

MARRIAGE:
The Original Plan!

DIVORCE:
The Only Exception!

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The Original Plan For Marriage

Five important biblical teachings to consider about MARRIAGE:

1. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman who enter into a covenant [an agreement or contract] to live together as husband and wife (Gen. 2:24-25; Pro. 2:17; Ezek. 16:8).
2. Marriage is often referred to as "holy matrimony" because marriage is holy [sacred, set apart or consecrated to God], and therefore is NOT to be thought of as a common or secular thing, but rather this holy union formed by a sacred ceremony or assembly before God (Mal. 2:14) represents three cords [husband, wife and God]—a close relationship not easily broken (Eccl. 4:12).
3. Marriage is honourable (Heb. 13:4), and NOT to be entered into lightly or entered out of lightly because it is a lifelong relationship and companionship that enables the man and woman to become one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5; Mal. 2:14), both physically (1 Cor. 7:3-5) and spiritually (1 Pet. 3:7), until death (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2).

4. There are certain customs and traditions attached to marriage, such as in some cultures parental consent is required and a bride price is paid by the bridegroom to the family of the bride in order to ratify the marriage (Gen. 24:53; 29:20-30; 34:12; Exo. 22:16-17; 1 Sam. 18:23-28; 2 Sam. 3:14). However, whether the sacred ceremony or assembly to form the marriage was [1] a church wedding [which many bible commentators agree that one important message of the first recorded miracle of the Lord at a marriage was to endorse Christian marriage in the church - John 2:1-11], or [2] whether performed at a registry office, or [3] whether a traditional marriage—these 3 ways are equally approved and accepted by God to form a marriage in accordance with biblical teachings particularly if [1] vows are exchanged [a verbal oath or agreement of commitment affirmed before God who is the main witness of the man and woman entering into a covenant - Mal. 2:14], and [2] there is a sexual encounter to consummate the marriage, so to fulfil the physical aspect of the "one flesh" principle (Gen. 2:22-24; Matt. 19:4-6).
5. Finally, there is the legal commitment to consider [before any written legal marriage contract which is very important in modern marriages], the marriage contract or agreement that the husband and wife enter into is founded on the marriage law at the beginning. Marriage is God's institution—THE ORIGINAL PLAN for marriage was universal in application to all people. God

established marriage at the beginning (Matt. 19:4-6) for primarily the following 3 reasons: [1] lifelong commitment and companionship (Gen. 2:18), which may include the right to financial support or sharing financial affairs (Pro. 24:3-4; Act. 20:35); [2] for procreation in order to acquire godly offsprings (Mal. 2:15), and the right in sharing parental responsibilities (Pro. 22:6; Eph. 6:4); and [3] particularly to prevent fornication (1 Cor. 7:1-5)—and have the right to enjoy sexual relations with spouse (Pro. 5:18-20; Son. 5:1; 7:1-13). Marriage was God's idea, it was God who brought the woman to Adam (Gen. 2:22), so that the two may be joined as husband and wife, and Adam was in agreement, evident by his verbal oath and commitment to become one flesh with his wife (Gen. 2:23-24).

In regards to marriages in the Jewish community [Israel, God's ancient people], separation from foreigners or Gentiles was emphasised (Neh. 9:2; 10:28-30; Ezra 9:1-2; 10:2-3), particularly nations that were a threat to Israel who would turn Israel from worshipping God (Deut. 7:1-3), this was the law, but there were also notable exceptions, particularly two women mentioned in the Lord Jesus' ancestry who were foreigners [Ruth and Rahab]. By respecting God's institution, Gentile marriages would also be blessed by God, particularly evident by the blessing of the fruit of the womb and the increase in the human race (Gen. 1:27-28; Ps. 127:3-5).



The Validity Of Divorce

Divorce was a controversial topic in Jesus' day, with two main schools of thought, centered around two of its most famous proponents. The first was the school of Rabbi Shammai [a more strict and unpopular view] and second was the school of Rabbi Hillel [a more lax and popular view]. The school of Rabbi Shammai understood that uncleanness meant sexual immorality (Lev. 18:20; Deut. 24:1-4), and said this was the only valid reason for divorce. The school of Rabbi Hillel understood uncleanness to mean any sort of indiscretion; even to the point where for some rabbis, burning a husband's breakfast was considered valid grounds for divorce. This is why God revealed in Malachi 2:16 that He hates divorce because many were divorcing without a valid reason to the extent that Israel had become an adulterous nation (Matt. 12:39; 16:4)—divorce can lead onto "sin" particularly if one divorces and remarries in an unlawful manner, it multiplies the "sin" of adultery (Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 19:9). God hates all forms of "sin" (Pro. 6:16-19; Ps. 5:4) because "sin" separates us from Him (Is. 59:2; Rom. 3:23; 6:23), but particularly "sexual sin" (1 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

In Matthew 19:3, the Lord Jesus was asked a question in regards to the lawful grounds for divorce. The nature of the question seems to indicate that the greater majority of the religious leaders perception of marriage and divorce was wrong—the focus ought to be how to preserve marriage rather than seeking how to lightly get out of marriage for any reason—as this perception was intended to give men any excuse to treacherously divorce their wives in order to marry another woman. The Lord's response exposed them, but also helps all of us to grasp the correct perception of marriage and divorce. Bear in mind that the question put before the Lord was in regards to DIVORCE, but the Lord gave a discourse about marriage, and so He based His teaching on the subject of divorce on God's original plan for marriage at the beginning primarily to clarify the correct view and focus, which should be to establish marriage for life—so to prevent divorce (Matt. 19:4-6). And secondly, due to the hardness of the heart which causes an offender to refuse to repent from their sin, the Lord's response to the question raised about the validity of divorce also points out the only exception—fornication.

However, the implications were that He was not referring to a sexual encounter before a marriage was consummated exclusively. There are bible commentators that argue that the Lord Jesus' teaching on marriage that ends in divorce due to "fornication" was only in accordance to Jewish customs and traditions referring to

"the betrothal" or before the marriage was consummated (Matt. 1:18-20). However, when a man was betrothed to a woman, although the marriage was not consummated (Deut. 20:7), yet the Scriptures and Jewish law treats the betrothal in the same way as a marriage that was consummated by sexual intercourse—the betrothal was "valid marriage" (Ex. 21:7-10; Deut. 20:7; Judg. 14:1-20; 15:1-6), as the betrothal covenant agreement of marriage binds the couple together, and therefore only a valid reason to divorce could dissolve the contract the couple have entered into (Matt. 1:18-19). Furthermore, when Mary [the mother of Jesus] was betrothed to Joseph, he was referred to as Mary's husband (Matt. 1:19), and also the penalty or the consequences of fornication when betrothed to a man or woman was the death sentence (Deut. 22:23-24), just like when a marriage was consummated by sexual intercourse—the penalty for adultery at earliest times (Gen. 38:24); and later times through the law of Moses (Deut. 22:22) was also the death sentence (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22).

Therefore, the Lord's response to the question raised about the validity of divorce was based on THE ORIGINAL PLAN for marriage to firstly preserve marriage for life, while secondly permitting THE ONLY EXCEPTION from the inspired teaching of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 due to defilement caused by sexual immorality. The Lord's teaching on the law concerning divorce from the inspired teaching of Deuteronomy

24:1-4 also seems more likely to refer to an unlawful sexual encounter both before or after the consummation of a marriage union in accordance with Leviticus 18:20, and also the [1646] Westminster Confession of Faith grasped this understanding stating that, "adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, gives just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract.[11] In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce and, after the divorce,[12] to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.[13]."

It is also important to understand the meaning of the word "fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18) from the languages in which the Bible was originally written. The Bible was mainly written in Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, and in Greek, the original language of the New Testament writings. Firstly, it is necessary to analyse the word "fornication" from the Hebrew and Greek word, and finally in English. The Septuagint [LXX, a Greek translation from Hebrew] uses it predominately for the Hebrew word "zanah"—"commit fornication, be a harlot." This is primarily sexual involvement with humans, but the Bible also figuratively depicts it to idolatry (Col. 3:5-6; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 23:1-49).

The Bible presents Israel as the bride of God, and "fornication" [harlotry] depicted in relation to "idolatry" with other gods affects the relationship (Jer. 3:8-14;

Ezek. 16:15-34; 23:1-49). Moreover, the King James Version [KJV, an English translation from Greek] translated the word "fornication" from the Greek word "porneia." According to Strong's Concordance of the Bible [an index of every word in the KJV], the Greek word "porneia," also includes adultery and prostitution. "Porneia" comes from another Greek word that also includes indulging in any kind of unlawful lust, which would include homosexuality (Gen. 19:1-11) or incest (1 Cor. 5:1; 6:18). The use of the word in the gospels and the epistles is always in reference to sexual sin. It is also where the English word "pornography" comes from. The Greek word "porneia" translated into English does NOT refer to "fornication" ONLY, but it is a broad word, a generic term for sexual sin of ANY kind, or promiscuity of any or every kind, and therefore can be translated as "sexual immorality" or "fornication" or "adultery" or "whoredom" or "harlotry." It is clear that fornication is the sexual sin generally associated to the unmarried, and adultery is the sexual sin exclusively associated to the married. But the Bible reveals that it is possible for a married person to be involved in harlotry [to commit fornication] (Hos. 1:2; 2:2-7; Ezek. 23:2-5; Mark 6:18), and therefore, when a married person commits adultery, they also commit fornication in the process [particularly if the person they have sexual intercourse with is an unmarried person, then the married man or woman allows fornication to enter into their marriage to break the marriage bond].

A married person commits "adultery" against their spouse, and in so doing he or she sins against God and their own body, as "fornication" is also committed (1 Cor. 6:15-20) with a person that they are not lawfully married to (Mark 6:18), which also accords with the meaning of "fornication" in the dictionary and thesaurus of American and English words such as Webster and Oxford. According to Webster's definition of "fornication" it is referred to as consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other. Therefore, any sexual relations outside the bond of marriage is fornication (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2). And above all, God shows that "adultery" as well as "fornication" can be committed by a married person when He accused Israel of "harlotry" (Jer. 3:8-9; Num. 25:1-18; Ezek. 16:26-34).

After teaching about the original plan for marriage at the beginning [which was universal in application to all people], the Lord then proceeded to answer the question put before Him in regards to DIVORCE. Just like in Jesus' day, some people want to divorce for ANY reason, but the Lord has permitted divorce for only "ONE reason"—that is fornication [sexual immorality] (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Moreover, what consummates a marriage is when the man and woman have sexual intercourse, and the two become one flesh in union together (Matt. 19:4-6); and in like manner, what can dissolve a marriage besides physical death (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2) is sexual

immorality, as the unfaithful spouse becomes one flesh with another (1 Cor. 6:16). The main emphasis is that some kind of "uncleanliness" in the form of "sexual sin" has occurred which the Lord deems as the ONLY valid reason for divorce. The Lord does not command it take place, but He allows it. Mark and Luke failed to include this clause in their gospel account, but it does not mean that the Lord Jesus' words are irrelevant in Matthew, for all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). Also one gospel often gives us additional information and expands our knowledge on a topic that another gospel only briefly mentions or omits entirely [such as Jesus final words on the cross, his inscription message, information about Joseph of Arimathaea, etc]. In regards to the topic of marriage, the Scriptures give good guidance to establish marriage so to prevent divorce. Here are biblical marriage, divorce and remarriage guidelines and scriptural exceptions, with the emphasis on the GUIDELINES—to teach the guidelines, but to note scriptural exceptions.



Marriage Guidelines

1. A Christian should marry another Christian (1 Cor. 9:5; 7:39), and should NOT separate what God has joined (Mark 10:6-9).
2. A Christian should NOT marry an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 7:39). The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul reiterated the Lord's teaching on marriage (1 Cor. 7:10-11), and also taught about unholy unions that can lead to "idolatry" (2 Cor. 6:14-16), which is another element of the Lord's teaching on "fornication" [harlotry] in relation to the worship of other gods or false gods, particularly evident in a mixed marriage when an unbeliever's intention is to turn a believer from worshipping the true God (Deut. 7:3-4; 1 King. 11:1-4; Rom. 1:25) to friendship with the world (Jam. 4:4).
3. One wife for Christian man or one husband for Christian woman (1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 3:2).
4. Non-Christian marriages [between male and female] are recognised by God, who blesses them with children, and the human race is increased (Gen. 1:27-28; Ps. 127:3-5).

5. Marriage is binding until death (1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2), so it is important for husband and wife to strive to forgive one another (Col. 3:12-19; John 8:1-11); and to be understanding (1 Pet. 3:7).



Scriptural [Marriage] Exceptions

1. If a believer is married to an unbelieving spouse before conversion, and the unbeliever is willing to live with the believer, then continue marriage (1 Cor. 7:12), as the Scriptures seem to imply that God has set apart such a situation to work in the unbeliever's heart [and if they have children, to also work in the children] to ultimately save them by the instrumentality of the believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:13-14; Act. 16:31-33).
2. Hosea was commanded to marry a harlot in order to portray the unfaithfulness of Israel (Hos. 1:2).
3. The first marriage is not the only marriage recognised by the Lord, as the Lord acknowledged the woman at the well of Jacob had five husbands (John 4:17-18).



Divorce Guidelines

1. A Christian should NOT divorce another Christian (1 Cor. 7:10-11; Mal. 2:14-15).
2. A divorced person should NOT remarry another person if divorced companion still alive, otherwise they will be committing adultery (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18).
3. Whoever marries a divorced person also commits adultery (Matt. 19:9).



Scriptural [Divorce] Exceptions

1. **SEXUAL IMMORALITY IS THE ONLY VALID REASON FOR DIVORCE** (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). In a "mixed marriage," in a situation where the unbelieving spouse departs from the believing spouse, the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 7:40) also allowed divorce (1 Cor. 7:12-16). This appears to conflict with the Lord's teaching, but it actually accords with the Lord's teaching (Ezek. 6:9), for Lord Jesus allows divorce when sexual immorality occurs at any point in a marriage, especially if there is no option for reconciliation due to [1] the offender's stubbornness in refusing to repent from sexual immorality, and this also leads onto [2] the offender departing from the innocent spouse; or [3] if there is an unlawful remarriage to another.
2. In the days of Ezra, the Jews who had married heathen wives were advised to divorce them (Ezra 9:1-15; 10:18-44).



Remarriage Guidelines

1. Death of companion (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).
2. Christian remarries divorced Christian companion again (1 Cor. 7:11).
3. If divorced woman remarries and the second husband divorces her or dies, the first husband cannot remarry her after she has been defiled (Deut. 24:3-4; Jer. 3:1, 8-9).



Scriptural [Remarriage] Exceptions

1. **SEXUAL IMMORALITY IS THE ONLY VALID REASON FOR REMARRIAGE TO ANOTHER AFTER DIVORCE (Matt. 19:9).** When one is completely given up to sensuality—sexual immorality is repeated and unrepentant, and so dissolves a marriage relationship as the unfaithful spouse becomes one flesh with another (1 Cor. 6:16; Matt. 19:9). Moreover, after divorce due to sexual immorality, an innocent brother or sister in a mixed marriage is freed from the marriage law to live a single life onto the Lord or to remarry onto the Lord and not sin (1 Cor. 7:27-28; Matt. 19:9).
2. The Scriptures also figuratively portrays a picture depicting Israel's captivity by Assyria and Babylon in reference to Israel [the wife] being put away (Jer. 3:8; Ezek. 23:1-49; Is. 54:1-8) whom God [the husband] gave a certificate of divorce because of her persistent unfaithfulness, and then in His mercy called for Israel to return to Him (Jer. 3:1-8; 24-25; Hos. 2:2-5; Is. 54:1-8).



The Lord's Lesson Of Mercy & Forgiveness In Marriage

Furthermore, Christ did not come to abolish the Law of God [the 10 commandments, which included the Law forbidding adultery - Jam. 2:10-11], but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 10:4). In other words, He is the Law, evident by His action toward the woman caught in adultery [the 7th commandment] recorded in John 8:3-12. As mentioned before, adultery was punishable unto death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22; Pro. 6:32).

The Lord Jesus was the only One without sin and the only One who could have enforced the punishment of the Law [forbidding adultery] by stoning the woman to death, but He chose to show mercy and forgiveness, and not to immediately condemn (John 8:7-11). Why? It appears that the Lord was teaching us a lesson about His character in regards to His mercy (Is. 30:18; Jam. 2:13), even toward the offender [those who are apparently guilty], in allowing time for them to repent (Rom. 2:4; Rev. 2:20-22; Jon. 3:10; 4:11; Nah. 1:2-3; 3:1-7; Jer. 3:12-14).



Psalm 103:8

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy."

This lesson of mercy and forgiveness is necessary in marriage, particularly if adultery and fornication has occurred, if it is possible, then forgiveness and reconciliation should be pursued first before divorce (Luke 17:3-4). But it is also important to remember the command that the Lord gave to the woman, "go and sin no more" (John 8:11)—a command more likely directed to a repentant person (John 8:12; Matt. 3:8; Act. 2:38; 3:19). It is evident by the woman's response to the Lord's questions that she was a repentant woman, who recognised that she was in the presence of the Lord, and not a mere man (John 8:11).

However, the command that the Lord gave to the woman was also very important because assuming that the woman was unrepentant—if the woman ignored His command by continuing in the sin of adultery—by her failure to repent [particularly in the time appointed - Rev. 2:20-22; Eccl. 3:1; 8:6] she would be considered a sexual immoral person, and no longer receive His mercy,

but the other side of His character for persistent unfaithfulness (Ezek. 12-23), which is His judgment and justice (Heb. 13:4; Rev. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 6:9-13; Jer. 5:4-7).

Whatever "The Lord says is final." It is clear in Matt. 5:32 & 19:9 due to sexual immorality, that the Lord has allowed an exception to the law of marriage, which can be considered a permit only after seeking reconciliation has been unsuccessful. In summary, **THE ORIGINAL PLAN** for "marriage" at the beginning was universal in application to all people in regards to the union of one man and one woman in holy matrimony until death—**THE ONLY EXCEPTION** [sexual immorality], which allows the innocent spouse **ONLY** to divorce and remarry another (Matt. 5:32; 19:1-9) must be taken with the utmost consideration.