

THOUGHTS ON INFIDELITY, DIVORCE, AND RECONCILIATION IN MARRIAGE

1. Vows should not be broken: “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you” (Deut 23:21). “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:5).
2. God hates divorce: “‘For I hate divorce,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel” (Malachi 2:16a).
3. Divorce is permissible in cases of sexual immorality: “‘Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’ They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ 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 19:6–9). Note three things: (1) divorce is an admission of hardness of heart; (2) the Greek word *pornia*, translated “immorality,” is broader than adultery—it includes all kinds of sexual immorality such as homosexuality, lesbianism, and sodomy, and (3) many interpreters do not think there is an “exception clause” (“except for immorality”) because the Greek expression is rare. I believe in the exception clause.
4. Treat the offending party in grace and give him or her time to repent before administering discipline: “But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds” (Revelation 2:20–22).
5. The offending party must repent in order to be forgiven: “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). Notice that forgiveness is not automatic, but is conditioned upon repentance (a change of mind and hopefully behavior). No repentance, no forgiveness. Forgiveness is, however, unlimited: “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Luke 17:4).
6. Reconciliation is always preferable to separation: “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away” (1 Corinthians 7:10–11).
7. Patience and forbearance are virtues—fruit of the Spirit: “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God” (1 Peter 2:20). “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). “...in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (Romans 3:25b). “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression” (Proverbs 19:11). “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).
8. No moral sin is committed in being married to an unfaithful partner—not even to a prostitute: God ordered Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife (Hosea 1:2–3), who later became a slave, and, after proving to be unfaithful, Hosea was instructed to take her back (3:1–2). This was an object lesson of God’s love for unfaithful Israel.
9. Put the needs of others before your own: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3–4). Kids need a mom or a dad. Factor them into the equation before making your decision.
10. Follow the example of Jesus: Jesus disciplines but never divorces his bride, the Church, no matter how unfaithful she becomes (Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 19:7).