

Divorce Permitted

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Freedom of Divorce Permitted

(Deuteronomy 21:10-14; 24:1)

Divorce Restricted

(Matthew 5:32)

Because Almighty God is merciful and loves mankind, He makes allowances for their many weaknesses (Ps. 103:14-16). However, this does not mean He condones their sins (1Jn. 3:4; Eze. 18:4, 20; Ac. 17:30; Rom. 6:23). Instead, He created the means through which their sins could be forgiven (Jn. 1:29; 1Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 9:22). Throughout Holy Scripture, God issued rulings and commands to deal with the many different situations and problems that man would get himself into, including divorce. God never intended for a man and woman to break their marriage vow, and His regulations are in response to those who disobey His will regarding this relationship, which is vital to the survival of families, communities, and nations.

'For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Therefore take heed to your spirit (i.e. examine your motives), that you do not deal treacherously' (Mal. 2:16; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Although some people attempt to use Deuteronomy 21:10-14 to accuse God of permitting divorce, the context of this section of scripture is dealing with man's conduct during times of warfare. Man's history is replete with atrocities associated with war, but God does not condone them. One travesty associated with man's behavior during warfare involves rape,

and it is important to note that under God's system of governance rape is punishable by death (Dt. 22:25). Therefore, it is God's intent to protect women from being tortured, raped, or abused in battles involving civilian populations.

When you (ancient Israel) go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, ¹¹and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, ¹²then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. ¹³She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. ¹⁴And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her (Dt. 21:10-14; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Not many people in the Western world today have experienced invasion, defeat at the hands of an enemy, or various forms of brutality from a conquering nation. Therefore, the scriptures above are difficult to relate to. Nonetheless, when one nation invades another, whoever loses is subject to the conquering power. In many cases, the nation that was defeated becomes a slave to the victor. All the rights, that the defeated nation used to enjoy, are removed. Anyone who has encountered any of these activities will appreciate that God's ordinances are meant to prevent torture, rape, and other forms of abuse in the event of war and captivity.

In the absence of war, the rights of women within ancient Israel were protected. This is confirmed by the next law which deals with a virgin who is seduced by a man. In most societies today, a man can have intercourse with

a woman and then abandon her. If she conceives as a result of being seduced, the child is usually supported one way or another by taxpayers and/or family members. However, in ancient Israel, God's law prevented a man from running away from his responsibilities. If a man was able to abscond from his duties as a husband, the woman would be in trouble because other matrimonial laws prohibited her from marrying someone else (Dt. 22:13-21). In cases like this if the man could leave, a woman would end up being dependent on family members for the rest of her life.

If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, ²⁹then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; **he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days** (Dt. 22:28-29; emphasis added).

For those who insisted on divorce, the divorced woman was to remain unmarried. If she remarried, she was considered defiled.

Then her (the divorced woman's) former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife **after she has been defiled**; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance (Dt. 24:4; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Contrary to those who believe that Jesus Christ did not uphold his heavenly Father's law and commandments (Mt. 5:18-19), the next scripture proves that Christ was in agreement with what Almighty God had instructed throughout the First Covenant, including regulations on divorce.

But I (Christ) say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes (makes it possible for) her to commit adultery; and **whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery** (Mt. 5:32; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

In the scripture above, Christ emphasized that whoever married a divorced woman would be considered an adulterer because God does not recognize divorce except for sexual immorality. In other words, God considers the woman as still being married to her first husband even though she might claim she is divorced.

In most cases, divorce is the result of mankind's selfish, stubborn, and rebellious nature.

He (Christ) said to them, 'Moses, **because of the hardness of your hearts**, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so (Mt. 19:8; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' ⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh'; ⁹Therefore **what God has joined together, let not man separate** (Mk. 10:6-9; emphasis added).

So he (Christ) said to them (the disciples), 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹²And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (Mk. 10:11-12; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The apostle Paul addressed the issue of divorce for those newly converted brethren whose unconverted spouses no longer wished to

remain married to them due to conflicts arising from their belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Now to the married I (Paul) command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. ¹²But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him (1Cor. 7:10-13; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or sister (in the faith) is not under bondage in such cases... (1Cor. 7:15a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

These laws and concepts are foreign to our societies today, but Christ will reinforce them following his return to rule this planet because they lead to a peaceful and happy world. In the meantime, our societies are gradually disintegrating due to the "hardness of our hearts" when it comes to obeying God's word regarding our conduct with one another, including divorce. Unfortunately, very few people see a connection between the decline of nations today and divorce rates. Thankfully, some historians have compiled enough data to make the connection for those who have the eyes to see it. Tacitus, a Roman historian of the early Empire wrote about the strength of the family unit when Rome was at the zenith of its power and influence.

In the good old days (of the Republic), every man's son, born in wedlock, was brought up not in the chamber of some hireling nurse, but in his mother's lap, and at her knee. And that mother

could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children... (Tacitus, Dialogue on Oratory, 28, Loeb Classics).

At the age of seven a boy was released from the care of his mother in order to continue his education under the leadership of his father.

The idea of entrusting the training of a future Roman citizen (i.e. young son) to the incompetent guidance of a slave was repellent to the Roman mind at this time (Castle, op. cit., p, 113).

Unfortunately, the strong family unit of the earlier Roman Empire gradually became eroded with divorce becoming more and more prevalent. There were a number of factors contributing to this situation including fathers traveling away to remote parts of the Empire and their wives and children left alone for extended periods of time.

Added to this initial cause of family disruption was the consequent easy attitude to the marriage tie, the increasing frequency of divorce, and growing freedom and laxity in women's morals, all of which ended in a loosening of the old family unit in which the best in Roman character had its roots. Great as were the men who made history in these last years of the Republic, there was yet something lacking in moral stature among Roman upper classes which had been characteristic of earlier generations. Personal aggrandizement was too eagerly sought and too readily achieved by the ruthless...and the old traditions of selfless service to the state were weakening (ibid., pp. 119, 120).

The effects of family breakdown on the children are also recorded by some historians.

The fine edge of character had been blunted in the Rome of the second century (C.E.). The stern face of the traditional 'pater familias' (the father of the family) had faded out; instead we see on every hand the flabby face of the son of the house, the eternal spoiled child of society, who has grown accustomed to luxury and lost all sense of discipline (Daily Life in Ancient Rome, Jerome Carcopino, pp. 78-79).

Regarding the Rome of the Antonine period, around 150 C.E., Jerome Carcopino quotes from Seneca who witnessed the same problem a number of decades before.

They divorce in order to remarry. They marry in order to divorce (ibid., p. 100).

The Roman writer Martial stated that marriage had become merely a form of legalized adultery. If this situation is not reversed in societies today, law and order will eventually breakdown as history has shown time and time again. The Bible strongly indicates that disruption of the family unit will be a hallmark of the generation leading up to Christ's return. Therefore, it is critical for as many voices as possible to declare the seriousness of divorce as one of the factors contributing to the breakdown of society.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. ⁵Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. ⁶And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a **curse** (SHD 2764; [appointed to] utter destruction) (Mal. 4:4-6; emphasis added).

In reality, Almighty God will allow mankind enough time to learn that the consequences of disobedience to His law and commandments,

including those related to marriage and divorce, eventually end in grief and hardship. Because God is kind and patient with mankind, most people confuse His apparent lack of action with tacit approval of their selfish and rebellious conduct, which it is not.

I (Almighty God) have held My peace a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself. Now (after mankind has completely rejected God's law and commandments) I will cry like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once. ¹⁵I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, and I will dry up the pools (Isa. 42:14-15; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

In conclusion, divorce is not something that God ever intended mankind to do. However, as God granted man the freedom to choose between His way of living versus Satan's way, divorce is something that man can choose if he wishes, but it is contrary to God's will. Living contrary to God's will comes naturally and easily to mankind, but the end result is never good.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Prov. 16:25; cf. 14:12; emphasis added).

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