



Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Part 1 (1 Cor. 7:8-11, 39-40)

The topics of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are important, controversial, and complex. For this reason we are going to divide 1 Cor. 7:8-16 into two lessons. Marriage is the most intimate of human relationships. In marriage we share our hopes, dreams, desires, and our very selves. Marriage can be happy and joyful or it can degenerate into a miserable and painful existence.

Most people enter their marriages with great hopes and expectations imagining a wonderful and happy life with their spouse. Most believe their marriages will endure the difficult testing that may come as love holds them together. Yet as much as we hope for marriages to succeed we are reminded that a high percentage of marriages in Australia fail. Every church and every family is touched by divorce.



Probably no one in this world hates divorce as much as those who have gone through it. And though God designed marriage, and hates divorce, he does not hate divorced people. God loves those who have endured the agony of divorce as much as those who have intact marriages. In the church we need to love and minister to those who have suffered the tragedy of a broken marriage.

1. What are some of the consequences of divorce and how can the church minister to those who have suffered a divorce?

Divorce was prevalent in Corinth in the first century. It is said that some people were married and divorced a dozen times or more. Because of all of the problems surrounding marriage, divorce and remarriage the Corinthians appealed to Paul for answers to their problems. Now in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul answers some of the Corinthians questions about marriage. In the previous lesson we learned that marriage is not mandatory and that singleness is acceptable. We also learned that sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage.

As we move on to what Paul has to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage we need to understand an important fact: Paul does not address every specific situation that people may face today. He does not write about abusive marriages. He does not write about those who are married to alcoholic spouses. He does not write about those who contribute nothing emotionally or physically to the marriage. Paul addresses specific questions that were asked him by the Corinthian Christians. Still, this passage provides some guidelines for our understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

I. A Word to the Unmarried

In **verses 8-9** Paul speaks to those people are not at this time married. He tells them, ***“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”***

These verses tend to be somewhat controversial. We know of course who widows are. They are women whose husbands have died. The word **unmarried** is somewhat more difficult to understand. The word can simply refer to people who have never been married, but the word can also be used to refer to widowers or those who are divorced. It seems most likely that the word here points to widowers or to those whose spouse deserted them when they became Christians. To allow a blanket permission for marriage after divorce would contradict other biblical teachings.

2. What are the teachings of 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 39-40 and 1 Timothy 5:14 concerning widows?

3. Why might it be better, in some cases, for widows or widowers to remain single.

Paul says that he is single in verse 8. At the time Paul wrote this verse he was unmarried, but it is likely that he was married at one time in his life. It was assumed that Jewish men would marry. It is believed that Paul had been a member of the Sanhedrin and Sanhedrin members were apparently required to be married. If Paul was indeed married at some point we do not know what happened to his wife. She may have died, or deserted him when he became a Christian.

Paul says that it is good not to marry, but he does not say that remarriage for those whose spouse has died is bad. He does not even say that it is better to remain unmarried. As Paul teaches 1 Cor. 7:7, it is a gift to be able to remain unmarried. If you have that gift then it is good to exercise it, but if you do not have the gift to remain unmarried and your spouse has died then you should remarry.

II. A Word to Those Married to a Christian Spouse

In **verses 10-11** Paul clearly says, ***“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.”***



4. Why doesn't Paul allow any exceptions for divorce between two Christians?

5. What does Jesus teach about marriage in Mark 10:6-9?

As we would expect, Paul agrees with Jesus when he says that the wife must not separate from her husband and then he goes on to say, ***“But if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband . . .”*** Paul expects for married couples to stay married and to live together until parted by death. He does not expect separation and divorce, but he knows it will sometimes happen so he wants to hold open the possibility for reconciliation as long as possible. There are instances of reconciliation in marriages where it seemed impossible.

Paul does not give any permission for remarriage to either party where both husband and wife are Christians. The Bible is so restrictive because God wants us to make every effort possible to reconcile. He knows that once divorce and remarriage take place, then reconciliation is impossible. If you are a Christian who is married to another Christian, you must remain married. If you separate then you must either be reconciled to your spouse or you must remain unmarried.

6. What does Jesus teach about divorce in Matthew 19:9?

7. Does Jesus teach that adultery must bring the marriage to an end?

Jesus allows for divorce and remarriage for the innocent spouse when there has been unfaithfulness in the marriage and this the only exception given to the Christian. Adultery breaks the marriage vow and allows the innocent party to remarry. God doesn't expect that a person ought to be bound to a partner who is sexually active with another person. This defrauds the innocent party and exposes them to disease, abuse, and humiliation.

If a marriage partner so abuses their spouse as to involve themselves sexually with another person then the innocent party is free to divorce and marry again. There are often truly innocent people in divorce and the Lord provides for their protection.

God's allows for divorce and remarriage when the marriage bed has been violated. His standards for divorce are so strict because He takes marriage so seriously. God knows divorce is painful. When God created Eve and brought her to Adam, the man said in **Genesis 2:23**, *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."* Then verse 24 adds, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

Marriage makes a man and woman one flesh. This joining is a unique and profound and spiritual mystery. In marriage we are united with another person in body, mind, and spirit so separation cannot come without great pain.

8. Describe some of the reasons why divorce is so painful.

Marriage is a glue that binds two people together. In woodworking sometimes we take two pieces of wood and glue them together. We can place those pieces of wood in a vice to as the glue sets and bonds. When we take those two pieces of wood out of the vice they are indeed joined. They cannot be easily separated. A wedge and hammer may be required to divide the pieces of wood and when they are separated they are not separated cleanly. Pieces of wood from each board are stuck to the other. Pieces from each board have been ripped away. These two pieces are not restored to their original condition. Marriage is much the same way. It hurts to be torn apart.



The Scripture teaches that marriage is permissible, though not always recommended for those whose spouse has died. The Scripture also teaches that if a Christians is married to a non-Christian they should not separate, but if they do, they should not remarry. In the case of marital unfaithfulness the innocent party is free to divorce and remarry, though they are not required to divorce the guilty spouse.

9. What are some ways the church can work to prepare Christians for marriage and strengthen existing marriages?