

Take it Back

Matthew 19:3-9

Pierre Cannings

I. Test v. 3

- a. Pharisees- The last time Pharisees were on stage in Matthew they also came to Jesus in order to test him 16:1
- b. Tested - **to attempt to entrap through a process of inquiry, test.** Jesus was so treated by his opponents, who planned to use their findings against him
 - i. Over against Mark's account, Mt 19:7 stresses the Pharisees as opponents rather than Jesus as pedagogue: they no longer respond to a question of Jesus but object to his statement. **Worthy to take into account that Jesus is often the objection when we are seeking something else from his teaching**
 - ii. Divorce may be the area chosen for discussion simply because it is an area that touches people's lives deeply. The outcome for John the Baptist of speaking publicly about issues of marriage and divorce with reference to Herod Antipas had been disastrous (see at 14:3–12).
 - iii. The recent Herodias affair (14:3–12), along with Jesus' own teaching in 5:31–32, may also have influenced the Pharisees' question (for further background see under 5:31–32).
- c. Lawful
 - i. Man Divorce
 - 1. Divorce- **to dissolve a marriage relationship**
 - 2. The Jews did not question the legality of divorce. That was legalised by Dt 24:1, 2. But they debated about the scope and limits of reasons for divorce. where the views of the schools of Hillel and of Shammai are given. The former allowed divorce for trivial offenses, the latter only for some unchaste act
 - 3. Mal 2:16 ('I [Yahweh] hate divorce' or, alternatively, 'One who divorces because of hate ...')takes us, as remarked in
 - 4. In the time of Jesus there was in practice no legal protection of women from arbitrary divorce, though financial consequences (primarily the release to the woman of the monies involved in the marriage settlement), social pressure, and sometimes moral scruple provided some constraint.
 - 5. The wording reflects only a man's perspective, since women were rarely if ever able to divorce in ancient Judaism. Yet although no reciprocal language appears in this context, 5:31 and Mark

10:11–12 show that Jesus' teachings on the topic granted both women and men equal privileges and responsibilities.

- ii. Any Reason
 - 1. **that which is responsible**
 - 2. "for any cause," however, can be taken in two ways, i.e., "for every reason whatever" (i.e., Hillel's position) or "for any reason (at all)."

II. Back to the Facts vs. 4-6

- a. Created Gen 1:27
 - i. Jesus goes beyond Deuteronomy and the Pharisees' debate to a creation ordinance. "Haven't you read," as in 12:3, 5, challenges his interrogators' understanding of the Scriptures. He quotes the LXX of Gen 1:27 and 2:24 almost verbatim. God originally intended for marriages to be permanent. He created two complementary genders for each other
 - ii. That is to say, the toleration of divorce by the law is a departure from the high standard of morality presupposed in the creation of a single pair. Divorce is a bad custom which has grown up amongst a degenerate people, and the Mosaic law tolerated it as an accommodation to a low level of moral custom
 - iii. Gen 2:22–24 teaches that God created males and females (Gen 1:27) in order to re-create them into an inviolable union Marriage thereby establishes a new physical relationship ("one *flesh*") comparable to other familial relationships, held together by a natural (i.e., hereditary) and therefore indissoluble covenant
- b. One
 - i. Leave- The marriage covenant has two parts to it. To "leave ... and be united" means *to transfer one's fundamental allegiance from parents to spouse*.
 - ii. "One flesh" describes the interpersonal intimacy that should characterize the marriage partnership and culminate in sexual relations
 - iii. Rather it affirms that just as blood relations are one's flesh and bone ... so marriage creates a similar kinship relation between man and wife
 - iv. Gen 2:24
 - 1. After leaving comes cleaving to the wife. The image clearly involves the sexual, but set over against the leaving of parents the physical union stands for a much more comprehensive union of lives. There is a new bond now which relativizes the claims of natural family loyalties.
 - 2. At this point Jesus' reflection on divorce clearly takes place against the backdrop of a high view of the commitment of marriage and the significance of the union established in marriage between man and woman. It is possible that, centuries earlier, Mal. 2:15–16

already found a connection between opposition to divorce and the creation account

- v. Jesus' initial comment focusses sharply on the language of 'one flesh': 'no longer two but one flesh' aligns divorce with the violence of something like mutilation, amputation, or dismemberment. The image then changes to that of two creatures yoked together by God. In marriage God makes a man and woman a linked pair, partnered for the needs, responsibilities, and eventualities of life.

III. Get it Right vs. 7-9

- a. The main point is not that the teaching of Genesis is from God, that in Deuteronomy from Moses.
- b. Hardness of Hearts
 - i. Hardness- **an unyielding frame of mind, hardness of heart, coldness, obstinacy, stubbornness**
 - ii. The σκληροκαρδι- ('hard-hearted') root is found five times in the LXX but only in Ezk. 3:7 is the imagery reflected in the Hebrew text
- c. Moses Permitted
 - i. Permitted - **to allow someone to do**
 - ii. 'Moses commanded (ἐνετείλατο)', which Jesus displaces with 'Moses permitted'
 - iii. Moses sanctioned divorce. Christ at once makes His position clear. The law upon this point was an accommodation to a rude state of society. But a prior and higher law is to be found in the Creation narrative, "Male and female He created them," Gn 1:27
 - iv. With Jesus' prohibition of divorce, the Pharisees must have felt they had Jesus trapped since after all it was clear that Moses had in fact allowed and regulated divorce, according to Deut 24:1-4. The authority of Moses for the Pharisees (cf. 23:2) is evident in the use of ἐνετείλατο, "commanded." The βιβλίον ἀποστασίου, "certificate of divorce" (cf. Deut 24:1-3; cf. Jer 3:8), was a legal document that recorded the separation and the reason for the separation, which enabled the divorced woman to enter into a new marriage. (The only stipulation in Deut 24:4 is that the divorced woman was not allowed again to become the wife of her former husband.)
 - v. However, since the prohibition of remarriage (Deut 24:4a) is the apodosis of the deuteronomic *crux interpretum*, the assumption is that divorce was a known practice regulated by now unknown customs or rules. Indeed, the practical issue in the debate between rabbis was to explain the grounds for divorce, centering on the meaning of the vague phrase (Deut 24:1)

- vi. Jesus responds by admitting that Moses “permitted” (ἐπέτρεψεν, elsewhere in Matthew only in 8:21; contrast ἐνετείλατο, “commanded,” in the preceding verse) divorce but at the same time declaring that, rather than the ideal will of God, this was a concession to “your [i.e., the people’s] hard-heartedness” The Mosaic legislation in Deut 24:1–4 was thus not normative but only secondary and temporary, an allowance dependent on the sinfulness of the people. *In that context it served as a control against abuse and excess (for a similar kind of argument, cf. Gal 3:15–19)*
 - vii. God’s provisions for divorce were temporary, based on the calloused rebellion of fallen humanity against God. He did not originally create people to divorce each other, and he therefore does not intend for those whom he re-creates—the community of Jesus’ followers—to practice divorce. As in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims a higher standard of righteousness for his followers than the law of Moses. This distinction suggests that we must be more lenient with non-Christians who divorce but also that we may not include “hard-heartedness” as a legitimate excuse for Christians divorcing.
 - viii. *Deuteronomy 24:1–4 granted no permission for divorce but prohibited a woman who had already been divorced and remarried from being remarried to her original husband.*
 - ix. *Two facts above all are pertinent. (i) Although divorce is taken for granted in a number of OT texts, it is elsewhere implied that something might be wrong with divorce (Lev 18:18 [?]; Deut 24:4; Mal 2:16). Moreover, Lev 21:7 and Ezek 44:22 prohibit priests from marrying divorcees, which suggests that divorce is at odds with holiness. (ii) The OT permits but does not command divorce. The only command in Deut 24:1–4 is that ‘the former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife’. The importance of this (at least for Matthew) can be seen from this, that whereas in v. 7 the Pharisees ask why Moses ‘commanded’ a certificate of divorce to be given, in v. 8 Jesus speaks of Moses giving permission (ἐπέτρεψεν). Here then there is a correction: Moses did not command divorce, he only allowed it. Near to hand was the idea that he allowed it as the lesser of two evils in some circumstances.*
 - x. Beginning
 - 1. The Pharisees should remember how “the creator” (ὁ κτίσας; lit. “the one having created”; only here in Matthew) designed things ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, “from the beginning.”
- d. Divorce Matthew 5:32
- i. Except for Immorality - the sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman
 - 1. But this could be understood quite restrictively by emphasising the first term and relating ‘nakedness’ to sexual immorality, or it could be understood quite expansively by emphasising the second

term, taking 'matter' to mean 'any matter' and 'nakedness' as metaphorical of anything shameful

2. lit. "nakedness of a thing," i.e., "a matter of uncleanness"; LXX ἄσχημον πρᾶγμα, lit. "unseemly thing [or deed]"), which the Shammaites interpreted narrowly and the Hillelites broadly. The subject of divorce has already been discussed early in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount (see Comment on 5:31–32; cf. v. 9 below).
3. Otherwise he reproduces Mk. 10:11, adding only μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ ('except for sexual impurity')
4. *Porneia* ("marital unfaithfulness") has been translated a number of different ways but should be taken as referring to adultery or related sexual sins (see commentary on 5:32). The uniqueness of 19:9 lies in its combination of a reference to adultery with permission for the "innocent" party to remarry. Some scholars deny that the exception clause modifies both verbs ("divorces" and "marries another") and argue that even when divorce is permitted, remarriage is always wrong. But a careful grammatical analysis renders this interpretation unlikely.

ii. Remarries Adultery

1. Apart from the allowed exception, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another μοιχᾶται, "commits adultery" (cf. Luke 16:18; Matt 5:32, the only other place in the Gospel where this verb occurs, is not exactly parallel since it refers to marrying a divorced woman).