

The King's Teaching On Marriage And Divorce

Matthew 19:1-9

Introduction

In Matthew 19 the focus shifts from the training of the disciples to the hostility of the Jewish leaders. Jesus will leave the Galilee for Judea beyond the Jordan.

The Jewish leaders will confront Jesus once again. This time on the subject of the Laws concerning divorce. The subjects of marriage and divorce created quite a stir in the time of Moses, and Jesus and even now! Jesus will point out that the religious leaders views on the subject did not reflect the heart of God or the intent of God or the will of God.

We live in a culture that has abandoned a Biblical view of marriage (for the most part). Politicians and government leaders and the popular culture do not embrace the notion of the sanctity of marriage. What does the Bible say about marriage? The Bible has a lot to say on the subject of marriage and divorce. My goal is not to cover everything the Bible says about the subject; but to at least consider what Jesus has to say on the subject in this section of Scripture.

The Debate Concerning Divorce (vv.1-3)

Matthew 19:1-9 (NKJV) 1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

2 And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.

Mark's gospel says; "And the people gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again" (10:1). This is the region called Perea. This is the area where John the Baptist ministered. This is the place where John the Baptist was in part arrested and executed for his very public proclamations about marriage and divorce.

Could Christians face persecution for simply believing what the Bible says about marriage? Doing what's right begins by believing what's right.

Imagine the religious leaders continue to witness Jesus healing people and teaching people, making hurting people whole. But the religious leaders are not interested in believing Jesus or trusting Jesus but rather in discrediting Jesus. They would rather debate Jesus than celebrate His goodness (see Courson p.121).

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

The Lord's enemies would not leave Him alone. Their question was not motivated by a sincere desire for God's heart on this most important matter of marriage and divorce, but rather to generate conflict and reduce Jesus' popularity among the people.

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In the ancient world marriage and divorce were hot topics. It's common knowledge that two Rabbi's interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in profoundly different ways. The passage reads; "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 uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of the house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, 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, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife, after 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 is giving you as an inheritance."

One Rabbi Hillel took this passage to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any cause, while the followers of Rabbi Shammai—suggested that the word uncleanness must of necessity mean sexual infidelity or adultery. The answer that Jesus provides will go past the bitter debate among the Rabbi's and even past the Law the Moses and Jesus will revisit God's original and intentional plan for marriage.

The statistics of divorce are gruesome. The U.S. census gave the following figures; in 1920 1 in every 7 marriages ended in divorce. 1940 1 in 6; 1960 1 in 4; 1977; 1 in 3. According to a number of sources the divorce rate peaked in the 1980's climbing as high as 1 in 2 divorces; with some sources suggesting the divorce rate now is one in 3 marriages. Some suggest that the divorce rate is declining not because people have a higher view of marriage—but rather because millennials are simply not getting married.

But statistics can cause us to distance ourselves from the pain and the trauma and the horror of failed marriages. Behind every failed marriage there are at least two broken hearts.

The Divine Intention Concerning Marriage (vv.4-6)

4And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'

5and 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'?

6So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Where did marriage begin? In the Garden of Eden. Jesus begins his answer by saying; "Have you not read" the writings of Moses! Jesus references the Bible—the book of Genesis.

The institution of marriage finds its origin in God Himself. God created human beings male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

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Marriage was intended to be heterosexual (male and female); intimate, permanent; monogamous. Marriage is a committed partnership between a man and woman.

Jesus appeals to God's Word to determine God's will. Remember the Pharisees want to trap Jesus. "They were serving their own desires, not seeking to know his view of God's will based on God's Word. As we examine the divorce issue, our motives must be to do God's will, not to serve our own desires" (see *Life Application Bible Commentary; Matthew p. 368*).

The Pharisees focus was on divorce. The Lord Jesus will focus on God's plan and design and purpose for marriage.

Don't overlook the answer Jesus gives. Before we can speak about divorce we must be prepared to speak about God's plan and design for marriage. The sanctity of marriage. Before we can consider the qualifications or conditions that would allow for divorce we must look at God's purposes for marriage!

The Bible gives at least four reasons or purposes for marriage:

1. Perpetuate the race (Genesis 1:28).
2. Personal companionship and enjoyment (Genesis 2:18).
3. Prevent sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 7:1-6).
4. Illustrate Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22-23).

The Lord clearly prefers a loving, stable, strong, household. The Lord Jesus reminds the Pharisees that God's design for marriage included three elements:

1. The man leaves his parents in a public act and promises himself to his wife.
2. The man and woman enter into a covenant and take responsibility for each others welfare in every aspect of life. This includes all mental, emotional, physical, spiritual elements. We have to include that this priority becomes the central relationship that places the partner in a position of priority. Clearly this priority excludes God. Human beings primary loyalty lies with their Creator. But having said that—all earthly relationships are placed in a position subordinate to the spouse. This includes mothers and fathers and children.
3. The two become one—united—one flesh—intimacy—reserved only for the marital relationship—this is a sexual union.

What can we glean from these simple elements? Marriage is a covenant; a committed partnership between one man and one woman. The union is intimate and permanent. God created Adam for Himself. God created Eve for Adam and Himself. God chose to make Eve not from dust—but rather from the man's flesh and bone. In the act of creation God illustrates that human beings in marriage represent this one flesh concept. There is a spiritual, supernatural, mystical element. God uses this physical and spiritual union as a symbol for Christ's relationship

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to the Church. God takes the marriage covenant seriously. Marriage is not a good idea for anyone who ignores or refuses to accept the Bible's assessment of marriage. The goal of marriage is not happiness or even convenience or sexual expression. The goal of marriage is unity. Unity based on trust, respect, affection. A permanent partnership. The goal of marriage is not simply friendship or companionship.

Marriage is a cooperative effort. Husbands have a role to play, and wives have a role to play. But whatever the God given tasks are—they are to reflect the glory of God and to honor God. Marriage is a gift from God. God was the first priest, witness and guest. God created Adam and Eve as perfect compliments to one another. They share an equal honor, dignity and worth.

The Decree Of Moses Concerning Divorce (vv.7-8)

7They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

The Pharisees considered Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as the proof text for divorce.

The Pharisees appeared to be thinking about the subject of marriage and divorce more from a legal and cultural perspective rather than a spiritual and Biblical perspective. Marriage and divorce were transactions—the cost to do business. Like buying and selling property and Jesus condemns this attitude. God's intention is unity. What God intends to keep united should not be separated.

The Pharisees would have interpreted the statement of Jesus "what God has joined together let not man separate" as flying in the face of the Law! Was Jesus saying that Moses' Law was contrary to God's commands?

8He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

The Pharisees seek to pit Jesus against Moses.

The Lord required the man to give his wife a certificate of divorce to protect the woman. In what sense? To make it more difficult for the man to divorce his wife in the heat of anger and to provide proof that she was the unwilling victim of her husband's rebellion and disobedience—and to give her the opportunity to lawfully remarry!

Why did God permit divorce? Jesus gives the answer; "because of the hardness of your hearts" God "permitted you to divorce your wives".

What caused this hardness of heart? The answer in part is found in the passage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which we have already read. A man marries a woman. He is displeased and finds

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something 'unclean' or indecent (NIV). The controversy centered around those words. Some suggested that a man could divorce his wife for any reason; the woman was unable to conceive a child, or he simply found another woman more attractive. There was another issue. In the ancient world it was not uncommon that a father gave a dowry or bride price. This could include money, land, slaves or other properties or resources. The dowry remained the possession of the woman throughout the marriage. If the husband divorced the woman—for any reason other than sexual infidelity the dowry remained with the woman and was returned. But sometimes the man would falsely accuse the woman in order to retain the dowry.

Did actual infidelity take place? Certainly. What was the punishment according to the Law for marital infidelity? Death by stoning.

In Deuteronomy 24:1 "some uncleanness" literally reads "a matter of nakedness" which suggest some kind of immorality (Leviticus 18). One of the issues that this brings up is—was this divorce law a temporary law or a permanent law and are people allowed to divorce one another for any reason or no reason at all?

Human beings are by nature and choice sinful. Even God's choicest servants did not live up to the Biblical ideal of marriage. Moses established laws to protect the innocent victims. In Jewish Law only the husband could initiate and carry out a divorce. Because of Moses' Law a woman wasn't simply forced out—she was allowed a certificate so that she could reclaim her dowry and be eligible to remarry. In one sense the Law of Moses afforded women some civil rights, and legal redress. The Law of Moses gave at least some protection and limited the abuses of divorce.

The hardness of heart lies in the fact that some people are insensitive. This hardness refers to the stubborn, willful disregard for God's plan for marriage. God knows many people will not follow through with God's plan and design for marriage.

When all is said and done, divorce was permitted, but not commanded or even commended.

The Direct Implications For The King's Disciples (v.9)

9And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Scholars agree that the words sexual immorality applies to both husband and wife. Mark adds; "And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery" (10:12 NIV).

The Lord makes it clear that divorce was permitted on the grounds of sexual infidelity. Paul writes this sin is against the body (1 Corinthians 6:15-18) and is a sin against the marriage union—which is a physical union. The word "sexual immorality" seems to include a number of sexual

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sins. In Mark's gospel (7:21) speaks of fornications (plural), and also in Acts 15:20; Romans 1:29 and 1 Corinthians 6:13 the term is generic and includes sexual behavior among the married, and the unmarried.

Jesus states that divorce for any other reason makes the parties guilty of adultery if they remarry (see Matthew 5:27-31; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1-2).

Here when Jesus uses the expression "and whoever marries her who is divorced" the implication is divorced for reasons other than marital infidelity.

Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. Adultery does not dissolve the marriage. Divorce dissolves the marriage.

What is the answer that Jesus gives to the religious leaders who are looking to trap Jesus? Jesus believed the Bible. Jesus believed what God said about marriage. Divorce is allowed when sexual immorality is present. Divorce is not commanded or demanded or even preferred. The root of all divorce is hardness of heart (an unwillingness to accept God's revelation about marriage).

Divorce creates a kind of killing fields in relationships. In the movie the Killing Fields it describes the slaughter of the Cambodian refugees during the take over of that country by the Camea Rouge. In one scene a journalist has to run through a rice field where bodies have been piled high, and everywhere. Thousands of skeletons give mute testimony of the utter depravity of the human heart left unchecked. Like a killing a field many of us chose to bury or dump or failed relationships only to find ourselves tripping over the dead. We must choose life. We must choose God's way and pay close attention to God's Word.

Conclusion

God created marriage to be a sacred, permanent, bond dissolved only by death. When both husband and wife enter the marriage with a Biblical understanding and commitment, they provide security and safety and stability for their home, for their children and strength to weather life's difficulties.

Marriage creates a new identity. Divorce dissolves that identity. When a man or a woman gets a divorce are they really divorced in God's eyes? The answer is yes. A divorce terminates a marriage. Divorce is not necessarily a sin; but divorce is always the result of sin.

Remember death is not a sin—but death is always the result of sin. The Bible teaches "the soul that sins shall surely die". In Jeremiah 3:8 "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also."

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God got a divorce. God has a failed relationship. Was God the source of that failure? No. God was the innocent victim in a failed relationship. It may be difficult for you picture God as divorced—but at this very moment God is still at work trying to effect reconciliation.

Principles Of Marriage

1. Marriage is a divinely ordained institution.
2. Marriage is the first and most fundamental institution.
3. Marriage is a covenant and binding.
4. Marriage is a place for true intimacy.
5. Marriage is a covenant of companionship.
6. Marriage is to conform to the model of Christ and His Church.

Divorce

1. Divorce always stems from hardheartedness (sin).
2. Divorce is not necessarily sinful—but is the result of sin.
3. Divorce always breaks a marriage.
4. Divorce is never necessary among believers.
5. Divorce is legitimate on the grounds of sexual immorality.
6. Divorce is legitimate when an unbeliever wishes to divorce the believer (1 Cor.7:15).
7. **Divorce is forgivable when sinful.**

Remarriage

1. In general is desirable.
2. Is possible for a divorced person.
3. Is possible even for the sinfully divorced person through repentance and forgiveness.
4. Is possible only when all Biblical obligations have been met.
5. Is possible only when parties are prepared to embrace the Biblical view of marriage.