

**Biblical Guidance on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage**  
Content, information, and excerpts from ‘Women Helping Women,’  
by Elyse Fitzpatrick & Carol Cornish (Harvest House).

## **Marriage**

Marriage was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3).

Biblical marriages involve the making of covenantal vows and promises, involving the leaving of one’s home, the cleaving to one’s spouse for life, and the weaving together of two separate lives into one, all for the glory of God (Genesis 2:24-25). This oneness and service is to model the relationship of Christ and His church (His bride) to the world (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Conflict between sinners, especially in close relationships, including husband and wife, is inevitable. But that doesn’t mean we have to allow conflict to divide us. God’s ideal for married men and women is to stay together for life, growing in Christ-likeness, learning to resolve conflicts in a God-honoring manner, and learning to forgive (Matthew 5:23-26, 18:15-17; Romans 12; Colossians 3; James 4:1-12).

## **Divorce**

The purpose of divorce is to dissolve a marriage. It is literally a cutting, putting, or sending away. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) because it is always a result of sin and brings long-lasting misery and destruction with it.

Divorce was not God’s plan for man, but as Jesus teaches, it came about because of the hardness of man’s sinful heart (Matthew 19:8).

Although God hates divorce, He recognizes and regulates it (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Although He recognizes and regulates it, He is not commending the practice of it. Rather, as is seen in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, He is regulating a practice that was already occurring in Israel. Jesus also acknowledged that, while divorce is not God’s desire, marriage still can be destroyed by sinful man—He continues in Matthew 19:6 & Mark 10:9 by cautioning people not to separate what God has joined together.

Since God hates divorce and we know that He hates sin (Psalm 45:7), many people may erroneously conclude that therefore all divorce is sin. The Bible never says all divorce is sin! A good student of the Bible will not make the mistake of looking at only one passage of Scripture to determine biblical truth. The Scriptures must be considered as a *whole*.

In Deuteronomy 22:13-29 and 24:1-4, God regulates rather than forbids divorce. Since sin is repugnant to God, and Deuteronomy 25:16 says, “Everyone who acts unjustly is an abomination to the Lord your God,” God wouldn’t regulate divorce if it were always sinful.

Jeremiah 3:8 says, “I (God) saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.” Since God cannot sin, and since God divorced faithless Israel, it follows, therefore, that divorce *per se* is not sin. (By the way, God later reconciled with faithless Israel and forgave her for her adultery. (Jeremiah 3:11-14) He loves, is full of grace, and has set a perfect example for us to follow.)

It is the *cause* of divorce that is sin. Following are the only legitimate grounds for divorce, according to the God who created us and instituted marriage:

- Unrepentant, sexual adultery by a spouse (Matthew 5:32, 19:9)
- Desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15-16)

Another way to summarize this is:

- When 2 Christians are married to each other, divorce is allowable, and is not sinful, if either a) a spouse has committed adultery and is unrepentant, or b) for desertion if one spouse is declared an unbeliever through church discipline because he or she deserted the family.
- Divorce is allowable and is not sinful for a believer married to an unbeliever on two grounds as well: a) if the unbeliever leaves (desertion), or b) for unrepentant adultery.

### **Sinful Divorce**

If a divorce was for reasons other than sexual adultery or desertion by an unbelieving spouse, it was a sinful divorce.

There is no sin too great for the blood of Jesus Christ. All sins, including sinful divorce, are forgivable. This doesn't take away from the obvious negative consequences both spouses may face for their lifetime due to divorce (the challenges of being a single parent, the powerful impact separation has on their children and their children's children, etc.). In sinful situations, including sinful divorce, God's desire is for reconciliation and forgiveness—between the person and God, and between the two spouses.

If a person is born again, there is no condemnation because of Christ (Romans 8:1). If one has confessed his or her sin, the person is cleansed (1 John 1:9). These truths apply to everyone whether they are divorced or not! Whether a woman became a believer before, during or after her divorce, God will forgive her when she prays for forgiveness out of a sincere, repentant heart.

If, as some have been taught, a person can be forgiven for divorce only if it happened before salvation, then Christ died in vain, and there is no such thing as salvation by grace and grace alone.

## **Reconciliation**

The Bible clearly states that Christians are to seek reconciliation when a negative matter has affected a relationship (Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15). We are always responsible, as much as it depends on us, to be at peace with everyone around us (Romans 12:18). According to the whole counsel of God then, we must be willing to also reconcile a broken marriage. Remarriage is a preferable option when the erring spouse truly repents and seeks reconciliation (as long as neither spouse has already remarried, and as long as the unbelieving spouse (if that is the case) has repented and become born-again) (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Please keep in mind that divorce is never mandated, or commanded—even when it is permitted by God and is a sinful situation, we are still called as Christians to forgive, seek reconciliation, and live at peace with everyone. Again, it is permitted in the cases already stated above, but is not desired. Even though a believing spouse is ‘released’ and free to leave if the unbelieving spouse initiates it, the believing spouse is to be careful not to do anything to try and initiate or force the situation on his or her own.

## **Remarriage**

The controversy among Christians over remarriage after divorce surrounds Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32, 19:9, Mark 10:11-12, and Luke 16:18. Here Jesus issues warnings against committing adultery. He says that the question, “Who may remarry?” is answered in this way: “All persons properly divorced may be remarried.” By properly divorced He means those who are “released without obligation,” as already discussed here.

Those who have been divorced according to the biblical provisions discussed are free and able to remarry. A woman who has been righteously divorced has no obligation to seek reconciliation with her former spouse and remarry him, although she may do so if he is repentant.

If, however, a sinful divorce has occurred, a woman does have an obligation to seek reconciliation and remarriage if her former husband is a believer.

For further counsel on issues of marriage, divorce and remarriage,  
continue to study the Scriptures (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 2:15),  
and consider seeking godly counsel from biblical church leadership.