

What is the time frame for a divorced person to remarry, especially if that person's former spouse has not remarried?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, Mark 10:11-12, Matthew 5:23-24, 1 Corinthians 7:39

Code: QA513

The answer is a critical one because many people are in the category of the divorced, regardless of how that divorce occurred. The first place to go in Scripture in answering this question is where the apostle Paul says: "To the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (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" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Although this passage is speaking to the fact of a divorce, not the time frame, it does give us a most important word on remarriage.

Remember, remarriage is permitted for the faithful partner when the divorce was on biblical grounds. So those Christians who divorce because of unrepentant sexual sin by their spouse are allowed by God to marry another believer (Matthew 5:32; 19:9), as are those who have been forsaken by an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:15). Those who divorce on any other grounds have sinned against God and their partners, and for them to marry another is an act of "adultery" (Mark 10:11-12).

That is why Paul says that a believing woman who sinfully divorces should "remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If she repents from her sin of unbiblical divorce, the true fruits of that repentance would be to seek reconciliation with her former husband (Matthew 5:23-24). The same is true for a man who divorces unbiblically (1 Corinthians 7:11). The only time such a person could remarry another is if the former spouse remarries, proves to be an unbeliever, or dies, in which cases reconciliation would no longer be possible.

The Bible also gives a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds and there is still a responsibility to reconcile, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer (Mark 10:11-12).

The key to answering this question in any particular case is to ascertain if the divorced person has had a *biblically allowable divorce*. If they have, then they are free at any time to remarry, but only "in the Lord" (see 1 Corinthians 7:39). This is the only person who is free to remarry. If someone has unbiblically divorced their spouse, they may not remarry, but rather should seek to be reconciled to their former spouse.

If, on the other hand, an innocent spouse has had a divorce initiated against them, they must seek the wisdom of the elders in determining their present and future marital status. Some elders/leaders could determine, upon the evaluation of an individual's situation, whether the innocent party is free to remarry. The all-important factor is the elders' examination of each case and their biblical wisdom on the matter.

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