

QUESTION: What does the Bible say about separation and/or divorce for Christians?

ANSWER: For the purposes of this study, we will only look at a marriage between two Christians. Jesus gave general commands regarding marriage in Matthew 19, and Paul expanded on the Lord Jesus' commands in I Corinthians 7 (that's what Paul means by "yet not I but the Lord" - he means Jesus already gave specific commandments about it, and "I, not the Lord, say" - meaning Jesus did not specifically mention these circumstances). God's desire in every situation would be RECONCILIATION between the parties, especially since they are both His children. Reconciliation takes cooperation by both parties, so if one spouse has hardened their heart by disobedience to God, it would take much prayer, and maybe a long time, before God could bring reconciliation. All things are possible with God, so no situation is without hope.

- **I Corinthians 7:10-11** "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: a wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or **be RECONCILED to her husband**. And a husband is not to divorce his wife."
- **Matthew 19:3-9** "The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He 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. 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.'"

This is what God's word has to say about divorce and separation, and we should never take it lightly. However, there are some situations where God's grace makes an allowance for the hardness of heart in one party, when the other party is trying desperately to keep the marriage together. When

Malachi 2:16 says God "hates divorce" it is not meant to make the one who has been abandoned by a spouse feel guilty, but is rather a warning for the spouse who is looking for a way out while still trying to say they are in God's will (see I John 1:6). A common thought among carnal Christians who insist on leaving a marriage, is that they are somehow still in God's will and filled with the Holy Spirit. God says if you are claiming to be godly or Spirit-filled, and yet treating your spouse "treacherously" you should **"take heed to your spirit"** because no one would do that if they had even "a remnant of the Spirit." In fact, Ephesians 5:18-25 shows us that part of the EVIDENCE of being filled with the Spirit is that wives will be submissive to their husbands, and that husbands will love their wives as Christ loves the church. God hates divorce because marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church, and because of what divorce does to His people. Divorce causes pain, emotional turmoil, and damage of all kinds to the ones involved, especially if there are children involved. Paul says in I Corinthians 7:15, that the spouse who has been deserted is not to be under a burden or bondage because of something they could not help, because they could not stop their spouse from leaving. The context here is of a Believer married to an unbeliever, but the principle is the same with Believers. A carnal, flesh-controlled Christian will ACT just like a non-believer, and the deserted spouse is not to be held under a bondage of guilt, or condemned to a life of loneliness, if all methods and prayers for reconciliation fail.

- **I Corinthians 7:15** "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister (a Christian) is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace."
- **Malachi 2:14-16** ".....The Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant (the vows you took). But not one has done so who has **a remnant of the Spirit**.....**Take heed then, to your spirit**, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 'For I hate divorce,' says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'And him who covers his garment with wrong,' says the Lord of hosts. 'So **take heed to your spirit**, that you do not deal treacherously.'"
- **I John 1:6** "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness (disobedience), we lie and do not practice the truth."