

# ***Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage***

## **Marriage**

At Camelback Bible Church, we believe marriage is a holy union. It is endowed with a most sacred purpose: to reflect the glory of the triune God!

The glory of God is neither abstract nor impossible to define. It is – profoundly – the miracle of self-giving love. Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other on the basis of sacrificial love (John 17:24). The three-way torrent of mutual self-giving evokes a chorus of praise in heaven. It is the glory that cements Holy Tri-unity (John 17:23).

One of the marvels of the Scriptures is the truth that God has created us in his image (Genesis 1:26). Above all, he has invested us with a supernatural capacity for self-giving love. This explains why ‘man’ had to be fashioned as ‘male and female’ (Genesis 1:27). It requires at least two people – a male and a female, a husband and a wife – to perpetuate the divine miracle of selfless love.

Love of this kind fills marriage with tremendous blessing. Nothing promotes the happiness of two spouses so much as mutual self-sacrifice. But in the economy of God there is an even higher purpose in marriage: namely, to spread his glory throughout the world. As the earth is populated by marriages which are marked by the divine radiance of selfless love, the glory of God penetrates to the four corners of the planet and his praises resound from the lips of all who see it (Genesis 1:28).

Marriage is a sacred vehicle for the worldwide dissemination of God’s glory!

## **Divorce**

No wonder the marital bond is viewed in Scripture as sacrosanct. Jesus underscores its inviolability with a stern warning: ‘What God has joined together, let no man separate!’ (Matthew 19:6) The prophet Malachi is equally unambiguous: ‘God hates divorce!’ (Malachi 2:16).

God ***must*** hate divorce. How could he do otherwise? Divorce dissolves the vehicle – marriage – by which his glory is published throughout creation. It thus undermines his sacred agenda. It also makes a mockery of self-giving love. It thus defiles his image.

For this reason, we at Camelback Bible Church are committed to preserving marriages. We ***never*** counsel divorce. We reject the contemporary tendency to respond to intra-marital strife by resorting to easy, legal dissolution.

Instead, we believe it is God's desire to heal – miraculously, if necessary – even the most troubled marriages. As a church, we seek compassionately to minister to husbands and wives who need the transforming power of Christ in their marriages.

We thus affirm that more is at stake in our marriages than the mutual happiness of two people. There is the glory of God! As a church family, we must zealously guard the godliness of our marriages, pleading with the Lord to make them reflect the self-giving love of the Trinity itself, and so become beacons of divine glory in a world languishing in the darkness of selfishness and marital discord.

But as a church we also acknowledge that divorce happens. Sin can work its destructive power in our marriages, infecting them with egotism and a spirit of disunity.

In certain rare instances, God seems to allow for divorce, on the grounds that a union can become so ruptured that it no longer exists. This is the case, it would seem, when one partner unites sexually with another outside of marriage (Matthew 19:9) or when an unbelieving spouse deserts a believer (1 Corinthians 7:15). In these instances, the injured party may be justified in seeking a divorce.

But it must also be asserted that in neither instance is divorce required. Even in a situation as heart-rending as adultery, the Lord can bless the injured partner with a soft heart and a forgiving spirit (Matthew 19:8), and self-giving love can win its greatest triumph: a full and lasting reconciliation. In the same way in which God responded to our spiritual adultery by pouring himself out in love on the cross (Romans 5:5), so also we who bear his image can respond to rejection in marriage with the miracle of sacrificial love.

## **Remarriage**

For the partner who justly seeks a divorce, the question of remarriage is often a matter of pressing concern. Is it permissible biblically? Interestingly, the apostle Paul seeks to redirect questions like this by challenging a divorced person to view his or her singleness as an opportunity to serve the Lord with an undistracted mind, free from the demands of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

But to those for whom remarriage remains an important issue, it must be acknowledged that serious students of the Bible have, throughout history, found it difficult to arrive at a unanimous answer. Even the leaders of Camelback Bible Church represent differing positions.

The difficulty arises from the fact that, in the two biblical texts where divorce seems to be allowed (Matthew 19:9 [see also Synoptic parallels] and 1 Corinthians 7:15), remarriage is not **explicitly** endorsed. Instead, each passage is preoccupied with preserving marriage and circumscribing divorce, and makes only incidental reference to remarriage.

The two main interpretations of the incidental references to remarriage are as follows. Some maintain that remarriage is assumed in these key biblical texts. Since divorce dissolves a marital bond, the original union can no longer be held to be binding. An aggrieved partner is thus free to remarry. Others believe that the inviolability of marriage – which is the clear thrust of the passages – necessarily precludes the possibility of remarriage. While divorce may in rare instances be permitted, its ultimate goal is always reconciliation, not remarriage.

At Camelback Bible Church, we require people interested in remarriage to receive input from leaders representing **both** positions. Then, the individual, together with the prayerful counsel of pastors and elders, may be led to make an informed and God-honoring decision on the matter.

## **Conclusion**

Marriage is a glorious union. It is intended to fulfill the exalted purpose of God in creation – the spread of the glory of his image throughout the world.

A union of such monumental significance must never be broken. It should be approached with a holy seriousness. Indeed, it ought to be bypassed altogether, unless a man and a woman can affirm without reservation that they are uniting for the glory of God. Until then, it is better to remain single and to fulfill the heavenly mandate of reflecting the divine image by loving others without the encumbrance of the demands and distractions of marriage (see Matthew 19:10-11).

But to those for whom marriage has been ordained, it is a supremely high and wonderful calling. While intimacy with one of the opposite gender will invariably produce a measure of trials and challenges, there is no difficulty that the transforming power of Christ cannot surmount. May we at Camelback Bible Church beseech God to work mightily in our marriages, making them true deposits of his irradant image and of the miracle of his self-giving love . . . to his glory! Amen.