

Ask Anything "Divorce and Remarriage"

Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9

Delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic via Livestream and to two gatherings of under 50 people at Central Baptist Church on November 15, 2020

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Today we are continuing in our Ask Anything series. The next question you asked and voted to be preached on concerns divorce and remarriage. You asked, **(SHOW SLIDE 2) When would divorce be permissible? When is re-marriage acceptable?**
 - This is a difficult subject to speak on because it touches people's emotions at a deep level. Some of you grew up as children with the pain of divorce, others have been divorced, and some of you are in such an unhappy marriage that you are pondering divorce.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 3)** This morning I aim to speak with two voices; a priestly voice and a prophetic voice. The priests in the Old Testament were to care for the people and show compassion to them in their weakness and sin. I aim to speak with a priestly voice to all those affected by divorce.
 - The prophets in the Old Testament spoke strong words of truth that called the people back to God when they had strayed. I aim to speak with a prophetic voice to a day and age that has rejected God's good standards on marriage.
 - The same God who said in **"I hate divorce"** in Malachi 2:16 is the same God who says, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."**
 - There is something for everyone in here whether single, married, divorced, or your spouse has passed away, even if it is just to learn in order to help others.
- This morning I want to dig into Jesus' teaching on divorce. In our passage Jesus makes three points. Before we look at Jesus' words let's just outline four different views on this subject.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Canadian societal view: divorce and remarriage are allowed anytime, for anybody, for anything.**
 - Then there are three Christian views.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Christian view #1: no divorce at all for anybody, not for any reason, or under any circumstance.**
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Christian view #2: divorce under certain circumstances is permissible but no remarriage is allowed.**
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 7) Christian view #3: both divorce and remarriage are possible but only under certain circumstances.**

1ST CENTURY VIEWS ON DIVORCE

- In Jesus' day there were two competing views, each represented by a different Rabbinic school. This is important background to understanding Jesus' words so listen closely.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** Rabbi Shammai: divorce was only possible for adultery and divorce must take place when adultery occurs.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** Rabbi Hillel: divorce is permitted for even the slightest reason. The vast part of Jewish culture, and especially the Scribes and Pharisees followed this lenient view.
 - The Mishnah, which was a collection of Rabbinical teaching, stated that a man could divorce his wife for just about any reason from not being able to have children, to missing teeth, to thinning hair, or burning the supper.
- So just like our secular culture today, many people in the 1st century believed that divorce could happen for just about any reason, particularly if you were a man. It seems that the disciples also had this lax view.
 - With that background we are ready now to hear Jesus' three points; points that stress the permanence of marriage.

PREOCCUPIED WITH MARRIAGE, NOT THE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** First, we must take the permanence of marriage seriously because God created it to be an exclusive relationship that lasts a lifetime.
 - Look at chapter 19:3. **READ 3 - (SHOW SLIDE 11)** And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" So the Pharisees want to know where Jesus stands in the debate. Is he a conservative? Or, Is he a liberal?
 - **READ 4-6 - (SHOW SLIDE 12)** ⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
- So notice that Jesus does not directly answer their question about the grounds for divorce. Essentially, he says, "***I refuse to talk about the grounds of divorce before we spend some time talking about what God created marriage to be.***" I will follow Jesus' lead on your questions. He refers them back to Genesis 1 and 2 where we read that God created a man and a woman, named Adam and Eve, and then joined them in marriage.
 - We see in Genesis that **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** God created marriage to be an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. God gave Adam a woman.
 - God did not create marriage to be between three people. Neither did God create two Adams or two Eves.
 - In quoting Genesis Jesus is also reminding the Pharisees that **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** God created marriage to be a permanent relationship. The old King James Version translates it as a man shall leave his father and mother and "cleave" to his wife. That word "cleave" is the key to understanding what makes people married.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 15)** Let me ask you – what is it that makes two people married?

- Most people today say love or affection. But your dog has undying affection for you. If you think love and affection are what make you married then you can see why people quickly divorce – they have some troubles, they lose the feelings, and so they conclude that the marriage has ended.
 - Well, maybe it is sexual union that makes a marriage? No, that can't be it. Unmarried people have sex all the time. Again, if you think a great sex life is what makes you married you will quickly divorce when your sex life is not what you want it to be.
 - Love, affection, and sex, are certainly part of marriage but they are not the essence of it.
- This word “cleave” means to make a covenant. It is a public vow of faithfulness and commitment.
 - The public vow is what makes two people married.
- I get a little concerned when engaged couples want to write their vows to each other. They inevitably say things like **“I love you. I want you. You complete me.”** Those are nice things to say but they are not vows. A vow is a promise about the future. At your wedding you are not simply making a declaration of your present love. You are making a promise about future love.
 - Saying **“I love you”** is not a covenant. A covenant is saying, **“I promise to take you as my wife, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part.”** So do you see why Jesus refuses to talk about divorce until he has first talked about marriage?
 - How you define marriage will define your views of divorce. If you define marriage as a contract based on love, affection, and great sex, then you will allow divorce for just about any reason. But if you see that God created marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman then your views of divorce will be very different.
- One more application before I move to the second point. Single people, do you see that God's command for Christians to marry only other Christians is in fact looking out for your best interest? If you are going to be in a permanent relationship with someone else you will not just get physically naked – you will get personally naked. You will give every part of yourself to them.
 - As one pastor says, if Jesus is the most important thing to you then how are you going to share life with someone who yawns at that idea, laughs at that idea, or even mocks the core of who you are? God's command is good and for your joy.
 - So that is Jesus' first point: we must take the permanence of marriage seriously because this is how our Creator designed it.

THE GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE ARE A CONCESSION, NOT A COMMAND

- **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** Second, we must take the permanence of marriage seriously because even the grounds for divorce are a concession, not a command.
- Look at chapter 19:7. **READ 7 (SHOW SLIDE 17)** They said to him, **“Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”**

- So after Jesus has given his teaching on marriage the Pharisees bring up an objection. ***“Jesus, if your views are so right then why did Moses command us in Deuteronomy 24 to give our wives a certificate of divorce?”*** So the Pharisees were teaching the people God was fine with divorce as long as you gave your wife a certificate.
 - Jesus is going to argue that they are twisting what the law says. Jesus says, ***“No, this is a misreading of Deuteronomy 24 and your views are destroying families, children, and the entire social order.”***
- So what does Deuteronomy 24 actually teach? **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** ***“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, ² and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife.***
 - Notice that verses 1 and 2 begin with conditional clauses. **(SHOW SLIDE 19- Underline “if” in 1a and “if” in 2a).** So God is not making a general command about divorce. He is saying IF this situation happens, THEN do this. The debate was about what constitutes “indecency.” **(SHOW SLIDE 20)**
 - So this poor woman has now been divorced by her second husband. So the point of this entire law is to warn a husband that IF he divorces his wife and she remarries THEN he can never have her back again. The obvious question then is ***“why did God give this law?”*** Two reasons.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 21)** **First, God gave this law to protect the dignity of women.**
 - If a woman was divorced people would assume she had committed adultery. So to protect her, God commands that a certificate be given to her stating the reasons for the divorce. She is given legal rights, self-respect, and the freedom to remarry.
 - This law also protects women from capricious husbands who in their anger quickly divorce their wives.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 22)** **Second, God gives this law to regulate a chaotic situation, not to endorse divorce.**
 - This law simply provides some procedures IF a divorce takes place and therefore the most reluctant permission is implied and tolerated. But God is not endorsing divorce; he is regulating it. This is what Jesus says in Mt 19. In verse 7 the Pharisees said Moses commanded them to do this. What they called a *command*, Jesus called a *concession*. Look at verse 8. **READ 8 - (SHOW SLIDE 23)** **He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.**
 - Once again Jesus is saying, ***“Why are you talking about the grounds of divorce? You should be talking about the oneness of a married couple. You should be talking about how divorce severs what God joined together.”***

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 24)** That is why people often refer to divorce like an amputation. In our day divorce is so easy – like taking off an old hat in order to put on a new one. Jesus says that we all know marriage is a deep oneness. We know this because divorce is not like removing your hat. It is like removing a limb. It causes a lot of pain for everyone involved, including the children.
 - So Jesus’ second point is that we must take the permanence of marriage seriously because the even grounds for divorce are a concession, not a command.

ASIDE FROM THE EXCEPTIONS, REMARRIAGE RESULTS IN ADULTERY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 25)** Third, we must take the permanence of marriage seriously because, aside from the biblical exceptions, remarriage after divorce results in adultery.
 - Come back to Mathew 5. READ 31-32 - **(SHOW SLIDE 26)** ³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
 - To paraphrase, *“you have heard the teaching of the Pharisees on Deuteronomy 24 who use it to push their own agenda of permitting husbands to freely divorce their wives simply by giving them a document. But I say to you that, unless it is because of sexual immorality, such irresponsible behaviour will lead him and his wife and their second spouses into unions that begin with adultery.”*
- Jesus is not saying the second marriage is not truly a marriage. No, he calls it a marriage. Jesus is also not saying the second marriage is a permanent state of adultery. The verb here refers to a one-time act, not a continual state. Jesus says you commit adultery, not you keep committing adultery.
 - So it appears that the first act of adultery within the new marriage dissolves the one-flesh union of the original marriage. The new marriage then is initially, but not perpetually, adulterous. Remarriage, without biblical grounds, is sinful but the marriage does not remain sinful.
 - Consequently, we should not challenge the legitimacy of the second marriage after it is consummated. It is a true marriage in God’s eyes.
- But Jesus also says there is a time when divorce and eventual remarriage is acceptable but not required. **(SHOW SLIDE 27- “except on the ground of sexual immorality”)** If divorce is like amputation then Jesus says that there are times when an amputation *may* be necessary.
 - Jesus says one of those grounds is when there has been sexual immorality involved. The Greek word is “porneia.” It refers to adultery, fornication, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, or any other form of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Such an act breaks the covenant of oneness.
 - Jesus says that in such a case it is morally acceptable to divorce and to remarry. It needs to be pointed out however that even in such a case

Jesus does not command divorce. There are many stories of couples being reconciled to each other even after affairs.

- Paul goes on to add another exception clause in I Corinthians 7. He says that when a non-Christian spouse wants to divorce a Christian spouse, the believer is not bound to such a marriage. So these two grounds of sexual immorality and a non-Christian leaving are permissible grounds for divorce and eventual remarriage.

THREE WORDS OF GRACE

- That was a lot of teaching. Let's get practical now. Let me wrap this all up with three words of grace, two words of challenge, and one story. **(SHOW SLIDE 28)** My first word of grace is **to those of who have been divorced because their spouse was sexually immoral.**
 - According to Jesus, you may be guilty of sins in the marriage but you are not guilty of sin in the divorce. Your spouse broke the marriage covenant when they cheated on you. You should not carry around any shame or disgrace. You are free to remarry.
- My second word of grace is **(SHOW SLIDE 29)** **to those who have been divorced, but not on biblical grounds and who have not remarried.** What should you do? You need to come to Jesus to find forgiveness for your sins.
 - Let me be very clear on this: divorce is not the unpardonable sin. In Jesus, there is forgiveness for you. He was punished on the cross for the sin of your divorce and in Jesus there is new life for you.
 - If neither of you are remarried, then you must ask if there is any possibility of getting back together. Only after that has been attempted can there be any discussion about remarriage.
 - At Central we have something called DivorceCare. Most people will tell you that separation and divorce are the most painful and stressful experiences they've ever faced. It's a confusing time when you feel isolated and have lots of questions about issues you've never faced before. DivorceCare groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. We are just completing one and hope to start another one in February.
- My third word of grace is **(SHOW SLIDE 30)** **to those who have been divorced, but it was not on biblical grounds and who have remarried.** You also need to seek the grace and forgiveness of God through Jesus. But Jesus is also saying in this passage that the marriage you are in now is a real marriage before God. You should not leave it because of your previous sins. God's call on your life is to work at ensuring this next marriage works.
 - I also want to remind you that God is the one who is the great redeemer. He loves to redeem that which was lost, to mend that which is broken, to make beauty out of ashes. Think of King David. Has anyone ever begun a marriage under a greater cloud of sin than David? He seduced another man's wife, got her pregnant, had her husband killed, and then married her.
 - And yet after David had confessed his sin, God began to redeem him. Bathsheba gives birth to Solomon whose line eventually gives birth to

Jesus. God took a marriage that started in unbelievable sin and used it to bring forth the Messiah. That is what God does. He redeems the worst situations.

TWO WORDS OF CHALLENGE

- Two words of challenge. **(SHOW SLIDE 31)** Challenge #1: **the Church must receive divorced people with grace and truth.** For those who have divorced on unbiblical grounds we must call them to seek forgiveness in Jesus and to teach them God's view of marriage.
 - This is also why I cannot accept the Christian view that says a Christian can never, under any circumstances, get divorced. Such a view makes a higher standard than Jesus, fails to deal with the fact that we live in a sinful world, and therefore places a terrible burden on the innocent party who has been cheated on.
 - Such innocent parties deserve our support and compassion, not our condemnation.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 32)** Challenge #2: **no matter the state of your marriage, pursue greater faithfulness with your spouse.**
 - If your marriage is in trouble, don't give up! Seek help from others. Seek God. He is the great reconciler. The story of the Bible is the story of how God has reconciled sinners back to himself. That reconciliation came at a great cost – the death of His Son. Jesus died to win a bride to himself whom he will never divorce.

ONE STORY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 33)** Finally now, **one story.** Heather and I once watched a movie called, *The Vow*. It is based on the true story of a man named Kim and his wife named Krickitt. The true story is even better than the movie. Two months after their wedding they were driving to see their parents when they were involved in a brutal accident. Krickitt hit her head hard. She was given less than ½ percent chance of survival.
 - She did survive but sustained a serious brain injury. When she woke up they asked her who her husband was and she replied that she wasn't married. Can you imagine your spouse forgetting who you are? Kim worked to get her to remember him. He put pictures of them everywhere but nothing worked. Kim realized that the woman he married had essentially died in that accident. Finally, a therapist suggested they try to fall in love again. They started to date and fell in love for a second time.
 - They had a second wedding ceremony. But here is the kicker – after 2 kids, 4 dogs and 18 years of marriage, Krickitt has never recovered her memory.
- Kim and Krickitt claim that it was their faith in Jesus Christ that got them through it all. During an interview Kim said, ***"We live in a society where vows are constantly broken. Forty years ago 'till death do us part' meant the death of a soul mate. Today it is the death of a marriage that society has accepted."***

- Some people have said that Kim is a hero for staying with his wife when it was so hard. Kim responds by saying, ***“It was a choice based on obedience to God not the feelings I had.”*** He said, ***“I’m no hero. I made a vow.”***
 - All of us need God’s help to be faithful in whatever situation we are in. Let’s sing “Lord I need you” now in response.