

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Session 1: Divorce and Remarriage

January 18, 2023

Why Talk about Divorce and Remarriage?

- It is *SENSITIVE* – most families are affected by this issue; difficult to read some biblical texts and discuss without fear of hurting feelings
- It is *PERVASIVE* – if any institution needs to talk about marriage, divorce, “family values” and human relationships, it should be the Church
- It is *SPIRITUAL* – we need to know what the Bible says; how we understand it and what God’s expectations are of us in marriage

Three Basic Questions

- What are the questions society and we are asking about divorce and remarriage?
- What does the Bible teach about this issue?
- What is an appropriate response/stance from followers of Jesus Christ?

State of Marriage

- Historically, the Church has been outspoken against divorce
 1. King Henry VIII and beginnings of Anglican church
 2. Difficulty getting annulments through Catholic church
 3. Sacraments not offered to those divorced/remarried
- Baptists have also had strong views
 - In 2015 a Baptist megachurch in Dallas sought to discipline a woman for divorcing her husband.

State of Marriage (cont.)

- Previously, the Church's stance against divorce was supported by social conventions (divorce nearly an unthinkable option; viewed as a last resort in desperate circumstances)
- From middle to the end of the 20th century, society changed; now, divorce is in some cultures almost the norm.
- The Church has changed-cultural acceptance has led to much more consent from the Church; tendency today is "marital matters are private affairs that are not to be judged by others"
- What does the Bible say? What should we teach about divorce and remarriage?

Questions asked about Divorce and Remarriage

- Is divorce a sin? (the unpardonable sin)
- Is there ever a situation in which divorce would be God's will?
- If a Christian becomes divorced, is remarriage an acceptable option for that person from God's perspective?
- What does the Bible teach about divorce and remarriage?

Understanding Mark 10:2-12

- This section of Mark's Gospel is stressing the cost of discipleship (8:34, 9:35, 10:42-45)
- Mark is presenting marriage as one aspect of discipleship (spiritual matter, faith issue); sacrificial service in human relationships
- Moses gave permission for divorce but Jesus issues a declaration against it; Jesus says divorce is a sign of hardness of heart; divorcing one to marry another is nothing more than a devious form of adultery.

Divorce in Jesus' Time

- Divorce universally accepted; the only debatable issue was legitimate grounds for divorce or remarriage
- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 presupposes the practice of divorce and merely prohibits a man from marrying his divorced wife after her intervening second marriage
- These leaders probably had heard that Jesus taught against divorce and wanted to set up "Moses vs. Jesus"
- Jesus tells them that Moses "permitted" divorce but did not "command" divorce; then, Jesus (1) declares the permission was due to the hardness of their hearts, (2) He appeals behind Moses to God's intention (Genesis)

Understanding Mark 10

- Pharisees not only trying to entrap Jesus; they are attempting to circumvent God's intention
- They are concerned about a rule; Jesus is concerned about real human relationships
- Later Jesus gives further instructions to His disciples ("adultery") two interpretations:
- Jesus concedes occasions for divorce, but excludes the option of remarriage
- Condemning those who intentionally divorce one in order to remarry another

Conclusions from Mark 10

- Divorce may be legal, but it is clearly not God's intention for creating humanity male and female
- Divorce is a matter of the heart, not a matter of the law
- For the Christian, marriage is a matter of spiritual discipleship; Jesus' disciples are to renounce divorce and follow in the way of the cross, seeking to fulfill God's intention for human relationships

Matthew 19:3-12

“And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who made 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 put asunder.”

They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."

The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, It is not expedient to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. 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 for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."

Understanding Matthew 19

- Same basic episode with subtle changes
- Original question adds “for any cause” – asks Jesus to take a position on a well known controversy between various rabbinical schools
- Jesus doesn’t ask about Moses, he tells them
- Jesus adds “except for unchastity” (not in Mark); we will see later this exception is also not in Luke or Paul
- This exception clause is included in Matt. 5:32
- Remaining questions: “What does Jesus mean by “unchastity” or “sexual immorality”?”