

Divorce + Remarriage = Adultery

Relevant Scripture

Genesis 1:27-28, 2:20-25; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:22-33. See also Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 24:1-4.

Doctrine

- The standard of God for marriage is one man and one woman for one lifetime.
- Marriage is a creation ordinance, ordained by God in the Garden of Eden.
- Marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church.
- In marriage, God joins two people together in a union of “one flesh” and humans may not put that asunder. Only God can dissolve that union, and He does so through death. A bill of divorce does not change that.
- God hates divorce.
- If a man divorces his wife and remarries, he is committing adultery, and the woman he marries is committing adultery. Likewise, if a woman divorces her husband.
- The only exception to divorce and remarriage being adultery is the case of “porneia” (translated as “fornication”). This refers to premarital sexual relations discovered at or before the consummation of a marriage. Hence, we find Joseph minded to “put away” (or, divorce) Mary when she becomes pregnant during their betrothal period (Matthew 1:19). And we have the case of a woman who fraudulently claims to be a virgin, but her deceit is discovered on the wedding night (Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

Objections And Responses

Objection: Jesus says that adultery is an exception

Jesus says that “porneia” is an exception to divorce and remarriage being adultery, and sometimes, “porneia” includes adultery (for example, Ephesians 5:3), so He is talking about adultery. Therefore, if my spouse cheats on me, it’s OK for me to get divorced and remarried.

Response: The Greek word for “adultery” is “moichea.” Whenever “porneia” and “moichea” appear in the same context, a distinction is made between the two words as follows: “porneia” refers to pre-marital sexual behavior, and “moichea” refers to extra-marital sexual behavior (for example, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Galatians 5:19). Both words are used in the same verse here (Matthew 5:32 and 19:9). If Jesus meant “adultery” He would have used the word “moichea” to mean “adultery.” Instead, He purposefully used the word “porneia.” You or your spouse’s adultery is not an exception.

Objection: Paul says that abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is an exception

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:15 that if my spouse is an unbeliever and departs from me, then I am not under bondage. This means I am free to get divorced and remarried.

Response: Paul isn’t saying anything about divorce and remarriage in this passage. He is saying that you are not enslaved to trying to keep the unbelieving spouse from leaving; rather, let them go and live in peace. The Greek word that Paul uses here for “bondage” is “douloo” and this word does not refer in scripture to the marriage bond. Had Paul been talking about the marriage bond here, he would have used the word “deo” which, in fact, he uses later in the same chapter (verse 7:39). See also Romans 7:1-3.

Objection: Paul says that I’m not sinning if I get remarried after being divorced

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 that if I divorce my spouse and then remarry, I am not sinning.

Response: Starting at 1 Corinthians 7:25, Paul is addressing unmarried people, and one of his overarching themes is that it is better to be single than to be married. In 7:27, he is saying that if an unmarried man is already “bound unto a wife” (that is, betrothed to a woman – the Greek word “gyne” is the same word for both “wife” and “woman”), then don’t seek to change that; and if an unmarried man is “loosed from a wife” (that is, not betrothed to a woman), then don’t seek to change that. For unmarried people to get married is not a sin, but he’s warning them they will have trouble in the flesh. To say that Paul is addressing divorce and remarriage here would be to force an unnatural, out-of-context meaning, and it would have Paul contradicting himself from what he says in 7:11 and 7:39.

Objection: I was divorced and remarried before I was saved

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:20 to “let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” So, if I was called after having been divorced and remarried, I should remain in that situation.

Response: Paul is not suggesting in 1 Corinthians 7:20 that a person should continue living in sin. Jesus says that a divorced and remarried person is living in a state of continual, ongoing adultery. If you were involved in any other sin before you were saved, you should have stopped that sin. Why would adultery be any different?

Objection: Surely my particular situation is the exception to the rule

My spouse was physically or emotionally abusive. I was young and didn’t know what I was doing. My pastor told me it was OK. I am entitled to live however I want as long as I am happy. _____ (fill in the blank).

Response: Divorce + remarriage = adultery. You are not the exception.

Objection: It may have been adultery for me to get divorced and remarried, but that was in the past, and Jesus forgives

This isn’t the unpardonable sin. Jesus can forgive anything. Even if I made a mistake in getting divorced and remarried, God is merciful. So, I can expect to be forgiven.

Response: Yes, God is merciful and can certainly forgive. But you are being presumptuous to say, “I can go on sinning, and Jesus will forgive me anyway.” This attitude is the antithesis of the teaching of scripture. “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!” (Romans 6:1-2). This is the attitude of ancient Judah in the time of Jeremiah: “Will ye...commit adultery...and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?” (Jeremiah 7:9-10). You are “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness.” (Jude 4).

Why Does It Matter?

It should matter to everyone claiming to be a Christian and every church claiming to be a New Testament church:

- All of God’s standards matter.
- Jesus said: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)
- The lukewarm, lax approach by almost every church on this issue has opened the doors wide to same-sex marriage. You no longer have any moral authority on the subject of marriage.
- To allow something that God has forbidden to be the norm in your churches is not an act of mercy – it is treason.
- It is often a symptom of a rotting foundation. For example, a desire to smooth God’s perceived “rough edges” so He seems more palatable; a love of money (people would leave your church, and with them, their checkbooks); a craving to be well-liked and popular; etc. You may say you’re trying to be faithful to scripture and have been very prayerful about the matter, but that is rarely the case – an ulterior motive is far more likely.
- Marriage is a symbol of Christ and His church. You will treat it cavalierly at your own peril.

Further Reading

[Divorce And Remarriage \(Part 1\)](#)

[Divorce And Remarriage \(Part 2\)](#)