

Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel, is with us
"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
and shew my people their transgression,
and the house of Jacob their sins." Isaiah 58:1

Vital Biblical Topics

Study Prayerfully & Study Carefully

Divorce & Remarriage

1. Introduction

Divorce is on the increase. We are told that in some western countries one in three marriages (or cohabiting couples who never officially got married in the first place) will end in breakdown, separation or divorce. Because this break-up rate (**'divorce'**) is rapidly increasing the general public's opinion about divorce is also changing. No longer is divorce looked upon as a tragic failure on a couple's part, or the **breaking of solemn vows**. Divorce is now just one of those things. Comments such as this are common:

'The couple meant well. They tried to make their marriage work, but failed. It's happening all the time, all over the world: so what!'

This is by no means an isolated viewpoint. Many hold it and are now asking questions such as: If divorce is the likely end of so many marriages, should couples get married in the first place? What are the advantages of getting married? Bear in mind that the public's attitude towards marriage and divorce are crucial to the moral and economic welfare of a nation. If divorce is accepted by the masses without a qualm, soon every second marriage will end in divorce. What does the Almighty think about marriage: after all it was His idea in the first place.

Yahweh's opinion about marriage is:

Genesis 2: 18: ***"It is not good for man to be alone."***

He instituted marriage at the creation of the world. But what does He think about divorce? The answer is: He absolutely detests divorce.

Malachi 2: 14: ***"Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant."***

15: And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth."

16: For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

We can see here that the Almighty God is against divorce or **'putting away.'**: He hates it.

2. Adultery & Fornication

Sad to say the reality of modern married life has turned out very different from the ideal God planned. All around we see broken marriages and families living in silent turmoil. Sexual confusion abounds, especially concerning **adultery** and **fornication**. Note the difference between the two:

- **Adultery** is defined in the dictionary as ‘**voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with one of the opposite sex other than his/her spouse.**’ The Old Testament Hebrew word for adultery is **na’aph**. The New Testament Greek word for adultery is **Moicheuo**.
- **Fornication** is defined as ‘**voluntary sexual intercourse between an unmarried couple.**’ The Old Testament Hebrew word for fornication is **taznuth**. The New Testament Greek word for fornication is **porneia**. We note in the book of (Revelation) that **fornication** can be committed even when one of the parties is married. This is as true for married men as it is for married women. If they have sexual relations with a partner other than a spouse, then they are committing fornication.

Revelation 2: 20: *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit **fornication**, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*

21: *And I gave her space to repent of her **fornication**; and she repented not.*

22: *Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit **adultery** with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”*

Capital Offences:

According to Scripture adultery and fornication are capital offences: they attract the death penalty. So they are very serious sins. Adultery and fornication are classified with sins such as kidnap, murder, rape, witchcraft and blasphemy.

Leviticus 20: 10: *“And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the **adulterer** and the **adulteress** shall surely be put to death.”*

When ancient Israel was ruled by pagan emperors, whose officials and soldiers were often guilty of these very sins, Israel's puppet rulers were not allowed to carry out the death sentence on the guilty. As a result adultery, fornication, rape, witchcraft and blasphemy went unchecked. It is the same today. Most countries have removed the death sentence for these sins. Little wonder all these sins are on the increase. See article on **Penal Law**.

3. Divorce

The Almighty designed that sexual intercourse occur only within marriage. But millions of couples have their own agenda and don't want to know. They want to do their own thing and they **wilfully** break the divine commandments. The Bible says:

Romans 8: 7: *“**The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.**”*

Men and women are basically selfish; they want their own way and they seek their own pleasure. If their marriages hit difficulties (and most do) they opt for the easy way out - a divorce; never seeking their Maker's advice or help. Often the excuses put forward are trivial. Some distraught couples pay large sums of money to solicitors, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts: but many of these so-called experts have marital problems of their own. However, we are here to answer the question: **What are the scriptural grounds for divorce?** According to the Bible, **fornication** (sexual intercourse prior to marriage) and **porneia** (sexual indecency following marriage) are grounds for divorce. The Scriptures do not specifically mention **adultery** as grounds for divorce, presumably because adultery (**na’aph**) would have earned the death sentence in the first place; thereby making a divorce unnecessary. In other words the question of divorce wouldn't arise, as the adulterer and adulteress would have been put to death. This fact must be borne in mind when we consider the following words of Jesus Christ concerning divorce.

Matthew 5:

31: *“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of*

divorcement:

*32: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, **saving for the cause of fornication**, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”*

Matthew 19: 3: *“The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*

4: And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5: And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

*6: **Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.***

7: They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8: He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

*9: And I say unto you, **Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.**”*

Mark 10: 11: *“And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **and marry another**, committeth adultery against her.*

12: And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”

Note that little phrase ‘**and marry another**;

 because it includes married man sleeping around with single woman! This act of **fornication**; is common practice these days. But it is highly offensive to God Almighty.

Putting away for fornication:

Before we go further do remember that the phrase ‘**putting away**’ means ‘**divorce**.’ Yahweh is against ‘**putting away (divorce)**.’ He hates it. In fact it is this initial act of ‘**putting away**’ a wife for reasons other than **fornication** or **sexual indecency** that is the base sin that paves the way for the acts of adultery a divorced woman may commit after being divorced. When Jesus said that **fornication** is grounds for divorce, he was probably referring to the law concerning a man who married a girl and discovered that she was **not a virgin** (because she had committed fornication before the marriage). In such cases a man was permitted to divorce his bride on the morning after the wedding. And the reason was for the **fornication** she had committed with another man before her wedding. The scriptural passage outlining this little-known fact is as follows:

Deuteronomy 22: 13: *“If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her,*

14: And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid:

15: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate:

16: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife, and he hateth her;

17: And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

18: And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him;

19: And they shall amerce him in an hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the damsel, because he hath brought up an evil name upon a virgin of Israel: and she shall be his wife; he may not put her away all his days.

20: But if this thing be true, and the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel:

21: Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you.”

Sexual Indecency:

Sexual indecency within marriage may also be considered grounds for divorce.

Deuteronomy 24: 1: *“When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. 2: And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.”*

The Hebrew word ‘ervah’ translated here as ‘uncleanness’ means **indecency, sexual perversion, improper behaviour and shameful exposure**. The phrase ‘it come to pass’ indicates that the sin of ‘sexual indecency’ would come to light some time after the wedding. ‘Sexual indecency,’ therefore, constitutes grounds for divorce. **It could, of course, apply equally to the man as it does to the woman. In fact, ‘sexual indecency’ is probably more prevalent amongst males than amongst females.**

But alas! these days couples get divorced for scores of trivial reasons. As a result the marriage institution has become a joke to millions. The world's governments also compound the problem by ignoring **Yahweh's penal laws**. Thousands of futile laws have been tried and discarded. They don't work and never will. The Most High has given humanity express commandments as to **how to deal with sin and crime**. Society ignores His commandments at great cost.

4. Total Breakdown

When marriages totally breakdown - for whatever reason - and couples go through the trauma of a divorce, the question is asked: **are they doing the right thing?** Because this occurs on so large a scale these days, many would answer:

‘Of course they are. No one wants a squabbling couple to continue in marital misery!’

But is this the best answer? We don't think so. Right here let us affirm that we are not without sympathy for those involved in a marriage breakdown. Most of us have close relatives who have gone through the agonies of a divorce, and we feel deeply for them. No doubt, the Almighty also suffers deeply as he witnesses the unfaithfulness of His own wife (**Israel**) and the disintegration of human marriages all over the world. Nevertheless the fact remains that sanctioning divorce for any and every reason is only adding to the swelling tide of misery that is engulfing family life around the globe. For it is a sad fact, that the more readily available divorce becomes, the faster the divorce rate will rise. **Divorce is not always the answer to a broken marriage.** It may bring temporal relief for the individuals concerned, but in the long run it undermines the very foundations of society and excludes any hopes of **reconciliation**.

In their efforts to relieve the misery of incompatible couples, well meaning authorities of the Church and State have all too often introduced stop-gap laws which merely mass produce the very problems they were intended to cure. **They have tried to help the few and inadvertently brought havoc to the many.** The mounting divorce rate and the colossal frustration experienced in millions of homes are proof positive that man is quite incapable of formulating his own laws and solving his own problems; especially when they involve those delicate issues between a man and his wife. In these areas it is vitally important therefore that we closely follow the directions of the Almighty God or we risk making shipwreck of our marriages, not to mention our souls.

5. Separation

Having said that, what should a couple do when their marriage totally breaks down? The scriptural answer is: **If total breakdown occurs and a wife finds it absolutely impossible to live with her husband, she may separate from him: but she is advised not to marry another man.** If at all possible she should stay single during her husband's lifetime and try to work towards a reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 7: 10: *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife*

depart from her husband:

11: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

12: But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

13: And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.

14: For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

15: But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

16: For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

Here we can clearly see that in extreme cases when a marriage partnership completely disintegrates, a **separation is allowed by God**; simply because the Almighty has no pleasure in forcing unhappy couples to live together. But notice that the Scriptures do not advocate a divorce and remarriage. Those alternatives are not mentioned. A woman who, therefore, finds that her husband is impossible to live with (the reasons are not given but one can easily imagine what they are: **adultery, fornication, twisted sexual behaviour, violence etc.**) may choose to leave her husband: but she should not divorce him and marry another man. **She should, instead, return to the single state and - if possible - work towards a reconciliation.** Reconciliation is a perfect reflection of what the Almighty has Himself successfully accomplished. Has He not won His erring **'wife Israel'** back to Himself? Moreover, I am certain that if humanity continues to ignore the directions of Scripture on these vital matters, and that is what appears to be happening, then the whole superstructure of civilization, which has as its main building block the **'family unit,'** will collapse in ruins. The fact is: broken marriages can be restored and become even stronger than before. Everyone knows of cases where husbands and wives have become reconciled even after repeated incidents of adultery and fornication or being apart for many years.

6. Remarriage

Married Women:

A married woman is bound by the law of God to her husband as long as he lives: but is at liberty to remarry when her husband dies. If, whilst he lives, she marries another man, she is classified in Scripture as an adulteress:

Romans 7: 2: ***"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.***

3: So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."

Bear in mind that Paul is here writing to believers living in pagan Rome: where capital punishment for adultery was not practiced. In other words the divine law which forbids a woman having two living husbands still applies. **It supersedes human law.**

Married Men:

Strange as it may seem, in ancient Israel men were allowed to have more than one wife: but they were not allowed to put away (divorce) the first wife in preference for the second. **Sexual encounters with unmarried girls was not considered a marriage but ranked as fornication!** For a second marriage to be considered valid, it had to be properly performed and accepted by the priesthood and the people. The rights of the first wife were also to be guaranteed. (Exodus 21: 10) The western practice which allows, yea compels, men to divorce a first wife before taking a second is not endorsed in the Scriptures. It is a manmade rule which leads to divorce - something hateful to the Almighty God. Men who, therefore, put away a wife to take another are not meeting **Yahweh's original plan (Matthew 19: 8) of one man to one wife.** Incidentally, the Scriptures do not allow men with more than one wife to hold leading positions in the church. **Take note all bishops, pastors, elders, deacons and youth leaders.**

1 Timothy 3: 2: ***"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good***

behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”

1 Timothy 3: 12: *“Let the deacons be the **husbands of one wife**, ruling their children and their own houses well.”*

Titus 1: 6: *“If any be blameless, the **husband of one wife**, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.”*

Remarried Divorcees:

We now consider the position of the remarried divorcee who, knowing nothing about the Almighty's laws concerning marriage and divorce, decides to become a believer. This situation is common in the west and is on the increase. It is not explicitly dealt with in Scripture, but I have enough information to venture an opinion; though I must emphasize that this is only my **opinion**. The world is under the sway of Satan and many of the laws used by various nations to regulate family life are - by Yahweh's standards - woefully inadequate. Human laws on marriage, divorce and remarriage are examples of this. They were written by well meaning individuals or committees and subsequently vetted, amended and passed by well meaning governments; but they are still woefully inadequate by divine standards. Nevertheless, people live by them and quite freely marry, divorce and remarry - often several times over. Some of these people then come to know the Saviour and later learn the Bible teaching about marriage - that it is for life. Are they expected to go back to their first partner? The answer is **NO**: and I write this on the strength of the principle latent in this passage of Scripture:

Deuteronomy 24: 1: *“When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

*2: And when she is departed out of his house, **she may go and be another man's wife.***

3: And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;

*4: **Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”***

This text does cater for a second marriage. Also in it we notice the reference about **returning to her former husband**. That act of returning to a former husband, after being officially divorced and married to another, is classified as an **abomination**. It is obviously something that ought not to be done. In view of this, therefore, I would conclude that given the choice between the two alternatives of returning to a former husband or staying married to the second man the **second alternative is to be preferred**. The woman should stay with her new partner and not return to the first husband.

7. Summary

In summary we would say that:

1. Divorce:

- The breaking apart of **legally married couples** is on the increase. **No one doubts this fact.** Indeed it is a sign of the times: **a sign that the return** of Jesus Christ is near. (Matthew 24: 37-39) Needless to say we all sympathize with couples whose marriages have broken up; but **divorce is not the answer. The Almighty hates divorce.** (Malachi 2: 16)

2. Adultery & Fornication:

- **Are not the same thing.** They are both sexual sins, **but with a difference.** In Scripture we find that divorce is permitted exceptionally in cases of: **fornication** (Matthew 5: 31-32, 19: 9, Mark 10: 11-12) **sexual indecency** (Deuteronomy 24: 1) Adultery is not mentioned in Scripture as grounds for divorce, simply because adultery is a capital offence, which if carried out would make divorce unnecessary. **The guilty party would receive the death sentence.**

3. With the best will in the world,

- Marriages still breakdown for various other reasons. **Way too often the man is to blame.** Whatever be the case and whoever is to blame, divorce should be the very last resort. **Remember that the Most High hates divorce.**
- 4. **When a marriage totally collapses,**
 - A separation is permitted, but **reconciliation should thereafter be aimed at.** Though men in ancient Israel were allowed to have more than one wife; **the practice was certainly not the Almighty's ideal.** (Deuteronomy 17: 17) Men with more than one wife are **not allowed** to officiate in the Christian church as bishops, ministers, pastors, elders, deacons or youth leaders . (1 Timothy 3: 2-12, Titus 1: 6) If a woman is divorced and marries again, she is **not allowed** to return to her former husband. (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4)

AMEN!

In the Son's Name - For the Father's glory.

Elder: *Max W. Mader*

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