

Marriage and Divorce from God's Perspective

How is a marriage more than just living together?

Does divorce release a couple from their marriage vows?

If you are a Christian and are considering marriage, or considering divorce, read on!

The scene is a common one. A husband and wife decide that they no longer love each other and they want a divorce. Unable to get along, they live in continual contention. Why shouldn't they divorce? Why must there be "scriptural grounds"? And without such grounds, what's wrong with starting over and marrying someone else more compatible?

From a human perspective, the perspective of society, if your quality of life can be improved by a divorce and a remarriage, then why hinder it? But when we understand what marriage is in the sight of heaven we see the reasons for the clear Biblical rules regarding divorce and remarriage.

What really makes a couple married? Is it the wedding ceremony? Is it the pronouncement of the presiding official? Is it the signing of legal papers? Or is it simply the fact that the two begin living together? While all of these elements play a part in uniting a man and wife, the act that permanently binds the two lives together is their exchange of vows. A marriage, in its essence, is a solemn covenant, a verbal contract established through a willing exchange of vows. The vows create the marriage.

In our society a man's word means very little. But before God and the heavenly host not one word we utter is lost. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matthew 12: 36, 37. "That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform." "For the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee." Deuteronomy 23: 23, 21.

We may change our mind, but never our word. Once it is spoken in the hearing of heaven, we cannot take it back. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Ecclesiastes 5:2.

God's own word is, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Psalm 89:34. And every child of God who opens his mouth to speak will declare, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." Judges 11:35.

Marriage vows are a solemn pledge to be faithful to each other for as long as both are living. In this agreement, both individuals are pledging before God to reserve

their intimacies exclusively for the other. Until death dissolves it, this verbal contract cannot be legitimately broken under any circumstance.

This explains the question of divorce and remarriage. When a marriage breaks up because of incompatibility or other unscriptural grounds, they must remain single for the rest of their lives (1 Cor. 7:11). Why? Because the vows they once made to each other are still binding.

Notice this: "A woman may be legally divorced from her husband by the laws of the land and yet not divorced in the sight of God and according to higher law. There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God. Although the laws of the land may grant a divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the laws of God." The Adventist Home, p. 344.

No courthouse or judge can nullify your solemn contract of fidelity to your once-chosen companion. You may have obtained a "courthouse divorce" long ago, but if there are no scriptural grounds for divorce, your marriage pledge is still binding. The only thing that can dissolve a marriage in the sight of God and nullify its contract is the sin of physical violation of the pledge to faithfulness.

If two married people simply cannot live together, they may choose to separate. But even in separation they are still under lifetime obligation to their marriage vows to remain faithful to each other. And hopes should be entertained that hearts would be changed by the grace of God, so that harmony could once again be restored.

But if they actually file for divorce, not only are they separating, and withholding themselves from the one whom they have pledged to love and care for, but in getting the divorce, they do so intending that they are thereby dissolving their whole obligation of faithfulness to each other. Their action indicates a determination to cast off their vows of loyalty and to make the separation permanent. There is the sin of divorce. There is what brings devastation to the family and to the community.

As we understand heaven's definitions of marriage and divorce we begin to comprehend the sacredness of the divine institution. Couples contemplating marriage should not approach the altar until they are absolutely certain that they can abide for the rest of their lives under the commitment that they have pledged to each other. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put assunder."

Bible References

Marriage: Genesis 2:18, 21-24; Proverbs 18:22; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4.

Divorce: Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31, 32; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 27, 39.

Vows: Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Judges 11:29-40; Psalm 15:1, 4b; Psalm 89:34; Ecclesiastes 5:2-6; Matthew 12:36, 37; Galatians 3:15.

What to Do

Before you pledge yourselves to each other, know exactly what you are doing and the unchangeable nature of your vows. Once you have opened your mouth, you can never go back on your words.

Once you have pledged yourself in marriage, do all you can to show your love and faithfulness to your companion. If there are problems, ask God to help you make the very best of the situation and to give you the grace to love and cherish your companion for the rest of your life.

If the problem becomes so serious that it cannot be resolved and a separation must occur, remember that you are still obligated to your vows.

If the agreement to faithfulness has been physically violated, the marriage covenant is broken, and you are released from your vows. But even then it is possible for the guilty one to come to repentance and be accepted once again by God and by the offended partner.

"Love Never Fails"