

Doctrine of Divorce

1. The Bible refers to divorce in only eleven passages.
2. God divorced or put away backsliding Israel.
 - *Isaiah 50:1 Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.*
 - *Jeremiah 3:8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.*
3. The high priest of Israel was not to marry a divorced woman.
 - *Leviticus 21:14 A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.*
4. The divorced daughter of a priest was allowed to return home provided she had no children.
 - *Leviticus 22:13 But if the priest's daughter be a widow, or divorced, and have no child, and is returned unto her father's house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's meat: but there shall no stranger eat thereof.*
5. The word of a divorced woman was binding.
 - *Numbers 30:9 But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her.*
6. The Lord brought to the attention to the people of His day that they had heard that if a man wanted to put away his wife, he should give her a writing of divorcement..
 - *Matthew 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:*
7. Jesus taught that a person who divorces his wife for any reason except for adultery, caused her to commit adultery if she remarried.
 - *Matthew 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*
8. The Law of Moses provided for a man to divorce his wife for "*some uncleanness in her*".

- *Deuteronomy 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*
9. A woman who was divorced and remarried could not return to her first husband if a second divorce took place.
- *Deuteronomy 24:3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; 4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.*
10. When questioned as to why Moses gave a bill of divorcement, Jesus explained it was because of the hardness of the human heart.
11. From the beginning God did not intend for divorce to take place.
- *Matthew 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*
 - *Mark 10:4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*
12. Yet for the hardness of heart God permitted divorce.
13. There are a limited number of passages in the New Testament which deal with this subject. The following Scriptures are appealed to for understanding:
- *Matthew 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*
 - *Matthew 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*
 - *Mark 10:11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.*

- *Luke 16:18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.*
- *Romans 7:1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? 2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.*
- *1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. 5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. 6 But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. 7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. 8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. 10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: 11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. 12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13 And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. 15 But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. 16 For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? 17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. 21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. 22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. 23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. 24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God. 25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. 27 Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. 28 But*

and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you. 29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; 30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; 31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. 32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. 34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction. 36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. 37 Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. 38 So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. 39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. 40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

14. The absence of many passages on this topic may suggest the simplicity of a holy standard with which the New Testament church should be identified.

15. In summary it may be stated that:

- Christians have a right to marry but only in the Lord. *1 Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.*
- Christians have no right to violate the Laws of the Lord by living together without legal bonding. Such activity is fornication. The word fornication in the Hebrew is *zanah* (*zaw-naw*). *Zanah* comes from a primitive root, "to be highly-fed, and therefore wanton." It does mean to commit adultery, usually of the female and less often, fornication, or sexual activity among the unmarried. In the New Testament the word fornication is *porneia* and covers a wide range of sexual activity to include illicit relationships between those who are married, relationships between those who are not married, and incest. The biblical command is to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18). When the church of Corinth became associated with the sin of fornication based upon the lifestyle of its members, Paul wrote the people a shocking letter to stop such practices and administer church discipline (1 Cor. 7:2). The apostle was grieved over those who did not repent (2 Cor. 12:21).

- Christians who marry should not get a divorce.
 - When a divorce takes place in the life of a Christian, a remarriage cannot take place without sin. Therefore, in order to avoid more sin, remarriage is prohibited.
16. Such a position is simple and powerful because when practiced it brings stability to a society.
 17. Such a position is hated by human nature because it hold individuals to a high level of accountability.
 18. When people stop loving each other and start hurting each other, the human mind must find a way to justify evil attitudes and actions such as divorce. One way to justify sinful behavior is to tell each other that it is really right to do wrong. What God has joined together, individuals may tear apart (Matt. 19:6).
 19. So freely were people tearing apart the institution of marriage with a simple piece of paper that Jesus felt compelled to remind His generation that: *"anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness causes her to become an adulterous, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."*
 20. It does not matter what translation is read, the interpretation of these words remains just as strong. Jesus said that if a man will divorce his wife he in effect is the one who caused her to go out and find another man and live with him thereby in essence commit adultery. If a man divorces his wife because she is found to be sexually unfaithful, he does not cause her to commit adultery. Why? Because she has already committed adultery. She has already been unfaithful. Therefore, the husband cannot cause what the wife has consented to.
 21. For people who have been blessed with a good marriage, for people who have found a faithful partner, there is no problem whatsoever with these words of Christ. We do not think the words of Christ are unwise or unfair. We do not think the standard is too high. We see the value and the Divine wisdom of the teachings of Jesus. We believe that a man should not divorce his wife. We believe that a man who marries a divorced woman really is going to be with another man's wife and so in essence commits adultery. However, who is brave enough to stand with Jesus and to state plainly what is happening in a society of fallen humanity? Who will say what is implied: divorce and remarriage is simply another way to practice polygamy? Serial divorce and remarriage is just another way to get rid of one person for another without regard for the Moral Law of God.
 - *Exodus 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.*
 22. A church is wise to have a simple policy: We will not perform remarriages following a divorce! A church is wise to say that, *"As long as a spouse of a divorced person lives, we will not perform a remarriage. We will stand with Jesus and not cause a man to commit adultery by marrying her who is put away or divorced."* If a spouse has died there is biblical permission for remarriage.

- *1 Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.*
23. Such a strong position seems to go contrary to the gospel of redeeming grace. How can the church talk about forgiveness, redemption, and restoration if remarriage after divorce for incompatibility is not allowed? Is the church more harsh than God?
24. Such a strong position against remarrying divorced people seems so unloving and unreasonable. It seemed this way to the disciples who said in breathless wonder and anger: If the case of the man be so to his wife, it is not good to marry (Matt. 19:10)! The Lord was taking away the male superiority and authority over a woman by restricting legitimate divorce for one cause and the disciples found the removal of their male authority offensive. But Jesus did not retreat and neither should the church. Jesus frankly admitted that the principles of the people in His kingdom were much higher than the principles practiced by the world. The Lord said plainly: All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given... He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matt. 19:11-12).
25. The reason why so many cannot receive this saying of Jesus is because it strikes at the very practice and belief system of the world. People who have divorced their wives, wives who have divorced their husband, people who have blissfully remarried and have had children feel condemned by these comments of Christ.
26. There are only three options by way of response to the teaching of Jesus on divorce.
- A person can obey the gospel mandate and live by the known will of the Lord. Obedience would include:
 - ❖ The right to marry a believer.
 - ❖ A commitment to marriage vows and if something happens
 - ❖ A refusal to remarry until death separates the relationship.
 - A fundamental rejection of the plain meaning of the teaching of Jesus. Divorce is rationalized and justified. The Word of God is held in disregard on this matter. People who are religiously inclined tend to adopt this position and pretend no wrong has been done.
 - Repent. Biblical repentance means a recognition of what the perfect will of God is and humble confession that it has been violated. Repentance also calls for a support of the biblical teaching even if self has violated it.
27. For those who find themselves remarried, the counsel is not to separate. The past cannot be undone. God can still bless and honor a commitment. But there should be some time of confession of having violated the will of God regardless of how it feels—good or bad.
28. Remarriage and divorce are not unpardonable sins. After repentance and confession the grace of God is abundant. Love will still cover a multitude of sins.