

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 19:7-9

Code: 2338

Let's open our Bibles together to Matthew chapter 19. Returning to the section on Jesus' teaching on divorce. Matthew chapter 19, and we're looking at the first twelve verses. For the past two weeks, our study of this great passage has focused primarily on the divine creation of marriage, as we've looked at the first six verses. And now, as we focus on the second six verses, verses 7 to 12, we're going to be looking more particularly at the issue of divorce.

Now remember that verse 1 says: "It came to pass that when Jesus had finished these sayings." We told you that that means the finish of a discourse. And the discourse which He completed was that in chapter 18 on the child likeness of the believer, a great discourse. "And when He had finished that, He departed from Galilee." And we noted that that meant the end of the Galilean ministry, a period of several years in which He had articulated His Messiahship, in which He had gathered and trained His disciples had now come to an end, and He was leaving that place. It says He, "Upon leaving, came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan," known as the beyond area called Perea.

So, He entered into Perea and in chapters 19 and 20, we find the ministry that He had in Perea. Now, He is moving through Perea to the south, because He is headed for Jerusalem where He will die and rise again. So, we are moving toward the climax of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in the Peraan ministry, we find in verse 2, that great multitudes followed Him. Mark 10, you'll remember, added that He taught them and then Matthew says, "And He healed them there." So, we see then, the Lord Jesus moving the same kind of ministry of teaching, and healing, and demonstrating His Messianic credentials from Galilee to Perea, a place now populated by many Jews who would need also to be exposed to their Messiah. Now, while in Perea, He is confronted by His archrivals, the Pharisees. And we find in verse 3 the attack. And that was the first point in our outline: the attack. "The Pharisees also came unto Him testing Him and saying unto Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause.'"

Now, they wanted to confront Jesus with a question that He really couldn't answer. They wanted to trap Him. They knew what He believed. They knew that He believed that it was not legal or lawful to divorce for every cause and they wanted Him to say that so He would be unpopular with the people. They wanted Him to say it, also, so that He would be unpopular with the resident ruler who, Herod Antipas by name, had already beheaded John the Baptist for saying something similar to that, for he himself was one illegitimately divorced and remarried. And so, they really ask the question in verse 3 to put Jesus in an impossible position with the people and with the ruler of the area.

We come to verse 4, then, and the answer. That's our second major point in the outline, the answer. "He answered and said unto them," and as He speaks, He gives four reasons why divorce is not lawful for every cause. But He answers the question in such a way that they can't hold Him responsible for it because He answers it with Scripture. And He says to them, in a very almost caustic way, "Have you not read, are you ignorant of the Scripture, you who purport to be the teachers of the law, you who assume that you know every in and every out of all of God's revelation? Have you not read that God said that He made them at the beginning male and female?" That God said, "For this cause shall a man leave father, mother, shall cleave to his wife, they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more two but one flesh, and what therefore God hath joined together, let not man divorce."

I mean, haven't you read what God said? And so, Jesus takes His stand on Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 and says, I'm simply agreeing with God which, in fact, puts the Pharisees in an impossible position. And everybody else, too. Because if they're going to argue with Him, they're going to have to argue with God. Now, you remember that I told you there were four reasons given there why the answer is no, it is not lawful to divorce for every cause. Reason number one, God created one man for one woman. Reason number two, God created a strong bond indicated by the word cleave in verse 5. Reason number three, He made them one flesh, verse 5. And then verse 6 says and once you're one flesh, you can't be divided 'cause you're not two anymore. That's the third reason, one flesh. And finally, marriage is a work of God and so what God has joined together, let not man divorce. So, four good reasons why divorce is not lawful for any reason. And we saw that in saying that, Jesus really reaffirmed the Old Testament standard for marriage. He affirmed that God desired marriage to be a lifelong monogamous relationship between two people.

We, last time, sort of traced that thought, didn't we, through the Old Testament, and we saw that it never changes. You come all the way to the end of the Old Testament; you come into the book of Malachi, the last book. And in that, God reiterates exactly what He said in Genesis, He says in Malachi 2 verse 16, "I hate divorce." So, God has not changed His view from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the Old Testament. He still hates divorce.

Now, someone might ask in response to all the things we talked about in the Old Testament, "What makes a marriage? When we say What God has joined together, don't let a man divorce, what is it that makes a marriage?" And some people have tried to say, "Well, sex relationship is what makes a marriage, so all you have to do is have a sex relationship with someone, and you're automatically married because that's the essence of one flesh, and that's what marriage really is." But that is not true, biblically. If sex made a marriage, there would be no such thing as fornication, because two people having sex who aren't married wouldn't be committing fornication; they'd be getting married, if sex made a marriage. But God says that when two people unmarried commit an act of sexual relationship together, that is not a marriage, that is a sin. That is fornication.

Further, in Exodus chapter 22, verses 16 and 17, it says, “If a man lies with a woman, he is therefore, because he has taken her virginity, to marry her.” Which is to say that just lying with her didn’t cause a marriage. He is to marry her, or if her father refuses him, then he is to pay the father a sufficient sum to compensate him for what, in some sense, he has stolen from his daughter, but he is not seen as married by that sex act, rather responsible to at a later time get married.

Further, adultery does not dissolve a marriage. In Malachi 2, as I mentioned, it says God hates divorce. But it also says something else in verse 14, it says: “You have been, the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, yet is she thy companion and the wife of thy covenant?” And what that is saying is this: no matter what you did in committing adultery, and that’s what they had done, you dealt treacherously against her, but she is still your wife. And how so? Because she is the wife of your, what? Your covenant. It is not the sex act that makes a marriage; it is the covenant that makes a marriage. It is the coming together of two people who pledge lifelong covenant of companionship. The Bible affirms that the covenant makes a marriage. Marriage is a covenantal arrangement for lifelong companionship. And so, when a person has a sex relationship with someone, that doesn’t make a marriage; and when a person in a marriage has a sex relationship with someone else, that doesn’t make another marriage. That just is a sin against the marriage the person is in by covenant. So, it is the binding covenant of lifelong pledge of companionship that constitutes a marriage.

And anytime that happens, anytime two people make that covenant, whether they’re saved people or not, they come together in a God-ordained and God-created union which therefore should never be divorced. That’s the essence of what our Lord is saying. And so, that’s His answer.

Now let’s go on to the third point, this morning, and see how far we can get in the argument, verse 7. “They say unto Him,” the Pharisees, “why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorce and to divorce her?” Now, what amazes me here is that they are not all interested in the divine ideal that the Lord has just presented. The Lord has affirmed lifelong marriage. The Lord has said God hates divorce, in essence. From the very beginning, God never intended that. But they are not interested in the divine ideal. They are only interested in the exception. And this is how it is with sinful people. They’re not interested in abiding by the law; they’re only interested in finding the loopholes, that’s all. And the Pharisees are classic cases of people looking for loopholes in God’s law. On the one hand, they want to be thought of as keeping God’s law because that’s how they enter into God’s favor. On the other hand, they want to find every way out they possibly can.

And so, the exemption is what interests them in order to accommodate their lust, and accommodate their multiple divorces and adulteries. And they are, again, pretty wily about it because they seek to pit Jesus against Moses. And if they can do that, that’s just another way they can discredit Jesus with the people, right? Because the people revere Moses, next to God, and if they can set Jesus against

Moses, they will have accomplished something significant. And so, they say, “Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement and to divorce her?” In other words, if You say all that is true, then why did Moses command divorce? Now, that’s a loaded question because Moses didn’t command divorce, but they chose their own words.

Let’s find out what Moses did say. Go back in your Bible to Deuteronomy chapter 24 because that is the passage they have in mind. It is the only passage relative to Moses that gives any definitive statement about divorce. Deuteronomy, chapter 24. Now, in order to understand this passage, we have to acknowledge in the beginning that the authorized version of the King James has not settled on the proper interpretation or the proper translation of the text, and so we are in debt to the New American Standard Bible for correctly translating this so that it makes proper sense. Let me read it to you very, very carefully so that you’ll understand what it is saying. Now, this is the passage that they leaned on, this is the passage where they said Moses commanded divorce, listen to what it says: “When a man takes a wife,” we’re reading verses 1 to 4, “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, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife.” Now, we’ll stop there.

Now, do you get the picture? This is the first two verses. This guy marries a lady, and it happens that he doesn’t like her; she cannot find favor in his eyes, “because he’s found in her some indecency.” And so, he writes her a certificate of divorce, and he puts it in her hand, and sends her out of the house, and she leaves the house and goes now because she’s legally divorced by that paper, and she becomes another man’s wife. Now, I want you to know at this point, there is absolutely no editorializing on this incident. The text does not say that the man did what was right. The text does not say that the woman did what was right. It doesn’t say that the man did what was wrong, or the woman did what was wrong. It doesn’t say anything. It doesn’t say that God commanded him to divorce her. It doesn’t say that he had to divorce her. God doesn’t say he did the right thing in divorcing her. There’s absolutely no editorial comment from God at all, or Moses. It simply an illustration of a guy who married a woman, saw an indecency, wanted to unload her, wrote her a divorce certificate, and sent her out of the house, and she remarried. That’s all, that’s as far as we’ve gotten in the first two verses.

Now, let’s pick it up in verse 3. “If the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce,” now, husband number two decides that he doesn’t like her any better than husband number one did, “and he 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 sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife since she has been defiled.” She goes to number two, and husband number two doesn’t like her, so he divorces her and sends her out. And then husband number one, in the meantime, is saying, you know, I’m kind of lonely, and the food hasn’t been nearly as good since you’ve been gone, and I’ve got a lot of work around the house, and I miss your companionship, and I

want to marry you. And the Bible says he cannot. He cannot marry her. That is the first comment on the incident. There is a command in Deuteronomy 24, but it is not related to divorce, it is related to remarriage. He is not permitted to remarry her. Even if husband number two dies, and she is widowed, she cannot go back to husband number one. Why? She has been defiled, and 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. To marry that woman is a sin. To marry that woman is a sin because she is defiled.

Now, the Jewish Rabbis did not so interpret this passage. They interpreted it as a command to divorce, that husband number one, when he found an indecency in her, divorced her because he was commanded to do that. And they took it that the command here was to divorce that woman. And you're surprised at that; the King James does the same thing, because it reads this way. "When a man has taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass she find no favor in his eyes, because he's found some indecency in her, then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of this house." So, they picked up the same rabbinical traditional interpretation, but that is not the way the text reads. And I'm not going to take you into the protasis-apodosis of the Hebrew to show you, but you'll have to trust me for it. The rendering of the text has nothing to do with a command to divorce, it says if a man does this, and if he does this, and if he does this, then he can't take her back. The command is that he can't take her back, not that he can, that he should divorce her.

But it was this interpretation of the passage, upon which the Pharisees had based their many divorces. And so, they say to Jesus, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?" And the whole thing was a misinterpretation of Deuteronomy chapter 24. The passage does not condone divorce, mark it, the passage does not advocate divorce, the passage does not command divorce, the passage regulates remarriage. It is a passage designed to regulate remarriage.

Now, just for your own information, there are several other places in the Old Testament where divorce is mentioned. Deuteronomy 22 verse 19 and 29; Leviticus 21, verses 7 and 14, up to this point, also mention divorce but they do not condone it, they do not commend it, they do not command it. They only comment that it exists, and this passage does the same. It just acknowledges the existence of divorce. It is not commanded, it is not even approved. But in the passage, we find there was a cause for this divorce.

And let's look at it and we'll understand the passage: "Because he found in her some uncleanness, or some indecency." Let me tell you what the literal Hebrew is: the nakedness of a thing. He found in her the nakedness of a thing. Now there are all kinds of possibilities for this in Jewish tradition. The Jews said it could be anything. As I told you last time, loose hair, spinning around in the street saying bad things about your mother-in-law, burning dinner, talking with men, anything, and they found that to be

an indecency, or an uncleanness, or the nakedness of a thing, as they interpret it. But if you want to know how to interpret the Bible, you don't interpret it by what the way you like to interpret it, you interpret it by its context. And if you just simply go backwards a little bit into chapter 23, you'll find the same term is used and it's very interesting. Chapter 23, verse 13, here is a regulation about dealing with elimination, physical elimination: "And thou shalt have a shovel among thy weapons, and it shall be when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee for the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp to deliver thee and to give up thine enemies before thee. Therefore shall thy camp be holy that He see no," and there's the term, "uncleanness. No indecency, no unclean thing in thee and turn away from thee." It's simply saying: bury your excrement. That's what it's saying. Because God walks in your camp, along with a lot of other folks, by the way.

It seemed to be a very obvious issue of decency, and that is the very same term that is used in 24:1: he found in her some indecency, some unclean thing, some dirty thing, some vile thing, some shameful thing, some improper thing, something unbecoming to a woman, something embarrassing to her husband. But, it cannot refer to adultery. Because adultery, at this point, resulted in, what? In death. And it would have said adultery. It is something dirty, something embarrassing, something gross but not adultery because Deuteronomy 22 very clearly says that there is to be death for adultery, in verses 22 to 24. So, this has got to be something short of adultery. Now, we don't know what it was, but let me give you what I think is the proper understanding.

If you knew in your society that adultery ended in death, you might do a lot of things but you generally would control yourself just short of adultery, true? I mean, you really wouldn't want to die. And so, apparently what happened was, there were people who were entering into shameless indecent, habitual indulgence in sexual sin or other sin, but coming just short of actually committing adultery, acts that stop just short of adultery. And that appears to be what happened in Deuteronomy 24. Here's a woman who is shameful, who is vile, and she stops short of adultery so the death penalty cannot be applied, but she commits these evil things and her husband just divorces her.

And you say, well, you know, maybe there's a good reason for that. I remember when I was young in the ministry, a couple that were divorced because the wife said that the husband was shameful in his physical hygiene habits, and I'll never forget it. It can happen and perhaps there was even that possibility, I don't know. But he divorced her. But, do you know what happened? She went out of that union and married another guy and immediately became, what? Defiled. You say, "Why?" Because that was no basis for, what? For divorce. And as soon as she entered into another ongoing relationship with a man, even though she had a paper in her hand, she was nothing but an adulteress. You say, "It wasn't her fault, he dumped her." That's right, he made her an adulteress. And that's exactly the way the Lord puts it in Matthew chapter 5 when He says if you divorce your wife for anything less than adultery, or fornication, you make her an adulteress. She became defiled. And that's why, even if her second husband died, he couldn't take her back because God doesn't

want him marrying a defiled adulteress.

And so, the point of Deuteronomy 24 is that if you divorce your wife for anything short of, what? Of adultery, you cause her to, what? Commit adultery. And whoever married her, what? Commits adultery. And then when you remarry, what do you do? Commit adultery, and the woman you marry commits adultery. You literally proliferate adultery all over the place. She became defiled because she had no basis to end the first union, so the second union was unacceptable to God, and she found herself in the very same category as we read in Matthew 14, from last time, you remember? Where we knew that Agrippa had married Herodias, but the Bible says she was his brother Philip's wife, because God does not recognize the dissolution of the first union. He does not recognize the marriage, therefore, of the second union legitimately, and consequently all he is living in adultery. So, Deuteronomy 24 does not command divorce. It commands that you not remarry an illegitimately divorced person. It's a very strong word, my friend. You don't want to marry an illegitimately divorced person because you're marrying someone who is defiled.

Now, you see, God is protecting marriage. And He's saying this: you can't just divorce your wife for anything you want, or you're going to turn her into an adulteress, whoever marries her into an adulterer, yourself and who you marry into one, so just know that, and that ought to help you when you think about getting rid of your wife. Because you're just going to become an adulterer, and whoever you marry is going to fall into that category, and so is everybody else. And you see, God is, in a sense, trying to insulate that one man, one woman, monogamous, lifelong relationship by making the alternative one of disaster. And so, this text does not command divorce; it commands that you do not remarry an illegitimately divorced person.

Now, let's go back to Matthew chapter 19, and I want you to notice verses 8 and 9 and we move from the attack, to the answer, to the argument in verse 7. They argued with Him, and now to the affirmation, the affirmation in verses 8 and 9, the affirmation: "He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning, that was never intended to be." That's what that means. It was no command because of the hardness of your heart, Moses, what? Permitted it, tolerated it. But may I hasten to add, he didn't tolerate it for indecency, did he? He didn't tolerate it for shameless behavior, so he wouldn't have tolerated it for anything under that. He couldn't have been for burning the dinner if it wasn't for vile, if I can coin a phrase, extra-mental kind of behavior. If it wasn't for that, for living on the thin edge of vice and adultery and lewdness; if it wasn't for that, it wouldn't be for anything less than that, would it? Because you found somebody nicer, or because your wife talked to the wrong guy, or because you decided you wanted to go on to some other adventure? No. If it wasn't for something right on the edge of adultery, it wouldn't be for anything less than that.

So, Moses did permit it, but it wasn't in the Deuteronomy 24 passage that it was permitted. Frankly, dear friends, we don't know where in the Old Testament Moses actually permitted it because it

doesn't say that, but we do know that it must have been permitted for a legitimate basis or it wouldn't have been discussed for illegitimate basis in Deuteronomy 24. But the Old Testament does not give us a text where it says I permit you to get a divorce on the basis of this. So, we have to sort of draw that out. And I think there's a reason for that. I think God avoided saying it. It is a permission, but it's sort of way behind the scenes, it's not overtly stated lest people hurry to that passage to justify themselves.

Now, the point of the, Old Testament is this, then: divorce for less than adultery leads to adultery. And, of course, when there was adultery, God dealt with that with death. But, in His grace, and here we come to this verse 8: in God's grace there was a transition in the Old Testament from death to divorce for adultery. We have to understand that. Because God is a gracious God, He did not always enact the death penalty, did He? For example, did David commit adultery? Yes, many, many times. Did he die? No. God was gracious. And many others committed adultery. Solomon, did he commit adultery? Heaven only could record. The point being: there is the grace of God manifest in the Old Testament. And somewhere along the line, God in His tolerance, spared life and allowed divorce. If marriage could only be severed by adultery through death, then I'm convinced that God would have only allowed marriage to be severed by divorce in the case of adultery. And then, only where you had hardness of heart, hardness of heart. You see, the point is this: when there was an irreconcilable problem, in other words, you've got a partner in a marriage who is in an adulterous relationship and will not sever it and will not sever it, and there's no way to bring it back, there's no way to restore it. God may be gracious to that adulterous person, but where that hard heart is not softened, God permitted divorce for the innocent party to be free to remarry. I believe where you have an unrepentant, irreconcilable adultery, you have a hard heart. And you are pursuing your adultery in a hard-hearted way, then Moses allowed, not condoned, not commended, and not commanded, but allowed divorce, when God was gracious and didn't bring death. That's all we can understand about it, otherwise nothing makes sense.

We cannot give any more latitude than the Word of God does. It was a concession on account of sin to make life more bearable for one sinned against. Then, I believe, that God would not punish the innocent victim because he was gracious and didn't kill the guilty one, do you understand? Because if God killed the guilty one, the innocent one would be, what? Free. But just because God is gracious to the guilty one doesn't mean He's going to have to penalize the innocent one. Moses allowed divorce, but that was never, verse 8 says, the beginning, that was never God's original design. Now, I hope you understand this because it seems to be such a confusing thing today when the Word of God is rather clear on it.

So, Deuteronomy 24 does not authorize divorce. It only stipulated no remarriage. And by the way, in case you're confused about a passage in Mark chapter 10 where it speaks of Deuteronomy 24 as a command, Deuteronomy 24 is a command but it's not a command to divorce; it's a command, what? Not to remarry, so don't be confused by that. So, it is then a prohibition for remarriage, that's what

Deuteronomy 24 is.

But what are the grounds of divorce? As I said, the only thing we can see is the grounds of divorce would be adultery. Let me just see if I can't help you to see this. Go back in the Old Testament for a moment to Ezra chapter 10. Chapter 10, and this is kind of a difficult portion but it has to be dealt with, Ezra chapter 10, verse 3. "Now, therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and such as are born of them." Now, here are the people of God saying let's make a covenant with God to divorce our wives. "According to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God and let it be done according to the law." Now, the reason for this is that they had married pagans. God had forbidden them to do this and they had entered into mixed marriages. They had become spiritual adulterers. They had abandoned God, they had abandoned God's commandments, they had married these wives of adultery. And there's a real sense in which God doesn't even recognize these marriages. So, they said: let's get rid of these wives, for this matter belongs unto thee; we shall, we also will be with thee, be of good courage and do it. "Then arose Ezra, made the chief priests, the Levites and all Israel swear that they should do according to this word, and they swore." Now, there actually here is an advocating of divorce. They are told that they should divorce. And it's very difficult, at this point, to interpret the passage in specific; but in general, what it is, saying is this: they had entered into adulterous unions. It may well have been that they had divorced their Jewish wives to marry these pagans, and God never really saw those as legitimate marriages. But more than that, they had intermarried in a spiritual adultery, and God sees divorce as legitimate in that case.

Now, let me go a step further. Pagans live by adultery. In other words, their pagan worship was adulterous. They had temple prostitutes, both male and female. And when they went to worship, for example, the people who worshiped Baal would go in and actually engage in sex orgies. And I believe the reason that the reason there can be legitimate grounds for divorce here, is because their spouses were pagan adulterers and idolaters, okay? And on that basis, God is permitting them to shed those wives, or husbands, who are engaged in that incessant, unceasing worship of false gods connected not only with idolatry, but with adultery. And so, you see implied here then that they were to be divorced because of the spiritual intermarriage with idols, and the physical union they were having with the prostitutes who carried on the idolatrous worship. Now this is a hint, then, at the fact that there is legitimate divorce where there is adultery involved, a very important text. Let me take you to another one that is even more significant.

Isaiah chapter 50. Isaiah chapter 50, verse 1. Now in this particular verse, the Lord is confronting a wayward, disobedient, sinning people. And He is talking to them as their husband: Israel is My wife; I am her husband, is the idea. And so the Lord says: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorce whom I have divorced?" Where is your divorce certificate, God says. The answer, of course, is they don't have one. In other words, He's saying, How dare you join yourselves to idols, how dare you commit spiritual adultery, how dare you abandon God and the worship of the true God, how dare you leave

Me, your husband, O Israel, how dare you do that, where's your divorce? What gives you a right to do that? Have I divorced you? And the answer, of course, is that He had not. But look at Jeremiah 3:8. And now you're later than Isaiah. For 700 years now, God has been calling to Israel. For 700 years, He's been saying stop your idols, stop your idols, stop your spiritual adultery. For 700 years, Israel has been spiritually adulterous, joining itself to other husbands, other deities. 700 years of incessant spiritual adultery with other gods. And finally, after the 700 years, chapter 3 of Jeremiah, verse 8, "And I saw when for all the causes whereby Israel committed adultery I had divorced her and given her a bill of divorce."

Now, guess who divorces here? Who does it? God does it. God, after 700 years, divorced Israel. That's what He says. That's the analogy that He uses. And He did it for her committing adultery. Now if you want to know, then, what the basis of a divorce is in the Old Testament, it is adultery, because that's the only way you could break a marriage was through adultery because if you committed adultery, you'd be dead, and that would break the marriage and free the partner. But if God was gracious and didn't take your life, divorce was permitted but only when there was hardness of heart that could never be resolved, you see? And it took God 700 years to get to that place. So, it's a great illustration of patience, isn't it? You don't say, "My husband did it once; that's the end of him." There needs to be an understanding of that. It's for continued hardness of heart. So, even God divorced. That is such an important, important passage because God, my friend, does not do things that aren't right and God doesn't give us living illustrations of His own behavior that we can't follow. You understand that? So that's why it grieves me that people will come along and say there's no grounds for divorce; there is. But it's in a prolonged, unrepentant, irreconcilable case of adultery. That is the essence of what even the Lord is indicating.

In Jeremiah 31 and 32: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, I'll make a new covenant." You know what He's going to do? He's going to get married again. You know who He's going to get married to? First wife, Israel. He's going to get married again with the house of Israel, the house of Jacob. Verse 32, "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which My covenant, they broke, although I was an husband unto them." And that affirms that God was no longer their husband. But He will remarry them, and restore that covenant, and make a new covenant. So, there is allowable divorce for adultery.

Now, somebody might ask at this question: why did divorce replace death? And I've already suggested one reason. Reason number one is that because God is gracious. The same reason maybe the early years of the church when Ananias and Sapphira died for not giving what they promised to the Lord. They died but a lot of other folks throughout the history of the church have done the same thing and haven't died. God was establishing examples then. And God is patient to us. But I also think that maybe the reason death wasn't enforced was because there wasn't anybody around pure enough to enforce it. Because all of the executioners would have had to kill themselves first,

because the nation was so filled with adultery. In fact, do you remember the woman taken in adultery in John 8, and they were all there and they had their stones, you know, all the Pharisees were going to stone this woman for. They caught her in the act and the man just up and took off, the woman is there and they're ready to stone her. And Jesus looks them right in the eye and says, "Let him that is without," what? "Sin cast the first stone." He may have been saying you're a whole bunch of adulterers yourselves. How dare you be such hypocrites?

So, we see then, the Old Testament ideal. Jesus simply restates it, just restates it. Back to Matthew 19 now. God never intended divorce for any reason. But where there was adultery, God killed the partner. That's how sacred marriage is. He didn't want you to commit adultery, you could die. But God was gracious, and men were sinful, and where there was a constant irreconcilable adultery, God permitted divorce. But, the Old Testament permission was only designed to meet unique, practical problems in an imperfect, sinful world. And adultery is the only thing that can break the bond. And if it doesn't break the bond by death, it may break it by divorce.

And as I said before, if divorce is a merciful concession to the adulterer, do we then say that because God shows mercy to the guilty, He penalizes the innocent? In other words, let's say in the Old Testament your husband commits adultery, he's dead. He has no chance to repent. If he's unredeemed, he's in hell forever. Are you free to remarry? Sure, because death breaks the marriage. If God allows you to divorce, he allows that person to live in order that that person may have time to repent and be restored and even redeemed. Because He's gracious to that person, does He penalize this innocent person over here to a life of celibacy? Hardly, because God doesn't have to make tradeoffs. He isn't gracious to one, and make somebody else pay the price. And so, we believe that where there is grounds for divorce, there must therefore be grounds for remarriage. The purpose of the divorce, after all, was only to show mercy to the guilty, not to sentence the innocent to lifelong singleness, loneliness or misery.

So, the marriage ideal is the same, and Jesus says it, and the only reason Moses even allowed divorce was because your hearts were so hard. Now, verse 9. "And I say unto you, whosoever shall divorce his wife not on the grounds of fornication, or adultery," fornication being the broad term that encompasses adultery, here *moicheia* and *porneia* are on and the same, as in Matthew 5, we dealt with it there. "But whosoever shall put away his wife, not on the grounds of fornication, and shall marry another commits adultery. And whosoever marries her who is divorced, commits adultery." And Jesus says the same thing He said in Matthew 5:31 and 32. The same thing in Deuteronomy 24: when you get a divorce for other than adultery, you proliferate more adultery. That verse is not a new verse, that's not a new thought, that's not a new truth, that's Deuteronomy 24 all over again. That's Matthew chapter 5, verse 32, the same statement exactly is made there. It's nothing new; it's the same old principle. You see, in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, the Pharisees would say, we don't commit adultery, we don't commit adultery. And Jesus says to them, oh yes you do. You commit adultery two ways: one, when you look on a woman to lust after her you commit it in your heart.

Secondly, you commit adultery because you divorce for unbiblical grounds, and when you do that you make adulteries all over the place. So, you are adulterers of the first order. It's exactly what He's saying.

The key phrase: not on the grounds of fornication, or immorality. It is a commonly used word to encompass adultery. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:8, it says very clearly: "Nor let us act immorally," uses the same word, "as some of them acted immorally and 23,000 fell in one day." Now, people would say, well, no, you're only talking about fornication here, not adultery. It's outside of marriage, not including marriage. They're going to have to explain then that all 23,000 people who were killed by God and recorded in 1 Corinthians 10 were unmarried. That's silly. Obviously the word encompasses both sex outside of marriage and sex that would be constituted as adultery. He's not just referring only to unmarried Israelites, or unmarried Corinthians. The word encompasses all sexual evil.

Now, perhaps a word from Paul, 1 Corinthians chapter 7, will help fill in our thinking. First Corinthians 7:10: "Unto the married, I command, yet not I but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband." Now here, Paul reaffirms the same basic truth: don't leave your husband. But, if she departs, let's say you decided to do it, you just pack up and leave: "Let her remain," what? "Unmarried." You've got no basis at all to remarry. If you do, what will you become? An adulteress. Or, you have, a second option: be reconciled to your husband. And then he turns the table. "Now, don't let the husband divorce his wife." So, stay married. Very, very important. And we'll go back to 1 Corinthians next week when we get into some more things.

So, we've seen Jesus uphold God's ideal, then. And He silenced the Pharisees. In fact, He made them appear as adulterers. So, when they came to Him, they really walked into a buzz saw. They were trying to discredit Him and before the conversation is half over. They're standing there, a whole stack of adulterers in public gaze. Divorce is not God's will for every cause. It is never His will for any cause. It is permitted only in the cases of prolonged and unrepentant adultery, otherwise it makes defiled people.

Now, let me just draw this to a conclusion with one key thing. People always ask about the right to remarry, and I just want you to know that the Bible affirms that remarriage is okay. You say, "Where is that?" Well, look with me, all right? Romans 7:3. "So then," it says, "if while her husband lives," it's talking about a married lady, "if while her husband lives, she be married to another man, she'll be called an adulteress." You can't marry another man, can you, while your husband is still alive? Can't have two husbands; that's bigamy. "But, if her husband be dead, she's free from that law so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man." Now, that verse says remarriage is okay. Right? It's okay to remarry somebody, if your husband died. But all I'm trying to point out is that it does say remarriage is okay, under certain circumstances, one of which is, what? The death of a spouse. Now, this is not just there but 1 Timothy, for example, chapter 5, verse 14: "I will therefore,"

Paul says, I will, this is my desire, this is the best, “that the younger women marry.” And it has to do with the remarriage because the text actually says the younger women, that is widows, and the whole passage is about widows, you go back to verse 4 and it starts there, that the younger women marry again, and bear children, and lead the house, and give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. So, young widows are called on to remarry, so remarriage is okay.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 7. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 8: “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows: it is good for them if they abide even as I, but if they cannot have self-control, let them marry.” So, if you’re a widow, or a widower, you have a right to remarry. So, God is not against remarriage, in general. Look at verse 39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives, but if her husband be dead, she’s at liberty to be married to whom she will only in the Lord.” So, in all those passages, there’s an advocating of remarriage in the case of death. Now, it seems consequent to all of this to say this: that if God permits remarriage where there is death; then in cases of adultery, if God went by the absolute nature of the law, there would always be the possibility of remarriage, right? And because God allows for divorce, does not mean that when the person cannot be reconciled, there’s no hope for them but to be single all their life. I think that’s to confuse the issue. And so, I believe that God would allow remarriage in the case of an adultery that caused a divorce.

Now, 1 Corinthians 7:27, for a moment: “Are you bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife?” What does that mean? Have you been divorced? “Seek not a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned.” In other words, if you have been loosed from a wife, it doesn’t say how. If you’ve been loosed from a wife and it is justified, and it is legitimate, and it is according to biblical grounds, if you marry you’ve not sinned. You’ve not sinned. “Nor a virgin marry, she hath not sinned.” Isn’t that interesting? That it would put a previously married person in the same breath with a virgin? And so, we believe then, that God permits remarriage where divorce is on biblical grounds. Now, we’ve worked our way through the whole of the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees, but what is really fascinating about the passage is the reaction of the disciples. And that we’re going to look at next week.

Let’s have prayer. Father, we know that it’s easy to look for justification in the Scripture for our own evil, to look for ways out of following Your will. And we don’t intend to do either. We only want to understand Your truth. We only want to understand that You hate divorce. But You’re a merciful, gracious, forgiving God. And in cases of adultery where there cannot be reconciliation, You have not sentenced a person who seeks to do right to a life of abuse or misery. But You have given them a gracious alternative to marry in the Lord. But outside of that, God, You have really set the rules straight: no divorce and no remarriage, or everybody becomes adulterous. Thank You for the clear word from You, and may we never do treacherously against the wife of the covenant of our youth. May we reaffirm in our hearts day after day, the covenant made between the two and You. And may we celebrate with joy what You have put together, the sweet, sweet grace of life, the loving tender companionship of a man and a woman. Lord, we know that when people will keep that covenant, and

love each other deeply and truly, and keep You as the focus, You'll pour out on that union such blessedness, they'll not be able to receive it. But as soon as they violate Your principles, You bring Your just chastening.

And so, Father, we would sanctify marriage, and we would affirm that though You permit divorce and remarriage in extreme cases, from the beginning it was never that way. We pray that You would eliminate divorce from our fellowship in days ahead, that You would restore those who are in the midst of it, that You would bring back those who've already done it. I thank You for the invitation I received this week, Lord, to a wedding of two people who were divorced and are now coming back together. We would not tear apart what You've made. Bless the marriages in this church. We thank You that You have made them all. Fulfill them as they walk in obedience to You.

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