

Marriage, Divorce, and Re-marriage

Matthew 19:1-12

August 26th, 2018

Intro

Marriage is described as a good gift from the Lord

Proverbs 5:18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth.

Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 19:14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD.

Yet this passage addresses when marriage goes wrong and people begin to think that their happiness lies on the other side of divorce.

They may think that perhaps by ending the marriage they can end the pain they are in or regain control of life or finally breathe or be with the one that they really want to be with.

This is easily one of the most difficult passages to teach on in Matthew.

Not difficult because it is confusing, or unclear what he is saying

Difficult because of the high rate of divorce in our country. Difficult because any time it is addressed I'm not speaking to neutral, disinterested people but to people who have been affected by divorce. Children who grew up in homes divided by divorce. People who were on the receiving end of a divorce they did not want. People who pursued a divorce that they now regret. People who have been divorced and see nothing wrong with it.

Some of you may be challenged and may be tempted to bristle at what Jesus says here. But I want to encourage you to take it in. Don't reject parts of the Bible because they rub you the wrong way.

"The Bible is not a cafeteria where you pick what you want & leave the rest. The Bible is big momma's house; you eat what she cooks or you don't eat anything at all." HB Charles

Closes section 4 that ran from the end of chapter 13 through the beginning of 19; Enters our fifth and final section of Matthew's gospel leading to the cross. Like the other sections, it will combine narrative and teaching.

Marks the end of his ministry in Galilee where He has spent the majority of His ministry with only a few detours and departures. He won't return again until after the resurrection.

A large crowd followed again and a brief mention is made of His healing. Why drop that in?

Perhaps because there is so much real estate space given to Jesus' teaching that a person might get the mistaken idea that His one main task was to speak. These nuggets dropped in remind us that He had a broad ministry of compassion, miracles, and teaching.

1. Question: Is **divorce** allowed? (19:3)
 - a. Notice they come testing not merely asking.
 - i. In what way was it a test?
 - ii. Divorce was a contentious and debated issue in Jewish circles of the time.
 - iii. 2 main camps led by two famous rabbis
 1. Shammai – divorce allowed for sexual unfaithfulness

2. Hillel – divorce allowed for practically any reason at all, including letting her hair down in public, burning the bread, putting too much salt in dinner, or if the man simply found a woman he considered to be prettier.
 - iv. Whatever answer he gives would antagonize whoever in the audience held the opposite view, not unlike perhaps my experience today teaching on divorce!
 - b. Furthermore, if you recall from Matthew 14, John the Baptist had recently lost his head because he confronted Herod for his unlawful divorce and subsequent marriage to his sister-in-law.
 - i. Perhaps they hoped Jesus would meet a similar fate.
2. Answer: What God ***joined*** let no man ***separate*** (19:4-6)
- a. Have you not read?
 - i. Expected them to have read, expected them to have known what the Word said, expected that the Word would have relevance.
 - ii. He takes them to Genesis 1 and 2, the very beginning of the Bible.
 - iii. Takes them to the ABC's of marriage with letter A – God intended marriage between a man and woman for life (Odonnell)
 - iv. Mac – by quoting Genesis Jesus was saying your argument is not with Me, but with God. Same thing I hope to accomplish today – to say no more and no less than what the Bible says.
 - v. Carson, adapted and modified - Jesus essentially appealed to the principle of “the more original, the weightier” an accepted form of argument in Jewish exegesis. And it is impossible to go back further than creation for the responsibilities of mankind. If marriage is grounded in creation, in the way God has made us, then it cannot be reduced to a merely contractual relationship that breaks down when the contractual promises are broken.
 - b. God created a man and woman and joined them together in marriage
 - i. Two distinct genders
 - ii. In creating Adam and Eve, He made one man and one woman and joined them in marriage
 1. God could have from the beginning brought many women to Adam, but he did not
 2. God could have created groups of men and women that would cycle through in a series of commitments that break, but He did not. Divorce was not an option for Adam and Eve- there was no one else!
 - iii. For this reason . . . refers to Adam's perception that she was “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” because she had been made from him and for him.
 - iv. The husband (and wife by implication) leaves and joins because a new family unit is created.
 - c. The Bible describes marriage as a covenant
 - i. Contract is a temporary relationship that either party may terminate if the other fails to perform his contractual obligations. A contract is an arrangement for the benefit of the parties. It has clear escape clauses should those benefits cease to accrue. But the Bible views marriage as a covenantal commitment between a man and a woman to live in a permanent and exclusive union of two lives.
 1. Covenant – sacred bond, structured by God and witnessed by God.
 2. **Malachi 2:14b** though she is your companion and your wife by covenant

3. **Proverbs 2:17a** That leaves the companion of her youth And forgets the covenant of her God;
 - ii. (Dorani, adapted) the marriage is a permanent and exclusive union – “will leave” has the force of a command – leaves the strongest bond of our early life – marriage trumps all other relationships – children grow up and leave, brothers and sisters form their own lives and perhaps families, friendships are fragile and transitory.
 1. “no longer” marks the transition from two individual lives to one joint life together.
 2. Still individuals with individual interests, opinions, desires, giftedness, but their life together should be marked by unity not separateness.
 - d. Man is warned not to separate what God has joined.
3. Question: So why did Moses allow for a certificate of **divorce**? (19:7)
 - a. They make reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the passage that was at the center of the debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai.
 - i. I’m going to read it to you with some emphasis. Notice when the description of a scenario ends and the command begins.
 - ii. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** "**When** a man takes a wife and marries her, **and** it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes **because** he has found some indecency in her, **and** he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 **and** she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 **and if** the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, **or if** the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 **then** her former husband who sent her away **is not allowed** to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.
 1. Conservative shammai – focused on the word “indecency “ in the phrase “anything indecent”; the liberal Hillel focused on the word “anything”
 2. Describing a scenario but doesn’t give the command until v 4
 - a. Only command relates to remarriage
 - b. Difference between giving a new driver instruction on how to have a car wreck vs how to respond in the tragic scenario that there is a car wreck.
 3. Regulated divorce by requiring
 - a. a written statement (not merely verbally divorcing after saying “I divorce you” three times)
 - b. placing it in her hand
 - c. dissolving the home
 4. Protected the divorced woman (almost always the woman) from this awful state where she was abandoned by one man but unable to remarry because she couldn’t prove that she was divorced. At the time, a single woman, especially a single mother, would have very few options available to her.
4. Answer: Divorce is permitted (not commanded) in very **limited** circumstances (19:8-9)

Divorce was permitted because of hardness of heart

Certainly not commanded or commended

But in a fallen world, even the institution of marriage would be impacted and corrupted. Divorce was allowed and regulated in order to, as John Frame writes, “mitigate its oppressiveness and maintain the rights of those cast aside.”

- a. **Sexual** immorality (Matthew 5:32; 19:9)
 - i. The word Jesus uses is *porneia*, from which we get our word “pornography.” It refers to a broad range of sexual sin, including adultery.
 - ii. 3 ways it has been understood
 1. Unfaithfulness during the engagement
 - a. But they are clearly discussing marriage not engagement and are referring to marriage passages, specifically Deut 24
 2. Marriage to a near-relative that was prohibited by Leviticus 18.
 - a. Some ancient documents (not the Bible) use *porneia* at times in this limited way and it fits the scenario with Herod and Herodias that John the Baptist addressed.
 - b. However, this does not fit Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that only rules out a remarriage if there has been a subsequent marriage.
 3. Adultery
 - a. Best fits the meaning of Deut 24:1 and the issue being debated
- b. **Abandonment** by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-15)
 - i. Repeats Christ’s teaching on divorce (vv. 10-11)
 - ii. Paul adds the additional scenario of an unbelieving spouse leaving the believer. (vv. 12-15)
 1. Doesn’t mean this is his opinion; rather, in the first scenario he is quoting Jesus. Here is speaking in the same authority he always has as he writes under the inspiration of the Spirit.
 2. The believer is not to divorce the unbeliever.
 3. However if the unbeliever abandons, the believer can “let him leave.” Although the word “divorce” is not repeated, that is the context and would be the most natural way to take “let him leave.”
- c. What about other tragic and difficult scenarios?
 - i. Spousal abuse
 1. Even for those limit divorce to these two exceptions, some conclude that spousal abuse might be considered functional abandonment, especially if the individual is imprisoned.
 2. I am sympathetic toward that position because spousal abuse is wicked and destructive – rather than loving and respecting the husband (or wife) is choosing to abuse and harm the one person they should treat with the most tenderness.
 - a. Abuse should be handled seriously – talk with someone safe, don’t suffer in silence, it’s a crime so involve the police (God has given them to society to

uphold justice according to Romans 13), likely will involve separation for the safety of the victims.

3. We must acknowledge that it appears to be outside the two scenarios listed here by Jesus and Paul. While it is reasonable to conclude it could result in a functional abandonment, we must be cautious of an approach to the passages and topic of divorce that opens the door wider and wider beyond what the passages address.

- ii. Mental, emotional, verbal abuse

1. Again sympathetic because there are awful ways that a husband or wife treats the other, and yet these terms are used so broadly without definition in ways that could justify divorce in almost any scenario if they are considered grounds.

5. Marriage is not to be entered into ***lightly*** (19:10-12)

- a. The disciples (not the Pharisees) conclude it is better not to marry.

- i. Why? They are committed to following what Jesus says, but, like all of us, they are immersed in their own culture. They were accustomed to divorce for almost any reason and Jesus greatly restricts that, showing the seriousness that marriage should be entered into.

- b. Jesus teaches that some voluntarily live without marriage

- i. Those born “eunuchs” – perhaps with a genetic disorder that affects normal marital relations
- ii. Those made eunuchs – common at the time, but unethical, practice of castrating a court official to make him less tempted by the women of the court
- iii. Those who choose not to marry for the sake of the kingdom, providing greater flexibility for ministry.

- c. Not addressing those who desire to marry but have yet to find a spouse.

6. Practical applications for singles, married couples, and divorcees.

- a. Singles: Marry ***wisely***, marry ***well***

- i. This is the name of a book by Ernie Baker that seeks to help singles do just this.
- ii. Who you date is ultimately who you will marry so date wisely
- iii. Marry someone who knows Christ and will be committed to you because they are committed to Jesus. Marry someone kind.
- iv. If and when you marry, get good pre-marriage counseling

- b. Married couples: ***Invest*** in your marriage

- i. Don't hear this as saying you have two options: Divorce (nope, ruled out) and living in an awful marriage. Get help! Seek counsel. Read a good marriage book and put it in practice. Join a small group. Work on your side even if your spouse is unwilling to work on theirs.

- c. If remarried after divorce: ***Confess*** past wrongs; invest in your ***present*** marriage

- i. If you read the words of Christ and realize you have blown it, confess it, admit it to him and possibly to your ex. Don't excuse or minimize. As Christians we should be willing to call something sin because we should know how to deal with sin.

- ii. Then the solution is not to abandon your present marriage because that would be a further wrong. Instead, invest in the marriage you are in to make it joyful, rich, and God-honoring.



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