

If a painting hanging in your house was confirmed to be the work of a great artist like Rembrandt or Michelangelo, would you look at it differently? Of course you would! But do you think about marriage in the same way? The Bible tells us that God himself is the designer of marriage. It is His artistry! And if God is the artist, how much more valuable, how much more sacred, is His masterpiece of marriage.

This pamphlet is intended to introduce you to what the Bible says about marriage, divorce and remarriage. Our culture and our experiences can easily shape us when it comes to these topics. But only God's word can be a reliable "light to [our] path" (Ps. 119:105).

Since this simple resource cannot fully explore these topics, we've listed some "Recommended Resources" at the end of this pamphlet for those ready to go deeper. May God be glorified as we live in light of this Scripture: *Let marriage be held in honor among all...* (Hebrews 13:4a)

## Marriage

While the Bible exalts a life of singleness in light of God's kingdom work (Matt. 19:11, 12; 1 Cor. 7:7, 8, 28, 32-35), most people think about their lives through the lens of God's statement in Genesis 2:18: *"It is not good for the man to be alone"*. Consider what the Bible teaches us about marriage:

- **Marriage is designed by God, ordained by God, and orchestrated by God.** In Matthew 19:4, 5, (see also Mk. 10:6-9) Jesus pointed His listeners back to the very first marriage in Genesis 2:21-24. Jesus wanted to caution His hearers by reminding them that just as that first marriage was God's handiwork, so all marriages are God's handiwork.
- **Marriage is the sacred union of one man and one woman.** The Bible tells us that the result of God's handiwork is that a man and a woman become "one flesh". This phrase seems to point to a family *oneness* (Gen. 2:24), a sexual *oneness*

(1 Cor. 6:16), and a *oneness* of identity (Eph. 5:28-31). Additionally, we learn this *oneness* is formalized by means of a "covenant" (Mal. 2:14), and intended to be "till death do us part" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39 Rom. 7:1-3).

- **Marriage is a picture of God's own relationship with His people.** Scripture teaches us that, in both the Old and New Testaments, God chose marriage as the human relationship by which he could figuratively describe His own divine relationship with His people (cf. Is. 54:5; Eph. 5:25-27). In light of this fact, Christian marriages must be guided by and seek to reflect to the world the love, humility, and faithfulness that characterizes Christ's care for His Church, as well as the Church's loving submission to Christ. (Eph. 5:22, 25).

- **Marriage, for the disciple of Jesus Christ, should only involve another Christian.** Paul called those believers who desired to be married to seek only a believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Cor. 6:14, 15). For those already married to an unbeliever, Paul encouraged them to remain in these relationships (1 Cor. 7:12, 13).

## Divorce

Regardless of the particulars, divorce always represents a sad and painful break from God's ideal for marriage. While some wrongly gravitate to extremes on this topic (believing either the Bible has nothing relevant to say about divorce today or believing the Bible always condemns divorce), consider what the Bible itself tells us:

- **In most cases, divorce is contrary to the desires and design of God.** Jesus clearly answered those asking about the permissibility of divorce "for any cause" (Matt. 19:3) by saying "what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6 (cf. Mk. 10:9)). Paul confirms this general prohibition in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

- **In most cases, divorce results from a failure to reflect God's forgiveness and faithfulness to our spouse.** Christians are to be "forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven" them (Eph. 4:32). In light of Jesus' example and God's commands, there can be no limits placed on the extent of such grace (cf. Matt. 18:21, 22), no matter how hurtful the circumstances.
- **In some cases, the Bible does describe divorce as a permissible option.** While forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation should always be our first option, God does permit divorce in instances where one spouse is sexually unfaithful (Matt. 19:9). Divorce is also permitted in instances in which a Christian is abandoned by their non-Christian spouse (1 Cor. 7:15).

## Remarriage

In cases where one spouse dies, the Bible is clear that remarriage is permissible (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Tim. 5:14). But in most of the biblical passages related to remarriage, the related idea is not death, but divorce. Consider what Scripture teaches us about remarriage:

- **In most cases, Scripture provides those divorced with only two options: singleness or reconciliation.** According to Paul's understanding of Jesus' teaching ("not I, but the Lord"), divorce should not take place. But if it does, then believers are called to "*remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to*" the former spouse (1 Cor. 7:10, 11). In general, this appears to correspond with Jesus' warnings about divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:9; Mk. 10:11, 12; Lk. 16:18).
- **In instances of a biblically permissible divorce (see above), or in cases where reconciliation is no longer possible, God's people differ over whether or not Scripture permits remarriage.** When we look back over the whole history of the Christian faith, two viewpoints on the

(cont.)

question of remarriage have stood out in terms of faithfulness to God's word:

Some among God's people believe that the Bible teaches that the "one flesh" bond of marriage can only be broken by death (cf. Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39). These would argue that under no circumstances, outside of the death of one's former spouse, can a divorced believer be remarried. This viewpoint would teach that the allowable divorce of Matthew 19:9 has as its goal, not remarriage, but ideally, reconciliation (in light of God's own example of covenant faithfulness (cf. Jer. 3:1-25)). Similarly, these believe that Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 7:15 do not explicitly include a sanction for remarriage, only for letting the unbelieving spouse leave.

On the other hand, a majority of Christians today believe that when the Bible permits divorce, it also permits remarriage (if not, the word "divorce" makes little sense). This perspective would argue that removing remarriage from the "exception" given by Jesus in Matthew 19:9 twists the plain sense of the verse. As a covenant, designed by and sanctioned by God himself, and sadly, as a covenant that can be violated, only God can tell us when the covenant bond is dissolved. According to this perspective, God does just that in Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:15. Additionally, this perspective argues that if reconciliation is no longer possible, an unmarried, divorced spouse is free to remarry another believer.

## Moving Forward

When it comes to these important but often difficult issues, we want our focus at Way of Grace to be on the present and the future, not on the past. We accept all couples and individuals, regardless of what has already taken place in their lives, and will labor to help all couples and individuals grow in God's grace. We all stand on level ground before the Cross! Our desire and responsibility is to help believers navigate times of struggle and make decisions informed by the teaching summarized here; to move

forward with convictions that are God glorifying and Scripture-shaped.

Additionally, as a family of believers, we recognize that different convictions on these issues exist among us. But we also affirm that these differences will not undermine our unity in the essentials: in Christ and the work of the gospel. It is our desire to move forward "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:2, 3)

May God strengthen and protect every marriage at Way of Grace, and may He equip us with wisdom, compassion, and courage as we seek to help those whose relationships and families have been devastated by sin. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* (Matt. 5:14a, 16) May our marriages shine forth God's grace, to our children, to each other, and to a world in desperate need.

## Recommend Resources for Further Study:

*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* by Jay Adams (Zondervan, 1980).

*Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles & Pastoral Practice* by Andrew Cornes (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

*Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* by H. Wayne House (editor) (Intervarsity Press, 1990)

*God, Marriage, and Family* by Andreas J. Köstenberger (Crossway Books, 2004)

*The Divorce Dilemma* by John MacArthur (Day One Publications, 2009).

*Divorce*, by John Murray (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1961).

*This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper (Crossway Books, 2009).

*Jesus and Divorce* by Gordon J. Wenham & William E. Heth (Paternoster Press, 1997).



# Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Embracing God's Desires and Design