

What the BIBLE Says About Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage

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Preface

The enclosed material is taken from a sermon Dr. Redmond preached at the First Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas, on February 25, 2007. Many people were helped by this message and it is our prayer that this message now in printed form will be a blessing to you.

A Pastor's Perspective

Having been in the ministry for over 40 years, I have talked to countless individuals and couples about almost every conceivable relationship issue. Single adults have questions about marriage. “Should I marry or remain single? “When should I get married? “How will I know when I have found the right person?”

Those are the fun questions to answer. They are usually asked by those whose futures are bright with hope and whose enthusiasm for life is contagious.

Then there are the hard questions: “My husband is involved in an affair, what should I do? *or* “My wife announced that she wants a divorce, what can I do? *or* “What does the Bible say about divorce?”

The statistics are staggering. Recent data tells us that a divorce takes place in America every 27 seconds. The average duration of a marriage today is only 7 years. What in the world is happening? Hearts are broken. Children are devastated. In the midst of it all, people are asking “does the Bible have anything to say about divorce?”

Then the whole question of remarriage surfaces. Most people who have lived through the heartbreak of a divorce do, by God's grace, find that there is life after divorce. Most of these individuals desire to marry again. They wonder, though, at least silently, “What does the Bible say about remarriage?”

Well, these are the questions I hope to answer in this little booklet. The fact that you are reading this booklet means that these questions are important to you. Perhaps you have been through the agony of divorce. Perhaps someone you love has. Or maybe you are a serious Bible student and you just want to know what God's Word says.

Whatever your reason for reading this booklet, my prayer is that God will speak to you in these pages. One of the things I love about the Bible is that it answers the most challenging questions we could ever ask. Let's spend a few moments together thinking about what the Bible says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Marriage

The Bible teaches that God created marriage. After creating Adam and placing him in the wonderful Garden of Eden, God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18, NKJV). You know the rest of the story. The Bible teaches that God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. As Adam slept, God removed one of his ribs and out of that rib, God created the world's first woman, Eve. So it was that God brought Adam and Eve together in the Garden of Eden and the institution of marriage began.

God created marriage so Adam would have a companion, a friend, a helper. You see, when God created marriage He did so because He did not want man to be alone. God designed marriage to be a blessing and a help. I say that to help you to understand that marriage is a gift from God and like all of God's gifts, it is good!! The Bible says, “He who finds a wife finds a good *thing*, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22, NKJV).

Now, that does not mean that God intends for everyone to be married. Jesus indicated that for various reasons, some people never will be married (see Matthew 19:11-12). Jesus, of course, was never married. Paul was not married, at least not when he wrote to the Corinthians (see I Corinthians 7:1-9). According to church history, the gospel writer, Dr. Luke, never married. If you are a single adult and trying to determine whether or not God wants you to be married, ask Him. Ask Him to place His desires into your heart. The Bible says, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4, NKJV). Make

it your goal in life to please God. Seek Him first. Focus on honoring Him with all your heart and life. As you do that, God has promised to place His desires for your life into your heart. God will make it clear whether or not He wants you to be married. That is His job. Your job is to trust Him, love Him, serve Him, and be content with Him.

We have learned so far that God created marriage but that marriage is not for everyone. What else does the Bible teach on this important subject?

Well, the Bible also teaches that marriage is a covenant relationship that is to be permanent. Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6, NKJV). When a man and a woman marry, God intends for that marriage to last for a lifetime. God takes covenants very seriously. When a covenant is established, God intends for that covenant to be kept. The key word here is "*binding*." While marriage is a "*beautiful*" relationship, it is also a "*binding*" relationship. It is "for better or worse, until death do us part." So don't take the important step of marriage until you are ready to make a lifelong commitment!!

Divorce

Now what does the Bible say about divorce? First of all, the Bible is clear that divorce was not part of God's original plan (see Matthew 19:8). Divorce is a "falling short" of God's original plan and as such divorce is a sin. Any and every divorce can always be traced back to some sin somewhere. Since divorce is a sin, and since God hates sin, the Bible says that God hates divorce (see Malachi 2:13-16).

Since God hates divorce, He would never want there to be a divorce. However, in the Bible God does "allow" divorce under certain circumstances. He allows divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts and He allows divorce to protect what we might call the "innocent party" (see Matthew 19:8-9).

The Bible teaches that there are two biblical grounds for divorce. The first ground is sexual immorality. The second ground is if a Christian is married to an unbeliever who wants out of the marriage. These are the only two biblical grounds for divorce. Now, let's deal with these two grounds.

In Matthew 19, we find the most famous and fullest chapter in the Bible on this matter of marriage and divorce. In Matthew 19:1-9, we read about one of the biblical grounds for divorce, sexual immorality. You have to understand something before you read these verses. You have to understand a little background. In the day in which Jesus lived, there were two famous Jewish rabbis. These two rabbis had totally different beliefs about divorce. One of these rabbi's was named Hillel and the other was named Shammai. Hillel taught that you could get a divorce for any reason. If the wife burned the toast, you could get a divorce. If the wife snored, you could get a divorce. Hillel permitted divorce for any reason at all. Shammai, on the other hand, said the only reason God would allow divorce was if adultery had taken place. In his mind, there was no other ground for divorce.

One day the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, in effect, "Look, we know what Hillel teaches and we know what Shammai teaches. We want to know what You teach. What do You believe?" Let's read the biblical account:

"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?" And He answered and said to them, "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." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 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 19:1-9, NKJV).

Jesus made it clear that Moses did not "command" divorce, he only "permitted" it because of human sinfulness. And the sinfulness Jesus talked about here is sexual immorality. Jesus said, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9, NKJV). The Greek

word translated as “sexual immorality” is the word “pornea.” It is from this word that we get our word “pornography.” The word “pornea” refers to all kinds of sexual sins. The word includes adultery but is not limited to adultery. The idea here is that when a married person commits “pornea” he or she is breaking the marriage covenant. That is why Jesus said the other person would be free to divorce because the marriage covenant has been broken.

Now, that does not mean if a married person breaks the marriage covenant that the marriage has to end. Not at all!! How much better it would be if there could be genuine repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. That is always God’s way!! But if the guilty party refuses to repent, the innocent party would be biblically free to get a divorce because the covenant has already been broken.

The second biblical ground for divorce is if you are married to an unbeliever who wants out of the marriage. Pretend, for example, that Jack and Jill get married and at the time of their wedding neither one of them is a Christian. Well, after several years of marriage Jill starts going to church and she becomes a Christian. As a result, her life changes. She no longer wants to go with Jack to the bars and clubs. Making money is no longer the top priority in her life. She wants to go to church. She wants to spend time reading her Bible and praying. She wants to raise their children to fear the Lord. Well, Jack wants nothing to do with her new life. He wants to continue living as he always has... a life without God. He says to her, “Jill, if you don’t change back to the person you used to be, I’m out of here.” Now, what is Jill supposed to do? The Bible gives clear instructions: “But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (I Corinthians 7:15, NKJV). God’s Word is saying that if you are married to an unbeliever and he wants out of the marriage, let him go. Your relationship with Christ is more important than trying to force an unbeliever to stay married when he or she wants out. This is the second biblical ground for divorce.

Remarriage

What, then, does the Bible say about remarriage? Can a person who has been divorced remarry? In a nutshell, the answer is this...it depends. It depends on whether or not the first marriage is dead. If the first marriage is dead, then a person can remarry and not be guilty of sin. If the first marriage is not dead, then a person is not free to remarry. So the question, then, is how does a marriage become dead? According to the Bible there are three ways.

The first and most obvious way that a marriage dies is if one of the partners physically dies. When a spouse dies, the other spouse is free to remarry. This is clearly taught throughout the Bible (see Romans 7:2 and I Corinthians 7:39).

The second way that a marriage can die is through sexual immorality. As was stated earlier, sexual immorality breaks the marriage covenant. That is not to say that through repentance and forgiveness that the covenant cannot be restored, because it can. But it is to say that if one of the marriage partners has become sexually promiscuous and refuses to repent, the innocent party is free to divorce and remarry because the marriage covenant has been broken. That is why Jesus said, “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9, NKJV, emphasis mine). The person who indiscriminately divorces his wife and marries someone else is indeed guilty of adultery because the first marriage covenant was never broken. Do you see the pattern? A person can only remarry if the first marriage is dead and in this instance Jesus made it clear that sexual immorality breaks the covenant and potentially destroys the marriage. Again, only through repentance and forgiveness can a marriage be saved once the covenant has been broken.

The third way a marriage becomes dead is when a Christian is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever insists on leaving the relationship. The Bible instructs the believer in such cases to let the unbeliever out of the marriage relationship. The Bible goes on to say that “a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases” (I Corinthians 7:15, NKJV). What does it mean to not be under bondage? It means that the Christian is no longer bound to the marriage because the unbeliever insisted on leaving the marriage. If the believer is not bound, then he or she is free and that means he or she is free to remarry since the first marriage covenant is broken.

The teaching of scripture is that a person is free to remarry only if the first marriage is dead. If there has been physical death, spiritual death (sexual immorality), or the abandonment of the marriage by an unbeliever, then the Christian is free to remarry another Christian.

Some Closing Thoughts

As we have studied what the Bible says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, I hope you have been blessed and I hope things have become a little clearer to you. For those of you contemplating marriage, I encourage you to seek God's will. Be patient. Seek the counsel of godly family members and friends. Be patient. Pray about it. Ask yourself, "Is this the kind of person with whom I want to spend the rest of my life?" And did I mention, be patient!! God has a way of making things clear if we will give Him time to do so. Marriage is a lifelong commitment. Take your time in making this decision.

For those of you who are married, I encourage you to do everything you can to make your marriage the best it can possibly be!! Love your spouse. Forgive your spouse. Don't try to make your spouse be someone he or she is not. Spend time together. Pray together. Play together. Laugh together. Cry together. If you are married, God has blessed you with a special gift. Never take that gift for granted.

For those of you who are divorced, my heart goes out to you. Some of you are divorced and you did not want to be divorced. Your divorce was not your idea. Your spouse ended the marriage. God knows the truth about your divorce. I encourage you to forgive your former spouse. Unforgiveness has a way of making us bitter and angry. Don't fall into that trap. Forgive the person who hurt you and trust Jesus like never before!! He has allowed you to be in the situation you are now in and He has a plan in mind to see you through. If you will focus on Jesus, He will make the road ahead much clearer.

Others of you are divorced and the reason is because of your sin. You broke the marriage covenant. At this point, I strongly encourage you to repent. Seek God's forgiveness. We have already seen that God hates divorce but the Bible also teaches that God forgives sins. In fact, the Bible says that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, NKJV). The good news is that God loves you. God can forgive you. God can restore you. Is divorce a sin? Yes, of course it is. But we have a God in heaven who loves us so much He sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the full penalty of our sins and to make forgiveness possible. My friend, whatever you have done can be forgiven if you will confess that sin, turn from that sin, and ask God to forgive you.

There is one other category of people who could be reading this booklet. Perhaps you got divorced, remarried, and the first marriage was not dead. In other words, you remarried when you were not free to do so. What are you supposed to do now? Well, the first step is to agree with God that what you did was wrong. Ask for His forgiveness. Accept His forgiveness. And then learn a wonderful truth about God...He always takes us where we are. He will forgive you and He will make your current marriage a marriage that is touched by His grace in a special way. He will make something beautiful out of your marriage if you will commit it to Him. That's just the kind of God we serve!! So stay in your current marriage and let God be honored in it.

One Final Word

Remember, friend, no matter where you are in life, God loves you. It may well be that God has allowed you to be where you are so that you would read this little booklet and think for a moment about your soul...about your relationship with God...about what will happen to you when you die. It may be that God has allowed you to go through the heartache you are now experiencing so you would turn to Him...the Mender of broken hearts.

If you are not sure that you are truly a child of God, I encourage you to read the prayer printed below. After reading the prayer, if it reflects the desire of your heart, I encourage you to sincerely pray this prayer to God. He will hear you and He will save you.

Dear Jesus,

You know where I am in life right now and You know how I got here. Please forgive me for all of my sins. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. I invite you to come into my heart and make me a Christian. I turn away from my sins and ask You to help me live a godly life. Thank You, Jesus, for hearing my prayer. Thank You, Jesus, for answering my prayer. Welcome to my heart!! I trust You to save me!!

Amen

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, welcome to the family of God. The Bible says that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13, NKJV). Whatever has happened in your past has all been

forgiven. You are like a new baby whose life is all tomorrows and no yesterdays. I encourage you to get involved in a good church and begin to grow in your relationship with Jesus. He has great things planned for you both on earth and in heaven. His Word tells us, "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*" (I Corinthians 2:9, NKJV). That simply means God has great things planned for you!! With Jesus in your life, the best is indeed yet to be!!

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Dr. Redmond leads in a business Bible luncheon each Tuesday where a cross section of business leaders and people gather for a delicious meal and time of inspiration.