

# Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage According to the Bible

By John Covach

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There is an old Russian proverb that reads: "Before embarking on a journey, pray once. Before leaving for war, pray twice. But before you marry, pray three times!" Then from the deserts of Arabia we hear: "Choose your horse from a hundred, your friend from a thousand, and your wife from ten thousand." These and many other admonitions give advanced warning that marriage is very serious business. We realize it should be entered carefully and with the understanding that such commitments made in this life, will last indefinitely. This is exactly why much of our time, every month, is spent preparing people for marriages, mending burnt bridges of communication so that couples remain in marriage, or counseling people to see if they are eligible in God's eyes for remarriage,

Unfortunately, in this sinful world we also have to deal with aborted marriages, better known as divorces. And as we deal with God's people, this is one of the areas that cause pastors and members much frustration and anxiety. A divorce situation is never free of sin, and is very often the setting for much confusion and many tears. Hot on the heels of divorce, we usually can expect questions on remarriage. Christians are concerned that their relationship with God not be jeopardized, because they seek marital companionship.

I am very thankful that our Lord has spoken on all these subjects in his Holy Word. Without such Biblical direction it would be absolutely impossible to field the many questions we receive in this area and equally impossible to help our members with the tangled marital web they have woven for themselves or have had woven about them.

I envision this paper as the first in a series of papers on this subject. To carefully cover every passage in Scripture that deals with marriage, divorce, and remarriage would easily take a hundred pages of your concentration. (We'd also have to re-title this baby- "Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Marriage And Any Subject Closely Related To It, According To The Bible). I'll be happy if I can hold your interest for twenty pages of material.

Because I have been given the opportunity to be the first of many essayists to deal with this subject, I intend to skim the cream off the milk and only deal with selected passages that pertain to this paper. (Another way of saying, "I'll leave more difficult verses to those who can better explain them or to those who are asked to try). Trying to focus on difficulties we face in counseling concerning remarriage after divorce, I will only give you a background summary of what our God intended for marriage and His reasons for allowing a marriage bond to be broken. May our God bless our joint study and the discussion that is sure to follow.

## I. Marriage According to the Bible

If marriage were just a social arrangement that had evolved over the centuries for the entertainment and enjoyment of couples, we would have no problem letting men and women do what they liked with it. Marriage would then be like Monday night football. If you felt like taking part in it, it could be great; if it wasn't your cup of tea you could shut it off. But marriage in *not* a mere social arrangement

If marriage were only an earthly contract between two people, so that after, "I do," they "could"; if God said marriage was nothing more than a temporary license to live together we'd have fewer concerns about it. Then couples would be on a par with the critters in nature, who mate together, raise their young, and then part company for places unknown. But our God did *not* give us marriage as a temporary contract.

Marriage is an institution of our God and a permanent expression of what He desires to see transpire between a man and his wife. It has not been left to us to tamper or alter God's directives in this matter. It is not

up to us to set arbitrary time limits of how long these directives apply to our marriage relationships. God instituted marriage (Genesis 2:18-25); only He has the authority to speak definitively on this subject.

As we journey back through the pages of Scripture we learn that, when our Lord presented Eve to Adam, He intended a marital relationship to be a blessing for this couple and the future generations that would be born through them. "It was not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18) so the Creator gave him a wife to be his steady companion. Social creatures that we are, almost all of us need someone special to whom we can talk and with whom we can share our dreams. In marriage, a husband and wife can *both* find fulfillment in such companionship. Can you even imagine a man finding a closer friend in life than the one he calls "wife"? With the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ, I can not imagine one!

But Eve was to be more to Adam than just a pretty face to enjoy in conversation. She was created to be "a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). Eve was created to be the perfect complement to her husband. Physically, emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually she, could be the perfect counterpart to the man who shared her marriage. In fact, in their relationship they would "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Can two people work more intimately for each other's good? The Hebrew word used here is *רֶפֶּחַבֵּן*. It can be used to denote "skin," or "meat," or the "body," or a "close relative." But best here seems to be the idea of "flesh" referring to a "person" (confer Genesis 6:17 for usage). A husband and wife are to be jointed together as one "person." The wife is not just "another" helper to her husband, she is a helper absolutely suitable for him to the point that they can be *one*!

Related to the idea of becoming "one flesh" physically, we learn of several more ways God blessed marriage. He told our first parents, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). Obviously sexual intercourse was to be a gift God intended for a married couple. Physically they could share their love for each other and show each other intimate affection in the security of the marriage bond. After the fall into sin, when Satan, the world, and our flesh started to use sex to lead people into rebellion against our God, marriage became a safeguard against unchastity. It truly is better for a person "to marry than to burn with passion." (1 Corinthians 7:9)

A wonderful by-product of sexual union between man and wife is, of course, that they in all likelihood will become fruitful and be blest with children. "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him;" (Psalm 127:3) so says our God. Connected with a solid marriage bond, an environment is created in which children can grow up and learn. The stability enjoyed by a husband and wife is to establish the security children need as they develop. Children: a very blessed gift that God linked to marriage.

As we view all the blessings the Bible connects with marriage it is easy to see why people would want to have a relationship like this. And in order for them to receive these desired gifts, and enjoy them to their fullest, the Lord also regulated His institution of marriage. A couple could best benefit from wedded life, if they would follow God's divine design for their home. In the best interest of the married state, our Lord then, set down His rules for matrimony. Several of these are of great interest to us in this paper.

For, example, it is important to know that a marriage is to consist of *one* man and *one* woman. God did not create a whole bevy of beauties for Adam to claim as his wives; instead the man was given Eve. From that time on a man was to "be united to his *wife* and they (the two of them) will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The first marriage was monogamous and so it was to continue to be. God did tolerate multiple marriages in Old Testament times (We might think of Jacob, David, or others), but in the full light of the New Testament, we understand this is not to be the case in our age. Marriage today is to resemble the relationship between Christ and his bride (one bride), the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Therefore St. Paul writes: "To avoid fornication, let every man have his wife (not wives), and let every woman have her own husband (not husbands)" (1 Corinthians 7:2).

In God's regulations for marriage, we also learn that this union between one man and one woman is to be life-long. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, Paul by inspiration writes: "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes." In Romans 7:2 we have this same thought expressed. Of great importance to us is that even Jesus stressed the importance of this fact by making

comment of it during his ministry. He said, "Haven't you read...For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

One final thought in regard to marriage: As we listen to Jesus quote Genesis 2:24 notice what begins a marriage and is to continue through it. A man and wife are to be "united" and remain that way. The original Hebrew word used here is *qbfdf@* and it means "to cleave," "to adhere," or "to be glued to" something or, here, to *someone*. Our God is, in this word, explaining when a marriage comes into being. Of the essence in a marital union is commitment, life-long commitment. Where this permanent relationship has been established you truly have holy wedlock (wed=pledge). The fact that both parties involved are to state their intent of lifelong cleaving, by promises made to that effect, can be drawn from a passage like I Corinthians 6:16. There it says that a man who has sexual intercourse with a prostitute has become one body with her, but it does not say he becomes her husband. On the other hand on the basis of their betrothal, Mary and Joseph were considered man and wife "before they came together" (Matthew 1:18). Joseph is even referred to as Mary's "husband" (verse 19) because of the commitment they promised to one another. This point will be of special importance as we now examine what takes place when such lifelong commitments are not enjoyed by a married couple. The result might well be divorce.

## II. Divorce According to the Scriptures

When I was growing up in the early and mid '50's, I was either too young to realize that the church was having to deal with divorce or the attitude of most was pro-marriage, and couples were more committed to working problems out. It seemed like marriage ranked up there with the American flag, motherhood, and apple pie. But times are different today, aren't they? Protestors are burning the flag, women's libbers and lesbians are slamming motherhood, and in all likelihood the FDA or Surgeon General will soon ban apple pie as "hazardous to your health." Recent statistics show that one out of every two marriages ends in divorce, and that *more* than 50% of all teenage marriages end up as stats for the divorce courts. This is a sad commentary on our times, and a warning light to us that we need to know exactly what God's Word says on the subject.

To begin with, we need to understand that divorce is not necessarily a "dirty word" in the Scriptures. The Bible does not always, under all circumstances, for everyone, condemn divorce. While the Lord clearly states, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16), we can *not* understand this in an absolute way as if to mean there is nothing about divorce that could be anything but detestable to Him. Our God also said, "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries" (Jeremiah 3:8). Also, flip through the pages of Matthew chapter 1, there you will find Joseph called a "righteous man" as he planned to privately divorce pregnant Mary. From such passages we can see that divorce, for some persons, under some circumstances is altogether proper and not the object of God's hatred.

I can write this, and yet still tell you point-blank that God hates divorce. But He doesn't hate all the divorces in the same way nor does He hate every aspect of divorce. He hates what causes every divorce (even His own divorce with Israel), and that is sin. He always hates what divorce does to innocent children and to the injured party involved. He definitely hates divorces wrongfully obtained on grounds that He has not sanctioned. Of interest to us, then, are Biblical grounds for obtaining a divorce.

When a divorce takes place, a marriage relationship is being dissolved. Promised commitment and consent that established the original marriage bond is being retracted and is no longer considered binding. As you can see from the previous statements made on marriage, this is not a part of God's original institution. The Lord ordained that the pledge made by husband and wife was to bind them to each other until death. Well then, how did divorce ever begin? Unlike marriage, divorce is a human institution. In the Bible we are simply told why it came to be. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not his way from the beginning" (Matthew 19:8).

God never winked at divorce as if to give the impression He was unconcerned. He never ignored divorce, hoping it would go away. Instead our God, through men like Moses, regulated divorce so that innocent parties would not be totally crushed by the legal inventions of hardhearted men. The Lord was protecting His children when he regulated this practice. He did not want His people to divorce for any and every reason, but only in cases when he regulated this practice. He did not want His people to divorce for any and every reason, but only in cases when sin ruptured a marital union to a point beyond human repair.

In His Word, our God reveals to us two reasons for dissolving a marriage before the death of a spouse. The first of these is mentioned twice in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9). Jesus teaches that couples are not to divorce "except for marital unfaithfulness." To translate the NIV, you look to the Greek and find that "unfaithfulness" refers to "fornication" (a general term for illicit sexual intercourse).

Jesus is saying then, that if one spouse has engaged in extramarital intercourse and thus has broken the marriage bond, the injured spouse may secure a divorce and be free to remarry again. In such a divorce the injured party would simply and legally be establishing the fact that an unfaithful husband or wife had broken the union they once enjoyed and dissolved their relationship together. Fornication, then, is one Biblical ground for divorce.

When you think of fornication in this context you are referring to an actual sexual act and not the type of mental fornication Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:28. (If that were not true I fear most of us, maybe all of us, would have given our wives grounds for divorce many times over.) It should also be understood that fornication is not limited to a heterosexual act.

While living in Wisconsin, I had a conversation with a 60 year old friend on this very point. She told me she had been divorced and had not remarried over the past 30 years, because she had asked for a divorce from her husband for unbiblical reasons. Come to find out she had lived with this man for several years and he had never consummated the marriage. She bore up under this load until she discovered she was a convenient front for a raving homosexual. As we'll discover later she had not one, but two grounds for Biblical divorce. Of interest to us here, is that homosexual affairs are also a form of fornication.

In dealing with people who come to me looking to be justified in their divorce plans (by reason of fornication), I have also found it necessary to question whether illicit sexual intercourse has actually taken place. Many times this ground for divorce is only established by "over the fence" gossip or unproven suspicions. We need not ask our people to produce pictures or signed affidavits by the guilty parties, but that there has to be some proof on which to base such claims is only proper before a marriage is destroyed.

Before we move on, one last comment needs to be made. Jesus' words permitting divorce for fornication is never to be understood as a command: it is an option. The injured spouse may wish to forgive the unfaithful one and reestablish their previous relationship. In many cases, if both parties involved are Christians and the guilty spouse is repentant, reconciliation will follow. If the injured mate can say "I forgive you," in many cases a sure sign that this forgiveness is genuine will be that all wrong is forgotten and the marriage continued. But as pastors we can never demand that this be true, or burden someone's conscience with the thought that if fornication is forgiven then one must remain married. Jesus is not that specific in Matthew's Gospel and we have to beware lest what God allows to be separated we force to stay together. Unfaithfulness (lack of commitment) dissolved the marital union. Repentance, although desired, does not cement it back together.

The second Biblical ground for divorce is given to us by St. Paul in I Corinthians 7:15. Earlier in this chapter a believing spouse is given inspired instructions to remain in marriage with an unbelieving spouse as long as the later is willing to continue in this bond. But what happens if the unbeliever wants out of the marriage, no matter how hard the child of God tries to hold the home together? Paul writes, "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." If such desertion takes place an injured Christian spouse has no obligation to stay in that marriage relationship. By forsaking his commitment, an unbelieving spouse is once again breaking the marriage bond. The party is then free to remarry. Of course, before this freedom can be put into practice, a divorce will legally establish that the marriage no longer exists. Malicious desertion, then, is the second and only other Biblical ground for dissolving a marriage.

If a professing Christian deserts his spouse and refuses to repent or return home after persistent admonition, his lack of spiritual fruit will reveal his true colors. In such a case the professing Christian is apparently an unbelieving hypocrite and also becomes guilty of breaking the marriage on grounds of malicious desertion. Notice, however, that before the word desertion there is a designation of the type it is. "*Malicious*" desertion is a Scriptural reason for divorce. Any separation between spouses that is beyond the control of the "alleged deserter" is not a ground for divorce. If a separation results because of military service, job requirements, imprisonment, mental or physical disabilities, or whatever, this would not be classified as "malicious desertion."

On the other hand, although most malicious desertions are the result of local/physical separation, it is possible to be a victim of this sin while still living under the same roof with your spouse. In I Corinthians 7:15, the Greek word  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$  does not only refer to local separation. Its meaning is to separate, divide, or part in whatever way it occurs. This then would refer to a malicious desertion of the marriage vow in some way or another.

An example of this would be the permanent refusal of sexual intercourse in a marriage. God's Word says such refusal is not to take place among Christian spouses (I Corinthians 7:3-5). Unrepentant persistence in this sin would be a breaking of the marriage vow and would constitute malicious desertion. Keep in mind, however, that again we are talking about "malicious" behavior. If illness or some other reason beyond a spouse's control forces the couple to refrain from intercourse, even if this must be a permanent arrangement, this could not be considered "malicious" desertion of a marital vow.

Another example would be a spouse who constantly makes married life impossible because of his violent and destructive behavior. The man who returns home at night, persistently beats and threatens the life of his spouse and children, has maliciously deserted his family by his actions. I counseled with a lady who had her life threatened repeatedly by her husband. On one occasion, screaming children seemed to be the only thing that stopped him from killing her. He never was unfaithful and he always returned home at night. He kept his family clothed, fed, and sheltered. But he hated his Christian wife and let it be known that he wanted her dead. He maliciously separated himself from his marriage vow. In such a case our sister was free!

When speaking of malicious desertion, where local separation does not occur, I feel that we could cite other examples in which it might occur. We might think of the father who refuses to provide for his children and even sells the family's food stamps for cash to support his vices. We might have a case of malicious desertion in dealing with a persistent child abuser, who offers a threat to the child's life. These too, could be a breach of the marriage vow. But at this time I would like to voice a word of warning, lest we label each and every excuse for divorce as malicious desertion. Long hours of counseling will be necessary to determine if one spouse is persistent in violating his matrimonial vow, and does it with definite action and not just emotionally or mentally. Mental cruelty, incompatibility, loss of love, or disappointment over sexual performance cannot be construed as valid reasons for divorce. Talk to the brethren and ask their opinion if you suspect malicious desertion where local separation has not occurred. These situations may be more gray than black or white so some sanctified common sense and advice may prove very helpful.

Up to this point I've stated what I am convinced Scripture does say on divorce. Now, brothers, I would also like to bring up several points related to this subject that troubled me as I wrote this paper. I need the advantage of your background in Scripture and exegetical skill to clear up a few things for me.

I question whether there is Scriptural backing for the practice of allowing couples to legally separate and live apart in the unmarried state. This is a practice that has gone on in our Synod with I Corinthians 7:10-11 cited as a proof text. After commenting on this passage, *Shepherd Under Christ* (Page 283) reads: "If two Christians in their marriage find themselves at odds with one another, quarreling, unable to live together in peace, the solution may be separation, not, however, one that is permanent as in divorce, not one in which either marries another, which makes the separation permanent."

My problem is that I'm not sure whether I Corinthians 7:10-11 talks about a "separation, void of divorce," or not. The Greek word the NIV translates "separate" is  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\sigma\eta\nu\alpha\iota$  from  $\chi\omega\rho\iota/\zeta\omega$  (Aorist passive infinitive). It can mean to "separate" but in this context isn't this really referring to a divorce and not a

"separation void of divorce?" Notice in the verse itself that this separation would make the woman in question *αἰγάμον* ("unmarried"). She is to remain that way. Do we have a Scriptural leg to then stand on for a separation of the non-permanent variety?

That *χωρι/zw* can be understood to mean "divorce" can be seen in a passage like Matthew 19:6. The context that surrounds this verse is definitely referring to divorce. Jesus says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not *separate*" (*χωριζε/τω* -3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, present active, imperative from *χωρι/zw*). Do we just understand *χωρι/zw* to mean "separation void of divorce" here?

If I understand I Corinthians 7:10-11 correctly, Paul is not talking about "separation void of divorce." He is referring to a believer who would obtain a divorce for unbiblical reasons. I would see here a possible situation where two Christians would receive a divorce on unscriptural grounds and live apart. But now Paul says, "Do not remarry unless you are reconciled to your spouse." These Christians may be fighting and fuming; they still belong married; yet as long as they do not commit adultery by remarriage and leave open the chance for reconciliation, they could remain apart by reason of divorce until a time when their difficulties are settled.

I know situations in our church body where this has happened, and both the divorced husband and wife remained single and communicant members of one of our churches. My point is not to slander the parties involved or judge a decision prayerfully made by several of the brethren. I simply wonder whether this practice is, in reality, quite Biblical? By Word and sacrament both parties would continue to be nurtured in the faith. By their willingness to remain unmarried (in hope of future reconciliation) their attitudes could hardly be viewed as displaying fruits of impenitence. The fighting would stop. Because they are divorced, sexual intercourse would stop. By God's grace, might not abstinence and distance make the heart grow fonder? I welcome your comments.

As I examine this same passage in I Corinthians 7:10-11, another question came to my mind. In times past I have occasionally referred to sinfully divorced couples as being "still married in God's eyes" after their divorce. My question is whether we can ever say sinfully divorced people are still married in God's eyes. In this Corinthians passage if it is a reference to divorce, then our God would be saying that a person with an unscriptural divorce still in his eyes is *αἰγάμον* - "unmarried." It's true that only God can join people in marriage, however, man can sinfully break what was joined together by God. Doesn't Jesus Himself leave us with this picture when, again, He says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). Man can divide what God put together. Maybe no one else has ever referred to someone as being "still married in God's eyes" but I have and my feelings are that this is not an accurate statement in the context of divorce. If you are still with me, we now can proceed to the third and final part of this paper.

### **III. Remarriage According to the Bible**

Before writing this section, I scanned my church roster quickly. Without much thought at all, I could see that approximately one-tenth of King of King's membership has been involved in a remarriage. I may have missed a few. I may not be aware of all such cases. Most of those remarriages were handled by WELS pastors years ago, so I know very few of the details. But in the cases of remarriage with which I have personally been involved, I've made some astute observations:

1. Some cases are very easy to handle, others are very difficult (very shrewd, right?)
2. Some have "black and white" circumstances to ponder, others are very gray.
3. Some will be a joy to handle, others will drive you to your knees in tearful prayer.
4. Some who come to you will be allowed to remarry, others will be warned against such action.

Why don't we begin by talking about the easy, black and white, joyful, privilege of assuring our people that they may remarry without fear of sin. There are many verses in Scripture that not only say remarriage is permissible, but also encouraged (even commanded). In Romans 7:36 a woman is told that after her husband

dies she is able to remarry with no fear that she would be committing the sin of adultery. If God dissolves marriage by death, the living spouse, without guilt, can remarry. In I Corinthians 7:39 the same statement is made: "If her husband dies, she is free to marry." In fact, in this same chapter of Corinthians, verses 8 and 9, Paul *commands* certain widows to "tie the knot" again lest their lusts get the best of them. Remarriage after the death of a spouse receives God's seal of approval in Scripture.

After a Biblical divorce we also find that there are not problems if a remarriage is desired. In Matthew 19:9 we learn that divorce is proper for "marital unfaithfulness." If some would divorce for sinful grounds and remarry, they are committing adultery. But what about remarriage after a Biblical divorce? Obviously, Jesus is saying that our God sanctions this without the fear that a second marriage will be shrouded by adultery. The same holds true if a Christian divorces for malicious desertion. Remember, in I Corinthians 7:15, Paul says that a believer divorced for this reason is "not bound." Again, there is freedom to remarry without violating the Lord's will. Remarriage after a Biblical divorce also receives God's seal of approval in Scripture.

But now suppose that these believers, who have a God-given right to remarriage, introduce you to their sinfully divorced fiancée who is persistently impenitent when it comes to the breaking of his first marriage? Now we can talk about the difficult (difficult because sin and emotion cloud the issue), black and white (circumstances are clear), tearful (like Jeremiah, it can be bitter for us to use the Law to condemn sin), privilege (we are still God's servants carrying His Word) to warn against remarriage.

When speaking about remarriage in general, God's people need to know that when they marry again they should do so as our Lord directs. In Matthew 19:9 Christ Himself says that those who remarry a sinfully divorced person, such as the one previously mentioned, are committing adultery. As spokesmen for the Lord our members must be warned by us against such sin. Some might say that a believer would be free to marry a thief, or murderer, or slanderer; why not a sinfully divorced adulterer? The difference, as I see it, would be that a believer could speak out to a spouse against sins like stealing and not be dragged into it himself. But in the case of an adulterous remarriage, by entering the bed of adultery, the believer becomes contaminated in sin, too. Here we must warn against remarriage. It is taken for granted that to perform the wedding ceremony, even after warnings, would be to sanction this adulterous union.

But what if the sinfully divorced fiancée claims repentance, and yet an unwillingness to return to his unmarried first wife? Obviously, he shows himself unrepentant by his fruits. Persistent refusal to follow God's Word in I Corinthians 7:10-11 would be proof of impenitence. If he is sorry for past sin then he must seek forgiveness from those he has harmed (first wife, children, relatives) and reconcile with the woman to whom he should be married because of the marital oath he made before God. In any case, the believing party would not want to involve her fiancée in further sin that would endanger her soul or his. Remarriage, under these circumstances would be wrong.

Is it impossible then for the sinfully divorced to ever remarry? No, it is not. Under certain circumstances this would be possible. A couple might divorce on unscriptural grounds. But after months of single life, they may reconcile and decide to marry each other again. Such a remarriage would be in accord with God's will and acceptable. But even if circumstances were not so picture perfect, it still might be possible for the sinfully divorced to be wed once more. Finally we can discuss the difficult (clouded by sin), gray (circumstances are beyond reconciliation), tearful and prayerful (we need God's guidance and help) to assure the sinfully divorced that they have yet another chance at matrimony.

I've not been in the ministry long, but already it is clear that divorce and multiple divorce can make the puzzle of remarriage a difficult one to piece together. People who were actively involved in unscriptural divorce are much like the boy who falls in the manure pile. As they relay their story to you it has an unpleasant odor to it; the circumstances of their divorce and life thereafter is definitely messy; but by grace they can be picked up, cleaned up, and dressed up for a fresh start.

We dare never minimize the fact that unscriptural divorce is sin. However, we dare never demand that someone who was previously trapped in that sin be deprived of remarriage even though the injured spouse may still be alive. In any case where a sinfully divorced person desires to remarry, it should be of interest to us

whether this sin took place before or after conversion. That may help us understand why this sinful situation evolved in the first place. We should also be concerned whether the one guilty of this sin is truly repentant and producing fruits of repentance. Has he or she made every attempt for reconciliation with the first marriage partner? Is reconciliation even possible now? Has he or she asked forgiveness from all the people that were hurt by a sinful divorce? Have all alimony or child support payments been made and kept up?

These and more questions may need to be asked in determining whether true repentance and the fruits that should follow are evident. But if all spiritual factors seem in order, after our thorough investigation, then remarriage can not be denied. Scripture never says that a repentant sinner must remain in celibacy, even if his sin is adultery. When I realize this, it makes it very clear to me that no matter how much we have sinfully messed up our lives, Christ can make them right again. "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more!" (Romans 5:20)

At this point in the paper I intended to print several case histories of unusual situations I have encountered when counseling for or against remarriage. I have decided against printing these because my experience was basically acquired in Florida. If such printed material reached the wrong eyes it could be a cause for great offense. If time permits, I will orally share them with you and ask you to reach back into your ministry and add to the discussion. I pray this is not the last written word on such a detailed and important topic. This subject is too vast for one paper and we need to address this material in depth if it is to be of greater benefit to us in His service. If nothing more, I hope this paper and the discussion it will generate will drive us all back to the Word. Then we will find Biblical answers to our questions on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.



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