

# **DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE**

By Greg Lundstedt 2016

At Vancouver Bible Fellowship we would fully agree with the following Statement on Divorce from Valley Bible Church. Please note we have added to this statement. Also, at the end of this portion on Marriage and Divorce, I have added a paper on **CAN A LEADER BE DIVORCED?**

Divorce has become very common in our society and the church is not immune to its affects. Many Christians pursue divorce and probably all of us have known people who have been divorced. More often than not someone who is in some way connected to our church is heading toward divorce or in the midst of a divorce.

It is our desire to help each married couple to experience God's blessing upon their life, and part of our ministry is to teach what the Bible says about marriage and divorce. It is unfortunate that there is no universal agreement among Christians, but this does not mean that the Scripture is unclear about the subject. The problem appears to lie more with the application of the Bible in the difficult situations of life than with the correct understanding of the biblical teaching. However, proper interpretation precedes proper application.

## **WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE:**

### **Marriage is from God, not man.**

Marriage is an institution established by God. From the beginning of the Old Testament God established the permanent marital covenant. Genesis 2:24 teaches that the husband and wife are "one flesh" which no man should separate (cf. Matthew 19:4-6).

More than that, Jesus said, "what God has joined together, let no man separate." Therefore, when a couple is married, God is joining them together.

### **Marriage is between a man and a woman.**

Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:4-6 clearly set marriage as being between one man and one woman.

### **Marriage is good.**

Not only did God design marriage, He also says it is good (Proverbs 18:22). It was even used as a picture of God's relationship with His chosen people, Israel (Isaiah 49:18; 62:5) and later to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Church (1 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:32).

### **Marriage is not for everyone.**

Matthew 19:12 describes people who have chosen to remain single for the sake of the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 describes reasons for choosing to remain single in light of present difficulties (7:26) which lead to additional concerns in this present life. Singleness should not be seen as second rate, but as a valid alternative that has certain advantages in serving the Lord.

### **Marriage forms a new family.**

The meaning behind the idea of a man leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his wife (Genesis 2:24) is that a new family is created.

### **The man is the head of the wife and family.**

Ephesians 5:22-24 teaches the role of the husband and wife, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands,

as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything."

If we confuse these God-designed roles, trouble follows. Many, even Christians, have sought to undermine the position of the husband in the marriage relationship. This has served to damage marriages and more importantly, has dishonored the Lord by ignoring His Word.

### **In marriage the man and woman become one flesh.**

Marriage involves leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:24). This joining is the physical union between the husband and wife and is a part of marriage. 1 Corinthians 6:16 shows that the physical union in itself does not produce an indissoluble bond.

Of course marriage is more than two people who have moved in together, it is two people who have publicly committed themselves to each other as husband and wife. It is this union that is intended to be inseparable (Matthew 19:6).

### **Christians must marry Christians.**

1 Corinthians 7:39 provides freedom in choosing whether to marry and who to marry with one restriction, the woman must marry "in the Lord," meaning a fellow believer in Christ. In addition, 2 Corinthians 6:14 teaches us not to be "bound together with unbelievers." This command must apply to marriage since there is no earthly commitment more binding upon us than marriage.

### **WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DIVORCE:**

Marriage is a covenant (Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14). Furthermore, covenants are designed to be kept (Numbers 30:2; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and so should we.

We believe that marriage was intended by God to be for as long as both people are alive (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Therefore, we do not encourage divorce. For those in physical danger or for some other reason feel they are unable to remain with their marriage partner, we recommend separation rather than divorce. This separation is with the hope of one day seeing the restoration, through God's grace, of what God joined together.

However, there is a difference between what God intends and what God allows. There are two passages that allow for divorce under certain circumstances:

### **Matthew 19:3-12 allows for divorce when the spouse commits immorality.**

In Matthew 19, Jesus is asked about the permission to divorce granted by Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Jesus describes God's ideal that marriage should be permanent, and that divorce and remarriage results in adultery, with an exception -- immorality. Immorality is a term referring to acts of a sexual nature, most notably adultery. If a spouse has indeed broken the sexual bond, the other partner is not guilty of adultery by ending the relationship and remarrying.

However, the immorality should be known for a fact, not merely assumed. We have no right to end our marriage based upon our suspicions alone. Also, lust is a sin and considered by Jesus as adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:28), but it is not in itself technically an act of immorality.

We understand that passages such as Matthew 5:31-32, Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18 do not include an exception for the case of immorality. However, the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is sufficient to allow for divorce in the case of immorality.

### **1 Corinthians 7:15 allows for divorce when a spouse who is not a Christian abandons their**

**husband or wife.**

1 Corinthians 7:15 states that a believer is not under bondage if an unbeliever leaves. Not under bondage indicates that divorce is allowed in this situation. In addition to the believer having been abandoned, he or she has no expectation of God's Spirit to work to bring conviction to the heart of the departing spouse in that they have never submitted themselves to God through faith.

It is important to note that unlike the first exception, in this case the believer cannot initiate the divorce. If this occurs, Paul teaches that he should be allowed to leave. The believer cannot be bound to a marriage that no longer exists.

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT REMARRIAGE:**

It is sometimes claimed that the Bible allows divorce in certain cases, but not remarriage. However, each of the two exceptions include remarriage.

While the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 is linked to the divorce clause, it must be understood as applying to the entire sentence. There is only one situation that is discussed in Matthew 19:9: an individual who has divorced and remarried. It does not discuss a person who divorces and does not remarry. The one who divorces his wife except for immorality is the same individual who remarries. The two issues cannot be separated.

Also, by separating divorce from remarriage in Matthew 19:9, we are led to the odd conclusion that someone who divorces his wife, with the exception of immorality, commits adultery. That is, we are forced to say that divorce by itself is equal to adultery. Remarriage must be understood as well as divorce in Matthew 19:9.

In the case of 1 Corinthians 7:15, to say that a brother or sister is not under bondage in cases where an unbelieving spouse leaves implies that the believer has the freedom to remarry given the action of abandonment. To say remarriage is forbidden places a restriction upon the believer. This is also supported by 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, which says if you choose to remarry, you have not sinned.

**CONCLUSION:**

Marriage has been instituted by God as a covenant relationship to bring a man and woman together for the purpose of companionship (Genesis 2:18) in order to serve God. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) yet because of the failings of man He allows for divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery and desertion by an unbelieving spouse.

Yet divorce should not be understood as a necessary option in cases of immorality. We have the opportunity to trust in God's grace and exercise forgiveness, for mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). In cases of being divorced by an unbelieving spouse, our goal should be to seek for peace and allow the unbeliever to leave without a fight.

Finally, when divorce occurs it is a very difficult situation even under the best circumstances. God's grace is sufficient for all those who draw near to Him from a truly submissive heart. For those who love God and are called according to His purpose, He promises to work all things together for good (Romans 8:28). The present attitude of our heart is more important than our past choices we have made.

**CAN A LEADER BE DIVORCED?**  
**Additional help on the issue of divorce and remarriage**  
**and a lesson in understanding context.**  
By Greg Lundstedt 2009

Scripture is clear that elders are to be "**the husband of one wife**" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). The question then would be, what does the phrase "the husband of one wife" (Greek: *mias gunaikos andra*) mean?

This is an important issue, seeing as certain interpretations of this one qualification have kept many otherwise godly men from being elders. With this in mind, it behooves us to have an accurate biblical understanding of this phrase.

Now most of the qualifications listed for elder are clear and simple to understand, yet there are **many different interpretations** concerning the phrase "the husband of one wife." The following are some of the possibilities:

- a) A man not married to two women at once
- b) A man who is not remarried after death of a spouse or divorce
- c) A man devoted to one woman alone (i.e. his wife)

So then, how can we understand what this phrase "the husband of one wife" means? I believe if we understand three basic areas, we will be able to grasp the meaning of this passage. First, the meaning of *gunaikos* (woman or wife), second, the context of the qualifications for elder and widow (we will see why this is important later), and lastly, misunderstandings of Romans 7.

**The Meaning of Gunaikos (woman or wife):**

What does *gunaikos* (translated wife in 1 Timothy 3:2) mean? It is consistently translated woman or wife. Now remember context determines the meaning of words. For example, "can" means nothing apart from its context. But in context it derives meaning. "I can walk." "Give me a can of soda." The following passages reveal *gunaikos* is often translated woman.

**Some of Jesus' usage of *gunaikos*:**

*"But I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart."* Matthew 5:28

*"And behold, a **woman** who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak;"* Matthew 9:20

*"But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." And at once the **woman** was made well."* Matthew 9:22

*"Truly, I say to you, among those born of **women** there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* Matthew 11:11

**Some of Paul's usage of *gunaikos* in the very same book as our phrase:**

*"Likewise, I want **women** to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits **women** making a claim to godliness. Let a **woman** quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a **woman** to*

*teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the **woman** being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But **women** shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*  
1Timothy 2:9-14

Again, we need to be careful and remember context determines the meaning. If we were to erroneously substitute wife in any of these passages we would have some grave doctrinal issues to deal with.

Now there are other passages in which *gunaikos* is rightfully translated wife. **Clearly, this word can mean either woman or wife.** Remember, context determines the meaning.

### **The Context of the qualifications for elder and widow:**

The second important area we must address is that the context of 1 Timothy 3:2 and 1 Timothy 5 clearly is **the realm of character for the sake of establishing qualifications.** Take a look at 1 Timothy 3:1-3:

*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. (1Timothy 3:1-3)*

**What do all these characteristics have in common? Character, Christ likeness.** This is the context of the phrase translated "the husband of one wife." With this in mind, you could literally translate this phrase "**a one woman man.**" Indeed, this is a literal translation of the Greek.

Now if these were the only passages where this general term is used, we might have a hard time understanding it. However, it is apparent that Paul constantly uses this phrase in the context of character. How can I say this? I thought this and Titus 1 were the only passages with this phrase. Actually, there is one passage that is almost entirely overlooked when discussing this matter. It is a passage in the very same book of 1Timothy which absolutely strengthens this position.

*Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that **they may be above reproach.** But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been **the wife of one man.** (1Timothy 5:3-9)*

**Here is the exact same phrase with the genders switched: "*mias andros gune*"** literally a one (*mias*) man (*andros*) woman (*gune*). Literally, the widow is to have been "a one man woman."

Paul continues:

*having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet,*

*if she has assisted those in distress, and  
if she has devoted herself to every good work. (1 Timothy 5:10)*

Notice again Paul is describing character—Christ likeness

Paul continues:

***But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.***  
(1 Timothy 5:11-16)

Did you catch that? Paul commands the younger widows to get remarried. Now if "*widows indeed*" are to be "*the wife of one man*," this cannot mean married once. If it did, Paul would be a hypocrite for commanding younger widows to get remarried. It is, in context, a character issue relating to qualification as a "*widow indeed*". Widows who were to receive help from the church were to have godly character, they were to be one man women, i.e. they were devoted to one man only, their husbands.

Let me explain with a question. If a younger widow remarried, as Paul commanded, and her new husband also died, would she be disqualified from being put on the list because she was not the wife of one husband? Of course not! That is not the intent. **In context, it is character issue: was she a "one man woman?"**

The same is true for elders – Is he a "**one woman man?**" It is a character issue relating to qualifications.

Ray Stedman correctly writes:

"He is to be a 'one-woman man,' literally. It says, 'the husband of one wife.' This sounds like he is to have been married only once. Many have struggled over this passage because sometimes elders' wives die and elders remarry, or elders are divorced for some reason and remarry. This has given rise to a lot of controversy. But the word basically means that an elder is to be a one-woman man, i.e., not a philanderer, not attracted to every skirt that walks down the street, not constantly eyeing somebody or someone else's wife. It is to be very evident that an elder is committed to one woman, his wife, whom he loves."

So then, it is clear that the phrase, "*husband of one wife*" literally means in context, "a one woman man," a man devoted to one woman only, his wife.

### **Misunderstandings of Romans 7:**

As we have seen, one would still be a "one woman man" if a spouse died and he was to remarry and be devoted to her alone. **What about divorce?** Some use Romans 7 to say death is the only biblical grounds for remarriage. Is this biblical? In a word: no. Why can I say this? Let's look at Romans 7:

*Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to*

*another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. (Romans 7:1-3)*

In this passage, Paul uses the illustration of marriage to make what point? Death releases the Jew from the Law (See vs. 2).

Romans 7 gives one argument for release for remarriage. Let us call it Argument A (Death).

If you look at the context, honest interpreters will agree **Paul is clearly not teaching about marriage and divorce, he is only using it as an illustration. This is crucial to understand!**

**To be an honest, faithful interpreter, we must always use the specific passages to interpret other passages, which are not specifically teaching on that subject. Otherwise, we will err in our interpretation and hurt many people.**

**We must use passages that teach specifically about divorce (Matthew 5 & 19, 1 Corinthians 7) to interpret passages that do not (Romans 7).** If we do not do this we will error. It is my belief that anyone who uses Romans 7 to interpret Matthew 5 and 19 or 1 Corinthians 7 is in error.

Romans 7 does give us good truth about remarriage after the death of a spouse, but this is only one piece of the puzzle. In 1 Corinthians 7, it is clear that desertion by unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15) releases a spouse to remarry and there is no sin (1 Corinthians 7:28).

***Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches. (1 Corinthians 7:15-17)***

***Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. <sup>28</sup> But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Corinthians 7:27-28)***

Now obviously verse 27 and the beginning of 28 are not speaking of virgins as some erroneously say. Clearly, we see two possibilities: the released one remarrying and the virgin marrying. Notice we have two separate subjects. "You" referring to the bound or released one and "a virgin." Both are free to marry without sin.

It is clear in context that the released one (7:27) has been released through the desertion of an unbelieving spouse (7:15). But in 7:39, we see, as in Romans 7, a spouse is also released and free to remarry if a spouse dies.

So then we have two biblical reasons so far for release from the marriage bond, which opens the way for remarriage: Argument B (desertion by unbelieving spouse) and Argument A (death).

Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 give the last reason (Argument C) for divorce, which is unchastity or immorality (*pornea*).

***But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, **except for the cause of unchastity**, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)***

*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)*

Conversely, it is obvious that **if the innocent spouse remarries** in the case of immorality **they do not commit adultery**.

So then we have the three biblical, but extremely unfortunate, grounds for the breaking of the marriage bond and then remarriage. Argument A (death), Argument B (desertion by unbelieving spouse), and Argument C (immorality).

Now just because Argument A (death: Romans 7) is true does not mean Argument B (desertion by unbelieving spouse) and Argument C (immorality) are not true.

Again, **we must use passages that teach specifically about divorce (Matthew 5 and 19, 1 Corinthians 7) to interpret passages that do not (Romans 7)**. If we do not do this we will error. Therefore, we interpret Romans 7 in light of Matthew 5 & 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 and not the opposite.

In conclusion, we have seen that the qualification for an elder being a "*husband of one wife*" literally means a "one woman man" and speaks of a character trait, not specifically marital status. A man may be an elder even if he is divorced only if he meets the biblical qualifications. Thus, if divorced after becoming a Christian, his divorce must be on biblical grounds, as we spoke above, or he would be disqualified.

With this in mind, **in conclusion**, I want to share a portion from the elders at Valley Bible Church:

"The husband of one wife literally means 'a one woman man' or 'a one wife husband.' This does not forbid unmarried men from serving as elders (Paul himself was not married). It means that if the man is married, he must be devoted to his wife. It speaks of a spiritual character trait like the rest of the qualifications. If the man is unmarried, he must be the kind of person who would commit to one woman and not be found flirtatious. There must not be any adulterous actions or attitudes present in his life. A man is not automatically eliminated from eldership by a divorce in his past, recognizing that if he was a believer during the divorce, this divorce must meet the biblical qualifications of immorality or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse discussed earlier. The qualifications are not emphasized by what the man's character may have been in the past but rather what his character is currently.