

# BIBLICAL MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

## OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

### BASIC PRINCIPLES

"What therefore God has **joined together**,  
let no man separate."

**ONCE THE MARRIAGE HAS BEEN CONSUMMATED,  
TO INITIATE DIVORCE IS SIN!**

1. Gen. 2:24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become **one flesh**.
2. Matt. 19:6 Consequently they are no longer two, but **one flesh**. What therefore God has **joined together**, let no man separate. (Jesus taught that separation is equal to divorce and sin.)

### MARRIAGE DEFINED

Living together and having a heterosexual relationship does not constitute "becoming one flesh" or being "joined together" with God's blessing. The Bible does not define this as "marriage," but instead uses the word "fornication," which is sin. Two people of the same sex living together having a sexual relationship is not defined as "marriage," but is defined as "sodomy" (homosexuality or lesbianism, *Rom. 1:25-28*) and is also sin. Marriage by God's standards includes the following:

1. One man and one woman (Adam and Eve, not Annie and Eve or Adam and Steve). Gender confusion does not change these precepts. Your gender is on your original birth certificate.
2. The understanding that this is a "til death do us part" commitment between a man and a woman.
3. The blessing of the authority (God in the Garden, parents/spiritual leaders and/or governing authorities if possible).
4. A marriage certificate (The "certificate" of divorce referred to in the Bible was obviously needed to nullify a previous "certificate of marriage." These were legal documents which would need at least "two witnesses." They were used to establish facts such as date, place, and names, and they became part of the historical records used to establish such things as kinship and ownership of properties by family inheritance.

NOTE: Only under severe adverse conditions, such as living in a war-torn country, or being stranded on a deserted island, should someone ever consider #3 and #4 being modified.

### OLD TESTAMENT MARRIAGE PROCESS

#### MARRIAGE ARRANGED BY FATHERS OR RELATIVES

1. **Betrothal period** – (engagement) during which time they were considered to be married
  - a. This was a preparatory time for the final, formal marriage. The betrothed wife would usually live in the husband's household, but not in the same quarters, Gen. 24:67 – Isaac and Rebekah; Gen. 29:21 – Jacob and Rachel; Matt. 1:18-19 – Mary and Joseph; and Matt. 25:10 – the ten virgins;

obviously preparing for the Bride of Christ.

b. During this time, if any indecency, unseemliness, or immorality occurred with another man, and the wife was no longer a virgin, she could be put away or "sent out from his household" by a certificate of divorce. This was taught in both the Old Testament, and the New Testament (Old Testament teaching: Deut. 24:1-4; New Testament teaching: Matt. 1:18-19). This "sending out" or "sending away" was always before they were **"joined together."**

2. **Formal marriage** – If, at the time the marriage was consummated, the woman was found not to be a virgin, then Deut.22:13-19 applied. This complaint had to be made at the immediate time that the "two [first] became one flesh."

## **SIN PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OLD TESTAMENT IMMORALITY IN MARRIAGE**

### **ADULTERY – GOD'S LEGAL LIMITATIONS**

*Leviticus 20:10* 'If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, **the adulterer and the adulteress** shall surely be put to death.

*Deuteronomy 17:4-7* ...and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then **you shall inquire thoroughly**. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman [or **both** as in adultery] who has done this evil deed to your gates, that is, the man or the woman [or both], and you shall stone them to death. On the **evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness**. The hand of the [at least two eye] **witnesses shall be first against him** to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (See John 8:3-11)

*Deuteronomy 19:15* A **single witness** shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of **two or three [eye] witnesses** a matter shall be confirmed.

*Numbers 5:13* ...and a man has intercourse with her and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and she is undetected, although she has defiled herself, and **there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act** [eye witnesses],

### **GOD'S LEGAL LIMITATIONS CONCERNING DIVORCE**

*Deuteronomy 24:1-4* "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found **some indecency in her** [during the betrothal period], and he writes her **a certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand and **sends her out from his house[hold]**, and she leaves his house[hold] and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her **a certificate of divorce** and puts it in her hand [during the betrothal period] and **sends her out of his house[hold]**, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

### **OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF NO DIVORCE AFTER TWO "ARE JOINED TOGETHER"**

1. If a man found a virgin girl and **had relations** with her, **and they were discovered**, he must give the girl's father fifty shekels of silver, marry the girl, and **"was not allowed to divorce her all of his days."** (This was according to *Deut. 22:28-30*.)

2. In *Num. 5:12-28* a husband with a jealous spirit [**after they have become one flesh**], was to bring his wife to the priest with a grain offering of jealousy. The priest was to then take holy water in an earthenware vessel, mix it with some dust from the floor of the tabernacle, and have the wife drink it in front of the Lord. If the woman had been unfaithful her stomach would swell and her thigh waste

away, and she would become a curse among her people. If the woman was not defiled, she was then free and conceived children. **In either case, divorce was not allowed.**

3. If a man falsely accuses his wife of not being a virgin when he first "**goes into her**," and her parents bring out the evidence of her virginity, he is fined 100 shekels of silver. In addition "**he is not allowed to divorce her all of his days.**" This was according to *Deut. 22:13-19*.

### **OTHER EXAMPLES**

1. If an engaged woman willingly had relations with another man, they both were to be put to death – she, because she did not scream, and he, because he committed adultery. This was according to *Deut. 22:24*. However, if the woman did not consent, and screamed out, she was allowed to live, but the man was to be put to death. (This was according to *Deut.22:25-27*.)

2. If a man accused his wife of not being a virgin before marrying him, as she had claimed, and it was found to be true at the first "**joining together**," the wife was stoned to death for playing the harlot. This was according to *Deut. 22:20-21*.

3. In the case of an unfaithful wife who was **caught in the act** of adultery, or a married man who was **caught in adultery**, the Israelites were commanded to put both the man and woman to death. There had to be two or more eyewitnesses in all situations involving capital punishment. This was according to *Lev. 20:10*, and *Deut.17:4-7; 22:22*.

4. If a man was married to a woman and during the betrothal period he found **some indecency in her** before they were "**joined together**," he was allowed to write her a **certificate of divorce**. He was not ever allowed to remarry her. (This was according to *Deut. 24:1-4*.) (Joseph was going to do this to Mary until the angel revealed to him that she conceived the baby by the Holy Spirit.)

5. The woman who was given a **certificate of divorce** because of **some kind of indecency** was allowed to be married to another man, but she was not allowed to ever remarry the betrothed husband that gave her a **certificate of divorce**. (This is according to *Deut. 24:2*.)

NOTE: Women in the Old Testament never had an option at any time to obtain a certificate of divorce or question her husband's unfaithfulness.

### **THE BIBLE IS CONSISTENT – NO DIVORCE AFTER "TWO BECOME ONE"**

Some erroneously believe that verses such as *Matt. 5:32* and *Matt. 19:9* allow for divorce (after the two become one) if there is immorality in the marriage. These verses only allow the man to divorce his wife, not the wife divorce her husband, and then only during the betrothal (engagement) period as clearly found in *Deut. 22:13-19*, and *Deut. 24:1-4*, the cross-references given for the above *Matthew* verses in any reputable study Bible. A good example of this is the following situation with Joseph and Mary:

*Matthew 1:18-20, 24-25* Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother **Mary had been betrothed to Joseph**, before they **came together** she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And **Joseph her husband**, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, **planned to send her away** secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife**; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and **took Mary as his wife**, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

### **NEW TESTAMENT**

In *Matt. 19:3-8* Some Pharisees tested Jesus by asking Him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all. Jesus pointed them back to the Scriptures, quoting to them "FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." Jesus then went on to say, "WHAT THEREFORE GOD HAS **JOINED TOGETHER**, LET NO MAN [or woman] **SEPARATE**." Still the Pharisees, not wanting to accept this obviously clear concept, persisted. They asked why Moses

allowed a certificate of divorce. Jesus answered that **it was because of the hardness of their hearts**, but that **from the beginning it was not meant to be that way**, even during the betrothal period. However, the Law did allow for divorce during the betrothal period in the case of immorality. Immorality refers to fornication during the betrothal period before they are **"joined together."** Jesus was referring to Deut. 24:1-4. (See O. T. examples #4 and #5 above.)

**NOTE: Jesus made it very clear that separation or desertion is the same as divorce, and it was NEVER an option after the "two become one flesh" and are "joined together."** You CANNOT separate from your spouse (except by agreement *I Cor. 7:5*) and still claim you have not divorced that spouse.

### **TO INITIATE DIVORCE IS ADULTERY [and teaching that divorce is ever allowed is sin]**

*Mark 10:11-12* And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman **commits adultery** against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is **committing adultery.**"

*Luke 16:18* "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another **commits adultery**; and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband **commits adultery.**"

*Romans 7:1-3* Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? **For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living**; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called **an adulteress**; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an **adulteress** though she is joined to another man.

*1 Corinthians 7:10-11* But to the married I give instructions, not I, but **the Lord**, that **the wife should not leave her husband** (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that **the husband should not divorce his wife.**

*1 Corinthians 7:39* A wife is bound **as long as her husband lives**; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

**NOTE:** God's will is "no divorce," or "death do you part." But if you are deserted or divorced by a spouse and become one of the "unmarried," you may remarry, as we will see in the following select verses from *I Cor. 7:1-28*.

### **MARITAL SITUATIONS (NEW TESTAMENT)**

**NOTE:** God's Word is usually written in the male gender in a generic sense. (Example: *Titus 2:3-4* "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.") This does not mean God does not want women to be saved, just because it is written in the male gender. Thus, in many of the following New Testament verses the principle applies even when the genders are reversed, e.g., in *I Cor. 7:11* it is also true that a man should not leave (divorce) his wife; and if he does he is not allowed to marry (unless he reconciles with his wife). Also, if a wife has been divorced by her husband, she is called to peace, and may marry again, within the guidelines of God's word – *I Cor. 7:15, 27-28*.

*Chapter 7 of I Corinthians* addresses marital situations and guidelines for three types of people: VIRGINS – those who have never been married; WIDOWS – those who have lost their spouse through death; and UNMARRIED – those who have either divorced their spouse, or have been divorced by their spouse:

1. If the widows and the unmarried, whose spouses have deserted them, are not gifted to be single, they are encouraged to pursue their gift of marriage, for it is better to marry than to burn. This is found in *1 Cor. 7:9, 28, 40*. However, if these unmarried people and the widows do have the gift of singleness, they may remain single, and not seek a wife. This is found in *1 Cor. 7:8, 27*.
2. Once a man and woman are married **they are to stay married for life**. This is according to *1 Cor. 7:10, 11, 27, 39*; (*Matt.19:3*; *Mark 10:11-12*; *Luke 16:18* and *Rom. 7:1-3*).
3. If a wife leaves her husband, she has divorced him, and is to remain "unmarried," or be reconciled to her husband. If she does NOT repent, and refuses to submit to church discipline, she is then to be looked upon as a gentile and a tax gatherer (unbeliever) according to *1 Cor. 7:10-11 and Matt. 18:17*.)
4. If a Christian woman is married to an unbelieving husband who consents to live with her; she is NOT to send him away. However, if the unbelieving husband leaves, let him leave. The woman is no longer under bondage, she is called to peace. (This is according to *1 Cor. 7:13, 15*.)
5. If a Christian man is married to an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he is NOT to send her away. However, if she decides to leave, let her leave. The man is no longer under bondage, but he is called to peace. (This is according to *1 Cor. 7:12, 15*.)

## SUMMARY

### HUSBANDS

The believing husband, ideally, is to follow Christ's example and have only one wife in his lifetime. He is the head of his wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church (*Eph. 5:23, 24*). He should not divorce his wife (*1 Cor. 7:11*). If his wife chooses to leave (divorce) him, he has these options:

1. He may wait for her to reconcile and come back (*1 Cor.7:11*). He is not commanded to wait; the choice is his.
2. If she remains carnal after church discipline, (*Matt. 18:15-18*) she is living like an "unbeliever" in her walk. She can then be categorized by him as an "unbelieving [unfaithful] one" that Paul speaks of in *1 Cor. 7:15*. (She, of course, is still saved. You CANNOT lose eternal life in Jesus Christ.
3. After it is established that she is an "unbelieving one" by the local church body, the husband then has the right to obtain a certificate of divorce on the grounds of desertion, **understanding that he is not divorcing her**, he is only verifying what she has already done (*Jer. 3:6-8*). He is following civil law (*Rom. 13:1*), establishing his new legal status as "unmarried" or divorced.
4. Because his wife is considered an "unbelieving one," he can choose to remarry if he wishes to (*1 Cor. 7:27-28*). He has been called to peace (*1 Cor. 7:15*). If he lacks self-control, it is better that he remarries (*1 Cor. 7:9*). If he does decide to remarry, he has not sinned, but he may have trouble in this life (*1 Cor. 7:28*). He can choose to remain "unmarried" if that is his desire (*1 Cor. 7:8, 27, 32, 35*).
5. A husband following the above options is in not in violation of *1 Cor. 7:11*. Notice in *1 Cor. 7:11* that it is only the person who initiates the divorce who is commanded to "remain unmarried." And a husband who gives his wife a certificate of divorce after she has divorced (left) him is correctly protecting himself from bigamy, lawsuits, financial liability, etc., under the civil law. See #3.

If the believing husband leaves his wife or puts her out:

1. He is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to his wife (*1 Cor. 7:11*).
2. If he decides to ignore church discipline (*Matt. 18*) and remains carnal, he then becomes the "unbelieving" or "unfaithful" (though still saved) husband that Paul speaks of in *1 Cor. 7:15*. He is no longer walking in the Spirit, he has gone back to the flesh.
3. He is still bound to her for as long as she lives. This is according to *Rom. 7:2*; and *1Cor. 7:10, 39*. He is to "REMAIN UNMARRIED" or to be reconciled to his wife (*1Cor. 7:11*). If he marries another woman after having divorced (left) his first wife, he and the woman are both committing adultery (*Mark 10:12*).

## WIVES

The believing wife ideally should have only one husband in her lifetime. She is to follow Christ's commands to be a type of "bride of Christ" which Jesus would like to marry. References: *Eph. 5:22, 31, 32*; and *Rom. 7:2*. She is not to divorce (leave) her husband (*1 Cor. 7:10, 39*). If she does leave her husband or puts him out, the following apply:

1. She is to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. She is symbolized as a "type of Israel" who has left her husband (*Hosea 14:1, 2 and 1 Cor. 7:11*).
2. If she decides to ignore church discipline (*Matt. 18*) and remains carnal, she then becomes the "unbelieving" or "unfaithful" (though still saved) wife that Paul speaks of in *1 Cor. 7:15*. She is no longer walking in the Spirit; she has gone back to the flesh.
3. She is still bound to him for as long as he lives. This is according to *Rom. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:10, 39*. She is to "REMAIN UNMARRIED" or to be reconciled to her husband (*1 Cor. 7:11*). If she marries another man after having divorced (left) her first husband, she and the man are both committing adultery (*Mark 10:12*).

If her husband leaves her or puts her out:

1. She may wait for him to reconcile and come back (*1 Cor. 7:11*). She is not commanded to wait; the choice is hers.
2. If he remains carnal after church discipline, (*Matt. 18:15-18*) he is living like an "unbeliever" in his walk. He can then be categorized by her as an "unbelieving [unfaithful] one" that Paul speaks of in *1 Cor. 7:15*. (He, of course, is still saved. You CANNOT lose eternal life in Jesus Christ.)
3. After it is established that he is an "unbelieving one" by the local church body, the wife then has the right to obtain a certificate of divorce on the grounds of desertion, **understanding that she is not divorcing him**, she is only verifying what he has already done (*Jer. 3:6-8*). She is following civil law (*Rom. 13:1*), establishing her new legal status as "unmarried" or divorced.
4. Because her husband is considered an "unbelieving one," she can choose to remarry if she wishes to (*1 Cor. 7:27-28*). She has been called to peace (*1 Cor. 7:15*). If she lacks self-control, it is better that she remarries (*1 Cor. 7:9*). If she does decide to remarry, she has not sinned, but she may have trouble in this life (*1 Cor. 7:28*). She can also choose to remain "unmarried" if that is her desire (*1 Cor. 7:8, 27, 32, 35*).
5. A wife following the above action is not in violation of *1 Cor. 7:11*. Notice in *1 Cor. 7:11* that it is only the person who initiates the divorce who is commanded to "remain unmarried." And a wife who gives her husband a certificate of divorce after he has divorced (left) her, is correctly protecting herself from bigamy, lawsuits, financial liability, etc., under the civil law. See #3.
6. In *1 Tim. 5:14*, women under 60 years of age are encouraged to remarry if they are not under the ban of *1 Cor. 7:11*.

**The spiritual, obedient Christian is never to divorce, under any condition, after "the two become one flesh."** When a couple marries, they should vow before God "until death do we part," not "until death or immorality (or anything else) do we part!" This means that **nothing** will part, separate, or divorce the two of them but death. They must keep their vows (*Deut. 23:21-23*). This is also a picture of the eternal relationship between our Lord Jesus Christ and His Bride, faithful Christians in "fine (white) linen, bright and clean." *Rev. 19:7-8*