

# ADULTERY, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

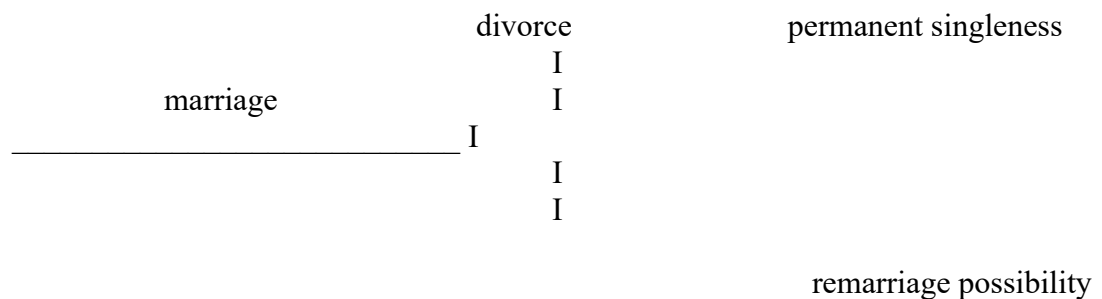
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## Introduction

### A. The elements of the issue diagrammed

**God's Intentional Will**  
(law) (ideal) (righteousness)

**God's Conditional Will**  
(law) (real) (redemption)



### B. New Testament teachings about divorce and remarriage: Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:8; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:1-17, 25-40

	Mt 5	Mt 19	Mk 10	Lk 16	Ro 7	1Cor 7
1. Man is not to divide what God has united in marriage.	x	x	x	x	x	10-11
2. Anyone that divorces and remarries commits adultery.	x	x	x			
3. Anyone that divorces causes the spouse to commit adultery.	x					
4. Anyone that marries a divorced person commits adultery.	x			x		
5. The "unchastity exception" qualifies God's primary principle.	x	x				
6. The "innocent party" is not forbidden to remarry.	x				15?	
7. A Christian that divorces a believing spouse is to remain unmarried or be reconciled.						11
8. Mixed marriages with unbelievers do not have to be dissolved.					12-14	
9. A believer is not bound if an unbelieving spouse divorces.					15	
10. A widow(er) may remarry.			x		8-9	
11. Not marrying cannot be practiced by everyone.	x				7	
12. Husband and wife have equal responsibility and opportunity in divorce and remarriage.		x			36-37	
13. The Deuteronomic divorce provision was a concession to hardheartedness (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Genesis 2:20-24; Malachi 2:14-16).			x		10-11	

### C. The ideal character of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount presents the ideals of the kingdom; it does not concentrate on the redemptive principle, that is, what the possibilities are once a person has sinned in not living up to the perfection ideal.

D. The effects of removing doctrinal material from a legal framework and putting it in an interpersonal framework

1. Creates a degree possibility in place of a simply either-or, categorical situation.
2. Can take intentionality into account.
3. Engages redemptive/grace options.

I. Biblical considerations regarding the possibility of remarriage

A. 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 is said to validate remarriage because it says, *“If you [who are loosed from a wife] remarry, you have not sinned,”* but

1. “Loosed” could mean by the death of the spouse rather than by the divorce of a spouse.
2. In the immediate context Paul is talking about virgins (7:25), not divorcees. widow(er)s.

\*3. 7:28a contrasts with female virgins (7:28b); hence, the preceding context (7:25-28a) deals with male virgins; hence, “virgin” means virgin woman in contrast to virgin man, not virgin in contrast to divorcee. “Loosed” can be taken as a stative passive, rather than a simple passive (perfect passive, λέλυσται) that refers to un-married (never married [32-38] or widowed [39-40]) rather than dis-married.

B. The human need for intimacy and sexual satisfaction

1. *“It is not good that man should be alone”* (Genesis 2:18).
2. *“It is better to marry than to burn [with passion]”* (1 Corinthians 7:9).
3. *“On account of fornication let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband”* (1 Corinthians 7:2-5).
4. Not everyone can abide the single state (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7).

Obviously, speaking of the “need” for intimacy and sexual release does not mean speaking of a life need; consequently, “need” amounts to saying “strong preference” or “natural inclination.”

It is recognized that Jesus is speaking here of the single state, but not abiding in the single state would seem to be even harder after a person was married and experienced sexual involvement, especially for the woman.

C. Remarriage of the “innocent party” is apparently allowed (Matthew 19:9).

Inasmuch as complete innocence seldom, if ever, exists in divorce, “innocent party” means innocent of unchastity (πορνεία). Certain defects in the innocent spouse may contribute to the other spouse’s unchastity without justifying it.

D. Legal separation was not an ancient-world marital status.

Without a specification like 1 Corinthians 7:11 (*“If she is divorced, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband”*), first-century Jewish and Gentile hearers would not have assumed a point was being made about permanent separation for life; there was no such institution in these cultures. The single state is not desired in itself, although it might be more desirable than an unbearable marital condition. Divorce does remove a person from an unacceptable identity, but with no remarriage option divorce appears to “punish” the righteous with the wicked by consigning them to being permanently single. Consequently, it is laid down as a basic principle that what is grounds for divorce is, so to speak, grounds for remarriage.

E. The exception clause of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is not necessarily exhaustive.

1. If only Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18 existed, interpreters could assume Jesus had no exception in mind. By parity of reason, the exception mentioned in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 does not have to be any more exhaustive than the “unnamed exception” in Mark and Luke. A stated item does not have to be restrictive in intent or exhaustive in scope.

2. *“Not being under bondage”* if the unbelieving spouse deserts (1 Corinthians 7:15) evidently means not being married any longer, that is, not feeling bound to honor a covenant broken by the other spouse.

3. The one spouse (a) may not have wanted the divorce, or (b) may not alone be able to provide for self and children on a permanent basis—particularly if she is a woman with few marketable skills outside the home. The children (c) may need a father figure, not just for disciplinary reasons but for healthy, well-rounded psychological development. (d) Abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, and otherwise both of the spouse and the children), drunkenness and other chemical and psychological addictions and dependencies, lack of physical and social provision, desertion, homosexual bent, corrupting influences on the children, and the like on the part of a spouse are as unbearable in a practical sense as having to live with a sexually unfaithful partner would be; yet these matters are presumably not addressed while only unchastity legitimizes divorce.

F. What is not addressed should not be forbidden.

A supposition for remarriage is set by the previous considerations that remarriage is everywhere assumed, that ancient culture knew nothing of permanent separation as a marital status, and that human need normally requires sexual satisfaction. Unless there is clear scriptural prohibition, remarriage in general should not be prohibited. Aside from particular situations scripture may specify for not remarriage, interpreters should be silent where scripture is silent. Not remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:11 should be limited to the circumstance it addresses.

II. “Let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled” (1 Corinthians 7:11).

A. Circumstance

1. Both spouses are Christian.

2. The statement is spoken from the viewpoint of the one initiating the divorce (contrast 7:15).

3. The directive deals with divorce for reasons other than unchastity.

a. Remarriage for unchastity, rather than remaining unmarried, is allowed in Matthew 19:9; whereas Paul speaks here of remaining single.

b. Presumably then the divorce is for other than unchastity, perhaps for abuse, drunkenness, or negative consequences of one spouse's conversion to Christ.

B. The reason for Paul's command to remain single

1. Because the previous marriage was not dissolved in God's eyes (?)

a. She is explicitly said to be "unmarried." "Still married in God's eyes" confuses a specific case with God's general ideal.

b. The scripture says, "*What God has joined together let not man put asunder*"; it does not say, "*What God has joined together man cannot put asunder*." If divorce could not be done, a person wonders whether there would be any point in prohibiting divorce.

c. Is not permanent separation implicitly forbidden by 1 Corinthians 7:5?

d. Other reasons can be given for remaining single (see next entries).

2. Because of the present distress (?)

Later in 7:28b-38 (cp. 7:8-9) Paul does bring in his concern about the present distress as well as the greater freedom in serving the Lord without distraction when unmarried. In that section of the chapter, however, he is dealing virgins and widows—evidently meaning older widows since in 1 Timothy 5:11-15 he commands widows (at least those under sixty—5:9) to remarry. For widows his reason for not remarrying is that he thought they would be happier (1 Corinthians 7:40).

3. Because of concern for reconciliation

a. To give opportunity for adjustments by the divorcee

b. To give opportunity for adjustments by the divorcer—adjustments and improvements in matters that may, in fact, have aggravated the first marriage

Those who specialize in dealing with marriage problems say that a person needs two or three years before getting involved in another relationship. There is a general problem of rushing into a new marriage on the rebound or out of an unconscious dependency.

c. If the other person remarries, begins practicing fornication, or it becomes generally obvious that nothing can be done to reconcile, then the possibility of remarriage becomes a different matter.

4. To make clear that the divorce was not in order to remarry

Paul pictures the one leaving as initiating the divorce—in contrast to 7:15, where

the divorce has been initiated by the other person.

5. To allow the person to re-establish himself instead of rushing into another marriage.

It takes a while for a person to re-establish himself as an autonomous individual, not referenced to a spouse.

### III. The “innocent party” limitation (Matthew 19:9)

With the exception of innocent parties, all remarried persons are called “adulterers”: (1) a spouse who divorces and remarries when the former spouse was not guilty of πορνεία; (2) the person who marries a divorced person that divorced a former spouse that was not guilty of πορνεία.

A. Except for 1 Corinthians 7:11, it is everywhere as much assumed that the divorced person will remarry as that single widowed people will marry. Note II, E, 3 above and II, B below.

B. “*Causes her to commit adultery*” (Matthew 5:32) is said in respect to an innocent party, because the exception clause accompanies the statement: except for unchastity if a man divorces his wife and marries someone else, he “*causes her to commit adultery*.” Not only does the verse assume remarriage by the wife who has been wronged (“causes”), it labels her an “adulteress” when she does so. Jesus evidently means, then, that in the theory of things remarriage under any circumstance during the lifetime of a former mate is tantamount to adultery; that is, it falls short of God’s ideal of one man for one woman for life. So to speak, Jesus is using the word *adultery* with quotation marks around it; he says it aside from dealing with all the practical issues involved in divorce-remarriage that may make remaining single worse than the remarriage that goes against the ideal nature and purpose for marriage.

The only other possibility would be to suppose that Jesus means by “causes” that, right or wrong, characteristically she will in fact remarry, as if to say, “*She will die in her sins, but her blood I will require at your hand.*”

### IV. Practical prerequisites of remarriage

A. Repent for your part in the previous marriage failure.

1. Again, “innocent party” means innocent of unchastity, but the innocent party can contribute to the other spouse’s unfaithfulness by exhibiting a critical spirit, by insensitivity to the partner’s sexual desires, by excessive absence from the family, by unnecessary interference with discipline of the children, by lack of sufficient attention to personal hygiene, by disinterest in the other’s pursuits, by unwillingness to listen, by insistence on having one’s own way, and so on. These admonitions apply regardless of whether a person was the innocent party or not.

2. Forgiveness that makes possible a new beginning always assumes repentance.

A note of warning is in order for someone who contemplates divorcing a spouse. He should not count on being able later to repent for having divorced the spouse or for “the roving eye” that may be urging a divorce that would not otherwise be all that necessary. When a person has later “just what he always wanted,” it is behaviorally impossible to repent of having it or of doing what made having it possible.

B. Commit yourself to change weaknesses.

The divorce rate among the remarried is much higher than in first marriages. The weaknesses that caused the first divorce are obviously being carried right on into the next one—with the same results.

C. Marry in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Divorced people often remarry the very type of person they had to divorce the first time. When they remarry heavy drinkers, hot-tempered individuals, verbally abusive persons, they are going to have the same problems all over again. When the newness of the relationship wears off, the spouse will almost invariably return to behavior evidenced before infatuation began.

We take it that marrying in the Lord is advice rather than moral commandment; that is, marrying a non-Christian is not immoral in itself; otherwise, Paul could presumably not have encouraged Christians to remain married to their pagan spouses. Nevertheless, to say the least, it is not wise to marry someone who does not share a person’s values, purposes, and moral commitments. A Christian who divorces a non-Christian spouse because of character defects or immoral behavior should not expect things to be any different the next time around with the same situation.

## Conclusion

Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew **19** have to do with the nature and purpose of marriage. They deal theoretically with God’s intentional will for marriage. The redemptive principle is brought to bear on the practical situation in the context of God’s conditional will for marriage as Paul appears to do in 1 Corinthians **7** in regard to the complexities of human existence that involve matters over which a person has no control.