

“Should a Husband Divorce His Unfaithful Wife?”

Hi, Greetings in Jesus name, I would like to know what the Bible teaches about when a wife is having sex with other men. What should the husband do in this case—should he divorce her and remarry? Will that be a sin in the sight of God according to the Bible?

Wow. There’s a lot of pain and anger connected to the situation that would result in asking this question! I’m sorry.

I do realize that some women are driven by such relational and sexual brokenness that their pathological pursuit of sexual partners outside the marriage indicates something is terribly wrong and needs attention. Telling such a woman, “Stop it!” will not have much of an impact. There’s much more going on.

But because God created women to be so relational, and because we long for safety and security in our relationships, if a wife is having sex with other men, that is not the norm. Something is driving her to do that, and I would want to know what it is. Since the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31), we need to pass your question through the filter of love: what is the most loving response to this situation?

Because I am a wife, and because I know how much my heart, like most other women, longs to be loved and respected and cherished by my husband, my question is, “Why is this lady going outside her marriage for sex?” I wonder how her husband is treating her. A woman who feels cherished and respected and valued by her husband usually does not have any interest in going to other men for attention, affection and affirmation.

There is obviously conflict here, and the Bible instructs us how to resolve conflict in God-honoring and people-honoring ways. First, it is always up to us to examine ourselves for our role in the conflict. “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3) So I would counsel the husband to ask himself, “What have I done to drive my wife to the arms of other men? Have I loved her as Christ loves the church, sacrificially? What part have my attitudes and choices played in what my wife has done?” Since there is a good chance that he has a blind spot about this, it would be wise to ask others who know the couple for their honest input: “Have you seen anything in me that is less than loving and kind toward my wife?” Whatever the answer is, the husband needs to acknowledge it, confess it to his wife, and ask her forgiveness—as well as change his ways of relating to her.

The next step of biblical conflict resolution is to talk to the other person in private. “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matt 18:15). This would mean a private husband-wife conversation where the husband talks to his wife about her sin, leading off with taking responsibility for any part he has played. It would be appropriate to share how her choices have deeply hurt him and ask her to stop and repent of her sin.

The third step, if the offender will not repent, is to escalate the conflict to involve others. “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed” (Matthew 18:16). This would mean bringing the situation into the light with others who are “doing life” with the couple.

The fourth step is to broaden the scope of the conflict to the larger community. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17).

If a husband has gone through all the steps of godly, biblical conflict resolution, and his wife is still hard-hearted and will not repent, then he does have the option of divorcing her. Jesus did give that option, but note the role of hard hearts in His teaching on divorce: "He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery'" (Matthew 19:8-9). I find it interesting in view of your question about a man possibly divorcing his wife, that Jesus ascribes hard-heartedness to the men seeking divorce. Of course some women are hard-hearted and unrepentant, but I'd be interested in asking the unfaithful wife, "Why are you doing this? Tell me about your relationship with your husband. Do you feel safe, secure, respected and loved? Do his eyes light up when you enter a room? Do you feel God's love for you through your husband? What are you looking for in other men that you're not getting from your husband?"

Finally, you asked about remarriage. According to the Matthew 19 passage, it does appear that a husband whose wife was unfaithful has the freedom in the Lord to remarry without it being adultery for him. But I earnestly want to impress on you that what would far more please and glorify God is to find the reasons for the broken relationship and repair it with the glue of grace and forgiveness. Ephesians 5:9-10 exhorts us to "live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord." Reconciliation pleases the Lord, and that is far more important than what a spouse is technically allowed to do in the wake of unfaithfulness.

I hope you find this helpful.

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