

Christian Marriage II

The problem of divorce

Matthew 19:3-12

³ And Pharisees came up to Jesus and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” ⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’? [Genesis 2:24] ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

⁷ They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” [Deut. 24:1] ⁸ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

¹ When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then 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 of his house, and she departs out of his house, ² and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and the latter man hates 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 man dies, who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Malachi 2:16

For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.

Luke 17:3-4

³ If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, “I repent,” you must forgive him.

Matthew 5:31-32

³¹ It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” ³² 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.

Mark 10:11-12

¹¹ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

1 Corinthians 7:10-16, 39

¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

¹⁶ Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?

Notes: In Matthew 19, the Pharisees are trying to test Jesus. Either to accept their view, divorce for any reason (v. 1, “any cause”), or no divorce, in which case get in possible political trouble with Herod Antipas (same reason why John Baptist was beheaded).

Jesus affirms, basically, no divorce, with one exception (get to that later). Pharisees counter with Deuteronomy 24.

Deuteronomy 24

Only place in OT that talks about divorce. Very strange passage.

Describes a situation in which a woman’s been divorced twice and states that her first husband may not remarry her.

May have been doing two things:

- protecting woman from abuse (thus ban remarrying 1st husband)
- regulating divorce: “found some indecency in her” (v. 1)

This was debated by Pharisees. Most felt that any reason was sufficient.

Jesus clearly interprets this as sexual infidelity

- “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality”
- porneia – “sexual immorality”

Then explains Deut. 24

- given to mitigate human brokenness
- notice Pharisees said, “Moses commanded” (v.7)
- fact Pharisees misread as command shows default assumption sinlessness
- but Deut. 24 is concession to sin, not positive command
- but Jesus, “Moses allowed you to divorce” (v. 8), permissible
- radical notion in ancient world, in which easy to divorce

Goes back original design for marriage – Genesis 2

- husband and wife become *one flesh* | one common life together
- sex consummating union, physically uniting
- therefore, to divorce is to tear apart one body (like ripping arm off)
- thus, Malachi 2:16, “covers garment with violence”
- God joined together | not independent decision, but divine involvement

Therefore, divorce and remarriage is equivalent to adultery (v. 9)

- b/c adultery is breaking faith w/ marriage vow | violation one-flesh union
- divorce is same, since breaking faith with vow
- and remarriage is also adultery because, again, breaking faith
- all violations of marriage, which intended lifelong fidelity

But what if someone violated marriage against you? (adultery)

- first, Jesus divorce is permissible, meaning not required
- actually, even then, reconciliation and forgiveness is the better way
- Luke 17:3-4, “you must forgive him” | gospel re-enactment
- also example of Hosea, didn’t divorce Gomer, sought reconciliation

But sometimes, too painful or impossible (no repentance)

- in that case, divorce is permissible
- but only on condition that spouse broke faith sexually (adultery)

Cannot divorce for other reasons

- deeply counter to both ancient and modern culture
- today, if fall out of love, get divorce | why stay loveless marriage?
- but Bible says, “love,” it’s agape-love | love as action, not feeling
- against modern “no-fault” divorce

Purpose of marriage is life-long fidelity – no matter what

- marriage vow, “for richer or poor, sickness and health, death do us part”

If innocent party (sinned against), you can remarry

But if divorce without cause, you must not remarry

- Jesus, this is adultery
- because you are breaking faith with marriage

Disciples express alarm – “better not to marry” (v. 10)

- this teaching is hard | Jesus’ standard of marriage is high (and beautiful)
- Jesus also upholds singleness as a legitimate option (radical!)

Matthew 5:31-32

- why “makes her commit adultery”? | she has no option but remarry
- if you pursue illegitimate divorce, it is adultery

Mark 10:11-2

- Jesus deeply egalitarian in views of marriage
- in ancient world, deeply sexist – only from male perspective
- Jesus – there is a deep equality/partnership in marriage
- Paul – both have conjugal rights, 1 Corinthians 7

Is there another possibility for legitimate divorce? 1 Cor. 7

- v. 10-11, Paul affirms what Jesus taught – divorce is sinful
- v. 12ff, “I, not the Lord,” not issue Jesus faced
- problem of inter-faith marriage because of conversions in early church

First, seek to stay in marriage

- marriage is promise to stay together – conversion doesn’t change

Second, perhaps marriage can lead spouse to Christ

- v. 14, “unbelieving spouse made holy”
- likewise, “children are made holy” (v. 14)
- v. 16 – “how do you know whether you will save spouse?”

v. 15, “if unbelieving spouse separates,” can divorce | abandonment

- forced into lifelong vain hope of reconciliation
- free to remarry (though Paul, “only in the Lord,” v. 39)

To ask, “can I divorce?” is wrong question

- Bible overwhelmingly affirms life-long nature of marriage promise
- in all cases, seek to reconcile and stay married
- there are special circumstances where cannot keep marriage
- only two cases: adultery and abandonment by unbelieving spouse

Special Cases:

(1) Can you be deserted by a believer?

- seek intervention by church
- marriage is not a private matter, but integrated into life church
- elders can exercise church discipline and appeal to spouse to reconcile
- if not, excommunicate | then unbeliever, then you can divorce

(2) Does physical abuse count as desertion? Emotional abuse?

- seek safety, separation
- again, seek intervention by church
- while separated, seek reconciliation

Abuse is tough issue because range of abuse

- cannot divorce because you are unhappy or your spouse is crappy
- in cases of extreme unrepentant abuse, I think permissible
- but always in consultation with elders | not an individual decision

(3) What if you already remarried sinfully?

- ask God for forgiveness and seek to stay married