

Jesus, The Bible, Divorce and Remarriage

Mark 10:1-12

Introduction: 1) Few issues have caused me more grief, soul searching and study than what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. In addition to the dozens of books and audios I have on the subject, I have 4 large files that date back just to the year 2000 that are 4 inches thick.

2) With divorce being so common in our own day many ministers ignore or avoid the subject to keep from hurting feelings and causing conflict. Some believe the Bible is no longer relevant to the issue in a world of no-fault divorce, the pill, “living together” and same sex relationships.

3) One cannot deny that the Church as a whole has a dismal and embarrassing track record in this area. Many believers are as casual about divorce and remarriage as are their lost friends and neighbors. In a culture that bears proudly the motto, “I have the right to be happy,” “serial polygamy” is considered a right and quite normal. Never mind that bodies are strewn everywhere, especially the children, and that happiness is even more elusive for those in subsequent marriages. Say what you want, facts remain a hard thing to deny. Just listen, as one of thousands of examples, to a poem penned by a little girl that won a poetry contest in the 9-13 age category in a town in New Jersey in 1999,

The Monster

The monster's here
The monster's there
The monster is just everywhere.
In my milk,
In my tea,
Doesn't it ever think of me?
Mom's here, Dad's there,
And I'm just not anywhere!
How can I say this,
Without any force;
The monster is called
Divorce!

4) Divorce, we now know, is even more traumatic than losing a spouse or parent by death. John Piper is right, “Death is usually clean pain. Divorce is usually dirty pain.” (“What God Had Joined Together, Let Not Man Separate”, Part 1, 6-24-07).

5) Dirty and destructive! “The American Family In Crises Research by the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life uncovered some disturbing facts. The divorce rate among evangelicals is almost the same as that of nonchurched people. One million U.S. children see their parents divorce yearly. The majority of children in America have fewer than 10 minutes of significant and meaningful conversation with their parents each week. If you remove the mother, you can measure this statistic in seconds.” (Pastor’s Weekly Briefing, in Religious Market Update, The Foster Letter, page 1, 08-10-2002).

6) Kelly Clarkson, 1st American Idol winner, saw her parents divorce at age 6. Its effect? Her own words in an interview: “I know people probably think I’ve been heartbroken, because of the stuff I’ve sung and written,” she says. “I love my friends and my family. But I have never said the words ‘I love you’ to anyone in a romantic relationship. I shouldn’t be a mother at all, because I’d be horrible. I’m not willing to be that selfless. I’m not keen on marriage. Men come and go.” Recalling her own parents’ divorce when she was just 6, Clarkson acknowledges that she fears betrayal. “When it comes to certain parts of my life, I won’t allow myself to be vulnerable at all. I have a lot of trust issues. I don’t let many people in.” Making a relationship work, she says, requires too much effort. “Love is something you work at. It doesn’t come easily. There are going to be bad days. You are going to have to work at loving someone when they are being an idiot. People think they’re just going to meet the right guy.” She laughs. “Don’t be ridiculous.” (*The Week*, 6-29-07).

Its effect? Listen to the words of her blockbuster hit “Because of You,” a reflection on the pain and fallout of divorce. The video has had over 18 million viewings.

Because of You
By Kelly Clarkson
Album: Breakaway (2004)

I will not make the same mistakes that you did
I will not let myself cause my heart so much misery
I will not break the way you did
You fell so hard
I've learned the hard way, to never let it get that far

Because of you
I never stray too far from the sidewalk
Because of you
I learned to play on the safe side
So I don't get hurt

Because of you
I find it hard to trust
Not only me, but everyone around me
Because of you
I am afraid

I lose my way
And it's not too long before you point it out
I cannot cry
Because I know that's weakness in your eyes
I'm forced to fake a smile, a laugh
Every day of my life
My heart can't possibly break
When it wasn't even whole to start with

Because of you
I never stray too far from the sidewalk
Because of you
I learned to play on the safe side
So I don't get hurt
Because of you
I find it hard to trust
Not only me, but everyone around me
Because of you
I am afraid

I watched you die
I heard you cry
Every night in your sleep
I was so young
You should have known better than to lean on me
You never thought of anyone else

You just saw your pain
 And now I cry
 In the middle of the night
 For the same damn thing

Because of you
 I never stray too far from the sidewalk
 Because of you
 I learned to play on the safe side
 So I don't get hurt
 Because of you
 I tried my hardest just to forget everything
 Because of you
 I don't know how to let anyone else in
 Because of you
 I'm ashamed of my life because it's empty
 Because of you
 I am afraid

Because of you
 Because of you

- Now, what I would like to do is survey the Bible and see exactly what it says about divorce and remarriage. Then I want us to note the different perspectives held on divorce and remarriage by those who accept the full authority of the Bible. Then, we will conclude with some final observations from Mark 10:1-12 as well as some practical points of application. This study demands our most careful and humble efforts. It is treacherous territory.
- The historical context of this issue is instructive as two competing rabbinic schools of thought were present in Jesus' day.
 - 1) The more conservative school followed Rabbi Shammai and said the only ground for divorce was the indecency of adultery (sexual immorality).
 - 2) The more liberal school followed Rabbi Hillel and said divorce could be granted for “any indecency” which included many more causes beyond adultery.

- The Pharisees in that day, for the most part, followed Rabbi Hillel, made divorce easy and wanted it to stay that way. So they come to Jesus “to test him” (v. 2). Four times this word “test” is used in Mark. Three times it is applied to the Pharisees (8:11; 10:2; 12:15). The other is to Satan (1:13)! As Satan twisted Scripture, so did these religious leaders. Here, they are doing it again.
- Jesus was, therefore, thrust into a debate like many of us are today. So, let’s try and get a handle on all this. As we shall see at the end of our study, the Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce, but Jesus wanted to talk about marriage and God’s divine blueprint. Jesus knew His Moses, the Pharisees didn’t!

I. Divorce and Remarriage: A Look At The Key Biblical Text With Theological Observations.

1) Gen 2:18-25: “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- Marriage is a good gift from a great God to be enjoyed. Sex is also a part of this good gift.

- God’s design is one man for one woman for a lifetime (unless separated by death; Rom 7:1-3).
- Marriage is the joining of two bodies, the conjoining of two wills, the bonding of two minds, and the union of two sets of God-given emotions.
- Marriage is sacred because it reflects the spiritual union of Christ and His Church, the believer and His Savior (Eph. 5:21-33). As Jesus would never divorce His bride, a spouse should never divorce their mate. “The ultimate meaning of marriage is the representation of the covenant keeping love between Christ and His church” (Piper).

2) Deuteronomy 24:1-4: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.”

- Though the Bible never condones divorce, it does recognize the reality of divorce (cf. also Is. 50:1; Jer. 3:1, 8-9).
- The allowance of a bill of divorce provides regulation and is a concession for the protection and welfare of an innocent victim (in the historical context, a woman’s “put away” status left her in a precarious situation, perhaps leading to either starvation or prostitution).
- Remarriage to one’s former spouse after marrying another is strictly forbidden.

3) Ezra 10:2-4, 10-12: “And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.” “And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now then make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, It is so; we must do as you have said.”

- This appears to be a unique situation (though nowhere does God give a direct command to divorce. The text may be recording their activity but not affirming it.)
- Some believe polygamy was an issue, though the text does not explicitly say this.
- In the best light, this is an exceptional act eliminating the greater of two evils: defilement through mixed marriages which led to idolatry.

4) Malachi 2:13-16: “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, for what reason? Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce, Says the Lord, the God of Israel, and him who

covers his garment with wrong, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

- Malachi wrote during the time of Ezra.
- God hates divorce. It is never His perfect will. (Is this perhaps a counter to the activity recorded in Ezra?)

5) Matthew 19:1-12: “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for “any” cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

- Jesus affirms God’s original design for marriage.
- Jesus states that divorce is the result of sin and the hardness of men’s hearts.

- Jesus says divorce is permitted in a case of sexual immorality (viewed only in a Jewish “betrothal” context by some).
- Jesus seems to imply permission to remarry though this is not clearly stated (19:9-12).

6) Mark 10:1-12

- This passage parallels Matthew 19:1-12 but it is more abbreviated.
- There is an important omission of the words “except for sexual immorality” in vv. 11-12.
- The omission is because 1) the betrothal view of Matt. 19:1-12 is correct and this gospel, being written to Romans and not Jews would not need to address the exception clause or 2) Mark’s account is simply a summation of the more lengthy account of Matthew and assumes the “except for sexual immorality” understanding.

7) Luke 16:18: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

- This is an even more concise account of the Matt. 19 and Mark 10 passages.
- The last point under Mark 10:1-12 also applies here.

8) Romans 7:1-3: “Or do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.”

- Paul reaffirms (like Jesus) God’s original design for marriage.
- The death of a spouse is clearly the only legitimate instance in which God advocates remarriage.

9) 1 Corinthians 7:7-9; 10-16; 39-40: “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?” “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wished, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.”

- Paul affirms the positive nature of the single life.
- Paul says it is better to marry than to burn with lust (and possibly fall into sexual immorality).
- God’s desire for troubled marriages is always reconciliation.
- God’s desire for those separated in marriage is to be reconciled or remain separated.

- Desertion by an unbelieving spouse permits divorce and, it seems, grants permission for remarriage (again, the text is silent, though some believe the summation of vv. 39-40 rules out remarriage).

II. Some Basic Observations About Divorce and Remarriage From A Survey of Scripture.

- 1) In dealing with this difficult issue, our goal must be to be biblical and not emotional in our position. We should also emphasize prevention and not be reactionary. The latter is difficult, especially for those who have experienced the pain of divorce in some way.
- 2) God's intent is one man joined to one woman for a lifetime. This is His perfect will for every marriage. Gen. 2:18-25
- 3) God hates divorce. Mal. 2:13-16
- 4) God's desire is that troubled marriages would always be reconciled. Divorce is never commanded or desired by God. Separation is sometimes deemed wise (1 Cor. 7:10-11).
- 5) I believe divorce may be biblically permissible in the cases of:
 - a) sexual immorality
 - b) desertion by an unbeliever
 - c) For some, if the divorce was pre-conversion (2 Cor. 5:17). I hold this view. Again, reconciliation is God's first desire. Where reconciliation is not possible, permission to remarry in the Lord may be allowed (though it is not expressly stated).
- 6) Divorce and remarriage are not sanctioned for reasons other than sexual immorality or desertion by an unbeliever. However, some would say that it seems that it would be better for one still to marry than to a) commit sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:9) or b) be unduly burdened and oppressed in a single state (Deut. 24:1-4). However, it is clear that God would encourage a single status and indeed He commends it as better (1 Cor. 7). The single looks to God in faith to 1) provide self-control and 2) meet one's needs.

III. Four Major Views on Divorce And Remarriage.

1. Patristic (Church Fathers) View (“patristic” refers to the early church fathers):

The exception clause “except for fornication: (sexual immorality, *porneia*) in Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:9-10 qualifies only the verb “put away” and not the remarriage clause. Hence, divorce was allowed for adultery only, and if it did occur for this reason, remarriage was not allowed. This view basically teaches: Divorce is allowed for adultery only. No remarriage is allowed. Those holding this view note: 1) there is no expressed statement for remarriage and 2) the nearness of the early church Fathers to the apostles.

2. Protestant-Evangelical View:

The exception clause “except for fornication” (sexual immorality) qualifies both “put away” and “marry another.” Thus, divorce is allowed for sexual immorality and remarriage is granted to the innocent party. This view basically teaches: Divorce is allowed for adultery and desertion by an unbelieving spouse with no possibility of reconciliation. Remarriage to a believer is permissible for the innocent party. Problems: The reaction of the disciples, “if such is the case, it is better not to marry,” does not seem to be explained as well by this view. This is also an argument from silence.

3) Betrothal View:

The exception clause means “premarital sexual intercourse” in the case of a man and woman who were betrothed. Jewish betrothal was a legal contract which could only be broken by divorce or death. It was more than an engagement but not a sexually consummated marriage. This view is said to better explain the disciples’ reaction upon hearing Jesus’ words. This view basically teaches: Divorce is allowed only for unfaithfulness during the betrothal period. If adultery was committed after the marriage, then divorce was not allowed for any reason.

Problems:

- 1) The technical meaning given to the phrase “sexual immorality” as “premarital sexual intercourse” during the betrothal period is unknown elsewhere in the Bible or in Greek literature.
- 2) The context of Deut. 24, which is the Old Testament passage forming the foundation of Jesus’ statements in Matt. 5 and 19, shows that the wife was not a betrothed wife.
- 3) This view makes the word “wife” in Matt. 19:7 and 8 refer to a wife after the marriage has been consummated, while the word “wife” in verse 9 is said to refer to a betrothed wife. The context seems to point to a wife who is already married.
- 4) **Unlawful Marriage View:**

This view takes “sexual immorality” in the exception clause to refer to incestuous marriages (Lev. 18:6-18). This view basically teaches: Divorce is allowed for those marriages within the prohibited degrees of kinship proscribed in Lev. 18:6-18.

Remarriage is usually not allowed, though there seems to be some differences of opinion on this.

Problems: The technical meaning of “incest” given to “sexual immorality” does not seem to fit the total context of the passage.

IV. The Teaching Of Paul On Divorce – 1 Corinthians 7.

Paul does not address the subject of divorce for adultery because Jesus had already spoken to that. He takes up the questions by the Corinthians on the subject of divorce for reasons other than adultery, specifically desertion.

In 1 Cor. 7:10-11, Paul says that a husband and a wife who are both Christians are not to divorce, but if they do, they are not to remarry.

In 1 Cor. 7:12-16, Paul addresses the problem of a saved spouse who is married to an unsaved spouse. If the unsaved party departs, the saved party is “not under bondage” in such cases. “Not under bondage” can mean: 1) free to divorce, 2) free to divorce and remarry, or 3) is not bound to try and stay with the unbelieving spouse, but if the unbeliever departs, he or she is not allowed to divorce and remarry.

As a result of the above survey, several positions on the subject of divorce are possible today:

- 1) Divorce is never permitted in the Scripture for any reason.
- 2) Divorce is permitted for adultery only, but remarriage is not allowed.
- 3) Divorce is permitted for adultery and desertion of an unbelieving partner, but remarriage is not permitted.
- 4) Divorce is permitted for adultery or desertion of an unbelieving partner, and remarriage to a believer is granted to the innocent party. (Those who believe the Bible allows for remarriage do so on the grounds of the exception clause in Matthew and the suggestion that if God grants divorce to the innocent party, by his grace he would also grant permission to remarriage.)
- 5) Divorce is permitted in the case of an incestuous marriage.
- 6) Divorce is permitted in the case of the divorce taking place prior to one’s conversion and there is no possibility of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17 is the basis of this position).

V. A Summation of Evangelical Positions on Divorce and Remarriage (after sexually consummated marriage).

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
Divorce Initiate By Non-Believers	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Physical Adultery is Grounds	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Physical Abuse or Abandonment is Grounds	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES

Unfaithful Desires (Lust) and Behavior (Flirting) are Grounds	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Remarriage after Permissible Divorce	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
	Liederbach, Patterson	Piper, David Jones	Heimbach	Wenham & Early Church	Akin, MacArthur, Feinbergs, Kostenberger & Most Evangelicals	Schaeffer, Westminster Confession	Luck

VI. Conclusion Thoughts: Dogmaticism and certainty is not appropriate in an area where good and godly students who affirm, without apology, the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, differ. Still, I do believe there are some things we can clearly affirm based upon Jesus' words in this passage of Scripture.

- 1) Marriage is a gift and work of God that receives its meaning and significance from God.
- 2) God's design for marriage is exclusively heterosexual and unique among all human relationships (10:6-7).
- 3) God's plan from the beginning is that marriage would be permanent and indissoluble (10:9).
Indeed Malachi 2:16 reminds us, "For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."
- 4) Jesus acknowledges that because we live in a fallen world and have hard hearts, divorce will occur (10:3-4). However, no divorce is ever necessary though it may be occasionally permissible to those whose divorce is on biblical grounds.
- 5) To divorce one's mate (without a biblical cause?) and remarry another is to commit the sin of adultery (10:11-12).

Now, to these clear statements in Mark 10:1-12, what else can we say about divorce and remarriage that is both prophetic and pastoral, instructive and redemptive?

- 6) Where the sin of adultery and/or divorce has taken place forgiveness is possible and available to those who repent and confess their sin (1 John 1:9).
- 7) If we are in an unbiblical marriage, we should not attempt to get out of it. Seek forgiveness for the sin of adultery, and then work hard to glorify God and be a blessing to the mate you are married to.
- 8) In the church we should emphasize the value and dignity of marriage while eliminating the shame and stigma of the divorced. We “mingle the call to obedience with the tears of compassion” (Sam Storm).
- 9) We should acknowledge that divorce is a sin that is far more hurtful and destructive than many other sins.
- 10) Concerning marriage, the diction “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is a good one. No minister should perform a wedding without requiring a) extensive pre-marital counseling and b) the signing of a pre-marital wedding covenant. A sample one is noted below.

VII. Pre-Marital Wedding Covenant

The decision to marry is the second most important decision one will ever make in a lifetime. The first is the decision whether or not you will personally commit your life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Keeping this in mind, we commit to God, our minister, and each other to:

1. Seek God’s will for our lives personally and together by following biblical principles for Christian living and marriage.
2. Not engage in pre-marital sex.
3. Be sure to do everything possible to build a Christian marriage and home. This means that both of us have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that we desire growth for that relationship over the entire course of our lives by being obedient to his Word.

4. Read and listen to all pre-marital material provided by our minister.
5. Be active in a Bible-believing church beginning now and during our marriage.
6. Buy and read *His Needs, Her Needs* by Willard Harley, *The Act of Marriage* by Tim LaHaye, *God on Sex* by Danny Akin, and *A Promise Kept* by Robertson McQuilkin.
7. Total openness and honesty with our minister and with each other both now and after our wedding.
8. Postpone or cancel the marriage if, at any time between now and the wedding, either one of us comes to believe this marriage is not right.
- * 9. Never allow the word “divorce” to enter the realm of our relationship. We are in this together for the duration of our lives. Divorce is not an option for us!
10. Seek competent Christian counsel should we encounter any difficulty in our marriage.

With the above commitments made, we believe God will be honored, and the prospects for a meaningful and happy marriage enhanced. With God’s help, we will seek to honor God with our lives and marriage all the days of our lives.
