

SUMMIT'S DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE

I. MARRIAGE

Marriage is a binding covenant created by God between one man and one woman for our holiness and for our joy. It is a picture of the gospel used to spread the glory of God.

- The relationship is designed to be a lifelong commitment of covenant love between one man and one woman. (Gen 2:24, Matt 19:3-8)
- The relationship is a place of sanctification for each mate. (Gen 2:18-22, Eph 5:25-33)
- The relationship is the first place God designed for the multiplying of a Godly legacy through the gospel. (Gen 1:28, Ps 78:5-7, 127:3-4, Malachi 2:15)
- The relationship is designed to be a reflection of the eternal covenant God makes with those who come to Him by faith through Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:25-32)
- The relationship is designed to be a place of God given joy. (Prov 5:18, Song of Sol 4:8-11)
- The marriage relationship was established and designed by God and reaffirmed by Jesus in his teachings. (Gen 2, Matt 19:4-6, Mark 10:5-9)

DOES THE SUMMIT HONOR COHABITATION RELATIONSHIPS AS MARRIAGES?

No. When a couple cohabitates for the purpose of avoiding taxes or other obligations common to married people, we would regard the relationship as sinful and illegitimate (Romans 13:1–3). All responsibilities toward the partner, children, and government are regarded as obligations to be honored. We would urge the couple to marry, to seal their relationship within covenant, to honor God, and to obey the civil authorities. Men and women commonly cohabit with one another, claiming that living together is more honest because a marriage license is merely a “piece of paper” that trivializes their love. The unspoken reality is that lifelong commitment to each other is not necessarily expected or desired. In this type of arrangement, children conceived in these relationships are forced to live in and adapt to an environment deeply embedded with “self-ism.” Though they are not told overtly, implied in the structure is a built-in exit plan. Legacy, inheritance, and family lineage are not cherished. Questions hang over the arrangement: is it a marriage with moral and covenantal obligations? Or is it a mutual agreement to be used and then discarded when the going gets tough or we fall out of love?

II. DIVORCE

Many fine scholars who love the Lord disagree on this issue. It must therefore be treated with a tremendous amount of mercy and grace. In no other period of human history has the ability to leave one’s commitment of marriage been so prevalent and easy. Today all that is required to divorce one’s spouse is a statement of irreconcilable differences. What then should be the response of the disciple of Jesus Christ?

God is clear in His scripture that divorce is contrary to both His design (Gen. 2:24) and will (Matt 19:3-8, 1 Cor. 7:10). He explicitly states that He is against divorce (Mal. 2:16). Why?

- **Divorce defames his glory.** Marriage is a picture of how God love is faithful to us eternally in a covenant relationship. When we divorce we give a false view of who God is and how he is faithful to us even when we are not. In so doing, we defame His glory.
- **Divorce wounds many for generations.** God also knows that every divorce brings destruction to everyone involved. Children, extended families, and spouses are wounded in ways that will affect the rest of their lives and beyond for generations. “Becoming one” as (Gen 2:24) God designed is not a metaphor. It is real; and when two who are “one” divorce, a ripping of the soul and of life occurs that leaves wounds for all those affected.

While never a part of God's original design, God allowed divorce because of the hardness of men's heart (sin). "A certificate of divorce" served as a tangible expression of man's rebellion against God's design and instruction.

WHEN IS DIVORCE PERMITTED?

1. **Adultery:** Adultery is a grievous sin and a profoundly serious matter. We agree with Jesus that adultery can be a reason for divorce. We also agree with him that "hardness of heart" is the real cause for this decision. However, God's desire is not for the offended party to immediately seek a divorce. Rather, like God who is faithful to us – even when we are not, (Is 1:21, Jer 2:20-24) we are to pursue reconciliation with our spouses.

There are two words for the type of sexual sin that constitutes adultery. While there is debate over these two words, most understand these two words as speaking of two categories of sin:

- Moicheia [moy·khah·o]: to have romantic or sexual relations with a married man or woman who is not one's lawful spouse (adultery).
- Porneia [por·ni·ah]: illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication (sexual activity before marriage), homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, incest.

We take the position that adultery is a broad range of sexual activity that constitutes immorality (porneia), which is a violation of the covenant of marriage (Proverbs 2:16–17). It is a betrayal of one's spouse and of God's witness and ratification of the marriage.

- After reconciliation has been pursued and the offender remains unrepentant, divorce is allowed.
- After reconciliation has been pursued and the offender seeks divorce, divorce is allowed.

2. **Abandonment by an unbeliever:** (1 Corinthians 7:13-15) In the event that an unbeliever chooses to leave and divorce one's Christian spouse, the believer is free to allow the divorce. Again, the hope and desire is always for reconciliation. This should be pursued first and last. In addition, the believer should not initiate divorcing a non-Christian, but should live graciously with one's spouse to quietly represent Christ with an infectious demeanor, kindness, generosity, and service

WHAT ABOUT ABUSE? DO I HAVE TO ENDURE AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

No. Abuse is never tolerable in marriage or against family members, especially children or the elderly. Abuse is sinful violence and must be treated as such. "Violent" abuse includes physical and verbal abuse. A person who lives under constant fear and dread – lives under "violence" to their soul. Those being harmed must be removed from the environment that endangers them so they can know and experience safety. At the least, it means separation for a period of time, so that measured progress can be achieved by the violent partner. A "no tolerance of future harm" stance must be clearly understood and consistently demonstrated by the violent partner for reunion to occur. At the worst, if trust is not recoverable, the harmed spouse must be respected to determine if they can or will reenter the relationship again.

Scripture does not address abuse as a legitimate reason for divorce. This issue becomes a judgment call on the part of the elders and must be handled in a case-by-case basis. Again, the goal must be reconciliation first – not divorce.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON DIVORCE

- Just because divorce is permitted – does not mean it should occur. God's heart in every situation is that we first pursue reconciliation. Because this is God's heart, we will lead as elders in the same way. We will not only encourage, but we will lead a spouse to pursue reconciliation no matter the unfaithfulness.
- Adultery, abandonment, and abuse (case-by-case) are the only legitimate biblical reasons for divorce. All other reasons for divorce are sinful and defiant, exhibiting an embedded hardness of the heart from one or both of the parties (Matthew 19:8).

III. REMARRIAGE

To reiterate: God's will and the admonition of the elders is going to be that the offended party seeks reconciliation at all costs. However, there are times when unrepentant sin leads a spouse to destroy the marriage covenant. Where the

scripture allows re-marriage it is not only permissible, it is celebrated. Additionally, singleness is an honorable way to live and bring glory to God.

WHEN DOES SCRIPTURE ALLOW REMARRIAGE?

1. **When your spouse dies you are free to remarry.** The marriage covenant ends with the death of one's husband or wife. (1 Corinthians 7:39)
2. **When you are the innocent party in adultery you are free to remarry.** (Matt 19:9)
Anyone who says, "I could never forgive my spouse if they cheated on me" has not embraced the faithfulness of God. Each of us frequently commits spiritual adultery on God – and yet he remains faithful to us always.
 - Adultery includes all forms of sexual immorality with another person.
 - Adultery includes your spouse divorcing you and then beginning a relationship with another person. (Often, the spouse has not committed adultery within the first marriage but leaves because they are not happy. If you pursue reconciliation and your spouse divorces you and begins a relationship with another – *this is adultery*.)
3. **When your unbelieving spouse divorces you, you are free to remarry.** (1 Cor 7:15)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THAT ARE RELATED TO REMARRIAGE:

A. What if I was divorced as an unbeliever? Can I remarry?

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 relationship with 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. For this reason, 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. It is expected that the previous spouse would be sought out with the express purpose of reconciliation. The elders will be a part of a process that asks you to pursue reconciliation with your former spouse (allowing that they are not remarried). After this process, you would be free to remarry.

B. What if I divorced because I was the victim of domestic violence or my children were being abused? 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 he must care for her and protect 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). The elders would expect every effort be made and sufficient time be allowed for the abusing spouse to repent. If no repentance was demonstrated, and reconciliation was improbable, remarriage would be permitted. Some have used biblical teaching on wives' submission to their husbands as a rule that battered women stay in their marriages. This is not our position. Physical harm to spouses or children is absolutely not acceptable.

C. Can I remarry if I divorced my spouse because I was unhappy or there was irreconcilable differences?

The scripture is clear - no. Work toward reconciliation. This means discover what made you incompatible and change. There are a few legitimate reasons for divorce as we have discussed. Incompatibility is not one of them. Furthermore, to remarry at this point is to commit adultery and causes the one you marry to commit adultery. (Matt 19:9, Corinthians 7:10-11)

D. Can I remarry if I was divorced because I committed adultery?

The scripture is clear – no. (Matt 19:9) To remarry at this point is to commit adultery and causes the one you marry to commit adultery.

SO IF I DIVORCE FOR UNBIBLICAL REASONS AM I TO STAY SINGLE FOREVER?

Jesus says, "And I say to you; whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." (Matt 19:9) To make this verse mean something other than what it directly says is simply wrong. It is an attempt to get what our hardened hearts want: to be in another relationship.

It sounds harsh to say, but you must stay single. However, in light of God's holy glory, this is not a harsh reality.

- Being single is not a curse, nor is it a dishonorable way to live. God says singleness is pleasing to Him. It allows one to unconditionally devote his/her life to live fully for Him. (1 Cor 7:32-35)
- In Christ, God does forgive you for your sin of divorce or adultery. However, his forgiveness is not justification for you to continue to sin by committing adultery again. Why is God so adamant about this? Because marriage is a life long covenant that is designed to mirror the eternal covenant God has with us through Christ. (Eph 5:25-32) This is why God hates divorce. Divorce defames his glory. When we divorce for any reason other than adultery or abuse, God sees us as still married. Therefore, when we join ourselves to another this becomes a threesome in God's eyes, which constitutes adultery. That is why Jesus says if you marry another you commit adultery.

WHAT IF I REMARRIED WITH NO BIBLICAL GROUNDS TO DO SO?

- Though you committed adultery in the act of getting married, you are not living in adultery. Do not divorce again. Two wrongs do not make this right before God's eyes. Instead, confess your sins and receive forgiveness. (1 John 1:9)

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is unending biblical debate regarding the issue of divorce and remarriage. People who seek to justify sin will always find a way to vindicate themselves in their own minds. The elders recognize that there are many complicated factors and variables in each marriage. Consequently we will prayerfully and biblically seek wisdom as we evaluate each case based on the clear direction of Scripture.

Primary texts concerning divorce and remarriage:

Genesis 2:23–24; Exodus 20:14,17; Deuteronomy 5:18; Deuteronomy 24:1–4 Malachi 2:14–17
Matthew 5:31–32; Matthew 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2–4; 1 Corinthians 7:10–17, 39;
1 Timothy 5:14

Secondary texts:

Genesis 1:26–28 (Male and female represent the image and likeness of God)
Genesis 2:18 (It is not good for man to be alone)
Genesis 3:16 (A woman's desire will be to rule or take preeminence over her husband's headship, but he will rule over her by God's decree)
Genesis 16:1–16; 21:8–21 (Hagar is named Abram's wife)
Genesis 20:1–7 (God confronts Abimelech to prevent him from defiling Sarah)
Genesis 24:1–67 (Rebekah is found and brought to Isaac. Pay particular attention to v. 58, where Rebekah agrees to the marriage. Marriage is not intended to be arranged against the will of the bride. Marriage is consensual, which also applies responsibility to the woman for joining into covenant.)
Genesis 39:1–23 (Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife. Pay particular attention to vv. 8-10, where Joseph regards adultery as an offense against God as well as against her husband.)
Exodus 21:7–11 (Husbands are to provide food, clothing, and marital rights.)