

# Why divorce is a good thing



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We owe all the wonderful aspects of modern marriage to one thing: divorce. You will hear just the opposite, of course. Religious fundamentalists and politicians will tell you that divorce is crumbling our society, ruining children's lives, and weakening the moral character of the nation. Don't listen to them. They know perfectly well why divorce is a good thing, they just don't want you to ever find out.

Divorce means choice. Divorce means that two people do not have to remain bound to each other until the grave, as society dictated until the 20th century. Divorce means that human beings can determine the path their life will take. And at its very root, divorce provides for that most crucial, most valuable of human experiences: happiness.

Divorce is also the great equalizer, and the hallmark of a truly advanced society in terms of women's rights. No woman can ever claim to feel "like property" or "subjugated by men" where there are equitable divorce laws in place. When we look back at ancient civilizations, the ones that stand out are the ones like ancient Egypt which provided equitable treatment for women and the accessibility of divorce as a way to end a legal marriage. Even in the modern world, the best countries for women are those that allow them to divorce freely and without social stigma.

But the freedom to live your life how you please, without affecting how others live theirs, is something that a great number of people don't want you to have. Religions in particular seem devoted to making sure that you don't live how you please, that your every action is analyzed and criticized and ultimately judged. Whether it's a stern and moralistic God or a harsh and

judgmental society you claim as your higher power, be aware that both of them have one central belief at their core: personal happiness is bad, and personal choice is worse.

The Catholic Church, for example, maintains that if you marry someone while your first spouse is still alive, you are committing adultery and will go to Hell. You are not allowed to put aside one spouse and find another, no matter what the reason. They don't like the idea of your having sex with more than one person in your life, even if you want to marry each person that you have it with.

Or do they?

If your spouse dies they have put no such hex on you. Widows and widowers are given the full blessing of the church to marry again. The limit seems to be three marriages, although I'm not sure how stringently this rule is applied. It may be that the widowed are allowed marrying as often as they wish. But even if the church absolutely forbids a widowed person from re-marrying more than twice, it still means that the church would rather sanction you're having sexual relations with three people in your life, rather than let you be married to two if the first one is merely divorced from you.

It's adultery and fornication if you divorce one spouse and remarry even once, but legitimate carnal relations if you marry three times because the other two died. This can't possibly indicate a desire to limit the number of sexual partners you have, or to stamp out the " sin" of sex.

I couldn't understand this breach in logic. As much as I disagree with the premise, if you're going to claim that all sex outside the bonds of your first marriage is sinful, then surely you have to call the widowed "fornicators" too, as much as the divorced are. But the church doesn't. And for years, neither did the public at large. Widowed people were pitied but respected. Divorced people caused scandal, were looked down upon by "respectable people", were shunned and considered morally bankrupt.

Now I know why.

It's a question of choice, of volition, a unique human quality.

The church, and society, simply wouldn't allow you to exercise your volition beyond that first choice of partner you made... a choice, by the way, that was often made for you by your parents and had nothing to do with what you wanted. Nothing would justify wanting to make another choice later in life. Only God could do that, it seems. If God took your partner away from you, you had no choice in that, and therefore, you were allowed to choose again. If God decided to take that spouse from you too, that wasn't your choice either. As long as you yourself weren't thinking and choosing and making your own decisions about your life, the church would be lenient on you. The minute you decided to affect change in your own life, to undo something you regretted doing or something that no longer served a purpose in your life, you were branded a "sinner".

So for centuries, miserably married people could only find freedom in the grave. Many people killed their mates to be free of them. It was not uncommon for aristocrats, attempting to climb the social ladder, to arrange

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for their no-longer-advantageous spouses to fall down stairs or eat poisoned meat so that they, the aristocrats, could marry someone higher up in the echelon of the nobility. For those without the stomach for murder, there was no option. There may have been unofficial separations as there are today, but the medieval mind was so accustomed to accepting discomfort and sacrifice that most unhappily married people stayed together because they felt it was their lot in life to suffer. It's a sentiment that carried through to our grandparents, and even our parents to some extent, many of whom lived out lives of unhappiness and dissatisfaction, bound for life to someone that contributed to the misery of their life, all under the guise of respecting the "sanctity" of wedlock.

It was only when people started believing that their happiness was more important than a vow to God, that they had choice in life and were free to make choices responsibly, that marriage was a voluntary, mutually agreed upon partnership of respect and love that could dissolve if that love and respect disappeared...it was only then that people started seeing marriage as an expression of joy and started enjoying the marriages they had.

There is nothing sacred about a loveless marriage. What's sacred is having the freedom to enjoy the best kind of marriage possible, the kind freely entered into by two people who understand that it could end if they neglect or abuse their partner, or that it could last a lifetime if they both want it to. What's sacred is knowing that a satisfying, happy marriage is always possible, no matter who you find yourself with at the moment or how many times you've tried to make it work and failed. What's sacred is saying to yourself, and your children, that happiness in love is a crucial component of

a healthy life, that sacrificing that happiness for some fuzzy morality is an insult to the human mind.

People who divorce and remarry respect the institution of marriage, and respect themselves. As difficult as divorce may be, as painful and unpleasant as it may be, it is necessary to preserve the essential beauty of marriage.

People are much more likely to respect and honor each other, to stay in love, when they know that if they don't earn their partners' love and admiration, constantly, their marriage could end. People who are bound, inextricably, to each other for life have no incentive to be good to each other.

### Children and Divorce

But what about the children?

It's a cry we hear constantly, in protest against everything from adult sites on the internet to garbage dumps to government cutbacks. Future generations, it seems, are far, far more important than this one. But I digress. I will discuss the issue of children and their relationship to marriage in a later page.

Yes, children are often hurt by divorce. Yes, it can be painful for a child to see his parents split up. But I believe it is far more damaging for an adult to have grown up in a household where love has disappeared from his parents' marriage, and therefore the only experience he has with it is that it's a doomed institution, a miserable partnership, something he never expects will give him joy.

One of the biggest mistakes parents make in child rearing is in putting their marriage last. It is imperative that you put your marriage first, not only for yourselves, but also for your children. Show your children what a marriage is, what they can expect and look forward to when they grow up. Show them a couple who are deeply in love and committed to each other, show them a man and woman enjoying being in love, respecting each other, living with each other, loving each other. If they see this, they will want and expect this for themselves. They will know what a good relationship is, and won't get drawn into bad ones.

So what happens if you aren't that blissful couple? What happens if you don't love each other, if your marriage isn't good? Then is that something you want your children to emulate? Even if your partner is the best parent in the world, it will do your child a great disservice if the two of you fight and hurt each other and then turn around and behave sweetly to your child. It will make your child feel uncomfortable, like they are somehow usurping love from one of their parents. Children plainly understand that their parents are supposed to be in love. It's what assures them that when they grow up they'll be in love as well. If you don't have a loving model to show your children, you are doing them no favors by staying married. Divorce. Separate yourselves from each other, and continue to be good, if separate, parents. Marry again, choosing carefully, so that your children can see that it's alright to want happiness for yourself and to go after it. Show them it's alright to leave one marriage if it's bad and start another one that's better. Give them some idea of what to expect for their own happiness in the future.

Divorce isn't easy. And naturally a happy marriage is preferable to divorce any day. I don't blame anyone for being afraid of divorce or for not wanting their marriage to end. But if we really want to understand what makes free, unfettered, romantic marriage possible, we have to embrace that which makes it possible, and give it the quiet respect it deserves.