counsel to reconcile the relationship. Much prayer and godly counsel must always precede divorce.

Although God hates divorce sometimes it is necessary: Both Ezra and Nehemiah commanded the Jews who had married pagan wives to divorce them (Ezra 10:2,3/Nehemiah 13:23-27). Even God Himself divorced Israel:

“Then I (Jehovah God) saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce . . .” Jeremiah 3:8

Although God hates divorce, He sometimes allows it. If the unbelieving spouse stands in the way of the believing spouse's relationship with God it is usually best to let the unbeliever depart to live the sinful life he or she desires. If a believing spouse backslides then he or she also becomes as an unbeliever. A brother or sister is not under bondage to stay in a relationship which stands in the way of God's will. If all efforts fail to bring peace between the two different lifestyles then **“let the unbeliever depart.”**

My heart goes out to the many Christians who have been told that they are not permitted to ever get remarried for the rest of their lives because they had experienced the pain of divorce. Some of God's people can easily live by themselves for the rest of their lives but the great majority of Christians find it extremely difficult to live in a single and celibate state. Consider the words of the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 7:9: “But if they cannot exercise self control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”** And again, **“But if the unbeliever (the unbelieving husband or wife) departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.”**

Therefore if an unbelieving spouse wishes to depart from their marriage relationship with a believing spouse then the Christian brother or Sister is not under perpetual bondage to that marriage. This sure sounds like the brother or sister is free to eventually get remarried to a believing spouse!

WITHOUT GOD'S GRACE MOST CHRISTIANS WOULD BE GUILTY OF PERPETUAL ADULTERY

Most American Christian men and women who have not been raised in a conservative church have had sexual intercourse with multiple partners prior to marriage. According to God's moral Law, all people are commanded to marry the first member of the opposite sex they lost their virginity with (See Exodus 22:16).

"If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not engaged ... and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days." Deuteronomy 22:28-30

If a woman is raped, the Law required the offending man to be put to death (Deuteronomy 22:25-27); this death released the woman to unite with another man in marriage without committing adultery.

When a man unites with a virgin woman it causes the woman's hymen to brake and blood to be spilled. This is God's lawful blood covenant between a man and a woman. This covenantal relationship is suppose to be for a lifetime. Unfortunately, most American men and women have lost their virginity prior to getting officially married in the eyes of the State. According to God's moral law most modern Christians are already guilty of entering into covenant with a member of the opposite sex and then breaking that covenant by joining ourselves to another. Many have repeated this covenant entering and covenant breaking process many times over before they finally resolved to enter into a permanent marriage covenant in the eyes of their community. In the eyes of the State they were only married once but in the eyes of God they have already had many husbands or wives.

The apostle Paul stated that if a man lies with a harlot he becomes **"one flesh"** with her. Paul's words harmonize with the words of Christ when he stated, **"and they twain shall become one flesh. And what God has joined together let no man put asunder."**

Paul's words further harmonize with the words of Christ as recorded in John 4:16. **"Go, call your husband, and come here."** The woman answered, **"I have no husband."** Jesus retorted, **"You have well said, I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband."**

Notice that Jesus being the All Knowing God says, **"Go, call your husband and come here."** Then Jesus acknowledged that the man she was having sexual relations with was not her civil husband (In the eyes of the State) but was in fact, **"her husband"** by becoming **"one flesh"** with her in the eyes of God. Hence, Jesus did not actually make a mistake by calling this man **"her husband."** The omniscient [All Knowing] Christ could not have erred when He said, **"Go, call your husband, and come here."** The physical intercourse of this couple made them **"one flesh"** [husband and wife] even though they never had a civil ceremony.

Churches and organizations who teach that Christians are never allowed to remarry because they were divorced and their former spouses are still alive (sometimes it is impossible to know if their former spouses are alive or dead) must also consider that most of their constituents have lost their virginity prior to their current marriage covenants. Statistics prove that most born again Christians who were not raised in the church have already lost their virginity before coming to Christ. If all born again Christians had to find and marry their original sexual partners then most everyone would be unmarried in our churches today.

Many divorced believers eventually start desiring a relationship with the opposite sex. When this happens they are consumed with condemnation because their Pastors have told them that their desire to remarry is a great sin before God.



Many Christians have been told that they must live the rest of their lives in a single and separated state because their former spouse is still alive. Others have been told that if they do not know where their former spouses are then they must assume that they are still alive. Therefore the divorced or separated Christian is told that he or she cannot be legally remarried in the site of God. Wherefore, many Christians suffer and find it very difficult to live for God without a lifelong partner. The preponderance of scriptures speak of the need for every man and every woman to have their own husband or wife. For it is better to marry than to burn!

IS REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE PERPETUAL ADULTERY?

“Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery: and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” Matthew 5:32

The use of the Greek word “moicheia” for adultery rather than “porneia” brings light to this difficult passage. The use of the word “moicheia” for adultery focuses on the breaking of the marriage covenant rather than on the sexual immorality itself. When a formerly married man and woman come together in the sexual union of another marriage, they break the former marriage covenant and start a new one. The initial sin of adultery does not have to be a continuing state. If a person has repented of his or her past adultery the sin is completely forgiven. Like other sins, this sin can be washed away by the blood of Christ.

Jesus Himself recognized the Samaritan woman as having five husbands prior to her living in sin with a man outside of marriage. Yet Jesus also called this man a husband even though they were not legally married (in the eyes of the State). Hence, it is clear that sexual union makes a man and a woman “one flesh.”

“Jesus said to her, (the Samaritan woman) Go, call your husband, and come here. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have well said, I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.” John 4:16-18

It is highly unlikely that the Samaritan woman had been widowed five times. From this passage of scripture we can be certain that Jesus recognized each man she had married as a husband. Jesus also recognized the man she was living with as a husband even though they were not legally married in the eyes of the community. Wherefore, it is certain that God can recognize marriages after divorces. If not, Jesus would not have called these men “husbands.”

The apostle Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 7:9:

“But if they cannot exercise self control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

The words “cannot exercise self control” imply that the strong natural impulse that God has given men and women makes it virtually impossible for most individuals to keep going on in a single state. Even God Himself declared, “**It is not good that the man should be alone (Genesis 2:18)**”

Jesus Himself declared the full extent of human need by stating, “**Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery . . .**” In other words, human need and loneliness would cause most women to eventually get remarried to another man. This would cause her to legally break the first marriage covenant through sexual union with another man to start a new marriage covenant.

Even in marriage the apostle Paul forbids married men and women to go long without joining themselves together in sexual union because if they defraud each other of sexual fulfillment God says that Satan will be tempting them for their “**lack of self control**” (1 Corinthians 7:5). It is very easy for those who have been blessed with a faithful spouse to be quick to condemn others who have been victimized by an unfaithful or abusive spouse. Yet if the same events occurred in their own lives what would they be doing and thinking? Would not Satan also be tempting them for their own “**lack of self control?**” Would they be so quick to judge others if they themselves were experiencing the same emptiness and loneliness of separated and divorced people?

It is natural for a man or a woman who has become single through the infidelity or backsliding of their former divorced spouse to want to find happiness and fulfillment in a happy marriage. Forcing a divorced Christian to remain single for the rest of his or her life when he or she desires to remarry usually causes that Christian to eventually backslide or fall into secret sins. Many of these hurt Christians either backslide from Christianity or they end up finding another church that will accept their remarriage. They can have nothing to do with their old church who has condemned them to Hell as perpetual adulterers.

Some teachers use the example of John the Baptist rebuking King Herod for divorcing his past wife and marrying his brother Philip’s wife to prove that remarriages are never acceptable in the site of God:

“For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’” Mark 6:17,18

If remarriages could be forgiven then why did John the Baptist rebuke King Herod for divorcing his wife and marrying his brother Philip’s wife? John rebuked Herod because of his complete disregard for the holy covenant of marriage. It appears that Herod divorced his wife and married his brother Philip’s wife without ever seeking godly counsel and without ever trying to reconcile both his marriage and his brother Philip’s marriage. It is obvious that Herod used his position as King to do whatever he wanted with complete disregard to God’s Word. That is why John rebuked King Herod! Herod was sinful and unrepentant for his actions.

God does demand that we try to work things out and reconcile our marriages. We do not have the right to divorce our spouses and remarry others without seeking the counsel of God and His Word. It is obvious that Herod had no scriptural grounds for divorcing his wife. His original wife probably did not mistreat him, nor was she unfaithful to him (Deuteronomy 24:1), and it is probable that she did not want to divorce him. Herod obviously married Herodias because he lusted after his brother's wife. This proves that we must always seek repentance and reconciliation before rushing into marrying someone else. If your spouse is being faithful; is not abusive; and does not wish to depart out of the relationship then it is wrong to have a divorce! God does not give license for divorce in any situation. When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba there were grave consequences and punishments for this sin! Yet God later did accept David's repentance and his marriage to Bathsheba.

Human nature proves that most men and women have a problem staying in a single state. After being married for a considerable amount of time it becomes increasingly difficult for men and women to go into a single and celibate way of life. This is why most married people who lose a spouse through death eventually get remarried. This is also why most married people who find themselves divorced find it unbearable to continue in this state for long either. They find themselves being constantly tormented with loneliness and harassing temptation. If the victimized spouse is very old, remaining in a single state might be relatively easy. But if the victimized spouse is relatively young, remaining in a single state for a long period of time can become increasingly difficult and can open up the former married person to possible immorality.

I am not stating that a young divorced Christian cannot remain single and celibate for the rest of his or her life. Some rare individuals can remain single for the rest of their lives without much difficulty. Yet the vast majority of divorced Christians will find that living in a celibate state for a long period of time will become so difficult that they will eventually give into their natural desire - causing them to commit some kind of sexual immorality. Moreover, it is very hard for people who were once married to be deprived from the emotional ties of a committed relationship. God said, **"It is not good for the man to be alone."** If the Creator Himself says that it is not good for a man or woman to be alone then we can be certain that **"IT IS NOT GOOD!"**

But there is hope for the divorced Christian who has been victimized by abuse or infidelity. And there is also hope for the person who has wronged their former spouse by committing adultery. The blood of Jesus Christ has the power to cleanse from all sins except one - The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. When we rightly divide the Word of Truth and balance the severity of God with His goodness, grace, and mercy, we all can have the opportunity to come boldly before the Throne of Grace to have all of our sins washed away by the blood of Christ.

How could our Loving Heavenly Father mandate that His people be tormented with passions for the rest of their lives that they cannot legally fulfill? For **"it is better to marry than to burn with passion." When we put all of the scriptures together we find that God can and will allow divorced people to eventually remarry but each situation must be basked in much prayer and godly counsel. God can and does forgive the sin of divorce and will allow remarriage as long as the Christian believer is God fearing and it is certain that reconciliation with the former spouse is unlikely to ever occur.**

How can we expect Christian men and women to remain single for the rest of their lives while their unbelieving or backsliding spouses go into immorality and never wish to return? 1 Corinthians 7:2 tells Christians to marry in order to refrain from sexual immorality:

"Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband."

Can we really expect millions of Christian believers to live the rest of their lives being single? What about the millions of Christian men who had become one flesh with many women without marriage ceremonies before coming to Christ? And what about the millions of Christian women who had become one flesh with many men (before they were born again) without ever having marriage ceremonies recognized by the State. Must they all locate the first man or woman they broke their virginity with? And what if a man or a woman had become "one flesh" with many others prior to marrying a virgin spouse? Should almost all Christians become single and celibate for the rest of their lives? What if your spouse backslid and you were forced into a divorce? Could you live the rest of your life without a life long partner? Please think about all of these facts before judging others!

