

Is It OK to Divorce and Remarry?

Millennial: "As a Christian, is it OK to divorce, then remarry?"

For the third year in a row, a divorce attorney in the Nashville area, W. Scott Kimberly, held a "giveaway" for free divorce representation on Valentine's Day.

Scott stated that for many people, Valentine's Day is "another reminder that they remain trapped in a relationship that they cannot leave because of financial problems, because of a spouse who refuses to agree to a divorce or for some other reason." In our society where we see multiple marriages and billboards promising "quick and easy divorce," God gives us a far different perspective.

"Marriage is to be honored among everyone, and the bed undefiled. But God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers" ().

If you're divorced, contemplating a divorce or single, read on. And please don't compromise through the seduction of living together (lifestyle fornication) or fear marrying because of discouraging statistics.

Avoid a truckload of trauma. God intends for us to enjoy a fulfilling marital relationship, yet it's true there are times divorce is necessary. Our responsibility is to reject any casual approach to the painful shattering of a marriage covenant with its lifelong consequences for multiple lives.

While millions trivialize marriage and minimize divorce, Netflix recently dared to release *Marriage Story*, which a reviewer says jolts audiences with a gut-wrenching reality

check of the emotional devastation that comes from divorce.

A Time of Recovery

God calls His people to recapture the sacredness and permanence of covenant marriage. The Bible records the exploits of Ezra and Nehemiah, who labored together in this mission. When Nehemiah returned to find some in marital unfaithfulness and intermarriage with pagan people, he was understandably furious!

He called the people to return to God's precepts (Deut. 7:3-6). He reminded them of the tragedy of Solomon. He stigmatized the obstinate ones (Deut. 25:2-3) in a passionate display of righteous indignation openly confronting, cursing, expelling, pummeling and even plucking out the hairs of the rebellious (!)

Scripture doesn't revel in Nehemiah's intensity but simply records it. It highlights necessary purification and restoration of what is holy. The application for us today, especially pastors, is to not avoid addressing hot-button issues out of fear of man and a desire to appear inclusive and non-judgmental. Cohabitation, casual divorce, pornography, homosexuality and gay "marriage" must be understood from a biblically informed worldview so God's people abide by His holy standards.

Many couples devote more time preparing for a wedding than a marriage. I strongly encourage you to make note and benefit from my two commentaries and podcasts on the Charisma Podcast Network the next two weeks, titled *How Do I Discover the Guy or Girl I'm to Marry?*

'Help! I Need Hope.'

It's important to embrace God's precepts and perspective to experience His blessings and fulfillment in marriage. If you

or someone you know is headed in the direction of marital breakup, push the pause button and ponder some important things. It takes humility, but remember: "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6b).

If you're reading this having been through a divorce, don't succumb to perpetual shame and condemnation but rather reflection. Were you an unbeliever? Were you in a backslidden state and have you since returned to God? If you did not have any biblical grounds for divorce, have you thoroughly repented, learned lessons and consecrated yourself to obey God without reservation?

If you're a woman in longstanding marital tension with an unbeliever, God's Word says that "if any do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, as they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Don't lose hope! In my 50 years of ministry, I've seen miracles of marriage restoration—even couples remarrying each other after divorcing!

The Biblical Basis for Divorce and Remarriage

Here are three commonly accepted biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage:

1. Ongoing and unrepentant adultery (). Also, was it a one-time incident or ongoing pattern of behavior? Remember recently deceased Kobe Bryant admitting to adultery and how his wife, who once before filed for divorce, reversed course when he sincerely repented.

2. Abandonment by an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:15); physical desertion (and some would add ongoing physical violence that reveals "breaking faith"—abandonment of any semblance of true faith—as grounds for separation and possible divorce after all attempts to avert it have failed). God says in Malachi 2:16

that He “hates divorce” and strongly rebukes and exposes those dealing treacherously with a spouse as well as marrying outside the faith.

3. Marriage with subsequent divorce as a non-Christian: “Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

A Cautionary Word

There are biblical grounds for a divorce. Yet this does not mean it's the first recourse when God is endeavoring to mature character through submitting to a season of biblical counseling, accountability and possibly a temporary separation. People must yield to Holy Spirit-empowered obedience rather than fleshly convenience. Mature character demonstrating humility, perseverance and meekness (strength under control) are essential as pressure reveals the person.

Someone once asked Ruth Graham if she ever thought about divorce with Billy. She responded, “Divorce? No. Murder? Well ...” she winked.

Again, “God hates divorce” (Mal. 2:16) but there is something He hates even more: adultery. This is why he allows it as grounds to nullify a sacred marriage covenant. God hates divorce (not divorced people) because of what divorce does to everyone involved. It's like hating cancer, not people with cancer.

In our culture, people tend to think divorce is no “big deal,” simply a “conscious uncoupling” as actress Gwyneth Paltrow called hers. It's a sad reality that it has become an acceptable solution to inevitable conflicts in marriage. What God is calling us to is to change our mind about divorce plus stop advising it as a quick way out of problems that all couples face.

A Christian marriage is different than what the world puts forth regarding marriage which, if difficulties mount or sexual attraction wanes, makes it normal to “bail”. Then instead of taking personal responsibility, folks often blame-shift and excuse it as just a “bad marriage.”

Christian marriage is not high school dating! God ordained marriage as a covenant—a sacred and binding vow for life between one man and one woman. It is not a 50-50 proposition but giving of oneself 100% for one’s spouse based not on fleeting emotion but an unselfish choice for the greatest good of one’s mate. My wife and I admit we’ve fallen short many times in almost 44 years of marriage, but we made a vow that “divorce is not an option,” and we’ve enjoyed the fruit of God’s favor from honoring covenantal commitment even as her parents did for almost 70 years.

Progress Through Perseverance

A study “Does Divorce Make People Happy?” conducted by the Institute for American Values encourages us. The findings were noteworthy because they “debunked the modern myth that someone in a troubled marriage is faced with a choice between either staying in a miserable relationship or getting a divorce to be more happy.”

This study revealed “a full 2/3 of the unhappily married spouses who persevered were actually happier five years later. Among those who initially rated their marriages as ‘very unhappy’ but remain together, nearly 80% considered themselves ‘happily married’ and ‘much happier’ five years later.”

“Surprisingly, the opposite was found to be true for those who divorced. The study confirmed that divorce frequently fails to make people happy because while it might provide a respite from the pain associated with a bad marriage, it also introduces a host of complex new emotional and physiological difficulties over which the parties involved have little

control. They include child custody battles, emotionally scarred children and economic hardships.”

Here’s the deal: When Pharisees tried to trick Jesus regarding divorce, He told them Mosaic Law permitted it for the “hardness of their hearts,” but He renewed God’s original standard saying, “from the beginning it was not so” ().

In this day of “free divorce” and “conscious uncoupling,” may we return to our roots, showing the world a better way under the benevolent reign of good King Jesus.