



Finishing the discussion of marriage, divorce, and remarriage

I preached on Marriage and Divorce on March 11 at Delta. We dealt very forthrightly with God's Word on both subjects, and I logged 61 minutes of pulpit time. But despite the depth and length that we gave to those subjects, we still weren't able to talk about the final piece of the trilogy, namely the issue of remarriage according to God's Word. So, I'd like to take some space here to finish the subject. Before we jump in, here's an overview of marriage and divorce:

Marriage:

- △ **Marriage is God-ordained (*Genesis 2:20-25*)**
 - God created Eve to be Adam's helper, and Eve is declared Adam's wife at her creation.

- △ **Marriage is designed as a Permanent Union (*Matthew 19:4-6*)**
 - Here's a little Sex Ed: when you have intercourse, you are not only coming together physically, but spiritually...it is a unique union...you join your soul to that person...people who are sexually promiscuous eventually end up so torn up because their souls are ripped apart between too many people.
 - God also is the ultimate one overseeing the marriage and joining the two together

- △ **Marriage is a Covenant (*Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14*)**
 - A man and woman declare love and devotion to each other, express their commitment, and share their vows...witnesses ratify the covenant...anniversaries celebrate the covenant.
 - It different than a contract...there's no signing bonus, no restructuring, no time limit.
 - God is in the middle of it.

- △ **Marriage reflects the Trinity (*Deuteronomy 6:4; Genesis 2:24*)**

- The Hebrew word "echad" means one, and it is used to describe the Trinitarian God and the oneness of a husband and wife
- A Christian marriage is God's first illustration of the community he desires his followers to have.

Divorce/Dissolving of a Marriage:

Δ Death (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2-4)

- Remember, a covenant is a life-long commitment...death is the most legitimate ending of the marriage covenant.

Δ Sexual Immorality/Adultery (Matthew 5:32, 19:9)

- Much has been debated over the word used here, "Porneia"...some try to make the meaning of the word very general and vague in regards to unfaithfulness...but I believe that it is inclusive of any sexual sin, and in a marriage covenant, adultery.
- When Jesus taught about divorce in **Matthew 19**, he was answering a specific question posed to him by the Pharisees when they asked "***Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?***" (v. 3)...the Pharisees were holding a pretty open view of divorce at this time, and Jesus made the point to talk about the covenant of marriage as opposed to the issue of divorce...but at the end of his answer, he did say that sexual immorality or adultery was a reason for divorce.
- The OT had very strict laws concerning adultery, if someone was caught in adultery, both parties were immediately killed (**Deuteronomy 22:22**)...so, death was ending the marriage covenant.
- Since that law isn't practiced now, some view that if the adulterer is not repentant of their sin, you can in effect live as if the adulterer is dead and are then released from the covenant.

Δ Non-Christian Divorce (1 Corinthians 7:15)

- If you get married and you are both unbelievers, and then one gets saved, if the unbelieving spouse wants out, the Christian is not to stop them
- The believing spouse is not to seek divorce, but live as a godly example and influence in the home, in hopes to see the unbeliever come to faith

- This is not about a Christian knowingly marrying a non-Christian...that's a whole other issue

△ **Hardness of heart (Matthew 19:8)**

- The thrust of this is "defiant, unrepentant sin"
 - This not only hurts the relationship with your spouse, but also is damaging your relationship with God
 - You cannot be poorly related to your spouse and rightly related to God at the same time!
- This can include issues of neglect and abuse which can break the marriage covenant
- If there are issues like this happening in a Christian marriage, the couple needs to go to the elders of the church for counsel, to work the process of church discipline, repentance and reconciliation, and ideally see the marriage restored

A final thought on the issue of divorce: just because God has given us concessions for divorce does not mean that he has given us license for divorce. His primary desire is for God-honoring marriages that practice repentance and reconciliation.

As for the issue of **remarriage**, the following is a very biblical summation from Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, where much of my study has originated from other than scripture.

Am I required to take back my spouse after they have committed adultery?

Whenever possible, reconciliation is the primary motivation behind our actions toward those who have done great harm to us **(1 Corinthians 7:11)**. Jesus says, "**You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your father in heaven**" **(Matthew 5:43-45)**.

How does one do this in practice? Doing good to the offending spouse will mean praying for God to deeply cut the offender to the bone of their resistance, so that there is no more opposition to change. Reconciliation is not simply entering into relationship again as though nothing happened **(Luke 17:3)**. It is not entrusting yourself to a betrayer who is likely to betray again.

And it is not melting before whatever display of apology the betrayer can muster. Repentance is deep, life changing remorse by the betrayer in the face of their depravity. It is the betrayer coming to the end of themselves and authentically turning toward those harmed to be permanently oriented toward blessing, not harming or neglecting, them. Repentance is not simply an apology; in fact, an apology is merely an admission that one has been caught, a want to be "let off the hook." Confession, not apology, is required (**James 5:16**). Confession spells out the offense in full.

Repentance is a well-considered path of measurable change that is demonstrated over time. As transformation is seen and confirmed, trust is regained. Restitution, where possible, is completed and reconciliation is begun with a better level of honesty, trust, and intimacy than existed before.

Repentance abandons all forms of violence (physical, which includes restraint, and standing in doorways; verbal, which is shouting, threats, demeaning ridiculing words; emotional, which can be subtle or over manipulation, and withholding.) It is a requirement on the part of the victim to forgive the offender when this authentic, long-lasting repentance is seen (**Colossians 3:13**).

If, however, there is no repentance, then there is no requirement to live together in the marriage (**1 Corinthians 7:10–11**). The temptation, though, is to give up prematurely. It is to lose hope that the restoration could occur sometime in the future. Other times it is more sinister. It is being hardened by resentment and wanting to make the other person pay.

Can I remarry if my spouse dies?

Yes. The marriage covenant ends with the death of one's husband or wife. You are free to marry (**1 Corinthians 7:39**).

Can I remarry after divorcing an adulterer?

This is the most disputed issue on the topic of divorce and remarriage. On the face of it, Jesus and the apostle Paul made no allowance for remarriage.

△ **"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an**

adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:31– 32)

- △ **“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)**
- △ **He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11–12)**
- △ **“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Luke 16:18)**
- △ **To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10–11)**

These statements by Jesus and Paul set the parameters for remarriage.

1. Jesus restricts the grounds for divorce to *moicheia* (adultery) or *porneia* (a broader net of sexual misconduct). Jesus speaks to the husband directly. If the husband is divorcing his wife, he is to give her a certificate of divorce, so she can remarry, rather than punish her by keeping her in a state of unsupported marriage. Jesus, in **Luke 16:19**, states that though an adulterous woman is given a certificate of divorce making it possible for her to remarry, the man who marries her commits adultery. The consequence of sexual sin is grave and not resolvable for the offending spouse, outside the mercy, forgiveness, and grace of the other spouse. Hardness of heart will demand punishment. Mercy and grace will work toward authentic repentance and restoration.

2. The innocent party of a divorce due to adultery may remarry. Remarriage after one has been betrayed by an adulterous spouse does not constitute adultery. The person marrying a previously married spouse who was the victim of an adulterous person also does not constitute adultery. This is implied but not specifically proscribed in **Matthew 19:9**. Scripture is clear: marriage is a covenant relationship that should not be broken

even under extreme circumstances of betrayal such as adultery. It should be restored through repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Paul instructed members of the Corinthian church who separated from their spouses to remain unmarried, so reconciliation could occur. Reconciliation is the priority (**1 Corinthians 7:10**).

3. A believer who remarries after a non-Christian spouse divorces the believing spouse constitutes a legitimate marriage (**1 Corinthians 7:15**).

4. If divorce occurs before a person has surrendered his or her life to Christ, and an appropriate effort to restore the marriage has been undertaken without favorable results, remarriage is appropriate, so long as the believer marries a Christian.

Does this mean the innocent party should remain single indefinitely?

It means they should remain single for as long as every effort is applied to reconcile with their husband or wife under the supervision of the church elders. Though divorce and remarriage is intensely personal, the counsel and objectivity available through consultation with the elders will greatly increase the likelihood of avoiding impulsiveness (**Proverbs 15:22; Hebrews 13:17**).

If the offending spouse remarries, is there any obligation for me to remain single?

This is a matter of conscience as no further option is available to restore the marriage. Remarriage to a former husband or wife who since the divorce has been married to another person is clearly forbidden (**Deuteronomy 24:3-4**). In this case the innocent party would be free to remarry, provided that resentments and relational issues are resolved so they are not carried forward into the new marriage.

Are there other justifications for remarriage?

Jesus made it clear that marrying an adulterer or adulteress constitutes adultery.

This means the one who is guilty of breaking faith and violating the covenant of marriage is committing himself or herself to a life of singleness. It is implicit that the innocent party may remarry, but the offender may not (**Mark 10:10–12; Luke 16:18**). The elders (of Mars Hill Church) take a conservative stance on remarriage, which we believe agrees with Jesus. This means that the primary thrust of any effort is to bring about repentance in the offender, restoration of relationship, forgiveness by the offended, and mutual reconciliation of the marriage.

The elders (of Mars Hill Church) would not support remarriage unless the previous marriage ended because of the stubborn unrepentance of the adulterer/adulteress (*moicheia*), or immoral person (*porneia*), or because of violence by the spouse of the previous marriage.

Can I remarry if I divorced my spouse just because we were incompatible?

No. Work toward reconciliation, which means discovering what made you incompatible, and change. There are few legitimate reasons for divorce.

Incompatibility is not one of them (**1 Corinthians 7:10**).

What if I divorced my spouse because of domestic violence, child abuse, or abandonment— can I remarry?

The Bible gives no direct instruction in these cases. However, the Bible is clear in this regard: a husband is responsible to love his wife, which means caring for her and protecting her from any harm. He is also responsible for the care and protection of his children. He must assure that no form of harm or exploitation comes to them (**Ephesians 5:21–31**).

Some have used biblical teaching on wives submitting to their husband to force battered women to stay in their marriages. This is not our position. Physical harm to spouses or children is absolutely not acceptable.

What if I was divorced while a non-Christian?

Though marriage is a blessing given to all humanity and is to be honored as a binding covenant even when entered into before being in Christ, it is understood that the non-Christian is

ignorant of God's decrees and expectations. Therefore, a non-Christian cannot be bound by the same expectations governing a Christian. The atonement Jesus achieved by His blood is sufficient to pay the penalty of previous sin. Therefore, that person would be eligible to remarry a Christian, but only after every effort is made to restore the previous marriage through a reconciliation process.

I believe that the Elders of Mars Hill Church have done a very thorough job of properly eyeleting scripture in regards to the issue of remarriage. That being said, this is not the official stance for Delta Church or the associations that we are a part of.

The bible is our final authority on all issues of faith and life. Generally, the bible teaches that: marriage is to be highly honored and every effort must be made to see that a marriage is God honoring; divorce is not God's desire or design, yet some concessions are made for it; and remarriage for issues other than death have specific parameters that should be adhered to.

Delta seeks to be a church where marriage is championed, cultivated, and celebrated. Delta also seeks to be a church where those who have been deeply wounded by the harsh realities of divorce can be healed. And Delta seeks to be a church where people and relationships can find restoration and reconciliation.