



Our View of Divorce and Remarriage

In Matthew 19, Jesus states that God ordained the institution of marriage, and He has declared that in *every* marriage, the husband and wife are to become one for life. Divorce destroys the marriage and breaks apart the union God Himself has established (Mark 10:9). *“I hate divorce,” says the Lord* (Malachi 2:16).

Jesus’ teaching on divorce is clear. He restricted divorce under most circumstances, and He forbids the remarriage of those who divorce on improper grounds, calling such remarriage adultery: *“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery”* (Matthew 5:32). The word *“immorality”* in that verse is the Greek word *porneia*, which includes all kinds of gross sexual immorality.

The Old Testament contained a few provisions governing the remarriage of divorced people (Leviticus 21:11,14; Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The rabbis had taken these laws and broadened them to permit divorce for virtually any reason. Under the rabbinical laws, if a wife displeased her husband in any way, he was entitled to divorce her. Jesus stated that this was never the purpose of Moses’ Law. In fact, Jesus’ teaching on divorce was given specifically to refute the rabbinical loopholes. Furthermore, He so aggressively opposed divorce, that when He had completed His teaching, His disciples concluded that it would be better never to get married (Matthew 19:10)!

So God’s thorough hatred of divorce is very clear in Scripture.

Nonetheless, there are two extraordinary cases in which Scripture teaches that God does permit divorced people to remarry.

First, note that Jesus Himself included this exception clause: *“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 commits adultery”* (Matthew 19:9). He allows an exception in this one case, only *“because of the hardness of your hearts”* (Matthew 19:8). Clearly, Jesus is treating divorce as a last resort, only to be sought in the case of hard-hearted adultery.

The apostle Paul allows one more reason for divorce: if an unbelieving spouse abandons a believer, the believer is under no obligation in such case to remain married to them (1 Corinthians 7:14). A divorce filed by the unbelieving spouse would free the abandoned spouse to remarry.

Yet, we must emphasize that apart from those two specific, exceptional cases, divorce is not authorized in Scripture.