

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DIVORCE?

INTRODUCTION

God never commanded every person to marry. He leaves that choice to us. But Holy Scripture takes a very high view of marriage.

Read Genesis 2:21-25. This is such a beautiful story. Woman created from man. Man and woman as comparable beings, both made in the image of God (Genesis 1:16-27). Just imagine Adam's joy. A one verse description of how a new home is created. And here we find the description of intimacy without shame.

Proverbs 18:22, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord."

Proverbs 19:14, "Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord."

Proverbs 31:10-31, "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies?"

There are many Old Testament passages which speak of Israel as God's bride.

Ephesians 5 is a great description of Christ and the church as groom and bride.

Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Jesus' first miracle, John 2, performed at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

GOD'S VIEW OF DIVORCE

Scripture takes a very high view of marriage. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it takes just as low a view of divorce. Disclaimer: Please note what I did NOT just say. I did NOT say that God hates the divorced. I did NOT say that those who have been through a divorce are without hope. I realize that while it takes two to get married, it only takes one to get a divorce. Sometimes fine people get "done wrong." Please know that I have no desire to add to their burden.

At the same time, we're here tonight to speak God's truth. I'm simple. I need to do this step-wise. The first step is to document God's attitude toward divorce.

At the very end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi made a list of sins which were separating God's people from Him. Malachi 2:13 begins item # 2 on his list. READ Malachi 2:13-16.

- What was covering the altar with tears?

- What was causing God to reject the worship of His people?

In a word, DIVORCE. Divorce, which God describes as dealing treacherously with the wife of your youth. And, did you notice verse 14? Divorce, which God says that He does not recognize. Despite the treacherous dealings, “Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

Why does God hate divorce? Malachi 3:16 tells us. READ. Divorce is a horribly violent act. Because He loves people, it must break God’s heart to see two people who have pledged their faith before him go back on their word. Divorce tears a family apart. There is no way to describe the pain that a divorce can cause the couple who experiences it. And we know we can’t say enough about children who may be involved. There is a popular myth that divorce only hurts really young children. Popular wisdom says that it’s better to divorce than to live together in an unhappy marriage. I wish people would realize that there is another choice. Unhappy marriages can change.

This book bears a 2000 copyright. Its title is The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study. Judith Wallerstein and associates surveyed adult children of divorce, people whom they had first interviewed 25 years ago. Their goal was to learn about the long-term effects of divorce. Popular wisdom says that divorce is hardest on young children, it’s less hard on teens, and its effects diminish as children of divorce move into young adulthood. Wallerstein’s study indicated that the effects of divorce are hard on young children, even harder on teens, and that the negative effects of divorce crescendo in young adulthood. How do you choose a spouse and make a lifelong commitment when you saw your parents’ marriage come apart?

Two cautions: (1) This study doesn’t make the Bible more true. The Bible doesn’t need scientific verification. (2) This study is neither prophetic nor prescriptive. It does NOT say that children of divorce are ruined for life. It does document that nearly all of life is more difficult for children whose parents divorce.

What does the Bible say about divorce? First, that God hates it. Second, don’t do it. READ Matthew 19:3. Background: ongoing debate between disciples of two prominent teachers. One: If you find your wife displeasing in any way, divorce her and try again. The other: You can divorce your wife and marry again, only if you find some serious fault in her. Who was right? Neither.

In answer to this question, Jesus goes back to the beginning, back to God’s will and God’s plan. READ 19:4-6. In a word, Jesus’ answer to the question of divorce is DON’T.

So the Pharisees ask their follow-up question. READ 19:7. If you say divorce is not God’s will, they why did Moses command it? Jesus, again, gives the perfect answer. Moses did not command divorce. Rather, God permitted divorce and regulated divorce under the Mosaic covenant because of the hardness of their hearts. I can’t prove this, but

it is my honest belief that some of those ruthless men would have killed their wives had that been the only way out of marriage.

You will note that Jesus, again, returns to God's will and God's purpose. "...But from the beginning it was not so."

Then, Jesus gives clear, plain teaching on what God allows today. READ 19:9. Implications of this passage?

- (1) Don't divorce. What God has joined together, let not man separate.
- (2) If one party breaks a marriage through fornication, through any type of sexual relations outside the marriage, then that person loses the privilege of marrying any other person.
- (3) The party who did not break the marriage through fornication, may divorce the unfaithful spouse and marry another without sin.

That is stout! That is restrictive! That's strong! That is just what the disciples thought. READ 19:10. If this is the case, if this is God's word concerning the permanence of marriage, then it is better not to marry! In verses 11 and 12 Jesus agrees in part. The apostles' saying is, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus answer is, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given." In other words, Jesus is reminding the apostles that that they have said too much. Yes, for some it is better not to marry. For others this is not the case.

What does the Bible say about divorce? (1) God hates it. (2) Don't do it. (3) If you do divorce – unless you divorce your mate because of his or her fornication – do not remarry. Serial monogamy is not a biblical option.

But what about 1 Corinthians 7, esp. verses 1-24? Time demands that we focus on verses 10-16. READ 7:10-16.

- (1) Do not leave your spouse, v. 7.
- (2) If you do leave, either remain unmarried or be reconciled to your spouse, v. 8.
- (3) Do not divorce your spouse even if your marriage partner refuses to become a Christian, v. 12.
- (4) It is not a sin to remain married to a non-Christian.
- (5) If your spouse leaves you because you have become a Christian, let your spouse go, v. 15. You are not to leave Christ in order to save your marriage. You are not to use force to try to make them stay.

I am aware that there are all manner of imaginative readings of 1 Corinthians. Some propose that it is a mixture of God's revelation and Paul's opinion. Some have even suggested that Paul countermanded the teaching of Jesus. V. 10, "not to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord..." V. 12, "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say..." This is augmented by the language of V. 25. Question of v. 25 is, "Should we be allowing our daughters to marry?" Answer: My judgment is that it is better if you don't because of the present distress. But, if you do, you have not sinned.

A faithful apostle would never attempt to countermand the teaching to the Master. A faithful apostle living 20 or more years after the cross could speak to situations and circumstances which did not exist while Jesus was on earth in the flesh, before the church came into being. It's no accident that Jesus never answered the question, "What do I do if I've become a Christian and my spouse has not? Is it wrong to continue the marriage? Can a spiritually live person be married to a spiritually dead person?" Paul's answer is in perfect harmony with the teaching of the Lord in Matthew 19. Stay married. Don't divorce. Divorce is not God's way.

Your topic is "What Does the Bible Say About Divorce?" There's a big question that you have not answered. Is there ever a time when divorce is the right thing to do?

The brief answer: Yes, if the marriage is not lawful in the sight of God. Two examples.

First, Matthew 14:1-4. Why was it not lawful for Herod to have Herodias as wife? Because she was his brother Philip's wife. If it is not lawful to have her, how could Herod make that right? Give her back or give her up.

Second, Ezra 10. READ 10:1-4. Solution? READ 10:10-12. Verse 44 tells us that even children being involved did not stop this process.

PREVENTING DIVORCE

1. Strong teaching on the permanence of marriage.
2. Marriage preparation by parents, church, preachers, elders.
3. Proactive support of marriage. M-F classes. M-F workshops. M-F mentoring.
4. Active intervention at the first sign of trouble.

CARING FOR THE DIVORCED

1. Don't devalue, insult, and/or drive away.
2. Help with childcare
3. Single-parenting classes.
4. Prayer.

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