

## Brief Treatise concerning Divorce

1. The popular exception, adultery, that has been widely used to justify divorce, is the result of a translation error. In brief, the line in Matthew 5:32 should be translated, “regardless of the doctrines about fornication.” If Jesus were only endorsing the Pharisee position (divorce was allowed among Pharisees for adultery only), the disciples would not have been shocked (see Matthew 19:10). The Scriptures give no acceptable reasons for divorce. Jesus was merely pointing out that the adultery exception proposed by the Pharisees was not to be considered.
2. Yet, divorce happens, even among Christians. We cannot assume that God was surprised by this. People mess up relationships all the time.
3. To summarize Paul’s reasons for marriage from 1 Corinthians 7, if you want to have sex, get married. Otherwise, staying single is better. Note that, in Matthew 5:32, Jesus assumes that a divorced woman will want to remarry, “Causes her to commit adultery.”
4. Since God would expect divorce to happen, and God set up marriage as the proper place for sex, a church doctrine that prevents remarriage after divorce is suspicious. Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:32, “Whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery,” was referring to the practice of that time (primarily among Sadducees) of marriages of extreme convenience, one-night stands followed by a quickie divorce – legalized prostitution. God is not fooled by our excuses or by our minimal attempts to make a marriage work. Christians should not write off unbelieving spouses, either (1 Corinthians 7:12 – 16). No divorce is “acceptable.” God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16, read 2:13 – 17). But, it happens.
5. So, let’s treat divorce like any other sin. Admit to yourself and to God your part in the mess. Then, move on. If reconciliation is possible, that is preferable. But at some point, we have to stop beating a dead horse. If you have sexual desires, get married to someone else – and do better than last time. Let God sort out the excuse-makers from those who messed up in a big way and are just trying to start over. Taking re-marriage off the table eliminates the outlet God set up for sexual desires, so the “adultery only” doctrine not only excuses some divorces, but also creates an untenable and unrecoverable situation for Christians who sinned through divorcing.