



Divorce & Remarriage

Questions and Biblical Answers

QUESTION: *My spouse isn't a believer and that makes it difficult to honor God and be happy in my marriage. Is it okay in this case to divorce my spouse?*

I Corinthians 7:12-14 *“If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.”*

ANSWER: *Some believers must have felt that being married to an unbeliever was somehow defiling their relationship with God. However, just the opposite is true. Again, because of their desire to serve Christ, some people in the Corinthian church thought they ought to divorce their pagan spouses and marry Christians. But Paul affirmed the marriage commitment. God's idea is for husbands and wives to stay together – even when one spouse is not a believer. The Christian spouse should try to win the other to Christ. It would be easy to try to rationalize leaving; however, Paul makes a strong case for staying with the unbelieving spouse and being a positive influence on the marriage. Paul, like Jesus, believed that marriage is permanent (see Mark 10:1-9).*

QUESTION: *What is my unbelieving spouse no longer wants to be married to me, is it okay for me to file for divorce and eventually remarry someone else?*

I Corinthians 7:15-16 *“But if an unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

ANSWER: *This verse is misused by some as a loophole to get out of the marriage covenant. But Paul's statements were given to encourage the Christian spouse to try to get along with the unbeliever and make the marriage work. If, however, the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving, Paul said to let him or her go (in other words, let them initiate the separation or divorce). The only alternative would be for the Christian to deny his or her faith to preserve the marriage, and that would be worst than dissolving the marriage. Paul's chief purpose in writing this was to urge married couples to seek unity, not separation (see 7:17; 1 Peter 3:1-2).*

QUESTION: *I believe God wants me to be happy in my marriage and He has allowed me permission to pursue it by divorcing my spouse (whether believer or unbeliever). Besides, our marriage was wrong or a mistake in the first place. Am I correct in making this decision?*

I Corinthians 7:17 *“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.”*

ANSWER: Apparently the Corinthians were ready to make wholesale changes without thinking through the ramifications to their present marriage or their ability to remarry in the future. Paul was saying that people should be Christians where they are. You can do God's work and demonstrate your faith anywhere. If you became a Christian after marriage, and your spouse is not a believer, remember that you don't have to be married to a Christian to live for Christ. Don't assume that you are in the wrong place or stuck with the wrong person. You may be just where God wants you (see 1 Corinthians 7:20).

QUESTION: Did God really intend for marriage to be permanent? Then why does He allow people to divorce both in the Old and New Testament?

Matthew 19:3-9 Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

ANSWER: Jesus points out several reasons in Matthew 19:4-6 that God intended marriage to be permanent for the importance of marriage. And although the law, found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 permitted divorce to occur, this practice, according to Jesus' words in Matthew 19:7-8, fell far short of God's ultimate design and intentions. The same is true today. Jesus said that Moses gave this law only because of the people's hard (selfish, stubborn) hearts – permanent marriage was God's intention to reveal His glory and power, regardless of how difficult it may be. Yet, because sinful human nature made divorce inevitable, Moses instituted some laws to help its victims. These were civil laws designed especially to protect women who, in that culture, were quite vulnerable when living alone. Because of Moses' law, a man could no longer just throw his wife out – he had to write a formal letter of dismissal. This was a radical step toward civil rights, for it made men think twice about divorce. Yet, God designed marriage to be indissoluble. In other words, instead of looking for reasons to leave each other, husbands and wives should humble themselves and concentrate on looking for ways to depend upon the Lord and honor their covenant with Him and one another for the rest of their lives.

QUESTION: What if I, as a believer, initiated a divorce with my spouse without biblical grounds or I didn't make every effort to keep my marriage permanent and holy, wouldn't God allow me to remarry someone else even if I'm a totally new person today?

Matthew 5:31-32 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

ANSWER: Divorce is as hurtful and destructive today as in Jesus' day. God intends marriage to be a lifetime commitment (see Genesis 2:24). When entering into marriage, people should never consider divorce an option for solving problems or a way out of a relationship that seems dead. In these verses, Jesus is also attacking those who purposefully abuse their marriage contract, using divorce to satisfy their lustful desire to marry someone else. Jesus said that divorce is not permissible except for unfaithfulness. Yet, this does not mean that divorce should automatically occur when a spouse commits adultery. The word translated "unfaithful" implies a sexual immoral life-style, not a confessed and repented act of adultery. Those who discover that their spouse has been unfaithful should first make every effort to forgive, reconcile, and restore their relationship. As believers, we are always to look for reasons to give God the opportunity (even after the divorce has occurred and our former spouse remains unmarried) to restore the marriage relationship rather than rationalizing or making excuses to leave it.