



Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible: A Fresh Look at What Scripture Teaches

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If the church is going to use the Bible to decide whether divorce is legitimate in certain cases and whether divorced couples have the right to remarry with the approval and blessing of God's people, then the Bible must be studied without prejudice toward a particular answer. The author examines the relevant passages in both the Old and New Testaments so that his readers can consider the many issues and interpretations that arise in trying to establish a consistently biblical position. As a result, readers can see more clearly and accept more firmly the truth of Scripture. The book succeeds at being exactly what the author wanted it to be: "a comprehensive, lucid, accurate study presented in a readable and practical style. . . ." It is a valuable resource for the pastor, counselor, church leader, and others who are struggling to understand and apply scriptural principles to the problems of divorce and remarriage.

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John says

A mixed bag.

Adams is right that 1 Cor 7 is about divorce, not separation. He helpfully rejects Murray's notion that some divorced people are "still married in God's eyes"; Paul calls them "unmarried."

But there are several things in this book that are questionable or just wrong.

Adams thinks that if you forgive, you are not allowed to divorce. So if a woman is married to an abusive man (and I don't think Adams ever brings up abuse, which is unfortunate) or, let's say, a husband who has committed adultery for a decade or even a pedophile, she must forgive him if he asks for forgiveness and then, having forgiven him, may not divorce him. This is like saying that if your employee robs you blind and then asks for forgiveness, you may not fire him or turn him over to the police. This is going beyond what Scripture requires.

Adams' interpretation of Deut 24 is quite strange: he thinks that the "thing of nakedness" [erwath dabar] here is anything that a husband doesn't like, any ground on which he wishes to divorce his wife—and that the law isn't saying that's okay but is simply saying that a husband who divorces his wife for no just cause cannot take her back if she marries someone else in between.

Some of Adams' "the Bible has an answer" stuff seems too simplistic, too cut and dried, especially when one of the steps is "if the other church won't listen to your church, then your church should declare that church to not be a church"!

In short, though there are some helpful things in this book and a pastor could benefit from working through them, I would not recommend this book to anyone else.

Justin says

Really helpful and concise. The writing is a bit difficult to follow sometimes.

Andrew Ivester says

Adams presents a biblical theology of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in this book. While not everyone will agree at every point, it is certainly worthwhile to wrestle with the Scriptures he cites on these difficult issues. Also, he gives helpful recommendations on how to present truth with grace. This is a helpful read on the subject.

Nate Pickowicz says

One of the best books I have ever read on the topic.

?Tara Sheehan? says

As an Irish Catholic who is on their second marriage the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage is particularly close to my heart. The Catholic Church used the bible as their reason to disallow me from my own faith despite the fact that United States law says your spouse can just leave and divorce you regardless of what the church says. Meaning the rest of us who are trying to abide by church law become innocent victims punished by being tossed out through no fault of our own. I was incredibly curious where this book was going to fall on that spectrum; was yet another person going to tell me the Church is right and I am barred from my faith or is someone else going to stand by my side to point out the hypocrisy in this?

Although the audience for this seemed to be geared more towards ministerial staff than a layperson it's still written in a way that your average person should be able to grasp the concepts and writing.

I liked that he steered away from the oft quoted idea that procreation is a foundational purpose of marriage because that always irritated me when you consider the number of childless couples. Does different genetics make their relationship any less valid than someone who can have kids? What about couples who choose NOT to have them for whatever the reason?

You will come away learning about the various scriptures that pertain to marriage, divorce and remarriage as he also provides the various viewpoints so at times I felt like he wasn't take a hard stance one way or the other but just wanted to provide information so people could come to their own conclusions in a way. His writing is easy to understand and he presented his arguments in a logical, well thought out manner but still at times I felt like he wasn't really trying to persuade the reader towards one side or the other.

In the end what I discovered is there is a lot of conflicting information and sets of rules that apply depending on how you can spin things or the position you hold. Ironically the position I came to after reading this it seems it would be better for the Church to stay out of marriage and let the government handle it as religions make things too complicated and too often punish the innocent.

If you're pro-gay marriage I seriously would NOT recommend this book. I think only traditional bible believing Christians will appreciate this and get any true benefit.

Pam Hettinga says

Sadly lacking.

Douglas Wilson says

Great. Really good. Also read in April of 1988.

Trent Still says

Best book by Adams I've read so far. I appreciate his distinctions and willingness to let Scripture carry the weight. The forgiveness of sins is Christ is an offense to many even in the church and needs to be better applied to divorce and remarriage.

J.E. Jr. says

Good book, examining a subject that is far too neglected theologically. I like Adams' careful commitment to being scripturally-based in all of his conclusions, and he does some good exegetical work. It's a bit dry at times, but not prohibitively so.

Matt Crawford says

Takes a difficult topic and for the most part says that personal opinion doesn't matter but here is what the Bible says. That I like. What I don't like is that remarriage (enough of an issue to own 1/3 the title) is only given 2 brief chapters towards the end. The title and introductory chapters make it seem that it will be discussed on full but it appears to just be tacked on at the end.

Kirk Miller says

Content -- good.

Tone -- could be improved at points, particularly when dealing with those with whom he disagrees (typical Jay Adams).

Sometimes a little simplistic in its handling of things.

Sometimes the opposite: stances were so, "If this, then that... If this, than that... If this, then..." (etc.) that things felt several levels removed from the text itself, and one began to feel suspicious of their legitimacy.

But, all in all, an impressive little treatment -- cuts through a complex issue with a lot of clarity (even if being in danger of a little over-simplicity at times).

David says

Very helpful

Kim Voss says

The audience for the book is pastors, but anyone with knowledge of the Bible can understand it. Very detailed look at the topic of marriage in the Bible. Adams is a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary and was a pastor. His emphasis is the grace of God.

Chad Warner says

A short and not very deep study of the Bible's teachings on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I don't agree on all points, but I appreciate the explanation and biblical basis for the arguments.

Summary

Divorce is biblical in cases of adultery (sexual immorality) and when an unbelieving spouse insists on abandoning a believer. Remarriage is biblical when both spouses were previously unmarried or biblically divorced. "Guilty" party may also remarry after repentance.

Notes

The disciples' comment that it would be better not to marry (Matt 19:10) shows that they understood Jesus to mean that sexual sin is the only permissible ground for divorce among believers.

Deut 24:1-4 refers to an unbiblical/illegitimate divorce (legal but sinful). Wife is defiled by 2nd marriage because her divorce was for unbiblical reasons, not for remarrying per se.

When Jesus speaks in Matt 5:32 of causing the divorced wife to commit adultery, he means a wife who is divorced for unbiblical reasons (as the wife of Deut 24); for "any ground" short of fornication. Those individuals had no right to divorce, so the 2nd marriage is adulterous. Anyone who marries someone who's not biblically divorced commits adultery.

The words "released" in 1 Cor 7:27-28 are the same in the original: "luo" which means divorce. These verses allow remarriage after divorce. V. 28a is speaking to the divorced couple of v. 27.

Ezek 44:22 shows that "priests are in a special class and may not do what is perfectly right for others to do": remarry after divorce.

When a person is converted, they are to remain in the state they were in when saved (even in unbiblical marriage or remarriage) (1 Cor 7:17-24).

The "guilty" party may remarry after repentance. Just as one may marry a former murderer, one may marry a former adulterer or sinfully divorced person.

1 Cor 7:10-11 means that believers may not divorce. Paul doesn't mention the exception of Matt 19:9, but he knew of it.

1 Cor 7:11 calls divorced couple "unmarried," showing that marriage contract is dissolved. This is also used

in Deut 24:1-4. Thus, to say divorced people are "still married in God's sight" is unbiblical.

Believers who divorce are required by 1 Cor 7:11 to remain unmarried so they can be reconciled.

Deut 24:1-4 uses language that makes it clear that divorce ends the marriage; the woman is only 1 man's wife at a time.

Rom 7:1-3 doesn't teach that only death breaks a marriage, because Jesus said that man can (through he may not) put asunder. Also, Paul was simply using marriage as an illustration here.

Jesus' statement on divorce in Matt 19 (and parallel passages) was speaking to people in the church, responding to comments about Deut 24:1-4, which regulates divorce among believers. He didn't intend to cover all circumstances.

In 1 Cor 7:14, to be sanctified by the believer means the unbelieving partner is exposed to the gospel. The children being holy means they're under the care of the church, under positive influences; not that they're necessarily saved.

1 Cor 7:12-16 means that believer must do all in their power to remain married to unbeliever, but if unbeliever insists on divorce, believer may divorce.

1 Cor 7:15 means that when unbelieving spouse leaves believer, all bonds of marriage are removed. Word translated "bound" is "duoloo," meaning "to enslave."

Exception clause of Matt 5:32 and 19:9 applies to divorce and remarriage in coordination, not just to divorce. In Matt 5:32, "Jesus says that one commits adultery by marrying another unless he has divorced his previous wife for fornication." In Matt 19:9, "the divorced wife and her second husband are warned that they will commit adultery unless she was divorced for fornication."

Deut 24:1-4 was meant to eliminate easy divorce by establishing serious consequences.

Aaron Ventura says

Not a bad starting point to get introduced to some of the basic teaching of Scripture. I was surprised by how short the book was considering this topic is the most complicated issue in pastoral counseling.
