

# **DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE**

*Sources include:*

<http://www.christian.org.uk/resources/theology/apologetics/marriage-and-family/divorce/>

<http://www.yutopian.com/religion/theology/Divorce.html>

<http://www.andrewcorbett.net/articles/divorce.htm>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/divorce-remarriage-a-position-paper.pdf?lang=en>

# **DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE**

*This is not intended to be a comprehensive study - it favours some UK study, statistics etc. - it is to stimulate you to think about divorce, not to summarise biblical teaching*

# **SOME KEY QUESTIONS**

CAN CHRISTIANS DIVORCE?

WHAT REASONS ARE “OK” FOR A  
CHRISTIAN TO DIVORCE?

IF DIVORCED CAN THEY REMARRY?

CAN CHRISTIANS SEPARATE?

WHAT ARE THE KEY BIBLE  
REFERENCES?



The ending of the legal union between two married people is called divorce. Throughout most ages and societies forms of divorce have existed. *“Divorce is an unnatural act.”*

## Are these ideas really biblical?

*“The reality of life is that divorce is not only common, but often necessary for people’s well-being.”*

Some have argued that men of God suffered the pain of divorce: **Moses**, who sent Zipporah away (Ex. 18:2)

**David** - who *apparently* divorced Michael (2Sam. 6:23)

**Hosea** the prophet.

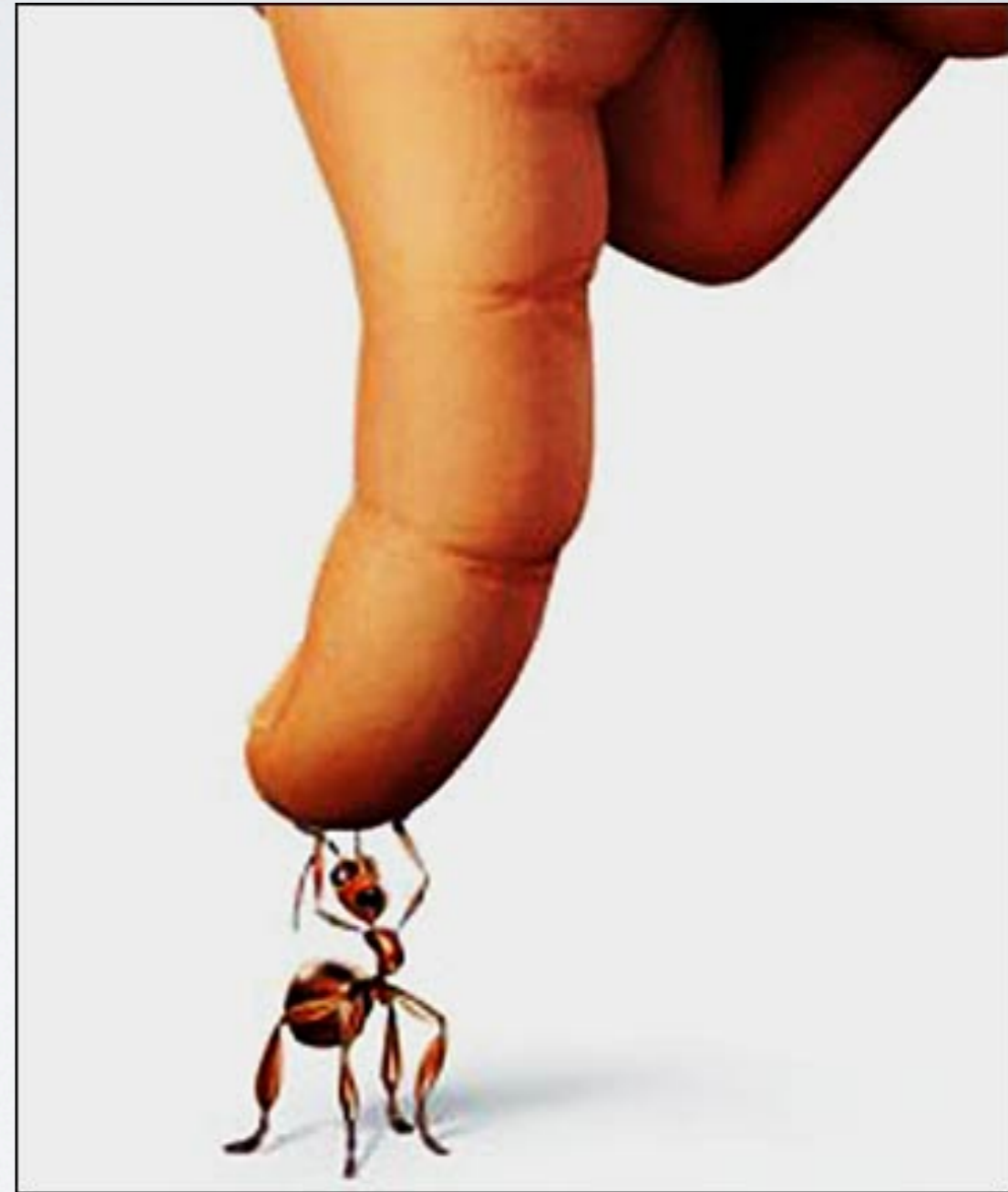
Divorce is becoming so common among those in the professional ministry that denominations are quickly forming policies governing ordination and remarriage.



# UK LAW AND STATISTICS ON DIVORCE

Five basic grounds for divorce:

- Adultery
- Unreasonable behaviour
- Desertion
- The parties to the marriage have lived apart for at least two years and both consent to the divorce (*no fault*)
- The parties have lived apart for at least five years (*no fault*)
- *The UK statistics are offered to exemplify the prevalence of divorce in “Western” nations*



## In 2003

- 166,700 divorces in the UK.
- the % of married couples divorcing per year in England and Wales was 1.4%.
- 55% of divorces involved one or more children under 16.

In 1997 it was calculated that more than 1 in 4 children will see their parents divorce before they are 16.

In 2001 11.5% of children lived in households headed by a divorced or separated parent.

Over 70% of children lived in a household headed by a married couple.

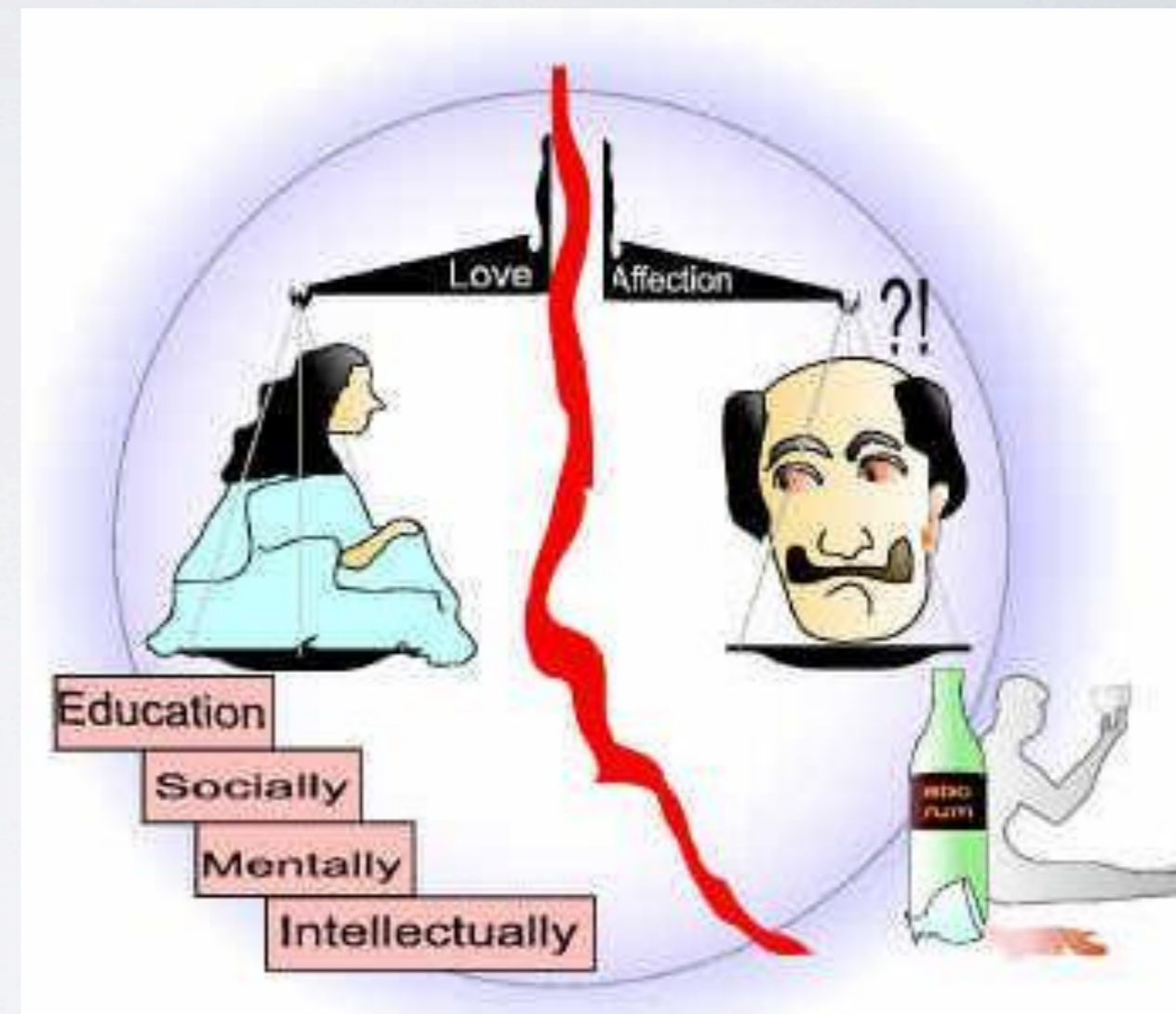
Rank	Country	Percent
1	 India	1.1
2	 Sri Lanka	1.5
3	 Japan	1.9
4	 Republic of Macedonia	5.0
5	 Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.0
6	 Turkey	6.0
7	 Armenia	6.0
8	 Georgia	6.6
9	 Italy	10.0
10	 Azerbaijan	10.3
11	 Albania	10.9
12	 Israel	14.8
13	 Spain	15.2
14	 Croatia	15.5
15	 Greece	15.7



# DEVELOPMENTAL OF BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF DIVORCE

In the OT divorce wasn't instituted, but rather legislated. That is, it was an established practice, much like slavery was.

God legislated for His people to regard marriage as a sacred institution, and for divorce not to be taken lightly - **Deut. 24:1-4**.



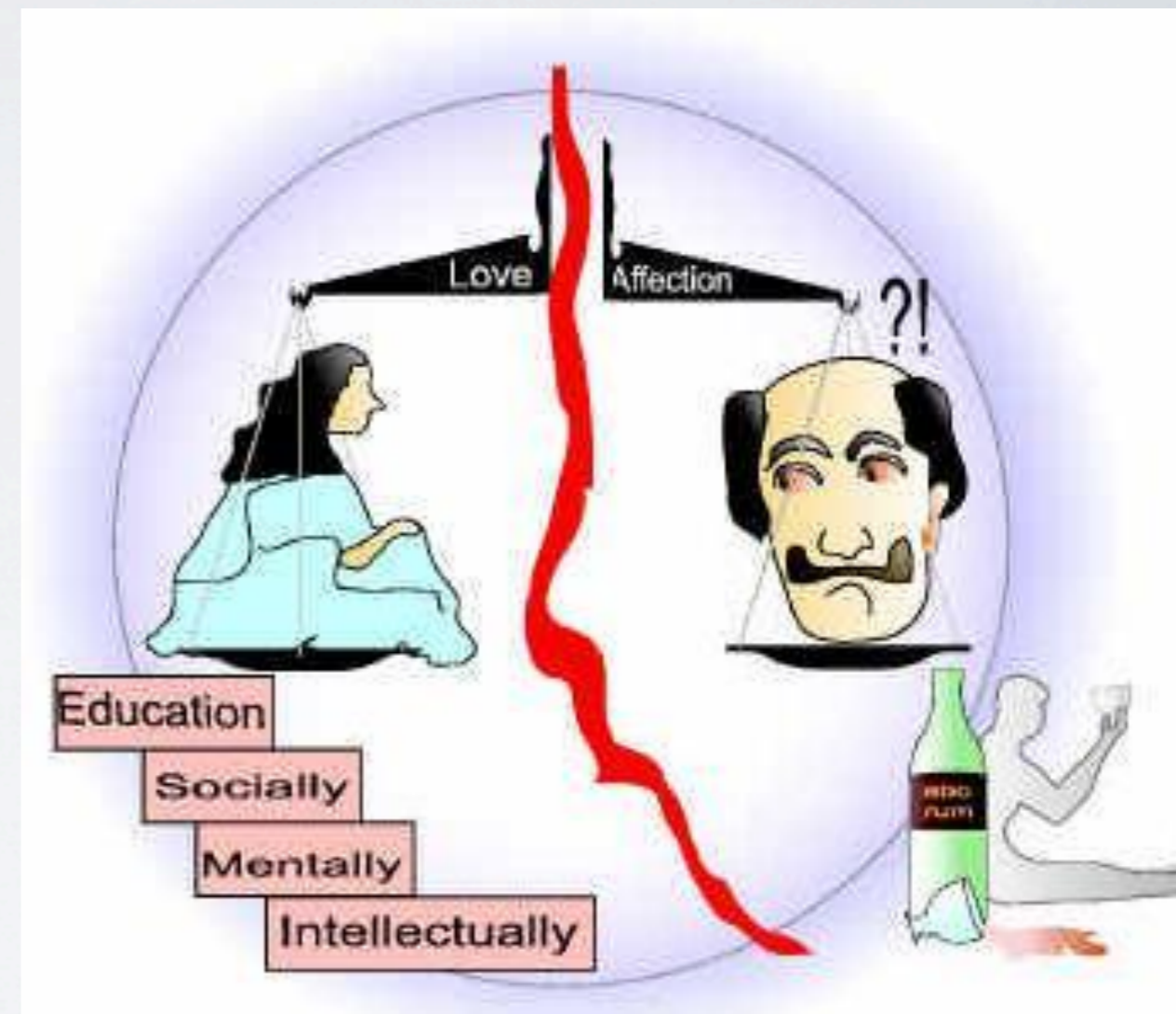
# DEVELOPMENTAL OF BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF DIVORCE

*1 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, 2 and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, 4 then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

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In OT culture marriages were usually arranged by parents; the marriage was meant to be lifelong; a husband expected fidelity from his wife and could exact the death penalty for adultery.

**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, recognises that divorce was a common social ill. It is accepting and legislating what was already taking place within their culture. This is set against the backdrop of God already having given commands for a man not to divorce his wife.



In the context of claiming a wife not to be a virgin on the wedding night  
*She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.*

## **Deuteronomy 22:19**

From the OT one can argue that it was God's intention that marriage was to be a life-long union between a man and a woman.



Near the end of the OT era, just after Ezra and Nehemiah had instructed the Jewish men to divorce their foreign wives (**Ezra 10:11**), Malachi wrote- (NIV2011 then NLT) *“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful. 16 “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”*

## **Malachi 2:16**



It has been said that Pharisaism in Judaism had developed so legalistically that they had made divorce almost inevitable for women who dared defy the slightest whims of their husbands. Consequently, Jesus shocked even His own disciples with His candid views on marriage being for life-

### **Matt 19:3-9**

*And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"*



4He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,  
5and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." 7They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" 8He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."



Christ's teaching reflected the heart of OT teaching - (**Dt. 24:1-4**) - he simply reinforced this truth.

His statements about fornication and adultery in **Matthew 5:31-32** are plain. *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Christ's intent was clear: marriage is the lifelong union between two parties which is violated in no more serious a fashion than in sexual activity outside of that relationship.



The only other NT passage on divorce is in **I Corinthians 7**. In this one chapter he commands against divorce on four separate occasions. We read a number of key sections from this in class.

**Hebrews** reinforces the overall message of Scripture regarding marriage and grounds for divorce- *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. **13:4***



**Andrew Corbett** says:

*“Paul in **1 Cor 7** says divorce is never an option for a Christian couple. It is an option however in a situation where one of the partners is violating the marriage covenant through sexual misconduct.”*

He also suggests that it is understandable for a wife to divorce a violent unrepentant husband - though then, the wife is best advised not to seek to enter into another marriage. The seriousness of the divorce implications can be taken too lightly by someone in this situation. Where a Christian has been involved in a divorce before coming to Christ, his/her past is washed away and they are free to get on with their life without the weight of condemnation.

*“For a Christian leader to divorce is a shameful thing. It is shameful that it came to this point, and secondly that they proceeded with a divorce despite the clear teaching of Scripture.”*

# BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS I: THE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE

God spelled out the importance of marriage for mankind right at the beginning of human history when, after Eve was created for Adam, the Bible records:

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”*

**Genesis 2:24**



Jesus Christ was asked a specific question about 'no-fault' divorce by the Pharisees: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" - **Matthew 19:3**

- His answer was emphatic

*'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6So they are no longer two but one flesh.* **What therefore**

**God has joined together, let not man separate."**

**Matthew 19:5-6**



Christ said that the provision in the Law of Moses permitting a man simply to write a certificate to divorce his wife was allowed only because of the hardness of men's hearts. Christ rejected this by appealing directly to Genesis:

*“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, **but from the beginning it was not so**”*

**Matt 19:8**



**“No-fault” divorce is  
unknown in Christian  
theology.**

Jesus clearly taught that adultery is a basis for divorce -

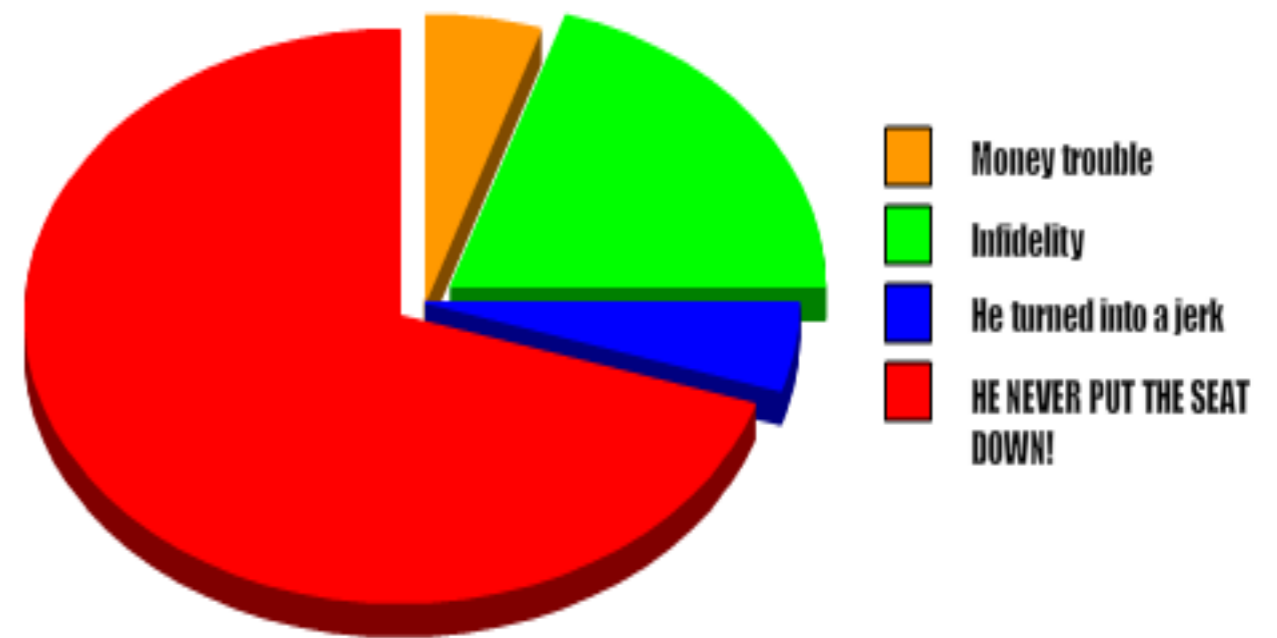
## **Matthew 19:9**

Some Christians also believe that in **1 Cor 7:15** Paul allows for desertion as a ground of divorce. Both of these are clearly grounds of 'fault'.

*But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*

There is a need to draw the line between what we **could** and **should** do - permission does not mean it is right to do so.

## **Why Women Get Divorced**





Most Christians who favor divorce try to justify their view by arguing that God allowed divorce - **Duet 24:1-3** - in the Old Testament law. They proceed to argue that since God is never changing, then he must allow divorce now.

Based on **Mal 2:16, 1 Cor 7:10-11, 1 Cor 7:27, Mt 19:6** and **Mk 10:9**, it is clear that God dislikes divorce (to the extent that He used the word hate). Christ said, 'What God has joined together, let not man (nor woman) separate (Matthew 19:6).



*To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. I I But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

*27 Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife.*

*6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

*9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*



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Why did Moses allow divorce then - **Deut 24:1-3**? Did God contradict Himself, or did he change his mind? If we read **Mark 10:5**, we learn that Moses allowed divorce because the Israelites hearts were hardened, much like Pharaohs heart (**Ex 4:21, Ex 10:20**).

God allowed Pharaoh an(d those who desire divorce) to harden their hearts, does it mean that He supported what they did? God allows sins to occur too, but that does not mean He plans or likes these actions!



**One commentator suggests the following line of reasoning;**

Jesus said, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Please note that the **exception** here refers to committing **adultery**, and **not** to divorce). What this passage teaches is that if a husband divorces his wife, he causes her to commit adultery if she remarries (and vice versa).



However, if a husband divorces his wife because she has committed adultery, then he does not cause her to commit adultery.

The passage does not teach that it's okay to get divorce if adultery is involved. It teaches that if a husband hardens his heart to divorce his wife, under what situation does he cause his wife to commit adultery.

***Thus there are absolutely no grounds for divorce Biblically.***



It has been said that if adultery is involved, Christians should learn to forgive, much like God forgave our sins.

***Is that fair, right?***

Christians should consider the impact of divorce on children.

***Having read this what do you think is a Biblical point of view on whether Christians should divorce?***



# CHURCH VIEWPOINTS ON THE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE

There are sincerely held differences of view amongst credally orthodox Churches on the question of remarriage after divorce. There are essentially two views. ***Some do not allow remarriage at all; others permit it only for the innocent spouse.***

Amongst Protestants, theological conservatives can be found in both groups.





## **The Church of England**

(Episcopalian) teaches that marriage is for life. Its long-standing position until very recently has been to permit divorce but not remarriage since it is argued that in God's sight the couple are still married.

However, in 2002 the synod of the Church passed a motion stating that in exceptional circumstances, a divorced person may marry again in church during the lifetime of a former spouse.



## The **Roman Catholic Church**

believes divorce is immoral and a grave offence against the natural law. It therefore considers re-marriage while both husband and wife are alive as adultery. RC statement has said,

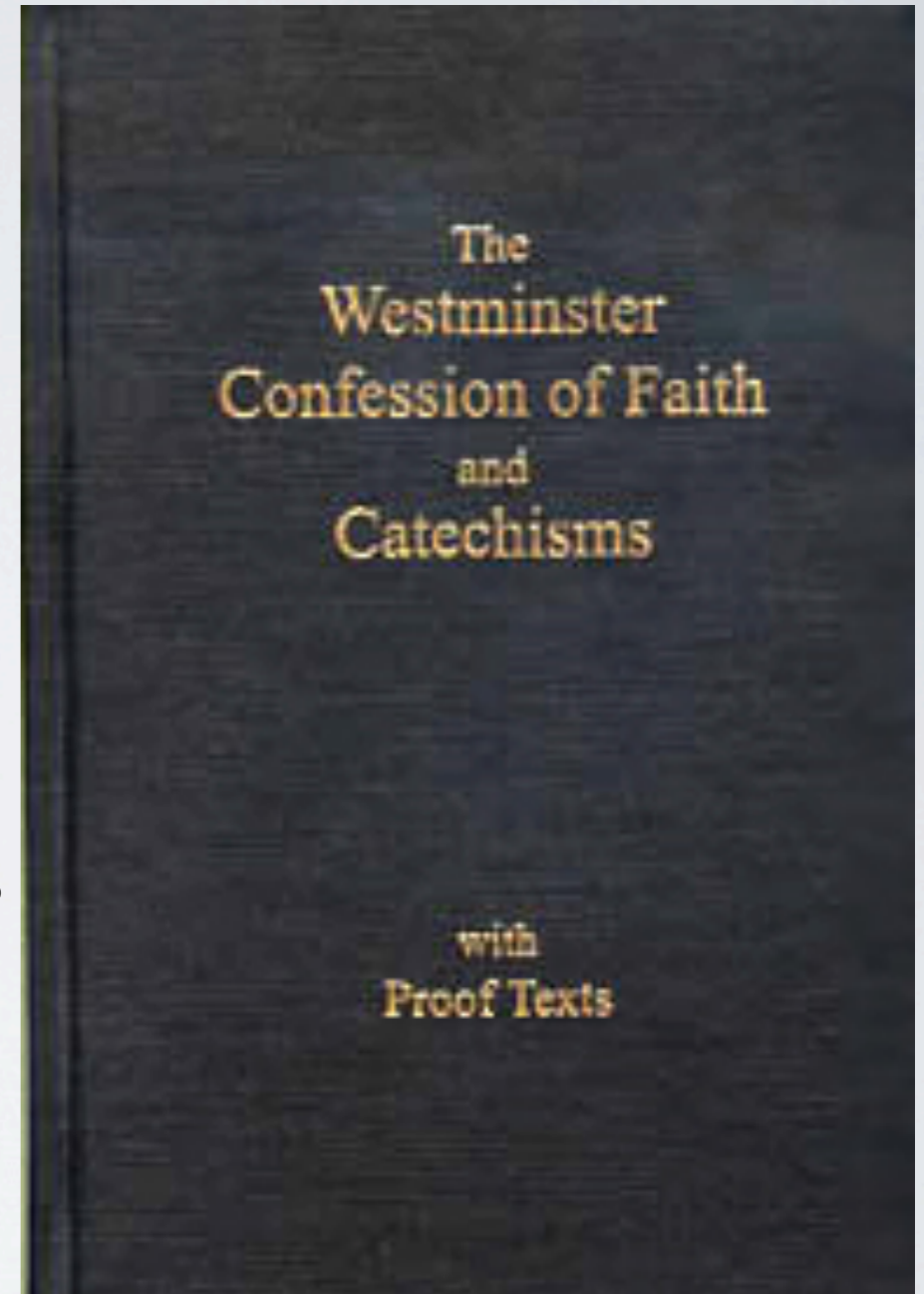
*“It can happen when one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage.”*



# The Westminster Confession

(1647) associated with Presbyterian Churches permits divorce and re-marriage for the innocent party in the case of adultery.

For centuries the tendency was for churches of all denominations not to permit any divorce at all. They only allowed legal separation (i.e. non-cohabitation) of spouses and even then only where one spouse had committed a serious sin against the other, such as adultery. Both parties remained legally married and therefore could not remarry.



The Reformers permitted remarriage after divorce for the innocent party. This was theoretically possible, but after a detailed study of court records in Reformation Germany, Joel Harrington found that *“divorce was a relatively little exercised option”*. The possibility of collusion in order to obtain a divorce *“was considered so great by Protestant authorities that they would not even consider allowing re-marriage unless the innocent spouse was free from any suspicion and willing to endure a series of legal and financial obstacles intended to dissuade him or her from such a course”*.



# THE CASE FOR PROMOTING RECONCILIATION

The Bible is clear that marriage is intended to be lifelong. This is for everyone's good irrespective of whether the married couple are Christians.



Even where there are grounds for divorce Christians have always stressed that strenuous efforts at reconciliation must be attempted first. In **1 Corinthians 7:10** Paul specifically requires spouses to stay together, or, if they have separated, to attempt reconciliation. When this fails legal separation has often been seen as preferable to divorce.

The divorce process can be hard to stop once started - in the UK every year an average of 14% of husbands or wives drop their divorce petitions - between 18-34,000 divorces are dropped every year.



**OTHER POINTS  
FROM UK LAW AND  
STATISTICS**

# NO-FAULT DIVORCE

The 1996 Family Law Act replaced the 1969 Divorce Reform Act with no-fault divorce in England and Wales. It is a great relief that the 'no-fault' divorce provisions of the 1996 Act are to be repealed without ever having come into force. The reason for this is that the pilot schemes have shown the Act to be unworkable - *Under the Act, it would have been easier to get out of a marriage than a hire purchase agreement.*





# THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE HIGH DIVORCE RATE

The average cost of divorce in the UK now costs £25,575 - Rs 19.18 lakh. More than a third of couples are forced to sell their marital home when they split up.

In its green paper Supporting Families the Government itself acknowledged that “Rising crime and drug abuse are indirect symptoms of problems in the family.”

Of the 60,000 children living in care, 98% are there due to family breakdown.



Professor A H Halsey, Professor of Social Policy at Nuffield College, Oxford and co-author of English Ethical Socialism states:

*“No one can deny that divorce, separation, birth outside marriage and one-parent families as well as cohabitation and extra-marital sexual intercourse have increased rapidly. Many applaud these freedoms. But what should be universally acknowledged is that the children of parents who do not follow the traditional norm (i.e. taking on personal, active and long-term responsibility for the social upbringing of the children they generate) are thereby disadvantaged in many major aspects of their chances of living a successful life. On the evidence available such children tend to die earlier, to have more illness, to do less well at school, to exist at a lower level of nutrition, comfort and conviviality, to suffer more unemployment, to be more prone to deviance and crime, and finally to repeat the cycle of unstable parenting from which they themselves have suffered... The evidence all points in the same direction, is formidable, and tallies with common sense.”*

A report produced in 1998 and reviewed by the liberal-minded Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that:

*“Children of separated families have a higher probability of:*

- *being in poverty and poor housing;*
- *being poorer when they are adults;*
- *behavioural problems;*
- *performing less well at school;*
- *needing medical treatment;*
- *leaving school/home when young;*
- *becoming sexually active, pregnant, or a parent at an early age;*
- *depressive symptoms, high levels of smoking and drinking and drug use during adolescence and adulthood.”*



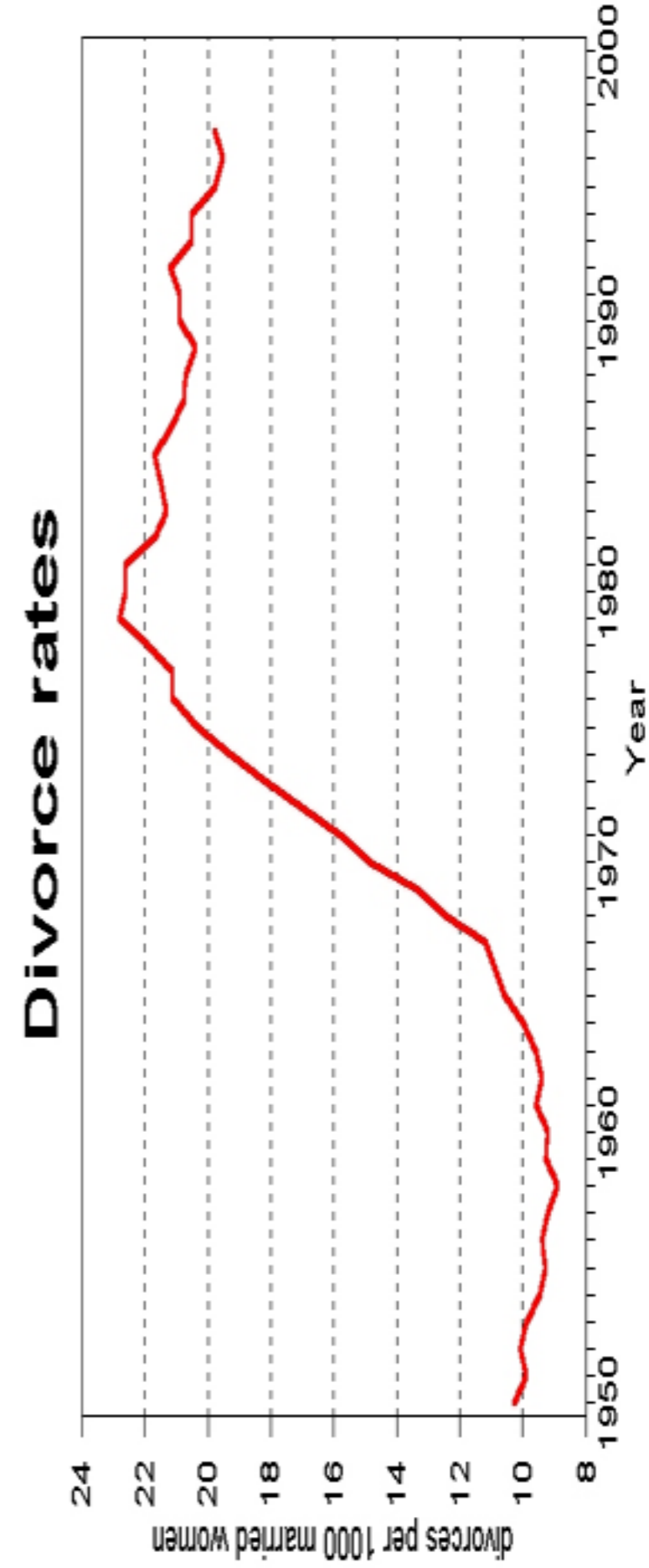
The Exeter Family Study found that divorce does not usually reduce conflict for the children: in fact the opposite is true:

*“...the experience of most children whose parents have divorced is of increased conflict over an extended period, with the child involved to an extent that may not have been the case while the marriage lasted.”*

A report from One Plus One has shown that adults who divorce have a greatly increased incidence (compared to those who remain married) of heart disease, cancer, alcoholism and suicide.



In the UK every time the law on divorce has been liberalised, the number of divorces has increased.



**JOHN PIPER:**  
***11 REASONS WHY I BELIEVE ALL  
REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE IS  
PROHIBITED WHILE BOTH SPOUSES  
ARE ALIVE***

**1. Luke 16:18 calls all remarriage after  
divorce adultery.**

Luke 16:18: Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

2. Mark 10:11-12 call all remarriage after divorce adultery whether it is the husband or the wife who does the divorcing.

3. Mark 10:2-9 and Matthew 19:3-8 teach that Jesus rejected the Pharisees' justification of divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1 and reasserted the purpose of God in creation that no human being separate what God has joined together.

4. Matthew 5:32 does not teach that remarriage is lawful in some cases. Rather it reaffirms that marriage after divorce is adultery, even for those who have been divorced innocently, and that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of the adultery of her second marriage unless she had already become an adulteress before the divorce.

5. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 teaches that divorce is wrong but that if it is inevitable the person who divorces should not remarry.



6. I Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:1-3 teach that remarriage is legitimate only after the death of a spouse.

7. Matthew 19:10-12 teaches that special Christian grace is given by God to Christ's disciples to sustain them in singleness when they renounce remarriage according to the law of Christ.

8. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not legislate grounds for divorce but teaches that the "one-flesh" relationship established by marriage is not obliterated by divorce or even by remarriage.

9. I Corinthians 7:15 does not mean that when a Christian is deserted by an unbelieving spouse he or she is free to remarry. It means that the Christian is not bound to fight in order to preserve togetherness. Separation is permissible if the unbelieving partner insists on it.

10. I Corinthians 7:27-28 does not teach the right of divorced persons to remarry. It teaches that betrothed virgins should seriously consider the life of singleness, but do not sin if they marry.

11. The exception clause of Matthew 19:9 need not imply that divorce on account of adultery frees a person to be remarried. All the weight of the New Testament evidence given in the preceding ten points is against this view, and there are several ways to make good sense out of this verse so that it does not conflict with the broad teaching of the New Testament that remarriage after divorce is prohibited

## **Piper's Conclusions and Applications**

In the New Testament the question about remarriage after divorce is **not determined by:**

The guilt or innocence of either spouse,

Nor by whether either spouse is a believer or not,

Nor by whether the divorce happened before or after either spouse's conversion,

Nor by the ease or difficulty of living as a single parent for the rest of life on earth,

Nor by whether there is adultery or desertion involved,

Nor by the on-going reality of the hardness of the human heart,

Nor by the cultural permissiveness of the surrounding society

## **Rather it is determined by the fact that:**

Marriage is a "one-flesh" relationship of divine establishment and extraordinary significance in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8),

Only God, not man, can end this one-flesh relationship (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9—this is why remarriage is called adultery by Jesus: he assumes that the first marriage is still binding, Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11),

God ends the one-flesh relationship of marriage only through the death of one of the spouses (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39),

The grace and power of God are promised and sufficient to enable a trusting, divorced Christian to be single all this earthly life if necessary (Matthew 19:10-12,26; 1 Corinthians 10:13), Temporal frustrations and disadvantages are much to be preferred over the disobedience of remarriage, and will yield deep and lasting joy both in this life and the life to come (Matthew 5:29-30).

## **Those who are already remarried:**

Should acknowledge that the choice to remarry and the act of entering a second marriage was sin, and confess it as such and seek forgiveness

Should not attempt to return to the first partner after entering a second union

Should not separate and live as single people thinking that this would result in less sin because all their sexual relations are acts of adultery. The Bible does not give prescriptions for this particular case, but it does treat second marriages as having significant standing in God's eyes. That is, there were promises made and there has been a union formed. It should not have been formed, but it was. It is not to be taken lightly. Promises are to be kept, and the union is to be sanctified to God. While not the ideal state, staying in a second marriage is God's will for a couple and their ongoing relations should not be looked on as adulterous.