

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage (by Mike Sasso)

The intention and goal of this paper is to help the sincere Christian to discover God's will, and to possibly hear God's voice, regarding his or her decisions in the biblical area of marriage, divorce and remarriage. This study is in no way intended to bring judgment or condemnation upon those who have already made unfortunate, or less-than-biblical choices in these areas of life. We know that all of us have made sinful choices that might have led to long-term consequences. But, sometimes, gaining a true knowledge of God's will, as it is revealed in His Word, might demand our moving toward repentance, or even an immediate change in our actions or circumstances of living. And, at other times, while our repentance and change of heart might be truly sincere, our living circumstances simply cannot be changed, or returned to some previous state of biblical correctness. If you, after reading this paper, realize that you might have divorced or remarried outside of God's will, you simply must know that you always have total access to God's perfect grace and complete forgiveness, simply by repenting humbly before a holy God who totally loves you. God's grace is big enough to cover you and bless you even in circumstances that might be outside of His original plan for your life. Just as God blessed King David's marriage to Bathsheba (A relationship which began outside of God's will in great and obvious sin). We believe God can and will bless you in your current circumstance, whether you are separated, divorced, single or remarried, if you are just willing come to Him humbly in repentance and ask for His forgiveness and restoration. We know our God is a God of new beginnings.

MARRIAGE

1. **God's intention for Marriage** is that it is to be a sincere and lasting vow of commitment before God constituting a life-long union of secure and loving companionship between one man and one woman. Gen 2:18,24; Mat 19:3-6; Mark 10:6-9.
 - a. Marriage is intended to be a relationship of love and safety where both the husband and wife reflect Christ's love to the glory of God. Eph 5:25, 28-29; 1Peter 3:1-11.
 - b. Marriage is intended to be an environment where both the husband and wife freely and liberally give and receive love and respect. 1Cor 7:1-5.
 - c. Marriage is intended to be intimate and exclusive. There should be no other relationship that competes with or equals the relationship between a husband and wife. Eph 5:21-33.

- i. The sins of “adultery” and “fornication” are examples of violating the exclusivity of the marriage relationship. (Ex 20:14; Mt 5:27,28; Ga 5:19)
- ii. A simple look at the typical marriage vows will confirm the above. Traditional Vows: I, Mike take you, Linda to be my lawful wedded wife. I promise to love and to cherish you from this day forward, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse and forsaking all others to keep myself to you only, so long as we both shall live.
- iii. Because of the importance of exclusivity in marriage setting up perimeters and safeguards are highly recommended. Perimeters such as never being alone with the opposite sex unless they are your family.
- d. So, because of the intimate nature of God’s intention for marriage (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5,6; Mark 10:8; Eph 5:31); a believer is genuinely warned and exhorted that he or she must not marry an unbeliever. 1Cor 7:39; 2Co 6:14-17.

DIVORCE

2. **Divorce** is the separation and termination of the marriage covenant. Divorce originated from man and not from God (Mat 19:8). Therefore, divorce is the result of sin; and it always brings grief and pain. Divorce regularly creates more hurt than healing. And, divorce brings an end to the one thing that Christ said was to reflect His relationship with His church. (Eph 5:31-32). That’s why God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) But God does not hate divorced people.

a. Though the plan and practice of divorce did not originate from God, divorce has been rampant through out human history. So, the Lord has given us guidelines, both to acknowledge, and also to regulate the practice of divorce, primarily because of the hardness of our human hearts and the sinfulness and selfishness of our human condition.

i. Old Testament examples:

- 1. Some OT divorce laws were given for protection of the wife: Deut 22:29b & 24:1-4
- 2. God makes certain allowances for divorce: Deut24:1-4; Jer 3:1; Ezr 10:3,19;

ii. **New testament examples:**

1. God prohibits divorce: Mat 19:4-6; Mark 10:7-12; Luke 16:18; 1Cor 7:10-13
2. God authorizes divorce under limited circumstances: Mat 5:31; 19:8; Mark 10:4,5;

iii. Even though God hates divorce, because sin and selfishness is the root cause behind every divorce; not every divorce is biblically impermissible.

1. The LORD Himself actually divorced Himself from Israel because of her unfaithfulness and treachery towards Him. Jer 3:8

b. The "stance" of the biblical Christian then, is that divorce is never a desirable solution to a marriage conflict, and it is not to be acceptable or normal among Christians.

3. When divorce is clearly acceptable in the sight of God.

a. **Adultery**: Jesus acknowledged the legitimacy of divorce in the case of sexual unfaithfulness (**fornication** = *porneia* *por-ni'-ah*, meaning any type of sexual relationship outside of the marriage relationship). (Mat 5:32, 19:9)

i. This means that in the case of unrepented sexual unfaithfulness, the betrayed spouse is free, in the eyes of God to initiate a divorce. The unfaithful spouse has broken the marriage vows through adultery.

1. Keep in mind that restoration of the marriage is still possible if the offending spouse repents and the offended spouse seeks the Lord and finds grace to work on this damaged marriage.
2. The offended spouse ought to guard against bitterness and hardness of heart. Forgiveness is also an issue that must be dealt with, regardless of whether the marriage ends in divorce or not. (Matt 6:12-15)

b. **Divorce initiated and carried out by an unbelieving spouse** also releases a believer from the obligation of the marriage vow. A believer is commanded not to depart from, or to divorce an unbelieving spouse if the unbeliever is willing to stay with the

believer; but if the unbeliever departs and/or divorces the believer; the believer is free from the marriage commitment. (1Cor 7:10-15).

4. **When divorce is clearly unacceptable in the sight of God.**

The most commonly used grounds for divorce today, that are clearly unbiblical include, but are not limited to: incompatibility, irreconcilable differences, marriage to the "wrong" person, etc. Pastors often hear excuses for divorce, such as: "We didn't know what we were getting into"; "I believe that God wants me to be happy"; "I know what the Bible says, but God knows my heart", or; I just don't love him (or her) anymore, etc.. (But, the sacred vow you made when you got married in the first place was, "for better or for worse". That vow is permanent and binding in the sight of God.)

a. **So what then, is "God's will" when I might be contemplating a divorce that is not supported by scriptural grounds?**

- i. All of my unbiblical actions and attitudes that are creating my desire to divorce my spouse, must be brought to the Lord Jesus with a submissive heart of repentance, leading to a change of attitude and behavior reflecting my love and obedience to God.
- ii. Since the commitment of marriage is essentially "God's Rock Tumbler", where we are bound together for a lifetime, to make ourselves more useful to Christ. Often, marital issues are simply God's voice; that I must love Him more earnestly; and I must die to my own fleshly desires.
- iii. When facing severe; or long-term marital problems, the key question in my life should be, "What is God's will for me?" Rather than, "What is my will for me?"
- iv. Every possible avenue of resolution should be sought out in reconciling and restoring my love for my husband or wife, and our love and respect for one another, i.e.; counseling, books, DVD's, Bible studies, marriage groups and/or Marriage conferences, etc.
- v. When a spouse simply refuses any and all attempts to change for the better, the Lord may, in fact, be calling the unhappy or dissatisfied spouse to simply, "suffer according to the will of God for righteousness sake"; (1Pet 2:18-21;

3:1, 17; 4:12-16; 4:19) knowing that the Lord will truly reward him or her for his or her faithfulness in Christ.

The serious consequences of an unbiblical divorce

1. We know that; all sin carries with it; the natural principles of sowing and reaping. (Gal 6:7-8). We see this again, in the life of King David. Because, although God might have blessed David's marriage to Bathsheba, there were grave consequences of David's sin that followed him, and his family, for all of David's life; and for generations to follow. (2Sam 12:10-14). Your unbiblical divorce will truly create more problems than it will solve.
2. Jesus taught many times that; to divorce your spouse without biblical cause, and to marry another, is, in fact, to commit an act of adultery. Mat 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18.
 - a. So, in the case of the believer who initiates a divorce (except for the cause of sexual unfaithfulness) the divorce is unbiblical in the sight of God. And the divorcing person is biblically commanded by the Lord, either to remain single, or to reunite with his or her spouse. (1 Corinthians 7:11). So, we can see that; reconciliation is truly God's first choice for those who choose to divorce a spouse, regardless of whether there were Scriptural grounds for the divorce, or not. And we can find further clarifications and evidence for this premise in the Bible as well. And these are:
 - i. If the spouse who initiated a divorce, apart from the biblical grounds of adultery, were to choose to marry another. That subsequent marriage is considered an act of adultery in the eyes of God. (Mark 10:11-12)
 - ii. If either spouse (or any Christian) were to marry someone who has divorced his or her spouse on grounds other than infidelity. That marriage is adulterous. (Mat 5:32)
 - b. So, we would exhort any person, whether they are a person who has been the initiator of an unbiblical divorce; or they are someone who desires to marry an individual who has been the initiator of an unbiblical divorce, that; rather than marry one another; they should instead pursue the will of God, which would be to reconcile; or to step aside, to make provision for the reconciliation of the former marriage. (1Cor 7:10-11)
 - i. We recognize that reconciliation of a divorced couple becomes unrealistic (or impossible) if either person

becomes sexually involved with another or if either partner remarries; or; if either partner were to die. So, in these kinds of cases, God's grace and good judgment would apply. (Romans 7:2)

- ii. And, once a divorce is final; if the person who has been left behind by a spouse who has departed under unbiblical grounds; were to desire to remarry... We would encourage them to use good judgment; but, they are free to marry as they choose, in the Lord. (1Cor 7:15).
3. The evidence of a sincere repentant heart in a marriage partner who has divorced, or desired to divorce his or her spouse under unbiblical grounds will be seen in a sincere desire and genuine effort to reconcile with his or her spouse. (1Cor 7:11).

If reconciliation is truly impossible, because the partner who has been left behind in an unbiblical divorce has died; remarried, or; has become truly and absolutely unavailable to reconcile the former marriage; we would consider the former marriage to have ended.

REMARRIAGE

1. Because when we are born again all things have become new, and; we have become a new creation in Christ... We believe a divorced Christian would be free to remarry in the Lord; if his or her divorce took place before he or she became a Christian. (2Cor 5:17; 1Cor 7:24-28)
2. We believe, a Christian who has divorced his or her spouse because of adultery or abandonment (see "Divorce" 3.a), is free in the Lord to remarry, but any new marriage must only be to a believer. (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1Cor 7:39b)
3. We believe, the death of a spouse clearly frees a person to remarry. (Rom 7:3; 1Cor 7:39).
4. Now that we have covered the biblical legality of remarriage... When we are looking at our freedom to remarry another person after the failure of a marriage; we must keep in mind, the sinful nature of all human beings (Mat 19:8; Mark 10:5; Rom 3:9,10,23). Rarely is there a divorce, where there is a completely guiltless party... Your former marriage might be in the history books, and you might be biblically free to remarry; but remarriage is not always the most advisable or best route for you to take, in your life... We believe that; during and after a divorce, each spouse should search his or her heart before God in the light of genuine biblical truth; to discover what the Holy Spirit might have to say to them

personally, regarding the finalization of a divorce and/or the pursuit of a new relationship...

5. Marriage is sacred in God's eyes; and God takes your marriage vows very, very seriously... And, our hope is that; you will take your vows very seriously as well... If you are free to remarry; and you choose to consider remarriage; we hope you will take the time you need to recover from your divorce... We hope you will become a solid, mature believer; and, we hope you will choose a solid, mature believer as your new marriage partner... We hope you, and your new partner will allow yourselves to bond properly in a vigilant, sexually pure courtship; and we hope you will consider your new marriage choice very, very carefully... We know you can't remove all of the scar tissue you are carrying around from your past relationship(s). And we know that your new marriage will face some difficulty, because; even very good people don't act good all the time... We know that a stronger commitment level will probably be required for you to stay in your new marriage than was required for you to remain in your previous one, for the long term; Because the chances of divorce go up statistically for each remarriage. Chances for divorce in your 1st marriage 50%; 2nd marriage - 67%; 3rd marriage 73% and so on... So, we hope you will use sober judgment and healthy grace, when considering the subject of remarriage... Because, you must not add another bad experience to your marriage history. You really would do better to remain single; than to experience that...

A FEW SHORT WORDS ON ABUSE AND ABANDONMENT

We need to discuss these two topics, because they; combined with adultery, form the "Three A's" that make up the primary reasons for divorce in our modern world... Each of these "Three A's", are very delicate and sensitive issues, and, we; as Christians, always want to be extremely gracious when we are confronted with questions regarding any of them... The problem we face; is that each of these words describe sinful human behaviors that are very hard on relationships... Each of these terms can be used subjectively to describe behaviors that are truly wrong; but while a behavior might be very bad: it may not actually rise to the level of badness, where we would consider divorce to be the only viable option...

In other words, each of these terms can mean different things to different people, and we truly want to be gracious, but we have to be biblical as well... The other problem we face is that; only one of these terms actually appears in the Bible, the others are "Arguments from biblical silence", so we have to be very careful with our opinions. Again,

we truly want to be gracious, but here is how we would describe these terms... Adultery is actually having sexual intimacy with a real person; abandonment is actually leaving the home and refusing to return; and, abuse would mean behavior that actually causes physical, emotional or spiritual damage. Jesus did take these principles to the next level and addressed the condition of our hearts but did not address them as legitimate grounds for divorce. For instance, lust can be "adultery of the heart", but not necessarily grounds for divorce. There is so much more that can and should be said about these "three A's". But for now let us at least establish the following principles.

1. **In cases of genuine abuse (Patterns of Cruel and injurious mistreatment)**, we would never dispute that, separation is usually essential to protect the abused spouse and children. Yet, we really believe that, divorce should never be the first course of action we take, even when we are caught up in a genuinely abusive relationship. We believe, the healing of the marriage relationship should always be our first choice. Therefore, we believe, that, in cases of abuse, Godly counseling should be sought from qualified individuals who are familiar with the dynamics of abusive and controlling spouses.
 - a. We understand that abuse can take many forms... So, we believe that, a solution should be sought from the harmonious advice of church leaders to help sort out the details in each individual (case by case) situation. (Proverbs 11:14) There is a danger of erroneous conclusions leading to wrong decisions when one spouse seeks ongoing counsel without the other spouse being present in the counseling appointment(s).
 - b. We recognize there are complications... So, we believe that a qualified counselor can help a person decide, if they are dealing with truly dangerous behaviors; or simply the behaviors of; what the Bible would describe as, "an unbelieving spouse"..
 - i. A violent and abusive person may have established a deep pattern of control. Therefore separation from a violently abusive spouse will be necessary for the protection of the abused party.
 - ii. A verbally dominant/abusive spouse may reveal evidence of insecurity, or poor role modeling. And, he or she might also reveal that he or she either, is not willing to achieve Godly behavior from his or herself, or he or she is not a genuine Christian; in which case the instructions of 1Cor 7:12-13 might apply.

- c. So, we want to discuss here, the biblical concept of: "Being willing to work it out"... Because, if you are dealing with genuine violent, psychopathic or sexually perverted behavior; your tolerance and/or reconciliation options might be limited, indeed.

But, if you are simply dealing with the behaviors of an unbeliever; there is scriptural instruction to help you... The Bible says, "...If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is **willing** to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is **willing** to live with her, let her not divorce him." 1 Corinthians 7:12, 13, NKJV.

- i. Now, the word "**willing**" here is translated from the Greek word; (suneudokeo *soon-yoo-dok-eh'-o*) this word is translated, "be pleased" in the KJV and literally means, "to think well of in common, i.e. assent to, feel gratified with: to have hearty agreement, be pleased, have pleasure".
- ii. And, we recognize that a dominant, controlling, abusive spouse is neither demonstrating fruit of being a true believer, or an attitude of "pleasing, hearty, agreement". An abusive spouse is seeking his or her own will, well-being and pleasure rather than the will well-being and pleasure of their spouse. And, we agree this is a big problem...

6. **THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW** – There are many instances in scripture where less-than-perfect people have clearly sinned and violated God's laws and yet, these folks were shown mercy and granted forgiveness and grace by a loving God. If you have already violated the clear commands of scripture and made decisions in your life that were sinful acts of disobedience to God, there is hope if you repent and turn to Him now. One great danger in these situations is that the people of God permanently turn their back on those who have married, divorced or remarried outside of the will of God. With this in mind, we who comprise the church should seek to have the mind of Christ and apply grace to others as well, as we are directed by the Holy Spirit, and modeled by scripture. So, here are just a few examples for us to consider:

- b. **Rahab the harlot** (Joshua 6:17,25; James 2:25) – Under the strict letter of the law, Rahab was both a harlot and a gentile... She was an enemy of Israel. On all of these counts, Rahab should have been legally put to death. Yet, because of her faith and evident heart of repentance, God granted her mercy and she was not only allowed to live, but Rahab was allowed to partake in the

blessings of God's people, Israel. Rahab was also included in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, Found in Matthew chapter 1.

- c. **King David** – After committing both adultery and murder (2Samuel 11) David should have been put to death according to the Law of Moses... Yet, because of God's Grace and David's faithful and repentant heart, David was shown mercy (2Sam 12:13; Ps 51). Though David paid a huge price for his sin, which brought a curse upon his house (2Sam 12:10-12) David still reigned as God's anointed king with God's full benefits and blessings.
- d. **Hosea** – The entire Old Testament book of Hosea demonstrates God's persistent mercy and enduring grace toward His unfaithful people, which is illustrated through God's instruction to Hosea, to continually seek out, and to receive back his harlot wife, even in her repeated acts of sexual sin and betrayal... According to Jewish law, Hosea's wife, Gomer should certainly have been put to death. But God's heart of kindness; was to grant mercy and to continually seek restoration for Gomer.
- e. **The woman at the well** (John 4:1-42) – According to the letter of the Law of Moses, this immoral Samaritan woman, with a sexual history of no less than five husbands and a current live-in boyfriend, should never have found acceptance with a pure and holy God. Yet, because of the grace and compassion of the Lord Jesus, this woman found faith in Christ, and she went forward to evangelize her community.
- f. **The woman caught in adultery** (John 8:3-11) – According to the Law of Moses, this woman should have been put to death for having sex without the benefit of marriage. Yet, even before she had an opportunity to demonstrate any repentance at all, Jesus rescued her from execution at the hands of the religious folks, who had sentenced her to death, and Jesus went on to exhort this young woman to repentance in Him.

7. Closing statement

We believe, the marriage relationship should be viewed and treated in comparison to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22-30). This relationship is intended to be permanent and devotedly enduring.

After Jesus' disciples fully understood his firm stand against unbiblical divorce, they proclaimed, "If this is the case then it is better not to marry" (Matt 19:10). Thus the vows of marriage and the contemplation of divorce should

be taken very seriously before God. So, we believe, that a divorce should never be initiated without a careful study of the scriptures and prayerfully seeking God's will for the situation.

We believe that, Christian couples who are experiencing challenging marital problems should seek Godly counsel and mentoring rather than separation or divorce. We believe, the attitude of a God-honoring Christian facing a difficult or impossible marriage situation, should be, "How do **we** fix this", rather than, "How do **I** get out of this". We believe that, most divorces in the church, are caused by Christians who are seeking ways to "Rise up in the flesh", rather than to seek opportunities to, "Die to the flesh"; as Christ's example would invariably have us do...

We realize that every case is different. So we want to carefully examine each individual case in the light of scripture, rather than the light of personal opinion. And we certainly believe it is prudent for a divorced person seeking to remarry in the church, to conduct their lives and relationships under the guidance and protection of the pastors or elders.

We think, a believer should view nearly every interpersonal conflict that comes into his or her life as, first and foremost, an opportunity to show the "Greater love", and to "Lay his life down for his friends" John 15:13

We'd like to direct you to some other scriptures to consider, on the topic of marriage, divorce and remarriage; Matthew 16:24; Philippians 2:1-19; Ephesians chapters 4, 5, 6; Colossians 3; 1Peter chapters 2 & 3; Heb 13:4-6.

And, we want to provide for you, as a church, a family, and a group of God-seeking brothers and sisters; a unified voice of support and exhortation, as we face together, some of the deep, deep struggles of life...

**Helpful web links relating to this topic:
(For web version only)**

- <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/A377>
- <http://www.carm.org/what-does-bible-teach-about-divorce>
- <http://www.gracefordivorce.org>
- www.Safeplaceministries.com

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