

Divorce, Remarriage, and Grace

Divorce, Remarriage, and Grace

A lesson about a person's
relationship with God and the
church after divorce and remarriage

Timothy J Lukings

Divorce, Remarriage, and Grace

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	Pg 3
2	God Hates Divorce	Pg 5
3	When Divorce is Allowed	Pg 7
4	The Sermon on the Mount	Pg 11
5.	The Key to God's Grace	Pg 15
6	God's Grace is Big Enough	Pg 18
7	Conclusion	Pg 26

INTRODUCTION

Divorce and remarriage is a long-debated subject. Like with most things, you can find someone who will say what you want to hear. I am not interested in trying to convince anyone of anything. I'm not trying to squelch your convictions, nor will I attempt to scratch itching ears. I simply want to explain what I believe I have learned after personal experience drove me to see things a different way. I have experienced divorce, extreme loneliness, and remarriage. I have learned lessons from God's Word, and witnessed the unmistakable work of the Holy Spirit.

After raising one biological son, two adopted children; nearly twenty years of ministry, and twenty-eight years of marriage – I never would have guessed that it would happen to me. The why's and the how's of how I ended up divorced are unimportant. The lessons I learned through experience and Scripture are!

It is not my intent to try to change your theology as much as it is to create a higher level of understanding, and a lower level of judgmentalism toward those who have been divorced, and even remarried. At the same time, I want to make sure that it is clearly understood

that divorce is not what God wants for any marriage. He hates it. What serious Christian wants to do what God hates? None do. Not only that, the emotional pain caused by divorce is unlike any pain I have ever felt. I know that was true for my children as well, and that a painful ripple affect rolled over the hearts of my entire family. I want to issue a stern warning to avoid divorce at all costs. Divorce happens. Don't make it happen.

We sing the song: *"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."* And we sing: *"Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt."*, yet we act as if, for the divorced person, grace is diminished to the point where they can keep their foot in the door of heaven but cannot experience the full benefits of grace on earth. The church says: "You can teach Sunday School, but you can't be on the church Board because you are divorced." "You can attend our church, and we appreciate your giving, but you cannot hold a place of leadership because you are divorced." "You can sing in our in our worship team, but you cannot minister in the pulpit, because you are divorced." I've learned that the words of the old hymn that most of us have sung are true. Everyone sings it, but whole denominations deny it by their theology. "God's grace exceeds our sin and our guilt". Amazing Grace was applied to *"a wretched man like me"*. – a man who was divorced and remarried.

We have to get past theology that places limits on God's grace and learn what we must do to be a recipient of it.

GOD HATES DIVORCE

Of course, God hates divorce. For one thing, the Scripture says so. *“For I hate divorce!” says the LORD, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty”* (**Malachi 2:16, NLT**).

A marriage is intended to be a perfect picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. That’s why the Scripture refers to the church as the bride of Christ (**Revelation 19:7-9; 21:9**). It is also why Paul uses the relationship between Christ and the church to describe the love between a husband and wife. *“For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her.”* (**Ephesians 5:25, NLT**). Especially in Christian marriages, our marriage relationship should be a witness to all who know us regarding the unconditional, everlasting love of God. When a Christian marriage fails and ends in divorce, the testimony of perfect unity has failed and can have the opposite effect. God hates that!

When a person is remarried, any hope of reconciliation is nullified. Remarriage adds insult to injury, sort of speak. The impact that has on our testimony that caused Jesus to be pretty direct in his teaching on the subject. He said: *“But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.”* (**Matthew 5:32**). Jesus says that if you are divorced and remarry, or if you marry a divorced person, it is the equivalent of adultery. It puts a period on any hope for reconciliation within a marital relationship.

Clearly, in the mind of God, divorce is a serious subject. Remarriage - even more so. God hates divorce because it nullifies the primary spiritual purpose of our marriage. The example of the unity between Christ and His church that is to be revealed through a man and woman becoming one, is ruined.

He hates remarriage because it makes reconciliation impossible. God is all about reconciliation. Christ came to reconcile man and God. In turn, we are to be ministers of reconciliation. Of course, God does not desire for any relationship to be broken, yet when two people have an issue that divides them – and through love and forgiveness reconciliation takes place; it is a wonderful example of God’s love and forgiveness. It is a picture of God’s desire to pay any price to restore His relationship with mankind. *“Therefore, if anyone is in*

Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

(2 Corinthians 5:17-20, NLT)

God hates divorce. God hates divorce and remarriage for those reasons.

WHEN DIVORCE IS ALLOWED

God is not without understanding. He knows that some things are devastating to a relationship. Two allowable reasons for divorce are clear in the New Testament. Adultery is one of them. In the Old Testament He likened idol worship to spiritual adultery. In fact, the first of the Ten Commandments speaks to this. *“You must not have any other god but me. 4 “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. 5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.” (Exodus 20:3-5).* Idolatry severs the intimate relationship between God and man. Adultery separates two people in an intimate relationship. God understands how devastating adultery is to a marriage, and allows for divorce in this situation. *“But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32, NLT).*

The second allowable reason for divorce in the New Testament is abandonment. You can't have a relationship with someone who won't have a relationship with you. *"But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace."* (**I Corinthians 7:15**). The principle of abandonment is dealt with in diverse ways for various authors and teachers. The interpretation is often painted with a broad brush, but the Apostle Paul is pretty specific. He is speaking to situations where one partner is Christian and the other isn't. In that case the marriage is less likely to fulfil the spiritual purpose of representing the relationship between Christ and the church anyway, at least with intent. Divorce is allowable. It does not have the same negative impact on a couple's ability to glorify God through their marriage, because that marriage is not purposed to glorify God by both parties, in the first place.

It is important to note that neither Jesus or the Apostle Paul are suggesting that these two things are an easy way out of a marriage. God hates divorce no matter what. If reconciliation is at all possible, every attempt should be made. Jesus does recognize, however, that sexual sin breaks the bond between a husband and wife. My belief is that, with sexual sin, there is a transfer of the spiritual union away from the spouse and to the person they commit adultery with. Adultery breaks the mystical

and spiritual bond between a husband and wife.

Paul acknowledges that if one partner chooses to leave the relationship with no intent of returning, then reconciliation is out of the control of the innocent partner. It is unreasonable, then, to require that person to remain obligated to the marriage.

Although I don't have specific chapter and verse, I certainly believe that biblical principles are sufficient enough to affirm that spousal abuse would be another allowable reason for divorce. Some also state that emotional neglect, another form of abuse, is grounds for divorce. *"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* (1 Timothy 5:8)

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In this great sermon, Jesus condemns divorce. We read part of it already. *“For example, a man who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery. And anyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.” (Luke 16:18, NLT).*

In this passage, Jesus is tightening the grip on his followers thinking regarding divorce. Moses had allowed it in ancient history, but Jesus says ‘no’. That was too lenient. God mysteriously took two lives and made them into one. If God did that, it’s not man’s business to undo it. If you marry someone else, you are committing adultery. That’s how God sees it according to Jesus.

I don’t want to understate or under-emphasize anything that Jesus taught, but to those are so harsh against the divorced and remarried, let’s take a look at a couple of other parts of Jesus’ message. *“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 So if your*

eye—even your good eye —causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your hand—even your stronger hand —causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30)

Why is it that we take one part of the sermon at face value, and not others? Immediately before Jesus’ dissertation on divorce, he addressed the issues of lust that involves the eyes, and sins that involve the hand. Perhaps he had theft in mind, or anger that leads to physical violence when speaking of sins committed by the hand. He says that if our eyes cause us to lust, then we are better off to gouge it out and throw it away. If our hand causes us to sin, cut it off and throw it away. I happen to know that there are a lot of people, both men and women, who are guilty of lust; but I don’t see a lot of one-eyed Christians at church. Nor do I see a lot of single-handed people who have committed some kind of sin involving the hand. But those same people who should be one-handed, one-eyed believers, according to Jesus’ teaching are quick to say: “That person shouldn’t be in church leadership! They are divorced and remarried.”

Did Jesus really mean that we should gouge our eye out, or cut off a hand? He certainly was not suggesting that we mutilate our physical bodies. He was, however, teaching that we must do whatever is necessary

to prevent ourselves from sinning again.

Jesus goes on to say: *“You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.’ 32 But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.”*
(Matthew 5:31-32, NLT)

Is it possible, and it’s a question more than a theological position, that just as Jesus gave extreme examples of how to deal with sin in the former verses to reveal how important it is that we deal with our sin affectively; that He is also using extreme language in His presentation regarding divorce in order to prevent unnecessary break-ups?

Here is something to think about. People interpret Jesus’ teaching as meaning that, because God hates divorce, if a divorced person remarries then they are committing adultery every time they are intimate with their new spouse. I don’t believe that to be true. A person who is divorced or who marries a divorced person becomes one with that person.

I know that Paul is speaking of something very different here, but there is a principle that we can draw from his example. He instructs men to not join with a prostitute because we are temples of the Holy Spirit and they become one body with the prostitute. That is

highly inappropriate. *“And don’t you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.”* (1 **Corinthians 6:16, NLT**). That being the case, however, when a man or woman who has been divorced is joined together with a second spouse, they become one with their second spouse. They are not committing adultery every time they are intimate. I believe Paul teaches us that there is a transfer of one-ness.

To be fair, even though that is what I believe, there is a question that remains regarding that last statement. That is, is it truly a transfer of one-ness, or in the mind of God, is the divorced and remarried person now mystically united to more than one person? This is a mystery. It is a question that we cannot answer, and yet the impact of the answer is very significant. Nonetheless, the next chapter remains even more significant.

THE KEY TO GOD'S GRACE

I don't recall if I was divorced or still separated when, sitting in my office at Habitat for Humanity, I had a thought. My thought was that good marriages take the effort of two people. As much as I wanted to blame my first wife for our failed marriage, I realized that failed marriages probably take the actions and lack of effort of both partners as well. I began to seriously think about how I may have contributed to the failure of my marriage. I made notes, and then did something that was very difficult to do. My first wife and I weren't very communicative at the time, but I emailed her and apologized for the things that I had put on my list. I then prayed, confessed of those things before God, and asked for His forgiveness. My life was about to change.

I believe that repentance is the key that unlocks the door to God's grace in every situation. In a moment I am going to talk about the enormity of God's grace and how it applies to those that are divorced and remarried, but to do so it is essential that we first talk about this subject briefly.

Repentance requires more than acknowledgment of sin, and even confession. Repentance requires change of behaviour, a turning away from whatever it was that we have done, or have been doing. For that change to

be real and lasting, there must be a change of heart, which is the driving force between the things that we do.

That kind of repentance doesn't come natural to us. It requires prayer. God will help us if we ask.

"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

(2 Timothy 2:25, NLT)

This is a thought-provoking process.

Introspection is a challenging effort when you are specifically looking for behaviour that you need to change. No one wants to do that. We are typically pretty comfortable with who we are and how we live our lives.

What is important to note is that true repentance opens the door to God's grace. **There is only one unpardonable sin mentioned in Scripture, and the person committing that sin is not even remotely interested in repenting. Every other sin is eligible to be completely forgiven and forgotten by God.** Every other sin is eligible for God's grace, including divorce and remarriage.

Experience has proven this to me. It is a very long story that I won't take time to share in detail, but I can tell you that after my period of repentance, God came after me. Ultimately, a wonderful Christian woman and speaker whom I had never met before put her finger

in my face and said: *“How dare you disqualify yourself from something God qualified you for?”* She proceeded to prophecy that God would restore my ministry.

God not only forgave me; He came after me. He renewed my calling and set before me an opportunity to minister His Word once again. I learned in a much deeper way that repentance is the key to God’s grace.

GOD'S GRACE IS BIG ENOUGH

Grace can be a confusing subject. Rarely do we find balance when it is being taught. To some, we have to do something to deserve it. This teaching totally contradicts the meaning of the word grace. To others it is available to everyone no matter how they behave or what they believe. It comes without repentance. This cheapens the value of God's gift to us. We must find balance on this subject.

It's hard to talk about grace without making it sound like sin is excusable and that grace offers us an easy way out. It does not. God still hates sin of all kinds. He still hates divorce, and remarriage is still complicated. The Apostle Paul dealt with that very issue in his letter to the Romans. *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* **(Romans 6:1-2, NIV)**

There are a few Greek words that are translated to the English word 'grace' in scripture, but most commonly it is 'charis'. Strong's Concordance defines

‘charis’ as "graciousness, benefit, favor, gift, good-will, thanks, or grace."

MW Collegiate Dictionary defines ‘grace’ in this way: *“Unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification: a virtue coming from God: a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine grace.”*

Perhaps the 160-year-old hymn defines ‘grace’ the best.

Marvelous Grace

Julia H. Johnston, 1849-1919

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

*Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,
threaten the soul with infinite loss;
grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
points to the refuge, the mighty cross.*

*Dark is the stain that we cannot hide.
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,
brighter than snow you may be today.*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
freely bestowed on all who believe!*

*You that are longing to see his face,
will you this moment his grace receive?*

Refrain:

*Grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin!*

Now I want to tell you what ‘grace’ means to me. There are some principles in God’s Kingdom that we have an intellectual understanding of, that we THINK we have a good handle on, but in reality, our understanding is limited to what we have been taught or by our personal experience. It is kind of like wading into the lake. When you go waist deep, you know that the lake is at least waist deep, and you’re pretty sure it’s deeper but you don’t know until you walk further out and experience its depth.

For most of my life, my understanding of grace was waist deep. It was wonderful. It was amazing. It gave me the assurance of eternal life, but it had limitations. I could see its’ depth. My understanding of it was shallow compared to what life has since taught me.

After writing myself off as becoming a Christian with no ability to minister, and who would barely squeak through heaven’s gates – God prophetically called me back into ministry and has blessed my wife’s and my

marriage. This has expanded my understanding of the depths of His grace by many times over.

Amazingly, people have recognized God's call on my life and opened their hearts for me to minister to them. The people I have been privileged to minister to have helped me see just how limitless the Grace of God really is. Every time I stand behind the pulpit to preach the Word of God, I am awestruck by the privilege of doing so, and the grace that allows it.

The rest of this message is VERY important, so please keep reading. God's Grace is not merely sufficient. It is boundless *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you..."* (2 **Corinthians 9:8, NIV**). The oldest definition of the word 'boundless' is to 'overflow' or to 'run over'. As human beings we have a tendency to place limits on the grace of God. We act as if it isn't sufficient for all sin. We act as if God's grace is NOT boundless. The end result of that, if we have committed one of those sins, is that we feel that our sin is too deep for God's grace to reach. We feel defeated and we give up. I did that.

I believe that the sins we struggle applying God's grace to the most are those that affect others on an ongoing basis. For example: The murderer may feel that they could never be forgiven because the person(s) they murdered stays dead and their family has lost a loved one for forever. The abortionist may feel that they could

never become a Christian because they have taken the lives of children who never had a chance to live their life. The rapist may struggle in this area because their sin has changed the psyche and emotional health of another person.

Divorce is another. I had been taught that by being divorced and remarried I could still be a Christian but not fulfil the call of God on my life. (God's grace was sufficient, but with limitations). The pain that this doctrine of grace caused me was excruciating and made church one of the most difficult places for me to be. It wasn't at all that I had a need to be in the spotlight, but I had a call on my life that could not be filled. That never went away.

Certainly, our sin affects those around us; some more than others, and some in greater ways than others. We need to ask forgiveness from those people. We need to do what we can to foster healing and positivity. We must pray for, and trust God to meet the needs of those people as well.

Here is what YOU need to know. It doesn't matter what you have done. It doesn't matter how big or small your sin is. It just doesn't matter. God's grace abounds! It is not sufficient grace; it is abounding grace. It is more than is needed to cover your sin if you come to God with sincere repentance. The ocean of God's grace is deeper than you could possibly imagine, and it is

an ocean that overflows with love.

We can't underestimate the scriptural teaching about the sea of God's forgetfulness (**Micah 7:19**), or that our sin is cast as far as the east is from the west (**Psalms 103:12-14**). At the point of sincere repentance, we start fresh in the mind of God. Everything is new. He looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ. He doesn't see our past failures. He sees our life as it is now and wants to bless it. Because of God's grace He forgets our past and blesses our present.

If there is unrepented sin in your life, the ocean of God's grace is behind you. You have to turn around to get to it. You can't keep going the same direction that you are going and expect to get where God's grace is. You can't expect to keep doing the things that you are doing and have grace applied to your life. To get to the reservoir of God's grace you must turn around and go the opposite direction from the direction that has led you into sin. That's the repentance that we already spoke of.

Let me tell you something. If you continue in your sin, you will never get to the ocean of God's grace. If you are divorced, I encourage you to stop in your tracks and determine what your part was in the breakdown of your former marriage. If you find anything, it is to your advantage to acknowledge it, confess it, and repent of it. If you are remarried, you

don't want to carry that behaviour into your present marriage, nor do you want it to impact your relationship with God

You cannot walk in sin and grace at the same time. But, there is no sin strong enough to keep grace out when repentance is sincere. Remember? The Apostle Paul was speaking of grace to the Romans when he said: *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (**Romans 6:1, NIV**). Jesus said: *"...unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (**Luke 13:3, NIV**)

Also, there is something you need to know and understand. Sin has consequence. Divorce has consequence. Because of Moses' disobedience he could not enter the Promised Land. Because of David's sin with Bathsheba, he lost a child, and there was ongoing strife in his family. But let's not forget that the Israelites still got to the land of promise because of Moses' leadership, and David also had a son by the name of Solomon, who fulfilled David's dream to build a temple to the Lord in Jerusalem. There were present-life consequences, but boundless grace simultaneously.

For me personally, there have been consequences. Despite God's boundless grace it has affected some relationships with family and friends. It's bigger than that, but there is no need to go into all of the

details.

When we step into the sea of God's grace, in heaven there is no record of our sin anymore and God will do an amazing work of restoration in your life. But, understand that as long as you are on earth there may still be consequences. We need to be okay with that!! We also need to accept that not everyone around us is as gracious as God is. Not everyone understands the enormity of God's grace.

CONCLUSION

If you need to experience God's boundless grace today it doesn't matter what you have done or what you are doing. It doesn't matter how big or how small your sin is, or was. God's grace is there for you, you just need to turn around and step into it. Start by asking for God's forgiveness and turn away from that sin. Follow up by asking forgiveness from those you have hurt.

No matter what your sin was, even divorce and remarriage, there may be consequences; but you can still walk in the freedom God's grace gives. Walk in the abundance of life it provides and let it overflow your life with God's goodness so that His grace and goodness can touch the lives of others through you.