

# What Does the Bible Say About Divorce?

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## Intro

- Marriage and divorce is an extremely challenging, emotional, and controversial topic. But it's also a very relevant topic because divorce is extremely common today. All of us have friends and family members who have gone through divorces. Even if you haven't gone through a divorce yourself, this topic still probably feels very personal to you.
- The challenge is that when we open the Bible we tend to read it through the lens of our own experiences. We will want to see what validates our feelings and resist what contradicts them.
- In this lesson I want to lay aside all of our personal experiences and biases and simply try to understand what Jesus said on this topic.

## The nature of Jesus' teaching

- One of the biggest hurdles for us in understanding Jesus' teaching on divorce is that we think following Jesus shouldn't be overly difficult.
- We live in a country where if you choose to become a Christian you will probably experience little or no persecution for that decision. But that's not how it was for the early disciples.
- Matthew 10:34-37
- **34** "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. **37** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

- Jesus is saying that the choice to follow him is going to lead to rejection and possibly death. Jesus was calling his disciples to the most extreme level of commitment.
- That's how life was for the early church:
  - Acts 8:3
  - **3** *But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*
  - Can you imagine being a Christian at that time not knowing whether the authorities would knock on your door and drag you and your loved ones off to jail? Can you imagine making the decision to follow Christ knowing that you could be put in prison for that decision?
- Perhaps the challenge for us is that since we are not as persecuted we can lose sight of the commitment and sacrifice necessary to follow Jesus. We can begin to think that Jesus' commands are meant to be convenient.
- The truth is that Jesus' commands are not convenient, they are extreme. Even though we are not heavily persecuted in this country we still must realize that Jesus has called us to a life of radical obedience. Before I can understand Jesus' teaching on divorce I must recognize the extreme commitment that Jesus calls me to in every area of my life.

## Matthew 19

- 19:3-6 - The Key Principles

**3** And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" **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."

- Jesus' points:
  - Two shall become one flesh
  - They are no longer two, they are one
  - What God has joined together, man must not separate.
- This is the key to this entire topic. When we get married, God joins us together. We do not have a right to break apart something that God joined together. Breaking that bond apart always involves sin.
- 19:7-8 - What about the Old Law?
 

7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" 8 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.
- God allowed them to divorce under the old law because their hearts were hard. But that was not what he really wanted.
- The Old Law was put in place to bring us to Christ. God allowed various sins at that time, but Christ showed us God's full will for how we should live.
- 19:9 - Remarriage
 

9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."
- Divorce & remarriage (except for fornication) is adultery
- Why did Jesus use the word adultery? Because a divorced person was joined to their former spouse. The divorced person still has a responsibility to that former spouse. In God's eyes, being married to someone new would be committing adultery against that previous spouse.
- Marks' account adds two more important details:
  - Mark 10:11-12

- *11 And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*
- This applies both to the husband and the wife. Jesus does not have a different rule for men than for women.
- This sin of adultery is not just a sin against God, it is a sin against the former spouse. By remarrying a person is harming their former spouse.
- The one exception: Fornication
  - Jesus gives this as the only exception to his rule.
  - What is fornication?
    - Vines defines this Greek word as: "illicit sexual intercourse."
    - This is not simply someone looking at pornography or having feelings toward someone of the opposite sex. Those are wrong and need to be repented of, but those are not what Jesus is talking about here. The word Jesus uses here refers to intercourse with someone who is not your spouse.
  - Jesus says that's the only grounds for a Christian to get a divorce. Now he doesn't say that Christians have to get a divorce if that occurs, but he says that's the only reason they could get a divorce.
- 19:10-12 - Is Jesus' teaching extreme?
 

**10** The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." **11** But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. **12** For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."
- The disciples seemed shocked and thought that Jesus' teaching was so extreme that it would be better not to get married at all.

- Jesus talks about how some people are eunuchs for various reasons. He's pointing out that some people have made the decision not to get married, and that's a fine decision to make.
- Jesus' teaching was extreme in their culture just like how it is extreme in our culture. God's way is different from man's way.
- Summary of our findings from Matthew 19
  - In this passage Jesus gives us two reasons that divorce is wrong:
    - 1. It's a sin against God. It is a ripping apart of what God joined together.
    - 2. It's a sin against a spouse. Remarrying is committing adultery against that former spouse.

#### Matthew 5:31-32

**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.

- Similar teaching to Matthew 19, but this passage shows how many people the sin of divorce hurts.
- When a husband divorces his wife he causes her to commit adultery
  - That tells me that even if a wife didn't want to get a divorce and tried to hold onto the marriage, she still is not free to get remarried if her husband divorces her. It really doesn't matter who initiates the divorce. Neither party is allowed to get remarried.
  - This show how much divorce hurts people. There may be a spouse who was divorced against their wishes yet they still must remain single throughout the rest of their life. That seems unfair, but following Jesus is often unfair. Being a disciple involves suffering for Christ.
- Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery

- This shows how the sin is expanded out even further. If you've never been married before and you go and marry someone who was divorced for a reason other than fornication, you are committing adultery with them. Why would that be? Because they should still be married to their former spouse.
- This is extreme. This means that you need to really know a person's background before you marry them. Divorce hurts a lot of people.

#### 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

**10** To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband **11** (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

- What should someone do who is divorced for the wrong reason? Paul answers this questions
  - First he emphasizes that it is wrong for a husband and wife to divorce. Even if people never get remarried the divorce was still wrong because it broke what God had joined.
  - But then he gives instructions on what they should do if they have gotten a divorce.
    - Option 1: Stay single
    - Option 2: Be reconciled to their original spouse.
  - Those are the only two options. It makes sense that those are the only two options because Jesus said remarriage would result in adultery.

#### 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

**12** To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. **13** If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she

should not divorce him. **14** For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. **15** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. **16** For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

- What should a Christian do who is married to an unbeliever?
- Don't divorce the unbeliever
- Why not? They are made holy through you.
  - I believe he means that you have a holy influence on them. You are a holy influencing to that non-Christian and to your children.
  - It may be a very difficult situation, but it's important that you stay in that relationship.
- But what if the unbeliever divorces the Christian?
  - The Christian should let the unbeliever leave.
  - The Christian is not "enslaved." What does the word enslaved mean?
    - It is not the same word as "bound" that Paul uses earlier in the passage to refer to a marriage bond.
    - It's a word that was used of slavery, but not often used of marriage.
    - Perhaps he means in this case you are not enslaved to this command to stay with that unbeliever and try to save them. I think this is a really helpful statement that Paul makes because it relieves the spouse of guilt. At this point you've done everything you can, if they want to divorce, you can let them.
  - So can the Christian then go get remarried?
    - Paul doesn't say that. He doesn't bring up remarriage at all here.

- In the previous context he just talked about those who are divorced should not get remarried.
- If he did mean that they could get remarried it seems like it would go against what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32.
- Therefore I believe teaching that someone can get remarried because an unbelieving spouse divorced them is teaching something that this passage does not teach.
- The goal is to save the spouse. Paul ends this section by reemphasizing that our priority needs to be their salvation.
  - We need to realize that we don't know whether our staying with that person could save them. We might think that they are so hard hearted that they will never change, but God has saved some very hardened sinners before. Did anyone expect Saul of Tarsus to be saved?

## Questions

- Question 1: What should someone do who is divorced for the wrong reason and remarried?
  - If in being remarried the person is committing adultery, then the only solution is to end the adultery.
  - But wouldn't God forgive them of that sin so that they could stay in the new marriage?
    - Repentance means turning away from sin. God does not forgive us if we continue to commit a sin. The only way to be forgiven of the adultery is to stop committing it.
    - A good way to think about this is to think about adultery without divorce. Let's say a husband was routinely committing adultery against his wife. The wife confronts him on it and he tells her he's very sorry and that he's repented of it. But the next night he goes and sleeps with the other woman again.
    - Would this man be forgiven of his adultery? No, because he's still committing the sin. It seems like the same would be true of divorce and remarriage.

- Question 2: Does this apply to non-Christians?
  - Christ's teachings apply to everyone.
  - Some people believe that if you get divorced and remarried before you become a Christian then you don't have to repent of that sin and you can stay in the marriage.
  - The problem with that view is that all sins must be repented of regardless of when we committed them.
  - When Zacchaeus began following Christ he repented of sins he had committed before following Christ.
    - Luke 19
      - 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."
      - He did everything he could to make right the sins he had committed previously.
- Question 3: Are there other reasons for divorce such as violence, addictions, etc?
  - No, Jesus does not list any other reasons.
  - But we should use wisdom and discernment to protect ourselves and others. There are ways we can deal with this situation without getting a divorce.
  - Paul avoided persecution through means of the law.
    - Acts 22
      - **24** the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. **25** But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"
      - Those in difficult marriages may and should use legal and other means to protect themselves and their children.
      - We should work to support and help people who are in this kind of situation.

## Conclusion

- Divorce is so damaging. It hurts so many people and causes life long consequences.
- What God has joined together let not man separate. Let's not break apart God's work.