

Marriage and Divorce

Introduction

Matthew 19:4-9

1. In the study of divorce and remarriage, there is no more crucial passage than Matthew 19:9
2. We need to have an accurate working knowledge of Matthew 19:1-12, which is the context of Matthew 19:9.

The Teaching of Matthew 19:1-12

1. The setting – **Matthew 19:1-2** (Mark 10:1)
 - A. Jesus' discussion of divorce with the Pharisees took place toward the end of His ministry at a time when He had left Galilee and gone to "the region of Judea beyond the Jordan." (John 10:40-42)
 - B. The discussion with the Pharisees occurred in a locality that had strong associations with John the Baptizer, in the very dominion of Herod Antipas who had beheaded John for condemning his marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29)

2. **The Pharisees' question – Matthew 19:3** (Mark 10:2)
- A. **The Pharisees approached Jesus with a question.**
 - B. **Whatever their specific intent was, it was not honest — they were “testing Him.”**
 - C. **The question was: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”**
 - D. **Many have conjectured that the background of the Pharisees' question was a debate between various rabbinical schools of the day as to the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.**
Deuteronomy 24:1-4
 - E. **We need to be careful, however, in drawing conclusions about the background of the Pharisees' question – it is not obvious from the text that the original question even had to do with the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.**
 - F. **Whatever the background, the question itself concerned whether and when **divorce** was acceptable to God, not **divorce and remarriage**.**
 - G. **Remarriage does not appear in the discussion, at least explicitly, until verse 9.**

3. **Jesus' answer - Matthew 19:4-6** (Mark 10:3, 6-9).
- A. **Jesus answered the question by going all the way back to creation and God's original intention of permanency for marriage.**
 - B. **He charged them with ignorance of what they would have known if they had read and understood the Scriptures.**
 - C. **He quoted from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, establishing several points relating to the permanency of marriage.**
Genesis 1:27; 2:24
 - 1) **God made mankind.**
 - 2) **God made mankind male and female, creating one woman for the one man He had created.**

Malachi 2:15 But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And **let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.**

- a. **God did not provide any companion to hold in reserve for Adam, just in case things did not "work out" with Eve.**
 - b. **The creation of only one woman for Adam implies that God intended one to be enough!**
- 3) **God ordained marriage.**
 - 4) **God ordained marriage as a monogamous relationship.**
 - 5) **Marriage involves a man and woman being joined together and becoming "one flesh."**
 - 6) **It is God who joins (yokes) a man and woman together when they are rightfully married.**

- D. From these points, scripturally established, Jesus drew the conclusion that **it is wrong for man to separate what God has joined together**.
4. The question about Moses and the certificate of divorce - **Matthew 19:7** (Mark 10:4).
- A. The Pharisees clearly understood Jesus to be saying that a man **may not** divorce his wife for just any reason.
- B. Jesus having taken this position, the Pharisees thought they could show Jesus to be in conflict with Moses, whose law obviously made some provision for divorce.
- C. They asked, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?”
- D. The Pharisees seem to have had Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in view, a passage which, strictly speaking, did not **command** divorce — it only laid down some regulations that were to be enforced if divorce did occur in certain situations.
5. Jesus’ answer - **Matthew 19:8** (Mark 10:5).
- A. Jesus pointed out that just because **allowance** was made for certain actions in the Law of Moses did not necessarily mean those actions were **good**.
- B. Looking ahead to the coming of the Messiah through the people of Israel, the Law put some boundaries around them for the purpose of keeping them **relatively** more pure than the rest of the human race.
- 1) God took Israel where He found them, conditioned as they were by the low moral standards of the age in which they lived.
 - 2) There were some practices that Israel engaged in that God chose to **restrict** and **regulate** — temporarily.

- C. So Jesus said that it was because of the hardness of the hearts of Israel that God made provision for certain divorces, not because it was His original intention or ultimate purpose concerning marriage: “God permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”**
- 1) “Permitted,” or “suffered” (KJV), means that God tolerated divorce in Israel without approving of it. (Malachi 2:16)**
 - 2) The Law of Moses neither sanctioned divorce nor specifically prohibited it.**
 - 3) Divorce evidently was already common in Israel when the Law was given, and God did nothing more than tolerate it temporarily — because of the hardness of their hearts.**
 - 4) Other such things were tolerated by God before the sending of the Messiah into the world, not only in Israel but in the rest of humanity as well, such as polygamy.**

Acts 17:30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights.

- D. Whatever was allowed and regulated by such passages in the Old Testament as Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Jesus said that divorce for every cause was contrary to God’s intention at creation.**
- E. Whatever the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is, whatever Jewish practice may have been, the pronouncement of Jesus on marriage is what is binding for us today — and Jesus grounds His pronouncement on the will of God for marriage in the beginning.**

6. **Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage - Matthew 19:9** (Mark 10:11-12).
 - A. Having put the laws and allowances of Moses into their proper perspective, Jesus stated the law regarding marriage that would be a part of the New Covenant for all.
 - B. The "I say unto you" of Jesus is authoritative - **Matthew 28:18-20**
 - C. Jesus' teaching in this verse comes down to this: **Divorce and remarriage are scriptural only for the innocent party who has put away his or her mate for fornication — divorce for any other cause is sinful, and divorce and remarriage for any other cause constitutes adultery.**
 - D. The single exception allowed by the Lord makes obvious sense: fornication perverts the very "one flesh" relationship that is at the heart of marriage — it violates the union in a way that nothing else can.
 - E. The emphasis in this verse is on the sin of unjustly putting away one's mate for "just any reason" (v.3).
7. The disciples' response - **Matthew 19:10** (Mark 10:10).
 - A. Mark's account reveals that the discussion continued between Jesus and His disciples after they went into the house.
 - B. They speculated that if marriage was as permanent as Jesus had said, it would be better not to marry.
 - C. Like most people today, they apparently had come to think of divorce as a necessity in some situations.
 - D. According to Jesus, however, the truth is that divorce is **never necessary**: there is **always** another alternative, and (except in one case) God requires that we find it and accept it.

- 8. Jesus' teaching on celibacy - Matthew 19:11-12.**
- A. His disciples having raised the issue of celibacy, Jesus said that celibacy is indeed the better course sometimes.**
 - B. He gave three instances of celibacy.**
 - 1) Those who remain celibate because of birth defects.**
 - 2) Those who have been "made eunuchs by men," emasculated for some human reason.**
 - 3) Those who choose to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.**
 - C. Those who have no scriptural right to remarry may fall into the third category.**

End of Part 1

PART 2:**What Is the Teaching of Deuteronomy 24:1-4?**

1. The requirement contained in the passage.
 - A. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** prohibits a divorced and remarried woman from returning to her original husband, stating that she has been “defiled” and that such a return would be an “abomination” that would pollute the land. (Jeremiah 3:1)
 - B. The passage says nothing to **encourage** divorce and remarriage.
 - C. It says nothing about God’s **approval** of divorce and remarriage.
 - D. It simply regulated a situation that was bound to occur.
 - 1) The NKJV and most other recent translations clarify that the divorce and remarriage are not commanded or approved, but simply stated as a situation that may in fact arise from time to time.
 - 2) “There is certainly no command in the words of Moses, but, on the other hand, a clear purpose to render the proceeding more difficult in the case of the husband” (ISBE).

2. Discouragement of frivolous divorce.

- A. The requirement of **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** would have discouraged the frivolous putting away of a wife by requiring that, at least, a legal certificate of divorce be produced.
- B. This meant that the divorce had to be a legal transaction that followed due process — the wife could not merely be thrown out.
- C. Knowing that he could never be reunited with his wife would have tended to cause the husband to stop and think whether he really wanted to divorce her.

Is Matthew 19:9 A Part of the New Covenant?

- 1. The argument that excludes **Matthew 19:9** from the New Covenant.
 - A. Some argue that Jesus' statement in **Matthew 19:9** was made while the Law of Moses was still in effect and that its legislation is a part of the old covenant, not the new.
 - B. This position holds that Jesus was explaining the true meaning of the Old Testament law on divorce and remarriage, not giving law that would be binding on His disciples in the New Testament.
 - C. The exception made for fornication, found only in **Matthew 5:32** and **19:9**, is not repeated after Pentecost — it is argued that this indicates the exception is not a part of the law of Christ that governs the church.

2. For whom were the gospels intended?
- A. Not only **Matthew 19:9**, but **all** of the oral teaching in all of the gospels was spoken prior to Pentecost.
 - B. But the gospels — that is, the books themselves — were all written **after** Pentecost.
 - C. Obviously the content of these books was intended for the instruction of Christians after the establishment of the church and the passing away of the old covenant.
 - D. This is the point: although Jesus lived and taught while the Old Testament law was still in force, His teaching was law that **would** govern His disciples in the new kingdom which was about to be established - **Matthew 28:18-20**.
 - E. A law can be stated before it goes into effect (**Mark 16:16**) — and it is an **arbitrary rule** indeed which states that the only sayings of Jesus that constitute New Testament law are those repeated in some form after Pentecost.
 - F. The rationale used to reject **Matthew 19:9** as not being a part of the new covenant would require much else in the gospels to be rejected as well.

- 3. The contrast between Jesus' teaching and the Law of Moses.**
- A.** In **Matthew 19:7-9**, and also **Matthew 5:31-32**, Jesus clearly made a distinction between His teaching and what the Law of Moses had said.
- B.** In **Matthew 5**, Jesus not only made such a contrast in regard to divorce (**5:31-32**), but in regard to other matters also:
- 1) **Anger/murder - 5:21-22**
 - 2) **Lust/adultery - 5:27-28.**
 - 3) **Swearing - 5:33-34.**
 - 4) **An eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth - 5:38-39.**
 - 5) **Loving one's enemies - 5:43-44.**
- C.** Jesus' contrast was not just between His teaching and the interpretations of the rabbis — it dealt with the Law of Moses itself.
- D.** What Jesus taught was so clearly different from the Law of Moses that He had to defend Himself against accusations of trying to “destroy” the Law - **Matthew 5:17-20**.
- E.** The Pharisees thought that Jesus had said something different than the Law of Moses — and Jesus did not deny the difference, He simply explained why there was a difference - **Matthew 19:7-9**.

4. If **Matthew 19:9** is not applicable now, then when?

- A. Jesus' allowance of divorce for the cause of fornication could not have applied to Israel under the Old Testament — the Old Testament penalty for adultery was death.**

Leviticus 20:10 The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.

- B. If **Matthew 19:9** does not apply today, when did it apply, and to whom?**

Conclusion

- 1. Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage in **Matthew 19** is part of the teaching by which we will be judged**

John 12:47-50 And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. **He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.** For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

- 2. It is in following the teaching of Jesus that we will find "everlasting life" (**John 12:50**).**

