

Living Word Fellowship Church

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Divorce – Christ Teachings

I. Introduction

Marriage today has been reduced to companionship and sexual intimacy. Sitcoms and movies magnify this narrative daily. This mindset has influenced us to define God's statement "..... *it is not good that the man should be alone...*" (Genesis 2:18), primarily as a need for companionship rather than God's divine plan for mankind (Gen. 1:26-31). However, when we begin to address the issue of marriage in terms of how Christ defines it, God's divine plan is re-established.

The Bible gives at least four purposes for marriage:

- (1) To continue the race (Gen. 1:28)
- (2) For companionship and enjoyment (Gen. 2:18)
- (3) To avoid fornication (1 Cor. 7:1–6)
- (4) To show the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:22–23).

God's original purpose was that one man should wed one woman, and only death should break that union (Rom. 7:1–3). Marriage is basically a physical union (v. 5), although it ought to be a union of minds and hearts too. The marriage union is even stronger than family ties, for a man is to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. It is a sacred union, for Jesus said that God joins a man and woman together.¹

II. An Overview

Divorce was permitted in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:13-17) as well as in the New Testament (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; Romans 7:1-4). God in the Old Testament said He hated it (Malachi 2:16), and Christ in the New Testament says, "*that what God put together, let no man separate.*" (Matthew 19:6).

It is obvious that when man vowed before witnesses to be married until death, God solidified this covenant in heaven (Deut. 23:21-23; Roman 7:1-4). From this point forward, He defines how the marriage functions (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:21-33 etc.), and under what conditions it may end (Deut. 24:1-4; Matthew 19:1-9).

Marriage is not man's idea; it is part of God's plan for mankind. When two individuals enter holy matrimony, they must understand that their primary commitment is to God first, and then to one another. (Deut. 23:21-23)

This study will first examine divorce, then outline, from a biblical perspective, who may remarry and how this all works itself out.

¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1997, c1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (70). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

III. Christ on the Issue of Divorce

Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:2-12

A. Background to this text:

1. The Vow:

- a) Definition: A solemn promise or pledge that binds a person to perform a specified act or to behave in a certain manner. The first mention of a vow in the Bible is of Jacob at Bethel <Gen. 28:20-22; 31:13>. Other people who made a vow are Jephthah <Judge. 11:30-31,39>, Hannah <1 Sam. 1:11>, David <Ps. 132:2-5>, and Absalom <2 Sam. 15:7-8>. All vows were made to God as a promise in expectation of His favor <Gen. 28:20> or in thanksgiving for His blessings <Ps. 116:12-14>. Vowing might be a part of everyday devotion <Ps. 61:8> or the annual festivals <1 Sam. 1:21>. Vows must be paid to God in the congregation at the tabernacle or Temple <Deut. 12:6,11; Ps. 22:25>. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary Copyright (C) 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).
 - b) A covenant is not the same as a contract. A contract is an agreement between two parties who mutually agreed to fulfill. Whereas a covenant is a process in which someone (God) serves as the overseer and governs the conditions of the covenant (Malachi 2:14).
 - c) God does not break covenants (Leviticus 26:42).
 - d) God calls marriage a covenant in Malachi 2:14 and Proverbs 2:17 and further says that He serves as a witness between the man and his wife (Genesis 31:50).
 - e) When a man and woman make their wedding vows, they begin the process of establishing the marriage covenant before God as reflected in Numbers 30 and Psalm 116:14,18.
2. Our word husband comes from the Anglo-Saxon, hus and band: the bond of the house, anciently spelled housebond,-so in my Old Manuscript Bible. It is a lamentable case when the husband, instead of being the bond and union of the family, scatters and ruins it by dissipation, riot, and excess. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft)
 3. 19:10. Jewish men took the right to divorce for granted. To marry without an escape clause in case it did not work—parents arranged the marriages and partners did not always turn out as expected—made the prospect of marriage itself frightening.
 4. But some Pharisees sought to test Jesus through a question: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? The nation was divided over this issue. Followers of Hillel felt a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason, but others, following Shammai, thought one could not divorce his wife unless she were guilty of sexual offense. Without getting involved in the Hillel-Shammai controversy Jesus reminded the religious leaders of God's original purpose in establishing the marriage bond. God made people male and female (v. 4; Gen. 1:27). In marriage He joins them together in an inseparable bond (ONE flesh; Gen. 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). This bond is a higher calling than the parent-child relationship, for a man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife in a one-flesh relationship (Gen. 2:24). Therefore, what God has joined together, men ought not separate (chōrizetō; in 1 Cor. 7:10 this word means "to divorce").
 - a) The last part of the question is not in the parallel passage in Mark (10:2). Matthew possibly included it because he was writing to the Jews, who were aware of the dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel over the interpretation of Dt. 24:1-4. Shammai held that "something

indecent” meant ‘marital unfaithfulness’ – the only allowable cause for divorce. Hillel (c. 60 B.C. – A.D. 20) emphasized the preceding clause, “who becomes displeasing to him.” He would allow a man to divorce his wife if she did anything he disliked – even if she burned his food while cooking it. Jesus clearly took the side of Shammai (v. 9), but only after first pointing back to God’s original ideal for marriage in Gen. 1:27; 2:24.

5. Shammai believed indecent was adultery.
6. Hillel believed for any reason.
7. John the Baptist was killed over this issue.
 - a) This question could be dangerous. John the Baptist’s answer had resulted in his imprisonment and ultimately his death (Matt. 14:3–11). That the problem is posed with malicious intent is seen in the participle testing. It means to tempt. The basis for the question was Deut. 24:1.²
 - This is related to Herod Antipas marrying his brother’s ex-wife which violated Leviticus 18:6-20 because he had an incestuous relationship with her. This marriage was unlawful, as John the Baptist stated (Matthew 14:4), because of what was outlined by Moses in Leviticus 18:6-20. As a result, Christ was not supporting the Shammai or Hellel view. Christ was supporting the original view (Matthew 19:4-6); *“Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*
 - In Leviticus 18:6-20 God, through Moses, speaks out against all forms of relationships that displeased God (Paul uses this to speak out against the man in 1 Corinthians 5:1-8). This is why John the Baptist speaks out (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21) against Herod Antipas in Matthew 14. However, Herod Antipas wife encourages her daughter to talk Herod into having John the Baptist beheaded for speaking out against their marriage. As a result, John the Baptist was beheaded, and his head was brought to Herod on a platter.

B. The Issue of Divorce:

1. Sexual intimacy solidifies the marriage covenant (Genesis 2:24).
 - a) God says in Genesis that a husband and wife are one flesh. Paul teaches what this means 1 Corinthians 6:16 where he repeats what God said in Genesis 2:24. *“Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?”* For Paul says, *“The two will become one flesh.”*
 - Christ said this, when talking about divorce in Matthew 19:4-6.
 - Like the Apostle Paul, Christ, in Matthew 19:4-6, supports His point, in this passage, by repeating Genesis 2:24. This is why the writer of Hebrews said, *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”* (Hebrews 13:4)

²Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible commentary* (Mt 19:1-3). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

b) Sexual intimacy solidifies the marriage covenant. This is why when a husband and wife are sexually intimate on the wedding night, and if the wife is a virgin, the woman expels blood. All covenants are solidified with blood (Genesis 15:4-18; John 19:17-22).

- Summary: God is the overseer and governor of the marriage and the marriage covenant. Everyone who enters into marriage is accountable to Him (Deut. 23:21-23). He sets the conditions for marriage and its resolution.

2. Christ clearly states that divorce is permitted for only one cause, fornication. This is a sin against the body (1 Cor. 6:15–18) and thus a sin against the marriage union, which is a physical union. The word “fornication” as used in the Bible seems to include a number of sexual sins. Mark 7:21 speaks of “fornications” (plural), while Acts 15:20, Rom. 1:29, and 1 Cor. 6:13 indicate that “fornication” covers sexual sins in general. It is commonly agreed that fornication is used of sins committed by the unmarried, adultery by the married. In any case, Jesus states that divorce for any other reason makes the parties guilty of adultery if they remarry (see 5:27–31; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:1–2). Thus, there are but two physical causes that can break the marriage union: death and fornication.³

C. The issue of divorce because of abandonment was not discussed by Christ. It was addressed by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 7:12-15 and 1 Timothy 5:8).

IV. Conclusion

God hates divorce, but it is not an unforgivable sin. Jesus knew that the Samaritan woman had five husbands and still made a point to speak to her, bring her to salvation, knowing the man she was with was not her husband. Now that she had turned her life over to Christ, Jesus expected her to do what was right in the sight of God. God will forgive and re-establish a person’s life even if the divorce is for non-Biblical reasons. They must confess their sin, seek wise counsel, and seek godly advice before getting into a new relationship.

³Wiersbe, W. W. (1997, c1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament (70)*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.