

Matthew 19:1-15

"Marriage, Divorce & The Bible"

It's never easy trying to tackle the controversial/complex subject of divorce & remarriage... For as great as the epidemic is in our day, it was even more so in Jesus' day. So as you might imagine there was much debate as to what constitutes justification for the annihilation of the marriage union. The question had (has) overtones that dip into multiple arenas. It's a religious topic, a political topic, it's experiential, physical, it confronts us morally, ethically, it impacts us emotionally. It directly effects & has effected an untold amount of lives; therefore it demands great sensitivity.

The culture in which our Lord lived was in certain respects not unlike our own. Many people were married for better or worse, but unfortunately not for long... Therefore the religious leaders couldn't wait to get Him stuck on what seemed to be the horns of this dilemma. They wanted to place Him between the proverbial rock & a hard place. **No matter which way He answers He's bound to offend someone & if they're lucky He'll wind up in political trouble & share the same fate as J.B., however they'll settle for a simple turning of the tide of public opinion against Him.**

But here's the thing w/your Lord & mine. He was never concerned about public opinion. He concerned Himself w/one thing & that was the will of His Father. He said, "I *always* do those things which please *Him*." Oh He loved people (don't get me wrong), it's out of His great love *for* us that He laid down His life on behalf *of* us. However, His priority up until that point was on putting forth the word & the ways of God. Let's look together.

Vs 1-2

I want you guys to realize that Jesus wasn't moving randomly from one geographical region to the next. He's moving very specifically toward Jerusalem because the time of His *departure* is nearing. Notice in Vs 1 that it says He "finished" these sayings in Galilee. His work there was done...

As for the sayings He'd finished you can look back over the last few weeks & get a grip on what those were. Jesus was giving us incredible insight concerning what constitutes greatness in the kingdom of God. He shared how much He values those who follow Him, the critical need to safeguard personal holiness at every expense. He spoke on what it looks like to discipline & restore a sinning/straying brother/sister & gave us profound/practical instruction on maintaining the spirit of unity in the bond of peace through understanding the magnitude of God's forgiveness toward us & being willing (on the basis of His forgiveness toward us) to extend forgiveness toward others...

Now, having concluded His ministry in Galilee He moves south & comes to the region of Judea in which lies Jerusalem where He will soon be tried & crucified for the sins of the world. So if you followed Him geographically He went from Caesarea Philippi where He revealed Himself to the disciples as the Christ, the Son of the Living God (& announced that He was going to Jerusalem to be killed & be raised again the 3rd day). Then He moved south down into Galilee where He shared the things we just reviewed (& more), now He goes further south into the region of Judea knowing that His earthly ministry is coming to a close.

Jesus is moving intentionally toward the cross. No one would take His life, He laid it down willingly. He said the Good Shepherd *gives* His life for the sheep. He said of His life, *"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."* Jn 10:18

But we read that "great multitudes followed Him" & He healed them there. Matthew is wanting us to understand that the popularity & power of Jesus wasn't restricted to Galilee. It was evident in Judea as well. His fame went before Him everywhere He would go.

& I think it's interesting that it says that Jesus healed *them*, but we don't read necessarily that they *believed* in Him. People would follow Jesus for all kinds of different reasons (much like today). Some to hear the instruction & great teaching, others to be healed of affliction, some through simple curiosity or to be close to someone they saw as a celebrity. Others would follow Him just looking for an opportunity to ensnare Him, notice.

Vs 3

See the scene here. Against the backdrop of Jesus ministering hope & healing the Pharisees want to test Him (trap Him) in a subject pertaining to division/dissension & destruction. Don't think (even for a moment) that they had a genuine heart to learn the word/will/way of God here. They're not seeking truth, they were seeking to lay a trap.

Kind of like reporters asking questions of politicians when they're running for office. Find a controversial issue that people are already divided on & ask them to pick a side. Seeking to create the perfect storm & ignite a fire that pits the people against Him. They're trying to place Him on the horns of the "divorce dilemma". "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" "In Your estimation (Jesus) what would justify the annulling/dissolving of the marriage union?"

You might write it down & read it later. It's found in the 1st 4 Vs of the 24th Ch of the book of Deuteronomy. It states that when a man takes a wife & marries her, that if she finds no favor in his eyes because he's found *some uncleanness* in her that he can write her a certificate of divorce.

Sounds clear enough. However, the dilemma revolved around the phrase, “some uncleanness”. What is it exactly that counts for “uncleanness”? It became a hotbed of controversial debate that centered around 2 main schools of thought... Rabbi Shammai was very conservative. He stated that the only reason you could divorce your wife was if you married her only to discover that she was not a virgin. You’ve discovered an “uncleanness” in her, she’d been immoral you could divorce her.

Rabbi Hillel on the other hand was very liberal. He would say things like a man can divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner, or if she went w/unbound hair, if she spoke to other men on the street or spoke disrespectfully of his parents. One of Hillel’s followers (Rabbi Akiba) went as far as to say if a man found another woman more attractive than his wife, she had become unclean in his eyes & he could divorce her... (I’m not making this stuff up.

So 1 Rabbi understood “uncleanness” exclusively as sexual immorality. The other understood “uncleanness” to mean basically any type of indiscretion (anything about her that he didn’t like). Now, which do you think was the more popular ☺? People gravitated toward the liberal perspective (maybe it helped them sleep easier at night). So the question, “Who’s right Jesus? Shammai, or Hillel? Who do You side with?”

Vs 4-6

Family this is so important. Jesus completely ignores/bypasses the opinions of man & goes directly back to the word of God. “Have you not read...” & He takes them all the way back to God’s original intent, His design & desire for marriage. & That’s rooted not even in the law of Moses but rather in the Garden of Eden...

You see, the Pharisees wanted to debate divorce & rabbinical opinions, Jesus refocused the conversation upon the scriptures & marriage. So, “divorce” doesn’t take center stage, maintaining the marriage does. & Let me just say that this is a wise approach for anyone interested in keeping a marriage together. Don’t debate divorce, place the emphasis upon the *scriptures & marriage*.

Jesus says, “Let’s look at what God did when He established the very 1st marriage & that will teach us God’s heart *toward* marriage.” & If you & me, (we as believers) would build our marriages upon God’s *design*, than we wouldn’t have to worry about getting *divorced*...

There are a # of things that Jesus draws our attention to here. 1st of all man & woman were created by God, not evolved from some other species. “He who *made/created* them, created them *male* (singular) & *female* (singular).”

When God designed marriage it was pretty simple, one man & one woman. (That's all there was!) God could've made several men, & several women, He didn't. He created 1 man, & 1 woman for that man.

As a matter of fact God places a higher calling upon the bond of a husband & wife than He does a parent & child. "For this reason a man *shall leave* his (wife? No!) his father & mother & be *joined to his wife*. & The 2 shall become 1 flesh." So in marriage God joins the man & the woman (2 separate beings) together (notice not 2 men, not 2 women; a man & a woman) in an inseparable bond. It's a "one flesh" relationship (physically, spiritually, in navigating life practically, the 2 become 1 in their children, it's the total package).

The man & the woman "complete" one another. How many of you (who are married) have come to realize that well beyond the physical, you & your spouse are 2 *different* people ☺? On the one hand those differences can be challenges to overcome, it's part of God's great work in the marriage union. How He can bring 2 beings that aren't alike together & sanctify them & make them one unified life together to the glory of His name.

On the other hand differences in your spouse can help you to grow in areas that you would otherwise be lacking apart from them. They see things differently, bring different elements into the relationship emotionally, or a different element of sensitivity than you would have on your own. The result is a maturing & a balance that's brought to your life than you would otherwise have.

& At the risk of stating the obvious let me just point out that Jesus says that the bond between the man & the woman is something that *God* has joined together. Marriage is God's institution, not man's. & Whether we like it or not, since God created the institution of marriage, He's the one who makes the rules...

& There in Gen Ch 2 Vs 24-25 God gives us 4 instructions for marriage. "God Given Instructions For Marriage" #1 Severance #2 Permanence #3 Unity #4 Intimacy

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother (severance) and be joined (permanence) to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (unity). And they were both naked, the man and his wife (intimacy), and were not ashamed." Gen 2:24-25

& To state the obvious again, in the case of Adam & Eve divorce wasn't only inadvisable & wrong, it was impossible! There was no one else that they could possibly marry, God kept the possibility out of the equation altogether!

So divorce wasn't part of God's original plan for man. Why? Because sin wasn't in the plan for man, & divorce always results from sin in some form or another...

God doesn't want there to be division/destruction in the home, but "oneness". A husband & a wife, a father & a mother. I don't have to tell you the damage that takes place in broken homes (especially to the children).

According a set of statistics I've run across (Fatherless generation.com). 43% of US children live without their father [US Department of Census] 90% of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. [US D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census] 80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes. [Criminal Justice & Behaviour, Vol 14, pp. 403-26, 1978] 71% of pregnant teenagers lack a father. [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services press release, Friday, March 26, 1999] 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. [US D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census] 85% of children who exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. [Center for Disease Control] 90% of adolescent repeat arsonists live with only their mother. [Wray Herbert, "Dousing the Kindlers," Psychology Today, January, 1985, p. 28] 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. [National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools] 75% of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes. [Rainbows f for all God's Children] 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions have no father. [US Department of Justice, Special Report, Sept. 1988] 85% of youths in prisons grew up in a fatherless home. [Fulton County Georgia jail populations, Texas Department of Corrections, 1992] Fatherless boys and girls are: twice as likely to drop out of high school; twice as likely to end up in jail; four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems.

It's no wonder God hates divorce! *Malachi 2:16, "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence,' Says the Lord of hosts."* Divorce damages/destroys families, individuals, & children regardless of their age.

However; I should say that although God hates divorce, He doesn't hate *the divorced*. God loves you, but He hates sin & its impact upon you (& your family).

& I don't share those statistics to *discourage* single parents (because for God nothing will be impossible & He is in no way bound by statistics, amen?). I share those things to *encourage* married couples to double down, throw the divorce option out the window, love one another & love your children.

God's design/desire for your marriage is one of permanency & unity, it makes for a healthy family & brings Him glory. So what *God has joined together* (it's not just a social contract) let not *man* separate. Don't undo what God has done.

Vs 7-9

Back in Vs 7 they think they got Him. “If divorce isn’t part of God’s plan, than why did Moses *command* to give a certificate of divorce & to put her away?”

However, the fact of the matter is that Moses *never commanded* anyone to get a divorce. Divorce became a concession never a command. By the time the law concerning divorce was given, divorce was already a problem in Israel. Men were putting their wives away & the women were becoming social outcasts left defenseless & destitute. So Moses was putting parameters on the situation, *not commanding it but controlling it*.

But again Jesus points out, that was *never* God’s design or desire. However due to the *hardness of human hearts* God would permit it in certain circumstances. In other words, Jesus is saying, “Here’s the Divine Ideal. God wants your marriage to go the distance. 1 man, 1 woman for life, till death do you part. However, when human sinfulness & hardness of heart (unresponsiveness to the word & will of God) has made the ideal unobtainable, here is the allowance that God has made.”

& Sometimes the heart of the offending party is hard, they won’t do what needs done to reconcile the relationship. Sometimes it’s the heart of the offended party that’s hard, they refuse to reconcile & move past the offense even when there is genuine contrition & repentance. Oftentimes there’s a hardness (to some degree) on both sides...

& Jesus is wanting us to be clear on the fact that divorce is not some God ordained morally neutral option, but rather it’s an evidence of sin & grows out of the hardness & selfishness of the human heart.

Listen, happy/successful marriages aren’t accidents nor the luck of the draw. They’re the result of commitment, love, mutual understanding, sacrifice, death to self & selfishness, & hard work...

Ok; is there *ever* an exception? Is there ever a case whereby God will justify the dissolving of the marriage bond. Jesus says, “Yes”. If your spouse is unfaithful to you, if they are sexually immoral, Jesus says that that one thing can breach the covenant, the contract. Now He’s *not saying there has to be divorce in that situation*. There can be patient healing, forgiveness & restoration of the broken relationship. But He does acknowledge that it is possible for sexual immorality to deal a deathblow to a relationship, making it the one ground for divorce.

Later on, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul the apostle added what we call the “abandonment clause” as just cause for divorce as well (1 Cor 7:25).

Which is to say if you're married, you get saved, your spouse doesn't & they leave you, then you're free to let them leave. If they'll stay, let them stay. But if they go, you can let them go.

Here's what's not on the list of acceptable causes; incompatibility, misery, we no longer love each other, irreconcilable differences. "What about brutality?" Some would classify that as spousal abandonment, others would say some things are certainly cause for *separation* (that being one of them) but not divorce.

Now typically in a scenario where there's just cause for separation it's only a matter of time before the offending spouse gives just cause for divorce. But if for some weird reason they're playing the part of the unbeliever, making your life miserable, you decide to separate & they *continue to honor the marriage vow*. Then you must honor it as well. You're not free to remarry according to the instruction of scripture.

That's why scripture doesn't have 3 categories of people (married, single, or divorced). Because before the Lord, you're either married, or you're not, that's it. You see, the reason why a person who doesn't have a legitimate divorce commits adultery upon remarrying is because as far as God is concerned, they aren't divorced. Their marriage was never dissolved in a manner in which God acknowledges...

So the marriage bond is a binding promise that really can't be broken at our own discretion. If God doesn't recognize the promise being broken, then it's not broken.

Ok... Let me answer a couple quick questions & then I'll move on. Let's say you've already blown all this, but you really want to make it right, what do you do? "I was married, I got an unjustifiable divorce, now I'm married to someone else what should I do?" You should stay married to whom you're married to now. Paul (w/in the context of relationships) wrote in 1 Cor 7:17, "Live as you're called." If you've committed sin, repent of it before the Lord & move on.

"Am I living in adultery?" No. Did you commit adultery? If you're divorced & remarried un-biblically, than you did commit adultery (I can't soften that for you). But you don't live in that constant state. Again, repent & move on. Remember David (king of Israel). He took Uriah's wife, murdered Uriah & committed adultery w/Bathsheba. Were there repercussions to his sin? Absolutely, but did God say, "Divorce her because you're living in adultery?" No, after he repented God blessed his union w/her & Solomon (who was in the lineage of Christ) came from that relationship.

Does that teach us that God will justify sin? No.

But it does teach us that where sin abounds (Rom 5:20) grace abounds *much* more. “Go your way & sin no more.” Receive God’s grace & honor Him w/a holy life. And if there has been a failure in your past, know there is a redemptive plan for your future as you seek the Lord & walk w/Him from this point forward.

It’s a hard teaching from Jesus isn’t it? People are always looking for loopholes but they just aren’t there. The disciples understood this when Jesus was saying these things, check it out...

Vs 10-12

You see? It was clear to the disciples. Marriage is not a commitment to be entered into quickly/lightly. Their thinking was that if marriage is so binding before God, then maybe it is better not to marry.

Their perspective was one of marriage being endured, not enjoyed. They weren’t really thinking of their marriage in terms of submitting to God to bring Him glory. You & I should view our marriages as a ministry *to God & for God*.

But Jesus says, “Hey, what you’re talking about has some merit, but it’s not for everyone.” Some people are born eunuchs (w/out the capacity of sexual relations perhaps by a birth defect). Others may be made eunuchs (it was common for kings to castrate the men they would place over their harem). Then there are those who like Paul the apostle was given a gift of self-control & chose to live apart from marriage in order to be about kingdom business apart from distracting cares.

Jesus says, “If that’s you. Go for it & don’t feel guilty or pressured to get married by others in spite of it, just serve the Lord.” But for most people, God will call them to a marriage relationship. One is not better than the other, they each have their place in God’s plan.

Vs 13-15

No mistake that after this teaching on marriage Jesus ministers to the children. In Luke’s gospel we discover they were very young (baby dedications) & dad’s were bringing their babies & little ones to Jesus. Parents, bring your kids to Jesus. Don’t forbid them, Jesus wants kids to come to Him (what a text for child evangelism).

& He laid His hands on them & blessed them. I believe in discipline, but it’s also important to lay the hand of blessing upon your children as well. Encourage them & the plan God has for their lives. The disciples though Jesus might be annoyed by their coming... couldn’t be farther from the truth.

& The same is true for you. Jesus is never annoyed *by* you, He's never tired *of* you nor is He too tired *for* you. He loves you, come *before* Him, give your life *to* Him, be renewed *in* Him & blessed *by* Him today.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your great love, Your great grace & Your mercies that are new every morning. We thank You that You are for us & not against us & that Your heart is to lead us in the way everlasting. May we honor You w/our lives, w/our marriages & in our families. Pour Your Spirit out upon us & be glorified in us.

Knowing God's heart for marriage is a great thing. But if you're not in Christ it's not the main thing. The main thing that God wants to speak to *you* about is the cross of J.C. turning from sin & finding forgiveness in Him. We've talked about the sin that accompanies divorce, but the truth is that we have *all* sinned in some form or another & fall short of the glory of God. Forgiveness is available, salvation to all who call upon the name of the Lord. God loves you, Christ died *for* you, be reconciled to God through faith in J.C.