

Do Christians Who Divorce Have the Biblical Right to Marry Other People?

This is part 5 in a series. Read part 1, part 2, part 3 and part 4.

In my opinion, only God can truly answer this question. Spouses are encouraged to spend extended time in the Word and obedience to it, as well as extended times of prayer and fasting, and seeking godly counsel. All destructive relationships and toxic counsel must be severed as you seek to answer this question.

Many great bible teachers are divided on this issue. Some believe that remarriage to another is never allowed unless one of the spouses dies, but others suggest that it is permissible when adultery and abandonment occur. Much of the controversy centers on Matthew 5:32 where Jesus says, "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."

Remarriage is not the issue here; manipulation and abandonment are. I appreciate the words of J. Nolland on this point: "The normal understanding of Mt. 5:32b runs the danger of leaving the woman involved a double victim: she has been divorced by a husband who may well have rejected her at his own whim and is now to be barred from any new relationship because she bears the stigma of the 'divorcee'.

Matthew 5:32 has a twofold warning: 1) Do not divorce without cause. 2) Do not pursue a relationship with someone who has abandoned their spouse. Unfortunately, many add, "If you've experienced divorce, you cannot remarry-period." Not only does the text not say this, this statement actually condemns

someone for the actions of another: Forbidding remarriage because of the actions of the previous spouse.

One thing is certain, if the Scriptures on marriage and divorce were fully taught and acknowledged, it would create more serious consideration before marriage, and would be a great deterrent to divorce. Lack of regard for the Scriptures has taken us to the other extreme—no fault divorce.

I believe that God hates divorce; reconciliation is pleasing to Him. There are instances, in my opinion, when one is released through adultery and/or abandonment; however, reconciliation should still be sought. First and foremost, God's will is that we walk in integrity, follow His principles, use wisdom, be patient, and seek Him during the journey. For some, reconciliation may result, for others it may not.

When reconciliation does not occur, the enemy often resurrects past failures to hinder peace and joy. We become very fearful ... we do not want to experience the pain of divorce again.

If you are separated, or recently divorced, and are lacking peace and joy, I encourage you to rethink your current situation. Confusion, anxiety, fear and some forms of depression are sometimes indicators that we are outside of God's will. (Please note the word "sometimes".) One of the biggest obstacles when considering restoration or seeking direction is becoming involved with someone soon after you divorce or separate. This can severely hinder your chance for reconciliation, as well as your ability to follow God's lead. Avoid this at all costs.

God has given us the freedom to choose, and, in marriage, the choices of one will affect the life of the other. If your spouse has left, and you've waited and have done all that you can do biblically, I believe that God will consider your heart more than your circumstances. King David was not able to build

the temple because of his past—he was a man of war, but God said, “Whereas it was in your heart to build a temple for My name, you did well in that it was in your heart” (2 Chronicles 6:8). Contextually, this verse is not dealing with marriage, but the overlapping principle applies: Because David’s heart was right, God continued to direct him.

Many often thank the Lord for using divorce to bring them back to Him. I don’t believe that God causes divorce, but He does use it to bring the prodigal son home. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin; rejecting Christ is.

Clearly understand that I’m not advocating divorce, nor am I saying that if you are currently separated that divorce become an option because better opportunities await you. God hates divorce and anyone who has been there knows why.

I must reiterate: I believe, first and foremost, in reconciliation and restoration but these are not always options. That’s why a personal relationship with Jesus and obedience to God’s Word is profoundly important. Through that relationship you will be able to make the right decision. It won’t be easy because lives have been damaged, dreams destroyed, and promises broken, but God continually redeems us through His forgiveness as we forgive others. God desires that we know His will and follow His lead, especially during the detours of life.

Many divorced Christians carry years of regret into future relationships. If God is doing a new thing, it’s vitally important that past brokenness does not prevent future plans. But if God is ministering restoration in your spirit, wait for it; contend for it; pray fervently for it. I also encourage you to remove everything that may hinder restoration (e.g., wrong relationships, strongholds, addictions, anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, etc.), and seek Him wholeheartedly and unconditionally. He will direct you ... this I know.

Watch my sermon, "Lord, Remove My Guilt and Shame," on Vimeo.

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