

Article III – Regarding Marriage, Divorce and Re-marriage

The Bible states clearly that marriage is created by God as a permanent bond of life between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24-25, Matt 19:4-6). However, the Bible also offers several situations that allows for divorce and remarriage. The following elaborates on the circumstances of these situations, and stipulates whether or not divorce and subsequent re-marriage is allowed by God.

(1) Death of the spouse (1Cor 7:39)

The Bible teaches that the bond of marriage is permanent for life. When one spouse dies, the surviving spouse is free to re-marry.

(2) Adultery committed by the spouse (Matt 5:32, 19:9)

God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), but He also hates to see the marriage bond desecrated by spouses who continually pursue promiscuous, immoral life-styles and are unwilling to repent. (These refer to the physical acts of adultery, not the "lustful glance" mentioned by Jesus in Matt 5:28.) In situations such as these, Jesus permits the faithful partner to divorce and remarry. However, divorce is not a requirement. There is also the option of a higher road of forgiveness and restoration, if the spouse that committed the adultery is repentant. As a practice, we should always try to counsel towards reconciliation in following God's way of dealing with His people (Hosea 3:1).

(3) Desertion by the spouse (1Cor 7:12-15)

In 1Cor 7:12-15, Paul instructs the Christian spouse that he/she is not to divorce his/her unbelieving spouse, but if the unbelieving spouse insists on leaving a believing spouse, the Christian spouse is not under bondage (1Cor 7:15). The term "under bondage" carries the meaning of being obligated, or being bonded, like a slave is to her master. In the context of marriage, when the believing spouse is "not under bondage", it means he/she is no longer obligated to his/her marriage vows. Although Paul did not use the exact same word, in verse 39 of the same chapter in 1 Corinthians can be used for clarification. Here, Paul describes that a wife is "bound" to her husband as long as he is still alive, but if he dies, she is free to remarry another Christian.

(4) Divorce prior to salvation

in 2Cor 5:16-17, Paul tells us that a believer is a brand-new creation in Christ, and this includes our past marital failures. Paul says the old has passed away, we are made a new creation, free to begin life and marriage anew in obedience to Him. However, the person must first come to the understanding and admittance that his/her divorce prior to salvation was still sinful and displeasing to God. He/She is now committed to living according to God's teaching in the Bible. The person must make a good-will effort to seek forgiveness and appropriate reconciliation with his/her previous spouse. As Christians, we now stand and live in the newness of God's grace, and the Church is to exercise this grace in guiding new believers to live responsibility in forgiveness, freedom, and faith.

Biblical response for the divorcee

If a person divorces in a situation other than those listed in (1),(2),(3) or (4) above, he or she only has two options permitted in the teachings of the Bible: (a) to seek reconciliation and re-marriage with the original spouse (1Cor 7:10-11), or (b) to seek reconciliation and remain single for life. This is not a form of punishment, but a consequence of the choice he made. While his choice has closed the door of marriage in his life, God can still bring a life of blessings for him as a single person, if he walks in God's way.

If a person who should not have divorced, did divorce in a situation other those listed in (1),(2),(3), or (4) above, but has also re-married, he or she should not seek another divorce from his/her current spouse, but must first acknowledge that the previous acts of divorce and re-marriage were sinful, and also make a reasonable good will effort to seek forgiveness and appropriate reconciliation.

Separation under special circumstances, but not divorce.

In the case of abuse or addictions (drugs, alcohol, pornography. etc.), it may be necessary for the victimized spouse to be separated from the other spouse for the sake of safety, and/or to help the other spouse to come to repentance, but this separation must not lead to divorce (1Cor 7:10-11).

Notes on alternate views:

a) Divorce is permitted on all grounds

There are those who would refer to the Mosaic Law stated in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as God's approval of divorce. That is not a correct understanding. The passage in Deuteronomy does not provide

any divine approval on divorce. It recognizes that divorce was practiced amongst the Israelites and Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was given to mitigate the hardship and injustice suffered by a wife (Malachi 2:16) when her husband divorces her.

b) Divorce is not permitted at all

There are those who believe that divorce is not permitted on all grounds. Often they would cite Luke 16:18 and Mark 10:10-12. When you look at these two passages, they do speak without exception that our Lord Jesus Christ does not permit divorce. However, in applying the teachings of Christ on the issue of divorce, we must take all his teachings in entirety and all his teachings must not be contradictory. In Matthew 5:32 and 19:8-9, Christ Jesus stated twice, that adultery is an acceptable reason for divorce. The sayings of Christ in Luke 16:18, Mark 10:10-12 must not be interpreted in isolation but must be understood along with Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:8-9. Again, while we recognize what is permissible by Christ, we want also state that in practice, our approach to marital counseling must always aim toward repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as the most preferred direction.

Some would also interpret 1 Corinthians 7:39 to mean that divorce is not permissible. In this verse, Paul writes, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives". However, we must interpret this verse contextually. In the latter part of verse 39, Paul explains that this statement was made with regards to those who are widowed. If you examine chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians in its entirety, Paul is addressing the issue of marriage for different groups. In verse 39, he is writing to the widows, telling them that they are free to remarry other believers. The main emphasis in verse 39 is not on marriage-and-divorce but spousal death and remarriage.