

## "Divorce: When the Dream Is Shattered"

Matthew 19:3-9

### I. Introduction

- A. Marriage begins as an ideal that can soon turn into an ordeal, and that's when people start to look for a new deal—divorce is in their sights
- B. Broken homes produce broken lives that produce broken homes
  - 1. Millennials are waiting much longer than previous generations to get married while enjoying the fringe benefits of the marriage relationship without any commitment
  - 2. Two out of five people in Generation X and the millennial generation said that marriages have failed for most of the people they know
- C. Matthew 19 is the conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel about the issue of divorce
  - 1. The religious leaders intended to use a controversial issue to discredit Jesus
  - 2. Jesus gave them a direct answer without skirting the controversial nature of the question itself

### II. Divorce Is a Practical Issue (v. 3)

- A. The religious leaders brought up this question because divorce was a common issue in Israel
  - 1. The Pharisees were hoping to trap Jesus with this question in order to discredit Him in the eyes of the people
  - 2. Divorce was a topic of heated debate among the Jews
- B. Theoretically, there was no nation on earth that had a higher standard of the covenant of marriage than the nation of Israel; in reality, women of that day and age had no legal rights and could never divorce their husbands
  - 1. Marriage was regarded as a sacred duty
  - 2. There was a saying that the only reason for a man to be exempt from this duty was to devote his entire life to the study of Torah
  - 3. If a man refused to marry and have children, it was said that he was breaking the positive commandment to fill the earth and that he had slain his posterity
- C. There were many positive sayings concerning marriage
  - 1. Unchastity causes the glory of God to depart
  - 2. Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder, or adultery
  - 3. The very altar itself sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth
- D. The basis for this question was pulled from Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which is the only passage in the Old Testament that refers to divorce
- E. There were two opposing viewpoints as to what this passage meant
  - 1. One was more conservative, perpetuated by Rabbi Shammai, who interpreted the clause in Deuteronomy to mean only adultery
  - 2. The more liberal view was adopted by Rabbi Hillel
    - a. Hillel defined *uncleanness* in the widest possible way

- b. Rabbi Akiva later widened this view even further, saying that if a man found another woman more attractive than his wife, he could divorce his wife and marry the other woman
    - 3. By the time of Jesus, there was rampant no-fault divorce taking place
- III. Divorce Is a Biblical Issue (vv. 4-6)
  - A. Jesus' answer took them back to the beginning of marriage
    - 1. He answered indirectly, with a question: "Have you not read?" (v. 4)
      - a. Genesis 1:27
      - b. Genesis 2:24
    - 2. Jesus expects you to know your Bible
      - a. How can you ever obey God if you don't know what God said?
      - b. How are you ever going to know what God wants if you never read what God wants?
  - B. The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce, but Jesus took them back to the beginning
    - 1. If you want to understand the issues within something, you need to understand the concept itself first
    - 2. Jesus affirmed four important aspects of marriage
      - a. Marriage was God's idea
      - b. Marriage is between a man and woman
        - i. Blurring the lines between genders presents the biggest danger to marriage in our culture today
        - ii. God made man and woman—not one man and three women, just in case Eve didn't work out
      - c. It was God's plan to create oneness through marriage
        - i. This is the process of leaving, cleaving, and weaving
        - ii. "One flesh" (v. 6)
        - iii. It's impossible to divide one into two; it just becomes two halves
      - d. Marriage was designed to be permanent
        - i. God's intent was that marriage would be permanent and lifelong
        - ii. Divorce was not in God's original blueprint for marriage, though He permits it in limited circumstances
- IV. Divorce Is a Controversial Issue (v. 7)
  - A. The Pharisees' misconception can be seen at the heart of the question
    - 1. Did God ever, through Moses or anyone else, command anyone to divorce?
    - 2. They turned a divine concession into a divine command (divorce is a divine concession to human weakness)
  - B. God hates divorce
    - 1. Malachi 2:16
    - 2. God hates divorce, but He loves divorced people
  - C. A careful reading of Deuteronomy 24 reveals that it's not teaching about divorce or the certificate of divorce—those are incidental
    - 1. It concerns remarriage and focuses on protecting women
    - 2. What does the term *uncleanness* refer to?

- a. It cannot refer to adultery—the Old Testament punishment for adultery was not divorce, but death
    - b. Whatever the uncleanness was, it did not warrant a divorce (see Deuteronomy 24:4)
  - 3. The text did not advocate divorce
    - a. It was meant to protect the woman from her first husband
    - b. The adultery was the fault of the first husband, who divorced her
- V. Divorce Is a Moral Issue (vv. 8-9)
  - A. Jesus presented them with the correct interpretation
    - 1. Divorce always includes a hardening of the heart
    - 2. "Divorce tells us the truth about man. It tells us nothing about marriage" —Terence Kelshaw
  - B. The exception clause
    - 1. The Greek word for "sexual immorality" (v. 9) is *porneia*
    - 2. The verb tense used here indicates a continual, unrepentant pattern of behavior—the only allowable reason for a Christian to initiate divorce
    - 3. Matthew 5:27-32
    - 4. What Jesus required with the exception clause was more than the religious leaders required, but not more than Moses required
- VI. Conclusion
  - A. To those struggling with the weight and pain of a divorce:
    - 1. God understands
    - 2. Let forgiveness rule the day—God specializes in forgiveness
  - B. God speaks so strongly about divorce because He was divorced
    - 1. The people of Israel committed spiritual adultery over and over again
    - 2. Jeremiah 3:8
  - C. Any divorced person you know needs all the love and encouragement you can give them

**Figures referenced:** Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Hillel, Terence Kelshaw, Rabbi Shammai

**Cross references:** Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Jeremiah 3:8; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:27-32

**Greek words:** *porneia*

**Topic:** divorce

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