

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 18
Divorce and Remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:10–24, 39–40)
May 14, 2006
Pastor Mark Driscoll

A wife must not separate from her husband. . . . And a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:10–11

The church at Corinth was confused over issues pertaining to divorce and remarriage and asked their pastor, Paul, a number of questions. His answers are recorded in 1 Corinthians 7:10–24, 39–40. In our normal course of studying a book of the Bible such as 1 Corinthians, we would simply study these verses. But with the issue of divorce and remarriage being so significant in our culture and so debated in our church, it seems most prudent to answer the questions asked by the Corinthians in addition to many of the questions that are commonly asked at Mars Hill Church. The following notes are adapted from a position paper written by Pastor Bent Meyer on behalf of the elders.

What do we know for certain about marriage?

1. God created marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:22–25).
2. God designed marriage to be a permanent union of “oneness” that is not to be broken (Genesis 2:23–24; Matthew 19:4–6).
3. Marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14; Proverbs 2:17; Ecclesiastes 5:4). God and human witnesses ratify and officially record the event. Anniversaries revisit the covenant.
4. A marriage partnership is one in which the husband commits to ensuring his wife’s and his children’s well-being (Exodus 21:10; Ephesians 5:28–29; 1 Timothy 5:8).
5. A husband is accountable for his family’s well-being and conduct (Genesis 3:9; Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7).
6. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).
7. The death of a spouse terminates the marriage covenant (Romans 7:1–3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Does Mars Hill honor cohabitation relationships as marriages?

No. A marriage is both a spiritual and legal matter (Romans 13:1–3).

What constitutes the legitimate ending of a marriage?

1. The death of a spouse (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2–4).
2. Adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22).
3. Non-Christian divorce. A Christian should not initiate divorce with a non-Christian but should live graciously with their spouse. If the non-Christian divorces them, however, they are free to re-marry (1 Corinthians 7:10–24).
4. A wide range of sexual sins (*porneia*, in the Greek text). Much debate is generated over the word, *porneia* (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). It is used in combination with *moicheia* (Matthew 5:32), which some consider to be a

literary device to emphasize adultery. Others take the words to speak of two categories of sin.

- **Moicheia** [*moichao* / moy-khah-o]: to have romantic or sexual relations with a married man or woman who is not one's lawful spouse (adultery).
 - **Porneia** [*porneia* / por-ni-ah]: illicit sexual intercourse, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, incest, etc. We take the position that sexual deviancy in a broad range of sexual activity constitutes immorality.
5. Treachery or treasonous betrayal. Treachery is a breach of covenant that evaporates all "one-fleshness," safety, and loyalty (Malachi 2:14–16).
 6. Hardness of heart. Moses allowed divorce as concession to the hardness of heart. Hardness of heart violates two primary relationships simultaneously: relationship with the spouse and relationship with God (Matthew 19:8).

There are no other legitimate reasons. All other reasons for divorce are embedded in defiant sin (a hardness of heart) by one or both of the parties (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:5).

What will the elders do if my Christian spouse insists on divorcing me?

If a Christian initiates divorce, the elders will begin an investigation and if biblical grounds are not found then church discipline will begin. Our intent is mitigation and counseling to bring about repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Mark 10:11–12; Romans 7:2–3; 1 Corinthians 7:10–11, 27).

Does this mean women must endure abusive relationships?

No. Abuse (physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, etc.) intolerably and sinfully violates the frequent command to love like Jesus and the spirit of 1 Peter 3:7. Those being harmed must be removed from the environment that endangers them and the laws of our state must be followed. This issue becomes a judgment call on the part of the elders regarding whether or not divorce due to hardness of heart is appropriate.

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) because Jesus says we should love our enemies (Matthew 5:43–45). The Bible also commands sinners to repent. If, however, there is no repentance, then there is no requirement to remain married (1 Corinthians 7:10–11).

Can I remarry if my spouse dies?

Yes. The marriage covenant ends with the death of one's spouse (Romans 7:2; 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 (Matthew 5:31–32; 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10–11).

These following points set the parameters for remarriage.

- The innocent party of a divorce due to adultery may remarry but the guilty party may not remarry (Matthew 19:19; Mark 10:10–12; Luke 16:18).
- A believer who remarries after a non-Christian spouse divorces the believing spouse constitutes a legitimate marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- 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 until every effort to reconcile has been exhausted, under the supervision of the church elders to help guard against 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 (Deuteronomy 24:3–4). In this case the innocent party would be free to remarry.

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 (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. The elders would expect every effort and sufficient time be allowed for the abusing spouse to repent. If no repentance was demonstrated, and reconciliation was improbable, remarriage would be permitted.

What if I was divorced while a non-Christian?

While marriage is given for all humanity, non-Christians cannot be expected to obey God's commands and Jesus died to forgive repentant sinners. 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.

Concluding Remarks

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