

“What God has joined together...” Matthew 19:3-9

God’s will is that marriage, between one man and one woman, last until they are parted by death. But in a broken world, that ideal is often not achieved. Are there ever any biblically permissible grounds for a marriage to be dissolved? What does Jesus say?

Marriage was the first gift God gave to mankind.
Marriage is designed to reflect God’s love and faithfulness toward us.
When marriages fail there are always painful consequences.

Extremely sensitive topic. Every life touched.

I can’t speak to every unique circumstance. The Bible does not address every unique circumstance. I’m not speaking for every pastor and elder. My position. Godly people disagree.

What I think the Bible and Jesus specifically teach about divorce.

Read Matthew 19:3

1. Pharisees attempt to entrap Jesus

Debate between two rabbinical schools – Meaning of Dt 24:1

“some indecency” (Heb. lit. “nakedness of a thing or matter”)

Shammai - Immorality; specifically adultery

Hillel - “indecency OR another matter”

Bad cooking; find a better looking woman

Guess who was more popular? Hillel won the day by 2nd century!

2. Jesus redirects the discussion – 19:4-6

v. 4. Gen 1:27; marriage is grounded in created order

v. 5. Gen 2:24; marriage is an act of creation. Two become one flesh.
Physical, emotional, psychological

v. 6. Marriage is created by God. State may recognize it, but it is divine.

So who are we to tear it apart? CONSEQUENCES

Tearing it apart always has consequences. Even if there are biblical grounds; every attempt has been made to re-establish trust.

Ex – Tearing apart paper glued together. Glue represents every shared event – dating, vacations, children, new house, friends, shared family

Divorce is not a solution to all problems but an exchange of problems

For the best part of thirty years we have been conducting a vast experiment with the family, and now the results are in: the decline of the two-parent, married-couple family has resulted in poverty, ill-health, educational failure, unhappiness, anti-social behavior, isolation and social exclusion for thousands of women, men and children.

From Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family By Rebecca O'Neill; Sept. 2002, CIVITAS

- Fundamental issue is NOT, “What are legitimate grounds for divorce?”
 - BUT, “What can I do to help my marriage last for a lifetime?”
- NEXT WEEK. Pharisees not satisfied, press for an answer

3. Pharisees press for an answer – 19:7

4. Jesus ends the debate – 19:8-9

A. They have missed Moses’ point. Permitted, not required.

Ex – Joseph sought to divorce Mary quietly.

B. Certificate designed to protect the woman

In most of ANE she could be reclaimed. Certificate allowed her to safely remarry so that another man could provide for her.

C. Not God’s original intent. Designed to be permanent.
Adam and Eve never thought about divorce and remarriage. Eve could honestly say, I love you more than any other man on the face of the earth.

D. Hillel is wrong. Divorce for porneia, not for “any matter.”

Define: “immorality” (Matthew 19:9; cf. 5:32)

- **extra-marital sexual acts, including adultery, prostitution, homosexual acts, incest, bestiality**
- Does not include emotional abandonment

Only divorce for adultery? No.

Jesus only addressing the debated issue – meaning of “matter of indecency”

Other permissible criteria were agreed upon

Specifically, beginning in the Law of Moses, protections were given by God for women who had limited means of supporting themselves physically and financially.

- **Life-threatening neglect or behavior**

Exodus 21:7-11

Ex – Husband working, but not making enough. Wife has to work too to pay the bills. Divorce? No.

Ex – Husband not working; confronted; refuses to work; racking up debt; wife working, but can't stay ahead of husband's spending; family heading toward financial destitution. Divorce? Maybe. State of Texas: only financial protection through divorce. ISSUE: UNREPENTANT.

Conjugal rights (failure to provide)

Issue was not that woman was not receiving adequate physical pleasure from the relationship, but that she could not provide for herself in her old age apart from children.

Paul applied Law to 1st century gentile setting – 1 Corinthians 7

Physical abuse – worse than abandonment. This is a CRIME.

Conclusions

- Marriage should be monogamous
- Marriage is heterosexual; obligations of marriage cannot be fulfilled between same gender people
- Marriage should be lifelong
- Divorce is permitted on certain narrowly defined grounds (porneia, extreme neglect, abandonment)
- Divorce is never mandatory
- Reconciliation is always preferable if possible

Application

1. If you are struggling, ask for help
2. If you are contemplating divorce, slow down and get help
3. If you are already divorced
 - A. With biblical grounds
 - You are free to remarry a godly spouse
 - You are free to reconcile if possible
 - B. Without biblical grounds or you caused the divorce
 - Confess to those you have hurt (own your part; don't hurl accusations; be a healer)
 - If not remarried, pursue reconciliation
 - If remarried, commit to lifelong marriage
4. To all

Live in the grace and power of God

Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! *Nothing is too difficult for You.*"