

# Marriage and Divorce

Andy looked again at the official envelope on the kitchen table. He didn't need to open it to know what was in it. His final divorce papers were there in black and white. He was no longer married to Katie. He sighed, he'd been such a fool to throw it all away. Six years of marriage to a woman he thought was wonderful and all for a drunken one-night stand, (after a row with Katie), with a woman who didn't even bother to ask his name. What an idiot! He still loved Katie. He'd never meant to hurt her, but he knew that he'd hurt her desperately. He also knew that however much she'd once loved him and maybe even still loved him, the trust was gone and it was over and there on the table was the letter to prove it.

When he'd made his wedding vows six years ago he'd meant every single word. For better or worse, for richer or poorer, and of course to be faithful to Katie for ever. But he hadn't been faithful. Looking back he realised that there was never actually a moment when he'd decided to be unfaithful. Clichéd though it sounded, it had 'just happened'. He'd had a stressful couple of weeks at work and he and Katie had had a stupid fight about something so stupid and insignificant he couldn't even remember how it had started. But he certainly remembered how it had finished. He'd said some childish, hurtful things to Katie and then he'd stormed out of the house in a temper. For a while he'd paced the streets in anger and then he'd decided to go for a drink. He went to the nearest pub and ordered a whisky and then another . . . He was aware of an attractive woman sitting next to him at the bar and after a while they started talking. She was sympathetic and friendly. She was all the things that Katie hadn't been when he'd stormed out of the house. And so, he'd thrown away his marriage for a one-night stand.

At first he'd thought he would get away with it. He got home in the early hours of the morning and went to bed. The next day he apologised to Katie about the row and at first it seemed like things would be OK. But he couldn't relax, he felt so guilty, he sensed that she could feel something was wrong and somehow five days later she'd stumbled upon the truth. He never did find out how, lipstick on

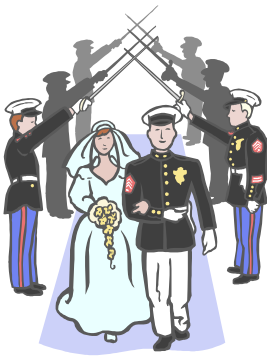
his collar, perfume, a lost earring, a word from someone who'd seen him in the pub. Maybe it was just intuition, but somehow she knew and one day she confronted him. She didn't get emotional, she didn't scream and shout, she simply asked him. Andy had been so shocked at the direct question that he'd given himself away without saying a word, the guilt had been written all over his face. Katie, surprisingly, had remained calm, she'd told him that she was going out for a couple of hours and that by the time she came back she wanted him to have packed his bags and gone. And that was that. No more trust, no more marriage. He'd never regretted anything so much in his life. Six years ago, it had all looked so promising and so good and now.....Andy reached slowly for the envelope on the table and thought about life without Katie.



- 1) List ten qualities that you would hope to find in a marriage (or long term) partner.  
Pick the three qualities that you think would be the most important and explain why you would hope to find them in your partner.
- 2) “People think too much about the wedding and not enough about the marriage” How far do you agree with this statement? Explain why.
- 3) Make a list of reasons why you think marriages/partnerships break up. What do you think are the differences between marriage break up and the break up of a long term partnership?
- 4) Some people:
  - disagree with divorce
  - think a divorce should be easier to obtain
  - think a divorce should be more difficult to obtainWhat do you think and why?
- 5) Why do you think Katie ended the marriage after Andy had the affair? Do you think she should have given him another chance? Consider what Katie might have been thinking. What were her alternatives? Write an alternative ending to the story from the point where Andy admitted he’d been unfaithful.

- 6) Could forgiveness have played a part in this story? What does real forgiveness involve? Two people are involved in forgiveness. What does each one have to do to enable the relationship to be healed?

## Activity



In groups design your own marriage ceremony. If you are not religious, do not make it a religious ceremony.

Think about who will take the ceremony, where it will be, what will be said, and the promises made.



Try and think of some original symbols that may be used.

## A Christian Perspective on Marriage and Divorce

Christians believe that marriage is very important for several reasons.

- It is the primary way that God intended men and women to relate to each other
- It is the context God intended for sexual relationships
- It provides lifelong companionship
- It is a secure environment for bringing up children

“The Lord God said ‘it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ . . . For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

Genesis 2:18&24

Christians believe that a marriage relationship is holy (very special) and that no one should come between the relationship of a husband and wife.

In a marriage ceremony the bride and groom make promises in front of witnesses and before God, and Christians believe that these promises should be honoured. Christians recognise in these promises, or vows, that married life will not always be easy (better **or** worse, richer **or poorer**, **sickness** and health), but they are made for a lifetime. Marriage is a lifetime commitment and for this reason, many Christians do not look favourably on divorce.

The Church of England will allow divorce in some circumstances, such as adultery and abuse. Simply ‘not getting along’ is not sufficient reason for a divorce. The couple would be encouraged to stay together and work things out, perhaps with the help of the priest, or a marriage counsellor.

The Roman Catholic Church does not allow divorce. The only way a Catholic Christian can end a marriage is to have it ‘annulled’. This is not the same as a divorce. An annulment cancels out the marriage and declares that for one reason or another it never actually counted as a marriage in the first place.

A marriage may be annulled in the following circumstances:

- You can prove that one, or both, of the partners was forced into the marriage against their will
- One of the partners was already married (bigamy)
- When the marriage took place one of the partners was not aware of what they were doing
- If somebody is unable to carry out their duties as husband, or wife. For example if they were mentally ill
- If it can be proved that at the time of the marriage, one of the partners had no intention of having children



Not all churches will allow a divorced person to remarry in church. If a couple is married in a civil ceremony they may have a blessing service in a church, where they make promises and prayers are said for the marriage.



## Things to talk about

- 1) Many people like to get married in a church even though they are not religious. Why do you think this is?
- 2) Everyone has the equal right to get married in their local parish church. Some people think that this right should only be given to regular church-goers as a marriage service is a religious ceremony, where the couple make promises to each other before God. What do you think?
- 3) “The idea of one partner for life is unnatural”  
How far do you agree with this statement?
- 4) Is it too easy to get a divorce? What do you think the minimum time should be before a couple can get a divorce? Explain why.
- 5) Make a list of all the people who can be affected when a couple divorce.

All marriages have difficulties to a greater or lesser degree. Yet most marriages don't end in divorce. What action can a couple take if they are experiencing marital difficulties?

## Personal Perspectives on Marriage and Divorce



“Difficulties in marriage are not proof that love and commitment no longer exist, but are an opportunity to test the capacity the couple have to develop and grow. Many marriages which end in divorce need not do so and with appropriate support and counselling could grow and thrive . . . however, there may be circumstances under which it is legitimate for a woman to leave her husband if that is the only way that she and/or her children can escape persistent physical violence.”

*Rt Rev Michael Langrish, Bishop of Exeter*

“Marriage in the Catholic Church is a lifelong covenant and so we do not have a divorce like the legal system does, as our view of marriage is that it isn't a legal contract, but a solemn bonding between two people. If someone is being abused, then the best thing would be to remove the possibility of this happening again. This may mean that the couple would have to split up, or work through the situation in another way, with perhaps the support of counsellors and/or the law, but they wouldn't be allowed to marry again, as they are already married.”

*Paul Cummins RC Priest*

