

31 "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';^{32*} but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

As Jesus progresses with His kingdom teaching he addresses another topic that cannot be isolated from other Scripture. There is a context here. He has just spoken about adultery of the heart and now He speaks about physical adultery and an imposed adultery and then after this subject He gives His command, His "but I say unto you" on the matter of swearing by oaths.

All three to some degree have a relationship as far as the sanctity of marriage is concerned.

And so before we begin a rather difficult and for some a controversial study let's lay the foundation for Jesus' purpose in this passage we are looking at this morning. We will also go further and look at Matthew 19:3-12.

Jesus primary purpose, I believe, is not in allowing divorce or remarriage, although they are addressed. The primary goal is the preservation of God's creation ordinance of marriage, especially in the New Covenant church.

Here the audience is Jewish and marriage and divorce and remarriage has a context that dates back to Moses - the Law and the Prophets. But here and in Mt.19 we will see, once again, that Jesus will attack the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of God's intent in the Law and even in the permission God grants through Moses that does not contradict His original intent but grants mercy because of sinful men.

Jesus quotes in part from the following:

De 24:1 "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,
De 24:2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*,
De 24:3 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,De 24:4 *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.

So there is a context for Jesus to continue with his interpretation of the Law.

But what was a certificate of divorce, what did it say?

Here is an example:

The form of a writing of divorcement, as given by Maimonides is as follows:

``On such a day of the week, in such a month, of such a year, either from the creation, or the epocha of contracts, according to the usual way of computation, which we observe in such a place; I such an one, the son of such an one, of such a place; or if I have any other name, or surname, or my parents, or my place, or the place of my parents; by my own will, without any force, I put away, dismiss, and divorce thee. Thee, I say, who art such an one, the daughter of such an one, of such a place; or if thou hast any other name, or surname, or thy parents, or thy place, or the place of thy parents; who wast my wife heretofore, but now I put thee away, dismiss and divorce thee; so that thou art in thine own hand, and hast power over thyself, to go, and marry any other man, whom thou pleasest; and let no man hinder thee in my name, from this day forward and for ever; and lo! thou art free to any man: and let this be unto thee, from me, a bill of divorce, an instrument of dismissal, and a letter of forsaking, according to the law of Moses and Israel."

``Such an one, the son of such an one, witness.
Such an one, the son of such an one, witness."

Notice, that the woman was dismissed with the power to marry another man.

If this statement was not included it was not a legitimate divorce even in Moses day nor would t have been in Jesus' time amongst the Jews.

But now, Jesus is giving His Law to those who will not be Jews by religion but Christians by regeneration and transformation and there will be only one legitimate reason, at this time as foundations are being laid for the New covenant kingdom, and that will be for some kind of sexual wrong doing. Listen to these four translations:

32NASB but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of *unchastity*, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

NIV But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for *marital unfaithfulness*, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

NKJV "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except *sexual immorality* causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

ESV: But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of *sexual immorality*, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Which is correct?

The greek word is the word porneia. It can, depending on the context of a passage, be translated meaning everything that is mentioned in the previous translations and it can mean fornication in other passages.

In this text, marital unfaithfulness may be a little too broad but not without merit. This idea is better addressed when Paul adds another permission for divorce in 1 Cor. 7:14. Here in this passage the natural force of porneia as sexual sin should probably be the meaning and the exception clause holds force as well. At this time of Jesus teaching to His kingdom people there is only one reason for divorce and that is sexual sin.

Now, the burning question for some may be what about a woman divorcing a man? We will address that with a reference to Mk:10:12 a little further on..

The natural way to take the except clause is that divorce is wrong because it generates adultery except in the case of fornication where permission is given if not mandated.

That is all that can be said about this text in regards to divorce and remarriage.

To expand our understanding of Jesus on this subject lets go to Matthew 19:3-12 to see what else Jesus has to say.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 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'? "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." They *said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" 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. "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." The disciples *said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. "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." (Matthew 19:3-12, NAS95).

The setting for this teaching is different and it is not in a deliberate fixed context of expanding on the norms of the Christian life, but it is the authoritative Law of Christ which is being spoken to all who will hear and in particular it is again correcting the

misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Pharisees. This setting is a theological dispute that raises the question of what divorces are allowed

The two main schools of Pharisaic teachers debated the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1, in which a man finds "any matter of indecency" in his wife and hence divorces her. The School of Shammai interpreted Deuteronomy 24 as indicating that a man could divorce his wife for the cause of unfaithfulness ("indecency"); the School of Hillel understood the passage to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any cause, even burning his toast. In practice both schools agreed that the law at least often granted the man a right to divorce, regrettable as divorce was

Jesus, however, circumvents their whole argument based on Deuteronomy 24. The ultimate issue should not be the right to divorce, but God's original desire for husbands and wives to be one flesh; "one flesh" is the language of family ties and alliances (as in 2 Sam 5:1). Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. (2 Samuel 5:1, NAS95).

The Genesis principle from which Jesus draws this application goes beyond opposing divorce; it opposes marital disharmony altogether. Indeed, the purpose of the Deuteronomy 24 law itself was probably to ward off hasty divorce and therefore to provide some legal protection for the wife.

Although his opponents claim Scripture for their purposes, Jesus challenges their actual knowledge of Scripture by showing that they are proof texting rather than reading it in light of God's whole plan: *Haven't you read . . . ?*

Some Pharisees might have considered Jesus "liberal" (as we would put it) in his interpretations, but his objection was not to Scripture but to human traditions of interpretation; here he even attributes a saying of the biblical narrator directly to God: **He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 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'?**

So Jesus' main thrust in the teaching is not divorce but the sanctity of marriage as a creation ordinance, something that God puts together is not meant for, it is not ordained for man to separate.

D.A. Carson makes a good point when he writes "Divorce is not only unnatural but rebellion against God."

This leads the Pharisees to their next question:

7* They *said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?"

Jesus then corrects them again:

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.

Moses did not command, he permitted in this passage.

Now we can look at the passage in Mark because it is a close parallel to this passage with a few differences.

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. "But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6"But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7"FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."10 In the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again.11 And He *said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her;12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." (Mark 10:2-12, NAS95).

The heart of the teaching is the same in each passage.

Divorce was permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts. It provided some comfort against extreme cruelty, especially for women in a patriarchal society.

But notice the questions His disciples have for Him in private. They were not yet settled because of all they had been taught and what Jewish society allowed. Not only that but the surroundings of Greek and Roman culture were rampant with divorce and little did they know that they would also be preaching the Gospel to the gentiles, where women divorced their husbands.

Then He says what must have shaken them to the very core of their moral and religious senses.

11 And He *said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her;12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

But even to the Jews who heard the message in Mark's Gospel and who heard Jesus knew that it was probably a rebuke to Herodias who was an incestuous adulteress who could not bear the truth of John the Baptist and his preaching about her immorality.

Here is an equality in sin and its consequences. They would not in any regular course of Jewish living believe that a woman would divorce her husband. Now here in Mark we do not have the exception clause but Mark's Gospel is aimed at Gentiles where Matthew's Gospel is directed to primarily a Jewish audience. The point here in Mark is not the reason for divorce but again the sanctity of marriage and it is an extreme statement in light of the Gentile audience that takes marriage so frivolously.

So, now that we know divorce prohibition is not related only to men lets return to Matthew 19:8

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.

Whatever God allows or permits does not in any way abrogate what are His original ordained intentions. God is not morally neutral. God hates divorce. All sin has it's consequences, even divorce. Any view of divorce and remarriage that sees the problem only in terms of what may or may not have been done is missing the point. In the end it is a hardness of heart which is a sin problem.

Let's conclude this morning with a look at I Cor. 7

10 ¶ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband11 (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.

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.13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children

are unclean, but now they are holy.15* Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.16* For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

At this time in the development of the church another permission for divorce is granted. But Paul first states as a reminder for Christian husband and wives, both are believers, that there should not be a divorce, reconciliation must be attempted and if one leaves then they cannot be remarried. Now of course we must also include what Jesus has previously taught, because Paul would have taught the same. Paul is not addressing the exception here as Jesus did but is saying an arbitrary divorce is not acceptable. It is sin and there cannot be re-marriage under this circumstance.

Although divorce always has its consequences, Jesus did not forbid re-marriage when a divorce was legitimate according to His command. The innocent party, if remarried has adultery put on them by the guilty party because of an illegitimate divorce.

If a husband or a wife of a believer is an unbeliever, obviously this is after a marriage has taken place because Christians are forbidden to marry unbelievers, 2Co 6:14* Do not be bound together (unequally yoked) with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

If an unbelieving spouse wants the believing spouse to leave the marriage Paul says the person is free, no longer under bondage to the marriage covenant. Notice the difference between divorce amongst two believers and this divorce. No implications of imposed adultery for the believer.

There is much more that could be said about this matter of marriage, divorce and re-marriage in a different setting for study.

But for now let's finish with some final thoughts as a basic working model in how to approach this biblically.

First, marriage is a creation ordinance

Second, God hates divorce Mal 2:16

Third, because of the hardness of men's heart in both the Old and New Covenant God permits divorce and remarriage under very strict circumstances.

Fourth, marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with His bride, the church, according to Eph.5:21-33

Fifth, as Christians Christ has given us norms to live by according to the Beatitudes and because divorce is rooted in sin there must be the recognition of sin, mourning over sin, being merciful in our relationships, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being salt and light in a sinful world and being ready to suffer persecution for standing for the sanctity of marriage.

Everything that is taught in Scripture about repentance and seeking reconciliation and restoration and forgiveness must be attempted before divorce is ever an option for Christians.

The principles of church discipline must be enforced if need be. Divorce is not a private matter for the church it is a public concern. There are many biblical principles that must be applied in counsel to those who are having marital difficulties but realizing that all these difficulties are rooted in sin and have a biblical cure for the hurting soul.

Remember in biblical times marriages were arranged. Some still are today regardless of your culture.

Marriage is not a guarantee for happiness. But Christians who are seeking the will of God and who are being faithful and obedient to the Word of God will find the fulfillment of God's purpose in marriage.

Jesus is repealing or abolishing formally and publicly what Moses gave the people of Israel and does two things. He lightens the judgement for sexual sin- (no death penalty) and He restricts the reason for divorce to only sexual sin.