

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

INTRODUCTION:

1. The purpose of this study is to review the biblical pattern for marriage and to understand the scriptural approach to divorce and remarriage.
2. The Christian community is for the most part united on the standards for marriage; but is widely divided on the issues of divorce and remarriage. This presents problems as believers move from one church to another. In one place it is taught that there are biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage may be permitted. But in another place it is taught that there are no biblical grounds for divorce and therefore no remarriage. How does one chart their way through such rough waters?
3. This study is designed to help the Christian at least get an accurate perspective on the whole issue of marriage and divorce. This teacher has come to his own conclusions on the matter of divorce; but he is no pope and cannot dictate what should be the position of another believer.
4. One thing that might be helpful to remember is that whatever view one adopts on the matter of divorce and remarriage he must be charitable toward those with whom he disagrees. Also, he must be sure that he has followed the ground rules of biblical interpretation. The Word of Truth must be rightly divided; one's prejudices must not be allowed to get in the way.
5. A warning is also in order. If you have been involved in a divorce you must not let that experience dictate your theology of divorce.

I. Marriage

A. **Genesis 2:18-25.**

1. Marriage was established by the Word of God, "Then the Lord God said,"
 - a. As Lord (YAWEH): Marriage can only find its full meaning in relationship with God. He is the God who enters into a personal relationship with man. Marriage does not find its significance in humanistic explanations.
 - b. As God (ELOHIM): Marriage was brought into being by the Creator. He also has the right to give us the purpose of marriage and how it is to function. Marriage is not the invention of man as some sociological convenience.

2. Marriage was instituted for the purpose of providing companionship – “It is not good for the man to be alone.” It is one with whom you are intimately united in thoughts, goals, plans, efforts (and, in the case of marriage, in bodies).
 - a. The goal of marriage is to meet this mutual need of companionship. Genuine fellowship is to be experienced, e.g., Christ and the church.
 - b. The means of achieving this goal is love. “Love, in marriage, focuses upon giving one’s spouse the companionship he/she needs to eliminate loneliness.” Adams
 - c. The inability of many to experience this kind of relationship in marriage helps to explain many of the societal activities which are popular in our day.
3. Marriage was designed by God to provide mutual needs – “I will make him a helper suitable for him.”
 - a. Equal and adequate for one another.
 - b. They serve as each other’s counterpart. I call this the image of God match-up.
 - c. The husband and wife are to complement one another. Each brings something into the marriage, which the other needs.
4. Marriage is to be a growing unity in body, soul, spirit, mind and heart, “and they shall become one flesh.”
 - a. Loyalty
 - b. Adjustments

B. Ephesians 5:22-33.

1. Wives – be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
 - a. This is not an option. It is a command.
 - b. She is to be a submissive helper.
 - c. There is to be a mutual submission to one another’s needs (5:21).
 - d. This is a mental attitude basically.

2. Husbands – love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.
 - a. This also is a command not a suggestion.
 - b. This love will behave in a certain way.
 - c. The husband is to be a sacrificial lover. He looks out for her needs.
3. Symbolic purpose –

C. Colossians 3:18-19.

1. Essentially the same as the Ephesians passage.
2. The significance of these passages in the prison epistles: Notice their place in the plan of the epistles.
3. A caution for the husband, “and to not be embittered against them.”

D. Titus 2:1-8

1. Four groups are addressed: older men, older women, younger women and young men.
2. The special needs of each group:
2. Notice the result when Christian families do not function according to the Word of God, “that the Word of God may not be dishonored.”

E. 1 Peter 3:1-7.

1. The problem of a spiritually mixed marriage. How does the believer reach the unbeliever for Christ in the home?
2. The Christian wife’s wardrobe is made up of:
3. The husband is to live with his wife in an understanding way. He must be sensitive to her needs. He is not to make her suffer.

II. Divorce in the Old Testament.

A. Deuteronomy 21: 10-15, 7.

1. Divorce was allowed in certain cases.

2. It was not mandatory however.
3. The law was designed to protect the slave taken in war.

B. Deuteronomy 22:18-19.

1. Protection of bride accused of not being a virgin on wedding night.
2. A fine for the man who falsely accuses his wife of not being a virgin.
3. He could never divorce her.
4. Divorce was not instituted by God but God regulated it. Divorce is a human institution.

C. Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

1. Divorce was practiced in Israel.
2. It was regulated rather than forbidden outright.
3. Although divorce is recognized, permitted and regulated in the Bible, it was not instituted by God.
4. Divorce was allowed for the reason on uncleanness. Much debate has revolved around the meaning of this word. The Hebrew is ERWATH DABAR (). It was disputed even among the Rabbis. There were two schools of interpretation by the time of Christ.
 - a. Hillel's school: Liberal view, allowed divorce for almost reason ("for every cause" – Matthew 19:3), any grievance, not matter how trivial.
 - b. Shammai's school: Strict view, restricted divorce to cases of fornication.

The Hebrew word ERWATH () is from the very ERWAH () which means to be naked. The Hebrew is literally, "a matter of nakedness." ERWATH is used in Deuteronomy 23:14 in reference to the repulsiveness of human waste in the Camp of Israel. So whatever ERWATH DABAR means it was something very disgusting or repulsive. But sexual sin seems to be excluded for adultery was punishable by death. John Murray says: "...there is not evidence to show that ERWATH DABAR refers to adultery or any act of sexual uncleanness... We may conclude that ERWATH DABAR means some indecency of impropriety of behavior.

The general statement ERWATH DABAR must remain that way. It probably covers anything to which a husband might take offense short of sexual sin (porneia).

5. Divorce procedures were to be followed:

- a. There was a written bill of divorce (Deut. 24:1ff; Jeremiah 3:8). It had to be written and clearly stated. This was a protective device. It served as a deterrent to false accusations, hasty divorce, etc. The requirement of time promoted objectivity in the matter.
 - b. The bill must be served. The bill of divorcement had to be personally put into the other party's hand. Again you can see how the time factor is brought in. An initial emotional decision would face the hurdles of legal order.
 - c. The person divorced must be sent from the home. This protected the woman and served as proof of her lawful release from marital obligations.
6. The husband may not remarry his divorced wife if she had been married to another man in the meantime. She was considered "defiled." This defilement was in relation to her first husband. She could not remarry her first husband. The marriage contract had been violated.
7. Divorce did dissolve the original union. It is possible for men to put asunder what God has put together. Notice that it says "former husband", "wife of another."
8. In summary of this passage: (a) Moses recognized divorce as an existing reality in Israel. (b) Moses did not institute divorce. (c) Divorce was limited to the cause of "uncleanness." (d) Easy divorces were discouraged by the legal process necessary.

D. Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13

1. Intermarriage between Israelites and idolatrous Gentiles threatened the purity and purpose of the theocracy.
2. Revival in Israel necessitated divorce.
3. The issue at stake was spiritual not racial. Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Exodus 34:14-16.
4. The believer today cannot use this passage to divorce an unbelieving husband/wife. Such action would contradict 1 Corinthians 7:12-13.

However, this incident does indicate that a marriage can be dissolved. It may be assumed that the procedure of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was followed.

E. Malachi 2:13-16

1. Israelite men were divorcing their Jewish wives to marry idolatrous women.
2. Their sin is strongly rebuked.
3. The violation of a marriage covenant is a serious thing. To be faithless to one's companion is a sin.

God hates divorce. Divorce is an institution of man not God. But how does God hate divorce and permit it at the same time? He hates divorce because of the sin behind it, but not all divorces are sinful. If all divorces are sinful then God becomes guilty of promoting sin (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13).

F. Summary of Old Testament Teaching.

1. God instituted marriage not divorce.
2. God permitted and regulated divorce.
3. Divorce dissolved the original union. Sexual union alone does not constitute a marriage. A writ of divorcement (a legal proceeding) was necessary. Actually there were three things that could dissolve a marriage: (a)

Natural death;

(b) Execution for adultery (Deut. 22:22); (c) Divorce.

God regulated divorce for Israel's own protection. Legal proceedings were intended to discourage foolish and hasty divorce actions.

5. Remarriage was permitted where divorce was permitted.
6. Remarriage could be adultery without being bigamy or polygamy.

Remarriage to a first husband was forbidden. This was a restraint to serial and trial marriages and divorces (e.g., This would make one think twice about the possible finality that divorce could bring under such a regulation.

III. Divorce in the New Testament

A. Matthew 5:31-32

1. Divorces were easily obtained within Judaism. It was very prevalent and a real problem in the time of Jesus.

2. The context of this passage is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is developing the true meaning of the Law. Judaism had encrusted the Law with many man-made additions by the first century. “And it was said” is a reference by Jesus to the perversion of the Mosaic Law by religion.
3. The part of the Law under discussion here is Deut. 24:1-4. The Rabbinical teaching had taken this Old Testament passage as if divorce were a requirement. Actually it was only a regulation of divorce (see notes Deut. 24:1-4). The husband was not under any obligation to divorce his wife. Religion had shifted the whole emphasis of the passage.
4. Jesus sets Himself and therefore the authoritative explanation of the Law over against that of first century Judaism with an emphatic “I” (ego de lego).
5. Jesus says to divorce a wife for any reason but that of fornication is sin. He restricts grounds for divorce to marital unfaithfulness (the meaning of “fornication”).
6. The emphasis of Jesus is on the permanency of marriage. The emphasis is not on the exception but on the fact that marriage is a permanent relationship.
7. A distinction is made between fornication and adultery. Fornication (porneia) is a broad term which covers all types of sexual sins (incest, bestiality, homosexuality and lesbianism, as well as adultery). Adultery is a more specific term. In adultery the marriage covenant is always in view as well as sexual unfaithfulness. Fornication includes adultery, sodomy, etc.
8. But notice in this passage that even in the case of fornication divorce is not commanded. Divorce is not an automatic thing but fornication does provide a legitimate ground for divorce.
9. The husband is responsible for the adultery of his wife if she is divorced for any other reason than fornication. The one who marries her is guilty of adultery.
10. It also ought to be added that in that divorce is not commanded even in the case of fornication the Christian must be willing to forgive and seek to keep the marriage together. The Christian ought to be able to forgive their partner for unfaithfulness (Eph. 4:30,32).
11. I do not understand “fornication” to be referring to betrothal unfaithfulness. This is a common interpretation but an erroneous one. The idea of unfaithfulness during engagement period is totally foreign to the passage.
 - a. The Old Testament context of Matthew 5:31, 32 is Deut. 24:1-4. The subject of that passage is the marriage relationship not the betrothal period s(and the violation of such discovered on the first night of marriage).

- b. Fornication does not mean just pre-marital sex. This is an unwarranted limitation of the term porneia.
- c. Fornication by itself does not break a marriage relationship. It takes a b of divorcement (legal proceedings).

- 13. Remarriage is forbidden if the divorce is for any other reason than fornication.
- 14. Remarriage is permitted if the divorce had been for the cause of fornication. This is an inference but I believe a justified one.

B. Matthew 19:3-12

- 1. Again the context is similar to that of Matthew 5:31, 32. The Pharisees come to Jesus with their erroneous understanding of Deut. 24:1-4. They have shifted the emphasis from God's ideal of permanency in marriage to "how can a man get out of a marriage." This is the same danger that we face today by the way.
- 2. Jesus in response underscore the divine ideal. The Pharisees had missed the point of marriage. It was not something to get out of but to stay in.
- 3. The Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus in a contradiction (19:7). They said Moses commanded divorce. But Jesus said that Moses did not command divorce. He permitted it because of the hardness of their heart. There is a great difference between the two. Divorce was with God's permission. It was not His intention. Israel had rebelled against the initial design of God that marriage be a permanent relationship. So as a result Moses restricted divorce and regulated with careful legal proceedings. Deut. 24:1-4 was designed to discourage hasty divorces and protect the woman.
- 4. With the emphasis of Jesus being on the permanency of marriage, we are reminded again of the nature of any divorce. It is intrinsically a rebellion against the original design of God. This is true even though it is permitted on limited grounds.
- 5. Permission is granted for divorce on the grounds of fornication. This is what the Matthew 5:31, passage has stated (except for immorality, NASB).
- 6. Jesus condemns the man who divorces his wife for any other reason than fornication and remarries another person.
- 7. Jesus implies that remarriage is permitted if one has a legitimate divorce (for the cause of fornication). They are not committing adultery if they remarry having been divorced on grounds of fornication. This is an advancement over the Matthew 5:31, 32 passage.

C. Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18

1. This is a parallel passage to Matthew 19:3-12.
2. The stress again is on the divine ideal.
3. The exception clause is not included here. Why this omission? Some say that this is because the exception clause refers only to the Jews and to the betrothal period as it was practiced in Israel (Matthew being directed primarily to a Jewish audience; Mark and Luke, which also omits the exception clause, being directed to largely a gentile audience). However, if this is so then does that mean that the Sermon on the Mount is only for the Jews?

a. One attempt to resolve this problem has been to say that the exception clause was later added by some scribe. But this is no solution for it is a contradiction of the inspiration of the Bible.

b. Another attempt is that of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches. This position is that a reconciliation can be found by seeing the Matthew account as teaching separation not divorce. In other words, when fornication occurs one may seek a legitimate separation from “bed and from board.” But how can this be when both accounts in Matthew are tied in with the Deut. 24:1-4 passage where divorce is the issue? The idea of separation is foreign to the context.

c. I believe the best explanation is one of intention. Matthew’s purpose is to correct the misunderstanding of Deut. 24:1-4 by giving the only grounds for divorce and the right of remarriage. Mark and Luke emphasize the correction of the abuse of Deut. 24:1-4 by underscoring the sin involved in illegitimate divorce. Matthew’s additional information (a man may put away his wife for adultery and he may marry another when such divorce is consummated) is not contradiction by the silence of Mark and Luke on the matter.

4. In Mark the wife is seen as initiating the divorce.

D. I Corinthians 7:10-24

1. The Corinthian church was plagued with problems related to marriage and divorce. It seems to have been believed by some in the Corinthian church that marriage was a moral evil and so were asking the question, “ought I to dissolve my marriage since celibacy is a higher moral state?” Essentially the issue was (as it is today) can a Christian divorce a fellow Christian?

2. Paul deals with two different groups in these verses. The marriage of two believers (vv. 10, 11) and the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever (vv. 12-16).

3. To the first situation Paul says that there must be no divorce. The verb “should not leave” is chorize. It means to separate, i.e., divorce. Paul is summarizing the teaching of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. Christ taught that marriage is a permanent relationship (Matthew 19:10-12).
4. Paul doesn’t mention the exception clause of Christ in Matthew 5 and 19, because he is answering a question not giving a systematic treatise on divorce.
5. The point is simply this: In a marriage of two believers neither ought to dissolve the marriage by divorce. Don’t seek a divorce (the exception given by Jesus is not under discussion). If a divorce does take place both should remain unmarried and seek reconciliation to one another. They must remain unmarried if reconciliation is not possible.
6. Notice that when a divorce takes place on non-biblical grounds the result is an “unmarried” state. It is erroneous to say they are “still married in God’s sight.” Such a statement is not only wrong it is harmful.
7. Once again the ideal is stressed. The ideal is a permanent union.
8. The second group addressed is the mixed marriage, a marriage involving a believer and unbeliever. They were married when they were both unbelievers and now one has believed in Christ. What should the believing partner do in a situation like this?
9. The Lord Jesus Christ had not said anything specifically on this matter. Jesus did not give the last word on divorce. In the progress of revelation, there was something more to be added.
10. The believing partner is not to divorce his/her unbelieving partner (7:12, 13).
11. The believer cannot use Ezra 10 for a justification of divorce. He/she must not initiate a divorce on spiritual grounds. Paul gives three reasons why this must not happen:
 - a. The unbelieving husband/wife and children are sanctified by the believing partner. The believer in a home is a plus. It is to the spiritual advantage of the unbeliever whether they realize it or not.
 - b. The believer is called upon to make peace. Try to make the marriage work (“has called us to peace”). The believer should stay in a position to work on solutions.
 - c. The unbeliever may be saved (7:16).

12. If the unbeliever is unwilling to live with the believer, then let him leave (7:15). If the unbeliever deserts the believer, then the believer is not obligated to keep the marriage together. This then is a second ground for legitimate divorce, i.e., the willful desertion of the believer by the unbeliever.

13. Divorce is permitted in this situation and therefore remarriage is possible. The believer is “not under bondage.” The verb is *douloo*. All the bonds of marriage have been removed and he/she is a totally free person.

14. However, let’s not forget what the ideal is. That is the thing that one must try to hold onto. God wants us to have a permanent union with our marriage partner. The believer must work to maintain that.

Supplement Section

The Exception Clause

I. Vocabulary Clarification. The exception clause is a reference to the statement of Jesus in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 in which He says that there is one ground on which believers might divorce a spouse. The word, exception, means to leave out or a case that does not follow the general rule. The general rule in this case is that all divorce is an act of disobedience. The exception to this is divorce for the cause of fornication. Jesus states that there is only one ground for divorce among believers: “fornication,” or “sexual sin” (porneia).

II. Analysis of the Clause.

A. The exception clause, in Matthew 5:32, is literally “apart from a matter of fornication.”

B. The exception clause, in Matthew 19:9, is literally “not for fornication.”

C. Though the wording is slightly different in the Greek but the meaning is virtually the same. Our main concern is a determination of the meaning of the word “fornication.”

III. The Context of the Clause. In both Matthew 5 and 19, Jesus is stressing the importance of permanence in a marital relationship. He speaks to this issue against the background of easily obtained divorces in both the Jewish and Gentile world. Jesus seeks to restrict divorce. So the exceptive clause was not designed to promote divorce but was rather aimed at tightening a loose attitude toward marriage and divorce. Therefore, the exceptive clause was a part of an attempt to limit divorce not encourage it. This is seen in the response of the disciples to what Jesus said (Matthew 19:10). “The one-and-only exception, in their culture at that time, would be taken as a severe restriction upon divorce practices.”

IV. The Meaning of Porneia. The Greek for fornication is porneia. It has been translated various ways – “unchastity” (RS, NEB, NASB); “marital unfaithfulness” (NIV); “fornication” (KJV, LB, JB).

The noun porneia occurs twenty-six times in the New Testament. Mt. 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3; 19:2.

The noun pornos (fornicator) occurs ten times. 1 Cor. 5:9, 10, 11; 6:9; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 12:16; 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.

The noun porne (harlot) occurs twelve times. Mt. 21:31, 32, etc.

The verb porneuo (commit fornication) occurs eight times. 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:8; Rev. 2:14, 20; 17:2; 18:3, 9.

When one considers all these passages, the basic meaning of the word becomes apparent. Fornication refers to sexual sins of any and all sorts. It covers the spectrum of sexual sins – incest, bestiality, homosexuality and lesbianism, as well as adultery. In our modern legal use of the term, it is limited to sexual sins by unmarried persons. But his meaning must not be read back into the biblical term.

A brief word must be said about the meaning of “adultery.” In its biblical usage, adultery (moichao) is unfaithfulness toward one’s marriage partner. Adultery and fornication are not the same. Fornication refers to sexual sin. Adultery refers to violation of one’s marriage covenant by sexual sin.

All of this bears upon the exception clause in this way. The act of sexual sin (fornication) results in adultery (violation of marriage covenant). So Jesus’ permission to divorce a spouse is based on the violating act (sexual sin, porneia) not on its effect (adultery).

V. The Various Views on the Exception Clause.

A. Unfaithfulness during the betrothal period.

This is a very popular interpretation of the exceptive clause. It holds that Jesus permitted divorce and remarriage in the case of sexual sin during the engagement period. Since this has application only to the Jewish betrothal institution at the time of Christ and not to modern marriage, this interpretation does not allow for any grounds for divorce today.

There are some glaring weaknesses in this interpretation.

1. It violates the law of context. Jesus and the Pharisees were not discussing betrothal but marriage (Gen. 2:24; Deut. 24:1-4).
2. It violates the meaning of porneia (fornication). This betrothal thesis limits porneia to sexual sin before marriage. This is an artificial explanation without any contextual basis whatever.

B. Marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18.

According to this view, the “except for porneia” would refer to marriage within the prohibited relationships of Leviticus 18:6-18, i.e., marriage between near relatives. If one married a near relative in violation of Jewish law, he should seek an annulment. Beyond this all other divorce is disallowed.

This view like the betrothal thesis virtually eliminates any just cause for divorce today. This interpretation suffers from the same flaws as the betrothal theory.

C. Unlawful marriage with Gentile idolaters.

This interpretation is based upon the allowance for divorce in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:23-31, in order to keep the Jews from idolatry and apostasy.

In addition to the criticisms stated this view also violates Paul's command to the believing partner not to send the unbelieving partner away (1 Cor. 7:10, 12-13).

D. Sexual immorality resulting in adultery.

This I believe is the correct interpretation of "except for fornication." Fornication covers incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism, as well as adultery. Therefore, fornication is the ground upon which one may serve a bill of divorce. Notice I said may. Divorce is not commanded. The believers should be willing to forgive if he/she is so sinned against and should seek reconciliation.

VI. The Disruptive Nature of Fornication.

What is there about sexual immorality which makes it a just cause for divorce?

A. Fornication violates the purpose for which the body was designed (1 Cor. 6:13-20). The believer's body belongs to the Lord because he is in union with Christ. To take the body and commit immorality with it is spiritual infidelity. Sexual union is an intimate union and is to be the love expression between husband and wife. When sexual union with one who is not the wife/husband takes place, it is spiritual adultery and is a tragic "new union."

B. Fornication creates special problems. Fornication whether committed before or after marriage results in some unique personal and relational problems. There will be physical, mental, and spiritual problems that will interfere with the companionship one is to have with their husband/wife (e.g., communication problems). One's ability to respond to their marriage partner is seriously hindered by unlawful sexual activity because of the barriers thrown up.

C. Fornication does not dissolve a marriage. This is an important point. The act of fornication resulting in adultery does not by itself constitute a new marriage nor does it automatically dissolve an existing marriage. If it does happen then there must be repentance and forgiveness extended to the guilty partner.

E. Romans 7:1-3

1. Some attempt to use these verses to prove that only death can dissolve a marriage union. “Only when her husband dies is she free to be remarried. A second marriage while one’s spouse yet lives is adultery.”

2. Such an interpretation of this passage has several flaws:

a. It is reading into these verses more than Paul intended to say. Paul is using marriage as a picture of the Mosaic Law. His point is that death dissolves the marriage relationship. Therefore as death ends marital obligation so does my identification with the death of Christ end the believer’s obligation to the Law. In the death of the husband is seen the believer’s death to the Law.

b. To make Paul mean that nothing can break a marriage but death results in a contradiction to Christ’s words that man can put asunder by divorce what God has joined together.

c. Marriage is not under discussion in Romans 7:1-6 but rather one’s relation to the Law.

d. The fact that a passage does not include an exception which does occur elsewhere in Scripture does not negate the exception nor is it a contradiction to the exception. For example, the general truth of obedience to governmental leaders (Rom. 13:1) does not contradict the exception (when matters of conscience are involved, Acts 4:18-20).

e. To say that only death dissolves a marriage is to call all remarriages after divorce polygamy or polyandry “in God’s eyes.”

F. Summary of New Testament Teaching.

1. God’s ideal in marriage was and is one man, one woman, forever. This is clear and is the emphasis even in those passages where the possibility of dissolving a marriage is discussed.

2. It is possible to dissolve a marriage. This is possible through death and divorce.

In divorce, it is possible in one of two ways:

a. Legal procedure with biblical grounds.

b. Legal procedure with no biblical grounds.

3. The biblical grounds for divorce are:

- a. Fornication resulting in adultery
- b. Desertion on the part of the unbelieving partner.

4. Though there are biblical grounds for divorce, divorce is not required. In the case of fornication, the believer should admonish the offending partner to repent and forgiveness should be extended. Reconciliation is always the better way. The same is to hold true if the unbelieving partner leaves the believer. The believer should do all he/she can to hold the marriage together.

5. The absence of the exception clause in Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians 7 is not to be construed as a contradiction to it. The silence of Scripture on any given point does not negate its statements and teaching elsewhere.

6. Though it is possible for sinful man to shatter the ideal of God and it is possible for marriage relationships to be dissolved, such behavior is not according to the design of God.

IV. Remarriage

A. Remarriage in general is desirable and is not sinful in itself. Romans 7:3b; 1 Tim. 5:14; 1 Cor. 7:8, 9; 1 Cor. 7:39

B. Remarriage after divorce is not disallowed. Divorce does dissolve a marriage.

The exception clause allows it (Mt. 5:32; Mt. 19:9). Also, when Jesus was asked to comment upon divorce, it was in connection with the existing divorce law of Deut. 24:1-4. In that place, God allowed remarriage of the divorced partner.

2. The desertion of the unbelieving partner allows for it. 1 Cor. 7:15

C. Remarriage is allowed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28. All persons properly divorced may remarry.

D. Remarriage should not be called sin where God has allowed it. 1 Cor. 7:28

Remarriage was allowed in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 44:22 The exception proved the rule. If no one was allowed to marry a divorced person anyway, the prohibition would be pointless.

The believer is not permitted to remarry an unbeliever if all obligations have been met. 1 Corinthians 7:12-15; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

G. Remarriage of those divorced for causes other than fornication and desertion constitutes adultery. Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11-12.

1. This is not because they were “still married in God’s sight.”
2. This can be repented of and forgiven without disrupting married life.

Those who have been divorced and remarried must be accepted into the church members.

I. Remarriage is possible in view of the biblical words for divorce. E.G., Deut. 24:1- 3 – “bill of divorce” - “to cut off.” When used of a legal document, meant “to annul, make void.” Matthew 5:32 – set free, release, pardon; let go, send away, dismiss.

Remarriage does not in itself exclude a believer from an office or service in the church. 1 Tim. 3:2; 12; Titus 1:6 (See additional notes.)

1. Their service may be limited.

A public ministry does demand higher standards because of the Representative nature of the office.

Supplement Remarriage and Christian Service

1. Remarriage does not in and of itself disqualify one from an office in the church or from service in the church.
2. Divorce and remarriage may disqualify one from the office of elder or deacon or from other service in the local church.
3. The reason for such disqualification from these offices or certain types of service would be based upon such qualifications as “must be above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2) and also “must have a good reputation with outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7). Titus reiterates this by saying he “must be blameless” (Titus 1:6).
4. The church must consider the circumstances of his divorce and/or remarriage. Such factors also as the grounds of his divorce, the reputation he carries because of his divorce must be considered. It is possible that the circumstances of his divorce and/or remarriage may be such that a person for years afterward (perhaps even for the remainder of his life) would fail to qualify because of the bad reputation that he bears as a result.

5. Two things must be remembered in the consideration of qualifications for Christian service:

a. God does forgive all sins in Christ. 1 Cor. 6:9-11. The only unforgivable sin is the sin of unbelief.

b. Forgiveness does not clear one from every consequence of sin. There are social consequences to one's sin. One's service may be limited because of past sin.

To isolate divorce and/or remarriage as the only "sins" which would disqualify a man from a church office and/or service is to add to the Bible. Why is divorce singled out? What about drunkenness, murder, homosexuality, covetousness, etc.?

It is my opinion that though the qualification "a one woman kind of man" does not of itself exclude a remarried man from the office of overseer or deacon the additional qualification (in particular, "above reproach"; "blameless") may tend to eliminate many if not most remarried candidates from such offices.

In answer to the criticism that this is lowering the standards, it must be pointed out that it is not but is rather keeping them where God has put them. We have no right to raise standards where God has not put them.

Husband of One Wife

1 Timothy 5:9

1. Five Views:

a. Marriage to the Church View: Roman Catholic view: but not view of all Roman Catholics. "One wife" is the church. A clumsy attempt to protect the Romish doctrine of celibacy for priests.

b. Prohibition of Polygamy View and Marital Fidelity: Polygamy a problem in Paul's day.

c. Prohibition of Remarried Widowers View: Prohibition of second marriages.

d. Exclusion of Unmarried Overseers View: Only married men are eligible for office.

e. Prohibition of Divorce View: Prohibition of divorce or any other marital infidelity in persons chosen for the overseership.

Reasons for preferring Marital Fidelity View:

Paul was/is talking about what the pastor/bishop is not what he had been.

Married only once view proves too much (excludes widowers).

If Paul had meant “married only once” he could easily have said it.

To deny remarriage to a candidate for office of bishop or deacon is tantamount to denying remarriage to any man.

Marital fidelity view is consistent with the background of Paul’s day. (Temple prostitutes; companions/mistresses; polygamy.)

If not referring to marital fidelity, then no qualification in this matter in 1 Tim. 3:2-7.

Paul was concerned not about how many times a man had been married, but about how many wives he had!

Recovery from Divorce.

Introduction: Our concern now is to consider how one who is divorced should respond in a biblical way. It is not enough to say that “it’s all water under the bridge.” The believer must always be concerned with the question, “Am I meeting my biblical obligations?”

The first step to be taken after a divorce has taken place is intensive and extensive self-examination. “Have I sinned?” and “Have I repented of my sin?” “Did I have biblical grounds for divorce?” “Did I do my best to be a peacemaker?” “How did I contribute to the divorce?” “Have I wronged by ex-husband/wife?”

Genuine biblical repentance must be exercised if it is necessary. I John 1:9. I must acknowledge my sin before God in a spirit of contrition (Psalm 51).

If I have wronged anyone (my ex-husband, wife, in-laws, children, lawyer, etc.), I should seek their forgiveness. Mt. 18:21-35. It may be that I have been guilty of hurting and unkind words. If I have initiated the divorce on unbiblical grounds, then I must acknowledge that and ask forgiveness.

There are particular sins to which the divorced may be especially vulnerable. Some of these are:

Bitterness: Here is anger allowed to go unchecked. It will only fester and get worse unless I do something about it. I become the slave of the one toward whom I am bitter.

Revenge – Am I seeking to get back at the one who hurt me? This kind of sin can take many subtle forms. Watch out for this motive when working out a divorce settlement. Children can even become a weapon to get back at the former spouse.

Gossip – Spreading information whether false or true to others who are not a part of the solution.

Self-pity – Beware of going off into the “drunk” of feeling sorry for oneself. Am I blaming God for my problems? I had better look at the real cause of my difficulties, sin not God. God is great enough to use any problem but He does not sponsor sin. My divorce is not God’s fault.

If the divorce was for unbiblical reasons, the divorcee should remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:11). Be open to reconciliation and do all within your power to attain it. If and when the former spouse remarries, the remarriage (to someone else) may be considered. But this isn’t commanded in Scripture. Commit your future to the Lord and get life in biblical perspective.

If the divorce was for biblical reasons, the divorcee is free to remarry but only if all biblical obligations have been met (points 1-3 above). Though remarriage is permitted, it is not commanded. God could grant the gift of celibacy for a life of special service in the church of God. But even if the gift of celibacy is not given, it is a wise thing to remain unmarried for a while because of the danger of a “rebound marriage.”

Be alert to your vulnerability to sympathy and affection. You might mistake these for love.

Don’t allow your loss of “security” to cause you to find the next port in the storm. If you remarry for security only you may live to regret it.

It might even be wise to avoid dating right away. You have been wounded and may not be as objective about life and love as you ought to be.

The time to recover from a divorce is right away. By this I mean that biblical action must be taken immediately.

Learn from your past. Let the failures be stepping stones to a more consistently obedient life. Don’t sit around and brood but instead put your live on a God-honoring course. Learn from the past but don’t live in it.

Discipline yourself for godliness. Make spiritual growth a priority and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Develop a prayer life, spend time in the Word, be faithful to a Bible-teaching church, and seek out Christian friendships. Utilize God’s support system for rebuilding.

Consider what your spiritual gift(s) is/are and how it can be used more effectively. It is possible to focus so much on your own hurt and suffering that you can forget about others. Remember that the believer has been called to minister on behalf of the Lord.

Establish priorities and goals. Differentiate between what is good, better, and best. Set some goals and seek to implement them. Take up a new hobby, redo the living room, plant a garden. Don't just sit around reacting to everyone and everything.

Take a long hard look at the reasons for the failure of your marriage. Even though reconciliation may not be possible, good biblical reflection on the past can be productive. In what ways did you contribute to the divorce? What sinful habits can you now detect in your own life that you couldn't see before? Search out the Word of God on these matters and allow God to use the divorce to bring you to a better understanding of yourself and the ways of God. Eph. 4:22-24.

Another important aspect of recovery from divorce is the proper way to handle one's thought life. This is a particular problem if one's ex-spouse has either remarried or is dating around. A great battle will be fought with jealousy but the larger war that is waged is in the one in the mind. I can think about the things I want to think about and I do not have to become a slave to any thought that comes into my mind. In addition to following through on the previously suggested principles, the following steps should be taken:

Refuse to allow those thoughts of the past to impede your spiritual progress. Don't let them breed mental sins of jealousy, anger, revenge.

Don't dwell on things that you really can't do anything about. Get your mind in gear and go on to things which are productive. Phil. 4:8

Don't let your conversation get preoccupied with your previous marriage and spouse. Such things as long telephone conversations, old friends who drop by should not be allowed to victimize you. Take charge of the conversation and keep it from becoming gripe sessions or the beginning of a pity-party.

Try to keep your schedule as normal as possible. A lot of free time or rendezvous with another divorcee (who might be very bitter) may only serve to work you up into relapse of devastating proportions. Take some good biblical advice and "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." (Rom. 13:14).

The local church can do a lot to help the divorced in their recovery.

It can possibly prevent a divorce in the first place by staying one step ahead of possible divorce situations. This is done by believers bearing one another's burdens and reproving, rebuking and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine. Be sensitive to the needs of one another.

Church discipline should be implemented where necessary. Matthew 18:15-20. It could be that a private rebuke may keep a sin from spreading.

Accept the divorced into the life of the church. They should not be ostracized or treated as if they had some kind of disease. Even though the church may choose to exclude the divorced from certain offices, this should not give rise to harsh and unloving treatment.

The non-divorced in the church had been not be self-righteous about the divorced. Remember our Lord's parable on continual forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. And it is also possible that we have a telephone pole in our own eye and we are trying to get the speck of sawdust out of the eye of someone else.

Divorce and the Children

Introduction:

"I remember it was near my birthday when I was going to be 6 that Dad said at lunch he was leaving. I tried to say, "No, Dad, don't do it," but I couldn't get my voice out. I was too much shocked. All the fun things we had done flashed right out of my head and all the bad things came in, like when he had to go to the hospital with his bad back and when he got mad at me. The bad thoughts just stuck there. My life sort of changed in that moment. Like I used to be always happy and suddenly I was sad." *An 8 year-old girl.*

The children of divorce – the problem is formidable in numbers alone. There are currently 12 million children under the age of 18 whose parents are divorced – and all in all, around 1 million children a year suffer through the dissolution of their families. *Newsweek – Feb. 11, 1980.*

Movies and books have sought to portray this problem – "Kramer vs. Kramer"; prime-time television serials; many specialized books.

It is estimated that 45 percent of all children born in any given year will live with only one of their parents at some time before they are 18.

"Traditionally, the family has been the transmitter of social values. Will instability in the family make some social institutions unstable? The jury is still, out." *Arthur Norton, Chief of the Marriage and Family Branch of the Census Bureau.*

Sin does indeed complicate life and it is no more evident than in this area of the children and divorce. Does God's Word give any direction? I believe it does.

The Effects of Divorce Upon Children.

Ages 2 to 4.

Possibly great impact upon the infant but it probably won't start showing up until this age period.

Regression in development to a more dependent level.

Reversion to diapers, demanding to be fed.

Possible effect upon child's sexual development.

Guilt – "I am responsible for daddy leaving mama."

Ages 6 to 8

Some of the same problems mentioned above but with additional things such as fear.

Many experts believe that this is the most critical age for children of divorce.

Depression and general sadness.

Attempt by boys to take the place of their father as protector.

Ages 8 to 12

Anger directed toward the parent which the child thinks to be the one who initiated the divorce.

This anger can be seen in the classroom or at church.

May form close relationship with an adult outside the home.

Teenagers.

The loyalty dilemma. "Mom doesn't want me to like Dad, and vice versa."

Attempt to play one parent off against the other in order to get what they want.

Anger, depression and escape. Teenage girl may try to find security and affection in her date life.

Steps to take to help children adjust to a divorce.

("Divorce and the Children" by H. S. Vigeneo and Anne Claire)

Allow the children time to heal.

Don't reveal all your emotions.

Treat your children as persons.

Be honest. Explain things.

Don't destroy the other parent.

Don't run interference for your former mate.

My Own List:

Make sure that you have dealt with you own attitudes. If you are a bitter person, it will affect your children.

Along with this, engage in some serious self-examination (see notes on Recovery from Divorce).

Become conscious of the special needs of your child.

Give them the spiritual training they need. Don't get so absorbed in your own problems that you forget their spiritual needs.

Don't try to give them unnecessary time and attention. Beware of the attempt to "work off your guilt by serving them."

If you have the right to remarry, don't rush into a date life without adequately preparing the children for it.

See to it that you and the children utilize the local church as God's support system. A good Bible-teaching church helps to meet many needs (caring, security, authority, prayer, etc.)

Guidelines for Blended Marriages.

My concern here is for the family with a mixture of children from previous marriages.

In a mature way, come to some agreements with ex-spouses as to visiting rights, child support, special occasions, etc. Get as much in writing as necessary and work at acting responsibly and cooperately. Don't do further damage to the children.

Do not allow the children to manipulate you or your ex-spouse (e.g., "If you don't let me get that bike, I'm going to live with daddy.")

Let them know what your expectations are and what their responsibilities are.

Discuss this potential problem with your ex-spouse.

Ask your ex-spouse to cooperate with you in your disciplinary procedures and principles. It sure will help if the children are not subjected to conflicting approaches to responsibilities and discipline.

Beware of the sin of partiality. Don't give preferential treatment to your biological children over your adopted children. Work at being consistent. Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21

Don't take out your emotional frustrations on your adopted children.

Work closely with your present husband/wife in understanding your adopted children. You need to become aware of their special needs, their personalities, strengths, and weaknesses.

Commit each child to the Lord and treat them as loans from God. Psalm 127:3

Vigeneno and Claire give 10 suggestions:

Become aware.

Clarify the issues.

Comfort.

Encourage them.

Continue to be patient.

Recognize their emotions and share your own.

Keep the faith.

Take time for family fun.

Measure responsibility.

Let everything be done in love.

Some Biblical examples of "blended" marriages:

Genesis 21

Sarah – Isaac; Hagar – Ishmael

2 Samuel

David's family

Loose-Ends and What-Ifs.

For parents and grandparents whose children or grandchildren are involved in a divorce:

Divorce prevention training must begin in a child's life (day one). If you come from a broken home, take special efforts to see that such a chain is broken by you. What things contributed to your father and mother's divorce? Deal with them in your own life. Parents cannot guarantee that divorce will not happen to their children but much can be done to fulfill your biblical obligations to them.

If your child becomes involved in a divorce, let this be the occasion for you to carefully examine your own life (attitudes, relationships, etc.) to see if any sinful patterns were a contributing factor. Our children are responsible for their own behavior but we parents are accountable to God for the way we reared them.

If you see a broken home in the making, ask God for wisdom as to how you can counsel your child. You may need to ask their forgiveness for failing them in some way. Utilize the principles of Galatians 6:1-5:

Seek to restore a sinning brother (or child) in a spirit of gentleness.

Bear one another's burdens.

Examine your own work.

They are finally responsible for themselves.

If you as grandparents choose to help with your grandchildren, use the time to train them in the ways of God. Remember the part Timothy's grandmother played in his life (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

Some questions and answers:

Do the New Testament principles and restrictions on marriage, divorce and remarriage apply to believers and unbelievers alike?

In a general way they do. For instance the marriage of two unbelievers is a legitimate marriage in the sight of God. The procedural elements in a marriage (a legal ceremony, etc.) are binding upon believer and unbeliever but only the believer can be required/admonished to fulfill the principles of marriage (love your wife as Christ loved the church, etc.).

Marriage is a foundational institution and is for the good of society. When a society attacks marriage, it is committing suicide.

Since marriage was instituted by God, man does not have the right to set it aside nor does he have the right to encourage the dissolution of marriages (by easy divorce).

Is a marriage valid without a marriage ceremony?

A couple is responsible to go through a culturally approved and legally sanctioned ceremony, if one is available.

We are to be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 2:13). The marriage ceremony is such an institution and should be used for that reason alone.

Since marriage is to be held in honor by all (Heb. 13:4), the marriage ceremony should not be side-stepped.

A marriage is made up of two things: A covenant (exchanging of vows and promises made) and sexual intercourse.

The forms of a marriage ceremony may vary. A couple does not have to have a ceremony in a church to make it a "better marriage."

Is it necessary for a Christian to divorce his/her spouse if sexual unfaithfulness takes place?

No.

Though divorce in such a case is permitted after all biblical obligations are met, the better way is forgiveness and mutual commitment to a better marriage. God does not encourage divorce; He only permits it. There is a difference.

Try to perpetuate the ideal through a permanent relationship together.

However, the Scriptures recognize "levels" of non-sinful behavior (1 Cor. 7:38) approaching God's ideal.

Is the Old Testament practice of the parents arranging the marriage of their children God's ideal?

No. It was a cultural practice and not mandated by God.

There were love marriages in Israel. The young man could make his preferences known (Gen. 34:4; Judges 14:2) and on rarer occasion the girl could even take some initiative (1 Sam. 18:20).

It is not right to say that the daughter had no say as to whom she had to marry.

Some What-Ifs.

What if in a marriage of two believers, one is unfaithful and refuses to repent and even continues to live in sin?

Biblical procedures must be followed as developed in Matthew 18:15-20. If and when the church disciplines the sinning partner, then the partner who has been faithful may consider divorce. But it must be stressed that all biblical obligations must be met.

What if a believers is married to an unbeliever (one became a believer after they were married) and the unbeliever is hostile to the believer, won't let them go to church, harasses them and ridicules them and throws off on Christianity?

The answer to this dilemma is found in 1 Cor. 7:12:

The believer does not have biblical grounds for leaving the unbeliever.

The believer ought to make the best of it and should not be the one to initiate a divorce (1 Cor. 7:12-16, three reasons).

If the believer does divorce the unbeliever, it is an act of rebellion against God. The believer should repent and must remain unmarried.

What if two unbelievers are married and one becomes a Christian and the unbeliever leaves?

Guidance is found in 1 Cor. 7:12-16.

If the unbelieving partner willfully deserts the believer then the believer is "not under bondage." The believer is free to divorce the unbeliever and is free to remarry.

What if in a mixed marriage (a believer and unbeliever) the unbeliever wants his wife to take care of his home, raise his children, etc., but he wants to run around with other women (he takes long weekend)?

She has grounds for divorce. Matthew 19:9

Divorce is rejection of God's ideal.

She should remain and be a positive influence on her husband. She must extend forgiveness. Matthew 18:21-35.

She must understand the purposes of God in suffering and how to biblically respond to maximum pressure in life. 1 Pet. 3 & 4

She does not have the right to refuse sexual relations.

This is a difficult thing to suggest and is easier said than done but it is the obligation of the believer. She may be instrumental in winning him to the Lord. God's grace is sufficient.

What if a divorced person wants to remarry and the divorce occurred before their conversion.

The biblical guidelines for divorce and remarriage apply to the unbeliever as well as the believer. Marriage was instituted for the entire human race.

Certainly all sins are forgiven at salvation. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22

In that the former partner has remarried someone else, the believer is free to remarry and enter into a Christian marriage.

If the former spouse is still unmarried, go to them and explain the new situation (conversion and desire for a Christian marriage). Pray for their salvation and try to evangelize them. Seek reconciliation. If the unbeliever does not wish to remarry the believer is free (1 Cor. 7:15).

What if after a divorce, one of the partners remarries and the divorce was for unbiblical reasons?

The act of adultery has been committed upon remarriage.

If this has been done by a believer, they must repent.

Upon repentance, there must be an ongoing effort to build a Christian marriage.

What if a person wants to remarry and their divorce was on biblical grounds (fornication or desertion by an unbelieving partner)?

Remarriage is neither commanded or forbidden.

Reconciliation is the ideal to strive for if it is at all possible.

If reconciliation is not possible, then work on building oneself up in Christ and pray for wisdom in thinking about remarriage. Don't be in a rush. Get into the Word of God and develop your own convictions about remarriage. You don't want to base your convictions on what others say.

Summary and Conclusion.

To the married – Work at building a marriage which honors the Lord and is a clear reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. Bring your children up

in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When conflicts arise between husband and wife, handle them biblically. Ask the questions – Am I meeting my Scriptural obligations? Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Practice forgiveness and learn how love behaves.

To the divorced, but not remarried – Study the teaching of the Word of God on divorce and remarriage. Come to some Scriptural convictions on these matters. Become a part of a Bible-teaching church and seek wise counsel. Don't rush into any remarriage without a biblically-informed conscience. If you are having personal problems, remarriage is not going to solve them. Only obedience to the Lord will bring happiness not just finding a new husband or wife. Learn to serve the Lord where you are. 1 Cor. 7:10-24

To the divorced and remarried – Do not try to think and live as if the past never happened. Find out how God wants you to handle the past. This will be the only way to start building for the future. If you divorced for unbiblical reasons then confess that sin to the Lord if you are a believer. If you have recently come to know Christ as Savior and your divorce and remarriage took place before your conversion, God has granted forgiveness in your acceptance of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Become aware of the special problems connected with a blended marriage (if you are not already) and avail yourself to the grace of God and be occupied with Christ.

To the church – The church must be willing to forgive those whom God has forgiven. It must not be self-righteous in this matter of divorce and remarriage.

Treat divorced people on a grace basis like God treats us all. Our scale of sin does not always coincide with God's. We may need to get the telephone pole out of our own eye before we attempt to get the speck of sawdust out of someone else's eye. What about pride, hypocrisy, gossip, slander, prejudice, etc.?

Divorce and remarriage will have a limiting effect on one's service in the local church. This doesn't mean that such people are not forgiven. It just means that sin does bear some consequences. The extent to which the local church decides to limit the divorced in positions of service should be prayerfully, carefully and Scripturally determined putting into office only those who are above reproach, of a good reputation, and blameless.