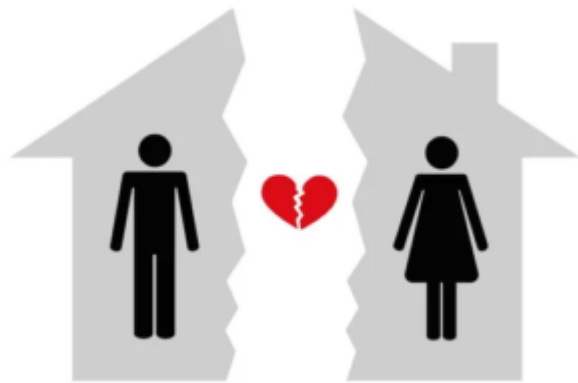


Biblical Reasons for Divorce, When Remarriage is Allowed, and How Adultery Figures In

Description



This article won't be a quick read because it's an in-

depth study of the reasons that God allows Christians to get a divorce. We'll also do a similarly in-depth study of remarriage, and how adultery fits into the whole picture.

I suggest that you read my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#) before you read this article. It's not strictly necessary, but I'll reference that article often in this one, so it will help.

Without further ado, we'll dive in.

Context first

Before we get into the specific reasons that God allows divorce, we need to look at a few other places in the Bible to get context. Much of this article won't make sense without this context, so we can either:

1. Constantly interrupt the reasons to give the context
2. Give the context up front and then go through the reasons (*mostly*) without interruption.

I know which I'd prefer to read.

First: the Old Testament matters

I once visited a church and mentioned an Old Testament passage in a discussion. The pastor looked at me in much the same way as a long-suffering parent would look at a child who just made *yet another* silly statement, and then he said “You do know that”’s the Old Testament right?”

Fortunately, God predicted that some people would have this approach and addressed it in the New Testament:

Romans 15:4

For **whatever** was previously written, it was all written **for our instruction**, so through endurance and through the encouragement of the **Scriptures**, we might have hope.

We do not have to obey the Mosaic Law. However, that doesn’t mean we can’t learn from it and the rest of the Old Testament. We can learn God’s opinion on a multitude of issues that the New Testament doesn’t touch. God said that **whatever** was previously written, it was all written for our instruction. Thus, we will make use of that instruction extensively in this article.

The Old Testament procedure for divorce

This is found in the Old Testament law:

Deuteronomy 24:1

1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and **he writes her a certificate of divorce** and **puts it in her hand** and **sends her out from his house**,

(We’ll talk about the “indecency” part later)

A legal divorce in the Old Testament required three things:

1. The husband must have a certificate of divorce.
2. The husband must give the certificate to his wife. *(In Rabbinic tradition, this had to be done in the presence of witnesses to make it official.)*
3. The husband had to “**put out**” (**send away**) the woman from his house so that they were separated.

That last point is extremely important, and so is the fact that he had to actually give her the divorce certificate. Why? Because some (*wicked*) men didn’t do it the proper way. These men would skip straight to the “putting out” stage without giving her a bill of divorce, which was a great evil.

Putting out is altogether different than divorce in Jewish culture. **A man would permanently kick his wife out, denying her the Jewish divorce certificate.** This woman would still be legally married, but with no home. Her dowry and children would be retained by the husband. She would have already surrendered her virginity to him. **She would be ineligible to remarry, since technically, she was still legally bound to her husband.** Further, her culture would label her as an adulteress since she did not have a valid divorce certificate. And this lady couldn't just rent an apartment and get a job teaching kindergarten " **there was no place for a put out woman in Jewish culture of that day except prostitution.** Since the marriages were most often arranged, this whole horrible chain of events would have been completely out of her control. **The husband, however, was free to marry again and to do this as much as he liked.** That is why Moses required a divorce certificate to be given so that the marriage was legally, fairly, and religiously terminated and the woman would be free to remarry and go on with life.

(explanation from Religion Mythbusters: "Marriage and Divorce Myth #1 " Does God Hate Divorce?")

Now, in the passages in the New Testament where Jesus addresses divorce, He's actually addressing this practice of "putting out" a wife without a divorce certificate; Jesus wasn't (directly) addressing divorce. I have a whole article on this topic entitled: [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#). Again, I recommend that you read it because it will help understand this article.

This context of "putting out" is very important, and bears directly on the next bit of context.

Does God hate divorce?

This is one of the most common objections to divorce that people bring up, mostly based on the following verse.

Malachi 2:13-16

13 "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with favor* from your hand.

14 "Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because 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.**

15 "But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that one do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and **let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.**

16 **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**.

The word translated "divorce" in verse 16 is the Hebrew word שָׁלַח ([shalach](#)). It means:

to send, **send away**, let go, stretch out

Hmm, "divorce" seems like a bit of a stretch, but it fits perfectly with the "putting out" that we just saw above. By contrast, the actual Hebrew word for divorce is כִּרְיָתוּת ([kerithuth](#)), which is the word used in the Deuteronomy passage where God gave the divorce procedure. If you've read my article entitled: [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#), you should be able to see how this fits perfectly with Jesus' teaching on the topic because Malachi 2 is addressed in that article as well.

Why is this important?

Because Malachi 2 isn't talking about "divorce". It's talking about "putting out" a wife without properly divorcing her, which could "and often would" force her into prostitution.

That's why God talks about dealing treacherously 3 times in 4 verses. **It's hard to imagine a more treacherous way to treat your wife than to force her into prostitution.** This verse in Malachi 2 isn't about divorce; it's about "putting out" a wife without properly divorcing her. God clearly and understandably hates the treachery of a husband forcing his wife into prostitution.

So does God hate divorce?

Maybe.

However, that seems unlikely given that God Himself got a divorce. (*Spiritually/metaphorically*)

Seriously.

God's divorce

God got a divorce, at least in the spiritual/metaphorical sense.

Jeremiah 3:6-8

6 Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there.

7 After she has done all these things she will return to Me; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

8 And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

So yes, God Himself got a divorce.

(Further, God remarried since the church is the bride of Christ; more on remarriage later.)

Notice too that God followed his own prescription: He gave Israel a writ (certificate) of divorce and sent her away. The prophets delivered the divorce certificate on many, many occasions, like the one we just read. Then God didn't send a prophet to speak to Israel for 400+ years between the last Old Testament prophet and John the Baptizer, which sounds like a form of sending away to me.

It seems unlikely that God hates divorce since He Himself got one. *(Spiritually/metaphorically)*

Perhaps more evidence that God doesn't hate divorce is the fact that He included an automatic divorce in the Mosaic law.

Seriously.

The Automatic Divorce in the Mosaic Law.

First, this touches on the topic of Biblical slavery. However and I can't stress this enough Biblical slavery is nothing like what we usually think of when we hear the term slavery.

Biblical slavery in the Mosaic Law was entirely voluntary.

100% voluntary.

In fact, the Old Testament penalty for kidnapping which is essential for forced slavery was death. *(Exodus 21:16)*

I'll write an article about it someday, but until then Mike Winger on YouTube has [a great ~10 minute video on Biblical slavery](#). He has a longer video too, which covers the topic in much more detail. Short version: Biblical slavery was voluntary, had a *limited* duration, and was *voluntarily* entered in to, typically to prevent yourself and/or your family from starving, often after some economic hardship. (*famine, war, plague, etc.*)

With that in mind, here's the automatic divorce passage:

Exodus 21:2-6

2 If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.

3 If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him.

4 If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and **he shall go out alone**.

5 But if the slave plainly says, "I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,"

6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.

The only way I can read that is a divorce. Could it be something else? I suppose. Does it actually say divorce? No. However, a man permanently leaving his wife and children sounds like a divorce to me. I suppose you could say they were still married, but what God commanded a few verses later makes it nearly impossible that it's not a divorce.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes to himself another wife, **he may not reduce** her food, her clothing, or **her conjugal rights**.

11 If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

(This verse touches on polygamy, which we'll also touch on later.)

So by the fact that he's not providing for his wife and not having sex with her, they will be divorced.

So yes, there's an automatic divorce in the Bible.

Yes the newly freed former slave could stick around, but there's nothing that says he has to, or even that he should. He goes out alone, without wife and children, which sounds a lot like the last step of the divorce procedure to me. As you just saw in the passage a few verses later, failure to provide for a wife and/or have sex with her is cause for her to divorce him.

Sounds like a divorce to me.

By the way, Exodus 21:2-4 makes it clear that there is one relationship that supersedes the marriage relationship in God's eyes: the master/slave relationship. (And again, biblical slavery was entirely voluntary and of limited duration.)

No, I'm not kidding.

While the Bible treats marriage as sacrosanct and incredibly important, **this verse plays absolute *havoc* with most Christian's theology on marriage and divorce.** There's no denying that this verse is extremely disruptive to modern Christian ideas on marriage.

Another passage that's extremely disruptive to modern ideas on marriage is the Bible's prescription for marrying a woman who was captured in war. We'll look at that next, though only briefly because it's not very applicable these days.

Rules to divorce a captive

I mostly include this verse for completeness, since it has little bearing on Christian marriage today. However, it's interesting how God regulates divorces customs, and does so in a way that is utterly foreign to our modern way of thinking.

Deuteronomy 21:10-14

10 "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take them away captive,

11 and **see among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself,**

12 then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.

13 "She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and mourn her father and mother a full month; and **after that you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.**

14 "It shall be, **if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes;** but you shall certainly not sell her for money, you shall not mistreat her, because you have humbled her.

This verse isn't particularly applicable, but it is very interesting. The only real application is this: notice how easily a man could divorce his wife if he married her as a captive. He didn't even need much of a cause, other than that she displeased him. God could've made this regulation anything that He wanted to make it. A "normal" Hebrew divorce required "uncleanness" (*which we'll define lower down*) and God could've required that here!

!but He didn't.

Again, we see that divorce is permissible by God under certain situations. If you married a captive of war, you could divorce her if she simply displeased you. (*The bar was normally higher, as we'll see lower down.*) This is significant because of the ease with which a divorce could be obtained according to God's command.

So no, it doesn't appear that God hates divorce.

Putting out yes, but He doesn't appear to hate divorce.

Next we need to look at the concept of a covenant, and what it actually is. That's extremely important for obvious reasons.

What is a covenant?

We'll define a covenant in a moment, but first we'll reestablish that marriage is indeed a covenant.

Malachi 2:14

14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because 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.

However, most people have no idea what a covenant actually is, and that's truly a shame. To rectify this, there's a video below and I highly recommend you listen to a roughly 9-minute section that will make it perfectly clear; from 1:36:14 to 1:44:50. The video is four hours long and covers many topics, but that 9-minute section is enough to understand covenants as it relates to marriage/divorce. (If you want to watch the whole thing which incidentally I recommend please see my disclaimer for it first in my article: [Seeing the Bible from the Hebrew Cultural Perspective](#).)

The section from 1:36:14 to 1:44:50 is enough context for this article.

(For those who can't watch the video for some reason: Biblically speaking, a covenant is a contract between a greater party and a lesser party that establishes a relationship between them. The greater party (God in marriage) sets all the conditions, the lesser party can only choose to accept or reject. Most importantly for this discussion, the penalty for breaking a true covenant is death.)

That's how serious a covenant is. Tell me that clip didn't change your understanding of God's covenant with us, and help you understand God's love for us better. **As it relates to marriage, here is the point: The biblical penalty for breaking a covenant including the covenant of marriage is death.**

No, I'm not kidding.

(Maybe it's time to rethink that HOA "covenant")

The Bible is 100% clear about this penalty, especially concerning marriage:

Deuteronomy 22:22

22 If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.

Leviticus 20:10

10 If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

The penalty for breaking a true biblical covenant "including the covenant of marriage" is death. I'm hitting this point hard because it will become important later. For now, please try to adjust to the idea that breaking the marriage covenant is deserving of death in God's eyes.

But what about the woman caught in adultery?

You'll notice that the story is [bracketed] in most modern translations, indicating *serious* doubt about its authenticity. An overwhelming majority of New Testament scholars believe it wasn't original to John, but added later. One of the most respected New Testament scholars of our time has a whole article about it entitled [My Favorite Passage that's Not in the Bible](#). In it, he says:

The great majority of Greek manuscripts through the first eight centuries lack this pericope. And except for Bezae (or codex D), virtually all of the most important Greek witnesses through the first eight centuries do not have the verses.

In fairness, that quote doesn't tell the whole story. I cover the other side in [my article on the pericope](#). In my article, I show how including the story of the woman caught in adultery actually introduces at least two serious errors into the Bible. Yes, including the story introduces errors.

No joke.

The evidence boils down to this: **The story of the woman caught in adultery was *not* written by John, and therefore is *not* scripture.** Because it's not scripture, we can safely ignore it.

Breaking a covenant vs ending it

One quick thing; breaking a covenant isn't the same as ending it. You can break a contract, but if you want to get out of the contract you can (*often*) use a clause in the contract itself to annul the contract, freeing you from its obligations.

Marriage is the same.

God included a few legitimate reasons that a husband or wife could end the marriage covenant via divorce, freeing him or her from its obligations. While the penalty for breaking the marriage covenant is death, there is no penalty for ending it via a divorce. (*Not that I've seen anyway, but we'll get to that later.*)

The definition of ***biblical*** Adultery

For the sake of clarity, we're going to define adultery so there's no misunderstanding. **The definitions of the Greek and Hebrew words that are translated "adultery" are different than our English word adultery.** Not vastly different, but definitely different.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, **biblical adultery is:**

conjugal infidelity. **An adulterer was a man who had illicit intercourse with a married or a betrothed woman**, and such a woman was an adulteress. Intercourse between a married man and an unmarried woman was fornication. Adultery was regarded as a great social wrong, as well as a great sin.

In my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#), I go through every single Greek and Hebrew word that's translated "adultery" and demonstrate the following: ***Biblical adultery only occurs when a man has sex with another man's wife (or betrothed).***

That's it.

(*And to be clear, while biblical adultery included betrothed women, modern "engagement" is nothing like Biblical betrothal. In betrothal, the groom-to-be paid a bride price to the girl's father to literally buy her as his wife. Conversely, modern engagement is merely a promise to marry someone. They are nothing alike.*)

If a married man has sex with an unmarried woman, he sins grievously; but he doesn't commit the specific sin of *Biblical* "adultery".

God is perfectly clear that [all sex outside of marriage is wrong](#); very wrong. In fact, He promises that He will judge all sex outside of marriage in Hebrews 13:4, saying "God will judge fornicators and adulterers". Those two classes of sin (*fornication and adultery*) cover every type of sex outside marriage.

They're all wrong and God will judge those who practice them.

However, fornication and adultery are *not* the same sin. Fornication is when a man "whether married or not" has sex with an *unmarried* woman. **Biblical adultery only occurs when a man "whether married or not" has sex with a *married* woman.** Biblically speaking, it's the marital status of the *woman*, not the *man*, that determines if it's adultery. Again both are serious sins, but they aren't the same sin.

That's™s important.

If you need more proof, please see my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#). Again, I go through every Greek and Hebrew word to prove this definition, as well as the places that the Bible defines adultery.

EDIT: Ezra Chapter 10

In Ezra chapter 10, Israel decides that they want to obey God better after returning from the the Babylonian captivity. The way they decide to do this is by divorcing (*without cause*) all their foreign wives, because God told Israel not to take foreign wives. I'm summarizing this passage instead of quoting it because sometimes, biblical accounts are descriptive, not prescriptive. God didn't tell them to divorce their wives, nor did they ask God if they should. They just did it without any input from God whatsoever.

Sometimes, the Bible records what was done without comment on if it should have been done.

Ezra 10 is one such case.

I cover this in more detail in my article: [The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible](#). I use Ezra chapter 10 as an example of the mistake of turning a historical narrative into a teaching when there's no commentary on it from scripture itself. I would argue that Israel sinned here, since the story of the Gibeonites in Joshua chapter 9 has this same element of them not asking God and they were rebuked for it.

See the link above for details.

One last bit of context

As we'll soon see, the reasons that God allows for divorce are different for men and women. That is, the reasons God allows men to seek a divorce are mostly different from the reasons that God allows women to seek a divorce. They do share one or two, but mostly they are different.

This shouldn't be surprising.

Consider the famous passage on marriage in Ephesians 5. God (*writing through Paul*) gives different instructions to the men than He does about the women. Men are commanded to behave one way, women another. Is it so surprising that the reasons for divorce are different too?

And for those who fear the difference will disadvantage women, you should realize that Biblically, it's actually harder for a man to divorce his wife than for a wife to divorce her husband.

(Spoiler: For a man to divorce his wife, she must have abandoned him or committed a sexual indiscretion, whereas a woman can divorce her husband for other reasons. So as long as a woman

remains sexually exclusive to her husband and doesn't abandon him, he doesn't have a legitimate reason to divorce her. Not so for wives, who have other, more varied reasons.)

Without further ado, we'll dive in, starting with men first.

Reasons Men can seek a Divorce

Here are the reasons that a Christian man can legitimately seek a divorce. Please note, these are the reasons that a man can seek a divorce; it doesn't mean that he must seek a divorce. Whether he does or not is up to him.

Husband Reason #1: Abandonment by an unbeliever

Now, we need to be clear. This is a very specific and narrow circumstance. It only applies in a few cases, not broadly.

1 Corinthians 7:12-16

12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if **any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.**

13 And a **woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.**

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one **leaves**, let him leave; the brother or the sister **is not under bondage in such cases**, but God has called us to peace.

Notice verse 15.

If your unbelieving spouse **leaves** you, then you are **not under bondage**. The Greek word translated **leaves** there is **χωρίζω** ([chōrizō](#)) and it means:

5563 **χωρίζω** (from 5561 /*cháira*, **open, vacated space**) **“properly, separate, divide (put asunder), i.e. depart, vacate; create space”** (which can be very *undesirable* or *unjustified*).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon has these two definitions:

Husband Reason #2: Adultery

Remember that biblical adultery is a man having sex with another man's wife.

The Biblical justification for a man getting a divorce because his wife committed adultery is quite clear from Jesus's words, but there's more to the verse than is obvious at a glance. As previously mentioned, it's more about putting out than divorce, and then also the man marrying a put out woman who was actually still married. Please see my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#) for more information.

Matthew 19:9 (edited; see the article link above for why)

9 And I say to you, **whoever** divorces sends away **his wife, except for sexual immorality**, and marries another woman of the same kind (*i.e. merely sent away and not properly divorced*) commits adultery.

Again, this is about putting out, not really about divorce. However, since sexual immorality was a valid reason for putting out, I see absolutely no reason whatsoever why it wouldn't also be a legitimate reason for a divorce. Further, God Himself also set that same precedent in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 3:6-8

6 Then **the LORD said** to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there.

7 I thought, "After she has done all these things she will return to Me; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

8 And I saw that **for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce**, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also.

God spiritually/metaphorically divorced Israel because of her spiritual/metaphorical adultery with idols and foreign gods. Lest you think marriage isn't the picture here, God makes it clear elsewhere that it is.

Jeremiah 31:31-32

31 Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel** and with the house of Judah,

32 not like **the covenant** which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, **My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them**, declares the LORD.

Marriage is definitely the picture there. God gave Israel a writ (*certificate*) of divorce and sent her away, just as He commanded a man to do in the Mosaic Law. He could do this because He was spiritually/metaphorically the husband of Israel and Judah.

Going back to Jesus's words on the topic, there's something else we can learn from that verse: **the "sending away" is gender specific. i.e. for men only.**

Notice that Jesus specifically says "divorces sends away **his wife**". **This statement is directed to men, not women**, because women obviously don't have wives. This isn't a gender-neutral teaching; it's a gender-specific teaching directed to men only.

Further, the word translated "whoever" in this verse is inflected as masculine, making it even more clear that Jesus is talking to men. (*For more information on "inflections" and how they are used to determine gender, you can see my article: [A Few Fun Things About Biblical \(Koine\) Greek.](#)*)

We'll talk more about this when we come to the reasons that wives can divorce their husbands.

Husband Reason #3: (*intentional*) Indecent Exposure

I've rarely seen this reason commented on, but it's clear from scripture.

Deuteronomy 24:1

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that **she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her**, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house

Many people take "indecency" to mean adultery here, but that's simply not possible. As we saw previously, biblical adultery (*a man having sex with another man's wife*) was punished by death according to God's command. If the husband is divorcing her, then clearly she's not being put to death for her crimes.

Therefore, this verse is **not** talking about adultery.

So what is it talking about then? We'll look at a few words which slightly alter the meaning, but only slightly. The Hebrew word translated "some" is the word "דָּבָר" (*dabar*) and it means:

I. singular **speech, discourse, saying, word**, as the sum of that which is spoken:

a. **דָּבָר חָכָם** *discreet in speech* 1 Samuel 16:18;
דָּבָר שֵׁפֶט *speech of lips* Psalm 59:13, *mere talk*

b. *word of command*,

Itâ€™s true.

God clearly stated this as a legitimate reason for divorce, as weâ€™ve just seen. Iâ€™d imagine that this is the first time youâ€™ve heard of this reason, but again itâ€™s perfectly clear from scripture. A wife lewdly or publicly exposing her sexual organs, especially to another man, is cause for her husband to divorce her.

No joke.

Now, given the other legal precedent in the Mosaic Law, I personally think that accidental exposure should not count. This is based on many passages, but the most clear is the Bibleâ€™s prescription in the case of rape of a betrothed woman. (*This passage also shows that betrothed woman was considered a wife; notice verse 24*)

Deuteronomy 22:23-24

23 â€œIf there is a girl who is a virgin betrothed to a man, and another man finds her in the city and lies with her,

24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighborâ€™s wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.

25 â€œBut if in the field the man finds the girl who is betrothed, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die

26 â€œBut you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case.

27 â€œWhen he found her in the field, the betrothed girl cried out, but there was no one to save her.

Again, nothing happens to the girl, who was a victim.

This is all over the law, that you shouldnâ€™t blame victims of a crime for the crime. No virtuous woman will want her â€œpudendaâ€ (sexual organs) exposed to the world. In fact, she would be the victim if it happened. So while intentional lewd/indecent exposure is cause for divorce, I would personally argue that unintentional exposure isnâ€™t.

In todayâ€™s world, OB-GYNs are often male as well. Should that count? Male doctors often deliver babies; should that count?

You definitely could make the case that it doesnâ€™t.

Remember that the Hebrew word there refers specifically to â€œlewd exposureâ€. You could argue that a doctorâ€™s visit and labor/delivery arenâ€™t â€œlewd exposureâ€ and thus shouldnâ€™t be treated as such. In my opinion, thatâ€™s a reasonable argument. Thatâ€™s my own personal opinion though, and itâ€™s worth every cent you paid for it. ðŸ˜‰

Husband Reason #4: She lied about being a virgin

Now, I want to be clear: the following only applies to a woman who *falsely* claimed to be a virgin when you married her, but she wasn't a virgin. If she didn't claim to be a virgin, then this is *not* grounds for divorce.

Deuteronomy 22:13-14 & 20-21

13 If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her

14 and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, "I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity,"

(the interim verses proscribe the penalties for the man if he accused her falsely, and we'll look at them later.)

20 But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman,

21 then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the **evil** from your midst.

In my article: [Yes, The Bible CLEARLY Says Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong](#), we look at the details of this verse. Specifically, when you look at the Hebrew words, God calls what the girl did a "shameful, stupid, wicked, sin/crime". (See *that article for details*). This might seem harsh, but this crime is almost identical to adultery.

It's nearly identical because it's **sexual fraud**.

- **Adultery:** "I vowed that I would only ever have sex with you, but broke that vow." (by sleeping with another man after I made the vow.)
- **Lying about being a virgin:** "I vowed that I would only ever have sex with you, but broke that vow." (by making it while knowing I'd already broken it)

Again, this doesn't apply if the woman didn't lie.

If a woman wasn't a virgin before the marriage *and* was upfront about that, then this passage doesn't apply. **It's only when a girl knows that she isn't a virgin, claims to be a virgin, and then marries a man who (wrongly) believes her to be a virgin.**

In such cases with a lying wife, if the man finds out that she wasn't the virgin that she claimed to be, he has the Biblical right to end the marriage. In the Old Testament, that was done in a judicial fashion with evidence and a public execution by stoning after conviction (*which notably the wronged man didn't necessarily take part in*). Today, divorce is a more modern remedy.

Further, the sexual fraud of a girl claiming to be a virgin while she isn't is a form of sexual immorality, which Jesus said was grounds for divorce. We'll look at this more under the next reason.

Husband Reason #5: Denial of Sex

One point before we start on this reason: **Wives can also divorce husbands for sexual denial, and it's 100% crystal clear from scripture for wives.** (Exodus 21:10-11, which we've looked at before and will again.)

That said, we'll dive in.

Matthew 19:9 (edited)

9 And I say to you, **whoever** divorces sends away **his wife, except for sexual immorality**, and marries another woman of the same kind (*i.e. merely sent away and not properly divorced*) commits adultery.

We've already covered that this verse is primarily about putting out, not divorce. However, putting out was acceptable on the grounds of sexual immorality, and thus divorce is also acceptable because of sexual immorality, which we define now.

The Greek word translated sexual immorality there is πορνεία ([porneia](#)), and it means:

4202 *porneia* (the root of the English terms pornography, pornographic; cf. 4205 /*pernos*) which is derived from *pernao*, to sell off properly, a selling off (surrendering) of sexual purity; **promiscuity of any (every) type.**

In my article [Yes, The Bible CLEARLY Says Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong](#), I spend a great deal of time demonstrating that this word primarily means all sex outside of marriage. However, it has an additional definition that is widely attested by nearly every Bible translation.

Porneia is almost always translated sexual immorality, because it refers not only to all sex outside of marriage, but also because it's a catch all word for anything that's both: (1) sexual, and (2) immoral.

Please read that again, because it's very important.

That's why *porneia* is almost always translated as sexual immorality. Therefore, **if something is both: (1) sexual, and (2) immoral, then it's *porneia* by definition.** (Technically,

biblical adultery is a form of fornication) I realized I've repeated myself here, but there's a reason for that: it's very important context for the next verse.

We'll look at it now.

Now, there's one sexual sin that's almost never mentioned in Christian circles, despite it arguably being the most common sexual sin in Christian circles: Sexual defrauding.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

3 The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

The Greek word translated "depriving" is ἀποστερέω (apostereō) and it means:

650 ἀποστερέω (from 575 /ἀπό, "away from" and 4732 /στερέω, "deprive") "properly, keep away from someone, i.e. by **defrauding** (depriving); **to cheat, taking away what rightfully belongs to someone else.**

This same word is also used in James:

James 5:4

4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you **kept back by fraud** (ἀποστερέω), cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

The word is only used 6 times, and every time it means to defraud. (*Mark 10:19, 1 Corinthians 6:7, 1 Corinthians 6:8, 1 Corinthians 7:5, 1 Timothy 6:5, James 5:4*). Husbands are required to have sex with their wives, just as wives are required to have sex with their husbands. Either the husband or the wife not doing this is defrauding, specifically "sexual defrauding" since one spouse is defrauding the other of sex.

Sexual defrauding is both (1) sexual, and (2) immoral.

Remember that ἀποστερέω "the word that Jesus uses as a legitimate cause for divorce/sending away in Matthew 19" is a "catch all" word for anything that is **both: (1) sexual, and (2) immoral.**

That would include sexual defrauding.

No joke.

Consider:

1. A wife refusing to have sex with her husband on an ongoing, continuous basis is *â€œapostate* (which means *â€œdefrauding*) according to 1 Cor 7:5.
2. Defrauding is immoral.
3. Thus, a wife refusing to have sex with her husband is both (1) sexual, and (2) immoral.
4. The definition of *â€œporne* refers to anything that is both (1) sexual, and (2) immoral.
5. Thus, a wife who *denies* defrauds her husband by denying him sex on an ongoing, continuous basis is committing *â€œporne*/sexual immorality.
6. Jesus says that *â€œporne*/sexual immorality is a legitimate cause for divorce.
7. **Therefore: a wife who sexually denies defrauds her husband by denying him sex on an ongoing, continuous basis has committed the sin of *â€œporne* and her husband can legitimately divorce her for it.**

Now, a caveat.

Similar to the case of accidental exposure above, (and wife reasons #2 and #3 below) a wife might become unable to have sex for a time for many reasons. Illness, childbirth, surgery, etc., are all reasons why your wife might *legitimately* not be able to have sex for a time. **This reason isn't for that. This is about a wife who won't have sex with her husband, not a wife who can't have sex with her husband.**

There's a difference.

I won't define how often *â€œenough* is though. That's a gray area and I'm not going to draw a hard line here because God didn't in scripture. (I try very hard not to speak where God hasn't spoken.)

I should also mention that penetrative intercourse isn't the only type of sex. Should a wife be unable to have normal sex, oral sex is another option. Oral sex (on both men and women) is actually spoken of in the Song of Solomon euphemistically and in a laudatory way. (But anal sex is a huge and very immoral no-no though; see [my article on homosexuality](#) for the verse/proof.)

Those are all the reasons that a man can seek a divorce. Now we'll look at the reasons that a woman can seek a divorce.

Reasons Women can seek a Divorce

Please note, these are the reasons that a woman can legitimately seek a divorce; it doesn't mean that she must seek a divorce. Whether she does or not is up to her.

Wife Reason #1: Abandonment by an unbeliever

We already covered this reason in some depth under the men's section, so we won't rehash it here. Suffice it to say that both men and women can divorce an unbelieving spouse if he/she is abandoned by her/him.

Wife Reason #2: Neglect of basic necessities

Continuing from wife reason #1, a Christian wife can still divorce her believing/Christian husband if he doesn't ensure that she is provided for. This obviously would be the case if he abandons her.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes to himself another wife, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

11 If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

(Note: this verse is talking about when a man takes a second wife, i.e. polygamy. We'll briefly touch on the topic of polygamy later in the article.)

The Hebrew word translated "clothing" is "kesuth" and it means:

1 covering, clothing Exodus 21:10; Exodus 22:26 (Covt. code), Deuteronomy 22:12; Job 24:7; Job 31:19; of "x" as clothing of heavens Isaiah 50:3

Given the context and word's definition including "covering", I don't think it's unreasonable to include "housing/shelter" as a form of "covering". So basic necessities like food (and thus water), clothes, shelter, and sex. Sex is a whole different animal though, so we'll cover it in the next reason.

Biblically, husbands are required to ensure that their wives' basic needs are met.

This isn't the only place that states this either, though the others don't mention divorce.

1 Timothy 5:8

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Now, the Greek word translated "anyone" there is inflected as a masculine word, so this is referring to men. The context is about a widow's children providing for her, so not quite wives. However, "those of his household" would definitely include his wife.

Ephesians makes this clear too.

Ephesians 5:28-30

28 So **husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies**. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

29 for **no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it**, just as Christ also does the church,

30 because we are members of His body.

Wives, if your husband neglects to ensure that your basic needs like food/water, clothing, and shelter/housing are provided for, you have biblical grounds for divorce.

However, notice that this is about needs, not wants.

God specifies food, clothing, and housing (*and sex, but weâ€™ll deal with sex separately*). A wife needs food, but doesnâ€™t need to eat out at fancy restaurants every night. A wife needs clothing, but doesnâ€™t need the latest fashion. A wife needs a home, but it doesnâ€™t need to be a mansion, just livable.

Wives, if your husband isnâ€™t making sure these basic needs are met, you have biblical grounds for divorce.

I should add that sometimes, life happens.

Like with women and lewd exposure, I personally donâ€™t think a woman should divorce her husband because he falls on hard times. If the man wants to provide and tries his best to do so, I personally donâ€™t think a woman should divorce him just because times are tough. Injuries and other things can happen, and likewise a woman shouldnâ€™t divorce him just because funds get tight!

if heâ€™s trying.

I personally think that this passage in Exodus is Godâ€™s way of allowing women to escape/divorce a deadbeat husband who wonâ€™t provide for her.

I firmly believe thatâ€™s the reason God wrote it, but I could be wrong.

It might apply in other situations, but I believe and I could be wrong but I believe that Godâ€™s intention was to allow wives to escape from a man who wonâ€™t provide for her. Theoretically, a wife could use it to kick her husband when he was (*financially*) down and still trying to provide, but I donâ€™t think thatâ€™s the intent.

Wife Reason #3: Denial of sex

Just like men, a woman can also divorce her husband because he denies her sex. In fact, the case for women being able to do this is even more clear. However “and I cannot stress this enough **a woman cannot divorce her husband for sexual denial based on the same verse that a man can** (*Matthew 19:9*). That verse speaks only to men, not women. Again though, the case for women is even clearer; just based on a different verse.

We just looked at the verse that makes it more clear, but we’ll look at it again.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes to himself another wife, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

11 If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

This isn’t the only passage which teaches that husbands are required to have sex with their wives, and we already covered the other passage under passage husband reason #5.

Now , like men, women should be reasonable about this.

Men can get injured in such a way that they are unable to have sex for a time.

There are all kinds of surgical procedures and medication that could render a man incapable of having sex for a time. While *technically* this could be considered a reason for divorce (*because he’s not having sex with her*), I personally believe that a woman shouldn’t divorce her husband for this. As with lewd exposure and being provided for above, realize that this is almost certainly intended for men who won’t do something, not for men who (*temporarily*) can’t do something.

There’s a huge difference between the two.

Men, if you find yourself having trouble performing without an obvious reason, you could try doing some kegel exercises, which strengthen the muscles men use to get an erection. The exercises are easy, fast, can be done anywhere without anyone knowing, and are more effective than Viagra according a study I read a while back. (*I can’t remember where and couldn’t find it again; sorry.*) Plus, the exercises are natural and avoid any drug-induced side effects.

(*Note to men, these exercises can also help you last longer and reach your full length, girth, and hardness potential. For ladies, doing these exercises can make sex more pleasurable. For both men and women, it can help with incontinence.*)

Wife Reason #4: Abuse

This is the least biblically supported reason for divorce, as the Bible doesn’t speak of it clearly like the others. While there is precedent for it, we must recognize up front that it’s not clearly stated like the others are. Ironically, this is probably the reason for which I’ll get the least push-back, despite it

being the least clear biblically.

However, I must be crystal clear that this is a biblical *“egregy area”*.

God didn’t speak clearly about this topic. There’s no verse where God specifically allows a woman (*or man*) to get a divorce because of abuse. Because of that, we’re left to sift through the rest of the Bible for clues. I think the clues clearly point towards divorce being acceptable in cases of physical abuse! but I could be wrong.

Scripture tells us:

1 Thessalonians 5:21

21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to what is good;

So examine this carefully and see if it lines up. I think it does, but it’s the weakest reason *by far* from a biblical perspective.

Evidence #1: Slaves and wounds

This is the strongest argument, but it’s not about marriage! or is it? Combined with other verses in the same chapter and some linguistic/cultural context, there’s a good chance that it could be applied to marriage.

Exodus 21:26-27

26 If a man strikes the eye of his male or *female slave*, and destroys it, *he shall let him go free on account of his eye.*

27 And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or *female slave*, *he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.*

Something to note, God often gives law in the form of examples.

For most of Jewish history, *this verse was also applied to any other serious physical injury too, including all permanent and semi-permanent injuries.* (*a major beating, broken bones, etc.*) Any of those were enough to trigger this clause according to both modern and ancient Jewish scholars. I see no reason to disagree with that interpretation.

So we’re talking about serious, permanent, or semi-permanent physical abuse. (*A major beating, broken bones, etc.*)

Evidence #2: Concubines (*slaves wives*) could use this clause; why not free wives?

If a man married one of his female slaves, she became a specific type of wife called a “concubine”.

- Biblically speaking, the type of “concubine” that God allowed was actually married to the man. **A concubine was a wife who was also a slave.** She was still a wife, and was still legally married to her husband, so there was no sex outside of marriage with a Biblical concubine.

(It’s worth noting that Exodus 21:10-11 “which we’ve already discussed several times” is specifically about when a man marries one of his slaves.)

Outside the Bible, “concubine” more commonly meant a woman who regularly slept with a man without being his wife. (Such as the women in a king’s harem). However, Biblical “concubines” were slaves who were married to their master. As proof of this, look at Judges:

Judges 19:1-5

1 Now it happened in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that **there was a certain Levite** sojourning in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, **who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah.**

2 But **his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father’s house** in Bethlehem in Judah and was there for a period of four months.

3 Then **her husband arose and went after her** to speak to her heart in order to bring her back, and his young man was with him as well as a pair of donkeys. So **she brought him into her father’s house, and the girl’s father saw him and was glad to meet him.**

4 And **his father-in-law, the girl’s father,** prevailed upon him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there.

5 Now it happened on the fourth day that they got up early in the morning, and he arose to go; and **the girl’s father said to his son-in-law,** “Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go.”

The girl was a concubine, yet her father is called her husband’s father-in-law, and her husband is a son-in-law to her father. The girl “who was a concubine” was **married** to him.

So yes, biblical concubines were actually married to the man.

Now consider: Since a biblical concubine (a wife who was also a slave) could leave her husband/master under this part of the law since she was a slave, why couldn’t a free/normal wife also be able to get a divorce under this passage?

That goes double because slave wives (*concubines*) had fewer freedoms than normal/free wives.

Evidence #3: It could mean “husband” too

There are two words in Hebrew you could use to say that a man was a husband. The first is **אִישׁ** (*ish*, pronounced *äsh*) which simply means *man*. A wife could say *my man*, and it would be understood that she meant her husband. Now, the word used in this passage is that same word *ish*. It's used 376 times in the Old Testament, but almost 20% of the times it's used (*nearly 1-in-5*), it's translated *husband*.

For example:

Genesis 3:16

To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your **husband (ish)**, And he will rule over you.

So you could legitimately translate it *husband* in the verse we've been talking about, like so:

Exodus 21:26-27

26 If a **man/husband (ish)** strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, **he shall let him go free on account of his eye.**

27 And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, **he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.**

But there's still more.

Evidence #4: Linguistically, husband = master/owner

The second Hebrew word that meant Husband is **בַּאֵל** (*baal*, not to be confused with the pagan god *Baal*, which doesn't have the apostrophe in most modern bibles). The Hebrew word *baal* (not the pagan god) literally means *Owner/master/husband*.

Strong's Concordance:

Definition: **owner**, lord

NAS Exhaustive Concordance:

Definition:
owner, lord

Brown-Driver-Briggs (Lexicon)

I. **בַּאֵל** 166 noun masculine: **owner**, lord

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance:

From baal; **a master; hence, a husband, or (figuratively) owner**

Those definitions are consistent with its usage too, and it's translated "husband" regularly. For example in the famous "excellent wife" passage of Proverbs, the word baal is accurately translated as "husband" many times. (*In verses 11, 23, 28, and 29*).

I bet you never heard that about Proverbs 31!

Further, there's a passage where the Hebrew word baal is used as both "master/owner" and "husband", and it's the same chapter that we've been looking at. (*Exodus 21*).

Exodus 21:28-29

28 If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but **the owner (baal) of the ox** shall go unpunished.

29 If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and **its owner (baal)** has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and **its owner (baal)** also shall be put to death

Again, "baal" (*not the pagan god*) is applied to husbands in the same chapter. (*Just a few verses before the part about freeing slaves because the master injured them.*)

Exodus 21:22

If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's **husband (baal)** may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide

So then,

1. **A female slave could leave if her "baal" caused serious injury.**
2. Therefore, concubines (*slaves wives*) could use this clause to get a divorce. **Therefore, why couldn't free wives?**
3. In Exodus 21:26-27, the word "man" could also be translated "husband".
4. A wife's husband was linguistically her "owner/master", making the link stronger

In my opinion, all of this put together makes a reasonable case that a woman "not a man, but a woman" could get a divorce because of serious physical abuse. (*A major beating, broken bones, etc.*)

At least, that's my opinion.

Search this out yourself and make your own determination.

(And BTW, I would prefer if men could divorce for this reason because [women are the perpetrators in more than 70% of nonreciprocally violent relationships](#). However, the case for men having this reason is incredibly weak, bordering on non-existent.)

The other side of the argument

There are many Christians who won't allow for divorce because of physical abuse. The primary text to support that is in 1 Peter:

1 Peter 3:1-2

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Since verse 1 starts with "in the same way", we need to back up a few verses to see what that "way" is:

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are **harshly treated**, you endure it with patience? But **if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.**

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

(25 is the last verse in this chapter.)

That's the other side of the argument. The word translated "harshly treated" is the Greek word *kolaphizō* (kolaphizō), and it means: (*Thayer's*)

1 aorist ἔκρουε; present passive ἵκεται; (ἵκετος, a fist, and this from ἵκω to peck, strike); **to strike with the fist, give one a blow with the fist** (Terence, colaphum infringo, Quintfl. col. duco) (A. V. to buffet): ἵκεται, Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65; **as a specific term for a general, equivalent to to maltreat, treat with violence and contumely,**

So, either to "strike with a fist" (*punch*), or it could mean generally to "maltreat" (*treat badly*).

I'm going to try and thread a doctrinal needle here:

Even ***IF*** God is saying that a wife should stay if her husband "punches" her "which is certainly debatable given the two definitions" that still does ***not*** mean that she ***can't*** divorce him because of the passage in Exodus that we just talked about. There's a world of difference between a punch and serious, permanent, or semi-permanent damage. They certainly ***can*** go hand in hand, but they don't have to.

Again, I think Exodus gives precedent to divorce for abuse, but again I could be wrong.

You know which direction I lean, but use discernment on this since the Bible isn't as clear as we would probably prefer.

What about emotional/verbal abuse?

The case for divorce because of "emotional abuse" is incredibly weak, though not non-existent. It's essentially based on only one verse:

1 Corinthians 5:11

But actually, I wrote to you **not to associate with any so-called brother if he is** an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or **a reviler**, or a drunkard, or a swindler" not even to eat with such a one.

The word translated "reviler" is the Greek word *loidoros*, which means:

Strong's:

Definition: abusive, **subst. railer**

Usage: a railer, reviler, abuser.

HELPS:

Cognate: 3060 *loÃdoros* "reproach (reviling); used of *injuring another's* reputation by *denigrating, abusive insults* (TDNT, 4:293). **See 3058 (loidoreÃ).**

As mentioned in the definition, it's related to the verb form *loidoreÃ*³, with the word above being the adjective form, and the word below being the verb form. Here's the verb form:

Strong's:

Definition: to abuse, revile

Usage: I revile a person to his face, abuse insultingly.

HELPS:

3058 loidoreÃ (from 3060 *loÃdoros*, "properly, to say harsh things (make verbal assaults); to *revile*; to spue bitter (tasteless) statements, using *mean-spirited, insulting* words to demoralize (humiliate).

Here's the wrench: remember 1 Peter chapters 2 and 3 that we just looked at? This exact word is used in chapter 2 as an example, and wives are told to behave in the same way.

1 Peter 2:21-22

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,**

22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

23 and **while being reviled, (loidoreÃ)** He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

And here's the command to wives a few verses later:

1 Peter 3:1-2

1 **In the same way,** you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that **even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,**

2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

So hereâ€™s the question: does the specific command to wives in 1 Peter 3 (with the context of chapter 2) override the general command in 1 Corinthians 5?

At law, generally speaking specific statutes override general statutes. If thatâ€™s the case here, then the specific command to wives in 1 Peter would override the general command in 1 Corinthians 5.

But does it?

Thatâ€™s the question.

Actually, hereâ€™s a better question: Is 1 Corinthians 5 even addressed to women in the first place?

I would make the (*very strong*) case that the Bible is addressed to men and not women, but this article is already long. For a more thorough treatment of the idea that the Bible is addressed mainly to men, I recommend reading the article [â€œThe Gender-Neutral Language Controversyâ€](#) on bible-researcher.com, especially the first set of bullet points under the heading [â€œThe Patriarchal Bible Problemâ€](#).

(And by the way, the Bible being addressed to men is actually a good thing for women. For more information on why, please see my article: [How Crucial are Women to a Biblical Household? Very!](#))

So:

- **IF** 1 Corinthians was addressed to women as well as men (*unlikely but possible; consider the command to [â€œact like menâ€](#) in 1 Cor 16:13*)
- **and IF** the general command in 1 Corinthians 5 overrides the specific command in 1 Peter (*again, unlikely but possible*)
- **Then** perhaps a wife can seek a divorce because her husband rails at her continually.

Youâ€™ll need to make up your own mind on this one.

Further, we must consider that if [â€œrevilerâ€](#) is cause for divorce, then everything else on the list is too. That would **greatly** expand the list of for getting a divorce. For example, [â€œcovetousâ€](#) is on the list. Does that mean a wife can divorce her husband because he has a bad case of envy? Itâ€™s a practical problem that will need a solution if one accepts divorce because the husband is a [â€œrevilerâ€](#).

Also, another practical problem is whereâ€™s the line? If a husband loses his temper occasionally and insults his wife, is that enough? Does it need to be constant? How often is constant? How often/bad is enough to trigger this clause? Iâ€™m not saying that itâ€™s wrong, but there are some serious practical problems that must be addressed.

[â€œWait, canâ€™t a woman divorce her husband for adultery?â€](#)

Perhaps, it depends on what you mean.

Let me explain.

Remember that *biblical* adultery is a very specific sin with a very specific definition. **Biblical adultery occurs when a man has sex with another man's wife (or betrothed, and an engaged woman doesn't count).** **Biblical adultery does not occur when a man — even a married man — has sex with an unmarried woman.** So if we're talking about Biblical adultery — that is, a woman's husband has sex with another man's wife — then perhaps the woman can divorce him!

Maybe.

If a woman takes a specific and fairly controversial doctrinal position, then perhaps she can. If a woman believes that biblical adultery — defined as a man having sex with another man's wife — deserves the death penalty, then there is a precedent for a woman divorcing her husband for having sex with another man's wife.

The argument goes like this:

- **If biblical** adultery deserves death (*which would free her from the marriage*)
- **And if** divorce is a suitable alternative when death isn't the legal penalty for biblical adultery. (*which isn't a bad argument*)
- **Then perhaps** a woman could argue she should be able to end the marriage via divorce because it won't be ended via her husband's death.

That's the argument — and it's a good argument — **but this only applies if a woman's husband has sex with another man's wife.**

Note: Someone I shared the draft with asked about what if a woman's husband decided that he wanted to have sex with other men. The Old Testament penalty for male homosexuality was death, just like adultery. So there's precedent that she could divorce him if you adhere to the logic above. Interestingly, the Bible doesn't mention female homosexuality even once (*Rom 1:26 is about something else*). Details in [my article on homosexuality](#).

But what about if a woman's husband has sex with an unmarried woman? Could she divorce him then?

We'll look at that now.

What If A Woman's Husband Has Sex With An Unmarried Woman? (Fornication) Can She Divorce Him?

There's actually a verse that touches on this, though not directly. It's in the Old Testament Law, so we aren't required to obey it. However, it does establish what God thinks should be done in this situation.

Context first: remember how we already covered that the Hebrew word *ishah* means *woman*, but could also be translated *husband*? Keep that in mind as you read the following verse:

Exodus 22:16-17

16 If a man/husband (ish) seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a bride-price for her to be his wife.

17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins.

The use of the word "ish" which often means "husband" indicates that this applies whether the man was married or not. Also notice that there's no exception if the man was already married. Thus, God said that a man "even a married man" who has sex with an unmarried woman should marry the woman that he seduced in addition to his current wife. Thus, his current wife has no legitimate reason to divorce him.

This verse is one of three places in the Bible where God **commanded** a man to have more than one wife, i.e. polygamy.

No joke.

I have an [article on polygamy](#) which covers the following points:

- In three places in scripture, God **commanded** polygamy (*once to a specific person, twice in the Mosaic Law under certain conditions.*)
 - Under one specific circumstance, a man would be **punished** for not marrying an additional wife. Yes this was God's command.
- **God rewarded a woman for helping her husband get an additional wife.**
- God describes himself as a polygamist, married to two women (*Israel and Judah*).
- Jesus describes Himself as a polygamist (*in a parable*) as marrying five women.
- King David was a polygamist, but the Bible says that he was blameless "except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite".
 - God said that He would've given King David additional wives if he had wanted them.
- God says the "sexually immoral" will end up in the lake of fire, but many polygamous men are in the Hebrews 11 "faith hall of fame".
- (*And no, multiple wives isn't biblical adultery because he isn't having sex with another man's wife; he's having sex with one of his own wives*)

Again, we cover all of these points at length in [my article on polygamy](#). We go through all the relevant scriptures one-by-one, and also answer the (*fairly weak*) counter-arguments against polygamy.

Also, don't forget one verse that we've already looked at several times. As you can see from the verse below, God requires men who have multiple wives to have sex with all of them.

Exodus 21:10-11

10 If he takes to himself **another wife**, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her **conjugal** rights.

11 If he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of money*.

If a man has more than one wife, God commanded him to have sex with all of them.

Again, no joke.

Despite what you've probably been taught your entire life, God allows a man to have more than one wife, and then requires him to have sex with all of them. The case that God allows men to take multiple wives is **absolutely ironclad**.

See the list above, and/or my article on polygamy.

Therefore, a woman has **absolutely no right** to expect that her husband will confine his sexual activity to her, because he could (*theoretically*) take another wife at some point.

It's true.

That's why a woman has no legitimate biblical grounds to divorce her husband if he has sex with an unmarried woman.

There is absolutely no precedent anywhere in the entire Bible for a woman to divorce her husband because he had sex with an unmarried woman.

None whatsoever.

Some might want to cite Jesus' words in Matthew about divorcing for "sexual immorality". But as we've already covered, Jesus was speaking to men, not women.

Further, in the Exodus passage that we just looked at, God said that when a married man had sex with an unmarried woman, he should marry her! even if he already has a wife. **That fact actually establishes a precedent against a wife divorcing her husband for having sex with an unmarried woman.**

Now to be clear, I have a whole article titled: [Yes, The Bible CLEARLY Says Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong](#). If a man has sex with a woman he isn't married to, he sins grievously and God will judge him for it unless he repents. **All** sex outside of marriage is wrong. No exceptions.

However, a man can have more than one wife.

I realize that most women probably hate this (*if you're a woman and still reading, I'm impressed*), but that doesn't change the facts.

Can I divorce my husband for watching porn?

I have an article entitled: [Are Porn, Masturbation, and Fantasy Sinful? Does the Bible/God Allow Them?](#). In it, I show that porn is indeed sinful. However, we must be careful not to make the Bible say something that it doesn't say. Given the context of the previous section, I think the answer to this

should be obvious.

No, a woman cannot divorce her husband because he watches porn.

There is simply no Biblical precedent for it whatsoever.

None.

(Remember that Jesus words in Matthew 19:9 only allow a man to divorce his wife for porneia/sexual immorality, not a wife to divorce her husband.)

I can't think of a single verse which would come within a mile of establishing a precedent for this. If you can think of one, go ahead and leave a comment below or email me on the [contact page](#). However, I don't believe you'll find it. I could be wrong of course, but I don't think it's in there. *(and before you bring up Matthew 5:27-28, please read [my article on the passage](#).)*

Prohibitions on divorce

Now that we've covered the reasons for divorce, we'll cover the two situations where a man isn't allowed to divorce his wife. Interestingly, there are no such situations for the wife. That is, as long as the wife has a valid reason, she isn't prevented from divorcing her husband; whereas a husband can be prevented under certain circumstances even with a valid reason.

Now, you could possibly make an exception if the wife commits adultery. Again, as covered in the section about wives divorcing for adultery, if adultery should end in death (*which would end the marriage*), then when the legal penalty for adultery isn't death, then divorce might be a suitable alternative.

Now, both of the prohibitions come from the Mosaic Law, so they aren't binding. However, I do think they apply very well.

Falsely accuse a bride of not being a virgin = can't divorce

This one is pretty clear.

Deuteronomy 22:13-19

13 If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her,

14 and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, "I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,"

15 then the girl's father and her mother shall take and bring out the *evidence* of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate.

16 "The girl's father shall say to the elders, "I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her;

17 and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, "I did not find your daughter a virgin." But this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city.

18 "So the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him,

19 and they shall fine him a hundred *shekels of silver* and give it to the girl's father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. **And she shall remain his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days.**

(Note: the bride price of a virgin was fifty shekels of silver, so this was a major fine; equal to twice what the man paid to marry the girl in the first place.)

This one is pretty simple: if a man falsely and publicly accuses his bride of not being a virgin, he cannot divorce her. It's pretty "cut and dried" as they say, and there's not much room for commentary.

Marry because of sex before marriage = can't divorce

This one is covered in two verses, one of which we've already looked at. The first one doesn't include the prohibition on divorce, but the second one does.

Exodus 22:16-17

16 "If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a bride-price for her to be his wife.

17 "If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins.

The next verse seems to include seduction as above, but also adds a prohibition on divorce:

Deuteronomy 22:28-29

28 "If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and lays hold of her and lies with her and they are discovered,

29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty *shekels of silver*, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; **he cannot divorce her all his days.**

This seems pretty simple also. If a man has sex with a woman he hasn't married and then he subsequently marries her, he cannot divorce her. **This includes if she commits a divorceable offense.** (*Again, with the possible exception of adultery*)

Prohibitions on Remarriage

Just like women have no prohibitions on divorce, men have no prohibitions on (re)marriage. That is, there appears to be no situation in which a man can't get married (*even if he already is, i.e. polygamy*) as long as he marries a Christian woman.

Many will point to Jesus words on divorce, but there's more going on in those passages than is obvious in English. Please see my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#) for more information.

Must always be Christian

One obvious prohibition is that marriage/remarriage must always be to a Christian.

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Lest someone think that marriage isn't the metaphor, Here's Jesus on the topic.

Matthew 19:5-6

5 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"

6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. **What therefore God has joined together**, let no man separate."

The Greek word translated "joined" there is *συνεζυγνυμι* ([suzeugnymi](#)), and it means:

4801 *syzeugnymi* (from 4862 /syn, "identified with" and 2201 /zeugnos, "yoke") "properly, **jointly-yoked; yoked (paired) together**, when God joins two people together for one purpose (Mt 19:6; Mk 10:9).

4801 /*syze* *ōgnymi* (â€œclosely-yokedâ€) is only used for marriage in the NT â€“ a union in which a husband and wife *live better for the Lord together, than either would do alone.*

[â€œThe word for â€“joined togetherâ€™ means â€“yoked together,â€™ **a common verb for marriage in ancient Greek**â€œ (WP, 1, 154).]

I really think they should translate it â€œyoked-togetherâ€ in Matthew 19. Anyway, no marrying non-Christians.

Period.

Now, here are the other two prohibitions.

No remarriage to a first husband after having a second

This one is clearly stated in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1 â€œWhen a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house,

2 and **she leaves his house and goes and becomes another manâ€™s wife,**

3 **and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife,**

4 ***then her former husband* who sent her away **is not allowed** to take her again to be his wife, since 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 gives you as an inheritance.**

If a Christian woman was divorced by *any* man â€“ Christian or non-Christian â€“ and then she marries *any* other man, and the second husband then dies or they are divorced, **then she is never allowed to remarry her first husband.**

Ever.

God seems pretty serious about this too.

Like, *really* serious.

Like, calling it an abomination serious.

So ladies, if you are divorced from a husband and you marry another man, the moment you marry the second man, you **forever** close the door to remarrying the previous husband. For some reason, **God calls this an abomination and a sin**, so don't do it. Ever. Men, if a wife that you were divorced from wants to marry you again, but she had another husband after you were divorced, then you aren't allowed to marry her again.

Ever.

Now, I would like to point out that does God allow the woman to remarry.

Although she committed the crime that caused her divorce, she can still get remarried. That will be an important point in a moment.

A woman divorces without cause = no remarriage.

These verses come immediately before a passage that we looked at before, where Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse leaves, that the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases. Before that instruction, God "writing through Paul" gives this instruction:

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that **the wife should not leave her husband**

11 (but if she does leave, **she must remain unmarried**, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

This seems like a clear instruction. If a Christian woman divorces her husband without a legitimate reason (*and we've already covered all of them*) then she should remain single and not remarry.

Notice two things:

1. This doesn't apply if the Christian husband divorces her, **only if she divorces him**.
2. No such prohibition is applied to men.

Now, this next bit should be obvious but I'm going to state it anyway: **This only applies if she divorces him without a legitimate reason**. As we've already seen, Christian women are allowed to get remarried after a legitimate divorce for legitimate biblical reasons.

I hope that's obvious by now, so I won't rehash it.

(And just to restate: *because her husband had sex with an unmarried woman is not a legitimate reason for a woman to get a divorce.*)

One last thing: if her husband dies, she's free to be remarried.

1 Corinthians 7:39

39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but **if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes**, only in the Lord.

So even if she divorced him without cause, if he dies, she then can be remarried.

Otherwise, remarriage is allowed

Now, those are the only prohibitions on remarriage that I've seen in the Bible. So unless one of those situations applies to you, then you are free to get married again.

1. Men, you always have the option to marry again with no restrictions of any kind. (*And again, before you cite Jesus's words please read my article [What Jesus Meant by Adultery in Matthew Chapters 5 & 19](#)*)
2. **Ladies you are free to get remarried**, unless you divorced him without a legitimate cause, or want to remarry a previous husband after having another husband after him,

Remember that in Deut 24:1-4, **the woman was allowed to get remarried even though she committed the sin that caused the divorce**. Please don't overlook that because it's important.

Therefore, even if a woman sins badly enough that her husband divorces her, she can still get validly remarried.

It's a legitimate, legal, lawful thing in God's eyes for her to get remarried, even when the woman sinned so badly that her husband legitimately divorced her. Even when she sinned, she can still get remarried.

Changing tracks slightly, there's one specific case that comes up enough that I want to mention it specifically: the case where an unbeliever divorced a Christian and that Christian wants to remarry.

1 Corinthians 7:12-16

12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that **if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.**

13 And a **woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.**

14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

15 Yet if the unbelieving one **leaves**, let him leave; the brother or the sister **is not under bondage** in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Notice the phrase: "not under bondage". Both men and women are free to remarry if an unbelieving spouse divorces him/her. So if you were married to someone who wasn't a Christian and that person divorced you, **in that case you can absolutely remarry with the full support of God and Scripture.**

This case comes up often enough in modern times that I wanted to point out that it's specifically allowed for by Scripture.

Conclusion

While God certainly isn't happy about divorce, He Himself got a divorce (*spiritually/metaphorically*) and thus it's highly unlikely that He hates divorce. The verse in Malachi 2 is about "putting out" a wife, essentially forcing her into prostitution. God hates that, rightly calling it treacherous. Further, God included an "automatic divorce" in the Old Testament law, so clearly it's allowed under some conditions.

Biblically speaking, marriage is a covenant. The penalty for breaking a covenant (*for example, via biblical adultery*) is death. **Biblical adultery is defined as "a man (married or unmarried) having sex with another man's wife."** A married man who sleeps with an unmarried woman sins grievously and God promised to judge such a man; however, he is a fornicator, not an adulterer.

Men are allowed to divorce a wife for the following reasons:

1. **His wife is an unbeliever and wants to leave, and/or she abandons him.** Both are based on 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, especially verse 15.
2. **His wife engages in sexual activity with another man while they are married (adultery).** This is based on Jesus' words in Matthew 19, and the precedent of God's divorce in Jeremiah 3:6-8.
3. **His wife (intentionally) lewdly exposes her sexual organs publicly or to another man.** This is based on Deuteronomy 24:1, which says exactly that.
4. **His wife claims to be a virgin before marriage, but it's proved that she lied and isn't a virgin.** This is based on Deuteronomy 22:13-21. (*If she didn't claim to be a virgin, then it's not grounds for divorce.*)
5. **His wife refuses to have sex with him on an ongoing basis.** This is based on the fact that depriving a spouse of sex is sexual defrauding according to 1 Cor 7:5. Jesus allowed a husband to divorce his wife for "porneia", which is something that is both (1) sexual, and (2) immoral, and sexual defrauding is both. This shouldn't be used against a wife who temporarily can't perform for medical reasons.

A wife can divorce her husband for the following reasons:

1. **Her husband is an unbeliever and wants to leave, and/or he abandons her.** Both are based on 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, especially verse 15.

2. **Her husband neglects to ensure that her basic necessities of food/water, clothing and shelter are provided for.** This is based on Exodus 21:10-11, as well as 1 Timothy 5:8. Note: this was almost certainly intended for a husband who won't provide, not a husband who (*temporarily*) can't provide.
3. **Her husband refuses to have sex with her on an ongoing basis.** This is based on Exodus 21:10-11, and also 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. Like reason #2, this shouldn't be used against a husband who temporarily can't perform for medical reasons.
4. Abuse:
 1. **Her husband causes serious physical harm to her.** This is admittedly not ironclad, but the context of Exodus 21:26-27, combined with Exodus 21:10-11 makes it clear that slave wives (*concubines*) could get out of a marriage for this reason. Why then couldn't a free wife? This goes double because in Exodus 21:26-27, the word *man* could also mean husband, and the other word for *husband* also means master/owner.
 2. Possibly "very unlikely, but possibly" for continuous verbal insults and verbal degradation based on 1 Cor 5:11. However, the specific command to wives in 1 Peter 2-3 overrides this general command. Further, the commands in 1 Cor 5 were likely not written to women at all, but men. Plus, it causes some serious practical problems as well.

A wife might be able to divorce her husband if he has sex with another man's wife (*adultery*). This is because biblical adultery was punished by death, and if she can't be released from the marriage through her husband's death, then perhaps divorce is a suitable alternative! perhaps.

A wife cannot divorce her husband because he has sex with an unmarried woman. There is simply no biblical precedent for this whatsoever. The correct remedy is prescribed by Exodus 22:16-17, and is for the man to take the unmarried woman as an additional wife since God doesn't prohibit polygamy. (See [my article on the topic](#) if you aren't convinced.)

A man cannot divorce a wife if:

1. **He married her because he had sex with her before they were married.** This is based on Deuteronomy 22:28-29, as well as Exodus 22:16-17
2. **He falsely accused her of not being a virgin after they married.** This is based on Deuteronomy 22:13-19.

Prohibitions on remarriage:

1. **Christians must always marry other Christians.** No exceptions. This is based on 2 Corinthians 6:14, among other verses.
2. **If a woman becomes divorced from her first husband, and then becomes another man's wife, and the second husband divorces her or dies, she may never remarry a previous husband.** This is based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4
3. **If a Christian woman divorces her husband without a valid biblical cause, she can't remarry except to reconcile with her husband.** This is based on 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

Unless one of the situations above applies, Christian men and women can always get married/remarried. Even when a wife commits the sin that caused her husband to divorce her, she can still get remarried according to Deuteronomy 24:1-2.

and that's it.

We're done.

That's the skinny on divorce. Yes it's a large topic, but I hope you can see God's wisdom in allowing it for certain reasons, but otherwise making marriage permanent. You can also see His mercy and grace in allowing remarriage, even for the offending party after a divorce.

He is so good. ðŸ™,™,