

“Dealing with Divorce” Part 3, Matthew 19:1-12, Sermon Notes
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“When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan;² and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.³ *Some* Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”⁴ And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,⁵ and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’?⁶ “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”⁷ They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?”⁸ 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.⁹ “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”¹¹ But He said to them, “Not all men *can* accept this statement, but *only* those to whom it has been given.¹² “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are *also* eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept *it*.” (Matt. 19:1-12 NAU)

Introduction

We now come to our concluding look on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage

We have been looking carefully at this subject seeking to uncover Jesus’ teaching on the matter

What we must walk away with at this point is, first, a high view of marriage

1. Marriage is God’s design
2. It is an institution that God upholds and seeks to protect
3. Marriage is designed for a man and woman to come together before God and join as one
4. They leave Father and Mother and they unite as one until death do them part

This view of marriage was a stark contrast to the practice and customs during Jesus life and ministry

- During this time divorce was easy

We said when we started this series that there were four possible views of marriage, divorce and remarriage

1. No divorce and no remarriage at all
2. Divorce but no remarriage at all, only reconciliation with the divorced spouse
3. Divorce and remarriage under limited circumstances
4. Divorce and remarriage under any circumstance

We here at SGBC operate under views 2 and 3 depending on the details and circumstances. marriage, divorce, and remarriage under limited circumstances

At this time the Pharisees operated under view 4

- Divorce and remarriage under any circumstance
- They may argue for limitations but the net application allowed for any reason

After Jesus challenged their view with a high view of marriage the Pharisees pressed Jesus as to why Moses commanded divorce

Jesus responded in verses 8-9 to their poor interpretation with two corrections and a warning

1. Correction 1: God never commanded divorce through Moses but rather permitted it

Divorce is always an act of gracious provision on God's part

- This is shocking for people to think about because they see divorce as only evil
- And indeed, divorce has devastating effects on families
- People tired with their spouse and wanting a new one, seek divorce for their own good
- And certainly, this is what it became for the Pharisees and even for many evangelicals today. BUT this is not God's design
- Divorce rather was permitted

This is important because one could ask if we counsel divorce and my answer is no.

- We do not counsel divorce. We counsel repentance, we counsel confession; we counsel forgiveness
- We actively seek to protect marriages

So then do we not allow divorce? NO that is not true either

- Like Jesus and Moses before him we permit divorce under limited circumstances
- Specifically, Moral or Physical Abandonment

My point is that we do not actively encourage it but we will support the innocent party

- The role of the church is to 1) Protect marriages
- 2) Warn sinners
- 3) Guard the truth by clarifying it and supporting it
 - By this I mean when a marriage is falling apart, leaders in the Church should be involved confronting sin and affirming the facts so that they can properly affirm who the innocent and guilty parties are
 - At the same time the leadership of the Church should be making it clear what the way of righteousness looks like for both parties
 - People who are seeking to honor God will seek to do whatever it takes to honor God in their life and marriage

Divorce was permitted and we certainly do not see anything in this context, or any other, stating otherwise

BTW if view 1 was the view Jesus taught, this would have been a perfect time for Jesus to clear up matters. No divorce at all. Moses messed up or Moses did not get it right. But Jesus does not change Moses at all. He simply clarifies Moses' instruction

2. Correct 2: Moses permitted Divorce because of hardness of heart

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. (Matt. 19:8 NAU)

Because of sin divorce exists. It always exists because of sin. Where there is no sin there is no divorce

- When a marriage is falling apart or has fallen apart sin has been at work in one or more parties
- Sometimes it is the fault of one party and at other times it is the fault of both parties and more

But their hardness of heart is at the root of the breakdown

- This means that sin must be confronted if marriages are going to be protected
- Where sin has gone unchecked in a marriage the foundation of marriage is being eroded
 - A wife nagging for a long time is eroding the foundation of a marriage
 - A husband aloof from teaching or engaging his family is eroding the foundation of marriage
 - Pride, lust, self-will, selfishness, anger, covetousness, etc., kill a marriage
 - Enough carnality overtime will kill any healthy marriage

When hardness of heart is at work, the life of a healthy marriage is being choked out and the peaceful fruit of righteousness and peace in the home are withering away

Some claim the problem with families in the Church is the allowance of divorce and we should not allow divorce

- The idea is that easy divorce is the problem. That is simply not the case. Even the text here says that. Easy divorce is the symptom of the problem of hardness of hearts because of sin
- Where sin is confronted and addressed faithfully, divorce among God's people is nearly non-existent at best and significantly limited at worse
 - Confronting sin is the grace which preserves and protects families
- If the problem was divorce then we would be assuming that out of nowhere two people just randomly fell into divorce and that is what destroyed their family
- Or we would have to conclude that the fix to the sin problem is marriage. Two sinners must remain married to fix their sin problem

Sadly this is not the case. The fix is repentance. The fix is submission to the truth. The fix is living according to the new life in Christ and submitting to the grace of God

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age," (Tit. 2:11-12 NAU)

God has permitted divorce because sin is in the world. Because people fall short of obedience to God. Because people live in rebellion against God's demands, God allows divorce

This leads us to the warning Christ gave:

Divorce was permitted because of unfaithfulness. The indecency that Moses spoke of in Deut 24:1-4 was unfaithfulness to the marriage

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt. 19:9 NAU)

Here view 4 is obviously removed because Jesus limits the terms of divorce to immorality

- This is in this context the hardness of heart which ends a marriage
 - Now mind you it does not necessarily need to end a marriage
 - If infidelity takes place there can be repentance on the part of the sinning party and forgiveness on behalf of the innocent party and restoration can occur
 - But when unfaithfulness is unrepentant and persistent the innocent party is free to divorce and remarry

Again then, when divorce is allowed, it is an act of mercy and grace. Infidelity was the death penalty in the OT. If God allowed for divorce for infidelity he was delaying the punishment upon the sinner.

- This could only mean because God was being patient with the sinner to give them a chance to repent
- But as well it is His mercy to the innocent party

We have a duty and responsibility to reveal, protect, and encourage the innocent. This we do by confronting sin and upholding the truth. If we find an innocent party in a divorce, we affirm their innocence and support their remarriage if that is what they seek

- They are not bound to remarry
- But if they do they are free if they have been abandoned by the guilty party

This is the warning here that Christ gives. Divorce is allowed in the case of infidelity

You might say, well wait Jesus only says Adultery here, why do you say moral or physical abandonment?

- This is because other passages of Scripture, particularly 1 Cor 7, add more to the discussion.

If you were here Sunday night sorry for the bit of repeat here but let us look at 1 Cor 7:10-16 quickly:

1 Cor. 7:10-16

Gives 3 principles which guide and direct divorce and remarriage

First notice Paul speaks to four groups here

1st All people seeking marriage or in marriage 1-7

- He gives instruction about marriage

- God's design and the purpose of marriage

2nd Unmarried Believers 8-9

- Remain single
- But it is ok to marry

3rd Married Believers 10-11

- They are not to divorce but if they do, they are to remain single

4th 12-18 A Christian Married to an unbeliever 12-16

Now one more thing I want to point out here which has caused people confusion.

- Look at verse 10

“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband” (1 Cor. 7:10 NAU)

Now look at verse 12

“But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her” (1 Cor. 7:12 NAU)

Some have seen these two statements and wondered about authority

- So verse 10 are authoritative words because Jesus spoke them and verse 12 and following are not because Paul taught them is how some people have taught this section or believed
- They have placed Jesus vs Paul and have Paul's Word's as subservient to Christ's words

This is not the right way to view what is happening here. These two statements are not showing authoritative and non-authoritative passages

Why not? Are we now exalting the Apostle Paul to the same level as the Son of God? Are we idolizing Paul?

- No – Not at all
- First, remember this – Peter said

“for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21 NAU)

- Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to speak the truth
- Secondly, the words you are reading of Paul which he takes credit for writing are inspired by God. They are God breathed.

- BTW this is another good passage to point to when discussing inspiration and dual authorship as God never violates the human instrument to deliver His Word.
- Paul says these are my words and God says the same. All Scripture is breathed out by God 2 Tim 3:16
- Third, Paul was an Apostle and given authority to deliver the Word of God to the Church. Eph 2:20
- Fourth, You need to see this because it helps us understand our passage in Matthew 19, since the Holy Spirit Inspired the text the message is authoritative
 - This is why Jesus did not contradict Moses in Deut 24:1-4 but rather affirmed and clarified Moses intention
 - So too here Paul's Words are not contradicting Christ but only going to expand what Christ is saying

So then what is happening in verses 10 and 12? What is Paul doing by distinguishing between his words and the words of Christ?

- If he is not saying that Jesus spoke authoritatively and I am adding my own uninspired thoughts here, then what is he doing?
- *Paul is telling us what was direct instruction from Christ and what he is adding to our Lord's instruction*

This is very helpful to us. Because in Paul's own Words he tells us what he believes Jesus taught. This summary is in verses 10-11

Now let us look at three principles or application of marriage and divorce brought out by Paul to round out our understanding of marriage, divorce, and remarriage

Principle 1: Two Christians can divorce and remain unmarried 1Cor 7:10-11 – View 2

1. Not that this is recommended as it opens up both parties to temptation
2. But if the wife cannot live with her husband and must divorce, she is free to divorce and remain unmarried
3. While many people ignore this principle because they think it is impossible to remain in this condition, I believe it is important to understand and observe this principle because in some cases where a spouse is living in an ungodly way in the marriage they should live under the threat that they could be permanently divorced with no hope of remarriage other to their own spouse again
 - a. I have counseled men who have been verbally abusive and micromanaging where the wife wanted out of the marriage and was willing to live the rest of her life alone and single rather than married. Needless to say when these guys, again are in Christ or at least claim to be, heard this was possible they started working at being godly in the home

Therefore based on this principle the “sin” in divorce is not the divorce itself otherwise verses 10 and 11 would be nullified as then Paul would be making allowance for sin

Also the assumption that once divorced no one is allowed to remarry at all no matter how they are divorced does not make sense in light of Paul saying that “if she does leave she is to remain unmarried.” The belief that once married I am never allowed to remarry again if I was divorced at all makes Paul's comments redundant. If the bible's assumption is once married

always married then Paul would not need to make the comment "she is to remain unmarried." The implication is that in a biblical divorce, just as in the case of the death of a spouse, the person is free to remarry in the Lord

Now what is interesting here, this is not exactly what Jesus says

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt. 19:9 NAU)

Now look, people want to argue that the divorce itself is wrong. But Matt 19:9 has two parts to the clause

1. He divorces his wife
2. AND he Marries another

Now that we see the two clauses, look at what Paul says again in 1 Cor 7:10

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, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (1 Cor. 7:10-11 NAU)

Here Paul says if you are going to fulfill clause 1 Divorce for any reason, and since he does not give any reason the implication is any reason at all, then the spouse is not free to remarry as then he would also be violating clause 2 and thus would commit adultery

- Not a state of being continually in adultery but will have committed adultery as he or she is not free to remarry

So then if two Christians are going to stubbornly press forward into divorce for any reason then they are to remain single for the rest of their lives or else be reconciled to each other

This again preserves and protects God's high view of marriage

- A union is not easily broken

Also the idea of "leave" not meaning divorce but only meaning literally "leaving" strains the context. Particularly verse 11 when it says she is to remain unmarried. *The idea that we are going to take the word "leave" as literal and not referring to divorce demands then that you take verse 11 and interpret "unmarried" as something other than literal.*

- You cannot take them both literally because then "leaving" IS being unmarried. "Unmarried" in verse 11 cannot be literal without making "leave" in verse 10 a euphemism for divorce. Which I believe is exactly what is happening in this context
- Paul is using "leave" as a euphemism for "divorce" and the context clearly bears this out
- The idea that we need to be woodenly literal in this text and interpret "leave" as meaning anything other than divorce exposes a bias because it cannot be reconciled with the immediate context of the passage

Principle 1: Two Christians can divorce but must remain single.

Principle 2: A Christian cannot divorce their spouse for being an unbeliever 1 Cor 7:12-14

- A statement like this has to be made because one might want to make the case that holiness allows for a Christian to push the unholy out of the home
- A believer cannot divorce someone simply because they are unequally yoked
- This is not to say they can get into a marriage where they are unequally yoked. It simply means they cannot get out of it for this reason

Principle 3: Let the unbeliever leave 1 Cor 7:15-16

- If the unbeliever departs from the marriage let them depart. We do not need to try to rescue them and keep them bound to the marriage
- Again depart is another euphemism for divorce
- The simplest expression of departing would be the unbeliever seeking a divorce and separating
- Obviously it is not always this simple at times, unbelievers may physically abandon the marriage without actually filing for divorce
 - In cases like this I believe the leaders of the Church should get involved to help seek reconciliation
 - To help expose the unbelief and departure of the party who left
 - To give clear direction to the believing party
 - Eventually to affirm when it is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that the unbeliever has departed and while has not actually filed for divorced has clearly divorced the party freeing the Christian to finalize legally what the unbeliever has practiced physically
- Also I think this idea of the unbeliever abandoning is the key to how immorality can be the basis for divorce Matt 19:9
 - Christians should be forgiving even if their spouse commits adultery
 - But if the spouse remains defiant and unbelieving in their adultery – ie have departed their marriage and went on to someone else – then the Christian is free to divorce and remarry in the Lord

So Paul continues and adds that abandonment is also a key to allowing divorce

- This abandonment may be a simple departure and unwillingness to reconcile
- OR it may be a sophisticated trail of deception, obfuscation, and manipulation that needs to be uncovered, documented, and confronted
 - This obviously takes more time and effort

Now turn back to Matthew 19 let us conclude this section by looking at the response of the disciples

Now again remember this: Jesus has significantly narrowed Divorce here. The Pharisees had taught free and quick divorce and Jesus taught divorce was allowed under very narrow circumstances

Notice the response of the Disciples

The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." Vs 10

Their response is that they should never get married then if this is what marriage is like

- Basically, this is another dull and weak moment for the disciples
- They had been influenced by a culture and theological teaching that diminished God's design in marriage and they were now concerned that they were going to be stuck in a difficult marriage if they were not allowed to divorce for any reason

Now look at our Lord's response:

"But He said to them, "Not all men *can* accept this statement, but *only* those to whom it has been given."

Now the question is what statement? The statement Jesus just made about divorce and remarriage? Or the statement the disciples just made about not getting married?

Some have concluded that His teaching on marriage and divorce was only for those who could receive it.

- Those who take a view 4 do not want any limitation to divorce
- This is not the case

The next verse in the context clarifies for us exactly which statement Christ had in mind

"For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are *also* eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept *it*." (Matt. 19:10-12 NAU)

There are a couple of observations that I want to make here:

First, the disciples complained that the standard Christ was too tight and none should marry if this is the case

- Christ's response is basically you guys are right and yet not everyone can handle this statement

He does not change the view at all. Instead He upholds God's high view of marriage

- Their burden over the truth was not a problem with the truth, it was a problem with their false views
- Their fears about being stuck in a relationship that was difficult was the problem

The second observation is an observation on singleness

"For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are *also* eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept *it*." (Matt. 19:12 NAU)

I want to encourage our single people here in this section. Some singles get to a point where they wonder if they are ever going to get married. They get worried that they will never find anyone. They wonder if God's will for their life is to never find someone to get married to

- *They say or believe something like this: "I am single and I don't want to be, but I am getting older and I have not found the right person, therefore maybe God does not want me to get married."*
- This idea grieves them because they desire to be married

Listen the desire to get married is not wrong and it is a sign that God will be gracious and supply

Look at the categories of singleness here: There are three

1. There are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb
 - a. There are those who have no desire for marriage and they are this way from birth
 - b. They have no appetite for the physical relationship of marriage
2. There are eunuchs who were made that way by men
 - a. There are those who are made this way
 - b. Castration or mutilation would take place in servants who worked in political, military, or governmental situations.
 - c. If a servant worked for royalty they would likely be made eunuchs in order to serve in the Kings courts
3. Then there are eunuchs who make themselves that way for the Kingdom of God
 - a. These choose to remain single in order to do God's Work

Listen then, if you are single and wondering what is God's plan for your life, ask yourself this question, am I in one of these categories?

1. No desire from birth?
2. Made to be single by the hands of others?
3. Desiring to commit yourself to the Kingdom of God

If you are not in those categories then God is not going to withhold any good thing from you.

- Keep faithful
- Seek the Lord
- Go to war with any remaining sin within. Crucify for your fears, unbelief, selfishness
- Prepare yourself to fulfill your God given role
- Seek out God's people
- Involve yourself in serving in the Church
- Surround yourself in Church activities, local and abroad. While doing these things God may make it clear that there is a partner out there for you to fulfill His perfect design in your life.
 - Get others in the Church involved
 - Tell wise and godly people your desires and ask for the wise and discrete help
 - Look we are well connected and there might be faithful people in other ministries we can connect you with.

Certainly, pray casting your concerns upon Him. Care for and be gracious to others and the perfect spouse will come along

Conclusion

Now we have covered the full spectrum in this series.

- We have covered Singleness, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

When I started this series I brought up:

When I was working at Grace to You, I received a counseling letter from a woman who was seeking help about remarriage. She had been divorced as an unbeliever became a Christian and then married a Christian man. They started to attend a Church that taught no divorce and no remarriage view and she started to question her new union. She went to her pastor who told the couple they needed to divorce and she needed to seek to be remarried to her first husband (Mind you this is a violation of Deut 24 and 1 Cor 7 as he was still an unbeliever)

- They did divorce and she sought to marry her former husband
- But he did not want to remarry
- She moved into a house next to his and continually sought to be remarried in order to honor God but he refused
- He finally got sick, was on his death bed, and she ministered to him the whole time. He recovered and still he did not want to get remarried
- She also admitted that she still loved her Christian husband and he still loved her

And she said, "Please help me, what should I do?"

I reminded her of some of the very principles here

1. That because of her marriage to her "Christian" husband she was unable to remarry her first husband. This was not allowed in Israel and was considered Deut 24:4 as an abomination which was practiced by the other nations. God was gracious by hardening the heart of your first spouse
2. The previous divorce whether caused by you or your former husband was before you were saved and already forgiven when you became a Christian
 - a. Divorce, like any other sin can be repented of and forgiven
3. The new union in Christ is a proper union recognized by God and you should return to your Christian husband

She did return to her Christian husband and they joyfully reunited in Christ. She wrote me a few months after my letter to her

Our doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is important to uphold

- We live in a fallen world and sin corrupts the heart of man
- God permits divorce because of hardness of hearts but only in limited circumstances
- Only in the cases of immorality and abandonment is divorce permitted

As Christians we live in the context of view 2 – Divorce and no remarriage. But when our spouse abandons the faith and is hardened in heart view 3 is applied to protect the innocent party

Hardened unbelief and departure from the marriage vow is evidence of unbelief and abandonment. This may be in the moral departing in the act of immorality, it may be in the physical act of leaving, it may be even more subtle is the selfish abandoning of duties and the obstinate refusal to repent

Let us work hard to uphold God's high a glorious design of marriage and at the same time seek to protect the innocent from hardness of heart caused by sin

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