

New Horizons Newsletter



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"May the Lord show you His favor and give you peace."

(Nu. 6:26)

DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE; IS IT BIBLICAL?

Part 1 of 2

By Dr. Pierre J. Samaan

There was this wife whose husband recently died making her a very sad widow. She chose the Funeral Home and a modest Casket. She wrestled with choosing the day and time for the Funeral. Her final task was to choose the inscription for the Gravestone. This seemed to take the most amount of concentration as compared to the other decisions. She said, "I just want to be right in describing my husband and our 40 years of marriage." Suddenly, there was a glimmer in her eyes, you could see that she came up with the inscription for her husband's gravestone. She seemed very proud of herself as she wrote, "Rest in Peace – Until We Meet Again!"

All kidding aside, it is sad to see that Christian divorces are on par with the secular divorce rate of about 45% for first marriages. Last year, in 2012, I performed 1350 Christian Counseling sessions. Over half of those sessions involved marital conflicts. The number of divorces coming from the Christian marital counseling was 20%. I see that figure as being "not good enough." Most of the marriages that fell into the 20% divorce rate were marriages that could have been saved if the couple either had professional premarital counseling or received Christian counseling as soon as it became apparent that conflicts were surfacing.

Statistics on the Likelihood of Divorce¹

- ⑤ On average, first marriages that end in divorce last about eight years.
- ⑤ In 2009, the divorce rate declined.
- ⑤ A 1995 study found a wide range of factors correlating with the divorce rate including frequency of sex, wealth, race, and religious commitment

¹Retrieved 2/27/13, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divorce>

- ⑤ In 2001, marriages between people of different faiths were three times more likely to be divorced than those of the same faith.
- ⑤ In a 1993 study, members of two mainline Protestant religions had a 20% chance of being divorced in 5 years; a Catholic and an Evangelical, a 33% chance; a Jew and a Christian, a 40% chance.
- ⑤ A study by the Barna Group, that conducts polls of interest to Christians, reports that a higher divorce rate was associated with infrequent church attendance.
- ⑤ While cohabitation has been shown to be associated with higher divorce rates, a study indicates that divorce-prone couples tend to first cohabit.
- ⑤ 81% of college graduates, over 26 years of age, who wed in the 1980s, were still married 20 years later.
- ⑤ 65% of college graduates under 26, who married in the 1980s, were still married 20 years later.
- ⑤ 49% of high school graduates under 26 years old, who married in the 1980s, were still married 20 years later.
- ⑤ Population studies have found that in 2004 and 2008, liberal-voting states have lower rates of divorce than conservative-voting states, possibly because people in liberal states tend to wait longer before getting married.
- ⑤ Women have filed slightly more than two-thirds of divorce cases in the United States.
- ⑤ White female-Black male and White female-Asian male marriages are more prone to divorce than White-White pairings.
- ⑤ Conversely, unions between White males and non-White females (and between Hispanics and non-Hispanic persons) have similar or lower risks of divorce than White-White marriages.
- ⑤ The Barna Research Group measured divorce statistics by religion. They found that 29 percent of Baptists are divorced (the highest for a US religious group), while only 21 percent of atheists/agnostics were divorced (the lowest).

Is There Biblical Permission for Divorce and Remarriage?

Below are the three most quoted Scriptures involving Divorce and Remarriage. Jesus answered the Pharisees who were trying to entrap him with the questions about divorce. They were hoping that he would say something that they could use to turn the people against Jesus. For many years, there was a popular "Hillelite" teaching of the time that divorce could be for "any cause." Of course, Jesus knew this and was addressing the Pharisees knowing they were thinking along the "any cause/matter," doctrine.

Hebraic and Greco-Roman culture were the legal and spiritual laws that were accepted about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Jesus understood that he did not have to give a detailed explanation of his answers about divorce, yet he had to address the liberal position of the day. Based upon the time period and what Jesus and Paul said and did not say about divorce and remarriage, there were two reasons for divorce and one for remarriage.

1. **Adultery – Marital Unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 24:1; spoken by Jesus in Matthew 5:32; 9:9-11; 19 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 7)**

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Marital unfaithfulness gives sanction for permissible divorce if the faithful spouse chooses not to reconcile. Whenever possible, we must weigh heavy the words of Jesus when he declared to forgive one another "seven times seventy" (Matthew 18:21-22)

³¹ *"It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce';* ³² *but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.* (Matthew 5:31-32 NASB)

In most cases, it is encouraged to work towards reconciliation whenever possible. There is some question whether Matthew 19:11 implies that the one divorcing an adulterer is permitted to remarry. However, this would still be considered defilement/uncleaness requiring the redeeming Blood of Christ.

Thank God, the blood of Christ covers all sins for those who are not chronically sinning without repentance (some say they never truly surrendered to God). For it would be impossible to have the Spirit of God and not be convicted when there is chronic sin. Therefore, the Scripture speaks of no one who is chronically unrepentant of sin entering the Kingdom of God (Romans 1:24-32; Galatians 5:13-26).

I know of chronic adulterers who are only sorry for having been caught. There are others who will confess knowing it will bring forgiveness from a Christian spouse, but will take it as a license to do it again (Ephesians 4:18; 5:5).

It is between the Christian spouse and God to determine divorce or reconciliation. Others are to forgive and let the victimized spouse know that whether you agree or not, you are there as a Christian brother or sister to give spiritual support, encouragement, and if necessary, forgiveness (Ephesians 4:2-3, 32). Let the church and those in it forgive the divorced person who has been betrayed or victimized by an unloving husband or wife. The pain of betrayal or victimization is unique to the sufferer. Only God knows their hearts and, for those unable to reconcile, we are compelled to forgive or our unforgiveness will bring God's judgment upon us.

In Ephesians 4:30, we read that we are not to sadden or upset the Holy Spirit of God that is within us. In verse 31, Paul goes on to list those things that we may do which will sadden God's Spirit.

³¹ *Let all bitterness and indignation and wrath (passion, rage, bad temper) and resentment (anger, animosity) and quarreling (brawling, clamor, contention) and slander (evil-speaking, abusive or blasphemous language) be banished from you, with all malice (spite, ill will, or baseness of any kind).*" (AMP)

When you remain in marital conflict, you will see many if not all of the above list of negative characteristics that will grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 18-20). What then are we to do about it? "STOP IT!" If you do not want to be a chronic offender of the Spirit of God, you must do the following in your marriage:

³² *... become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, **loving-hearted**), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you.*" (Ephesians 4:32 AMP) (emphasis mine)

Within your marriage, do not choose to remain carnally minded, like a baby in faith. Remember what Jesus spoke in John's vision written in Revelations. Jesus returned to snatch up the saints (believers) and there were those left behind because from the time they called on the name of Jesus they remained babies, lukewarm, and unchanging in their sinful lifestyles (Revelations 3:16). Some will say that those that are lukewarm never made a true surrender to God through Jesus Christ.

“¹However, brethren, I could not talk to you as to spiritual [men], but as to nonspiritual [men of the flesh, in whom the carnal nature predominates], as to mere infants [in the new life] in Christ [unable to talk yet!] ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not yet strong enough [to be ready for it]; but even yet you are not strong enough [to be ready for it], ³For you are still [unspiritual, having the nature] of the flesh [under the control of ordinary impulses]. For as long as [there are] envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men?” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3 AMP)

⁹ I say to you: whoever dismisses (repudiates, divorces) his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

¹⁰The disciples said to Him, If the case of a man with his wife is like this, it is neither profitable nor advisable to marry.

¹¹ But He said to them, Not all men can accept this saying, but it is for those to whom [the capacity to receive] it has been given. (Matthew 19:9-11 AMP)

Number One Complaint of a Husband & Wife

The number one complaint I receive from men participating in Christian Counseling is that their wife is not giving them enough sexual relations. That comment is usually followed up by the wife explaining that their husband has been unloving and the only time he is being loving is when he wants sex. I have heard many other reasons why sex is sparse within a marriage.

So, how are we to read 1 Corinthians 7, when Paul writes that neither the husband nor the wife are to hold back conjugal rights from the other?

³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights (goodwill, kindness, and what is due her as his wife), and likewise the wife to her husband.

⁴ For the wife does not have [exclusive] authority and control over her own body, but the husband [has his rights]; likewise also the husband does not have [exclusive] authority and control over his body, but the wife [has her rights].

⁵ Do not refuse and deprive and defraud each other [of your due marital rights], except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves unhindered to prayer. But afterwards resume marital relations, lest Satan tempt you [to sin] through your lack of restraint of sexual desire. (1 Corinthians 7:3-5 AMP)

Even God Divorced His People

Speaking of Israel “polluting its land with harlotry and wickedness” (whoredom and immorality), God said,

“⁸ And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce . . .” (Jeremiah 3:8).

God chose divorce and later invited repentance by saying He would take Israel back if they truly repented, acknowledging all their immorality and return to serving God (Jeremiah 3:11-24 NASB). Later, God promises a new covenant in which He will forgive Israel's and Judah's wickedness and no longer remember their sins (Jeremiah 31:31-37). Does this mean God will come together once again with Israel in a remarriage?

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I believe there is another good reason that God has identified adultery as defilement/uncleanness. The misbehavior (sin) of sleeping around leads to sexually transmitted infections (STI's). God gave us sexual boundaries, which kept His people medically safe. In the U.S. there are currently nearly 20 million new STI's this past year in 2012. Half of that number of new infections are among the nation's youth. Among new and existing infections, there are over 110 million STI's in the United States..² Our population in the U.S. is only 315 million.³

Can you even imagine what that would be if God had not set adultery/unmarried sex as a sin? Instead of one out of three to five Americans having STI's, everyone would be infected. Sexually transmitted infections have the potential to change a victim's DNA, which could lead to a "depraved mind."

"¹ But understand this, that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress and trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear].

² For people will be lovers of self and [utterly] self-centered, lovers of money and aroused by an inordinate [greedy] desire for wealth, proud and arrogant and contemptuous boasters. They will be abusive (blasphemous, scoffing), disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy and profane.

³ [They will be] without natural [human] affection (callous and inhuman), relentless (admitting of no truce or appeasement); [they will be] slanderers (false accusers, troublemakers), intemperate and loose in moral, and conduct, uncontrolled and fierce, haters of good.

⁴ [They will be] treacherous [betrayers], rash, [and] inflated with self-conceit. [They will be] lovers of sensual pleasures and vain amusements more than and rather than lovers of God.

⁵ For [although] they hold a form of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it [their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession]. Avoid [all] such people [turn away from them].

⁶ For among them are those who worm their way into homes and captivate silly and weak-natured and spiritually dwarfed women, loaded down with [the burden of their] sins [and easily] swayed and led away by various evil desires and seductive impulses.

⁷ [These weak women will listen to anybody who will teach them]; they are forever inquiring and getting information, but are never able to arrive at a recognition and knowledge of the Truth.

⁸ Now just as Jannes and Jambres were hostile to and resisted Moses, so these men also are hostile to and oppose the Truth. They have depraved and distorted minds, and are reprobate and counterfeit and to be rejected as far as the faith is concerned.

⁹ But they will not get very far, for their rash folly will become obvious to everybody, as was that of those [magicians mentioned].

¹⁰ Now you have closely observed and diligently followed my teaching, conduct, purpose in life, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1-10 AMP)

PART 2 WILL BE LOOKING AT ABANDONMENT AND DEATH OF SPOUSE IN THIS SERIES OF DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE; IS IT BIBLICAL?

²Retrieved 3/07/13, from <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats/STI-Estimates-Fact-Sheet-Feb-2013.pdf>

³Retrieved 3/12/13, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>

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