

# God's Rules Regarding Divorce

## INTRODUCTION.

- A. God instituted marriage, not divorce. It was man who introduced divorce. Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites. (cf. Matthew 19:8) However, from the beginning, God's will was not for two people to divorce, but to stay together.
- B. Through the action of divorce, mankind has brought great heartache upon the world.
  - 1. As a result of divorces, homes are broken apart and lives are wrecked.
  - 2. Divorce often results in the financial ruin of the families.
  - 3. Children are the greatest victim of divorces.
    - a. The divorced parents often try to buy their children's love and favoritism.
    - b. Many children of divorced parents grow up to see their marriages end in divorce.
    - c. Many people struggle with new mothers or new fathers as their divorced parents remarry.
  - 4. Friends, family members, and even the church are affected by a couple's decision to end their marriage.
  - 5. It can truly be said that divorce is a great stumbling block to many people. Satan could hardly have come up with a more effective way to adversely affect society and the church than the problem of divorce.
  - 6. Within the church, divorce has resulted in much controversy and division among brethren.
    - a. You have the question regarding teaching the unsaved who are divorced and remarried.
    - b. You have the question of divorcing and not remarrying.
    - c. You have the question of pornography and whether or not mental adultery is a cause for divorce.
    - d. These questions of controversy intensify when our loved ones and dear friends find themselves in, at best, questionable, situations.

- C. With how devastating is divorce, one would think our culture would seek to avoid divorce. On the contrary, divorce has become very prevalent in our society. Through our recent history, the divorce rate in the United States alone has reached unbelievable proportions.
1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gives a list of provisional number of divorces and annulments. According to this list, in the year 2007, there were 856,000 divorces and annulments in a population of 238,759,000. This was a rate of 3.6 per 1,000 total population.  
([http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage\\_divorce\\_tables.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm))
  2. According to the website: [www.divorcestatistics.org](http://www.divorcestatistics.org), . . .
    - a. 45% to 50% of first marriages end in divorce.
    - b. 60% to 67% of second marriages end in divorce.
    - c. 70% to 73% of third marriages end in divorce.
- D. It is our purpose to seek only the scriptural way regarding the teachings of marriage and divorce.
1. While we recognize the subject matter may be controversial, it is not because of God's teachings, but because of man's will. Mankind finds Jesus' teachings hard to accept. (cf. John 6:60; Matthew 19:10-11)
  2. We seek only to use God's standard. We will not use as a standard the civil law, religious scholars, current thinking in society, politically correct ideology, etc.
  3. We reject emotions, traditions of men, as well as human reasoning.
  4. God's word is our standard.
    - a. Isaiah 55:8-9
    - b. Psalms 19:7-11
  5. As the apostle Paul asked in Galatians 4:30, so too do we ask, "What do the Scriptures say?"
- E. Let us begin our study with considering four facts regarding marriage and divorce.

## **I. DEFINITION OF TERMS.**

- A. What is marriage?
1. Marriage refers to the union of one male and one female. (Matthew 19:4-5)
  2. The term "marriage" literally means "to become one's . . . to become a man's

wife.” (Thayer) (Deuteronomy 24:1-2; Ezekiel 16:8)

B. What is a covenant?

1. The word “covenant” as it’s applied to God’s “marriage” with Israel, is used in describing the husband and wife relationship. The term helps us to understand what constitutes the marriage.
2. When the Israelite husbands forsook their wives for foreign women, Malachi rebuked them for dealing “treacherously” both with God’s covenant and with “your wife by covenant.” (Malachi 2:10-14)
3. A covenant is an agreement or binding contract between two or more parties.
4. A covenant also calls for an oath, a vow, or a promise by the two parties to fulfill the terms of the contract.
5. A covenant may require a formal seal of ratification to verify the agreement. In the example of God’s covenant with Abraham, the covenant was symbolized by the physical sign of circumcision. (cf. Genesis 17:1-14)
6. Marriage is a family relationship that has been established by a covenant. Marriage is a covenant that involves terms, promises, and ratification. The terms, as God designed marriage, involve an agreement by a male and female to be husband and wife to one another.

C. What is divorce?

1. The word translated "divorce" (put away) means "to dismiss from the house, to repudiate (cast off, disown, renounce) as one's" (Thayer). The word translated "divorce" is used 69 times in the New Testament. It is translated: "release" (to let go free) in Matthew 27:17; "send away" (bid to depart) in Matthew 14:15; "let go" (dismiss, to detain no longer) in Luke 14:4; depart (to send one's self away) in Acts 28:25; "put away" in Matthew 1:19; 5:31-32; 19:7-9.
2. Keep in mind what constitutes marriage--a man and a woman have entered a covenant, by oath before God and witnesses, to live together as husband and wife, promising to be faithful to one another (“till death do us part”), promising to live as one flesh and they do live as one flesh in this relationship for a time.
3. However, when one spouse or the other decides to end their marriage relationship, they are intending “to dismiss from the house, to cast off, to release, to send away,

to let go, or to depart from” the other spouse. That is divorce, that's putting away. Divorce involves the breaking of the agreement to sustain the marriage relationship. Divorce is the undoing of the marriage.

4. We must point out this marriage covenant cannot be broken by one spouse or the other, or by mutual consent; God has to be considered. God has given only two ways that a spouse can be released from that covenant: death (Romans 7:2-3) and putting away a spouse because of fornication (Matthew 19:9). To divorce one's spouse for just any reason “profanes the covenant of the fathers.” (We will discuss this truth in greater detail later in this lesson.)
- D. What is fornication?
1. Jesus allows only one reason for a person to put away their spouse: That reason or cause is fornication. (Matthew 19:9; 5:32)
  2. “Fornication” (sexual immorality-NKJV) is the one cause for which a person may scripturally divorce his or her spouse and marry another.
  3. What is fornication? Fornication is a term that includes all kinds of illicit sexual relationships. Thayer defines the term to mean “illicit sexual intercourse in general.” Webster's Dictionary defines it: “human sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife.” According to Paul's description, “fornication” is sexual sin committed with the body. (1 Corinthians 6:13-18)
- E. What is adultery?
1. There is a difference between fornication and adultery. The two terms are closely related but there is a distinction made between the two terms throughout the Bible. Whereas fornication is a general term for all illicit sexual relation, adultery is used specifically of unlawful sexual conduct in violation of the marriage covenant. (Mark 10:11-12)
  2. Adultery is used of the relationship of a man with another man's wife or of a woman with another woman's husband. From the way Paul describes things, adultery is illicit sexual relations with a “bound by law” person (Romans 7:2-3). If a woman (man) is yet “bound (under obligation) by law (God's)” with reference to their husband (wife), but marries another, that act constitutes adultery.

## **II. FOUR FACTS REGARDING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.**

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- A. Fact Number One: Marriage was instituted by God.
1. According to Genesis 2:18-24, a marriage is made up of one man and one woman. (Matthew 19:4-5)
  2. The apostle Paul taught the marriage relationship ends at the death of either spouse. (Romans 7:2)
  3. The phrase “be joined” or “cleave” in Genesis 2:24 means, “join fast together, glue, cement, adhere.” This joining together or adhering to one another is manifested within the marriage relationship in different ways.
    - a. Becoming one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)
    - b. Intimate relationship. (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)
    - c. Husband cherishing and honoring the wife. (1 Peter 3:7)
    - d. The wife being in subjection to the husband and loving her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-24)
    - e. The husband loving his wife and being the head of the family. (Ephesians 5:25-31)
- B. Fact Number Two: Divorce is directly opposed to God's will regarding marriage.
1. God’s will is that man and woman be joined to one another or adhered to one another. Divorce brings an end to this adherence or joining. Consider for example how the Jewish man would give his wife a writing of divorcement and put her out of his house. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Having received the certificate of divorce, the wife would leave the house.
  2. God’s will is that no man should separate that which God has joined together. (Matthew 19:6) The process of divorce is the process of separating that which God has joined together.
- C. Fact Number Three: Marriage, not divorce, originated with God.
1. The origin of divorce came from the hardness of man’s heart. (Matthew 19:7-8)
  2. Divorce is the breaking of the covenant between the husband and wife. (Malachi 2:14; cf. Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16:8)
  3. Divorce is the process of dealing treacherously with one’s spouse. (Malachi 2:14)
  4. From the beginning, God’s design for the husband and wife was a life time commitment, ending only at death.

- D. Fact Number Four: God hates divorce! (Malachi 2:15,16)
1. During the time the Jews spent in Babylonian captivity, being influenced by the ungodly idolatrous society around them, many divorced their wives. The prophet Malachi rebuked them for divorcing their lawful wives. (Malachi 2:14-15) He then said to the people God “hates divorce.” Divorce is the violation of a covenant with God as well as with one's spouse.
  2. These unlawful divorces caused heartbreak, hardship and tears, and caused God to reject their worship. (Malachi 2:13) When there is no fornication involved, it is treachery to divorce one's spouse. (Malachi 2:15b, 16b) It “wearies the Lord” when God's people say something is good and delights God, when in reality it is evil and He hates it. (Malachi 2:17)
  3. The emphasis in this powerful passage is on the injustice done to the put away companion—and the injustice is just as treacherous whether there is any remarriage or not. In this passage, we see the importance of husband and wife being united in their devotion to God in order that together they may teach their children to love and obey God. (Malachi 2:15)
  4. There is a huge difference between how God and man looks upon divorce. Matthew 19:1-9 shows that God hates divorce today. God says that divorce often involves four people becoming adulterers. God’s attitude toward adultery is easy to understand: *“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”* (Hebrews 13:4; cf. Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

### **III. GOD’S TEACHINGS REGARDING ENDING A MARRIAGE.**

- A. God’s command is simple: Man is not to terminate the marriage relationship.
1. The apostle Paul said that a wife is not to depart from her husband and the husband is not to depart from his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)
    - a. *“Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.”* (1 Corinthians 7:10-11, NKJV)
    - b. Consider the English Standard Versions rendering of this verse;

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- c. *“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.”* (1 Corinthians 7:10-11, ESV)
- d. Please observe the phrase *“but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.”*
  - 1) Paul’s statement does not give authority for either spouse to separate from the other spouse.
  - 2) This parenthetical statement addresses the scenario where the wife (or husband) may choose, against God’s will, to leave their spouse. Such departure is in violation of God’s will and is, therefore, sinful.
  - 3) However, in the event that a person chooses to violate God’s will and separate from their spouse, they must either remain single or return to their spouse. They cannot marry another person.
  - 4) Later in this lesson, we will address the idea of divorcing and living single in greater detail.
- 2. Jesus said, *“So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”* (Matthew 19:6)
- 3. Two people, bound together by God, are not to be separated.
  - a. This includes any circumstance where one of the two willingly chooses to live apart, not living as man and wife.
  - b. This includes what some call “a legal separation.”
  - c. This also includes a legal divorce.
- B. Does God allow one to divorce one’s spouse as long as he determines to live a single life?
  - 1. This is a very important question which we will discuss before closing this study.
  - 2. Does 1 Corinthians 7:10 give authority for a person to divorce his spouse, remain single and still be right with God.
    - a. If 1 Corinthians 7:10 gives authority for a lawful separation as long as one remains unmarried, then . . .
      - 1) A person could leave his spouse and ignore all of God’s teachings

regarding the responsibilities of the husband and wife towards one another. Passages such as Ephesians 5:25-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7 would become disposable passages.

- 2) The very words of Jesus, *“let not man separate”* are without authority. (Matthew 19:6)
  - 3) God’s bond established between the husband and wife (see Romans 7:2-3) would be subject to a person’s wishes and desires.
- b. Paul’s statement, *“But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband”* is simply showing that if the woman chooses to leave her husband, that her only two options regarding that relationship is to remain single (because to marry another would be a another sin) or to go back to her husband.
3. The person who would leave their spouse under the misguided notion that they can live single and be right with God will surely find themselves one day facing the temptation to love and marry another. At that point, that person will do one of several things:
- a. Fall away from the Lord, turning their back on assembling with the saints because they are living in sin.
  - b. Find some other church or denomination who will accept their unscriptural marital status with open arms, thereby finding support for their ongoing sinful state.
  - c. Rewrite the facts of their history and the teachings of the scriptures, deceiving his or her self into thinking that their new found marriage is acceptable in the sight of God.
- C. Does God allow a person to put away his spouse for mental adultery?
1. There have been situations where one spouse has been addicted to pornography and the other spouse claims this addiction to be mental adultery, and, therefore, grounds for divorce.
  2. There have been situations where one spouse has been addicted to pornography and the other spouse claims this addiction to be mental adultery, and, therefore, grounds for divorce.

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3. As we considered earlier in our study, the definitions of fornication and adultery involve illicit physical sexual activity. While thinking and desiring sin is wrong, lusting after a woman is not physical contact with the woman.
  4. The idea of mental adultery comes from Matthew 5:27-28 where Jesus refers to a man who has committed “adultery in the heart” when that man lusted after a woman.
  5. If adultery in the heart qualifies as the “fornication” that is grounds for divorce, then “murder in the heart” (anger; hatred) should qualify as actual murder and be grounds for conviction of murder by civil authorities. (Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15)
- D. To whom do God’s marriage laws apply: Christians, alien sinners, or both?
1. The instructions which God gave to Adam and Eve were given to the whole of humanity at that one moment. (Genesis 2:18, 20-25)
  2. Take notice of a very specific statement showing the permanent relationship within marriage: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* (Genesis 2:24)
    - a. A man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. The Hebrew word for “be joined to” or “to cleave” carries the idea of a joining together, to glue, to adhere one to another.
    - b. This joining is of such a permanent nature that the text says *“and they shall become one flesh.”*
  3. Consider now the words of Jesus found in Matthew 19:3-9.
    - a. The Jews questioned Jesus saying, *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”* (vs 3)
    - b. Jesus, in answering their question, referred the Pharisees to the text of Genesis.
      - 1) Jesus said, *“‘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' ?”* (Matthew 19:4-5)
      - 2) Using the statement that the two are one flesh, Jesus concludes,

*“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

(Matthew 19:6)

- 3) Jesus declared the will of God to the people regarding divorce. Jesus answered the Pharisees’ question with this clear and understandable statement: *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*
  - 4) Take notice that Jesus was not establishing a new principle regarding marriage and divorce. Neither was Jesus expounding upon a principle found in the Law of Moses. Jesus was stating a principle which existed since the beginning of the world.
- c. Moving on to Matthew 19:7, we see the Pharisees asking Jesus, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”
- 1) Jesus answers this question by saying Moses allowed such because of the hardness of the people’s hearts.
  - 2) Then, speaking with authority Jesus said, “. . . *but from the beginning it was not so.*” (Matthew 19:8)
  - 3) Jesus’ statement shows what we established earlier. His teachings were principles which existed from the beginning.
- d. There is nothing within the text of Matthew 19:3-9 which would suggest that God’s principles regarding marriage began with the Jews. Neither is there any evidence proving that His instructions apply only to those who are Christians. God’s instructions applied to Adam and Eve as well as every married couple from the beginning of time.
- e. However, Jesus did add the one teaching in regards to the result of divorcing and remarrying without proper grounds.
- 1) Whereas the Jews believed divorce and remarriage was allowed, Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage would result in the sin of adultery unless the divorce was for the grounds of fornication.
  - 2) *And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever*

*marries her who is divorced commits adultery.* (Matthew 19:9)

4. Consider two very important questions:
  - a. If the “whoever” of Matthew 7:21-27 applies to everyone in the world, why wouldn’t the “whoever” of Matthew 5:31-32 apply to everyone in the world?
  - b. How can there be sexually immoral people “of this world” (1 Corinthians 5:9-10) if God’s sexual laws do not apply to unbelievers?
    - 1) How could some at Corinth have been “fornicators and adulterers” before they became Christians if God’s sexual laws do not apply to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)?
    - 2) How could a person’s “old man” (a person’s state before becoming a Christian) be guilty of “fornication” if God’s sexual laws do not apply to “the sons of disobedience” (Colossians 3:5-10)?

## **CONCLUSION.**

- A. The Bible’s teachings on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are fundamentally simple.
  1. However, mankind, because of the hardness of his heart, has developed the idea that the marriage relationship is expendable.
  2. As a result, people make choices without consulting God’s word and then are unwilling to change to fit God’s word. Instead, people try to change God’s word to fit their ungodly situation.
- B. Let every person who is contemplating marriage give much thought to God’s teachings against severing that marital relationship. Let us take to heart the following observations:
  1. Because of marital problems and challenges, choosing to live apart and not as husband and wife is a sin because one forsakes their God given responsibilities toward their spouse.
    - a. If one chooses to live apart from his or her spouse, willingly chooses to not live as husband and wife, then that person is violated the principle of not letting man separate what God has joined together. (cf. Matthew 19:6)
    - b. Also, two who choose to not live as husband and wife are ignoring Paul’s instructions regarding not depriving one another. (1 Corinthians 7:5)
  2. Filing for legal separation and living apart from the one to whom God has joined

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you is also a sin.

3. Putting away your spouse, divorcing your spouse, is sinful and a transgression of God's will and law.