

San Juan Church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... Marriage and Divorce

Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. Marriage was instituted by God with the creation of Adam and Eve. The first couple, being made male and female, were designed for marriage (Gen. 1:27). It was the purpose of God that man and woman should have the privilege of becoming "one flesh" in the divinely organized arrangement of marriage (Gen. 2:24).

Marriage, in God's original plan, is an honorable state: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled..." (Heb. 13:4). While there may be times in one's life when stress or difficulties make it not in that person's best interest to marry (1 Cor. 7:26, 28, 32, 35, 40), the general principle is, "It is not good that man (or woman) should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). The Bible makes it clear that "forbidding to marry" is contrary to the will of God (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

God's divine ideal for the marital union is that it should last as long as both spouses are alive. Death of one of the marriage partners terminates the relationship (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39) and there is no marriage beyond life in this worldly realm [the resurrection of the dead] (Matt. 22:30).

Since God is the author of marriage, it is His prerogative and His alone, to determine when a marriage can be dissolved if both partners are still living. What, therefore, is the divine will concerning divorce? Malachi 2:16 tells us that God "hates" divorce.

In the Old Testament, if a man's wife "found no favor in his eyes" because he found some unseemly habit in her, he could write her a "bill of divorce" and send her "out of his house" [that is, divorce her] (Deut. 24:1). God, through Moses, only tolerated divorce due to the "hardness of heart" characteristic of the Israelite people (Matt. 19:8). Jesus, in discussing this matter, declared that "from the beginning it has not been this way" (Matt. 19:8). This implies that God's original marriage plan, as instituted in Eden, had never changed though a relaxation of it had been allowed under the Mosaic Law. In anticipation of the New Covenant Jesus said: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9). This passage has a universal application that applies to all marriages in or outside of the church (Matt. 5:32). The term "immorality" [fornication], in its general meaning, denotes all unlawful sexual intercourse. In a marriage that has been violated by sexual "immorality", the innocent partner has the right of divorce, and, if desirable, remarriage. There is no other reason given in the New Testament by which one can lawfully divorce their spouse.

According to modern society's interpretation of morality, the New Testament's teaching regarding divorce and remarriage seems strict. As Christians abiding in God's word, we cannot lower the standards of the holy scriptures in order to justify a degenerate society!

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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