

God's Disapproval of Remarriage

By Ed Thompson

4/21/2024 V1.7

Introduction:

There are several divorce situations. This discussion is limited to legal marriage between two professing Christians, divorce, and remarriage to others.

The Spirit of the Law:

God proclaims His laws in the Old Testament, which are often adhered to by the strict "letter of the Law". One of the reasons why some marveled at Jesus' teaching (Luke 4:22) was because He not only taught the letter of the law but also the "spirit of the Law". The most obvious example of this is found in The Sermon on the Mount. The letter of the law states that adultery is wrong but Jesus expanded moral purity to include the intent of the heart. The letter of the law states that murder is wrong but Jesus expanded the spirit of the law to include hatred.

Over the last 50 years, much of the leadership of the modern American Church has used the letter of the law to justify divorce and marriage to others. However, it is proposed that to determine God's heart, it is necessary to discern the spirit of the law concerning divorce, marriage to others, and related doctrinal issues.

Mark 10:2-9 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ **But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'** ⁷ **'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,** ⁸ **and the two shall become one flesh.'** So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ **What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."**

This is the perfect example of the difference between the letter of the law, the certificate of divorce, and the spirit of the law, "the two shall become one flesh". The phrase, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate," clearly defines God's intent and the spirit of the law that marriage is to be permanent.

Hebrews 13:4 **Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.**

Some may look at only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the truth teaches the importance of the sanctity of marriage and appropriate sex.

The Sanctity of Marriage:

In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Fundamentally, God is the only being with the power to create. There is no indication that the angels or any of the heavenly hosts are granted any power of creation, and in part may be why the forces of darkness have such jealousy and hatred of man. However, God created man in His image, with even a limited power of creation. Thus, mankind is the only created being that God has ordained to generate a new, eternal, spiritual being when a baby is conceived.

The power to create new spiritual beings is a priceless gift, and as should be expected, God holds marriage and the process of conception to be sacred. Thus, God's moral laws regarding marriage and sex rest on foundations that are much more important than many understand. So, when God says, "What God has joined together, let no man separate", the intent is based on eternal consequences that are significantly deeper than moral and legal contracts. As with any great power comes tremendous responsibilities.

Supporting Biblical Principles:

During most of the 20th Century, the justification of divorce between Christians was limited to adultery (the "Exception Clause"). However, the exception clause abandons other Biblical principles.

With the desire to honor God's intent of marriage, many Biblically-based societies around the world have incorporated sacred marriage vows with such phrases as "until death do us part".

Num 30:2 If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

God is very clear about the importance of being true to our word and paying vows (Ecclesiastes 5:4, Psalms 50:14-23, Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Given that marriage and sex are sacred, it is proposed that marriage vows are not common contracts but holy vows. Therefore, they must be carefully considered before being made and carefully fulfilled.

Matthew 18:15-20 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed^[1] in heaven.

God's intent of relationships among His Children is first and always reconciliation, and toward this important goal, He has defined a specific reconciliation process. However, when many discover their spouse had an affair, their first reaction is to claim the "exception" clause, pursue divorce, and reject Biblical principles of reconciliation. It is sad when the "offending" spouse doesn't repent, but sadder when they do repent, but the "victim" spouse refuses to forgive them.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

A major problem within failed marriages is tremendous struggles and often a series of failures. However, just as all Believers are broken and must cling to God’s forgiveness and mercy, it is important for His Children to forgive others. As God models unconditional love and forgiveness, all of His Children need to be living examples, especially for relationships as important as marriage. Forgiving our debtors is confirmed by the spirit of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15).

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

The importance of forgiveness is obvious in the scripture, but becomes even more important in light of the principle of reconciliation (Matthew 18:15-20). If most Christians who suffer through divorce are honest, they would have to admit that they hold animosity and hate towards their former spouse. It is proposed that justifying divorce and especially marriage to others discourages forgiveness and unintentionally encourages some spouses to hold on to hurts, animosity, and hatred toward ex-spouses.

If a Believer falls into sin, acknowledges their failures, and repents, no sin should not be forgiven. The Apostle Paul considered himself to be the chief of sinners, partly because he murdered Believers. There will certainly be questions of their trustworthiness, but as God transformed Paul, so too fellow Believers who openly confess and repent of their sins should be embraced. However, it is difficult to trust or give credibility to anyone who, instead of acknowledging their failures, attempts to Biblically justify their sins. Therefore, attempts to justify divorce and marriage to others carry the potential of allowing ex-spouses to justify and hide their failures under the sins of their ex-spouses.

Justification of remarriage to others after divorce is not as simple as claiming the “exception clause”.

God’s Design for Marriage:

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

One of God’s ultimate purposes for Believers is to transform them into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The foundation of this transformation is for Believers to die to themselves, and crucify their selfishness and desires as a living sacrifice to God. It is proposed that an important purpose of God’s design for marriage is for both spouses to identify areas where they need to die to themselves and bow to Jesus Christ as Lord. Therefore, struggles and trials encountered in marriage need to be recognized and embraced as guideposts with thankfulness.

The natural heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), so failing and broken marriages are the symptoms of husbands refusing to die to themselves and love their wives and of wives refusing to die to themselves to honor their husbands. Therefore, unless there are drastic circumstances, divorce thwarts God’s purpose and an important goal for marriage. The solution for broken marriages is for both spouses to identify their failures of bowing to Jesus Christ as Lord, repent, and draw closer to Him. Counseling and techniques to improve horizontal relationships can be helpful, but the ultimate goal must

be for each spouse to strengthen their vertical relationships with God and develop abiding relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Biblical Issues of Marriage to Others:

Matthew 5:31-32 “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, **and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

A major issue with justifying divorce in the modern American Church culture is the *assumption* that a justified divorce automatically justifies the right of marriage to others. This interpretation claims that the letter of the law frees the wife in cases of immorality. However, it is proposed that this doctrine does not accurately reflect God’s heart or the spirit of the law as is taught by the Lord Jesus Christ or the Apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 7:10,11 To the married I give this charge (**not I, but the Lord**): the wife should not separate from her husband¹¹ (but if she does, **she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband**), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

The sinfulness of man’s heart creates situations where it is sometimes prudent to separate. It is proposed that God understands that some marriages will involve violence and potential harm, so He allows some provisions for divorce. However, given the sacred nature of marriage, sex, and vows, it is further proposed that if a woman separates from her husband (divorces), she is to remain unmarried or to be reconciled to her original husband.

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.**

Luke 16 also proclaims that marriage to others constitutes adultery, and provides no “exceptions”. A possible reason why the description in Matthew is different in Luke is because Matthew addresses Jewish culture. However, the overall spirit of the law, “what God has joined together, let no man separate,” and “she shall remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband,” teaches that God does not approve of marriage to others (except after death, which is beyond this discussion).

It is suspected that without the justification of marriage to others, many would not be so eager to seek a divorce and move on to new spouses. It is suspected that if remarriage to others is restricted, there would be much greater motivation for broken marriages to be reconciled.

Furthermore, “freedom of marriage to others promotes attitudes that if a marriage doesn’t work out, there is always divorce and marriage to someone else. Such attitudes are unbiblical and unhealthy, but given the propensity of divorced and remarried couples within the Church, this is apparently the attitude that many Christians hold (perhaps secretly) toward the sanctity of marriage, sex, and vows.

Ironically, some second marriages are “successful”. But separate from the Biblical and moral issues, it must be asked if God is more glorified and honored when both original spouses repent and bow to Him as Lord, or if repentance results in a successful marriage to someone else.

The Model of Marriage:

A major problem with the heart of mankind is that no Believer is immune to sin. But God's love is perfect, and He desires all of His children to repent. If a Believer falls into sin, there is separation (divorce) from fellow Believers and, in some aspects, from God. But as marriage is a model of the relationship between the Church (Believers) and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:22-28 and other scriptures), it is well understood that God continues to motivate the fallen to repent and be reconciled until their death. Therefore, it is proposed that God's purpose for divorce is reconciliation, and marriage to others does not fit the picture of reconciling broken relationships.

[Proverbs 24:16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.](#)

What seems to be often forgotten is that God loves His Children unconditionally. Before God, born-again Believers are clothed with the Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when they fall into sin, repent, and continue to repeat this cycle, God continues to love and embrace them. However, most Biblical justifications of divorce and marriage to others minimize the importance of reconciliation and violate other Biblical principles. God knows who will repent, but we do not. Therefore, it is proposed that justifying and allowing marriage to others involves presumptuous sin.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 restricts going back to original marriages after marrying another, and thus, marriage to others slams a door on any hope of reconciliation to original marriages. As marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church, marriage to others creates a picture that adultery is an unpardonable sin. While some hold significant animosity and want to believe their spouses committed unpardonable sins, this is not consistent with God's desire for sinners to repent or for spouses to be reconciled. On a practical note, the emotional trauma, the hurts, and the brokenness of failed marriages are great, and it is unwise for spouses to carry their unresolved issues into other relationships.

Contracts are agreements of mutual benefit between two parties. A covenant is an unbreakable promise by one party that is not dependent upon the second party. When God's Spirit enters and regenerates a person, they become born-again Believers, and God makes several covenants with them. Even when Believers sin and fail, God is faithful and doesn't break His covenants. It is proposed that marriage vows are covenants and are often reaffirmed at weddings with the proclamation, "What God has joined together, let no man separate". Therefore, while divorce (separation) may be prudent in some situations, marriage covenants are not broken by sins (i.e., adultery), which restricts justifications for marriage to others.

The fruit of the tree:

Divorce and marriage to others damage the potential for God's Children to be representatives of His character and place "wrinkles" on the Church. However, God is glorified when spouses reconcile and are remarried. The motives for justifying divorce and especially marriage to others are not always clear. Possibly to alleviate the injuries of innocent spouses. But there are always consequences when God's standards are violated. Helping someone cope with difficult situations and feel better must never be accomplished by sacrificing Biblical truths, because the consequences are often worse than the "cure":

The promotion of hatred: Divorce and marriage to others allow spouses in troubled marriages to avoid confronting and addressing their own issues. Instead of the spouses being forced to recognize their

failures and repent, many divorced Christians continue to hold bitterness, anger, and even hatred, often for many years.

Matthew 5:21-24 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² **But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment;** whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘**You fool!**’ **will be liable to the hell of fire.** ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

1 John 2:9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

There are broken marriages where a spouse falls into sin, breaks their vows, and the offended spouse is truly innocent. Many of these innocent spouses often forgive and don’t seek divorce. However, in cases where “innocent” spouses reject any responsibilities, refuse to forgive, and foster anger and bitterness, there are questions about whether they are humbly bowing to Jesus Christ as Lord, and possibly if they are genuinely born again.

Because of the betrayals and injuries, anger is natural, but if it continues beyond a reasonable period, the hatred is probably evidence of innocent spouses not fully grasping God’s love and forgiveness for themselves.

Regardless of who is responsible, hatred and anger place spouses at considerable risk of judgment. In some cases, “innocent” spouses use the divorce process for revenge. It is suspected that some remarry fairly quickly, no doubt to meet emotional needs, but also for revenge towards their ex-spouse. What is truly sad are cases where the offending spouse repents, but innocent spouses continue to hold resentment and *hatred*. Their refusal to reconcile rejects God’s plan and authority for reconciliation (Matthew 18). It is proposed that Justification of marriage to others encourages, or at least allows spouses to justify their attitudes and actions, and therefore places Church Leaders who make such justifications at risk of promoting hatred.

The promotion of open sin within the Church: Biblical justifications have created a slippery slope where divorce and marriage to others have become acceptable for a wide variety of reasons, often for many reasons other than adultery.

Many spouses guilty of adultery experience Church discipline and are expelled from a local Church. However, it is very common for them to marry their adulterous partner without any apparent level of repentance, and then just go down the street to a different local Church. The result is that many Believers within Churches are not challenged to identify and acknowledge their sins, and to humbly repent.

The first consequence is that many local Churches in the modern American Church are filled with unrepentant remarried couples. Such spouses are often experts at lying, but at the very least, local Churches should ask some uncomfortable questions if potential new members are in good standing with previous Churches. It is doubtful that very many local Churches have adopted such standards.

The second consequence is that the sanctity of marriage and sex has been so poorly upheld that many Christians, especially in the younger generations, have no respect for God’s institution of marriage and

live together out of wedlock. Such blatant, unopposed sins sadden and anger God, placing Church leaders, who are held to higher standards, at risk of severe judgment.

Calls to Action:

First, it is highly recommended that Church leadership develop clear doctrinal statements for divorce, and especially marriage to others, that are in harmony with Biblical principles.

Second, individuals in second or more marriages must be evaluated if they are under other local Church discipline, and only those who are willing to repent and make appropriate restitution should be accepted. Once accepted, they should be mentored to understand God's love, to **die to themselves**, and to humbly bow to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Third, it is recommended that Church leaders embrace policies not to marry divorced individuals to others. Where possible, divorced individuals who have not been remarried should be encouraged and guided to be reconciled to their original spouses.

Fourth, the importance of moral purity and the sanctity of marriage and sex must be taught and consistently promoted. Open sin must be appropriately addressed and not tolerated.

Fifth, it is proposed that the only effective solution for preventing and addressing the root causes of broken marriages is effective discipleship. Based on 1 Timothy 1:5, Believers must be challenged to incorporate the following qualities in their lives:

1. Pure Heart- to develop an intimate, abiding relationship, and to humbly bow to Jesus Christ as Lord.
 - a. To die to self and glorify God (accepting that life is never about ourselves but Him alone (John 12:25).
 - b. To diligently search for wisdom in the fear of the Lord.
 - c. To continually abide in His presence, staying out of the past and the future.
2. Clear Conscience- To take up the challenge to overcome the flesh, the world, and the forces of darkness by the power of His name, His death, and His resurrection.
 - a. To embrace the authority of God's Word, accurately understanding the truths and principles in harmony with God's heart.
 - b. To choose integrity, transparency, and accountability in all circumstances.
3. Sincere faith- to embrace the promises, power, and responsibilities of our new identities as new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).
 - a. To be gripped by God's grace, mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional love, in light of God's Holiness.
 - b. To identify and address the root causes of our sins, not focusing on the fruit or consequences of our transgressions.
4. Love- To embrace our identity as God sees us, thereby loving and serving others.
 - a. To embrace God's appointment to be the Lord Jesus Christ's Representative as commanded in Matthew 28:18-20.
 - b. To humble service others as Christ exemplified for us.

- c. To learn to speak the truth of God's Word in love into the lives of others.

Broken spouses within the Churches, especially those who bemoan the evils of their spouses or ex-spouses, reveal that critical issues have not been effectively addressed in their lives. Until appropriate challenges are made in their lives, individuals should not seek involvement in new relationships.

Conclusions:

Attempts to Biblically justify divorce and marriage to others create several violations of Biblical truths and principles. While removing justifications for marriage to others may be uncomfortable for some, conflicts of maintaining covenants, vows, reconciliation, and other Biblical issues are resolved.

This conclusion places many within the modern American Church who have been divorced and married to others at risk of violating Biblical principles (sin). Since God forbids remarriage to former spouses after marriage to others (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), He recognizes second marriages, and therefore, existing marriages should receive all due respect. However, the attitude toward all failures, including marriage to others, should reflect humble repentance (not to repeat previous failures), and thankfulness of God's love and forgiveness, but never justifications.

Some final comments concerning divorce and marriage to other situations are worth noting. In cases of forced marriage (rape), Biblically illegal marriages, and other strange marriage situations, the question must be asked with wisdom, "What has God rightfully joined, and what hasn't He joined together?" When non-believers are married and one becomes a Christian, it is acceptable for the non-believer to seek divorce. However, serious questions about whether marriage to others is Biblically justified require more in-depth study and wise consideration.

Foot Note:

It is natural to have empathy for individuals who have suffered through a broken marriage or divorce. The typical attitude towards remarriage is that the "innocent" spouse should not be *doomed* to live the rest of their life without the comfort and companionship of a spouse.

However, based on 1 Corinthians 7:8, "[To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am](#)", it is proposed that God does not view being single as a curse but as opportunities to accomplish important goals.

First goal, true confidence, happiness, and joy can only come from a solid relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is important for single spouses to focus on their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than the temporal happiness of marriage.

Second goal, being single allows individuals greater opportunities to serve others, embrace dying to self, and to be crucified in Christ (Galatians 2:20).

Third goal, where children are involved, it is important for the single spouse to focus on them instead of meeting their own needs.