

## Biblical Vision of Marriage

Marriage is a lifelong commitment established by God between one man and one woman which displays the relationship between Jesus Christ and his bride, the church. One author beautifully describes it:

*Every time a bride and groom take their vows, they are reenacting the biblical love story, whether they realize it or not. The Son of God stepping down out of eternity, entering time, taking on flesh, pursuing and winning his bride as his very heart and body with his inmost, sincerest love so that he can fit her to be with him forever above—that dramatic super-reality is the breathtaking reason why human marriage exists.<sup>1</sup>*

In light of this reality, a man is called to cherish his wife, to treat her with gentleness, to faithfully lead her, and to lay down his life for her as Christ did for the church.<sup>2</sup>

Correspondingly, a woman is called to love and respect her husband, to support him in his calling to lead, and to trust and submit to him as the church does to Christ.<sup>3</sup>

## Role of the Church in Cases of Divorce and Remarriage

When discussing divorce and remarriage, often times the question of permissibility is the first question. However, due to the wide range of possible circumstances, we must also pursue wisdom. There is more to be considered than mere permission. We must also ask, “what is the wisest course of action that will best serve the parties affected and bring God the most glory?”

Prior to pursuing divorce or remarriage, God calls Christians to invite their pastors and other trusted church members to prayerfully evaluate the situation with them to determine whether divorce or remarriage is both permissible and wise (Matt. 18:15-17, Heb. 13:17). A number of factors must be evaluated including the nature of the offense(s), the repentant or unrepentant attitude of the offending spouse, the need for church discipline, the impact on children, their family, and other individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Ortlund Jr., Ray. *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*. Pg. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 5:25-33, 1 Pet. 3:7

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 5:22-24, 1 Pet. 3:1-6

Every situation of divorce or remarriage is marked by tragedy, confusion, regret, and temptation. Christians in these situations need the love and support of godly brothers and sisters as they face the potential consequences and challenges. Our church stands ready and willing to comfort, counsel, and encourage them.

## **Biblical Grounds for Divorce**

Every human marriage is marred by sin and fails to fully reflect the glory it was intended to display. Regrettably, divorce is an all too common occurrence.

Yet permanence remains the ideal.<sup>4</sup> This is true even when there is biblical grounds for divorce. God often describes himself remaining committed to his people even when they commit spiritual adultery (cf. Hos. 2:14-23). Because of this, forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. Spouses who reconcile, even in the face of grievous sin, provide a compelling example of God's love for his people.

However, reconciliation is not always possible or advisable. God is not unaware, unconcerned, or uncaring to this fact. While he never commands divorce, he does make concessions for it on two grounds: sexual immorality<sup>5</sup> and abandonment.<sup>6</sup>

Sexual immorality is given as a grounds for divorce by Jesus in Matt. 5:23 and 19:9. *Porneia*, the term translated "sexual immorality" in these passages, is a general term that encompasses a broad range of sexual sins. In all of its forms, sexual conduct which falls outside the bounds of sexual contact between one man and one woman in the bonds of marriage is a violation of the marriage covenant and may constitute biblical grounds for divorce.

Abandonment occurs when one spouse no longer upholds their marriage covenant (1 Cor. 7:10-16). Abuse may also be included in this definition.<sup>7</sup> In severe instances of abuse, a spouse so violates their marriage covenant that it should be considered abandonment. Where abuse may break the law, the offending spouse is subject to investigation and prosecution by civil authorities.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 7:10-11

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 5:31-32, Matt. 19:3-9

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 7:10-16

<sup>7</sup> For definitions of abuse, please refer to the "Statement on Domestic Abuse."

## **Biblical Grounds for Remarriage**

Remarriage should be approached with patience and godly counsel. Marriage is never to be entered into lightly, and remarriage often calls for an even greater level of consideration and care.

The Bible does allow for a believer to remarry in the following circumstances:

1. A widow or widower is free to marry another believer (Rom. 7:2-3, 1 Cor. 7:39).
2. An abandoned spouse is free to marry another believer (1 Cor. 7:15).
3. An offended spouse in a case of sexual immorality is free to marry another believer (Matt 5:31-32, Matt. 19:3-9).
4. An offending spouse, in a case where their previous spouse sought divorce on biblical grounds, is free to remarry.

Whether or not one is permitted to pursue remarriage requires careful application of these principles. In particular, two circumstances deserve mentioning:

1. Either before or after becoming a Christian, a spouse divorces on unbiblical grounds and remarries. Should they return to their original spouse or stay with their current spouse? While the Bible does not address this situation specifically, we can infer that the new marriage effectively dissolves the previous marriage. In that case, they are to remain married to their current spouse.
2. A spouse divorces on unbiblical grounds, yet their previous spouse remains unmarried. In this case, scripture is clear that, if possible, they should seek reconciliation with the spouse they divorced or remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:10-11). In the event the offended spouse does remarry, the offending spouse is also now free to remarry on the grounds of abandonment.