

The Permanency of Marriage gives the reader an understanding of what the Bible says about marriage, family, and divorce using past/present research, quotes from early church leaders, arguments justifying divorce, and other issues.

The Permanency of Marriage
By Michael G. Berner

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A romantic wedding scene featuring a bride and groom in a field of autumn leaves. The bride is wearing a white strapless gown and holding a bouquet of flowers, while the groom is in a dark suit. They are standing close together, about to kiss. The background is a soft-focus field of golden and orange autumn foliage, with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm, bokeh effect.

MICHAEL G. BERNER

*The
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Foreword

Second Timothy 2:15: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

This verse has been a driving force in my life since I earned a Bible college degree in 1973. The imperative to study, to rightly understand the word of truth in order to be approved of God in everyday events and decisions, was furthered as I earned a seminary degree. However, applying this verse to marriage and divorce was a process that began as I watched my pastors and teachers change their position from “Divorce is wrong” to “God allows divorce for specific situations.” If God’s character never changes, how can divorce go from wrong to right? “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). “The Father of Lights (God), with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). If God’s counsel never changes, how can divorce go from wrong to acceptable? “The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11). “There are many devices in a man’s heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov. 19:21). If God’s Word never changes, how can divorce go from wrong to beneficial? “The word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isa. 40:8).

In a Bible college class on marriage and family counseling, I first attempted to understand this issue. A few years later, the issue of divorce and remarriage surfaced in the life of a very close personal friend. The need for a biblical response was now immediate. Later, this issue surfaced in my immediate family. The research intensified. With my own marriage approaching, my need to know was immensely personal. When my wife obtained her divorce, finding God’s answers became a necessity! I had to know exactly what God expected of me regardless of what family, friends, religious leaders, and literature said.

As I continued my personal study, I noticed a tendency to slant one’s presentation toward the author’s predetermined outcome. Those advocating a “scriptural” basis for divorce and for divorce and remarriage used the same chapters and verses, with slight differences,

to support their position. Those advocating a biblical position of no divorce and no remarriage used a set collection of chapters and verses to defend their position. I also noticed that both groups ignored verses that did not fit their chosen practice (see Appendix C for examples). To gain an understanding of each side, I began listing each and every passage referred to by every author and every speaker. Simultaneously, I listed commands and principles that had a bearing on marriage, on divorce, and on remarriage.

What follows is the result of my study. My study was initially done for my own life. How did God want me to live? How did God want my life to influence my children, nieces, and nephews? How did God want my life to impact my friends, my coworkers, my church, and my society? Most importantly, how did God want my life to reflect on His character and on His message of love and salvation?

After all, Ephesians 5:31–32 say, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and *they two shall be one flesh*. This is a great mystery, but *I speak concerning Christ and the Church*.”

My marriage pictures Christ’s relationship to every Church member. My marriage either enhances the Church or my marriage helps destroy the Church. My marriage either enhances the cause of Christ or my marriage helps destroy the cause of Christ.

I wish I could claim with certainty that this book exhausts everything God says on this topic. I can only say that it is as complete as I can make it.

This is a study, not an entertaining read. I hope you will read every reference for yourself. Each biblical reference is discussed in detail as it relates to marriage and as it relates to divorce. Therefore, there will be content repetition. All bolding, underlining, and italics are mine unless otherwise noted. All verses are from the King James Bible unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31–32). Based on these verses, our marriages picture Christ’s relationship to every Church member. Our marriages either enhance or harm the cause of Christ. Since our marriages are an object lesson of how God relates to each of us, we need to know why God wants a relationship with us.

God desires a relationship with us because He created us. Just like you and I want a lifelong relationship with the children we conceive, God wants a relationship with the children He made. Our relationship with our children can be damaged, limited, and even ended by our choices, by the actions of one parent, by the desires of the child, or by circumstances beyond our control. Just so, God’s relationship with us can be harmed by our choices, by our actions, by our desires. Circumstances are never beyond God’s control.

You and I desire a relationship with our children because we love them. We start loving them when we, as husband and wife, begin planning the child’s conception. Yes, children are born “unplanned.” As husbands and wives, we are sometimes “surprised” by the unexpected child. But how quickly does surprise turn to love and expectation? We start loving our children even before they are born. We love them before they are able to love us. We love our children even when they hurt us. We love them even if they reject us.

Just so, “We love Him (God), because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). How does God love us? As the Bible describes it, *love is doing what is best for the one loved regardless of what it costs us. Love is an act of the will.* Love affects our emotions, but love is not our emotions. We can choose to love even as God loves us. God tells us there is nothing lovable about our attitudes and actions (Rom. 3:10–12; 7:18). Yet, God chooses to love us, and through Christ, we are now acceptable (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10–11; Eph. 1:6).

This book is not written for the casual reader. This is a study, not an entertaining read. I encourage you to read every biblical reference for yourself. Each passage is discussed as if it were the only passage on marriage or divorce in the Bible. Each biblical reference is discussed in detail as it relates to marriage, as it relates to divorce, and as it relates remarriage. There will be content repetition. Unless otherwise noted, all references are from the King James Version.

Rules for Interpreting Scripture

- First mention: this is the foundational rule of interpretation. It states that God expresses His will the *first* time He mentions something in scripture. Later references expand, explain, and clarify the first mention. Later references *never contradict* God's original statement. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). God performed the first wedding/marriage (Gen. 2:22). God says marriage is a lifelong relationship (Gen. 2:24).
- God *never* contradicts His character or changes His standards and principles of morality. The book of Revelation never contradicts Genesis. The book of James never contradicts Micah. Micah never contradicts Revelation, Genesis, or any other book. God says, "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Marriage is a moral issue. Marriage involves promises, vows, and commitments. Breaking any of these is lying. Sex with anyone but our spouse is adultery.
- Difficult passages are interpreted in light of clear and easy-to-understand passages. Obeying this rule keeps scripture consistent within itself and keeps my personal desires from becoming "scripture."
- Keep interpretation consistent within the context. Context is in three parts: the context of the immediate chapter and verse, the context within the book of the Bible, and the context of all scripture. The book of Revelation never contradicts Genesis. The book of James never contradicts Joshua.
- Do not ignore verses, which will not give you your desired conclusion.

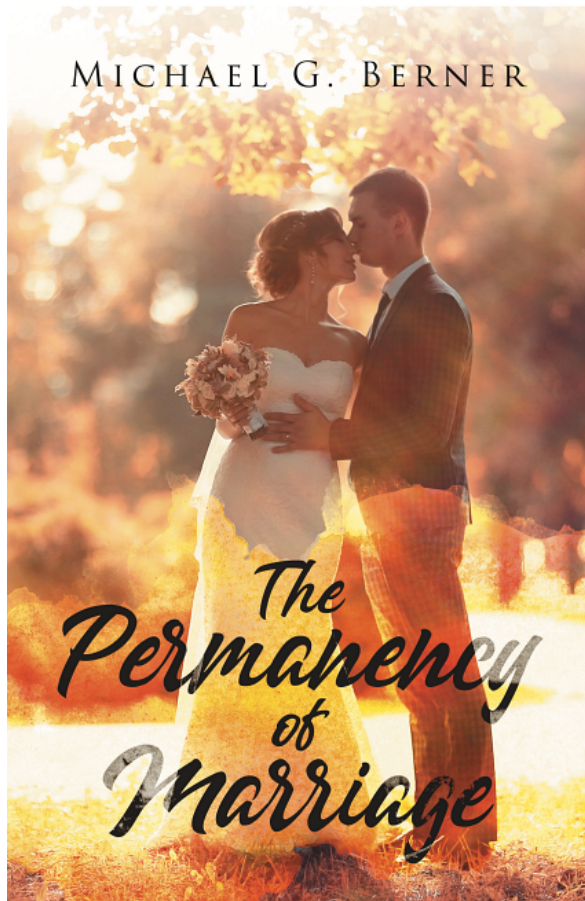
- Study the consequences. If the consequences lead to more godly living, the actions, desires, etc. are acceptable. If the consequences lead to less godly behavior, desires, etc. the behavior is unacceptable.

Let's look at what the Bible says about marriage, about divorce, and about remarriage while our first, second, third, or whichever husband or wife is still living. Let's do this in biblical order, starting in Genesis and going sequentially through the Bible.

When reading any book (including this one) on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, pay close attention to the verses the author does not mention (see Appendix C).

As Bible study teacher Tom Baugh said, "If it does not line up with all scripture, it is not Christian." Let's see what all scripture says about marriage. Let's see what all scripture says about divorce.

Note: During the review and revision process, negative comments came mainly from those who had not read the entire book. Making comments (positive or negative) without reading the entire book does not seem right—whether it is this book or any other publication. When someone comments on this book, please ask if they have read the entire book.



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