

## **Truths about Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

**Category : God, Relationships, Marriages and Divorce**

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### **Definitions of the terms "Marriage" and "Divorce"**

With the understanding that a universally accepted definition of marriage is much contested, in this essay the word "marriage" will be used to mean what the Bible says it is, i.e. the union between a man and a woman; and a godly marriage will be taken to mean exclusively the union of a husband and wife joined by God through a solemn covenant.

On the other hand I am aware that the word is used as well in today's society to refer to the social union between persons of the same sex as can be seen in redefined definitions in modern dictionaries such as the Merriam-Webster which include reference to same-sex marriage. In the Biblical context we also find the term marriage used for a man with multiple wives. Today marriage is also being considered more as a socio-legal contract between the couple rather than a relationship joined by a covenant, as we find it in the Bible. Therefore although the marriage made in heaven is the one joined by God, in this essay I will still be referring to any solemn covenant of oneness made between a man and a woman as marriage, in spite of the limitations of such a union.

The term divorce will therefore refer to the legal dissolution of a marriage either joined by God or by men through a covenant, or a socio-legal contract. One should note that in spite of the divorce being a legal dissolution it is not necessarily legitimate according to God's will since if a marriage is joined by God no man or social institution can truly declare it to be null or dissolute according to the principle set down by Jesus, the Son of God, in His interpretation of the Torah (Matt 19:6).

### **Principles of Godly Marriage**

We notice that not every marriage union is approved by God such as the instances when there is remarriage between Jews who divorced their wives - their new union is called an adulterous relationship by Jesus, except in cases of "pornea" which refers to unchastity or sexual immorality (Matt 5:32 & 19:19).

The wrath of God is aroused at perverse unions such as the joining of angles with daughters of men (Gen 6:1-7), and homosexual relationships (Gen 19, Lv 18:22, Lev 20:13, 1 Cor 6:9). Such unions are condemned by God and are definitely never considered as a legitimate union.

In the Torah it was also stipulated by God that the Jew should never inter-marry with foreigners or give their sons and daughters in marriage to a person who is not under the covenant since this would lead them away from God (Deut 7:3-6; Jos 23:6-8). The people of Israel greatly transgressed in this and were drawn to the foreign gods of the people they inter-married with, thus arousing God's jealousy and wrath because they lived in rebellion (Num 25; Judges 3:5-8; Mal 2:11-12). We see a great number of people repenting from this sin and separating from their foreign wives in order to flee from God's anger in the book of Ezra chapters 9 and 10. We see this direction also for those under the New Covenant, i.e. not to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:14) and not to become one with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:15-20), which passage can also be extended to mean that a Christian should not marry an unbeliever since it uses the argument that the believer should not

become one flesh with a prostitute because he is the temple of the Holy Spirit and a member of Christ. Christ cannot have fellowship with the unbeliever and in the same way the believer is not to become one flesh with an unbeliever since there is no fellowship between light and darkness (2 Cor 6:14-18). This is not so in the case of a believer who was married to an unbeliever before conversion (1 Cor 7:12-14).

God also disapproves of multiple wives since these turn the heart of a man away from God (Deut 17:17; Lev 18:18; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6). Solomon, in spite of his wisdom, did not heed to God's advise and fell in the predicament set in the law as he was led astray by his many foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1-10).

God is willing to be the match-maker and he does when godly people decide to trust the matter into His hands as we see in Genesis 24. Abraham's servant is led by God, according to the instructions of Abraham, in the choice of a wife for Isaac, his master's son. God is the only one who can really make a perfect match.

### **Divorce in the Old and the New Covenant**

As we saw above, under the old covenant there was only one instance when God permitted divorce, which Jesus refers to as unchastity (Matt 5:32; Deu 24:1) - some sexual conduct displeasing to the husband. I believe that unchastity did not refer necessarily to adultery, since this was punishable by stoning as specified by the law, a practice that was still practiced during Jesus' ministry (John 8:3-5). Thus, adultery under the old covenant was not dealt with through divorce but through execution. This can also be said in the case of fornication - sexual intercourse before the first marriage, which was punished in the same way as adultery (Deut 22:13-21). It seems then that the term "pornea" used by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel to explain the Mosaic law to the Pharisees refers to any inappropriate sexual conduct from one of the spouses. Under the old covenant God also expected some marriages to be dissolved if they were unlawful such as the episode of marriages to foreign wives in Ezra 9 and 10 mentioned above. Although God does not hate the divorcee yet it is stated that He hates divorce (Mal 2) and will not permit it to be done for any and every reason, not even under the old covenant (Matt 19:3-9). However it appears that Moses had given a concession for men under the old covenant to divorce (Deut 24:1-4; Mal 5:31) "because of the stubbornness of their hearts" and not because God agreed to it (Matt 19: 8).

Under the new covenant the Christian is not under the Law of Moses but under the Law of Love since by loving God and our neighbour we are fulfilling the law and against love there is no law (Matt 22:36-40; Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14, 22-23). For the Christians under the new covenant we find no concession for divorce in the Bible except in the case of having an unbelieving spouse who wants out of the marriage (1 Cor 7:15). Yet even such believers are urged by the apostle Paul to stay with those unbelieving spouses who consent to continue living in the married relationship since through the relationship these might come to believe (1 Cor 7:12-16). As for the rest the apostle states clearly that God's command is for believers not to divorce and that if they have to divorce they should not remarry and be reconciled to their spouses later if possible (1 Cor 7:10-11). Obviously this does not mean that they are separated and have any right, in the eyes of God, to form another sexual relationship as often happens in Malta, since this would be tantamount to adultery (Rom 7:3; Heb 13:14).

God hates divorce since He is a God of covenant and the covenant between husband and wife is the most important covenant after the one between God and the church. The former covenant represents the latter, in that it represents the marriage between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). That is why

God has established a godly marriage to be for life, until death divides the couple (Rom 7:1-3), as also the covenant between Christ and the church is forever.

## **Conclusion**

This short essay shows that one is to be very careful when giving direction from the Bible regarding this delicate subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. If improperly interpreted by failing to give careful consideration to the Biblical context and to differentiate between the old and new covenant of God with His people, there would inevitably be confusion and abuses. It is therefore crucial for the interpreter to distinguish between the Law of Moses and the Law of Love, both given by the holy and loving God, who upholds righteous relationships and hates divorce. He has provided both of these covenants for two different people, namely, His people, Israel, whose hearts were hardened to the words of the divinely inspired Prophets; and the Church - the new creation in Christ, made to be the temple of the Holy Spirit of God. Thus from these people with a different covenant reflecting their different revelation of God's heart, he has also different expectations. From us, the Church, the ones in the new, and much more glorious covenant (2 Cor 3) He expects perfection in love "to be imitators of Him as beloved children (Eph 5:1), reflecting the loving sacrifice of Christ for us and living this love towards God and each other. This is how a perfect marriage can be made. This is the basis for a marriage joined by God.

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**For further reading refer to:** Hagin, K. E. 2001. Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage.  
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