

Divorce and Remarriage - Summary & Conclusions

The following paragraphs summarize our understanding and application of the passages referenced below. A detailed explanation of these conclusions is contained in the five messages, “Divorce and Remarriage” (fall 2007) available from the SGBC media ministry. The table lists common subjects relating to divorce and remarriage and which passages have bearing on them

Subject	Matt. 5:31-21	Matt. 19:3-12	Mark 10:1-12	Luke 16:16-18	1 Cor. 7:10-16	1 Cor. 7:6-9	Rom. 7:2-3	Gen. 2:23-24	Eze. 16:7-9	Mal. 2:13-16	Hos. 2:14-20	Deut. 24:1-4
Definition of marriage		X	X					X	X	X	X	
OT provision for divorce & abuse of the provision	X	X	X									X
Exceptions allowing divorce & remarriage	X	X			X							
Cases of (re)marriage not allowed	X	X	X	X			X					X
Remarriage relating to <i>original</i> parties	X	X		X			X					
<i>Third</i> party marrying a divorced person	X			X								
Women’s rights and responsibility			X		X							
Separation					X							
Singleness		X				X						

Interpretation of Key Texts - The interpretation of key texts is indicated with bracketed [] words. These words are not part of the original text.

Matthew 19:9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced [except for sexual immorality] commits adultery.” NKJV

Matthew 5:32 “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery [if she remarries]. And whoever marries a divorced [not for sexual immorality] woman commits adultery.”

Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:11-12 should be understood in the light of Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9. The exception clause does not appear in Mark and Luke because everyone knew what Jesus and the Pharisees were discussing, i.e, divorce for reasons *other than* adultery. They also knew that the law commanded that an adulterous spouse be executed. The focus of the synoptic passages is the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Matt. 19:3. Jesus’ answer was an emphatic “no”.

Definitions regarding marriage

One’s definition of marriage affects one’s understanding of divorce. Marriage is a God designed union between one man and one woman in which the two become one for life. There is no earthly association intended to be closer and more permanent than marriage. Male and female gender differences were designed for the creation of the marriage union. “For this reason” [since God made them male and female] “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5).

How does God join them together? How do a man and a woman become a husband and a wife? The two become one when they swear a public oath to each other in the sight of God to be husband and wife. Biblically this is termed entering into a *covenant* (see OT refs.) with each other to be husband and wife as long as they both shall live. Once the oath is exchanged the man and woman are now husband and wife in the sight of God regardless of whether or not they have had sexual relations.

Definitions regarding divorce

Divorce is to publicly renounce the vows, or the covenant, made upon a marriage. That is, it is to declare that one’s spouse is no longer one’s spouse. In Israel this process was formalized in writing with a document called a “certificate of divorce.” *Though men and women “divorce” one another, this does not necessarily mean that God considers them divorced.* There are only two types of divorces that God acknowledges:

When one divorces a spouse for unrepentant sexual immorality God

considers both parties of the marriage as no longer married, i.e. no longer bound by the covenant they made when originally married. Also, when an unbeliever insists on divorcing a believing spouse, and does so, God no longer considers either party of the marriage bound by the original covenant.

Adultery does not automatically equate to divorce in God's sight (notice God's practice with Israel), just as having sexual relations does not automatically make people married in God's sight. It is the renouncing of the covenant which leads to divorce (notice God's pattern with Israel), and the entering into a covenant which creates a marriage.

Divorces made for any reasons other than the two mentioned above, even though one renounces the original marriage covenant publicly and in writing, are not acknowledged by God. In such *unlawful divorce* cases God still considers both parties as bound (married) by the original covenant. This fact has significant implications regarding a divorced person remarrying or a third party marrying someone who has been unlawfully divorced.

Death of a spouse ends the marriage covenant under any and all circumstances (Rom. 7:2-3).

Remarriage and marrying someone who is divorced

The position taken in this paper is that when God considers a person no longer bound by a previous marriage covenant, that person is free to remarry. And a third party marrying one whom God considers no longer bound by a previous marriage covenant may marry such a person without committing adultery. The number of cases that arise is large, but applying the following three principles leads to clarity regarding most cases.

1. If God views either person in a remarriage as still in a previous marital covenant *both* parties in the marriage commit adultery.
2. God views a marriage covenant still binding on both parties except in the case of unrepentant sexual immorality *and* the sexually immoral spouse is being divorced by the innocent spouse.
3. If an unbeliever divorces a believer neither party is considered by God to be bound to the previous marital covenant.

Separation

Separation is defined as spouses no longer living together or supporting each other but neither spouse has renounced the marriage covenant and

neither has remarried. If spouses are separated reconciliation should be pursued. If spouses are adulterous during a separation they are not automatically divorced in God's sight. Nor have they become married to those with whom they have committed adultery.

Unbiblically divorced and remarried

If one has been divorced on unbiblical grounds and is remarried they should acknowledge to God that this was sinful, ask His forgiveness, and honor the most recent marriage covenant. Refer to fifth message.

Definition of sexual immorality (porneia)

Porneia, translated 'sexual immorality', certainly includes adultery. However, there is extensive discussion as to what else may be included in this term. The term, as used in the exception clause (Matt. 19:3), could be broad enough to include sexual activity of any kind with anyone, of any gender, other than one's spouse. The continued use of pornography, which is a continued pursuit to be sexually involved with someone other than one's spouse ought to be seriously considered as porneia.

Illustrative case

Converted after an unlawful divorce - Discussion of this case illustrates applying most of the above principles. Mr. and Mrs. A were unlawfully divorced as unbelievers and neither has remarried. Mr. A now becomes converted and is considering seeking reconciliation with Mrs. A. Should he be encouraged to do so in view of the fact that 2 Cor. 6:14-18 and 1 Cor. 7:39 indicate that a believer is not to marry an unbeliever? Reconciliation should be encouraged because, in God's sight, the original marriage covenant is still binding. Mr. A should seek reconciliation, and only if Mrs. A (who has not remarried) insists on the previous divorce standing, is Mr. A free to remarry.

Spousal physical abuse and child abuse.

The biblically defensible right to self-defense and the duty to protect one's children, grants the legitimacy of separation in spousal physical abuse and child abuse situations. In these cases "separation with notification" should be done. One should get themselves into a place of physical safety and notify someone who has God given authority over the person committing the physical abuse. That would be church leaders and/or local authorities, or another brother or sister who has a relationship with the abuser. If you are in such a situation, it is wise to get counsel on how to carry out the separation before you do it.